

Study Examines Competing Interests in Maine Forests' Future

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(PhysOrg.com) -- In more than a decade of public debate about the future of Maine's forestlands, sustainability has been a linchpin, with stakeholders arguing that it be either reinvented or restored, depending on their view of human-nature relationships.

In a new study aimed at better understanding the [environmental issues](#) at stake, Stephanie Welcomer of the Maine Business School studied competing sustainability narratives published during an 11-year period (1994-2005) in support and opposition to proposed development of 3.2 million acres for a Maine Woods National Park and Preserve.

The study highlights the centrality of sustainability for community stakeholders debating their response to environmental challenges, says Welcomer, whose findings were recently published in the journal *Organization & Environment*.

It is a portrait of [sustainability](#) "as it is lived and contested" in Maine, she says.

"While providing different perspectives through their plots and actors, both narratives argue for an existing or desired recovered sustainable ecology, economy and society," writes Welcomer, an associate professor of management at the University of Maine.

With the 1994 proposal to establish a Maine Woods National Park and Preserve, two narratives were in play, both in pursuit of the North

Woods version of the Garden of Eden. The park narrative focused on the recovery of pristine forest that has been harmed by industry and technology, while the working forest narrative centered on a “civilized,” managed resource, with technology and ownership structures providing jobs, recreation and healthy woodlands.

“Narratives have great power to help people understand their world and guide their actions,” says Welcomer. “Examining and perhaps changing long-held dominant narratives is a key issue for communities and regions, as these narratives reflect understandings of environments, traditions, and practices that may no longer exist.

“To be sustainable in a rapidly-changing world that has serious economic, social and environmental problems, reflecting on existing narratives and revising them are crucial processes for communities and regions to address the changes and issues they face,” she says.

Provided by University of Maine

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