FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION
VERMONT
AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

USE VALUE APPRAISAL: *RESERVE FORESTLAND*

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and recreation

April 17, 2024

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WELCOME

ENROLLMENT CATEGORIES:

AGRICULTURAL LAND

FORESTLAND

GENERAL CONTEXT

- Forestland Use Value: $188/acre < 1 mile, $141/acre > 1 mile of Class 1, 2, or 3 road
- Subject to Commissioner's minimum management standards
- Managed for goals based on enrollment category
- Lien mechanism
- Management plan required every 10 years
- Forest Management Activity Reports required when activity is implemented

Historically, all family-owned parcels needed to be managed in-part, for sawtimber, with some options for enrollment of ecologically significant treatments areas (ESTAs), not necessarily managed for sawtimber but managed for ecological functions.

Forests with a critical mass of old forest characteristics can provide important contributions to:

- Native biodiversity
- Wildlife habitat
- Hydrologic regulation
- Carbon storage
- Forest resilience
- Localized cooling and climate buffering

Characteristics include:

- Large old trees
- Spatial variability in tree density and size
- Abundant downed deadwood
- Multiple canopy layers
- Large standing dead trees
- Regeneration
- Unique plant communities (understory plants, mosses, lichens)

These contributions are not exclusive to old forest, but the nature of some contributions may be unique to old forest and thus valuable.

“Old forest is absent in Vermont as a functional component of the landscape.”

Vermont Conservation Design sets a target of approximately 9% or 419,000 acres of Vermont's forestland to be in an old forest condition.

It is estimated that about 218,000 acres will likely develop into old forests based on conservation easements, wilderness designation, or other status.

- ***Old forest targets are often cited individually.***
- ***Consider strategies in the context of and interaction with other complementary goals – i.e. Young Forest targets (Vermont Conservation Design), Forest Futures Strategic Roadmap etc.***
- ***The concepts are compatible – and some approaches can be – but not all.***
- ***Balance can be achieved with careful approach.***

