

WILLIAM S. COOPER AWARD

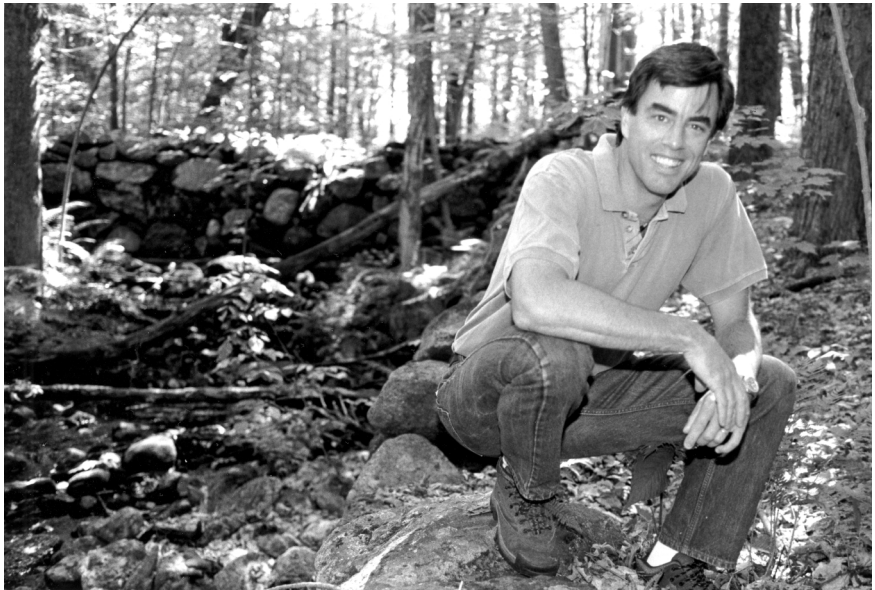
The William Skinner Cooper Award of the Ecological Society of America honors an outstanding recent contribution in geobotany, physiographic ecology, plant succession, or the distribution of organisms along environmental gradients. The 2003 Award is presented to Drs. David R. Foster, Glenn Motzkin, and Benjamin Slater of Harvard Forest, for their 1998 paper, "Land-use history as long-term broad-scale disturbance: regional forest dynamics in central New England," published in *Ecosystems* 1:98–119. This paper deals with a fundamental issue in modern physiographic, landscape-scale ecology: how human activities, in the form of land transformations, have altered the structure of the New England landscape and the basic relationships between forest type and environmental variables.

In this research, the authors summarize a range of data on patterns of human population spread, land use change, and associated changes in forest composition in central New England. They conclude that pre-settlement vegetation was highly variable within the region, and was distributed in a way that corresponded well to known climatic gradients. One of the primary impacts of land-use change, the authors argue, has been to disrupt that original order. Much of the regional variation has been lost from second-growth forests, and what is left is a homogenized version of the previous landscape structure.

These insights have obvious relevance to our understanding of New England's forested landscape, but there are broader implications of this work as well. David Foster and his co-authors do an outstanding job of redefining land-use change as an ecological process, and analyzing its impacts with the same framework that has been applied to other disturbances. Although land-use impacts have long been recognized, this paper "mainstreams" land-use

change by approaching it as an ecological process with the same persistent legacies and interactions with other features of the environment as other well-studied disturbances. It is clearly deserving of the 2003 W. S. Cooper Award.

Cooper Award Subcommittee: Andrea Lloyd (Chair), Paul Dayton, Sara Hotchkiss, Laura Hyatt, John Lichter, and Miles Silman.



David R. Foster