

US Forest Service buying 2,000 acres in Pownal, Stamford to expand Green Mountain National Forest

By [Tiffany Tan](#) [Apr 10 2022](#)

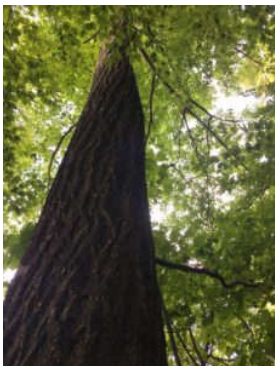


Roaring Branch Cascades is a scenic, secluded gorge in the new additions to the Green Mountain National Forest. Photo by Matt Peters

The Green Mountain National Forest is expected to grow by 2,100 acres in Bennington County within the next year. A conservation group is facilitating the U.S. Forest Service's purchase of three privately owned parcels of land in Pownal and Stamford, with the help of \$2.1 million in congressional funding.

The properties encompass forest lands that abut the Green Mountain National Forest — 688 acres in northeastern Pownal, 1,251 acres in central Stamford and 165 acres in eastern Stamford. Their locations caught the eye of the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit organization that works to create new parks and public land. The trust saw that the properties can increase the buffer between renowned Green Mountain hiking trails — the Appalachian Trail and Long Trail — and real estate developments and industries.

"It really ruins your wilderness experience if someone builds a subdivision half a mile from the trail," said Kate Wanner, senior project manager at the trust's Vermont office.



A towering American chestnut tree is among the new additions to the Green Mountain National Forest. Photo courtesy of Matt Peters

Two of the parcels are within a mile of the Long Trail and all of them can be seen from viewpoints along the trail, said Mollie Klepack Flanigan of the Green Mountain Club, founder and maintainer of the Long Trail.

She said the properties' conservation will help secure the remote and natural environment of the Long Trail, which is the United States' oldest long-distance trail. The land acquisition would also open pedestrian access to the Green Mountains from northeastern Pownal and extend the national forest's snowmobile trail, including 1.2 miles of the Stamford Pond Trail.

When the trust hired an ecologist to survey the properties, he apparently found several pleasant surprises, including the habitat of a recently discovered population of state-endangered American marten previously thought to live only in northeastern Vermont. But Wanner said there has been no evidence yet that the animal, a member of the weasel family, actually lives within any of the parcels. The Pownal land hosts a small crop of American chestnuts, of which there are very few mature specimens left. The Green Mountain integration could be useful in restoring the tree. And the parcels also have previously unmapped wetlands, which help absorb rainfall and promote flood protection.



Burs from a healthy, reproductive American chestnut tree — a strong addition to the Green Mountain National Forest. Forest officials are not aware of any other healthy, mature chestnuts in the forest. Photo courtesy of Matt Peters.

The U.S. Forest Service said the properties' addition into the 400,000-acre Green Mountains would help the agency fulfill its mission to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands for generations.

"We are honored to be entrusted to manage these parcels as public land for all to enjoy," Forest Service spokesperson Briana Graham said.

The three parcels of land are all owned by Park Forestry, a Connecticut-based company that buys private properties with conservation value so they could someday become public land.

The company owner, David Rubin, said the properties were originally eight separate parcels that he bought from various owners over 10 years. He has used the land for sustainable forestry while waiting for the time they could be put in public hands.



The rare Eastern dwarf mistletoe is found in the Red Spruce-Cinnamon Fern Swamp, and along the headwaters of Brown Brook, in the new additions to the Green Mountain National Forest. Photo by Matt Peters

"I bought them with this intention," he said. "It just takes me being very patient."

The U.S. Forest Service said it is common for landowners to offer their property to the agency for acquisition. But it is less common for them to have so much land available for acquisition, as is Rubin's case in Bennington County.

The properties are already under contract, but Wanner said the sale might not become official until sometime in 2023. The Forest Service would buy the land using \$2.1 million that U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., [earmarked](#) for the project in this year's federal budget bill, following a request from the Trust for Public Land.

But the trust said it needs to raise an additional \$128,000 to pay for acquisition costs, such as land title work, ecological analysis and legal fees.

