



Shared Stewardship Framework

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
And the
United States Department of Agriculture,
Forest Service



(Eastern Region, Northern Research Station, and Forest Products Laboratory)

Purpose

The purpose of this Shared Stewardship Framework is to assist the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and participating communities in furthering the goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) as described in the recently passed (2018) Massachusetts' State Law Chapter 209, Sections 89-91, as amended. It reflects the national vision for shared stewardship between the USDA Forest Service, States, tribes and other partners to support mutual priorities across landscapes at appropriate scale to achieve outcomes important to the parties. This Shared Stewardship Framework also helps the USDA Forest Service meet its national goals to:

- Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes
- Protect Forests from Threats
- Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

In addition, it directly relates to a key facet of Forest Service values and beliefs, i.e. "Helping states and communities to wisely use the forests to promote rural economic development and a quality rural environment." ([Forest Service Mission](#) and ["What We Believe"](#))

Priority State Landscape

The project area encompasses 361,941 acres located in the Northwest corner of Massachusetts. Parts of two counties comprise the area and include the most rural towns in the State:

- **Franklin County** is the most rural county in Massachusetts and includes the towns of Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne.
- **Berkshire County** is the westernmost county in Massachusetts. The northern third of the county includes the towns of Adams, Cheshire, Clarksburg, Florida, New Ashford, North Adams, Savoy, Williamstown, Peru, and Windsor.

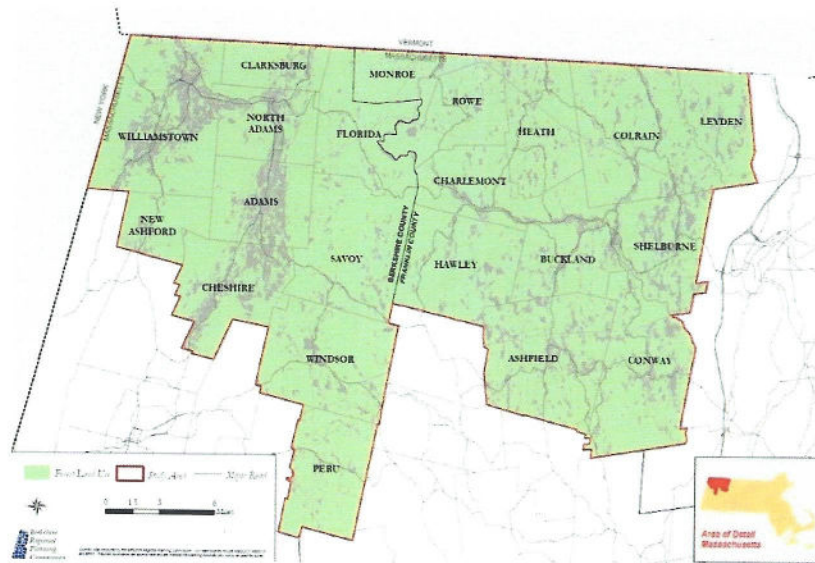


Figure 1: Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Potential Area for Designation

A unique geology, calcareous wetlands, combined with rich northern forests make up a biologically diverse ecosystem. The forests are interrupted by farms and homes along mostly rural roads. Visitors are drawn to the area to hike, ski, hunt, camp, fish, and snowmobile. Locals make their living off the woodlands running recreation-based businesses, cutting and selling firewood, harvesting timber for local furniture or flooring, working as foresters, or tapping maple syrup. All the while, the forests provide critical ecological services including clean water supply recharge and flood protection for portions of three major watersheds (Hudson River, Connecticut River, and Housatonic River), wildlife habitat and diversity, air purification, and carbon storage. The maps that are attached and part of this Shared Stewardship Framework highlight key attributes of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership area, such as:

- Preponderance of forestland
- Major watersheds – Connecticut River, Housatonic River, and Hudson River
- The confluence of three major forest ecosystems
- Appalachian Trail and multi-state connections
- Mosaic of landownerships – Private, State, Federal
- Major towns and roads
- Within 150 miles of 20 million people

As shown in the map below from the Massachusetts 2010 State Forest Action Plan (SFAP – page 166), the MTWP project area is in a “priority area” for the high-quality ecological services it provides (forest functions, benefits, and values) when analyzed at the local watershed level (hydrologic unit code (HUC) 12 level). This forestland also provides opportunities for recreational, spiritual, and aesthetic experiences, a forest environment in which people of all ages can connect with nature and the outdoors.

