



Contact: Katrina Farmer
Communications Associate
Monadnock Conservancy
603-357-0600, ext. 111

Katrina@MonadnockConservancy.org

Contact: Annette Ermini
Marketing Communications Manager
New England Forestry Foundation
978-952-6856, ext. 105

AErmini@NewEnglandForestry.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2011

Signature view from Route 101 in Marlborough now protected



Photo caption: These open fields and Cooper Hill (in the background) are highly visible from Route 101, on which the Cooper Hill Community Forest property has nearly a mile of frontage, and will now remain undeveloped thanks to recent conservation efforts. Photo courtesy of Monadnock Conservancy / ©Emily Hague

KEENE, N.H. — The Monadnock Conservancy, in partnership with the Town of Marlborough and the New England Forestry Foundation, recently protected an iconic 329.5-acre property in Marlborough. It includes a well-known spot alongside state Route 101 between the village and the Dublin town line where the landscape opens to wide-sweeping views of field and forest.

The conserved property, Cooper Hill Community Forest, formerly the Robinson Farm and later the site of an equestrian center, is across from the American Legion and next to the state highway department barn on the south side of Route 101. There are 26 acres of open fields, 288 acres of forest and approximately 15 acres of wetlands. Robbins Brook, a tributary of Minnewawa Brook, flows through the southern edge of the open fields. Cooper Hill, one of the highest points in town, is also protected.

“This project is a major success, not only for the Town of Marlborough but also for all the residents and visitors to this area,” said Ryan Owens, executive director of the Monadnock Conservancy. “Protecting this land reflects how the local community values rural character and the scenic heritage of the Monadnock Region.”

This conservation success comes after many years and many attempts at protecting the property. Numerous previous owners have pursued large-scale commercial and residential development, and though none were successful, now it’s guaranteed that the two-thirds of a mile of undeveloped frontage on Route 101 will remain as such thanks to a unique partnership between the town, two nonprofit conservation organizations and the private landowner.

The Town of Marlborough and the Monadnock Conservancy worked together to purchase a conservation easement on the land, which was funded by a town open space bond authorized by voters in 2005. Additional transaction funding for the project was provided by the Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership, a public/private effort to protect the Monadnock Highlands of western New Hampshire and north central Massachusetts. (To learn more, visit www.q2cpartnership.org.)

Landowner Matthew Iorio sold the easement. At the same time, the New England Forestry Foundation purchased the underlying property ownership from Iorio at a below-market rate with its own funds and donations from several generous private donors. Together, the ownership of the land by the New England Forestry Foundation and the conservation agreement with Marlborough and the Conservancy will allow for water protection, wildlife habitat, working lands and public access—now and for future generations.

“Forming partnerships has become critical in land-protection projects throughout the region,” said Whitney Beals, director of land protection for the New England Forestry Foundation. “Protecting the Cooper Hill Community Forest as a working woodland and wildlife habitat available for recreation became possible through a convergence of interests: the town, the Monadnock Conservancy, the New England Forestry Foundation and a conservation-minded landowner. We are pleased to be part of such a worthy community-based effort.”

Furthermore, the Town of Marlborough accomplishes its goal of protecting a place identified as within their category of highest priority for conservation.

“[It] has long been seen as a unique property. It has the rare, just-right combination of meadow and forest. The hills form a perfect backdrop for the field. In the fall it is not unusual to see cars parked along the fence and pictures being taken,” said John Northcott, Marlborough board of selectman chair who was involved with the project.

About the Monadnock Conservancy

Founded in 1989, the Monadnock Conservancy is the only land trust dedicated exclusively to the 35 towns of the Monadnock Region in southwestern New Hampshire. Its mission is to identify, promote, and actively seek protection of significant natural, aesthetic, and historic resources in the area; and to monitor and enforce the protection of lands in the trust. Based in Keene, N.H., the Conservancy has protected nearly 15,000 acres of forest, farmland, shoreline, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and recreation trails in the region. For more information, visit www.MonadnockConservancy.org.

About the New England Forestry Foundation

Established since 1944, New England Forestry Foundation is a recognized leader in forest conservation, sustainable forest management and forest education. The organization owns 136 forests comprising more than 23,000 acres and holds 137 conservation easements—protecting 1,143,498 acres—including the largest conservation easement in the United States. Together with their members, New England Forestry Foundation is enhancing forest health and wildlife habitat, providing clean air and water, creating carbon offsets and conserving forested landscapes for future generations. For more information, visit www.newenglandforestry.org.

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