



Town of Weathersfield, Vermont

TOWN FOREST RECREATION PLAN



Vermont Town Forest
Recreation Planning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Acknowledgements

All community plans are the result of a collective effort. In the development of this Town Forest Recreation Plan many individuals provided considerable input and expertise to the outcome. The project team would like to thank them for their tremendous assistance.

Project Team

Steering Committee

- ❖ Ed Morris
- ❖ Michelle Grald
- ❖ Dan Boyer
- ❖ Jeff Pelton
- ❖ Mark Richardson
- ❖ Judith Duhaime

Interagency Working Group

- ❖ VT Urban and Community Forestry Program—Project Lead
- ❖ VT Agency of Natural Resources—Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- ❖ VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development

Consultant Team

- ❖ SE Group—Project Lead
- ❖ Arrowwood Environmental—Natural Resources Sub-Consultant

OUR PARTNERS

The Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program is a joint initiative of Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FRP) and UVM Extension. Working group members include FPR's Recreation Program, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and Extension's Tourism and Marketing Program. Partners include over 40 organizations and stakeholders who have helped shape the process and deliverables.

Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

About the Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Community Assistance Program

Vermont has a long and proud tradition of town-owned and managed forests. Over 168 municipalities own over 67,000 acres of forestland, all open for public benefit. The values of these town forests are diverse, including watershed protection, wildlife habitat, forest products, outdoor classrooms, and neighborhood gathering places. Outdoor forest-based recreation is both a great opportunity and a growing challenge. Recognition of the economic and community benefits of forest-based recreation is on the rise. Concurrently, increased pressure from multiple recreation groups accentuate the need for planning assistance to balance the growing recreation interests and the health of the forest. In response, the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program and its partners received a grant from the US Forest Service to provide recreation planning assistance to ten diverse Vermont communities, and Weathersfield was one of those selected!

Project Purpose and Scope

At the broadest level, the Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Community Assistance Program is intended to empower communities to move forward with confidence on recreation projects in their Town Forest. This process has provided robust community involvement and comprehensive consideration of potential projects, so the community can move forward with confidence knowing that it is addressing the needs and preferences of its residents and visitors, is protecting the forest resources in its charge, and is effectively managing the forest for the resources and activities it values.



The project encompasses four key areas:

1. Developing the Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit to enable planning in ALL Vermont communities
2. Developing a compelling and inspiring vision to help guide the future management of the Town Forest
3. Developing discrete, clear and action-oriented strategies for improvement of recreation and stewardship that achieves the vision
4. Fostering implementation with support for local plan adoption, guidance for implementation, and the project toolkit



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Project Process

Over the past year, Weathersfield has worked with a consulting firm that specializes in community planning, SE Group, in a robust planning process to develop an action-based town forest stewardship and recreation plan. The innovative planning model included a public visioning workshop, needs assessment, facilitated walks in the Forest, a community survey, a public strategies workshop, and an engaged steering committee. This process has resulted in a plan that provides actionable strategies to assist the community in taking the next steps. This process has led to a Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit to support sustainable, forest-based recreation in town forests statewide.

How to Use This Plan

First and foremost, this plan is intended to document the community's desires for the Town Forest. Through robust public engagement, the planning process identified and solidified the community's comprehensive vision, which encompasses all the primary uses of town forests: conservation, recreation, education, and timbering and forest products. When decisions are being made about the Town Forest, the vision outlined in this document should be referred to and should inform how the community might weigh in on the future direction of the Forest.

In addition to the establishing a shared vision for the Forest, this planning process has also identified a series of concrete actions the town and its partners could take to implement the community's vision for the Forest in terms of recreation. Strategies for improvement of recreation could be physical enhancements—such as new trails, parking lots, or facilities—but strategies might also be non-physical improvements like enhanced maps and signage or policy-oriented strategies like creating a process for proposing and reviewing new trails or projects in the Forest. Potential strategies were reviewed and prioritized by the steering committee and the public during the Draft Strategies Workshop. All strategies identified by the steering committee and project team are found within the action plan table, but the highest priority projects have also received enhanced detail in the action plan.

For each strategy, the action plans identify:

- Project description
- Action responsibility
- Timing (immediate, short, medium, long-term)
- Partners involved
- Action or planning dependencies
- Available toolkits & support resources
- Funding & grant opportunities
- Magnitude of costs (\$-\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$)

Some of the strategies can be implemented directly by the town, its volunteers, and partners without additional funding or resources—others may require additional planning and design or require grants to complete. If grants or additional planning and design steps are needed, likely funding sources and implementation partners are identified in the action plan.



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

The Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit—a companion to this plan—offers guidelines, designs, case studies, best practices, and standards for the town to pursue towards realizing its vision. Whether the next step involves recruiting volunteers, writing a grant application, or building a trail, the Toolkit can help the town and its partners move forward.

The Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit is available on Urban and Community Forestry’s website at: <https://vtcommunityforestry.org/>

Community Benefits of Recreation in Town Forests

Recreation in town forests provides many benefits for local residents, economies, and the natural communities of Vermont.

Conservation and Habitat Protection

A town forest, as a protected natural area, has intrinsic conservation value. They act as habitat for local species and help conserve the area’s natural resources. Town forests can connect existing forest blocks, providing a larger, safe habitat for species. Linked habitat blocks also allow species to travel and adapt to changing conditions. The forests also protect and buffer local streams, improving water quality and habitat for aquatic species. In absorbing and filtering water, the forests improve flood resiliency and water quality across the watershed. Forests also help protect soils and biodiversity and provide a buffer against pests and disease. As a municipally owned parcel, the forest can leverage additional funds for conservation through taxes and community development grants.

A town forest also provides humans with benefits from conservation by linking people to nature and allowing them to experience a wide range of natural environments. It is becoming clearer that contact with nature is an important element of a healthy life style. Providing convenient, local access to forests and natural areas can make it easier to connect with and experience nature,



which is particularly important for the youth in our communities. According to the Institute for Social Research, the average American boy or girl spends just four to seven minutes in unstructured outdoor play each day, and more than six hours each day in front of an electronic screen (National Wildlife Federation, 2016). This is startling data that has been causing a ripple effect across the country. Nearly every industry that works with young people across the nation has established initiatives to help change this statistic. From school districts and environmental education organizations to federal land managers, conservationists and the outdoor retail industry, new funding streams for outreach and programs have developed.



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There are several negative long-term effects of kids' "nature deficit disorder," as coined by Richard Louv, but the two greatest impacts are general health and well-being of America's youth and the ability and desire for future generations to steward and value our public natural and wild areas, including our town forests. Although this national phenomenon is less of an issue in rural places like Vermont, convenient access to forests could help get even more young people outdoors more often.

Close to Home Recreational Opportunities

Town forests provide trails for both residents and visitors to enjoy. Town forest trails allow walkers, bikers, runners, horseback riders, skiers, and snowshoers to combine exercise and a natural experience in a convenient location without having to travel far from their home. Studies have shown that close and convenient access to recreation and the outdoors can significantly increase an individual's physical activity levels (Schipperijn et al, 2017). Town forests may also connect surrounding trail systems, enhancing the community's overall trail network. Town forest recreational opportunities can also integrate recreation with outdoor education through interpretive signage and nature walks, promoting other community values of health and nature education.

Economic Development

In Vermont, outdoor and forest-based recreation and the associated tourism are major drivers of the economy. Outdoor and forest-based recreation brings people into our communities. In the Mad River Valley, 78% of visitors have reported that trails and access to the outdoors was important in their decision to visit (MRV Moves, 2017). Trail users, both residents and visitors, will visit local restaurants and shops, bringing in tax revenue and creating jobs as well. Across our state, just four trail systems—the Catamount Trail, the Long Trail, the VAST system, and Kingdom Trails—have been found to generate over \$30.8 million annual economic activity, over \$2 million in annual tax revenues, and have supported over 365 jobs annually (VT Trails and Greenways, 2017). A single trail system in the Green Mountain National Forest—the Blueberry Lake Trails—has been found to generate \$1.8 million in annual sales, \$320,000 in annual tax revenues, and has supported 22 jobs annually (MRV Moves, 2017).