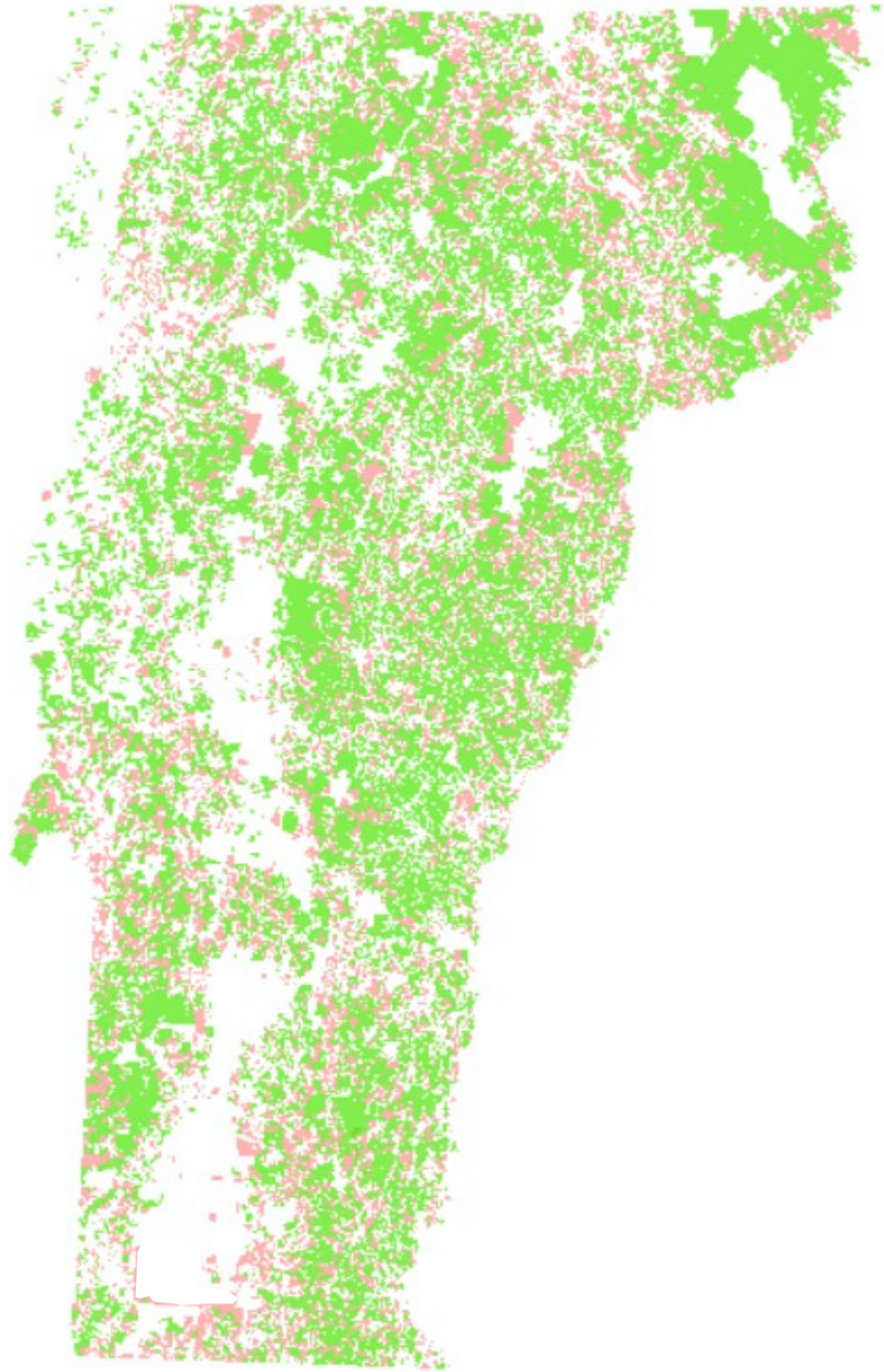
Parcels Enrolled in UVA

55% of eligible forestland parcels are enrolled

- 16,000 parcels enrolled
- 29,000 parcels eligible

70% of eligible forest acres are enrolled

- 1.98 million acres enrolled
- 2.77 million acres eligible



Reserve Forestland: Objectives

Objective 1: Maintain the primary purpose and outcome of the forestland category of UVA as: keep forestland in productive use with oversight by licensed professionals.

Objective 2: Increase opportunities to achieve old forests on UVA enrolled forestlands at a scale and pattern that helps Vermont benefit from old forests' values.

Background

- Act 146 created a new enrollment subcategory in the Managed Forestland category of Use Value Appraisal (UVA) called Reserve Forestland.
- The act required development of a report defining the program standards. This report was issued on December 30, 2022.
- Enrollments in the subcategory began July 1, 2023.
- April 1 was the first deadline for plan updates since start of the new category.
- Adoption rate from this update cycle are not yet known.

RESERVE FORESTLAND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Reserve Forestland is forested land managed with a primary purpose of accrual and protection of old forest functions, values, and associated characteristics. Management may include active or passive management, inclusive of the range of silvicultural strategies when consistent with all other standards. – Effective July 1, 2023

Eligibility

Baseline eligibility:

- 25 total enrolled forestland acres
- 20 acres are forested productive soils (Site Class I, II, or III) may be eligible for enrollment of Reserve Forestland. Of these parcels, the following eligibility thresholds apply:

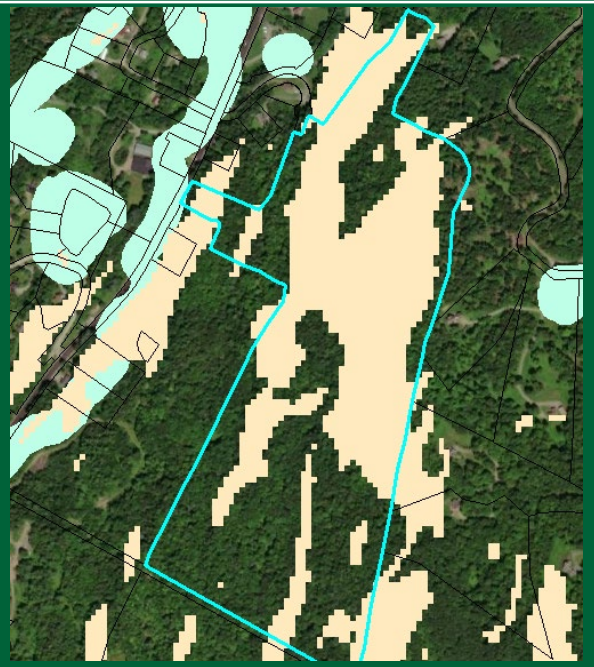
PARCELS WITH ≥ 100 ENROLLED ACRES: 30% or more of the parcel's enrolled acres need to be composed of significant and sensitive conditions, per program standards.

