

Northern Forest Institute



Annual Report, July 2011 - June 2012



Executive Summary

The 12 months between July 1st, 2011 and June 30th, 2012 represent a tremendous period of growth and success for NFI.

While continuing to develop core programming and partnerships, NFI added two full-time staff, 5 interns, and began the first summer of full operation of the newly-acquired Adirondack Interpretive Center (AIC). This center provides the mechanism for NFI to begin designing and delivering a wide range programs to public audiences while simultaneously increasing the diversity and quality of resources available to all users of ESF's Newcomb Campus.

Outreach to academic audiences continued at 2010-11 levels, with NFI working with a range of public and private secondary schools, colleges and universities.

The addition of professional development to NFI offerings was a much anticipated advancement this year. Our first leadership trainings were delivered to partners and were met with significant positive feedback and requests for more trainings.

NFI's primary partnership with New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation continued to grow, reaching new divisions and bureaus, an investment retuning immediate benefits, as well as several to be realized in coming years.

The experiences of this year have sharpened the focus on opportunities and challenges for NFI in the coming year, key of which will be identification and retention of a program manager, and the continued effort to secure committed funding to support NFI operations.



Environmental Philosopher

Marianne Patinelli-Dubay joined NFI in July of 2011, creating and leading the program division of Environmental Philosophy. Her contributions include conceiving, organizing and chairing the Adirondack's first symposium on Land Use and Ethics, which brought more than 30 individuals from 18 institutions, 9 US states and 3 foreign countries to the Newcomb Campus.

In addition, Marianne presented more than 4 invited papers at conferences throughout the region, delivered the keynote address and co-chaired the NYS Archives Partnership Trust conference on the *Adirondack Influence in the Humanities*.

Educational initiatives included teaching 3 courses at the collegiate level; introducing "Philosophy for Children" into the Newcomb Central School District; an Applied Ethics seminar designed for the NYS DEC Div of Lands & Forests; and serving as scholar in residence and facilitator for the NYS Council on Humanities, Adirondack Correctional Facility's continuing education series "The American Dream"

Program Manager

In July '11 NFI also welcomed Rebecca Oyer, hired as NFI's first Program Manager. Rebecca's considerable efforts went well beyond creating and delivering programing.

She developed major structural aspects of NFI's program management and systems to support that work. She was also primary in managing NFI's web presence, including the NFI and AIC web pages, and social media presence.

Rebecca left us at the end of the year however, her contributions were critical to the success of NFI while she with us, and establishing protocols that will carry NFI's success forward.



Junior Naturalist Intern

This year NFI created an internship program for local high school students interested in the physical sciences and natural history. The program was dubbed Junior Naturalist Internships.

NFI partnered with ESF's UMEB grant co-PIs to apply for a Research Assistantship for High School Students (RAHSS). As a team we were successful in receiving this supplemental grant, which provided additional funding and the opportunity for the JNs to participate in ongoing research at ESF's Huntington Wildlife Forest/Newcomb Campus.

A learning outcome of the program included the JNs, supervised by the Interpretive Naturalist Intern, creating and presenting a poster and presentation on their experiences during the Adirondack Research Consortium annual conference in May.



Interpretive Naturalist Intern

Carrying forward a pre-existing relationship between the former operators of the Interpretive Center and ESF's undergraduate program in Environmental Interpretation, NFI hired an interpretive naturalist intern, selected through a competitive application and review process.

NFI welcomed a second summer intern for the AIC from ESF. This student was sponsored by NSF's Undergraduate Mentoring in Environmental Biology (UMEB) program.

The UMEB program focuses on creating opportunities for undergraduates from traditionally underserved communities, providing them the funding and mentoring to engage in primary research while undergraduates.

The INI and UMEB interns spent the summer learning and practicing interpretive techniques, including program design and delivery, as well as guest services and nature center operations.



Programs, Initiatives and Special Events

NFI continued offering existing outreach programs, covering a wide range of content and units on forest and wildlife ecology, invasive species, climate change, geology, natural resource management, and reconnecting children to nature among other subjects. In addition, NFI staff researched, designed and in several cases partnered with other individuals and organizations to implement new programmatic lines. Programs include:

The Natural History of Fly Fishing – a monthly series between May – October, providing instruction and guided fishing opportunities for beginners through advance anglers.