Many people when moving to Vermont will choose a location based on its natural features and recreational opportunities. Nationwide, the National Association of Realtors found that 80% of Americans consider having trails and places to take a walk one of their top priorities when deciding where they would like to live. This ranked higher than even "high quality public schools" in their Community Preference Survey, which was selected by 74% of survey



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respondents (National Realtors Association, 2015). Access to the outdoors is increasingly being seen as a cornerstone of quality of life, particularly in rural communities, and having this access allows communities to attract and retain their workforce, which in turn helps attract and retain businesses. Therefore, an accessible town forest can be a key factor for strengthening the economic vitality of Vermont towns.

Health Benefits

Almost all hospitals and health providers encourage patients to include some form of physical activities in their daily lives to increase many aspects of their health. By providing convenient access to the outdoors, a town forest encourages community members to walk, bike, ski, snowshoe, or run in the forest regularly.



Obesity is one of the most significant health threats today. More than two-thirds (68.8 percent) of American adults are considered to be overweight or obese. More than one-third (35.7 percent) of American adults are considered to be obese (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Vermont has slightly lower rates of overweight and obese Adults at 57.7% overweight and 23.2% obese, but the issue is of critical importance in our state as well (CDC, 2012). Active lifestyles and physical activity help to combat obesity. Obesity exacerbates many other types of illnesses and reducing the levels of obesity leads to overall better health.

Studies have shown that trails and outdoor recreation contribute to healthy communities and lower healthcare costs for individuals and local governments. A 2004 cost-benefit analysis of using trails in Lincoln, Nebraska to reduce health care costs associated with inactivity found that for every \$1 invested in trails for physical activity, \$2.94 of public health benefits are produced (Wang et al, 2004).

Spending time in the forest's peaceful, natural setting is also proven to be beneficial to community members' mental health. In addition, the forest's trees improve the air quality of the surrounding area as well.



Chapter 2: Existing Conditions

Community Profile

The community profile presents relevant demographic, economic, and recreational information to planning for the Town Forest.

Summary

Weathersfield is a rural town with a slightly older population than the statewide average (48.6 median age in Weathersfield versus 42.8 statewide). The median household income in the Town of \$62,417 is above the statewide average of \$57,808, with fewer people below the poverty level as well (5% of the Weathersfield population is below the poverty line versus 11% statewide). Windsor County has a large tourism base but Weathersfield itself has relatively limited local business offerings to draw direct tourism spending. Still, the Town is influenced by this activity through second-home ownership and owning and working in businesses throughout the region. The town has many parks, open spaces, and miles of trails relative to its population size.





Population: 2,794



Median Age: 48.6



of School Age Children: 367



50 % Male 50 % Female



Household Median Income: \$62,417



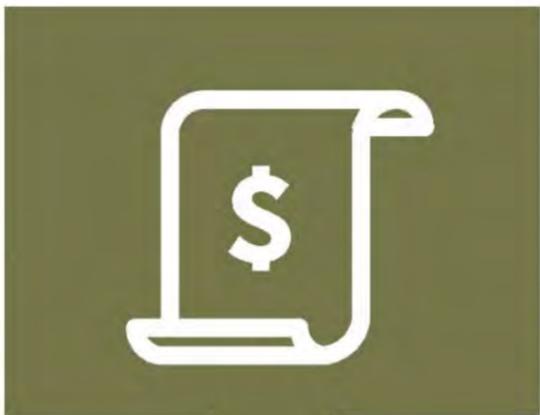
Residents Below Poverty Level: 5 %



3% Residential Units in Seasonal/Recreational Use



23 % County Employment in Travel & Tourism



Grand List Assessed Value: \$23,886,300



Number of Parks and Open Spaces: 13



Miles of Trails: 11



of Playgrounds: 2



Vermont Town Forest

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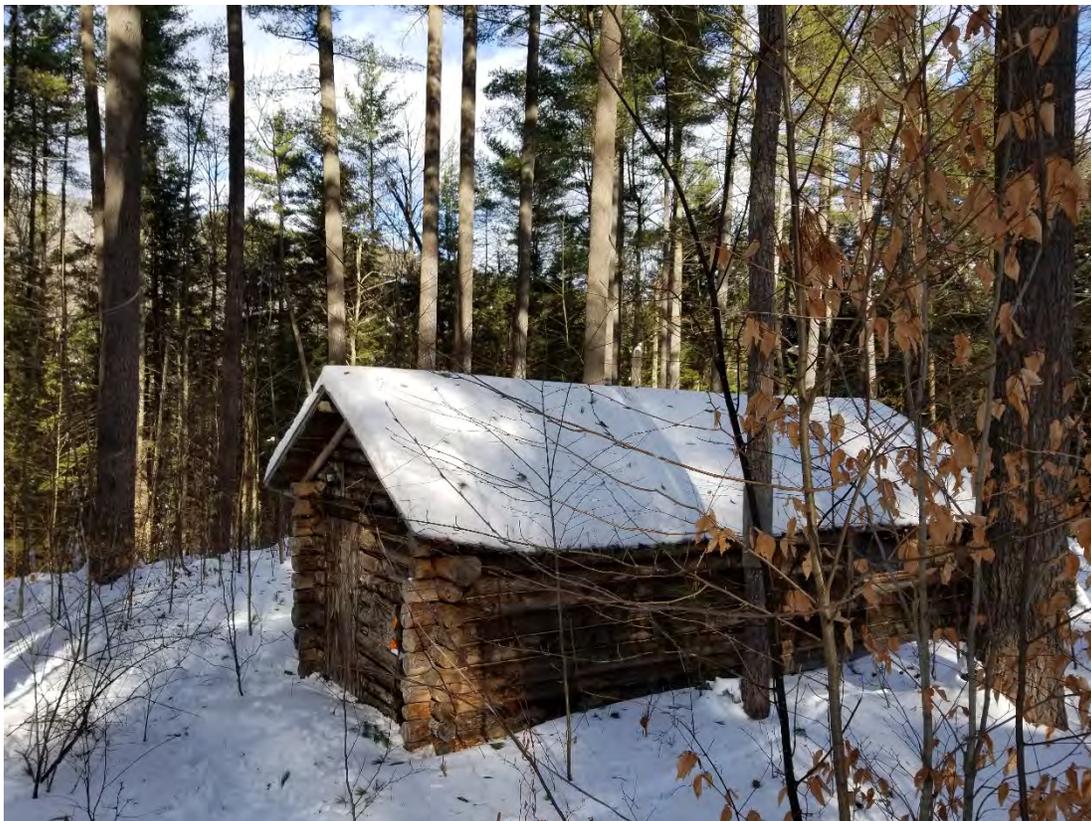
Town Forest Profile