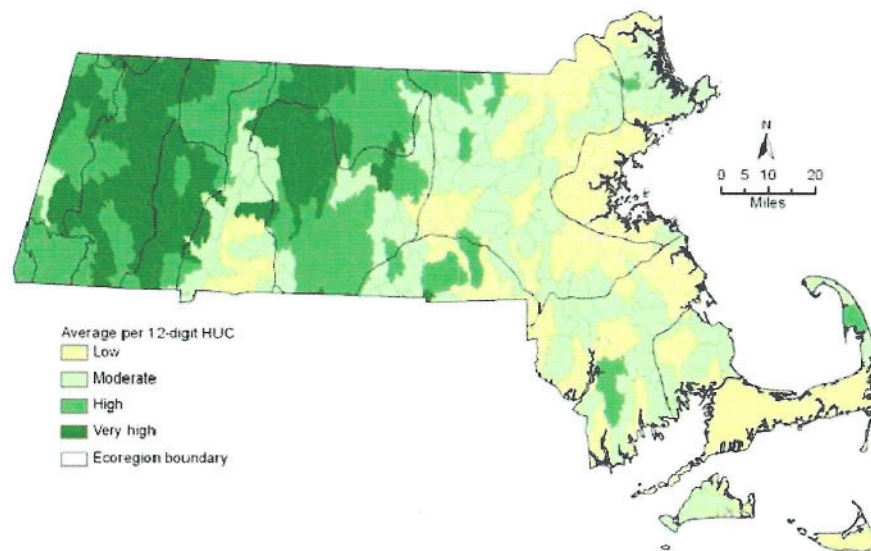


Figure 2: Synthesis Overlay - Forest Functions, Benefits and Values

Additionally, the project area is in two multi-state priority areas identified in the SFAP. As shown in the map below, there are four regions, located in Massachusetts and neighboring states, which have been recognized as priority areas for multi-state projects (page 168 in the SFAP): the Last Green Valley, the Quabbin to Cardigan region, the Green Mountain – Berkshire Hills, and the Taconic Region.

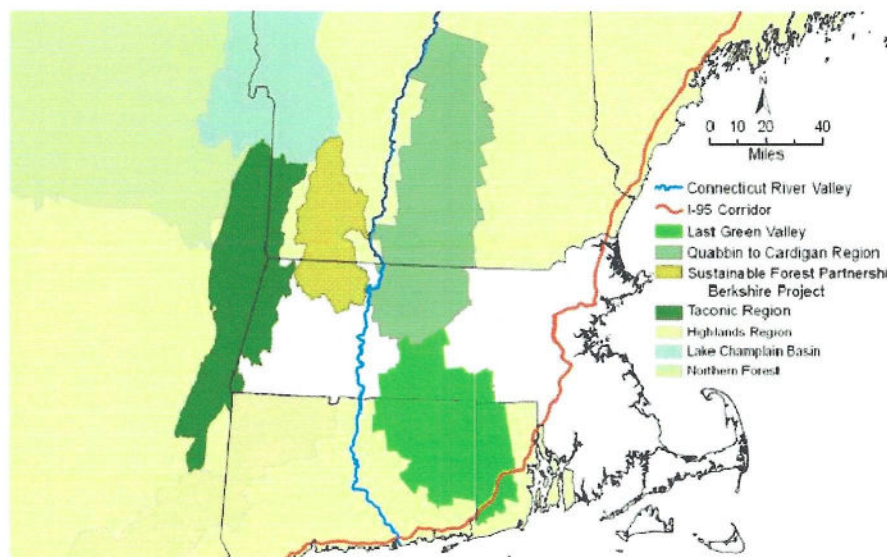


Figure 3: Massachusetts Multi-State Priority Areas

Benefit to the State

The MTWP is a grass-roots, private land forest conservation and economic development partnership anticipating a USDA Forest Service Special Designation in a 21-town area (361,941 acres) in Western Massachusetts. The parties recognize that federal legislation describing and