Aldo Leopold Workshop – A central figure in the modern conservation movement was celebrated with a day dedicated to examining his legacy through hands on activity, readings, a guided conversation and a showing of the feature length documentary *Green Fire*. The day started with a Leopold Bench-building workshop.

Working Forests Working For You – A monthly conversation with natural resource professionals, foresters, researchers and advocates to explore what a working forest is, and how forests are a critical part of healthy human and natural communities throughout the regional. This series included site visits to forestry research and demonstration sites with each presentation.

Got Game? - A monthly conversation with natural resource professionals, managers and researchers to discuss the importance of game management, share the latest research findings and natural history information on game species, and to highlight the contributions of hunters and anglers to the field of conservation.

Teddy Roosevelt Weekend – NFI hosted TR himself at the AIC, providing an educational component of this annual event, sponsored by the Town of Newcomb. This weekend of history, education and activity brings hundreds of visitors to Newcomb, and NFI was excited to play an active role this year, which will be expanding in years to come.

Full Moon Chili Snowshoe parties – On the Saturday nearest the full moon in each month from December through April NFI staff led interpretive night hikes on snowshoes. Each evening concluded with hot chocolate and s'mores beside a warming fire.

Audubon Bird Walks – NFI has developed a partnership with Northern New York Audubon, including being the host site for a birding hike on the first Saturday of each month.

Loons and Logs Celebration – To celebrate the first anniversary of operating the AIC under ESF management, NFI created a day celebrating two icons of Adirondack human and natural history. Commissioning the world's first and only rubber Loons (made in America!) we hosted a day of programming around logging, forest management, loon biology and research, all capped off with a “loon drive” down the former log driving route along the outlet of Rich Lake.

Hudson River Environmental Opportunities Network (HREON)

In May of this year NFI brought together 19 people, representing 17 organizations, from throughout the Hudson River watershed, from the headwaters to the harbor. This group was convened to explore how we can increase our communication, cooperation, and coordination in an effort to increase the environmental opportunities for traditionally underserve youth, increasing recruitment and retention of minority youth in physical sciences and related careers.





The Arbutus Beaver - In November NFI learned of the existence of an original Huntington-owned guide boat. Of the 11 Huntington at one time owned the whereabouts of only three were known: one in private ownership, one in the Mystic Seaport museum, and one derelict in the AEC's storage barn. The availability of this boat enables NFI to move forward with the development of an initiative using guide boats in multi-faceted interdisciplinary educational programming for both scholastic and public audiences. The Beaver was brought home to Huntington Wildlife Forest after an 80 year absence, and after a refurbishment during winter 2012/13 will be ready for use in support of education in summer of 2013.

AmeriCorps National Community Conservation Corps - Through a four-member partnership, spearheaded by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, ESF hosted a NC3 team of 10 members who contributed more than 1600 man-hours of work restoring trails and gardens, removing invasive plants, and establishing new fire ring at AIC over a two week period. NFI was able to provide plenty of in-service training and education in turn, including the team in lectures and programs, and creating a half-day leadership and ethics class for the Corps members.

Inaugural Land Use and Ethics Symposium - The Adirondacks is a landscape defined by tensions, between conservation and preservation, between deep wilderness and development, between equality and injustice. Yet despite the fascinating cauldron of human experience there is no forum - public or professional - in which these tensions are examined and discussed. That is until now. In May of 2012 NFI hosted the first symposium on land use and ethics, a resounding success offering more than 30 presentations and papers over two days in early spring. The strength of participant response has resulted in the second annual symposium being scheduled for late-may of 2013.

The Adirondack Interpretive Center

Taking programmatic control of the renamed-Adirondack Interpretive Center (AIC) was an intuitive move for NFI, though one with considerable risk. With no dedicated staff, funding, or carry-through programming, operating AIC represented a monumental “from scratch” undertaking. The first full 12-month reporting period has been a learning experience for guests and NFI alike.

Between July 1, 2011 and June 30 2012, NFI created and offered 129 public and scholastic programs at the AIC, attended by a total of 1,361 participants. NFI staff interacted with 5,558 visitors inside the AIC lobby, for total outreach contacts of 6,919 individuals. This does not include trail registry numbers, vehicular volume, or others who visit but do not enter the Center.

While there is a pronounced gap between first-year ESF visitation numbers and historic reporting, NFI received strong positive feedback on program options, improved range of offerings, and guest service. Many guests thanked ESF for keeping the Center open.