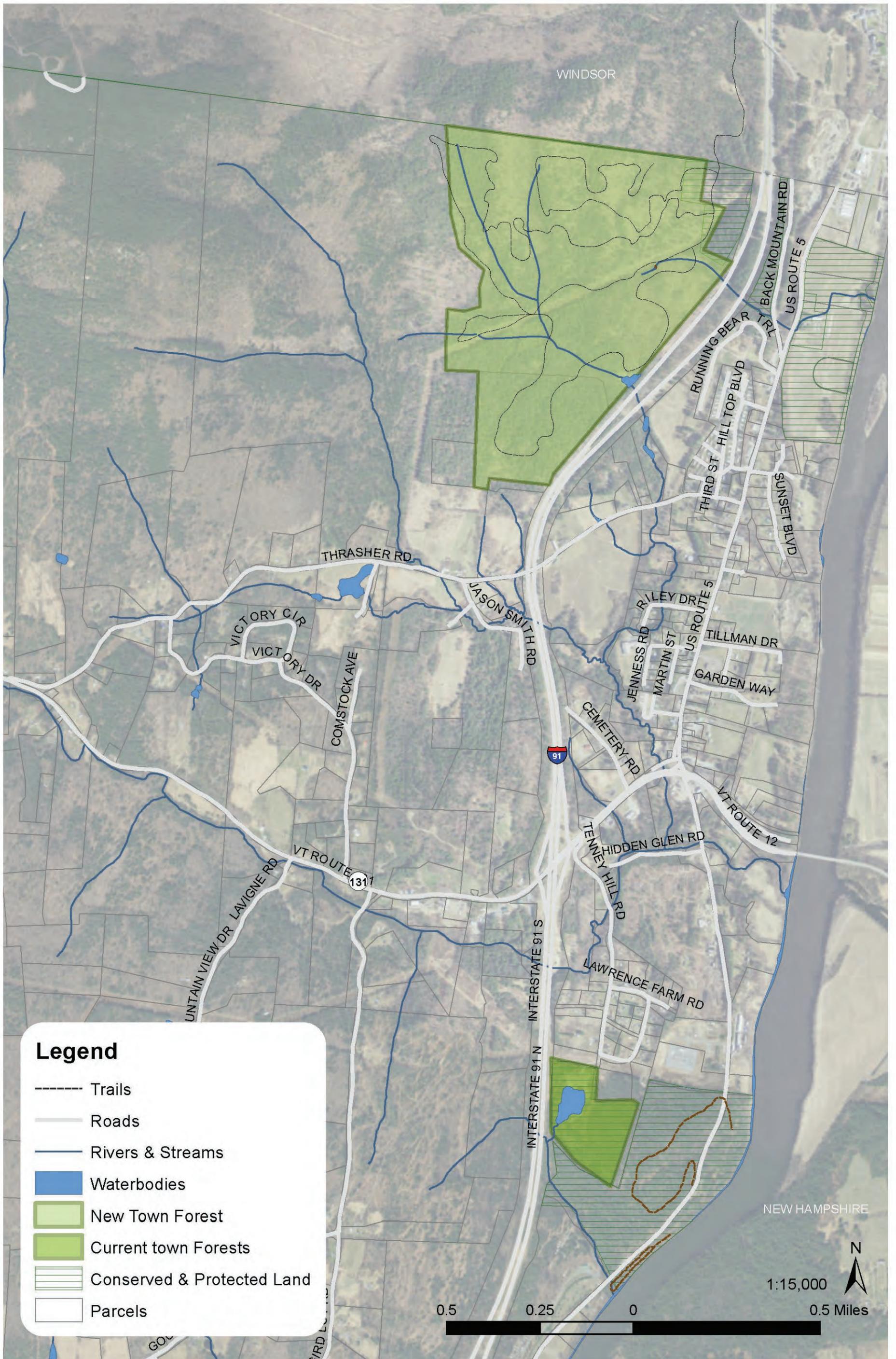
Forest Overview

The Weathersfield Town Forest is a 310-acre Forest bordering I-91 and Mt. Ascutney State Park. There is currently no public road access to the Forest and visitors must enter the Forest from the adjacent state land. As a result, the Forest currently sees minimal use and the town has not constructed trails or other infrastructure on the parcel since acquiring it. There is an old logging road network and former private and VAST trails on the parcel. Aside from limited hiking and snowshoeing, hunting is the only other existing use of the Forest parcel. The town is in the process of obtaining access for a public parking area and is now planning for the expected increase in users with the improved access. As the Forest is adjacent to Mt. Ascutney, it is also part of regional plan to create trail connections between area villages, mountains, and recreation areas.

Land Ownership and Conservation Background

The parcel became the Weathersfield Town Forest in 2010. The land had previously belonged to Janet Fellows. After her death, the Weathersfield Land Preservation Association and Conservation Commission worked with the Upper Valley Land Trust to purchase and ultimately donate the land to the town. Currently, the Conservation Commission plays the primary role in forest management, with collaboration from the Upper Valley Land Trust. No forest management plans exist for the parcel.



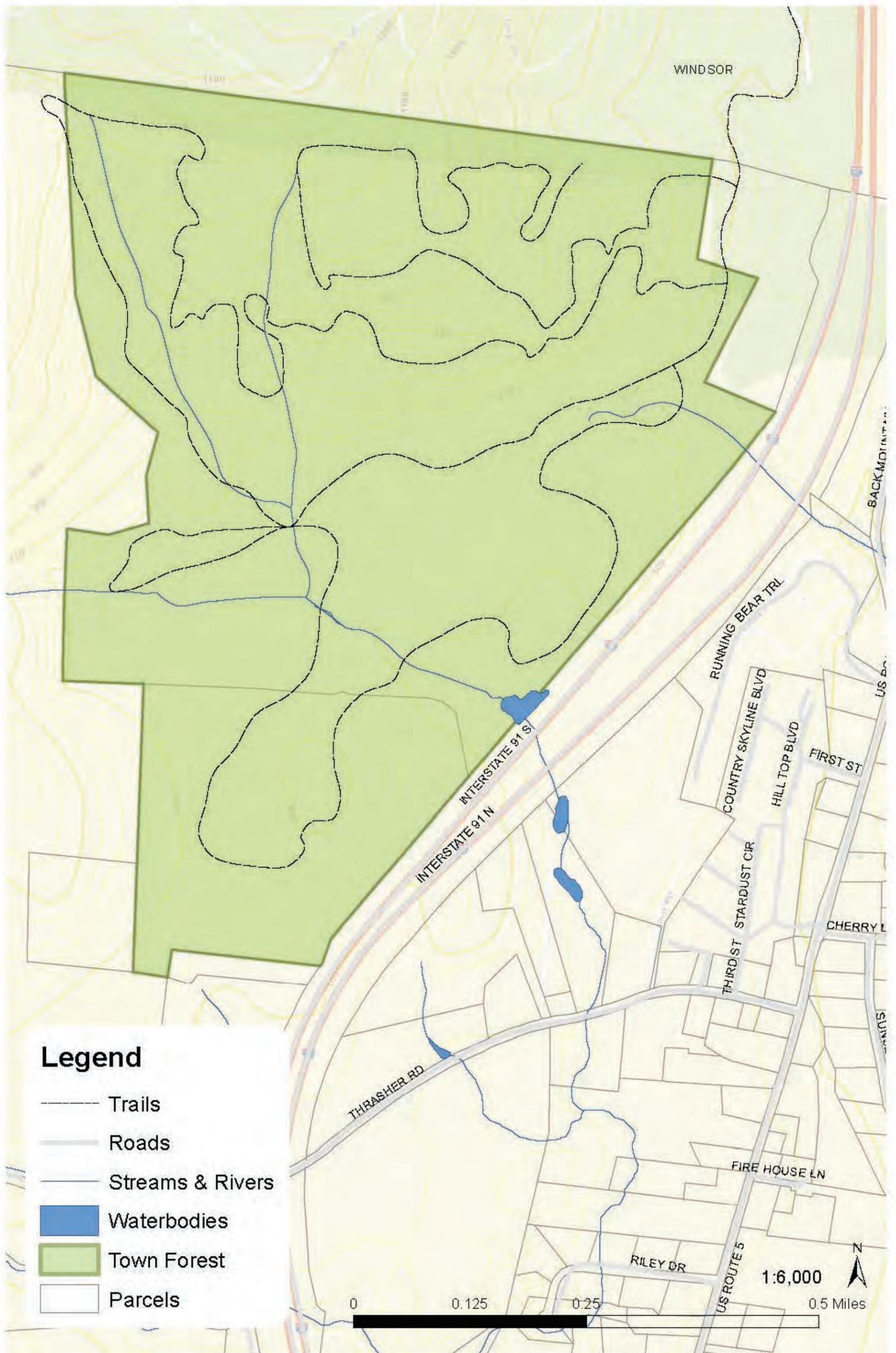


Legend

- Trails
- Roads
- Rivers & Streams
- Waterbodies
- New Town Forest
- Current town Forests
- Conserved & Protected Land
- Parcels

