



Local Wood Roundtable
Event Summary Report and Discussion Themes
December 2023

Hosted by Local Wood WORKS with support from the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation
April 28, 2023

Roundtable Premise and Purpose:

The demand for local and regionally produced wood products has grown in recent years as consumers increasingly use their wood purchases to positively impact a range of important social values, from sustainable forestry to rural economic development to mitigating climate change.

Knowledge about and access to Maine's small - medium sized lumber and wood products and producers can be a barrier for consumers, builders, and architects. Many custom sawmills and wood manufacturers have very local markets and lack the capacity to reach beyond them. There is no centralized marketplace for the variety of wood produced in Maine beyond a single small retail lumberyard.

The Local Wood Roundtable was convened in Hallowell on April 28, 2023 to increase connections and explore opportunities for mutual benefit throughout the wood producer ecosystem – landowners, foresters, loggers, mill operators, architects, builders, and homeowners.

Key Working Terms:

Local Wood WORKS Partnership

The Local Wood WORKS (LWW) Partnership was founded in 2013 and now includes eight partner organizations: Kennebec Land Trust (KLT), Maine Forest Service (MFS), Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), Maine Coast Heritage Trust (MCHT), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), GrowSmart Maine (GSM), Northern Forest Center (NFC), and Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

LWW partners are committed to advancing forest-based local economies and supporting the long-term conservation and sustainability of Maine’s forestlands. LWW supports projects that link forestland conservation, energy conservation, carbon storage, and sustainable natural-resource-based local

- 1) **Local wood** - produced within 100 miles by sustainable forestry practices
- 2) **Maine wood** - produced within Maine by sustainable forestry practices
- 3) **Regional wood** - produced within New England, New York, and neighboring Canadian provinces by sustainable forestry practices.

Sustainability - See Local Wood WORKS sustainability position paper. (<https://bit.ly/4agkmgT>)

April 28, 2023 Roundtable

Attendance

Fifty people from nonprofit organizations, public agencies, higher education, tribal governments, philanthropy, and businesses participated in the Roundtable. Participants brought expertise in marketing, forestry, affordable housing, climate change, architecture, construction, sales, policy, community development, and so much more.

Roundtable structure

The day was organized to support networking and the creation of new, and deepening of existing, partnerships and relationships. Following context-setting remarks, participants engaged in small table conversations and full group reflections focused on four scenarios and strategies, each exploring ‘What would it take to get there?’ and ‘What obstacles will need to be overcome to reach these goals?’

1. In five years, Maine has a thriving set of local wood exchanges (both in-person and on-line) through which local residents and businesses can source local wood for their use.
2. In the near term, substantially increased amounts of local lumber are used to help provide affordable housing in Maine.
3. Policies at the state, federal and local levels support increased use of local wood in Maine/the region.
4. What marketing campaigns/efforts are needed to make the demand for, and cachet of, local wood resemble that of local food?

The day concluded with an exploration of topics not yet surfaced and opportunities for working together followed by networking.

Themes / What we heard

The following section highlights themes that emerged throughout the day. It by no means captures the full extent of the rich conversations that took place.

1. **Value in connecting.** Throughout the day, participants noted the value of connecting with others in a Roundtable setting. Attendees frequently mentioned that they had been working in the field of forestland conservation and sustainability and rural economic development for a long time and lacked relationships with others across these sectors. Fostering these relationships has the potential to advance LWW’s mission.
2. Similarly, **gaps in knowledge** between what local, Maine and regional wood products are available, where to get them and what builders and consumers seek, is a challenge that could be addressed in part through better connections. Several inspiring new projects and partnerships were discussed.
3. Several calls were made to **host gatherings of this nature more often**. Common sentiments: "Many answers are in the room." "This is a huge ecosystem and we don’t talk to each other enough" were expressed in the wrap up.
4. **Opportunity in this moment.** There are potential synergies that are unique to this time and that are ripe for leveraging for greater impact. The need for housing and focus on reducing building emissions as a key strategy for addressing climate change creates opportunity for growers and producers. Businesses and conservation efforts have shared interests. Consumer interest in locally-sourced, sustainable products is high. There is opportunity, at this time, to move to a ‘tipping point’ that tips the scales in favor of locally sourced forest-based products.

