



# Woodscaping: Land Stewardship for Small Forested Properties

*Southern New England Forest Consortium*

## What is Woodscaping?

**W**oodscaping is a term for active management of small woodland parcels (in Rhode Island a small woodland parcel is considered to be less than 10 acres) in suburban and rural areas where more and more people are living. It is land stewardship that is done in a way that respects ecological values at the same time that it meets landowner goals such as creating a walking or skiing path, watching birds, enjoying privacy, cutting firewood or timber, making maple syrup, or other activities. Because woodscaping usually occurs where people live, it emphasizes the natural beauty and personal touch that people like around the home. Woodscaping is a mix of traditional forest management and landscaping activities that occurs within the context of a natural woodland or meadow ecosystem, not a lawn with ornamental trees. It can be done by a landowner or by a hired professional. Woodscaping may include neighbors working together on a project that extends beyond individual property lines.

## WHY CARE ABOUT PROTECTING SMALL TRACTS OF RHODE ISLAND FORESTLAND?

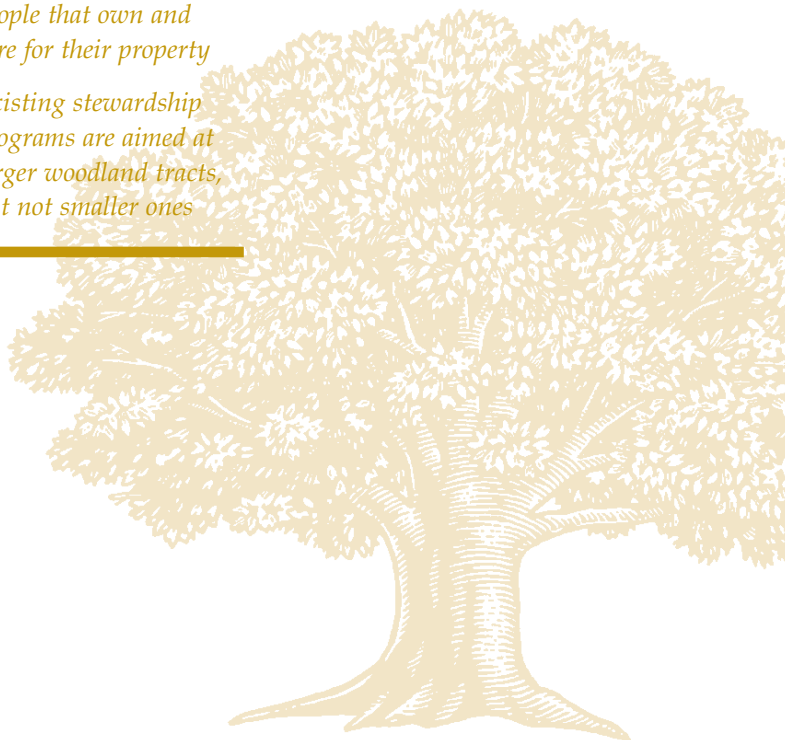
- *Small acreage forest ownerships are on the rise*
- *The pattern of small forest and meadow ownership magnifies pressure on public water supply, wildlife habitat and wood supply*
- *Wise stewardship depends on the many people that own and care for their property*
- *Existing stewardship programs are aimed at larger woodland tracts, but not smaller ones*

## What People are Doing

Jean Skarzynski owns a home on 2 acres of meadow, surrounded by 6 acres of woods in a small New England town. A recent evening program inspired Jean to tackle some new woodland projects at home to see if she could attract a greater variety of birds and animals. She learned that their meadow was an ideal habitat for bluebirds, and that a nesting pair would likely come if her family put out a birdhouse of the proper dimensions. Thinking about the woods, she planned to clear a footpath past a clump of large pines that had cavities created by a woodpecker. She also learned that by clearing around and aggressively pruning overgrown apple trees in the woods, fruit production would improve and create a Mecca for animals. The clearing would also make an ideal observation point for birds and animals - another stop along the footpath - and the cleared trees could easily be cut into wood for the fireplace.