authorizing such a designation does not yet exist, that this agreement is not dependent upon such federal legislation, and that by signing this agreement neither party enters into any obligations in regard to such legislation. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funded two regional planning efforts in the two counties located in the MTWP -- Sustainable Franklin County and Sustainable Berkshire County. Both planning efforts focused on preserving the region's rural character and managing and conserving forests. Because both plans included extensive public meetings, they were a good launching point for the MTWP initiative. The plans' recommendations included improved forest management, expanded forest conservation, and supporting home businesses based on forestry, farming, and tourism.

The MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) also convened 12 focus group sessions in 2012 with forest landowners, town officials, recreationists, forest industry, residents, and conservation organizations. The focus group report highlighted the desire to conserve and sustainably manage the abundant forest cover, but also highlighted the struggle of residents to find employment and towns to remain fiscally solvent.

The State legislation supporting this effort was passed on August 9, 2018, establishing a formal framework for the MTWP. Once 11 towns opt-in via mayor, select board, or town meeting vote over the next year, the MTWP will be established.

The goals of the MTWP are to support or expand initiatives and investment in the project area in the following areas:

1. Sustainable forest management
2. Forest land conservation through voluntary conservation restrictions
3. Sustainable natural resource-based economic development
4. Comprehensive education and visitor information programs
5. Long-term social and fiscal sustainability for communities

The intention is to accomplish these goals through a long-term "partnership" between the towns, city, and organizations with a presence in the region, educational institutions, the State's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and the USDA Forest Service. To this end, key "partnership" related attributes of the legislation include:

- All 21 towns are eligible for participation but need to "opt in" to receive incentives and to allow private landowners to access funding for Conservation Restrictions/Easements (Note: towns and landowners that do not opt-in may still be eligible for federal Forest Legacy and Community Open Space program funding).
- Forest land remains in private tax-paying ownership to generate revenues for the municipality;
- Incentives or payments for forest conservation restrictions/easements must be with willing sellers. Conservation Restrictions/Easements would be held by the state, land trusts or towns, as appropriate.
- A non-profit would be created to run day-to-day programs and oversee creation and implementation of the MTWP Plan.
- A trust fund is created with the intent to seek state, federal, grant, and private investments, which these parties are not obligated to provide, to be invested and loaned to local natural

resource businesses and projects as a revolving fund to run the partnership into the future.

- A forest center is envisioned to highlight local forest management and products and to be a place for training and technical assistance for landowners, foresters and towns.

Conservation of the MTWP forests will sustain a unique region where three un-fragmented ecosystems converge and protect the Deerfield River - considered one of Massachusetts' most pristine rivers. The MTWP area is also an area where sustainable economic revitalization is needed in the context of a forested landscape with many wildlife, recreation, and ecological services, and forest management attributes. There are opportunities to increase or improve the conservation and resiliency of forests; sustainable recreational tourism; sustainable forestry; management; marketing of local wood products; financial stability of rural towns; research to increase sustainable forestry; and to identify new manufacturing technologies related to forestry. Some key statistics that highlight this are below:

Resource Category	Acres or \$ or residents	Percent of Total Area
Total Area of Proposed Designation	361,941	100%
Forest Land	295,866	82%
State Wildlife Action Plan Priority Areas	227,060	63%
2010 Total Population	50,936	90 people/sq. mi.
Percent Population Change 2000 - 2010	-2,575	-4.8%
Per Capita Income	\$27,728	22% lower than state average
Protected Open Space	100,099 acres	28%