5. **Challenges.** Several challenges in increasing use of locally, sustainably sourced wood were noted often during the day:
 - a. Defining local, Maine and regional. It was noted that the terms “local” “Maine” and “regional” are used interchangeably but are different economically and environmentally and therefore mean different things to different people. Clarity of language and messaging and corresponding environmental/ economic/ social intent and goals are needed.
 - b. Participants spoke to, and shared different perspectives on, the cost differential between locally sourced wood and typical commodity (high volume production) wood. Work is needed to make locally-sourced lumber more accessible and affordable.
 - c. Participants noted the importance of conveying *the added environmental and social values* of local wood and trying to find uses of local wood that make the most sense. Clearly commodity wood has its place.
 - d. Wood supply chains, building codes, cost structures, growth windows for sustainably produced wood, policy, and shifts in consumer demand make for a very complex system within which to work and make change. Seemingly simple things such as labeling wood are far from simple. Identifying what changes are needed, what would elicit those changes, and developing strategy to doing so will be needed.

6. **Solutions.** Participants offered a wealth of solutions and ideas for future actions.
 - a. **Education & Messaging:** There is a need to clearly articulate the mutually reinforcing climate, community development and workforce, public health, and forest ecosystem benefits of using wood from sustainably managed forests.
 - b. **Branding and systems** that support labeling and sorting of local, Maine, and regionally-sourced wood products are needed. Efforts to target specific audiences were also noted as important to increase opportunity. Story telling was noted as a powerful way to move hearts and minds. Although not specifically articulated, an underlying theme is connecting producers with markets. What is the most effective arena for education and messaging?
 - c. **Policy:** Many policy-related solutions were noted including building incentives into the Farm Bill for local, Maine and regional wood use, development of state standards for climate friendly construction, strengthening worker-safety, enhancing the USDA climate-smart commodities program, and replacing existing disincentives (e.g. HUD requirements for housing) with incentives for locally sourced, sustainable, carbon-sequestering products. A coordinated, focused approach for policy change was called for, and would be most effective if carried out by those working in the policy arena.
 - d. **Collaboration & Connecting:** Several collaboration opportunities were noted, including group insurance purchasing and coordinating moving product to market to meet demand, perhaps through cooperative models. Approaching markets from a cluster or ecosystem approach may also be valuable, recognizing there are multiple supply chains and different markets that could use products, but have different needs (e.g. high end architecture and affordable housing). Opportunities are particularly ripe in regard to affordable housing and working in partnership with Wabanaki tribes. As noted above, a call for continued opportunity to connect and grow awareness and relationships across sectors was a key theme. In particular, it was noted that there is a gap in relationships between wood sellers and wood buyers that would be beneficial to close.

Reflections and actions from Local Wood WORKS

As with food, consumer demand for local, Maine, and regionally produced wood products has grown – and is similarly viewed as a means to support sustainable forestry and community based economic development, and address supply chain challenges and the actual (life cycle) environmental and public health costs of using petroleum rather than wood-based products.

In Maine, small and medium-scale forest-based businesses and their regionally-based market supply chains are little-known economic and community assets. It takes commitment, vision, entrepreneurship, and strong relationships to succeed in these forest-based sectors. Support for these often over-looked enterprises and the long-term sustainability of forestlands has the potential to generate many environmental and economic benefits.

Local Wood WORKS partners are deeply grateful to all who participated in this gathering and to all who wanted to be with us but were unable to be. The energy in the room was palpable. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to meet one another, even when somewhat unclear about the intent of the day. We learned, too, that a clear articulation of purpose and additional, supportive context would help participants to engage fully.

Other actions that Local Wood WORKS will be taking include:

- Continue to explore collaborations focused on affordable housing initiatives, beginning with the Affordable Housing + Local Sourcing Tour that which took place in September 2023.
- Define key roles for the Partnership and for each individual partner.
- Reach out to key supporters who are not now listed as Partners.
- Explore opportunities to develop a retail presence as an opportunity for messaging, such as working with LL Bean.
- Establish and build relationships with Wabanaki tribes and explore partnership opportunities.

We acknowledge that many people need to be involved in these, and other, actions and will continue to provide a convening role to support this. We welcome your continued ideas, action, and engagement.

The Local Woods Roundtable was hosted by Local Wood WORKS in partnership with the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, the Kennebec Land Trust, and Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI), and facilitated by Brad Gentry, Senior Associate Dean at the Yale School of the Environment.

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Local Wood WORKS is a collaboration of nonprofit organizations and the Maine Forest Service that seeks to conserve forestland while enhancing strong and resilient local economies through sustainable forestry practices and enhancement of local sourcing of wood products.

The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation works to support a culture of equity and interconnected well-being for people, animals, and the environment in partnership with nonprofits, community groups, government agencies, and other philanthropies.