0.5 0.25 0 0.5 Miles

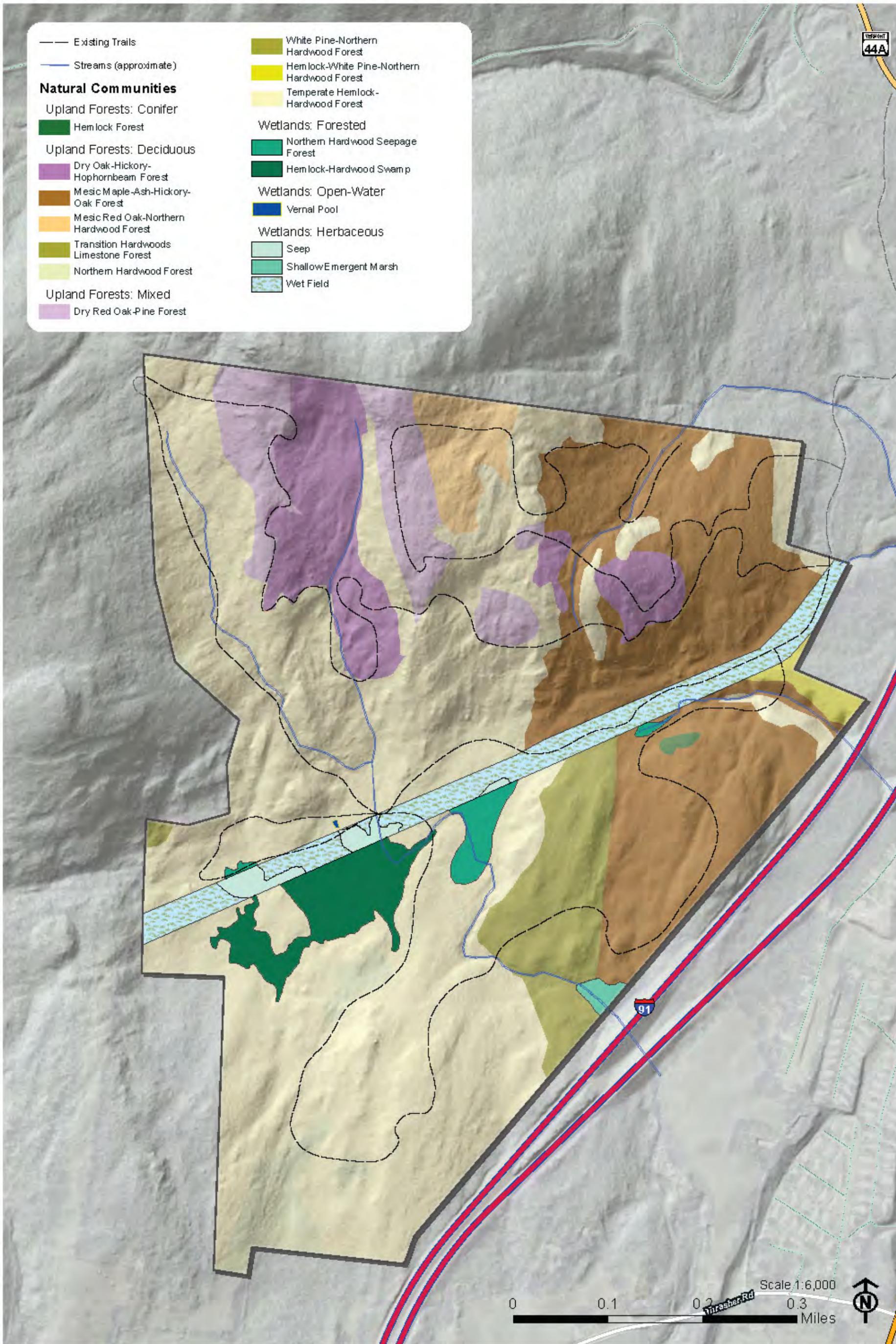


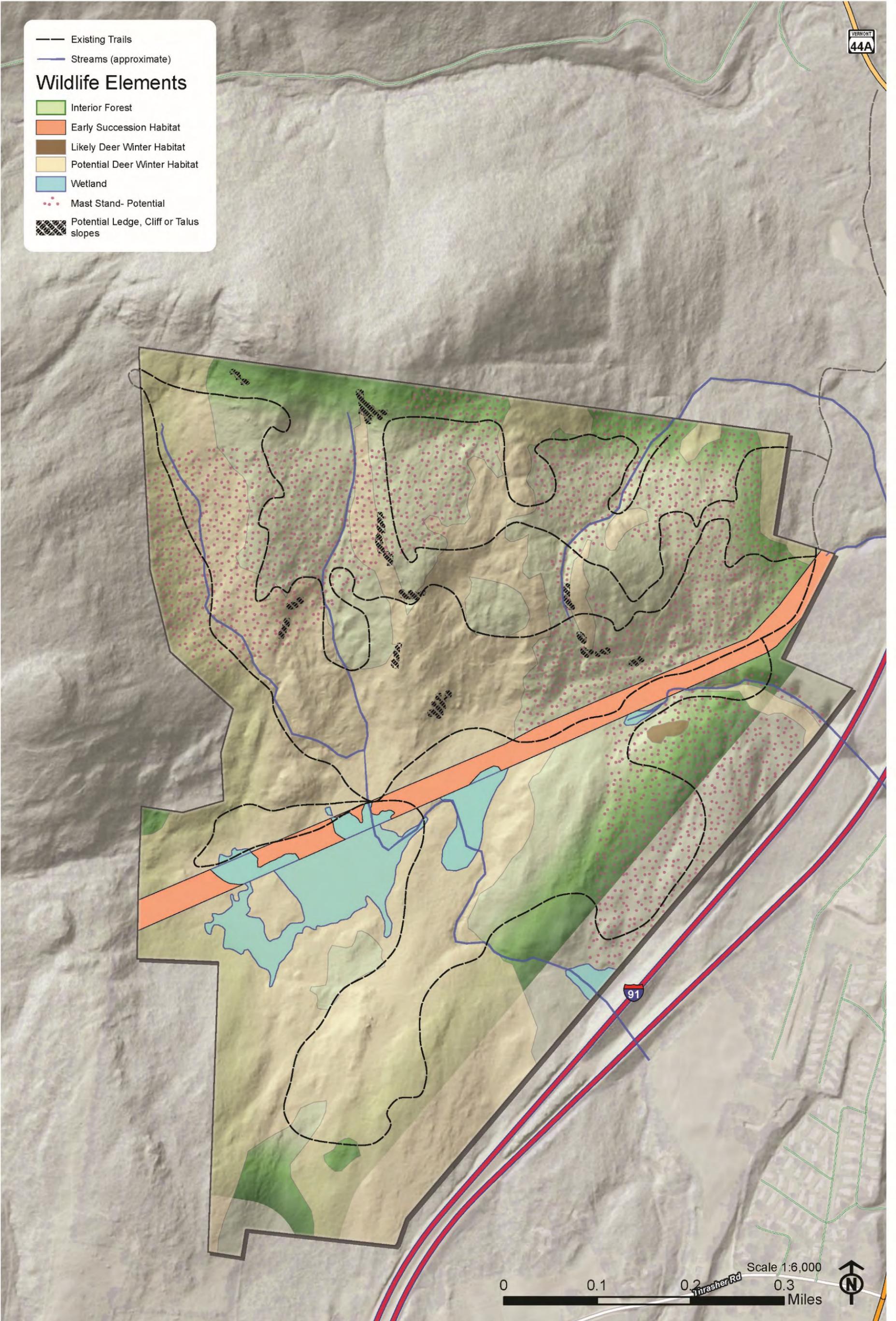


Legend

-  Trails
-  Roads
-  Streams & Rivers
-  Waterbodies
-  Town Forest
-  Parcels







Chapter 3: Public Engagement Summary and Needs Assessment

To bring the “town” into Town Forest, a robust public engagement process was at the heart of this plan. There were multiple workshops open to the public, a community survey, and many steering committee meetings to guide the plan. Through this process, the public identified issues, needs, desired attributes, and strategies to enhance the Forest. The public also offered feedback on the strategies and draft plans, to ensure a fit with the town and Forest’s needs, interests, and capacity.

Public Engagement

Kickoff Summit

A project kickoff summit with all 10 towns was held at the Bethel Town Hall on Friday, November 17, 2017. The summit introduced members of the town steering committee to the project and served as an initial opportunity to provide input. The project team provided a background of the project and an overview of the process. Through a working lunch, the committee members completed a SWOT worksheet (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to begin thinking about and analyzing the Forest.



A web survey was also available for other committee members who were not present to provide their thoughts. Facilitators led a community breakout session for the committee to speak to existing conditions, issues, and their vision for the town Forest. From Weathersfield, two people were in attendance.

Steering Committee Process

The steering committee, made up of the town manager, members of the Conservation Commission and Schoolboard, Parks and Recreation District staff, trails committee members, and selectmen, was instrumental to the process. Members of the steering committee attended the kickoff summit, helped plan and spread the word about the public workshops, reviewed the draft strategies and draft plan, and met with the project team and on their own to provide ideas and feedback throughout the process.

