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Native Plant Trust and The Nature Conservancy Release New Report Mapping Lands to Save Plant Diversity as the Climate Changes

First-of-its-kind report focuses on plant diversity and climate resilience as foundation for conservation

Boston, MA – Today, [Native Plant Trust](#) and [The Nature Conservancy](#) released [Conserving Plant Diversity in New England](#), a comprehensive report resulting from a two-year collaboration between the organizations. The report provides a scientific framework and detailed roadmap for conservation action and land protection at the species, habitat, and parcel scales that will save plant diversity—and thus overall biodiversity—in New England as the climate changes. This is the first report to focus on regional plant diversity, climate resilience, and science-based targets as the foundation for conservation policy and action. The report and its interactive mapping tool give policy makers, federal and state agencies, and land trusts the benchmarks and data to most effectively spend conservation dollars by protecting climate-resilient sites that capture plant and habitat diversity. Among the report’s conclusions is that saving plant diversity will require conserving an additional 2.3 million acres of land in specific habitats and locations across New England.

“We wanted to know if more than a century of conservation in New England has protected enough land in the right places to save the region’s plant diversity,” says **Debbi Edelstein, Executive Director of Native Plant Trust**. “The collaboration with The Nature Conservancy merged deep botanical knowledge with robust data modeling to generate a powerful approach to land protection that can direct limited funding to the best places for preserving the region’s plants and the living systems they sustain.”

The report assesses progress toward global targets for plant and land conservation that will ensure functioning, climate-resilient ecosystems. It delineates the regional distribution of 43 unique habitats, for the first time identifies 234 Important Plant Areas (IPAs) containing an abundance of rare species, assesses the current protection status of those habitats and IPAs and likely losses to development by 2050, and evaluates their ability to effectively adapt to a changing climate. With that data, the authors determined how many acres of land in each habitat or IPA needs protection to meet the benchmarks; and the mapping tool gives a regional, state, and parcel-level view of high-priority areas.

The benchmarks come from two primary sources. The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC), part of the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity, aims to protect for nature or natural processes at least 15 percent of each ecological region or vegetation type and 75 percent of Important Plant Areas. The Global Deal for Nature (GDN) seeks to preserve 30 percent of the world's ecosystems by 2030; it was adapted for New England with targets that aim for 30 percent secured from conversion to another use and 5-15 percent protected for nature and natural processes. The GDN's 30 x 30 is incorporated into the 2021 update to the Convention on Biological Diversity and was recently adopted by the Biden Administration in its "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" initiative.

In addition, the authors added climate resilience to the GDN/New England targets, so that protection efforts focus on places where the land provides many microclimates or natural strongholds for current plant populations that will enable them to endure under different climate scenarios. The report maps each habitat's and each IPA's most resilient land and assesses the progress toward permanently protecting and conserving these lands throughout New England.

Highlights of the analysis include:

- **Important Plant Areas** contain multiple populations of 212 rare plant taxa and climate-resilient examples of 43 habitats. Only 29 percent of the 2.6 million acres of IPAs—primarily high-elevation and northern sites—are conserved at the two highest levels of protection, while the GSPC target is 75 percent. Protecting the unsecured IPAs would go a long way toward sustaining the region's plant and habitat diversity.
- **Forests** cover 86 percent of the natural landscape, but only one of New England's ten forest types meet the GSPC target and only two meet the NE target for conservation.
- **Wetlands** cover 12 percent of the region and are critical to sustaining almost half our plants, birds, and other wildlife. Of the 18 types of wetlands, only 5 meet the GSPC and NE targets, and none of our 5 most common types meet the NE target.
- **Patch-forming habitats**, like summits, cliffs, barrens, and dunes, are only 2 percent of the landscape. But they are hotspots of plant diversity and have densities of rare species 10 times higher than wetlands and 40 times higher than upland forests. Of the 14 types, 7 meet the GSPC target and only 4 meet the NE target.

Recommendations:

In a changing climate, New England needs multi-layered, science-based approaches to saving plant diversity and the life it sustains. The rapidly changing climate will stress the ability of individual species and entire habitats to adapt, leading to migration, death or the formation of new assemblages. The authors thus recommend conserving an additional 2.3 million acres of specific climate-resilient habitat, including IPAs, to achieve the NE target of 30 percent of each habitat secured against conversion to another land use, with 5-15 percent protected for nature. In addition, land owners must ensure the effective management of the existing 5.2 million acres of conserved land that is open to multiple uses, including logging and mining. The report also examines and recommends additional conservation

strategies, such as assisted migration, restoration and augmentation of sites and populations, and seed banking to preserve genetic diversity.

“This innovative report and mapping tool will help ensure that New England’s native plants—the green foundation for functioning ecosystems—are at the forefront of conservation policy and action as climate plans develop,” says **Mark Anderson, the Director of Conservation Science at The Nature Conservancy**. “Conservation decision-makers are striving to bring resilience and diversity into their planning, and now policymakers and federal and state agencies will have a roadmap to guide their conservation efforts and priorities.”

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Native Plant Trust is the nation’s first plant conservation organization and the only one solely focused on New England’s native plants. We save native plants in the wild, grow them for gardens and restorations, and educate others on their value and use. We are based at Garden in the Woods, a renowned native plant botanic garden that attracts visitors from all over the world. From this flagship property in Framingham, Massachusetts, staff and volunteers work throughout New England each year to monitor and protect rare and endangered plants, collect and preserve seeds to ensure biological diversity, detect and control invasive species, conduct research, and offer a range of educational programs. Native Plant Trust also operates a nursery at Nasami Farm in western Massachusetts and manages six sanctuaries in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont that are open to the public. Native Plant Trust is among the first organizations worldwide to receive Advanced Conservation Practitioner accreditation by London-based Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), which included an endorsement by an International Advisory Council representing six continents. Please visit www.NativePlantTrust.org.

The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. Working in 79 countries and territories, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org.