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Northern Border Regional Commission Announces \$4m in Strategic Forest Economy Investments

At its winter meeting, the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) approved over \$4 Million in new awards to six projects as part of the Forest Economy Program (FEP). The Commission has prioritized investments that support the regional forest-based economy and the industry's evolution to include new technologies and viable business models across the four-state NBRC region of Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont. The six organizations receiving funding include:

- **University of Maine (Orono, ME) – \$745,869:** This project aims to accelerate the transition from plastics to more sustainable, recyclable, and biodegradable forest-based packaging in the consumer product sector. This will be achieved through rapid prototyping and the development of a pilot scale production of high-value molded pulp products.
- **Our Katahdin (Millinocket, ME) – \$1,000,000:** Awarded funds will be used to support critical water infrastructure needs, which support ongoing efforts to revitalize the 1,400-acre former Great Northern Paper mill site in Millinocket.
- **Vermont State University and Smokey House Center (Lyndon and Danby, VT) – \$995,146:** This collaborative project will develop a Forest Innovation Hub to support commercialization and innovation in the northern forest region. Funding will also support the launch of a pilot project at the Smokey House Center to showcase the economic and ecological benefits of building with regional wood products via the design of prototypical timber structures.
- **VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (Montpelier, VT) – \$565,641:** The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), in partnership with key collaborators, will use funds to support Phase One the Vermont Forest Future Strategic Roadmap. Project goals include the development of MyForestWorks, a collaborative outreach effort to educate communities about the benefits of wood energy, forest management, and wood products; and the creation of a Vermont Forest Innovation Cooperative, envisioned as a network of education, applied research, manufacturing, and industry professionals working to support emerging forest-based businesses and entrepreneurs.
- **Paul Smith's College (Paul Smiths, NY) – \$1,000,000:** Funds will support essential wastewater infrastructure improvements on its rural campus in Franklin County, New York. This

critical investment will help strengthen the institution that houses one of the country's premier forestry programs.

- **The Research Foundation for SUNY (Albany, NY) – \$148,856:** This project will complete Whole Building Lifecycle Analysis assessments for six or more mass timber buildings in the NBRC territory and the Northeast. The result will provide forest industry businesses with a clear evaluation of their forest products in the carbon economy.

“A thriving forest economy is critical to the success of rural communities across the region, which is why the Commission has made a strategic decision to elevate this sector in our grant making. We are excited to announce these investments in innovative projects that will contribute to growth of the forestry industry,” said **NBRC Federal Co-Chair Chris Saunders**.

“UMaine is committed to addressing sustainability challenges, and we are very proud of the fact that we can leverage our heritage forestry industry to accelerate the transition from plastics to forest-based packaging. This project will also contribute to the growth of our capabilities in the Advancing Manufacturing sector that will impact the state of Maine, and beyond,” said **University of Maine President and UMS Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation Joan Ferrini-Mundy**.

“On behalf of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR), I am thrilled to learn that our proposal to the NBRC, which aims to support the implementation of the recently completed Vermont Forest Future Strategic Roadmap and also bolster the Regional Forest Products Industry, has been funded. With this generous support from the NBRC, Vermont FPR and our forest sector partners will be able to implement the strategies and actions contained within the Roadmap to strengthen, modernize, promote, and protect Vermont's forest products sector and broader forest economy,” said **Oliver Pierson, Director, Forests Division, VT FPR**.

“We are very grateful to the NBRC for their support as we work to better quantify the environmental benefits of durable wood products from managed forests, and help the landowners and forest industries benefit from their important contributions to our economy and environment,” said **Paul Crovella of The Research Foundation for SUNY**.

The funds for this program, and all NBRC programs, are available thanks to the support of the Congressional Delegations of all four NBRC states: Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. The Commission anticipates announcing the availability of funds for a spring 2024 FEP round in the near future. NBRC's Timber for Transit program, geared towards organizations and communities interested in utilizing wood in transportation infrastructure, as well the Commission's flagship Catalyst Program, will accept pre-applications through March 15. For more information and additional announcements about NBRC programs, please refer to www.nbrc.gov.

About the Northern Border Regional Commission (www.nbrc.gov)

Created in 2008, the Northern Border Regional Commission is a federal-state partnership whose mission is to help alleviate economic distress and encourage private sector job creation in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont. The NBRC Forest Economy Program supports projects ranging from forest economy workforce development to demonstration of new wood product innovations, and projects that assist communities impacted by the decline in parts of the sector.