



# Vermont Land Trust

CONSERVING LAND FOR THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

## Community Forest Case Study:

# Middlesex Town Forest

Middlesex, Vermont

The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) holds the conservation easement on a number of community-owned properties for which a management plan is required by the easement. This plan is an important guide for how multiple uses of the property will be balanced. We interviewed people in several towns who were involved in the creation of their community forest plan. The following case study focuses on Middlesex Town Forest.

## Background

Eleanor Ott and Cynthia Steed purchased their 403-acre forested property in 1990. Several years later, the Middlesex Notch Wildlife Management Area was created across the road from their land. In 2004, they approached VLT about protecting their forest and making it available for public recreation.

VLT worked with the town and the landowners to develop a conservation plan and raise the money needed to buy and permanently protect the forest.

With the support of the Town of Middlesex, Friends of the Worcester Range, Vermont

### Property Snapshot

**Size:** 442 acres; 403 acres are subject to a conservation easement held by VLT and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board.

**Uses:** Hiking, walking, hunting, running, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, and educational activities.

**Description:** The property contains a diversity of forest types, including higher elevation yellow birch-red spruce forest, red oak-northern hardwood forest, and rich northern hardwood forest. Streams, wetlands, vernal pools, cliffs and other important features provide habitat for white-tailed deer, wild turkey, moose, black bear, and amphibians.



River Conservancy, and more than 100 private donors, Eleanor sold the land to the Town of Middlesex and the town conserved the land with VLT and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

## Management planning process

When the property was conserved, the Middlesex Conservation Commission was given the responsibility of overseeing the land, including developing the management plan.

The commission held meetings and outdoor events to learn about the land and the community's interests and goals. About 50 residents attended one of three public events that were held at the town forest in the spring and fall.

Following these walks, the commission hosted a public forum in the town hall to share the information they gathered during the forest walks and to solicit ideas for the town forest.

This forum led to three additional public meetings that focused on the following topics: wildlife habitat and natural resources; forest management and economic uses; and recreational and educational uses.

The events and meetings "were well advertised, whoever was interested could come," said Dave Shepard, former chair of the conservation commission. "We tried to make some targeted invites to people who we thought might be good to get on a particular topic."

Events and meetings were publicized through the local paper, the elementary school paper, the town website, and flyers. Postcards were sent to all residents, and reminders were emailed to those who provided their emails during the fundraising campaign to buy the land.

"We got input from... all the groups in town that would have an interest in it," said Dave. "There may have been some folks who were more represented than others, but we didn't leave anyone out. There were people in town interested in being able to use ATVs who couldn't be accommodated [because of restrictions in the conservation easement]. Though we did try to get their interests on the record in case there was more flexibility down the road."

The plan was modeled after other town forest management plans. The writing of the plan was a coordinated effort among multiple people.

"People took a section of the plan that they had a particular interest in," recalled Dave. "The co-chairs made sure it was connected together, and they put together the final document." The final plan was distributed on the town website.

