

## Paul Foley

---

**From:** Foster, David R. [drfoster@fas.harvard.edu]  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 06, 2016 7:41 AM  
**To:** Paul Foley  
**Subject:** C.R. # 1 -2016 O.B. Water District Solar Farm  
**Attachments:** Loss of MV Ancient Woodlands over Time[2].tiff; The fate & status of ancient woodland on MV[3].tiff

Dear Mr Foley

At the suggestion of Brendan O'Neill I would like to share my comments on the proposed solar panel installation in Oak Bluffs.

What I know of the project is based on the document C.R. # 1 -2016 O.B. Water District Solar Farm MVC Staff Report – 2016-02-03, which includes the following information:

Vegetation: 20.5-acres of a currently mostly wooded 45-acre site will be cleared.●  
Habitat: The whole site is designated as NHESP Habitat for State Listed Rare Species

My general response to this proposal is that the destruction of forests should be minimized anywhere on the Vineyard due to their critical role in carbon sequestration, habitat, and the maintenance of water quality. But, the forest targeted for clearing is particularly important it is a surviving ancient woodland that provides continuity and an important buffer to the adjoining State Forest, which is the largest area of ancient woods on the Vineyard.

Unlike the secondary forests that came in on abandoned farmland, these ancient woods occupy sites that were never cleared historically and therefore have continuity that extends back to times before the European settlement of the Island. Ecologically these forests are important because their soils are intact, their vegetation is characteristic of that occupying the landscape for thousands of years, the resprouting trees are often many hundreds of years old, and the habitat they provide is globally rare and valuable to many unusual as well as common species.

The attached set of maps depict the distribution and continual decline in ancient woodlands on the Vineyard since 1850. The report on the State Forest (reference & link below) highlights the historical and ecological importance of these Great Plain forests.

In comparison with many islands such as Nantucket the Vineyard has an unusual history in that about 40% of the land came through the peak of deforestation and farming in the 19th C as intact woodland. Since 1850 substantial areas of ancient woods extending up into West Chop and East Chop have been lost to development and so the remaining intact expanse of ancient woods is now centered on the Great Plain in and around the State Forest. Even there the lack of awareness of the historic and ecological importance of these woods and their treatment as "wasteland" has allowed them to be perforated and gobbled up by individual houses, industry and infrastructure, the airport, and large developments just outside the State Forest and other protected lands. The map sequence and "Fate & status of ancient woodland" summarizes this history of degradation and loss.

To clear thriving woodland that is actively storing carbon and mitigating climate change in order to install solar arrays is counterproductive. But, to further reduce an irreplaceable ancient ecosystem and a portion of the largest sandplain forest on the Island for such a purpose would be a travesty.

Solar panels belong on roofs, at the bottom of gravel pits, and on other sites in which the native vegetation has already been removed.

Ironically, I note that on our map of "The fate & status of ancient woodland on MV" it appears that we depict the proposed solar site as "protected" because it is owned and protected by the town for water resources.

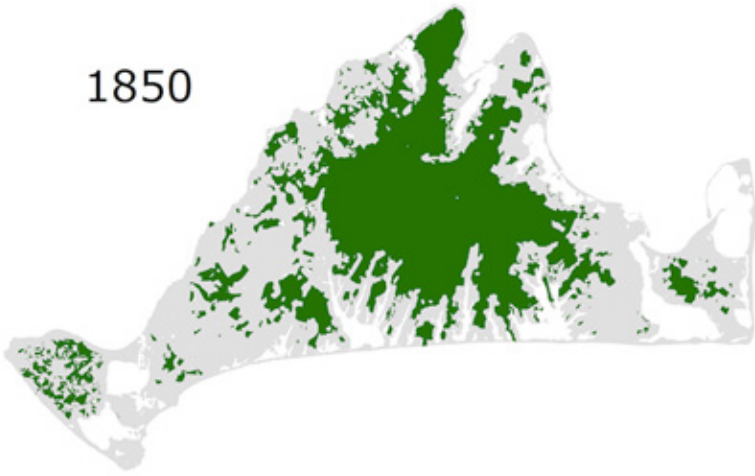
Sincerely, David Foster

Foster, D. R., Motzkin, G. 1999. **Historical influences on the landscape of Martha's Vineyard: perspectives on the management of the Manuel F. Correllus State Forest.** Harvard Forest Paper No. 23