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Visioning Workshop

A Visioning Workshop for the Weathersfield Town Forest was held at Martin Memorial Hall on January 9, 2018. The meeting was a drop-in anytime, open house format with questions about an overall vision for the town; the balance of recreation, education, conservation/natural resources, and forest products; the natural resources present on the site; and future activities in the Town Forest. Attendees wrote responses on boards, completed dot exercises, and drew their



ideas and knowledge on maps. Members of the project team and local steering committee were available for one-on-one chats with attendees, and a general comment box was provided for open-ended feedback. Background/baseline information about the project, the community, and the Forest, was also provided. 13 people signed in and an estimated 20-25 people were in attendance.

Please see Appendix 1 – Visioning Process Results, which combines the findings from this meeting and the community survey.

Community Survey

The Community Survey was launched at the public visioning workshop on January 9, 2018 and remained open through the Sunday after Town Meeting Day—March 11, 2018. The community survey asked the same questions as the public visioning workshop, in order to give the people who could not attend the meeting an opportunity to provide input. An online survey was made available. The community was made aware of the survey through a variety of methods including flyers distributed around town, press-releases and news articles, and email blasts and social media posts. In total, the survey received 58 responses.

Please see Appendix 1 for the Visioning Process Results, which combines the findings from the Public Visioning Workshop and the community survey.



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Strategies Workshop

A Strategies Workshop for Weathersfield Town Forest was held at the Martin Memorial Hall on July 9, 2018. The meeting was a combination presentation and open house. First, the attendees learned about the project process, the toolkit, vision framework, the management plan, and draft strategies. The meeting transitioned to an open house where attendees prioritized the draft strategies on boards and had the opportunity to have one-on-one discussions with members of the project team and steering committee. Attendees also indicated locations for the draft strategies on a large map. Eight people signed in and an estimated 15-20 people were in attendance.



Please see Appendix 2 for the Strategies Workshop Results.

Plan Presentation Workshop

The steering committee presented the plan to the selectboard and members of the public on December 17, 2018. In the presentation, the steering committee explained the project purpose and process and shared the vision framework and top priority strategies they developed. Representatives from Urban and Community Forestry and/or the Department of Forests Parks and Recreation were present to show support for the plan.

Implementation Summit

Representatives from our town attended the Town Forest Implementation Summit held on November 9, 2018 at the VYCC West Monitor Barn in Richmond, VT. The summit included representatives from all 10 pilot communities and provided opportunities for networking and information sharing. Attendees learned about commonalities and major takeaways across all ten town forests, the action plans developed by each of the towns, grant opportunities, and interpretive signage. The attendees heard from a panel about management and public decision making, received a sneak preview of the Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit, and took a walking tour of Richmond's town forest and the VYCC trail infrastructure.



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Needs Assessment

Through the public engagement process, community members identified the issues and needs associated with the Forest to be resolved in this planning process. Additional issues and needs were identified via site visits and natural resources assessments. The following issues and needs were identified:

1. Concerns about future use of ATVs in the Forest
2. Overlap with private events that are happening elsewhere in town
3. Lack of parking and access to the parcel
4. Handicap accessibility
5. Invasive species along the powerline cut
6. Horse trailer parking
7. Erosion concerns on existing logging roads
8. Expressed interest in regional trail connectivity (Trail Around Mt. Ascutney) and many nearby trail systems
9. Cabin on the property
10. Undeveloped Forest with no infrastructure (trails, signs, maps, etc.)
11. Deer wintering yards on the Forest



Chapter 4: Town Forest Vision Framework

A vision framework is a critically important tool that informs the goals and direction of the Town Forest recreation plan. The vision framework encompasses all forest uses—not just recreation—to understand how recreation should fit in with the community’s overall intent for the Forest. The vision framework is directional, descriptive, and aspirational, communicating what the community believes are the ideal conditions for the Forest—how things would look if all opportunities and issues were perfectly addressed.

The vision framework includes:

1. A discussion of the management balance in the Forest; and
2. A list of key attributes that describe the community’s desired character for the Forest

The vision framework is broad enough to encompass a variety of local perspectives. Unlike a simple one or two sentence vision statement, a vision framework allows for more complexity to be communicated and better illuminates the community’s desired character for the Forest—which is often multi-faceted.

The management balance discussion and list of key attributes work together to communicate the community’s overarching aspirations for the Forest. Both aspects of the vision framework should align, without repeating each other. The management balance describes the community’s management priorities for the Forest, while key attributes are a list of words or short phrases that expand upon the management balance and describe the community’s desired future character for the Forest. These two pieces work together and support each other to communicate the multi-faceted values of the community.

Visioning

At the public visioning workshop and in the community survey, attendees/respondents were asked, “What word or phrase best describes your EXISTING experience with the Town Forest in your community?” and “What word or phrase best describes your DESIRED FUTURE experience with the Town Forest in your community?” The results of these exercises are demonstrated in the word clouds below. The size of the words in the word clouds corresponds to the number of times that word was used in the responses.

Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Existing Experience

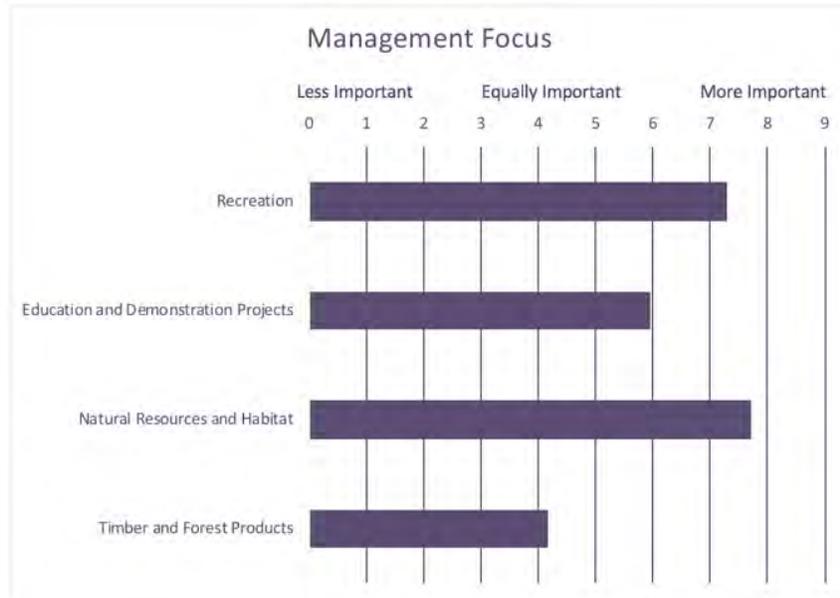


Most of the responses were from people who had not visited the Forest or even were unaware of its existence. Some respondents had visited the Forest for hiking and horseback riding. Many of those who had visited did provide extremely positive comments on the Forest – “enjoyment,” “I love it!,” “enchanted,” “beauty.”



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SHOULD fall for the Town Forest in your community? Should it lean towards Recreation, Education, Timber & Forest Products, or Natural Resources & Habitat?” Their responses are below:



The community felt that each of the four use areas are important in the management of the Town Forest but placed greater emphasis on Recreation and Natural Resources & Habitat than on Education & Demonstration Projects and Timber & Forest Products. From their experience in the community, the committee felt that recreation may be the strongest priority.



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Key Attributes

The following list of key attributes are the words or short phrases that communicate what the community believes are the ideal conditions for the Forest – how things would look if all opportunities and issues were perfectly addressed, which may be the same or different from how things currently look. This list is based on the analysis of public and committee input received through the visioning process, as well as the review of the community’s demographics, profile, Forest information, current management plans, and surveys.

1. Year-round recreation (snowshoeing, skiing, biking, hiking, horseback riding)
2. Supporting economic development
3. Sustainable and well-maintained trail system
4. Protection of wildlife habitat
5. Connectivity with other recreation resources around Mt. Ascutney especially the state park
6. Successful partnership and collaboration amongst all trail users
7. A piece of a larger connected forest block
8. Accessible and encouraging of public use with easements through private property
9. Maintain healthy balance between stewardship and human uses
10. Cabin as Forest destination
11. Sustainable management for multiple uses
12. Multi-dimensional environmental education
13. Multi-generational
14. Stewardship assistance from Upper Valley Land Trust
15. Solitude, rest, and rejuvenation
16. Collaboration and connection with surrounding towns
17. Trails for all ability levels
18. Beautiful vistas
19. Opportunities for learning about stewardship, history and the Forest
20. Well-known community asset



Chapter 5: Action Plan

Introduction

The Action Plan is a set of recommended strategies and projects to achieve the town’s vision. These strategies and projects were developed based on the key attributes, needs assessment, forest walks, and input from the steering committee and community. From a larger initial list of strategies, the steering committee has selected and edited the strategies to craft an action plan well-suited to the community’s interest, needs, and capacity.