As described in the State legislation, the State anticipates federal legislation to provide a special Federal designation of the MTWP area coupled with a formal relationship with the USDA Forest Service to support that designation. For example, in the State legislation formal representation by the USDA Forest Service on the MTWP Board and Executive Committee is conditioned on passage of complementary federal legislation. In the absence of such authorizing federal legislation, this framework for shared stewardship is intended to jointly further the goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership within existing USDA Forest Service authorities without further obligating either the USDA Forest Service or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Benefit to the Forest Service

The Forest Services' **Eastern Region** (R9) collaborates with States, other Federal agencies, tribes, landowners, and other partners to protect, conserve, and manage forests and community trees across the 20 Northeastern and Midwestern States and the District of Columbia. R9 provides leadership, technical support, sound science, and financial assistance to help ensure

that our forests and trees continue to provide clean water, forest products, wildlife habitat, recreation, and other benefits for present and future generations.

The **Northern Research Station (NRS)** works with a diverse group of partners to provide the scientific basis for protecting, conserving, and managing forests, community trees, and related resources. NRS implements a program that addresses a comprehensive scientific foundation, including the following overall strategic program directions: sustaining forests; forest disturbance processes; urban natural resources stewardship; providing clean air and water; and natural resources inventory and monitoring. In addition, the NRS Director also oversees the **Forest Products Laboratory (FPL)** in Madison, Wisconsin, which is the Nation's only federally funded wood utilization research laboratory. Its research scientists are primarily or partly responsible for many of today's wood-based technologies, including wood preservatives, glulam beams, oriented strand board, and fiber-based packaging.

USDA Forest Service units in the Eastern United States, including R9, NRS, and FPL, all have an interest in supporting the MTWP. The Agency has been actively engaged in creating a unique, mutually beneficial relationship among the municipalities and the State in this area since 2004. Former Forest Service Chiefs Bosworth, Kimbell, and Tidwell were a part of this effort. Since 2014, these Forest Service units have jointly funded a grant to the State to facilitate outreach and promote the goals of MTWP to communities in the project area. While there are no national forest system lands in Massachusetts, the Eastern Region's State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs – Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Health, Forest Legacy, State Fire Assistance, and Volunteer Fire Assistance, and Landscape Scale Restoration - have actively supported forest conservation throughout the State for many years. For example, over the past few years the USDA Forest Service provided grants to: (1) plant trees in North Adams and Greenfield (at the two ends of the MTWP); (2) encourage local wood markets in the MTWP region and (3) assist low income residents of the MTWP to gain wood heat via federal heat assistance programs.

The purpose for establishing the MTWP is directly related to the work of these programs. The MTWP also offers an innovative new way for the USDA Forest Service to relate with the mixed ownerships so often found in a forest landscape in the Eastern U.S. The MTWP can serve as a demonstration area of a multi-ownership forest where individuals and families, communities, local organizations and the State invite the USDA Forest Service to form a working partnership to sustain the forest and the rural communities that rely on that forest. The MTWP could also serve as a test production area for the Forest Products Laboratory to help fill the need for improved forest markets to reach the goals of the MTWP.

NRS collaborates on numerous forest research projects in the State, and has staff located in Amherst, Massachusetts. The MTWP legislation includes a provision that would establish a demonstration and/or research forest(s) on private, municipal, or State land. NRS facilitates collaborative research on federal, state and private forest lands and has expertise to offer the MTWP to create a collaborative new research forest focusing on how a mixed-ownership forest landscape can be managed in partnership to address emerging issues such as impacts and strategies to address new invasive forest insects and diseases, and climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience. The location of the MTWP is ideal as it is at the headwaters of three watersheds, at the confluence of three major forest ecosystems, and is in a region where there is a gap in the USDA Forest Service research forest system.

Benefits to the State and the Forest Service

Sharing implementation of the MTWP among the participating municipalities, State, and the USDA Forest Service contributes to the achievement of the Forest Service mission, to the Commonwealth implementation of both its State Forest Action Plan and Wildlife Action Plan, and the MTWP goals identified in the State legislation.

