



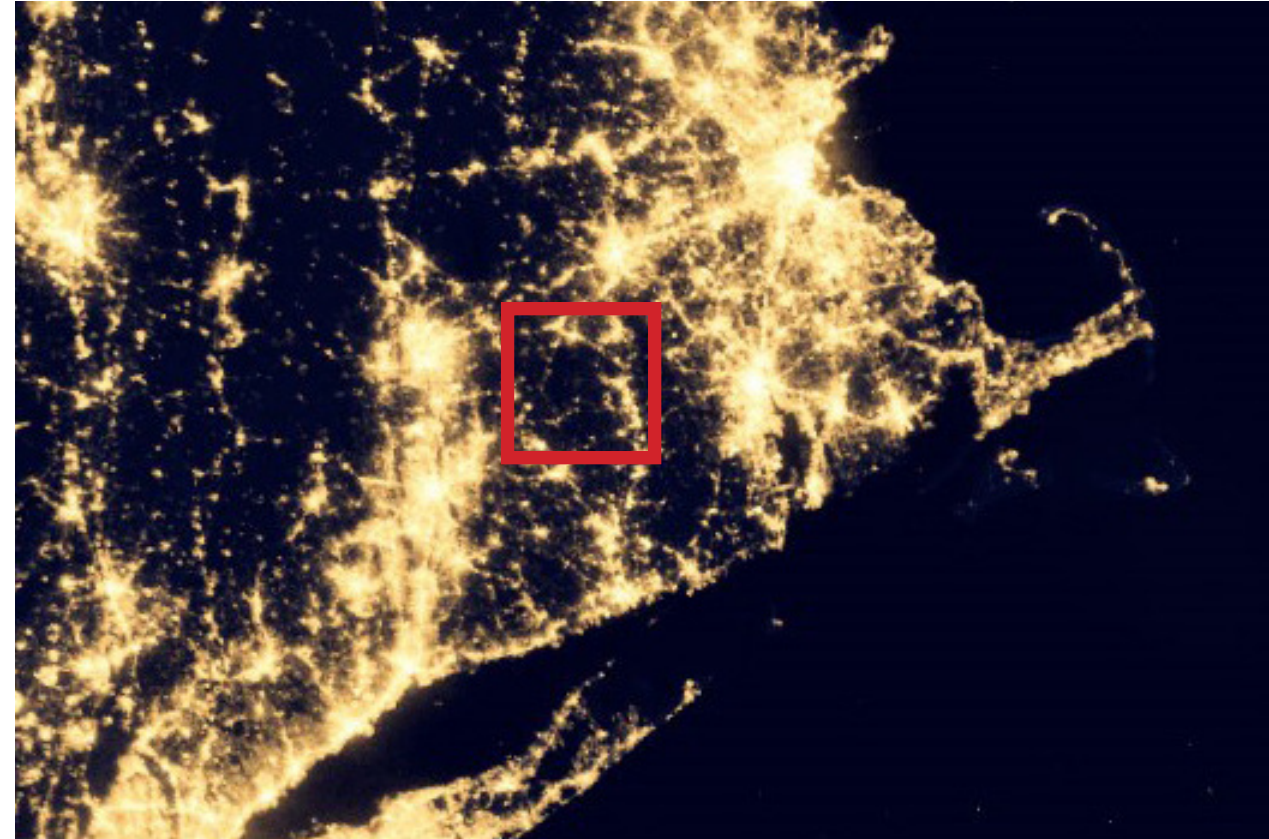
The Quiet Corner Initiative

School Forests

Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies

The Quiet Corner: At the Nexus of Development and Conservation

Viewed from space, the East Coast megalopolis is a continuous strip of nighttime lights that stretches from Washington to Boston. Except for one last dark spot: The Quiet Corner. These 500,000 acres are one of the last vestiges of New England's dense forests. They provide clean water and air, climate amelioration, wildlife habitat, timber and non-timber forest products, open space and recreation. But this area of natural and public values is not a single piece; it is a mosaic of small private landowners who may not always perceive their land as part of a larger ecosystem and may lack the resources to manage their forest. Without these resources, their choice is to sell the land. This inevitably leads to fragmentation and loss of woodlands, farmlands, and the rural feel of the Quiet Corner to land conversion for housing development.