The Action Plan includes an Action Plan Table, detailed “project pages” for the highest priority strategies, and an Action Plan map to graphically display the highest priority strategies.

Detailed Project Pages

The following pages provide more detail on the strategies that are most likely to achieve the community’s vision for the Forest and that have been identified by community members and the steering committee as top priorities. These project pages include the key attributes and needs assessment items that the strategy responds to, a more detailed description of the rationale and process to carry out the strategy, and the other items included in the action table.

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Parking Lot and Access Trail

Key Attribute #:

5

8

20

Need #:

3

6

Estimated Cost:

\$\$\$

Timing:

Ongoing

Creating free and easy public access to the Town Forest will allow the community to fully enjoy and appreciate this amazing asset. The Town is very aware of this need and has made great progress – securing access to a parcel on the south side of Thrasher Road for a parking area and working towards easements with a private landowner and the state for trail access from the parking lot to the Forest. The town should finalize that agreement and must also work with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT) on a short section of the proposed access trail that would fall in the I-91 ROW. To construct a trail through the ROW, the town must submit an AOT land proposal, which has been provided as part of this plan.

The new Town Forest parking lot should be both the gateway to the Forest and a destination in it of itself as its own small park. The parking area could have informal field space (that could double as event parking), a band stand/amphitheater, and other typical trailhead amenities such as a trailhead kiosk and picnic tables. The parking lot should be designed to accommodate horse trailers. The Town Forest access trail that leaves from the parking lot will cross through the private landowner's property on one of two routes – Alternative A is further from the farm house, but would require a short boardwalk section to build, while Alternative B is closer to the residence, but can likely avoid wetlands entirely.

The town should continue to work on additional access points to the Forest: a potential northern access from an FPR logging road and from the state park trails.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering
Committee/ Conservation
Commission

Partners Involved:

Landowners, FPR, AOT

Planning Required:

Trail easements, AOT and FHWA Trail
Proposal approval, NEPA Categorical
Exclusion (CE; using the "Trail Construction
and Reconstruction" exclusion)

Funding Opportunities:

LWCF, RTC, RTP, PBCG,
RWJF, TCPN

Toolkit Resources

Parking Considerations
Toolkit

Land Conservation and
Recreational Access Toolkit

Sustainable Trail Standards

Sustainable Facility
Standards

Trailhead Kiosk Volunteer
Designs



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Existing Trail Review and Redesign

Key Attribute #:



Need #:



Estimated Cost:

\$\$\$

Timing:

Short-Term

Although the Weathersfield Town Forest has yet to see much use as a public forest, there are many existing trails on the Forest. These are a combination of former logging roads, deer trails, and other trails from past human recreational use. The town should conduct an assessment of these trails to begin creating a recreational trail system in the Town Forest.

The Upper Valley Trails Alliance is a fantastic partner in this project, as they have worked with nearby towns to review and assess the existing trails to evaluate for potential ecological harm and mitigate the site through necessary means.

Some of the existing logging roads have erosion and drainage issues, but these are relatively minor. The existing trail corridors present opportunities but will require some trail reconstruction. The review may also determine that certain trails should be closed to some or all user groups and signage that reflects that should be posted. Other existing trails are overgrown and simply require maintenance.

Based on the results of the existing trail conditions assessment and review, the Town should reroute, redesign, or create entirely new trails to enhance experiences for all user groups, improve drainage, and limit erosion. The system should include a mix of traditional footpaths and "bike-optimized" multi-use natural surface trails to provide desired experiences. Many of these trails should also be able to accommodate equestrian use. Equestrian-specific trails should also be added where necessary. For example, in a location with a technical mountain bike feature or a narrow footpath, an equestrian trail should parallel it.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering Committee/Conservation Commission

Partners Involved:

Trails Collaborative, UVTA, ATA, STAB, GMHA, local builder/users

Planning Required:

Trail reroute & redesign

Funding Opportunities:

RTP, RTC, VHCP, ERG

Toolkit Resources

Trail Assessment Forms

Natural Resource Guidance Toolkit

Sustainable Trail Standards



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Trail Markers and Signage

Key Attribute #:

8 11

Need #:

10

Estimated Cost:

\$\$

Timing:
Short-Term

A robust trail marker and wayfinding signage is essential for the Weathersfield Town Forest. Proper signage ensures that the Forest is welcoming to visitors and all user groups concurrently. Given that this is a new Forest, where initially all users will be unfamiliar, signage is incredibly important.

Once the existing trail assessment and review is complete and the new trail system is constructed, signage should be put in place at each trail junction. These signs should label trails (with names and difficulty ratings for mountain bikers) and name the trails that can be accessed via that trail. Signage should point to major forest destinations such as the cabin, Thrasher Road Access Trail and Mt. Ascutney State Park. At major trail junctions, a map could be placed on the sign post as well. Interpretive signage for self-guided learning and programs would also enhance recreation experiences.

With many anticipated uses of the forest (hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding), additional signage should be placed at trailhead kiosks and throughout the forest to encourage proper trail etiquette. Signage should instruct trail users about when to yield to other users.

The signage and trail markers should alert trail users of Town ownership and management, especially as the adjoining land is a state park or private land. This signage builds awareness around the Town Forest and tells trail users who to contact in the event of down trees in the forest or other maintenance issues.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering
Committee/Conservation
Commission

Partners Involved:

Trails, Collaborative,
Ascutney Outdoors, STAB,
ATA, UVTA, GMHA

Planning Required:

Signage and Wayfinding Plan

Funding Opportunities:

RTP, RTC



Toolkit Resources

Trail Markers and Wayfinding
Toolkit

Interpretation Guidance
Toolkit



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Educational Programs and Partnerships

Key Attribute #:

12

13

19

Need #:

2

10

Estimated Cost:

\$

Timing:

Medium-Term

As trails are added for access and within the town forest, the town forest will become a place for both recreation and education. Youth and adult education programs should occur in the forest, teaching young and old about the ecology, geology, and history of the forest. In order to bring these programs to the forest, the town should partner with nearby schools and organizations and provide the necessary infrastructure to support the programs.

The Weathersfield School is located about a mile from the proposed parking area and the students could use the forest for a variety of programming. The parking area amphitheater should be used as an outdoor classroom and the cabin could serve as a gathering space for classes within the forest as well. Classes could create temporary signage throughout the forest, such as tree identification tags or other interpretive signage, with Town review. Other schools in the area should also be invited to the forest for field trips as well.

The Weathersfield Proctor Library is an exciting programming partner for the forest. The library is interested in creating a story walk in the forest. Story walks are an innovative and delightful way for children and adults to enjoy reading and the outdoors simultaneously. Laminated pages are attached to wooden stakes, along the trail, and as one strolls down the trail, they're directed to the next page in the story.

Other partnerships should be explored to bring adult programming to the forest. Options include the Conservation Commission, the Upper Valley Land Trust, and Ascutney Outdoors.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering Committee/Conservation Commission

Partners Involved:

STAB, Ascutney Outdoors, Paradise Sports, Vermont Youth Cycling, Windsor Bike Club, School, Library, UVLT, Others

Planning Required:

--

Funding Opportunities:

VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ

Toolkit Resources

Programming Partnerships

Story Walk Toolkit

Interpretation Guidance Toolkit



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Trail Network Connectivity

Key Attribute #:



Need #:



Estimated Cost:

\$\$\$

Timing:

Medium-Term

The Mt. Ascutney area has many trail networks that the Weathersfield Town Forest network should connect to.

Mt. Ascutney State Park adjoins the Town Forest and its extensive trail network should link to Weathersfield's. The physical connection between the two will attract more visitors to Weathersfield, especially since many state park visitors are staying overnight and looking for additional trail options. The town should continue an open dialogue with the state park around access and connectivity

The Swoops and Loops mountain bike trail network is located right near the state park entrance. A connection between that network, the state park, and the town forest would create a phenomenal mountain biking experience.

