

A COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

New York Demo Forest Shows Landowners Best Management Practices

The Challenge:

Rensselaer Plateau, the fifth largest forested region in New York, is comprised mostly of privately owned land. These landowners are seeking ways to conserve their land, manage their woodlands, and pass their properties on to future generations. Faced with rising county property taxes, many of the landowners are seeking to sell their land or timber. A great deal of indiscriminate logging has occurred on the plateau in recent years. While some training has shown landowners different management systems and the results of best practices, no related demonstration forest was available.

The Solution:

The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance decided that a community forest in the area would not only conserve some important land, it could also provide additional benefits. The Alliance learned about community forests by bringing experts in from New England for a full-day conference. They held public workshops, formed a committee of community members and began searching for community forest. They found 350 acres for sale and secured a contract, as well as a grant from the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program (CFP), and a loan from The Conservation Fund. The Alliance acquired the parcel in 2014.

Resulting Benefits:

The Rensselaer Plateau Community Forest is already being actively used by landowners and is of interest to a wide range of other stakeholders and users. With a Forest Management Plan in place, the Community Forest will serve as a demonstration forest and training site for chainsaw safety and best forestry practices. The Empire State Forest Products Association and New York Logger Training will begin using the Community Forest as a training site. The Rensselaer Plateau Alliance is expected to hold many of their educational and informative program events, and other outings at the



Antioch University Ecologist Tom Wessels leads a workshop on Reading the Forested Landscape at the Rensselaer Plateau Community Forest. (Photo: Jim Bonesteel, courtesy of Rensselaer Plateau Alliance)

community forest. Event organizers will explore and share with landowners the many avenues available to them for conserving their valued property and practicing sustainable forestry. The Community Forest will be open to the public year round, for recreational activities.

Sharing Success:

The Community Forest Committee is seeking partnerships with local colleges and universities, as well as opportunities to develop programs for Rensselaer County's urban and rural school children in grades K – 12.

The Rensselaer Plateau Community Forest has become a hub of active partnerships, spanning the full range of government, industry, academic, not-for-profit, and recreational and community partners. The growing list of partners includes: the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Dyken Pond Environmental Education Center, Grafton Lakes State Park, the Sage Colleges, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Rensselaer Land Trust, Empire State Forest Products Association, New York Logger Training, New York Forest Owners Association, Saratoga Mountain Bike Association, and the Rensselaer Plateau committee of community members. Residents and visitors of Rensselaer County will benefit from recreational access to this site and from a wide range of programs being developed by diverse partners.

Community Forest brings together wide range of partners and cooperators.



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