In addition to a comprehensive reconceiving of programming, NFI is also working to reconceive the AIC physically, in need of rejuvenation after 20 years. Sharing NFI’s commitment to better serve existing and new audiences are many donors. Two in particular have made significant commitments to helping accomplish this work.

In partnership with ESF Physical Plant and Art of Wild, an independent interpretive design firm, work has already begun on the transformation of the existing exhibit room into the Northern Forest Room, which will include new interactive exhibits, plate-glass windows, a fireplace and new furniture.

Design work is also underway to remodel the classroom, which will add a new bathroom, and expand and improve the teaching space.





Challenges

Staffing - NFI does not lack for ideas, opportunities, and audiences; it lacks capacity to capitalize these ideas and opportunities. The primary challenge facing NFI is securing qualified staff equally committed to the mission of NFI and living in the Adirondacks. In addition to program staff, growth of NFI activity is reaching a point where dedicated administrative support is increasing critical. NFI, as the outreach arm of the Adirondack Ecological Center (AEC), is working with AEC to partner on creative solutions to solve the administrative need for both entities.

Funding - The ESF College Foundation Inc. has been a strong, dedicated, and successful advocate sustaining NFI through development efforts. Revenue from programs, events and grant writing has also contributed to fiscal stability of NFI. However, any entity reliant entirely on soft funding is at risk to the vagaries of discretionary funding streams. Long-term sustainability will need to combine development, grant writing, and revenue with a dedicated endowment.

Marketing - NFI has invested significantly in cultivating relationships with regional media outlets, members of the press, and establishing exposure through web and social media presence. This effort has benefited greatly from the support and partnership of ESF's Office of Communications. Despite this, general and program attendance lags behind expectations. Comparing the first six months of 2011 to the same period of 2012 shows visitation to the AIC has doubled. While there are many factors potentially influencing this positive trend (quality and variety of programming, word of mouth advertising, increased regional awareness), experience over the reporting period indicates "getting the word out" via effective and timely marketing is paramount to increasing growth.

Goals for 2012-2013

Growth - NFI will grow outreach contacts for each of the three audiences on which we focus: Professional (trainings, workshops, professional development, etc.), Academic (scholastic and collegiate), and General audiences. To achieve this, during the 2012-13 reporting period NFI will:

Offer 6 additional events for professionals: agency personnel, teachers, loggers, land owners, etc.

Increase the number of scholastic contacts through development of the Adirondacks Futures in the High School project, increased outreach/solicitation to teachers, and additional marketing

Adding two new program series and 4 new stand-alone events for the general public: Got Game? (reorganized) Adirondack Guide Boat Day and recurring guide boat-based programming, Natural History of Traditional Adirondack Foods, Piqued by the Peaks, etc.

Funding - In addition to partnering with the College Foundation on development initiatives, NFI will host its second annual Loon Drive, and anticipates to increasing revenue by at least 30%. NFI will also submit grant proposals to cover events, initiatives, and staffing.

Masten House - In anticipation of the College Foundation closing on the purchase of Masten, NFI will create partnerships and content enabling programs to be held at Masten within 12 to 18 months.

Residential Semester - NFI is building and leading an academic semester residential experience for students from ESF and other institutions. This 15 credit suite of 5 courses will focus on the ecological and economic sustainability of the Park, and will feature Ross Whaley, Stacy McNulty, Marianne Patinelli-Dubay and Paul Hai as instructors, with a number of guest lecturers.

Infrastructure - NFI will work with ESF physical plant to complete 2 major renovation projects at AIC during 2012-13. Design work is already underway for 120 sq ft of new exhibits, part of a comprehensive renovation of the exhibit room, which will add plate glass viewing windows, new furnishings, and a fireplace. A new bathroom will be added to the classroom, improving and increasing teaching space.



