

# Natural Resource Managers' Perceptions of Trust in New England (USA)

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This research project investigates a combination of conflict resolution and trust issues from the perspective of natural resource managers in the New England region of the United States. It is widely recognized that public land managers face a difficult job balancing ecological, social and economic considerations. Newspapers reports and anecdotal evidence in New England suggests that some managers and agencies are better at managing those multiple considerations than others. Relationships between public land management agencies and local rural communities in the New England region vary from highly dysfunctional to extremely positive. While most public land management agencies integrate public opinion into decision making, the success of these public involvement strategies are largely unknown. To better understand conflict resolution and trust between agencies and local rural communities, our presentation will focus on public land managers in the New England region who have undoubtedly had successes and failures in developing agency-community relationships. Our research questions included: Where do strong and weak relationships exist in the New England region, from the perspective of managers? According to managers, what defines a trusting relationship? What has worked or has not worked in terms of relationship building activities? Are there differences between the opinions of front-line staff and administrators? Natural resource agencies invited to participate included the USDA Forest Service, Maine Forest Service, Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands, Vermont Division of Forestry, Parks, and Recreation, New York Division of Lands and Forests, Baxter State Park Authority, and Adirondack Park Agency. Questionnaire data were collected using an internet-based survey. After presenting the results of the research, recommendations will be presented that suggest ways of improving public involvement strategies, increasing trust from local rural communities, resolving conflicts, and improving natural resource manager morale regarding public interactions.