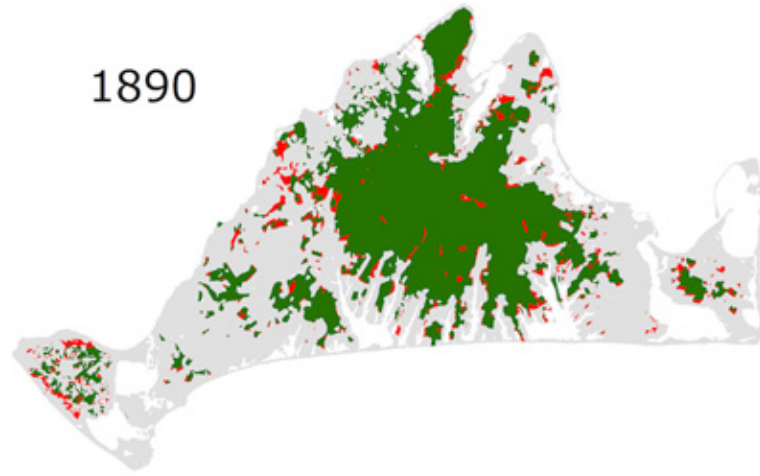
-----  
David Foster Resident West Tisbury, MA  
Director  
Harvard Forest, Harvard University  
Petersham, MA 01366 [978.724.3302](tel:978.724.3302)

<http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/>  
<http://www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/>

1850



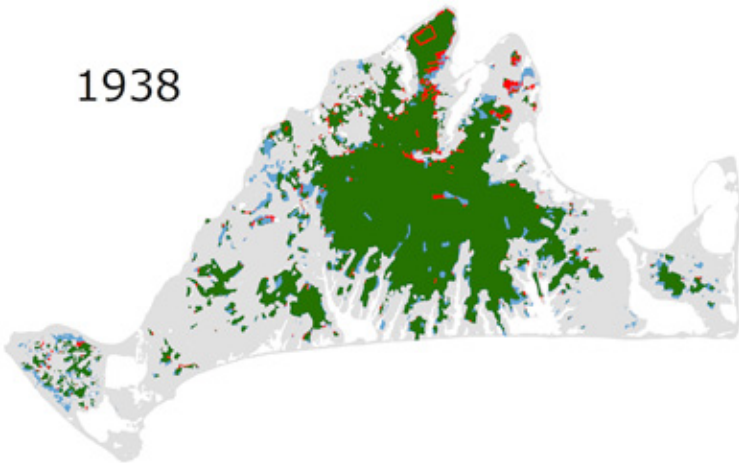
1890



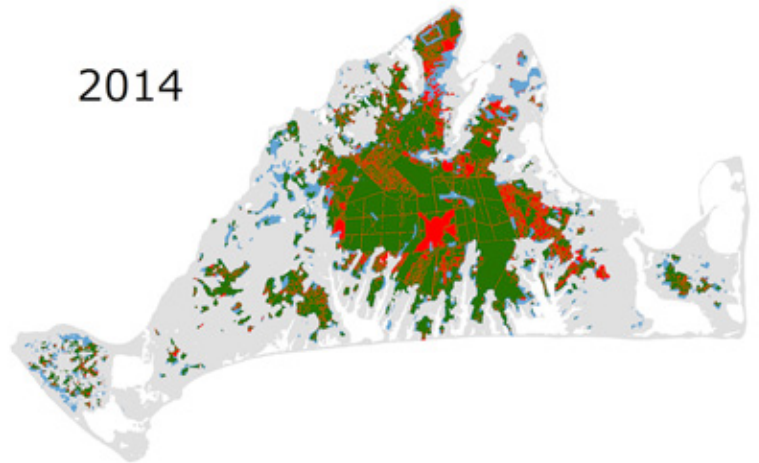
○ Not Wooded in 1850

● Ancient Woodland Lost in This Period

1938



2014



● Ancient Woodland Lost in Earlier Period

● Retained Ancient Woodland

- Protected Ancient Woodland
- Unprotected Ancient Woodland

2 mi.