While Federal legislation to support a special designation of the MTWP area has not been enacted at this time, such legislation is not necessary to proceed with this Shared Stewardship Framework which relies on existing authorities and affirms the USDA Forest Service's commitment to assist with MTWP implementation by:

1. Liaison: Designating a USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region "liaison" to the MTWP, who will facilitate timely communication and work with the State on special project needs to implement the goals of the Partnership. The liaison will collaborate with the USDA Forest Service-Washington Office to fulfill information needs or requests related to MTWP;
2. Outreach: Continuing to support the State's outreach work on the MTWP concept to the area's 21 municipalities as they decide to formally participate in the Partnership and in coordination as the Partnership formally launches;
3. Demonstration/Research Forest: Consulting on and providing technical assistance for the establishment of demonstration and research forests, on an appropriate parcel of private, municipal, or state land to be used to research and demonstrate exemplary sustainable forest management practices (especially focusing on management that is resilient to invasive forest insects and diseases, and climate change) to other landowners and the public via tours, publications, and other educational tools in collaboration with local research institutions such as the University of Massachusetts and Harvard Forest; and,
4. Recreation and Tourism: Consulting on and providing technical assistance related to local recreation and tourism opportunities and strategies.

Signatures



KATHLEEN A. THEOHARIDES

Secretary
Executive Office of Energy and
Environmental Affairs
Commonwealth of Massachusetts



VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN

Chief
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Attachment

Descriptive Maps

Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership Area

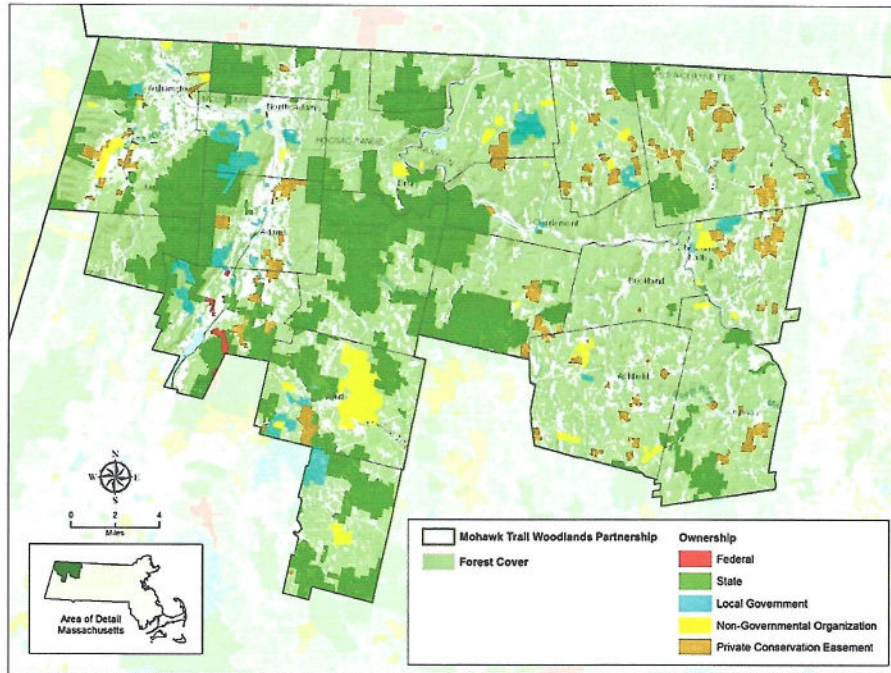


Figure A 1: Potential locations within the MTWP for Research/Demonstration forests