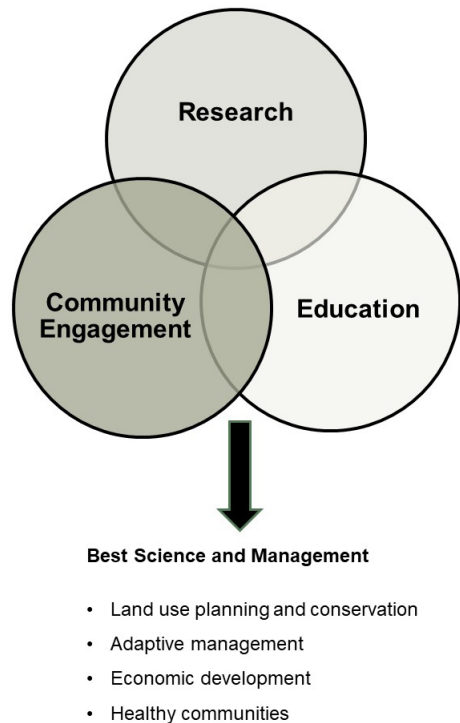


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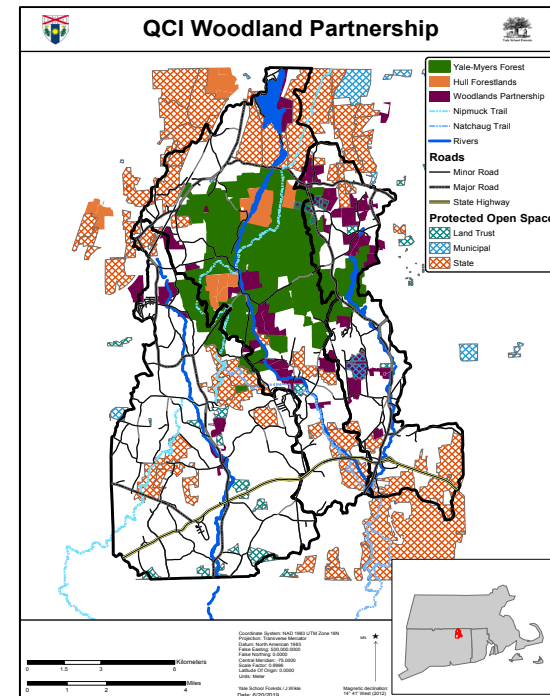
The Quiet Corner Initiative (QCI) was created in 2010 to promote cooperative learning between Yale faculty, students, Connecticut landowners, town administrations, the local forest products industry, and conservation organizations to improve the preservation of the natural resources. The initiative's work is centered around the 7,840-acre Yale-Myers Forest — a self-sufficient and certified woodland among the oldest sustainably managed forests in the nation — and its four neighboring towns of Ashford, Eastford, Union, and Woodstock. Sustainable rural living relies on secure sources of food and water, access to renewable energy, healthy forests, and protected open space. QCI uses these concepts as a framework around which to build a program that engages with the community through research, education and demonstration, and implementation.



QCI's purpose is to connect Yale students and faculty with the towns, the State and willing and interested landowners around topics of working lands management and conservation. This takes the form of ecological, social and economic research on the region; and management that involves the development of land stewardship plans, river assessments, timber harvest prescriptions, forest health assessments and other conservation services that benefit landowners, communities, and the long-term viability of the land. QCI is one of the only university programs in the country that seamlessly integrates an environmental course and extension curriculum into practice for a rural community.



Programming focuses on three subwatersheds of the Natchaug River in four towns surrounding the Yale-Myers Forest. The Natchaug River joins the Shetucket, then the Thames, which ultimately flows into Long Island Sound. These 50,000 acres of watershed encompass the drinking water supply for over 65,000 people immediately downstream. The region includes recognition by State and Federal authorities of lands classified as high value conservation forest, high priority for maintaining forest ecosystem health and biodiversity, and high value for soil and water conservation.





Wildlife and Wildlands

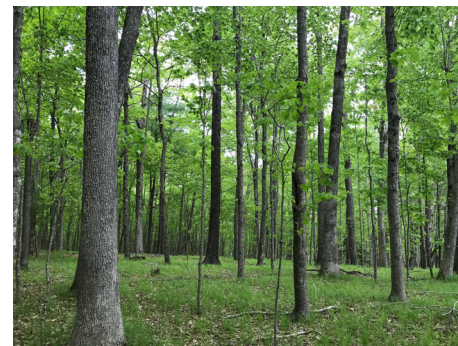
The Quiet Corner's forests provide habitat for wildlife including black bears and moose, which are rarely seen outside of the rural western half of Connecticut. The region is also a hotspot for forest bird diversity, serving as an important stopover spot and breeding area for neotropical migrants and providing habitat for resident species. Intact, forested landscapes help clean and cool the headwater streams like Bigelow Brook and the Still River, which are ideal for cold water species including eastern brook trout.