Ed Carillo found himself missing the extensive woodlands and fields of his youth, so he decided to pass on to his children some of the values that he'd learned by involving them in the care of the 12 acres surrounding their home. In late winter they tapped a line of old sugar maples for sap and boiled it down into syrup for friends and family. Each spring they planted Christmas tree seedlings that in 10 years could be harvested for the holidays.

Ed's greatest pride was a 5-acre grove of young oak trees from which, little by little, he and his kids were removing poorly shaped and crowded trees for stovewood each year. The first firewood had come from opening an access route for his pickup truck. Later, for added confidence, he hired a professional forester to evaluate their plans for both the oak grove and the rest of the property. Even though Ed is not sure whether he'll be around to harvest any mature timber, his desire to have his children learn first-hand about trees and how they grow, had been motivation enough - that and the reward of helping create what would one day be a beautiful grove of big trees, for people and wildlife alike.



## WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS?

- *A more attractive natural environment*
- *An increase in birds and other wildlife on the property*
- *More opportunities to enjoy your woods and fields*
- *Increase property value*
- *A pleasant hobby that could allow for some quiet time, exercise and learning*
- *Well-tended natural resources, protected for the community and future generations*

## WHAT ARE SOME COSTS?

- *Doing it yourself*
- *Time and effort involved in doing it yourself*
- *Some money*
- *The possibility of physical discomfort such as poison ivy or insect bites*
- *Hiring someone*
- *Time and effort to choose and hire someone*
- *Additional cost of hiring outside help*

## Benefits vs. Costs

It's human nature to maximize benefits and reduce costs. And, we all know that nothing worthwhile comes free. Given this, we feel woodscaping makes real sense – the benefits do outnumber the costs. Time and effort costs of doing woodscaping yourself can more optimistically be thought of in terms of recreation and exercise. Time and effort costs of hiring someone to help with woodscaping are probably a minimal expense. Physical discomforts can be safely avoided with proper clothing and repellents. And though some woodscaping activities may require you to spend money, many do not, and many others are relatively inexpensive.

*Susan Campbell, Massachusetts Forest Stewardship Program and Ellen Grady, Southern New England Forest Consortium, Inc. October 1996.*

## This series of factsheets will help you accomplish three important things:

- Learn more about your woodlands.
- Identify your goals, objectives, and project activities for your woodlands.
- Provide you with information and resources to make informed decisions and successfully accomplish your plans.

Depending on your level of commitment or your need for specialized technical assistance, this guide may be used as a supplement in working with a consulting forester and other natural resource professionals, or it may be all you need for right now to achieve your goals.

## How to use this publication

The following factsheets are designed to help you learn more about your woodlands. Whether you're interested in recreational enjoyment or enhancing your income, this guide will provide you with project ideas, information, and additional resources for achieving these plans. This publication will also help you to protect your woodlands and project investments by providing you with information to reduce potential environmental impacts.

There are 11 factsheets in this series that cover essential topics for woodland owners. There is also an inventory sheet, a place to sketch your property or woodland management area, a sheet to record your plans and activities, and a glossary of commonly used terms. Many of the factsheets provide basic principles, a starting point for working on a particular project, and then direct you towards additional resources for more specific information and assistance. Keep in mind that laws and regulations vary and change. Always check with local and state officials to make sure your activities comply with the law.

## Getting Started

You can read these factsheets all at once, or you may choose to focus on one or two at a time depending upon your interests. The first three factsheets provide background and basic principles on the history, functions and properties of Southern New England Forests and key elements of proper project planning. As suggested throughout the factsheets, take your time to identify your woodland resources and think about the type of activities you would like to undertake and your reasons for doing so. You can then use this publication to help you design a project action plan and accomplish your activities.

As a woodland owner in Southern New England, you play an extremely important role in protecting and managing forest habitat, as well as contributing to the diversity of land use types throughout the landscape. Above all, embrace the opportunities your woodlands present to enjoy nature with your family, friends, and neighbors.

*Programs and activities are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or national origin.*

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