PARCELS WITH < 100 ENROLLED ACRES: 50% or more of the parcel's enrolled acres need to be composed of significant and sensitive conditions, per program standards.

Significant and Sensitive Conditions:

- Ecologically Significant Treatment Areas (ESTAs)
- Steep slopes ≥ 35%
- Site IV lands, and
- Special places and sensitive sites

Examples
< 100 acres
Eligible
> 50%



ELIGIBLE example:

- 85 enrolled acres (all forest)
- 53 acres significant sensitive conditions (all steep slope)

62% significant sensitive conditions

INELIGIBLE example:

- 71 enrolled acres (forest + ag)
- 24 acres significant sensitive conditions (steep slope + riparian)

33% significant sensitive conditions

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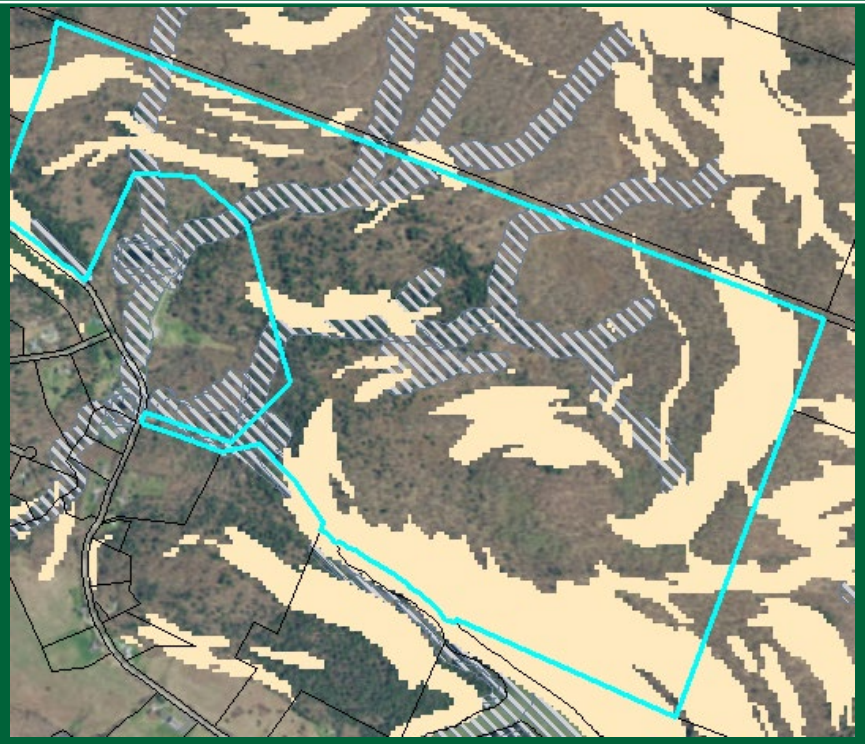
Examples
> 100 acres
Eligible
> 30%



ELIGIBLE example:

- 365 enrolled acres (all forest)
- 162 acres significant sensitive conditions (riparian + steep slope)

44% significant sensitive conditions.