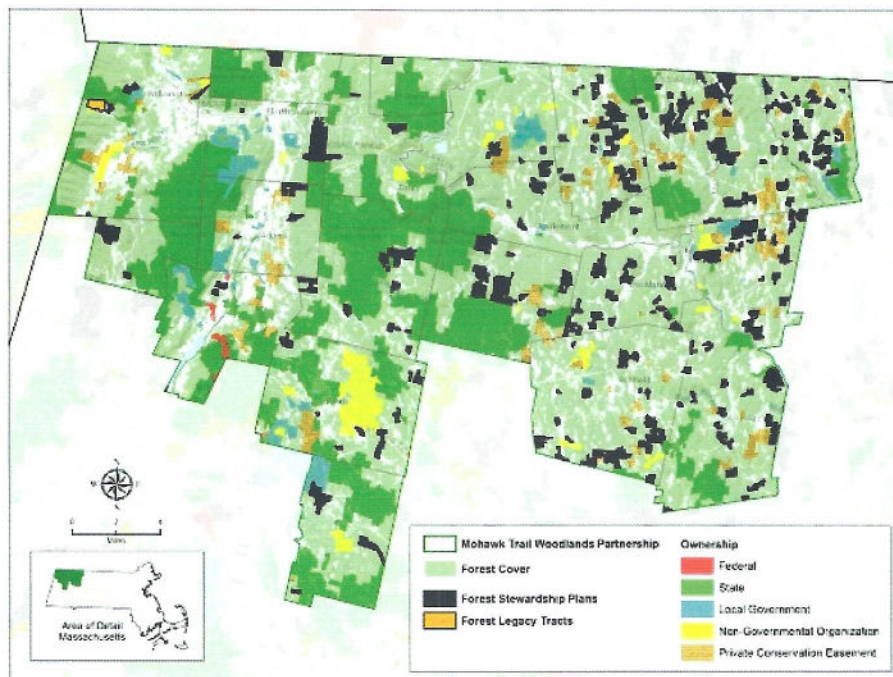


Figure A 2: Potential locations within the MTWP for Research/Demonstration forests: Private Land

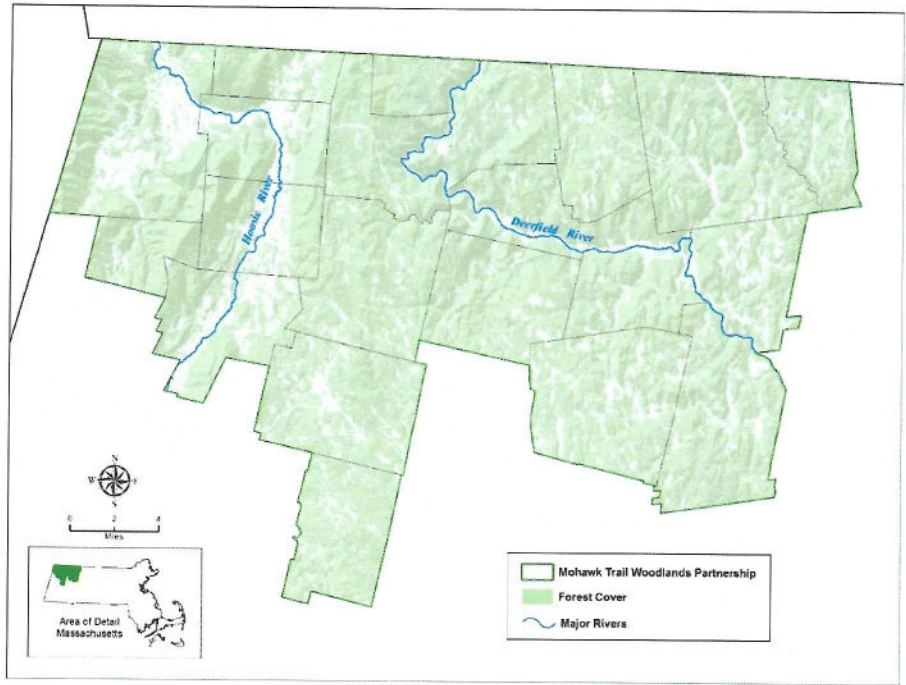


Figure A 3: Major waterways within the MTWP boundary.