A "Trail around Mt. Ascutney" that connects all the forests and trail systems in the region has been gathering momentum. Beyond the state park mentioned above, the West Windsor Town Forest and Little Ascutney WMA have trail systems and are part of the larger connected forest block. West Windsor, Windsor, and Weathersfield are also participating in a tri-town outdoor recreation plan, as the area's outdoor recreation offerings are becoming increasingly impressive and attractive to visitors. Weathersfield should actively engage in these discussions and seize opportunities to connect to these larger trail networks. Other possible connections include the Army Corps land and the Toonerville Trail in Springfield.

Further, Weathersfield should explore ways to connect the forest to its villages. The forest is in close proximity to the Ascutney village. A new trail connection, the addition of sidewalks on Route 5 and Thrasher Road, or some combination of both, could be explored to encourage residents to visit the forest more and to create a safe route to the forest from Weathersfield School.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering Committee/
Conservation Commission

Partners Involved:

Trails Collaborative, UVTA, ATA, STAB, GMHA, local builder/users

Planning Required:

Trails Master Plan (not required, but helps)

Funding

Opportunities:

BCP, BPP, RTP, RTC, RD, TAP, BPP, VCDP, RFG, VCF, BCP, MPG, LF, PBCG, AIG, RWJF, TCPN

Toolkit Resources

Land Conservation and Recreational Access Toolkit

Sustainable Trail Standards



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Trail Maps and Online Presence

Key Attribute #:

2 5 8 20

Need #:

8 10

Estimated Cost:

\$\$

Timing:

Short-Term

Once the Forest is accessible and the trails are laid out, trail maps must be readily available. The maps should display all the trails in the forest, with symbology that denotes the intended users of that trail and its difficulty.

These maps should be available at the trailhead kiosk, stores, and other gathering spaces in the villages. They should be posted at the trailhead, throughout the forest and possibly at Mt. Ascutney State Park. The map should also be available online on the town website, a forest-specific website, and local outdoor and trail websites such as Ascutney Trails Association, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, and Ascutney Outdoors.

The town should pursue opportunities to be included in regional trail mapping efforts, especially once the trail connections to nearby networks are in place.

The town should also pursue opportunities to involve local businesses in the map printing. Local businesses can be map sponsors, receiving a small advertisement on the map in return for their financial support. These ads encourage trail users to support local businesses, driving economic activity in the region.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission

Partners Involved:

Trails Collaborative, STAB, Ascutney Outdoors, Paradise Sports, Windsor Bike Club, UVTA, Chamber of Commerce

Planning Required:

Graphic Design, Cartography, Coordination

Funding Opportunities:

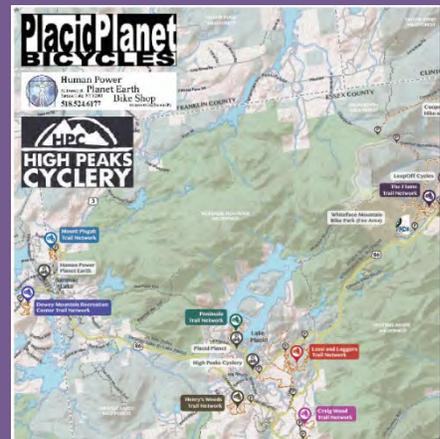
RTP

Toolkit Resources

Mapping and Promotion Toolkit

Programming Partnerships Toolkit

Trailhead Kiosk Volunteer



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Pause Places

Key Attribute #:

10

12

15

18

19

Need #:

9

10

Estimated Cost:

\$\$

Timing:

Medium-Term

Destinations are crucial to attract visitors and residents (and return trips) of all ages to the Forest. Forest visitors like to have a goal to guide their forest walks. Fortunately, the Weathersfield Town Forest has a perfect destination already – the cabin.

The cabin should be restored to become a central gathering place in the forest. The cabin should be restored to support day use, educational use, and possible overnight use. The forest should explore a partnership with the Vermont Huts Association for management of such use. The cabin area should also have picnic tables, interpretive signage around the history of the forest and cabin, and an outdoor fire pit (away from the cabin!) to accommodate groups and individuals visiting the cabin.

Throughout the Forest, the town should install “pause places.” Pause places are rest and/or informational stops for forest users to take a break, appreciate the scenery, and learn about the forest. Like the cabin, these pause places act as mini-destinations, making Forest visits more exciting, rejuvenating, and interesting. These pause places should be placed in locations with opportunities for views, birding/wildlife viewing, and natural and historical interpretation. All pause places should include a bench or appropriate rocks/boulders for seating.

In locations particularly well-suited for birding/wildlife viewing, a platform should be constructed. The platform should be large enough for educational groups and should have signage displaying the local species that are frequently seen from the platform.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering Committee/Conservation Commission

Partners Involved:

Vermont Huts Association, Trails Collaborative, Program and educational partners

Planning Required:

Historical and natural resource research, pause place design

Funding Opportunities:

LWCF, RTC, RTP, RFG, AIG

Toolkit Resources

Pause Places Toolkit

Bench Volunteer Designs

Sustainable Facility Standards

Interpretation Guidance Toolkit



Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning

Engaging Volunteers

Key Attribute #:



Need #:



Estimated Cost:

\$

Timing:
Short-Term

Once access is secured, the Weathersfield Town Forest will require many volunteers. Initially, volunteers will be needed to design, lay out, and construct trails. Once the trails have been constructed, a volunteer maintenance crew will also be vital.

A proven successful way to engage volunteers is through a Trails Collaborative. A Trails Collaborative is a group of passionate trail users in the community. By organizing them into a formal group, these trail users will feel excited and responsible to volunteer on the trails. The members of the Trails Collaborative should represent all forest user groups – hikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers, hunters, and horseback riders. It is recommended that Collaborative members be involved in other local groups, to harness the members of those groups to volunteer in the forest as well. A Trails Collaborative also ensures that all groups play an active role in the planning and management of the forest.

For Weathersfield, the Collaborative should include members of the following groups: the Ascutney Trails Association, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, Sports Trails of Ascutney Basin, Weathersfield Pathfinders, and Green Mountain Horse Association.

As the Forest is utilized, regular trail maintenance will become increasingly necessary. The Town should look to engage additional groups such as Boy and Girl Scouts, school groups, and students from the vocational/tech schools in Claremont, NH and Hartford, VT. The Town should also work with the Upper Valley Land Trust on their corporate volunteer program.

Responsibility:

Town Forest Steering
Committee/Conservation
Commission

Partners Involved:

ATA, UVTA, UVLT, GMHA,
STAB, WP, etc.

Planning Required:

Meeting facilitation

Funding Opportunities:

RTP, NPCB



Toolkit Resources

Volunteer Development and
Recruitment Toolkit

Programming Partnerships
Toolkit



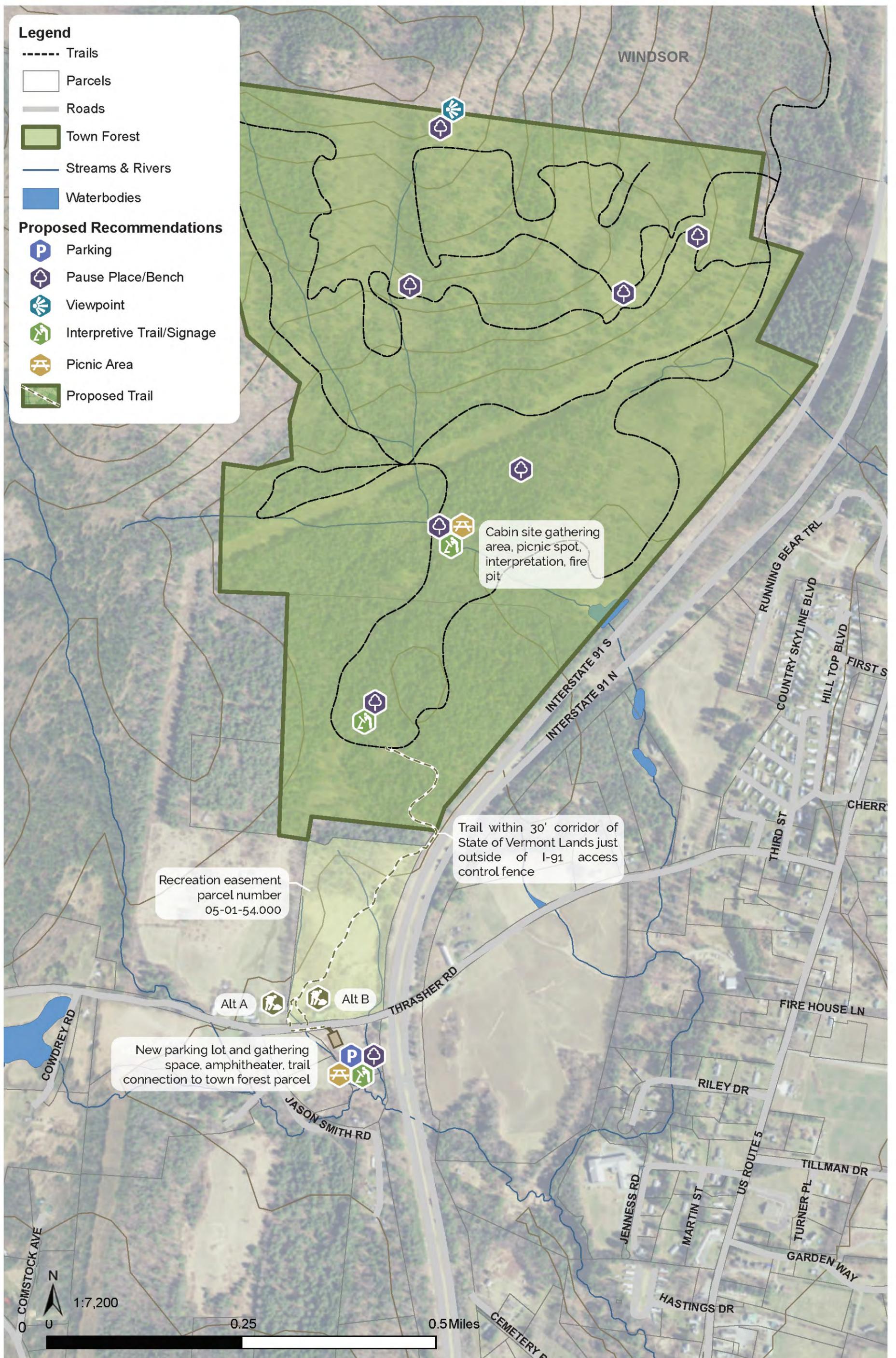
Vermont Town Forest

Recreation Planning

Action Plan Graphic

The following diagram shows conceptual locations for the high priority strategies with a spatial component. These locations are based on the community's pinpointing of strategies at the workshop, the natural resources of the Forest, the facilitated Forest walks, and the project team's understanding of the right spacing and locations for these strategies. The locations on this map are generalized and, in most cases, further planning and design will be necessary before construction.





Action Plan Table

The Action Plan Table on the following pages includes all the strategies for the town and additional information to help with implementation. The strategies were categorized under Parking & Access; Trails; Other Facilities & Structures; Education & Programs; Events; Maps, Outreach, and Promotion; and Administrative Actions. Each strategy has the following additional information:

- A detailed strategy description
- Responsibility – who the responsible parties are to pursue this strategy (i.e., Town, Conservation Commission)
- Timing (ongoing, short, medium, long-term) – when the responsible party should begin pursuing this strategy
- Partners involved – possible partners to be involved in this project (i.e., Vermont Land Trust, Vtrans, local trails groups, local schools)
- Planning required – planning, designs, assessments, or studies that needs to happen before this strategy can be pursued (i.e., trail system design, wildlife habitat assessments)
- Relative Cost (\$,\$\$,,\$\$\$,\$\$\$\$\$) – a ballpark estimate of what the project will cost. One dollar sign is little to no cost, two dollar signs is moderate, three dollar signs is more expensive, four dollar signs is very expensive. \$-\$\$ indicates the relative cost is between those two levels. \$/\$\$ indicates that the project can be either \$ or \$\$, depending on the chosen route (i.e., volunteer trail counts vs. electronic trail counter)
- Funding Opportunities – potential sources of funding for the project. These could be grants, local business sponsorships, or fundraising events
- Toolkit and Support Resources – the toolkit elements that provide guidance on pursuing this strategy. Guidance from Vtrans, the Vermont Town Forest Stewardship Guide, or other support resources can also be useful to pursue this strategy

Strategy or Action	Description	Responsibility	Timing (Ongoing, short, medium, and long-term)	Partners Involved	Planning required	Relative Cost (\$-\$\$-\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$)	Funding Opportunities	Toolkit & Support Resources
Create and maintain locations for birding and viewing wildlife.	Build more locations to sit and observe wildlife. Benches are encouraged in a variety of locations. Coordinate with Pause Places.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Program and educational partners	Natural resource research, pause place design	\$	LWCF,RTC,RTP,RFG,AIG	- Pause Places Toolkit -Bench Volunteer Designs -Interpretation Guidance Toolkit
4. Education & Programs								
Host school group programs in the forest	Bring students to the Forest for ecology programs, recreation programs, etc.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Weathersfield School and other program and educational partners	--	\$	VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Lessons, skills camps, and clinics	Offer lessons, skills camps, and clinics for trail running and mountain biking.	Program and educational partnerships	Medium-Term	STAB, Ascutney Outdoors, Paradise Sports, Vermont Youth Cycling, Windsor Bike Club	--	\$	VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Ecology tours	Offer ecology tours (birdwatching, plant identification, etc.) for children and adults.	Program and educational partnerships	Medium-Term	Town and forest steering committee	--	\$	VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Education Programs	Host educational programs in the Forest about ecology and the arts such as nature photography or wildlife sketching programs. Explore partnership with the Library and other local groups.	Program and educational partnerships	Medium-Term	Town and forest steering committee	--	\$	VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Story Walk	A StoryWalk is an innovative and delightful way for children — and adults! — to enjoy reading and the outdoors at the same time. Laminated pages from a children's book are attached to wooden stakes, which are installed along an outdoor path. As you stroll down the trail, you're directed to the next page in the story.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Proctor Library	--	\$\$	VCF	- Story Walk Toolkit
Species identification lists	Bird, plant and mammal species identification checklists could be developed and made available at the trailhead kiosk. Should also be utilized in education experiences.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Program and educational partners	--	\$	VCF, VHCB, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Valley Quest	Participate in the Valley Quest with an offering in the Town Forest, potentially connected to the cabin site.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Valley Quest	--	\$	VCF	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit



Strategy or Action	Description	Responsibility	Timing (Ongoing, short, medium, and long-term)	Partners Involved	Planning required	Relative Cost (\$-\$-\$-\$-\$-\$-\$)	Funding Opportunities	Toolkit & Support Resources
Interpretive signage	Develop interpretive signage that support educational programs and self-guided learning. Coordinate with development of Pause Places	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Program and educational partners	Historical and natural resource research, pause place design	\$	LWCF, RTC, RTP, RFG, AIG	-Interpretation Guidance Toolkit
5. Events								
Races in the forest	Hold small-scale race events (running, XC skiing, mountain biking, etc.) or local-serving adventure race (Tough Mudder, Warrior Dash, etc.) in the Forest and/or around Mt. Ascutney.	Race and Event Partners	Medium-Term	Ascutney Outdoors, STAB, ATA, UVTA, Windsor Bike Club	event and parking plan	\$	VCF, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Equestrian Events	Identify means to host and promote equestrian events in the Forest. Consider coordinating with Green Mountain Horse Association.	Race and Event Partners	Medium-Term	Green Mountain Horse Association, Ascutney Outdoors	event and parking plan	\$	VCF, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Competitive trail riding and endurance races	The campground at Ascutney State Park could service riders for a larger biking race in the Forest. This type of ride center could lead to IMBA qualification.	Race and Event Partners	Medium-Term	STAB, ATA, Ascutney Outdoors, Windsor Bike Club	event and parking plan	\$	VCF, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
Recreational Events	Hold community-oriented recreational events such as a moonlight snowshoe hike in the Town Forest.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	Ascutney Outdoors, Town	event and parking plan	\$	VCF, LF, BJJ	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit
6. Maps, Outreach, & Promotion								
Develop and disseminate trail maps	Create maps that show all trails in the Forest and make these maps readily available both online and in print. Consider opportunities to integrate with regional mapping efforts and Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA). Explore opportunities to engage local businesses in sponsoring map printing. Ads from local businesses can not only fund map printing but can also help connect Forest use with economic activity in the region.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Trails Collaborative, STAB, