



Let's take a Journey with Nature

We Need our Forests

What is a Forest?

A Forest is simply a large area dominated by trees. **Each Forest is a complex ecosystem** with distinct interrelationships with living organisms (the plants, animals, micro-organisms) and the non-living, inorganic part *sol, climate, waters, organic debris, rocks) of an environment and are distributed across the globe.

Forests have been classified in different ways. The World Conservation Monitoring Center divides the World's Forest into 26 major types, which reflect climatic zones as well as the principal types of trees. Others have been classified according to the geographical regions in which they exist and whether they are evergreen or deciduous.

The forests of New England and Bethel have a long and dynamic history. The European settlers found a landscape that was predominantly forested. Within a relatively short time, forests were being cleared for agricultural land uses. Through forest clearing, hunting, and trapping, the abundance of many species changed rapidly and the wilderness was gradually transformed into a domesticated rural landscape.

The peak of deforestation and agricultural activity across most of New England occurred from 1830 to 1880 (Harvard University). Across much of New England and Bethel, 60 to 80 percent of the land was cleared for pasture, tillage, orchards and buildings. Small remaining areas of woodland were subjected to frequent cuttings for home building and firewood.

Today, a second period of change in forest land use is occurring in New England and Bethel, this time for residential use. The change is evident in a decrease in the average size of acreage ownership and an increase in the number of owners of small acreages. Where once there was an abundance of white pines., the pines have been replaced by fast-growing species such as a s red oak, maples, white ash, birches, and others resulting in hard-wood forests.

There are a variety of natural stressors that effect the health of a forest. Among them are:

- hurricanes
- other wind storms
- ice storms
- pathogens (insects and disease)
- fires ignited by lightning strikes
- flooding by beavers
- and of, course, Human activity

With close to 60% of its land area in forest, Connecticut is one of the most heavily forested states in the nation. At the same time, Connecticut is also one of the most densely populated states. Today, the forests once again are being pushed back, not for agricultural use, but from the pervasive march of urban sprawl. What will the forests of Connecticut look like tomorrow?

Environmental benefits.

The environmental benefits of forests are numerous. Even urban forests, which include trees planted along city streets and those growing in parks or nature preserves, help reduce air pollution, safeguard private and public water sources, filter rainwater, provide essential habitat for wildlife and moderate summer and winter temperatures near homes.

Bethel's municipal water systems rely on water from forested watersheds, where forest soils provide natural filtration to keep streams clean and water quality high. Through photosynthesis, the trees and plants in forests provide most of the oxygen that humans and animals breathe. Forests also absorb and reduce the presence in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas and major contributor to climate change.

Social benefits.

Public forests, including forested parks, reserves and wilderness areas, are popular destinations for outdoor recreation, with visitors partaking in everything from camping and hiking to biking, swimming and fishing. The scenic beauty of the state's forests attracts tourists and new residents, and has inspired generations of artists and photographers.

Many seek out the tranquility of forests as places to find solace, stress relief or spiritual sanctuary. The mental and physical benefits of exposure to nature are well documented for people of all ages. And spending time in a natural setting such as a forest can be particularly beneficial to children, for both learning and development.



What can you do to help conserve our remaining forest land?

Support the Bethel Land Trust's mission of land conservation to permanently preserve sensitive natural areas, farmland, water sources or notable landmarks forever so as to help preserve or improve the quality of life of Bethel, CT residents.