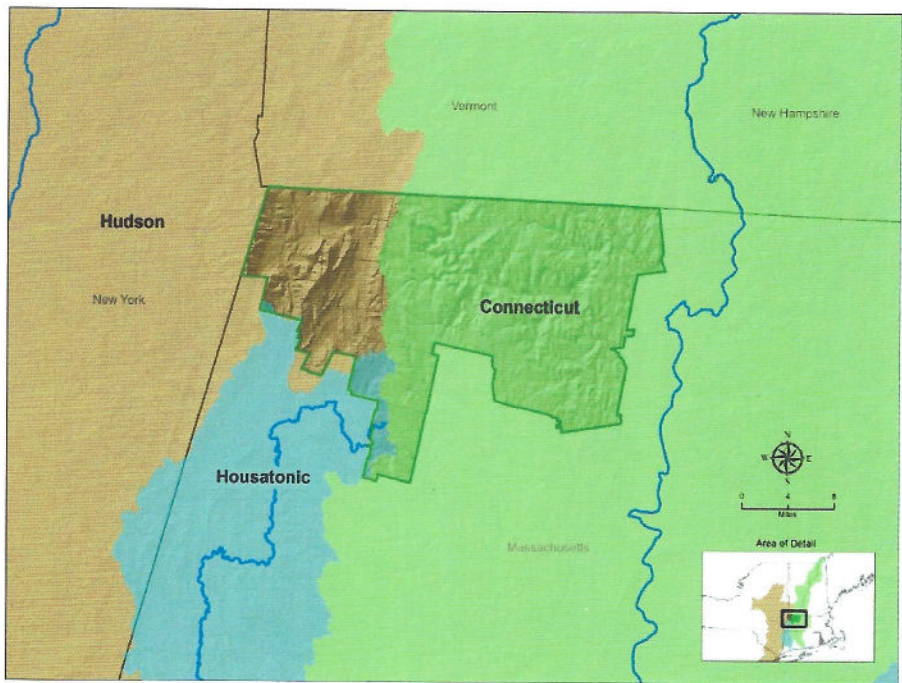


Figure A 4: Watersheds within the MTWP boundary.

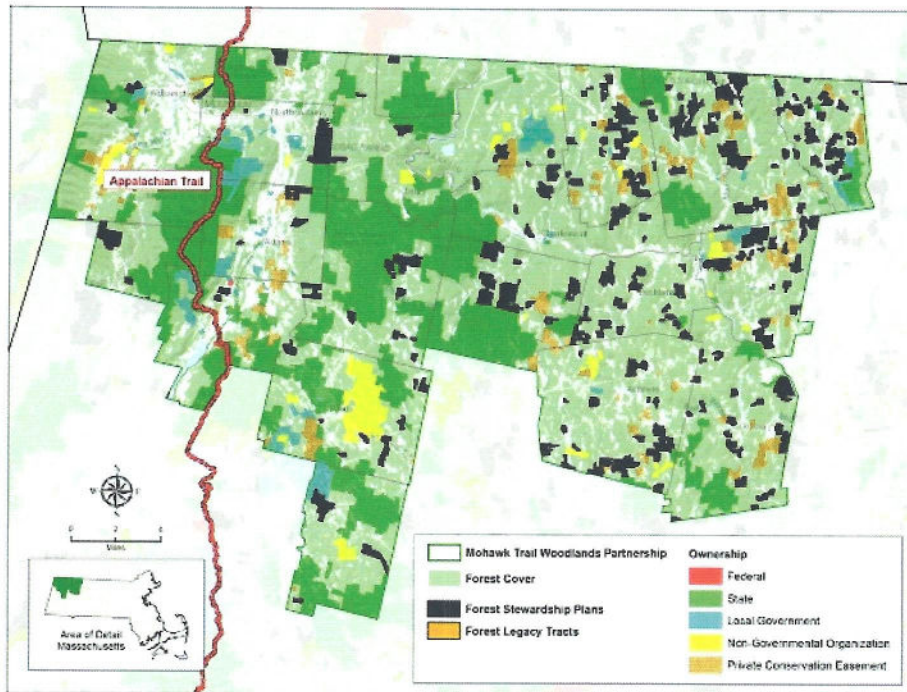


Figure A 5: Detail of the Appalachian Trail crossing various ownership boundaries within the MTWP.