INELIGIBLE example:

- 174 enrolled acres (forest + open)
- 18 acres significant sensitive conditions (riparian)

10% significant sensitive conditions

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Reserve Forestland

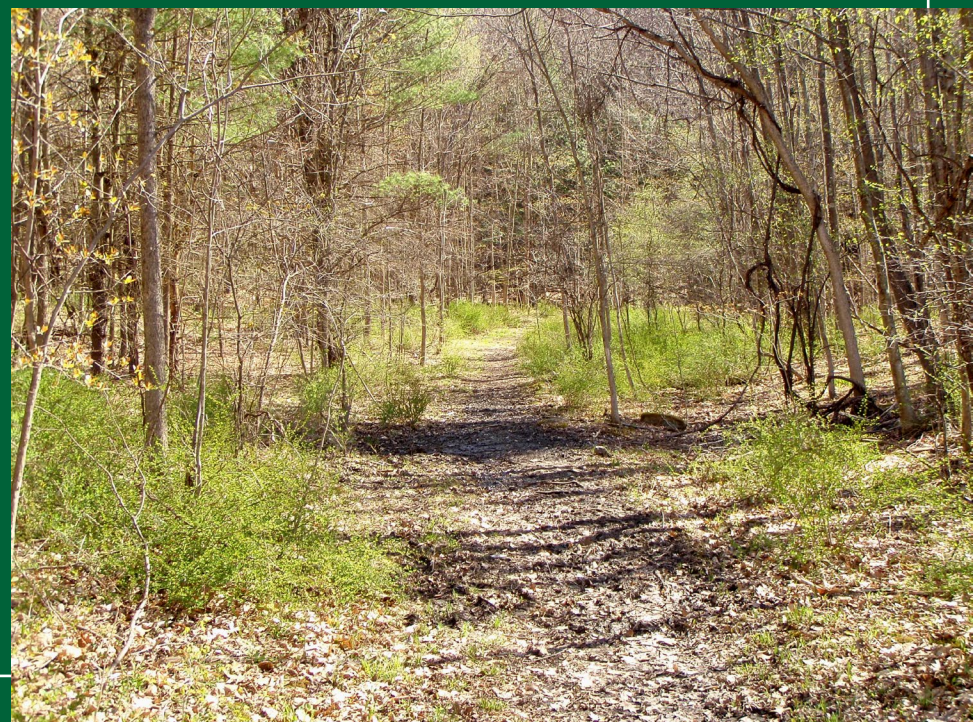
Management plans have **old-forest specific** management requirements.

Must be managed for old forest values and functions and landowners will need to demonstrate that the management strategy used is making progress towards attainment of old forest characteristics.

