

ROLE OF THE GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST

A. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

The Green Mountains form the backbone of the Western Abenaki homeland. Native life was thrown into turmoil by contact with French, Dutch, and English societies in the 17th and 18th centuries, reducing their population and altering their lifestyles. English settlement of this area began in the mid-18th century and flourished after the Revolution. Land-use in the 19th century included subsistence farming, grazing, and orchard operations, but was shaped by extractive industries like logging and mining. By the early 20th century, visitors to Vermont began considering the mountains a source of beauty and recreation opportunities.

The origin of the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) is due in large part to the persistent effort of committed Vermont citizens and legislators working over a three-decade period in the early 1900s to persuade Congress and the USDA Forest Service of the need for Vermont's own national forest. The tragic flood of 1927, with its resulting devastation to Vermont's towns and surrounding lands, was a key event that finally led to the official studies, proposals, and legislative actions resulting in President Herbert Hoover's proclamation of April 25, 1932 creating Vermont's sole National Forest. The name chosen was in honor of Vermont's namesake, the Green Mountain State.

The proposal that eventually led to the creation of the Green Mountain National Forest spoke of the need to improve and preserve local watersheds, offer resources for local wood industries, provide recreation to a region with an expanding population, and to "serve as a demonstration area of proper forest management" – reasons still valid today.

Today National Forest System lands are found within 55 towns in southern and central Vermont. Like other national forests in the eastern United States, the GMNF has been assembled parcel by parcel from lands acquired from willing private landowners. In earlier years, many of these lands had been heavily logged, grazed, farmed, and later abandoned. Soils were often highly eroded with streams and riverbanks in poor condition. Current federal ownership approaches 400,000 acres and comprises 49 percent of the land within the 815,000 acre exterior boundary. Due to the natural resilience of Vermont's forests and careful management, the USDA Forest Service has worked for over seventy years to restore a healthy, productive, and beautiful forest – one among a system of 155 national forests nationwide.

B. THE ROLE OF TODAY'S GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST

Straddling the spine of the Green Mountain range over the southern two-thirds of the State, the land within the National Forest embodies much of what is representative of Vermont's character and quality of life - lush forested hillsides interspersed by farms and village communities. The Green Mountains serve as an abiding connection of Vermont's people to the land and heighten the strong sense of place many feel. With our nation's population anticipated to double by mid-century, the Forest Service owes a special duty to act in ways that help preserve and maintain Vermont's landscape, its communities, and rural economy.

Today the GMNF encompasses 6 percent of Vermont's land base - roughly 50 percent of the State's public lands. It is the largest contiguous expanse of public land in Vermont. In contrast to some

regions in the western U.S., where public ownership makes up two-thirds of the land, in the New England-New York Region public land makes up only 17 percent of the land base. With over 70 million people currently living within a day's drive of the GMNF, public land is under increasing pressure to serve the people of this region in a variety of ways. Coming decades are predicted to bring further urbanization, sprawl, and loss of open space. As such, our management philosophy continues to be guided by the belief that public land in the Northeast will be increasingly scarce and precious.

The Forest Service will continue to manage these lands for multiple-use purposes. With each passing decade this increasingly involves managing among a host of often competing and sometime conflicting interests. We will strive to balance these uses and interests seeking to provide benefits for people today, with an eye towards coming trends so as to maintain options and opportunities for future generations.

The headwaters of many of Vermont's rivers flow from the National Forest. The foundation of our stewardship responsibilities begins by conducting our management activities in a manner that perpetuates an abundance of clean water and the maintenance of productive soils.

We recognize that local citizens value the National Forest as their "backyard" and that visitors are drawn from afar to experience its striking scenery and varied recreational opportunities. Our recreation niche will focus on the fact that the GMNF's large, contiguous blocks of land are well suited to trail-based activities in backcountry settings. The remote nature of much of this land makes Wilderness a special role the GMNF will serve to play. Working in partnership with many organizations will continue to be a hallmark of how the Forest Service provides recreation opportunities to the public.

Our forest management activities will be especially geared towards providing a diverse range of vegetation ages and species composition in order to enhance wildlife and plant habitat conditions, including those for threatened, endangered, and rare species. The guaranteed long tenure of ownership of National Forest System lands allows for trees to be grown longer, so that we may focus on producing high quality, high value forest products. This activity will be directed towards more productive and accessible lands.

The Green Mountain National Forest contributes to the economic well being of Vermont by serving as the setting for small businesses such as guiding services and large businesses such as ski areas, as a source of material for the forest products industry, and as the scenic background attraction for the tourism industry. We will collaborate with the State of Vermont, regional organizations, and towns so that our actions actively contribute towards sustaining the character of Vermont's rural landscape, fostering vibrant local communities and economies.

The Green Mountain National Forest will strive to serve as a model of ecological and science-based forest stewardship, where monitoring and evaluation activities are applied in order to adapt and improve management practices over time. We will collaborate with other parties to offer opportunities for research on forest ecosystems. The GMNF will serve as a demonstration area of various types of sustainable management techniques in order to serve as an example for other forestland ownerships. The GMNF will play an increasingly important educational role whereby people may gain a clearer understanding of the origins of the natural resources they use in everyday life so as to develop a greater conservation ethic and sense of personal responsibility for their actions.