Since QCI's beginning, student and faculty researchers have quantified impacts of different timber harvesting techniques on migrating songbirds to help retain the region's strength as an Audubon-recognized biodiversity hotspot. Landowners, faculty, and students have come together for workshops on winter wildlife tracking, bat habitat, and land management for birds.



Nearly 60% of Connecticut's land is forested and over 70% of that woodland is held by private landowners, the vast majority of whom place a high value on keeping their land forested into the future. This is one of the most forested parts of the state but at high threat of development and loss of forest cover as populations are projected to increase in this region over the next 30 years.



Rivers and Watersheds

Maintaining well-managed forest cover is a crucial component of our region's high-quality surface drinking water. In fact, a 10% increase in forest cover in a watershed can reduce water treatment costs by up to 20 percent. Private landowners own 88% of Connecticut's forests and working with them across their diversified interests and needs is critical in maintaining that forest cover and water quality. Land in forest not only avoids potential run off and increased erosion common in other land uses but the impact forests have on the soil creates a natural and stable filter to buffer contaminated water from other sources.



Though the Quiet Corner watersheds provide some of Connecticut's cleanest source water, poor road maintenance and improper development and farming practices can have dramatic impacts on water quality. Student studies in the Quiet Corner on ecosystem services suggest that residents and communities down stream are willing to pay sizable amounts for many of the services provided by private forestlands in these watersheds, and in particular for forest protection of watershed services – especially drinking water supply. In addition, through courses and special projects students have assessed the rivers, dams and culverts that have led to state funding for culvert replacement by bridges to enable free fish passage.

Working Forests and Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

Sustainable rural livelihoods in the Quiet Corner center on farms and forests in the region and the outputs and values stemming from these landholdings. Many owners of forestland depend on local labor and access to markets to manage their land for goals like wildlife habitat, forest health, and periodic income. These include timber from the forest, non-timber forest products (e.g. maple syrup), and agricultural crops. Threats to rural livelihoods include development pressure, loss of markets, and poor access to educational resources. QCI strives to buffer against these threats by creating a meeting platform, finding points of similarity to build market options, providing natural resource consulting, and working to protect against open space fragmentation and development.



Although much of the Quiet Corner is forested, agriculture is a way of life for people in the region and a source of income for many. QCI strives to help farmers access resources to keep their way of life viable. Seven percent of CT is currently in agriculture, but the four towns in the QCI region averages 8.25%. Between 1985 and 2010, CT saw a 15% reduction in agricultural land across the state, much of which occurred on prime farmland soils. By developing new markets, providing access to educational resources, and demonstrating sustainable agriculture, QCI hopes to keep the farming community robust in the Quiet Corner.

QCI Activities and Outreach

As of summer 2019, QCI has output 43 forest management plans covering 4,000 acres, 12 timber harvest prescriptions, 10 riparian assessments, 16 forest health assessments, and three regional conservation plans. QCI has also hosted 70 research seminars, 24 student-organized landowner workshops, and screened 14 films as part of the Environmental Film Festival at Yale. QCI continues to broaden and strengthen its relationship to the community here through student outreach and engagement with these extension and educational activities.



A Vision for the Future

We envision a QCI future that includes dramatic expansion in the engagement of our students, faculty, and staff with our surroundings focused on approaching society's evolving and urgent environmental challenges. Beyond our current forest-focused activities, we are working toward development of a living laboratory to test and demonstrate cutting edge research on the following topics: 1) exploring possibilities for rural self-sustaining energy; 2) continuing efforts to protect source waters for downstream uses in urban and agricultural areas; 3) protecting open space through creative conservation strategies; and 4) further developing of sustainable food systems. We will do this with “learning by doing” practicums and opportunities in the real world. Our approach will increase the diversity of ideas and promote the resilience of resources and the economy under the changing and unpredictable forces that affect human and environmental health. Lastly, QCI will continue to disseminate our learning through multiple avenues, including seminars, workshops, written media, webinars, and electronic media.





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Yale School Forests
360 Prospect St.
New Haven, CT 06511
quietcorner@yale.edu