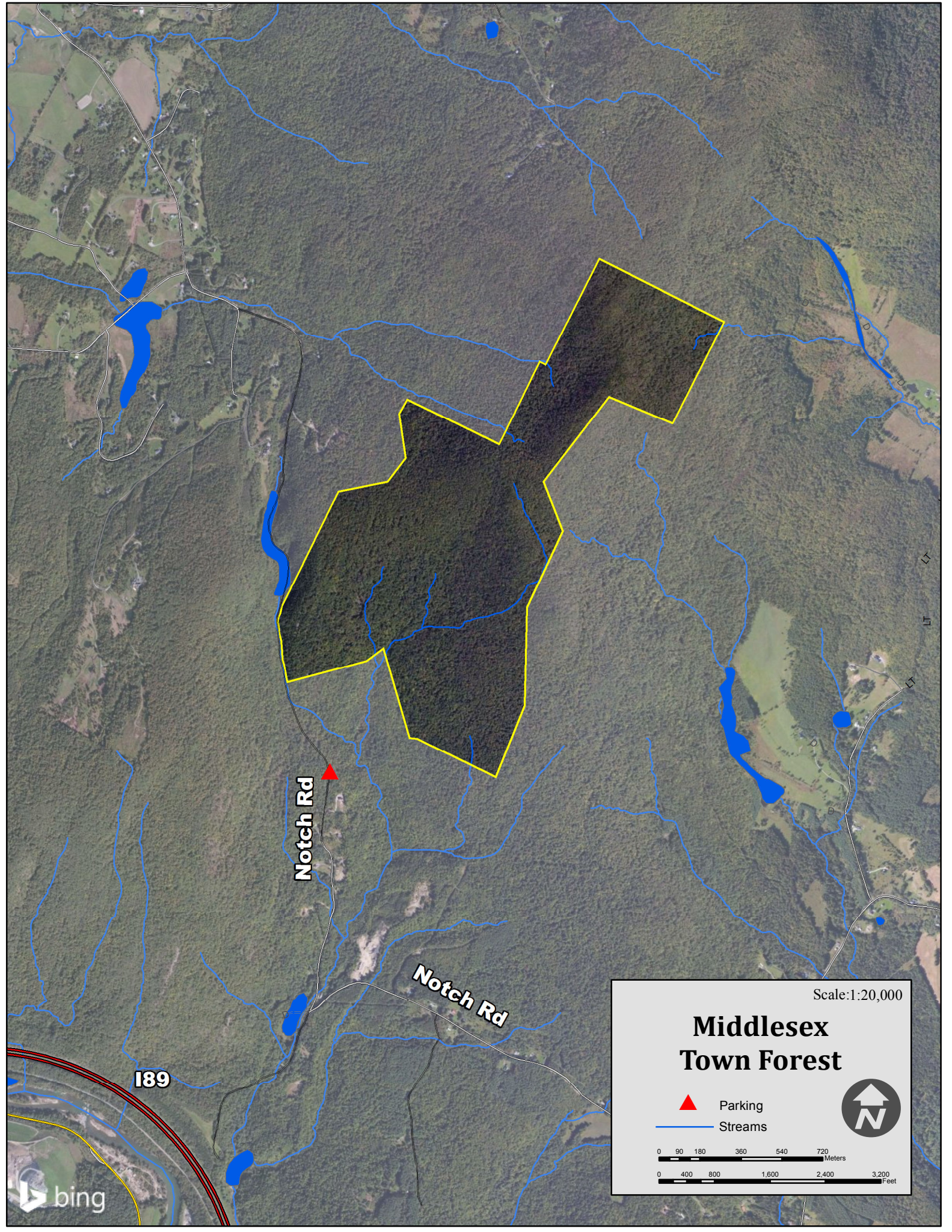
## Plan in action

Current management activities include developing recreational trails and identifying important resources on the property, such as vernal pools.

A volunteer has been marking the town forest boundaries. The conservation commission has also hosted educational walks.



Some income is expected to be generated from timber management.


The plan is currently in the process of being revised. "We're supposed to take a look at it and review on a roughly five-year basis," explained Dave. "Audubon did a forest assessment and we got the report from them after we finished the management plan. We will likely be incorporating some of those recommendations into the updated version of the plan."



Scale: 1:20,000

# Middlesex Town Forest

-  Parking
-  Streams



0 90 180 360 540 720 Meters

0 400 800 1,600 2,400 3,200 Feet

Notch Rd

Notch Rd

189

## Lessons Learned

The plan was successful in large part because of the efforts of community volunteers and the county forester (who wrote the forest stewardship plan).

“We were lucky to have people in town who had various areas of expertise,” said Dave. “For example, we had John Austin, a fish and wildlife biologist. If we didn’t have a wildlife biologist, then it would have definitely been helpful to hire someone to work on that.”

Furthermore, the responsibility for writing and coordination was spread over many shoulders.

Targeted outreach and different opportunities (walks or public meetings) for people to engage made sure that diverse community interests were represented.

Dave said that this inclusivity resulted in a better plan with more community support. “Even though the motorized ATV community would have liked to get trails... the fact that they were invited to participate and voice their interests—they felt like they were heard at least. They understood that there were certain constraints that we need to operate under,” said Dave.

The Conservation Commission spent a lot of time thinking about potential areas of conflict and tried to address them directly in the plan. For example, they chose to allow mountain biking only on certain trails to avoid potential conflicts with other trail users. So far there haven’t been any issues. ☪



*To see other studies and learn more, visit: [vlt.org/townforeststudy](http://vlt.org/townforeststudy) or contact Caitlin Cusack at (802) 861-6504 or [caitlin@vlt.org](mailto:caitlin@vlt.org).*



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