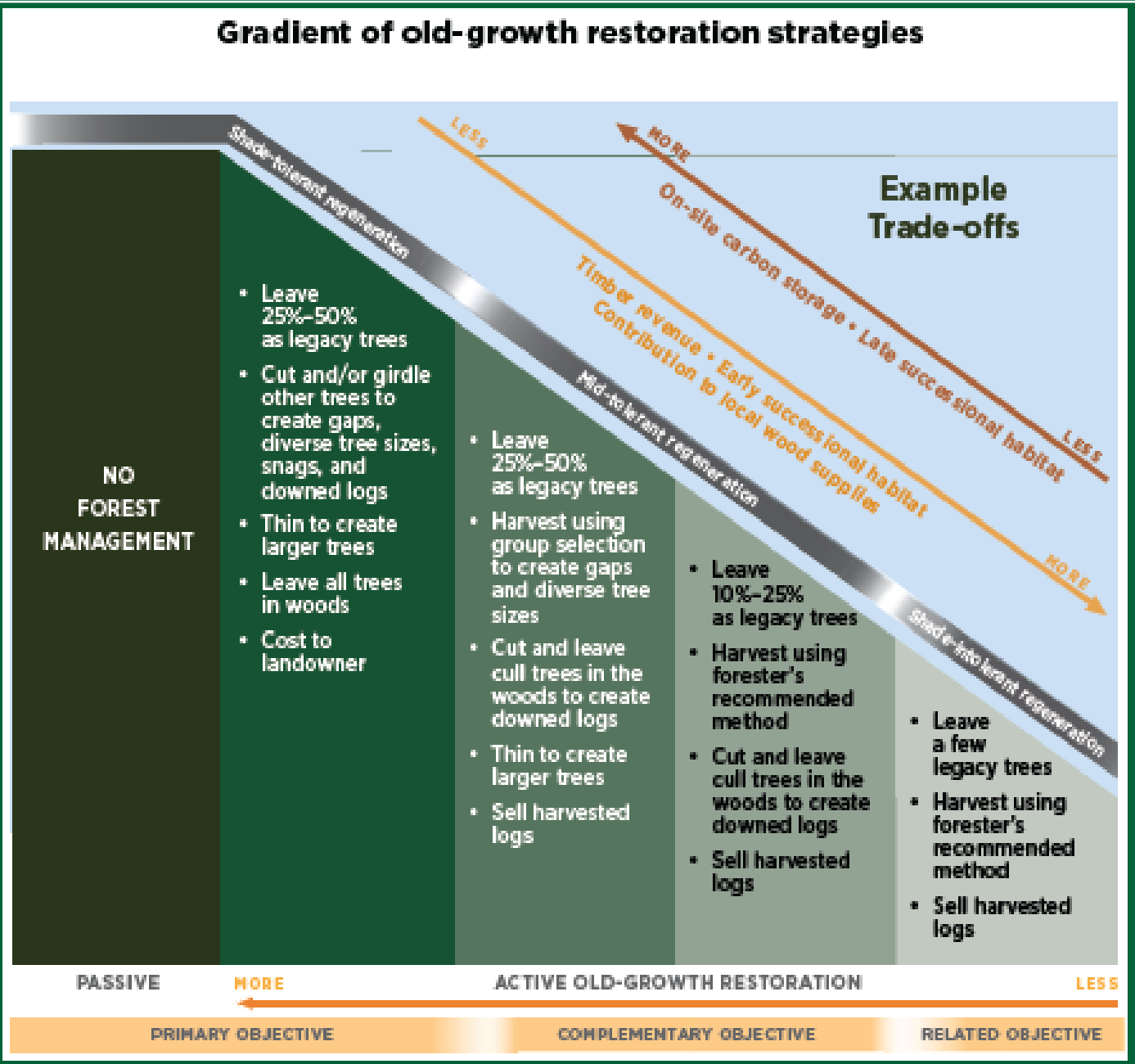
- Acceptable Management Practices
- Invasive Plants
- May Require Active Management

Enrollment is voluntary – may be some or all of a parcel.

Landowners may transition between eligible categories.



Gradient of old-growth restoration strategies



D'Amato, A., & Catanzaro, P. (2022) Restoring Old-Growth Characteristics to New England's and New York's Forests. The University of Vermont and UMass Amherst.

