



# Project Impacts

NSRC-FUNDED RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

## Public Access to Private Lands for Recreation and Tourism in the Northern Forest



PROJECT AWARD YEAR AND TITLE:

**2005**

*Public Access to Private Lands for Recreation and Tourism in the Northern Forest*

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Land ownership changes, globalization of the timber industry, growing recreational demand, and new conservation easements have contributed to the changing landscape of the Northern Forest region. To plan effectively, communities need to better understand how social and economic forces are affecting rural development prospects, particularly with respect to tourism and recreation on private lands.

Through a web forum, NSRC researchers gathered public input regarding land ownership change, recreational access, landowner liability, and changes within Northern Forest communities. A mail survey in each of the Northern Forest states provided similar information from private landowners owning 10 acres or more and large investment landowners with greater than 1,000 acres.

Responses indicate that 87% of large investment landowners allow public recreation on their lands. Almost half of private landowners have not limited recreational access to their lands in the past ten years, and less than 10% have closed off their land completely. Despite this level of access, the perception held by the majority of private landowners and the public sentiment from the web forum suggest that public access in the region has decreased over the same ten years. Results also suggest that many private landowners are not well-informed about liability protection offered them by state statutes, while large investment landowners tend to be more familiar with landowner liability statutes. Findings were disseminated through roundtable discussions in each state and a project website (<http://www.privatelandaccess.org/>), serving as a starting point for Northern Forest landowners, planners, natural resource agencies, and recreational interests to better understand landowner behaviors and perceptions and improve communication among diverse stakeholders.