

Forest Management Discussion Paper
for
Marsh-Billings National Historical Park
Woodstock, Vermont

February, 1998

PURPOSE

A volunteer forest management working group convened to develop ideas for forest management and use at Marsh-Billings National Historical Park (NHP). This document was developed based on the discussions of this working group. The group made recommendations for using the forest as a model for conservation stewardship using principles articulated by George Perkins Marsh and put in place by Frederick Billings and Laurance S. Rockefeller.

THE SETTING

Marsh-Billings National Historical Park includes the Billings mansion and Mount Tom forest in Woodstock, Vermont. The adjacent Billings Farm & Museum is on private property and operated by the Woodstock Foundation, Inc. Much of the land surrounding the farm and park is protected by scenic easement, town ownership, or through land trusts. Frederick Billings purchased the land in the hills near the Billings Farm and planted trees to reforest the denuded pastures. Many of these plantations still exist today, and are unique because of the long-term management of the forests by Billings and later by Rockefeller. The forest includes areas used as seasonal pastures for cattle, hiking trails, and carriage roads built by Billings so that the public could view the conservation practiced.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of the farm and forest, owned first by the Marsh family, then developed by Billings, and most recently cared for by the Rockefeller family, is a history rich in conservation stewardship.

It is the first designated tree farm in Vermont. Although this designation was not made until the program began in Vermont in the 1950s, tree farming began in the 19th century Billings era under the management of farm manager George Aitken. Frederick Billings took inspiration from the writings of a previous occupant of the farm, pioneer conservationist George Perkins Marsh, who wrote of the destruction of the American landscape through industrialization and poor agricultural practices in his book *Man and Nature*. The last plantation was planted in 1952. Since then, there

has been a continuous harvest of wood, thinning of stands, and clearing of vistas.

VISION FOR FOREST MANAGEMENT

Forest management at Marsh-Billings NHP should emphasize sustainable harvest through excellent conservation stewardship and making these practices available to the public through demonstration and participation. In addition, forest management will include maintenance of the scenic vistas of and through the woods, carriage road access, conservation of non-economic resources such as the forest understory, and provide a place for the public to visit for education, contemplation, relaxation and exercise.

A conservation stewardship workshop held at Marsh-Billings in 1993 recommended taking an expansive view of conservation stewardship to:

Adopt a holistic approach to the interpretation of conservation stewardship, celebrating the broad diversity of its historic roots--spiritual, aesthetic, and scientific.

Emphasize conservation stewardship as an evolving and dynamic concept shaped by human interaction with the natural world.

Establish an outreach program that will carry the conservation message beyond the boundaries of the park.

Use the history of the site and its protagonists (Marsh, Billings, and Rockefeller) as a lens for interpretation of the history of conservation stewardship in America. Demonstrate conservation stewardship through park management.

Work in partnership with the people of Woodstock and the region in developing

interpretive programs.

SILVICULTURE

The forest should be managed so that in 50 years it will have many of the same characteristics that it has now; timber production, aesthetics, vistas, active regeneration, watershed conservation, tree basal densities compatible with good production, etc. This management will require gathering baseline data and establishing goals for individual forest stands, and harvesting, replanting, and thinning as necessary to meet these goals. The public will be involved in this process as observers of the practices of good forest management.

To help determine the most appropriate forest management strategies, a cultural landscape report currently proposed by the National Park Service (NPS) should be developed and used to set forest treatment goals through a forest management plan. These documents will be based on the historical evolution of the landscape, including the Land Use History for Marsh-Billings NHP and the historic resource study currently underway.

Forest management has risks as well as rewards. Historical practices now seen to conflict with conservation should be modified to represent good stewardship.

Forest management will not take away from the public's ability to recreate in the woods and on the carriage roads. Instead, these experiences will be enhanced by providing for education through observation when public safety will not be compromised.

Baseline monitoring programs will be developed to insure that forest management is on track and to show the public that the management is in the interest of good conservation.

EDUCATION

The NPS will treat the forest as an interpretive exhibit with emphasis on conservation stewardship and public access to view forest management in progress.

