

40th Annual Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers - Boston Massachusetts 2016

40e Conférence annuelle des gouverneurs de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et des premiers ministres de l'Est du Canada

## RESOLUTION 40-3

### RESOLUTION ON ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY, ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE, AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

**WHEREAS**, the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers have shown international leadership through their collective action to address environmental protection and climate change, especially through work to expand use and production of renewable energy and other efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and

**WHEREAS**, the region's economy, culture, and identity are closely tied to and dependent upon its forests and water resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the region's cities and towns, infrastructure, and natural ecosystems are vulnerable to adverse impacts from climate change. Jurisdictions region-wide are taking steps to adapt to a changing climate, by making communities, infrastructure, and public investments more resilient; and

**WHEREAS**, the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers recognize the inherent connection between the region's forested landscape and its forest products economy, and the important role that private forest landowners play in the health and condition of its forests; and

**WHEREAS**, the Northern Appalachian-Acadian forest is globally significant as the most intact, contiguous temperate broadleaf forest in the world. The Northeastern coastal forest, including the coastal plain, and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence lowland forest provide a vital link for neotropical migrants of global significance. Boreal forests are globally important for millions of resident and migratory birds, including songbirds which depend on Boreal forests during different stages of their lifecycles. Together, these forests span portions of all six New England states and five eastern Canadian provinces. Global climate change is a prominent threat to the long-term health of these vital ecosystems. The spread of invasive species and wildlife disease, often exacerbated by global climate change, is another key threat; and

**WHEREAS**, Indigenous people historically have a strong connection to the land, and in the present day continue to recognize the traditional importance of a healthy environment to the social well-being and economic prosperity for future generations; and

**WHEREAS**, maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity is an important strategy for boosting the resilience of the region's native ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as its economy and human communities. Connected habitats provide the natural pathways necessary for fish, wildlife, and plants to move to meet their life needs and to find suitable habitat as climate conditions change. Intact

ecosystems also provide sustainable economic and social benefits on which the region's well-being depends – including renewable forest products, outdoor recreation and tourism, clean air and water, flood attenuation, carbon sequestration, and our “sense of place;” and

**WHEREAS**, transportation infrastructure, essential to the region's economic growth, can be designed and sited to ensure habitat connectivity for both terrestrial and aquatic species. Infrastructure that is appropriately sized and designed for terrestrial and aquatic habitat connectivity as the climate changes also brings significant public safety, economic, and climate resiliency benefits to communities. These include reduced risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions, decreased risk of flood damage and associated costs, safer and more reliable transportation networks, and enhanced water quality through avoided stream crossing failures (i.e., culverts and bridges); and

**WHEREAS**, our region's forests and water resources cross provincial, state, and national borders. Effective action to sustain these assets, along with the invaluable ecosystem goods and services they provide, requires collaboration across borders; and

**WHEREAS**, sustaining and restoring connected ecosystems requires a multi-faceted approach that includes development and application of sound science, targeted land conservation, sustainable land and water management, policy solutions, improved transportation infrastructure, outreach and engagement with key constituencies, and thoughtful land use planning; and

**WHEREAS**, multiple cross-border, public-private partnerships are actively working to sustain intact, connected ecosystems in this region.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers recognize the importance of ecological connectivity for the adaptability and resilience of our region's ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities in the face of climate change; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers acknowledge the need to work across landscapes and borders to advance efforts to restore and maintain ecological connectivity; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers instruct agencies within their jurisdictions to elevate ecological connectivity, conservation, and restoration in their activities. These agencies are further instructed to encourage regional collaboration, as appropriate, in order to identify priority connectivity zones that connect and expand existing protected areas and to mobilize and apply resources most effectively; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers advise agencies within their jurisdictions to support land protection and planning efforts that maintain and improve connectivity, and to promote the sustainable management of public and private lands and aquatic systems that further these objectives; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers instruct transportation and natural resource agencies to explore opportunities to develop, modify, and expand federal, state, and provincial transportation enhancement and designation programs in order to improve habitat connectivity; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers instruct transportation and natural resource agencies in each jurisdiction to collaborate in helping to identify the appropriate design and size of transportation infrastructure for movement of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, as well as changes in precipitation and peak flow rates projected under climate change. This will help achieve other critical benefits including improved water quality and flood resiliency; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers encourage land use planning entities at all levels, especially municipalities, to incorporate habitat connectivity objectives in land use planning and policies; and


**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers direct officials to collaborate, where possible, to document the current state of forest and habitat connectedness in individual jurisdictions and the region. States and provinces sharing habitats should collaborate, where possible, to develop regional work plans to identify and address potential issues and collaborative solutions; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers commit, where possible, to pursue collective efforts to control the invasion of exotic species and the spread of wildlife diseases by sharing information and best practices to protect the region's biodiversity and preserve the health of its forested and aquatic ecosystems; and

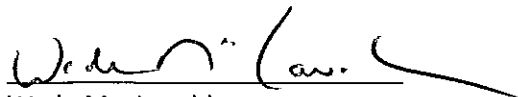
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers encourage agencies within their jurisdictions to collaborate to promote the vitality of the region's forested landscape and associated economy, including the forest products industry; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers request the Committee on the Environment to form a working group through the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual NEG/ECP Conference in 2020. The working group should coordinate these efforts and report back to the Coordinating Committee Officials at least every two years on current and planned activities supportive of the goals of this Resolution.

*Adopted at the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers, Boston, Massachusetts, August 29, 2016*



Charles D. Baker  
Governor of Massachusetts  
Co-Chair



Wade MacLauchlan  
Premier of Prince Edward Island  
Co-Chair



