



**Falmouth Conservation Commission
Comments on the Harvest Plans for
Woods Road and Blackstrap Hill Community Forests.**

The Falmouth Conservation Commission (FCC) is tasked with the stewardship of the Town of Falmouth's ecosystems and natural resources, including the town's forests and wildlife habitat. The vast majority of Falmouth's forests have been altered over time by development, agriculture, sand/gravel extraction, and intensive commercial timber harvesting. Current land uses in Town have shifted from these historical, predominantly extractive uses, to residential and commercial development, open space preservation, and some agricultural activity. Current land use practices have allowed many of the Town's forests to grow and thrive. However, current and past land use practices have also altered the natural composition, successional stages, and species diversity of our forests. This document is intended to convey the FCC's position on forest habitat management and to comment on the proposed Woods Road and Blackstrap Hill Community Forest harvest plans.

The composition of many of our forest stands is a product of prior timber harvesting, which focused on the removal of economically valuable tree species. As a result, the Town's forests are generally skewed towards tree species that have less commercial value (such as American beech and red maple). Although these species are important components of mixed northern hardwood forests, when these species dominate they can slow the growth of other species such as red oak, white pine, balsam fir, and spruce. Forests with higher tree species richness (i.e., a greater number of different species) and a variety of successional stages tend to provide the highest quality wildlife habitat and increased resistance to forest pests.

The FCC does recognize that there are Town forests and forest stands (i.e., portions of forests) that should be preserved and allowed to function under a natural disturbance regime (i.e., kept forever wild). However, other properties should be managed to improve wildlife habitat and forest health. The FCC does not recommend that the Town's forests be used for the explicit purpose of providing a source of income for the Town through commercial timber harvesting. However, certain tree removal and harvesting activities to create or maintain uncommon wildlife habitats should be considered and in many cases encouraged in our Town forests. Selective management can help reverse some of the historical alterations to the Town's forest structure and diversity.

The Falmouth Conservation Commission has reviewed the proposed Harvest Plans for the Woods Road Community Forest and Blackstrap Hill Community Forest and concurs with the purpose and methods of the proposed wildlife habitat management activities for improving the overall forest health of these parcels.