

Forest Stand Improvement Notice **Thinning for Wildlife and Forest Health**

Flagging is common in the Bethel Community Forest -we are always scouting new trail routes, identifying unique features on the property, and in this case, preparing for Thinning for Wildlife and Forest Health.



In August, 2024 IWT is preparing to implement a forest stand improvement practice funded by the New England Forestry Foundation, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and managed by LandVest.

This practice results in improved forest composition and stand quality, as the thinning work targets the removal of low-vigor, low value, and otherwise undesirable or diseased/damaged trees and groups of trees. Hand crews will be brush sawing the understory of trees <4"DBH and targeting a release of the best young trees in the forest. The openings in the tree canopy allow more light to reach the ground and give the other tree species a chance to establish themselves. The cut trees are left lying on the forest floor to decompose in place, fertilizing the soil and giving way to a more diverse and healthier group of trees.

Not all beech trees are cut. More mature beeches are left standing and in woodlands affected by beech bark disease such as ours, an isolated mature tree may not have any symptoms! These trees are conserved to maintain tree species diversity and the potential for beech nut production to benefit local wildlife.

Past logging practices and Beech Bark Disease has left over half of the Bethel Community Forest's standing timber consisting of diseased American Beech trees and other low value tree saplings. The resulting understory beech and sapling thicket creates dense shade which inhibits regeneration of other slower growing desirable tree species. The thicket also greatly reduces wildlife habitat.

Inland Woods + Trails has contracted with LandVest, LLC, a timberland management and consulting firm in Bethel, to manage the pre-commercial thinning of Beech and Striped Maple in the forest beginning in August 12, 2024. The pink flagging tells the cutting crews where stop or not to cut. The following is a short version of the prescription for the cut: All cut stems will be severed below the lowest live branch except when prevented by natural obstacles. Stems will be severed cleanly from the stump; stump height will be left 12 – 18 inches above ground surface or other natural obstacles. Cut stems will be felled away from property boundary lines and established land corners, roads, road ditches, recreation trails, and streams. At first, it may not be pretty! But the wildlife will love it and the forest will be very happy.