In 1998 and 1999 I interviewed 79 Northern Forest residents to explore ways in which people and communities develop a sense of place. Excerpts from these interviews, published here, tell how some Northern Forest residents see their communities, see commonalities and differences between their communities and others, and see how their local place identities fit within the broader region. These interviews serve as snapshots—points of view from people who live in all four states, whose careers range from carpenter to guide, teacher to entrepreneur, logger to occupational therapist, paper mill machinist to sheep farmer.

Three broad themes emerged from the interviews, each based on personal connections at different scales: individuals with community, individuals with place and the land, and people with their heritage.

At Home in the Northern Forest is organized around these three levels of relationships, ranging from the intimate to the abstract, as follows:

Chapter 1: People
This section reflects people’s beliefs about the human relationships, values and ethics that shape their communities, and their reflections on small-town life. It also describes perceptions of changing community makeup, interests, and overall health.

Chapter 2: The Land
This section outlines people’s attitudes toward physical places—including the forest, open spaces, waters, and other natural and built environments. It also describes people’s uses and desires of the working landscape, and their perceptions of the future of the forest and forest-based industries.

Chapter 3: Culture & Identity
The third section identifies cultural elements, people’s relationships with their own histories, regional economic conditions and changes, and people’s understandings of the Northern Forest as a place and a region.

Along with each set of quotes you’ll find observations on the subject at hand. Some of the infor-
Information is gleaned from my work and research in the Northern Forest, and some summarizes comments from the interviews that are not directly quoted. In either case, my interpretations are meant to provide a context for people’s remarks—which are based on their own perceptions—rather than a quantified or definitive description of the Northern Forest.

Opinions among the 79 people who generously shared their time and their views for this work varied widely; we made no attempt to reach consensus, and no individual’s remarks should be interpreted as the prevailing opinion among Northern Forest residents. Instead, the agreements—where they happen—and the divergent views—where they occur—are evidence of the fiber of life in the Northern Forest, seen through the eyes of the people who make their home here. The quotations themselves are either direct quotes or paraphrases of what I heard in my interviews, and are not necessarily the opinions of the Northern Forest Center.

I’d like to thank the many people who allowed us to interview and/or photograph them for At Home in the Northern Forest. Readers should note that the photographs are intended to illustrate the ideas and themes in the book; the use of any person’s photo does not necessarily correlate to the quotes on the accompanying page.

Make your own journey through At Home in the Northern Forest to explore some of the personal aspects of life in this place. Listen to the voices—passionate and calm, definite and uncertain, confident and questioning—as they tell of the place they call home. The more we understand the regional identity and sense of place in the Northern Forest, the more able we will be to build a better, more inclusive future marked by community health, economic stability, environmental and cultural integrity, and personal well being.

Laura E. Tam
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