NFI Founding Partners

The Northern Forest Institute would be simply an idea without the vision and confidence of four key partners who provided the support to build NFI. Their help has made all the difference:

NYS Department of Environmental
Conservation

Open Space Institute

Town of Newcomb

The Walbridge Fund

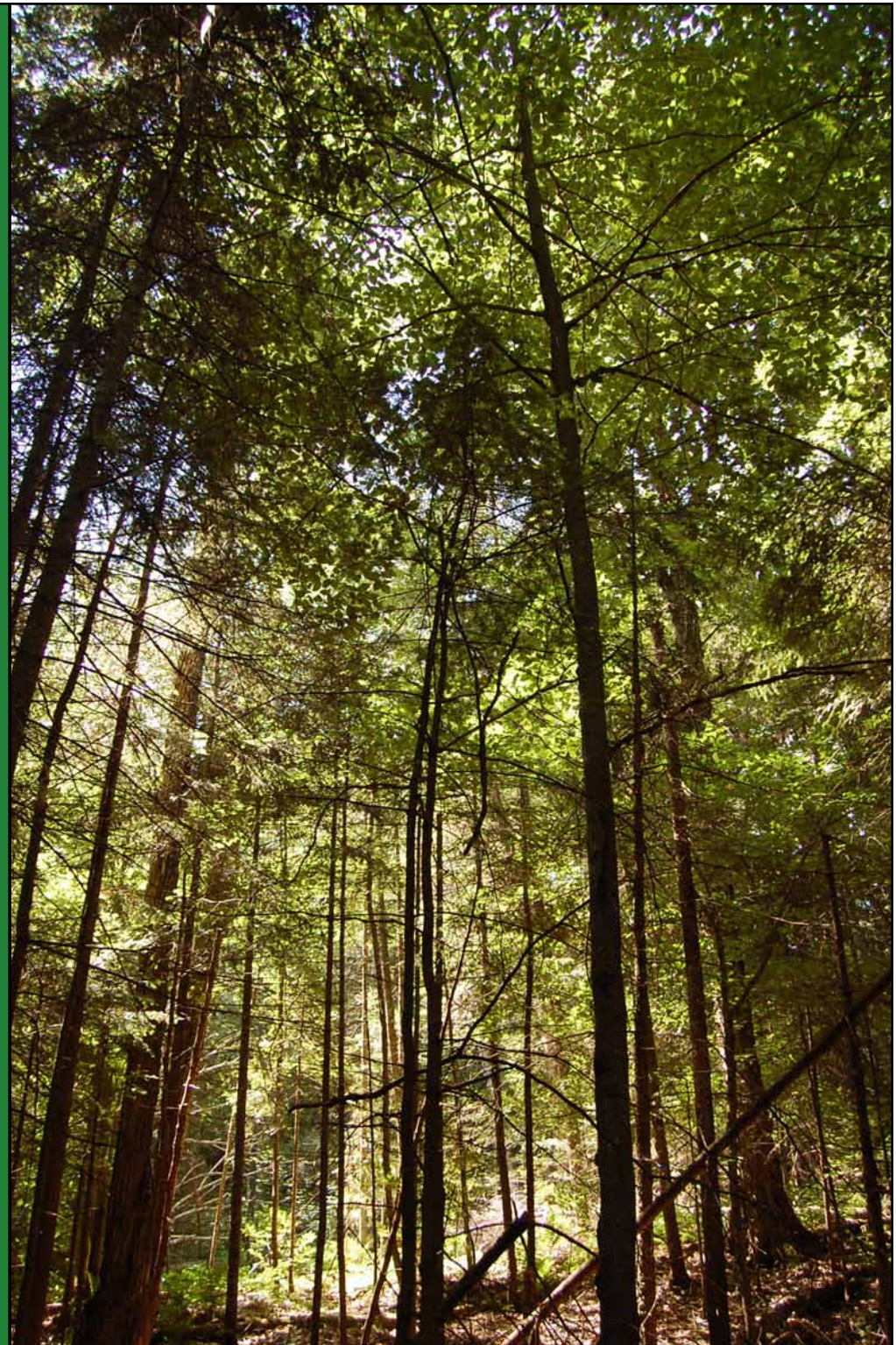
Additional Support

Many individuals and organizations have provided support during this year of operation, for which NFI is deeply grateful. Three in particular deserve mention:

Adirondack Park Institute

Charles and Elsbeth Morgan

Dr. Frederick and Virginia Parker



The Northern Forest Institute is the educational outreach unit of SUNY ESF's
Newcomb Campus at the Huntington Wildlife Forest in Newcomb, NY

For more information on NFI please visit us on the web at www.esf.edu/nfi

More information on the Adirondack Interpretive Center, operated by NFI,
can be found at www.esf.edu/aic

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State University of New York
College of Environmental Science and Forestry