The Kennebec Land Trust (KLT) works cooperatively with landowners and communities to conserve the forests, lakes, streams, wetlands, fields, and wildlife that help define central Maine. KLT protects and stewards land permanently, offers access to conserved properties, provides opportunities for people to learn about and enjoy the natural world, and works with partners to support sustainable forestry and farming.

CEI's mission is to build a just, vibrant and climate-resilient future for people and communities in Maine and rural regions by integrating finance, business expertise and policy solutions in ways that make the economy work more equitably.

Addendum – Reference Documents



Local Woods Roundtable April 28, 2023

Maple Hill Farm Inn & Retreat Center

Hosted by Local Woods Works in partnership with the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation

8:30 Registration & Networking

9:00 Welcome, introductions, opening thoughts, and group reflections

10:30 Scene setting for morning breakout discussions

10:45 Break

11:00 Table discussions on selected topic

1. *In five years, Maine has a thriving set of local wood exchanges (both in-person and on-line) through which local residents and businesses can source local wood for their use*

What will it take to get there?

What obstacles will need to be overcome?

2. *In the near term, substantially increased amounts of local lumber are used to help provide affordable housing in Maine*

What will it take to get there?

What obstacles will need to be overcome?

12:15 Lunch

1:00 Scene setting for afternoon breakout discussions

1:15 Table discussions on selected topics

3. *What policies at the state, federal and local levels would support increased use of local wood in Maine/the region?*

What will it take to get there?

What obstacles will need to be overcome?

4. *What marketing campaigns/efforts are needed to make the demand for and cachet of local wood look like that for local food?*

What will it take to get there?

What obstacles will need to be overcome?

2:45 Break

3:00 Group discussion:

As we all pursue these values, goals and futures, what other topics/opportunities have we missed during our discussions so far today?

3:45 Concluding thoughts and will do's

4:00 Opportunity for informal networking

4:45 Event ends

Thank you for joining us!



Supported by the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation



What is Local Wood WORKS

Local Wood WORKS is essentially an educational clearinghouse that facilitates sourcing of wood locally. We organize tours and lunch & learn talks, produce articles and market reports and maintain an online directory and other online tools. The organization is supported by a range of conservation-minded organizations who believe local sourcing supports strong, self-reliant local economies, sustainable forest management, carbon storage and maintenance of forests as forests.

FMI – See [Local Wood WORKS - www.localwoodworks.org/](http://www.localwoodworks.org/)

What is sustainable forestry?

It's the active management of forests for both ecological health and economic benefit. Sustainable forestry purifies groundwater, protects wildlife habitat and ecologically sensitive areas, supports outdoor recreation, and enhances carbon storage, while also providing lumber and non-timber products.

Local Wood WORKS believes patient forestry that produces bigger trees and more valuable lumber is the best strategy for achieving these multiple goals.

FMI – See [Local Wood WORKS Sustainability Principles- https://bit.ly/4agkmgT](https://bit.ly/4agkmgT)

Why is sustainable forestry at home better for the environment than preservation?

Forest preservation combined with global demand for lumber tends to intensify logging pressure in distant, globally threatened forests unprotected by environmental regulations and also tends to result in carbon-heavy supply chains. Sustainable forest management of ecologically resilient domestic forests can reverse these trends, but it requires reducing consumption patterns and changing attitudes that logging is worse for the local environment than non-management.

FMI – [The Illusion of Preservation paper - https://bit.ly/3RIgubv](https://bit.ly/3RIgubv)

How do forests mitigate climate change?

Forests naturally cycle harmful carbon out of the atmosphere through photosynthesis, storing it safely in tree trunks, branches, roots and soils. Carbon is released back to the atmosphere in the decomposition of rotting wood and in the burning of wood, but the safe carbon storage continues if wood is turned into lumber for buildings and furniture. Wood's climate benefit is magnified if wood replaces concrete, steel and other construction materials that emit carbon in their manufacture.

Can sustainable forestry sequester more carbon?

Yes, improved forest management can increase carbon sequestration by 20 percent over the next 60 years while still maintaining current timber harvest levels

FMI – See [Forest Carbon for Commercial Landowners - https://bit.ly/3tjceLV](https://bit.ly/3tjceLV)

How does awareness of local wood compare to awareness of local food

People tend to have a closer relationship to food (daily eating, weekly shopping) than wood (bought infrequently and often through intermediaries such as builders). Third party certification of sustainable practices has also proved more successful in agriculture (organic labeling) than in lumber (FSC and SFI certification). That said, Maine's forest economy is ten times larger than Maine's agriculture economy and with more robust export markets.

FMI – See [Local food and local wood comparison - https://bit.ly/3Rp7200](https://bit.ly/3Rp7200)

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