



ROBERT T. LEVERETT

Icy Glen Award

presented to

Ken Gooch

August 3, 2026 · Stockbridge, Massachusetts

*We want to give a name to something —
and then give that name to someone.*

We’re calling this the Icy Glen Award. And to tell you why, we have to take you back to Herman Melville, who wrote *Moby-Dick* just over the hill from here, at Arrowhead in Pittsfield — and who knew our own Ice Glen in Stockbridge firsthand, from his walks there with Nathaniel Hawthorne.

There’s a moment in *Moby-Dick* where Melville sends his narrator, Ishmael, far from home: onto a remote island in the South Seas, into a green cathedral of a forest lush with a temple of palms. And when Melville reaches for words to capture how impossibly, vividly alive that forest is — the vines, the ferns, the flowers weaving through everything — he doesn’t reach for the tropics. He reaches all the way back home, to the Berkshires. He writes:

“It was a wondrous sight. The wood was green as mosses of the Icy Glen; the trees stood high and haughty, feeling their living sap; the industrious earth beneath was as a weaver’s loom, with a gorgeous carpet on it, whereof the ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and woof, and the living flowers the figures.”

Green as the mosses of the Icy Glen. Of all the images in all the world, that is the one Melville chose to stand for life itself — teeming, growing, unbroken. He chose ours.

Which brings us to the man we honor today, because keeping that green alive and unbroken has been his life’s work.

For much of his career, Ken Gooch was the Commonwealth’s frontline defense for the health of its forests. As director of the Forest Health Program at the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, he led the state’s long fight against the invasive pests — the hemlock woolly adelgid, the emerald ash borer, and their kind — that threaten to unmake New England’s woods one tree at a time. It is patient, unglamorous, deeply scientific work, and few have done it better or longer.

And when Ice Glen’s own centuries-old hemlocks and white ash began to fail, it was Ken the Town of Stockbridge turned to. A certified arborist, he walked this old-growth forest and graded the health of every tree, then drew up the plan that is saving them still. The great hemlocks yet standing in that glen — some of them older than the nation itself — stand in no small part because of him.

He is, in the truest sense, a doctor to these woods — and like the best doctors, his care shows not in monuments but in all that quietly goes on living.

So today the wood is still green as the mosses of the Icy Glen — because of people like Ken. It is only fitting that the very first Icy Glen Award goes to the man who has done so much to keep it that way.