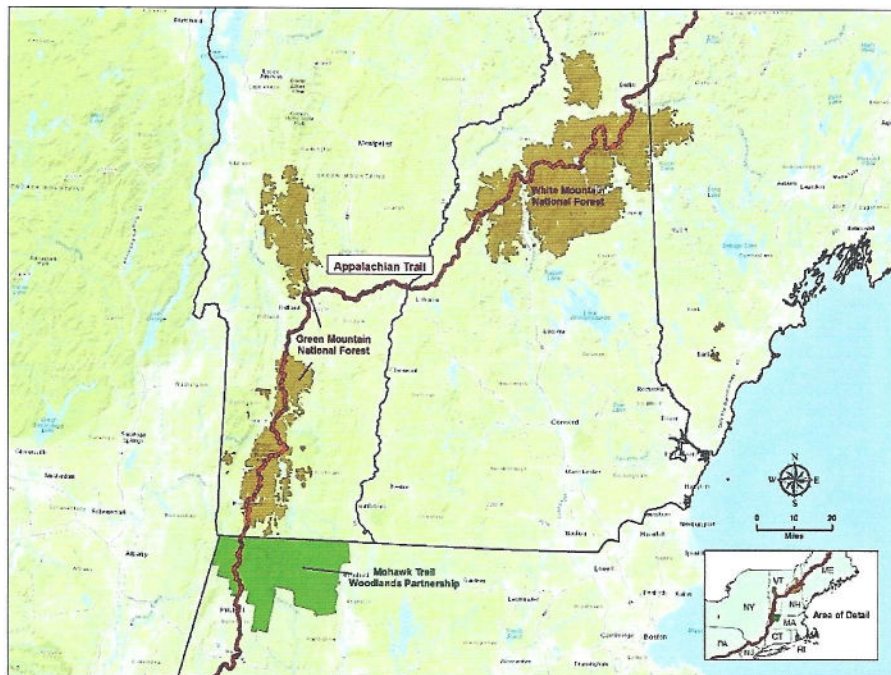


Figure A 6: Appalachian Trail vicinity with MTWP and National Forest System lands highlighted.

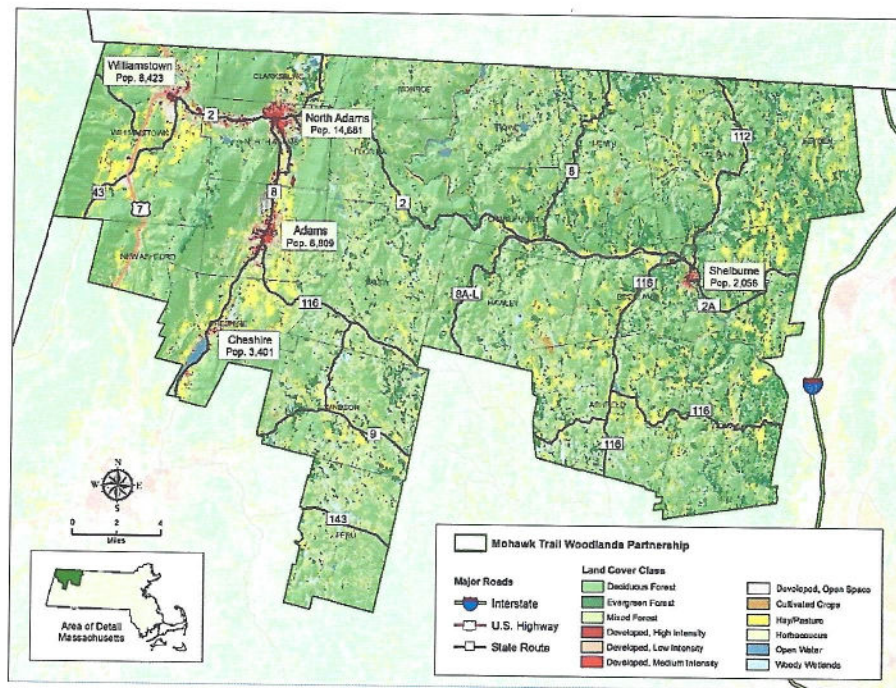


Figure A 7: Major highways within the MTWP boundary.