

Woodlots and Woodlands

The words people choose to describe land with trees in Maine can vary. Even though words such as “woodlots” and “woodlands” often are used interchangeably, sometimes these words leave impressions or suggest images that are unintended.

“Woodlot” is a traditional term used in New England to refer to the part of a farm where trees grow. At a time when much of New England was farmed, wood was a critical resource for the farmer, for fuel, building materials, as an extra source of income from timber, and sometimes as a place to pasture cattle or pigs. Today, most farms still have a woodlot, and many other wooded properties are still referred to as woodlots, even if there is no farm or no forest products are harvested there.

The term “woodland” comes from England, and was often used to describe the types of trees that grew in a small parcel of land – such as an oak woodland or a beech woodland. Today the term is often used for any wooded property that’s relatively small, regardless of how the land is used. In some scientific uses “woodland” means an area with certain characteristics.

Both terms are sometimes abbreviated when referring to wooded areas simply as “the woods.”

“Forest” is also an old term, usually meaning a larger ownership with trees where some particular purpose was being carried out, especially growing and harvesting timber, or managing game for hunting. From these activities came the profession of “forestry,” which is the art and science of managing forests for a variety of resources.

Today, many wooded areas, large and small, are owned by private individuals and families, and may support a wide range of uses – wildlife habitat, recreation and personal enjoyment, scenic beauty, clean water protection, and forest products – at the same time through careful management. Whether they are called woodlots, woodlands, forests, or something else, what’s important is the great resource they are for their owners and for everyone who benefits from Maine’s woods.