



Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

Northeast Wilderness Trust's (NEWT) mission is to conserve forever-wild landscapes for nature and people. Since our founding in 2002, NEWT has been singularly focused on wilderness conservation in New England and New York. Twenty years on, with over 93,000 acres permanently protected as wilderness, we have been successful in furthering our vision of a shared wilder

JEDI Efforts and Impact

Northeast Wilderness Trust strives to expand the wilderness tent through work under a program it calls "Widening the Wild." We believe that a more diverse wilderness movement is a more durable wilderness movement. This comes in the form of land donations, partnerships, cultural access, and empowering non-traditional voices in the conversation field. Specifically, as just two examples,

future for the region.

Scientific consensus has recognized the undeniable importance of wild forests for climate resiliency, carbon storage, wildlife habitat and biodiversity protection, and as important places of solace for human beings. Protecting wild forests is one of the most immediate, scalable, and tangible actions available to mitigate the entwined crises of climate chaos and biodiversity loss—and the impacts that both have on nature and people. To that end, NEWT has adopted an ambitious but achievable plan to protect a total of 160,000 acres as wilderness by 2030.

Final Success

Success of this project will result in the permanent, forever-wild protection of 2,079+/- acres of forests, wetlands, and headwater streams adjacent to the Appalachian Trail, protecting an ecologically critical parcel from future development and logging, allowing public access on this land for the first time, and ensuring that an important viewshed along the A.T. is preserved for the enjoyment of all who visit the Trail.

Location Details

we recently gifted a tract of land to a Native-led land trust and have begun enshrining cultural access into our conservation easements.

In this project, NEWT will establish Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve, a stunning 2,079-acre property which spans the towns of Orford and Lyme, NH. Conservation of this property will meaningfully enhance climate resilience and landscape connectivity in this region, protect important forest habitats for numerous bird species and other wildlife, and permanently conserve a large, forested landscape adjacent to the A.T. from future development.

Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve contains diverse natural communities, including intact forests, miles of streams, and over 30 acres of wetlands. Within property boundaries are the summit of Bundy Mountain, part of Stonehouse Mountain, and a portion of Jacobs Brook, which flows directly into the Connecticut River. Diverse forest types span from low to high elevation points on the property, ranging from early successional to mature. A possible red spruce forest has been identified, an S2/S3 community considered at risk of extinction in the state. If this identification is confirmed, this would be an extremely sensitive habitat in need of conservation.

This project will add a significant area of new conservation land within a well-connected landscape, strengthening habitat connectivity and facilitating wildlife movement. Most notably, this project is an exceptional opportunity to permanently protect a very large parcel from future development adjacent to the Appalachian Trail. Opportunities to protect such a large parcel bordering the A.T. in a single transaction are incredibly rare, resulting in a critically important outcome for the ecology of the A.T. corridor and for the benefit of the millions of hikers who visit the Trail each year.

Conservation of a large forest within a Tier 1 matrix forest is a high priority for conservation. Such large, forested blocks are absolutely essential for wildlife, including especially many bird



species which require vast areas of intact forest: this property has been mapped as highest quality habitat for several warbler species, including Black Throated Green Warblers, Canada Warblers, and Blackpoll Warbler.

Once NEWT acquires this property, Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve will be protected as forever-wild. This means that no logging will occur on this property, and areas that have been logged in recent years will gradually grow older and wilder. Over time, the entirety of this property will develop old forest characteristics, creating vital habitat needed by many species.

Biodiversity in Project Area

The entirety of this large property demonstrates resilience, flow, and recognized biodiversity characteristics when analyzed through TNC's Resilient Land Mapping Tool, meaning that conservation of this ecologically significant property will meaningfully advance climate resilience and landscape connectivity in this region, while also permanently protecting a large, forested landscape adjacent to the A.T. from future development to support biodiversity values.

Forever-wild conservation will provide the highest level of ecological protection to this property: a forever-wild forest left undisturbed by logging will eventually attain old-growth characteristics, creating the kind of habitat—currently very uncommon in the Northeast—that many species need to live and thrive, in particular in the face of a changing climate. In the case of Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve, given this property's resilience score of 1.21 SD (Above Average) as analyzed by TNC's Resilient Land Mapping Tool, it is expected that the forest here will flourish under the terms of forever-wild conservation. This is essential for protecting and enhancing biodiversity across the region.

One of the most compelling aspects of this project is the significant conservation context in this region. Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve borders the Appalachian Trail along a 2.1 mile section. This is important both ecologically—the A.T. corridor serves as a vital wildlife linkage—and will enhance the wild experience of the many visitors who hike this section of the Trail. In addition, this property is located within a 97,000-acre Tier 1 matrix forest block, borders 336 acres of private conservation land, and is only a short distance away from the White Mountain National Forest. This exceptional conservation context is reflected in a Local Connectivity score of 1.85 SD

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

This project will result in several economic and outdoor recreational impacts. Most notably, this project is a critical conservation opportunity to protect a large forest adjacent to the Appalachian Trail. Opportunities to protect such a large parcel adjacent to the Trail in a single transaction are very rare and critically important to protect both the ecological integrity of the A.T. corridor and the experience of hiking on the Trail. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and other organizations have highlighted the importance of conservation of properties adjacent to the A.T. This benefits the experience of hikers and supports the economic vitality of the communities along the Trail.

This project will also result in public access being established for the first time on this property, for the benefit of nearby community members and visitors to the region. While NEWT does not create and maintain trail networks, public access enjoyed at Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve may include backcountry hiking, snowshoeing, nature study, and some forms of hunting. NEWT will implement our standard hunting policies at this Preserve, allowing hunting of abundant prey species only. Our hunting program has been very successful in connecting many visitors to our preserves, especially in rural communities like those surrounding Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve.

Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve serves as an ideal setting for NEWT to host events and programming. Our new 2025-2030 Strategic Plan emphasizes increased public programming and events, in particular those taking place on NEWT properties. Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve is near several population centers and accessible from NEWT's office in Montpelier, facilitating easy staff travel. Some opportunities we are considering include guided ecology walks for school groups and members of the public, volunteer opportunities, and

(Above Average) through TNC's Resilient Land Mapping Tool. Conservation of a large forest within a Tier 1 matrix forest is an especially high priority for conservation, and this project is expected to significantly enhance habitat connectivity within the surrounding region.

Reflecting both the property's biodiversity values and its important conservation context, Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve is located within an Important Bird Area of continental importance, as recognized by BirdLife International, and within a Prioritized Habitat Block and Highest Ranked Wildlife Habitat area identified in NH's most recent State Wildlife Action Plan.

**Strategy & Timeline
For Final Success**

NEWT began working with the current landowner in 2024 to discuss possible conservation of this property. An appraisal was completed in January 2025. A purchase and sale agreement was drafted, reviewed, and signed by both parties on 3/3/2025. Under the terms of the agreement, NEWT will purchase the property at appraised value no later on or before 10/5/2025.

Prior to closing, NEWT staff are working to complete all necessary due diligence, to include a survey and environmental records check. We have begun outreach to funding partners and have submitted several applications seeking support for this project. With \$200,000 in applications submitted to date, we have a further \$3M+ in planned grant requests to be submitted in the coming months. In addition, NEWT will launch a full public campaign to support information sharing and engage individual donors. As our first large land acquisition in the state, this is an excellent opportunity to engage with new audiences. We are working towards raising the project budget of \$5,420,311 by our scheduled closing date in October.

Following NEWT's acquisition of the property, on-the-ground stewardship activities will begin and continue through the first half of 2026. These activities will include boundary marking, blocking vehicle access to logging roads, and conducting general property clean up. We aim to convey a forever-wild conservation easement on the Preserve to a qualified partner land trust roughly 12-18 months after closing.

"citizen science" events to document different species found at the Preserve.

Key Decision Makers

Now that NEWT is under contract to purchase this property in October, our main task will be to raise the funds necessary to successfully complete this project. The project budget of \$5,420,311 includes the land purchase price, due diligence costs, initial stewardship costs, institutional support, and a stewardship fund contribution to support long-term stewardship needs at Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve.

To meet the large funding need for this project, we are working with private foundations, government agencies, individual donors, and corporate donors to seek support. To date we have requested \$250,000 from four funding partners, with a further \$3M+ in planned grant applications. A grant award from The Conservation Alliance would be essential to meeting the funding need.

We are in the process of launching a public fundraising campaign for this project. An essential aspect of this campaign will be sharing information about Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve with many audiences, including local communities surrounding the property. We have engaged with our network of supporters based in New Hampshire to share information about the project. Given the importance of this project for the Appalachian Trail corridor, we are also working with partners such as the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to highlight the importance of Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve for the Trail.

This project is an outstanding conservation opportunity with a large funding need. Any support or engagement we can receive from the business community would significantly aid our fundraising progress. In addition to our application to The Conservation Alliance, NEWT works with a large corporate funding partner and will submit a request to them soon for this project.



We actively seek new relationships with local, regional, or national businesses to build support for forever-wild conservation.

Elevate Voices

This project creates many opportunities to engage local communities, including underrepresented groups. NEWT's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan introduces a new pillar to our work, called "Learn," to reflect the greater focus we now place on using our Wildlands Ecology program to create new educational opportunities. This includes a renewed emphasis on public programming and events taking place on NEWT properties.

Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve is an ideal location to pilot new ideas and initiatives corresponding to the Strategic Plan. As described above, some opportunities we are considering include guided ecology walks for school groups and members of the public, volunteer opportunities, and "citizen science" events to document different species found at the Preserve. NEWT has long-standing partnerships with two local organizations, Northern Woodlands Magazine and Upper Valley Land Trust. We intend to explore further opportunities for events at Spruce Ridge Wilderness Preserve in partnership with these organizations.

As part of this project, we will launch a comprehensive public campaign to share information about this project with local communities, highlighting in particular the benefit of a large conservation project adjacent to the A.T. We seek to engage local communities in this project and share the many benefits that will result from this project.

TCA Funding Plan

This large fee acquisition project is a very high conservation priority. The total project budget is \$5,420,311, including a land purchase price of \$4,000,000. Between now and the scheduled closing date in October 2025, NEWT will work to meet this significant funding need. Funding from The Conservation Alliance would be essential in our fundraising efforts. A potential award would be applied in full to the land purchase price, ensuring that NEWT will successfully protect this special place as forever-wild.

Confidential Items

There is nothing confidential in our proposal. Please share all information freely with member company employees.

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. Establish a large core wilderness area directly adjacent to the A.T., benefiting both the ecology of this region and the experience of hikers on the Trail.
2. Protect ecological values of the land for biodiversity and provide habitat for species that rely on mature forests for survival and flourishing.
3. Enhance habitat connectivity along the A.T. corridor and through surrounding conservation land, for the benefit of many wide-ranging species.
4. Protect an important 2.1 mile viewshed along the A.T. corridor for the benefit of millions of annual visitors to the Trail.
5. Provide new public access on this property, creating opportunities for public programming implemented by NEWT and partners.

How long it took to complete application

Other Relevant Application Details