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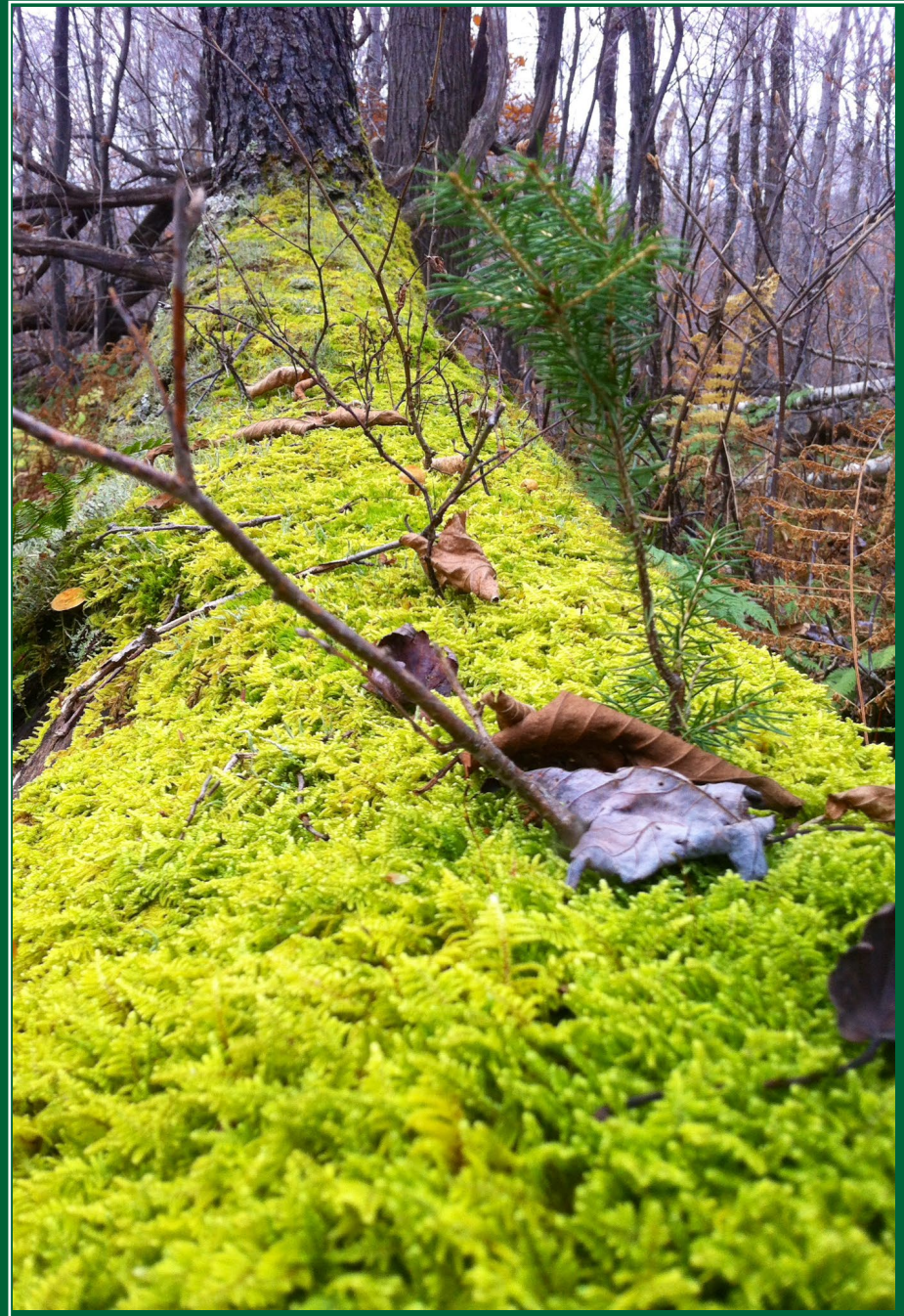
Reserve Forestland Current Interest

ESTIMATED ELIGIBILITY

	Acres	Parcels
UVA Enrolled	532,602	2,403
Potentially Eligible: Not Enrolled	158,581	1,717
Total	**691,183**	**4,120**

ENROLLMENTS IN PROGRESS

	Acres	Parcels
UVA Enrolled	561	8
Eligible -Not Yet Enrolled	626	6
Total	**1187**	**14**



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Most parcels will not be eligible:

Only about 15% of parcels are expected to be eligible for this enrollment option.

However, management for old forest characteristics and forest products are compatible, and many critical old forest characteristics can be achieved decades sooner with thoughtfully designed management strategies.

Landowners are encouraged to talk to their forester about how forest management can best meet their goals.

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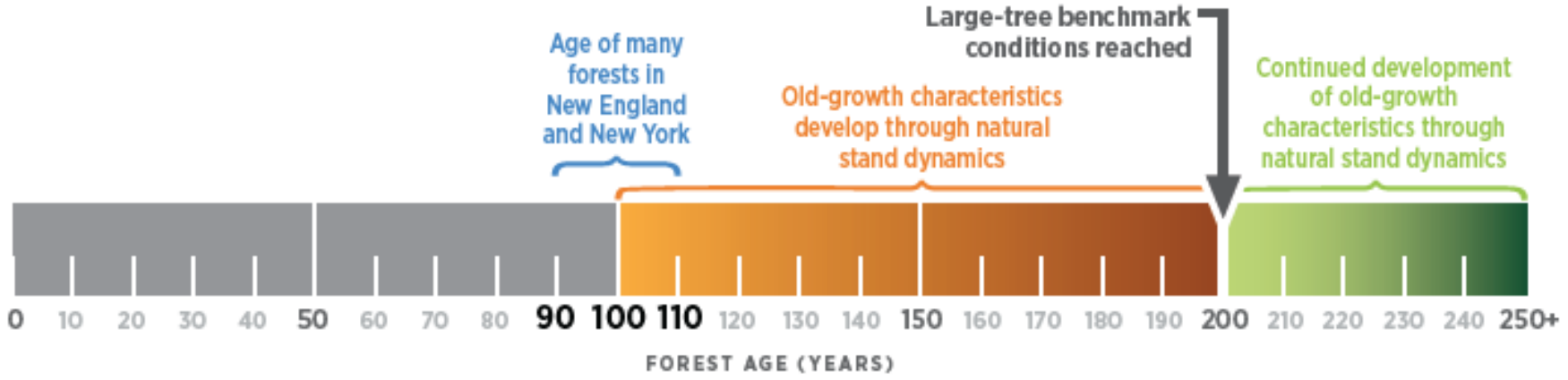
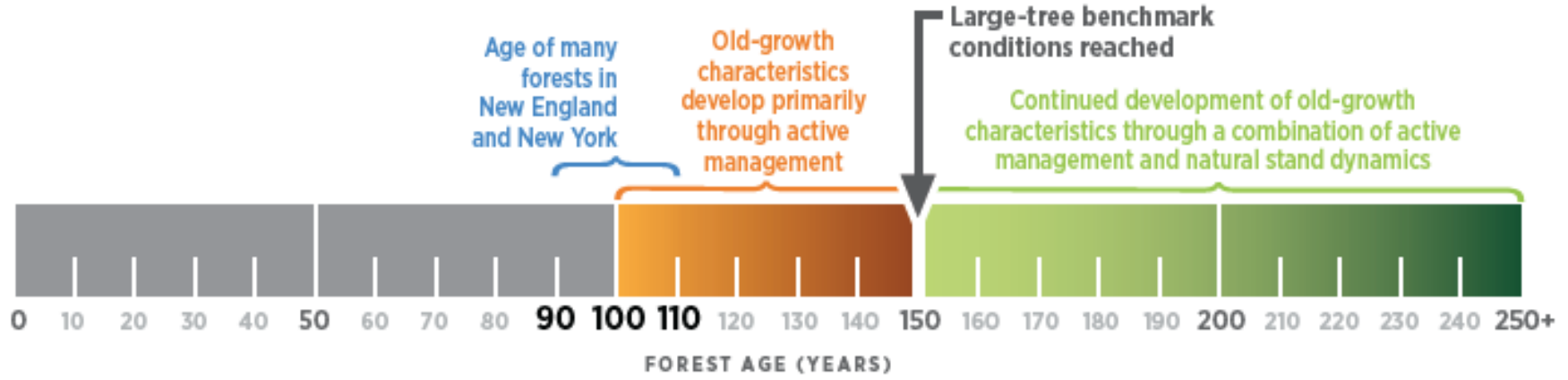
Passive Pathway to Old Forests



Adapted from Hagan and Whitman (2004)

Active Pathway to Old Forests



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WHERE TO FIND THIS STUFF

Reserve Forestland Website: https://fpr.vermont.gov/forest/uva-reserve-forestland

What resources are available to support enrollment and management for old forest functions?

- Restoring Old Growth Characteristics to New England's and New York's Forests (2022)
- Reserve Forestland Standards.
- Landowner overview of Use Value Appraisal brochure, and a Reserve Forestland brochure.
- Eligibility and acreage chart worksheet is available here: Eligibility and Acreage Chart Workbook

CONTEXT:
Balancing Objectives and Strategies for our Forests

- Young Forest
- Old Forest
- Sustainably Managed Forest
- Resilience, Biodiversity, Water, Carbon
- Vibrant Economy
- Local, Renewable Forest Products
- Jobs
- Emergency Response Capacity (storm damage, forest pests i.e. EAB)
- Cultural Connections
- Recreation

Tending to the Balance – Reserve Forestland

- Increased Ecologically Significant/Sensitive Conditions threshold for parcels less than 100 acres from 30% to 50% prior to passage.
- The legislation included a report evaluating of the utilization and impacts of the new sub-category due in 2026 and additional recommendations.