The public has been separated from, and is therefore not aware of, many good forest management practices. Management of the forest at Marsh-Billings NHP should be inclusive of the public and used as a model of conservation stewardship to be used by other landowners and managers on their farms and forests. The people of Woodstock and throughout Vermont should have a large role in the development of educational programs at Marsh-Billings NHP.

The park offers a unique partnership between the National Park Service and the Woodstock Foundation's Billings Farm & Museum. There are facilities that can provide opportunities for workshops, demonstrations, and interpretation of conservation stewardship.

Management can be contrasted with adjacent lands that are not currently managed for forest products. The long-term ownership of the forest by Billings and Rockefeller has resulted in a landscape of healthy forests exhibiting sound conservation and considerable human manipulation. The NPS should continue this excellent record of stewardship as an example for the public.

Three broad audiences to be targeted for educational opportunities include: 1) visitors to the park; 2) local and regional school groups; and 3) forest management professionals, college students interested in forestry and conservation, and forest landowners.

Most visitors to the park will not come to attend a specific workshop or course. Instead, they will come to walk in the forest, visit a newly established National Historical Park, or simply because it is a public land associated with Woodstock and the Billings Farm & Museum. These visitors may or may not have an extended visit to the forest, but many may have the time for a short walk on the

carriage roads through several forest management "scenes." Options should be organized to offer these visitors interpretive materials in the form of wayside exhibits, trail guides, or some other media that interprets the stewardship of the forest through the landscape. Reforestation, harvest, soil conservation, and stand thinning may all be easily visible within a short walk from the visitors center, but interpretive devices need to be developed to assist visitors in finding, looking at and understanding the forest landscape.

Marsh-Billings NHP provides an excellent site for school groups to visit a forest with a good trail system that will allow a variety of topics to be addressed outdoors. Environmental education could be provided through schools or by organizations working in partnership with the National Park Service. Many schools already visit the Billings Farm & Museum, which offers a range of instructional units. A visit to the Marsh-Billings NHP will offer additional educational options that can enhance an existing visit or warrant a separate visit entirely.

Professionals, college students, and landowners, would benefit from specific demonstrations, workshops and programs aimed at teaching good forest management practices and general principles of conservation. Special events could be held with assistance from other professionals. Recently, the Billings Farm & Museum held a workshop for draft horse logging. Other methods of forest management may be taught in a similar format. Another function of the Marsh-Billings NHP forest would be to use its potential as a managed public forest to provide field studies of forest management in progress. Colleges and universities could bring students to the park for their own field trips. NPS staff could assist in developing orientation materials and site history to these groups who would largely be guided by instructors. Lastly, this group could benefit from work experience as technicians, contractors, and volunteers in the forest to actually perform the labor required to effectively manage forests, including the interaction with the public that the park was established to provide.

Regardless of the knowledge they bring when they come into the forest, any visitor to the Marsh-

Billings NHP forest should leave with an understanding of who the people responsible for this landscape were, what actions they took to further their stewardship of the land, and how they influenced conservation beyond the boundaries of this property. This may be accomplished through visits to the visitors center, interpretive hikes, or through specific workshops aimed at getting forest management techniques to the participants. A visit to Marsh-Billings NHP should inspire people, and at the same time leave them with some understanding of the interrelationship of the forest land with the production of wood products.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The forest management working group convened at Marsh-Billings NHP to develop strategies for forest management included:

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Steve Harper, Forester

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John Wiggin, Woodstock Inn and Resort

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APPENDIX

PURPOSE OF MARSH-BILLINGS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

interpret the history and evolution of conservation stewardship in America;

to recognize and interpret the contributions and birthplace of George Perkins Marsh, pioneer environmentalist, author of *Man and Nature*, statesman, lawyer, and linguist;

to recognize and interpret the contributions of Frederick Billings, conservationist, pioneer in reforestation and scientific farm management, lawyer, philanthropist, and railroad builder, who extended the principles of land management introduced by Marsh;

to preserve the Marsh-Billings Mansion and its surrounding lands; and

to recognize the significant contributions of Julia Billings, Mary Billings French, Mary French Rockefeller, and Laurance Spelman Rockefeller in perpetuating the Marsh-Billings heritage.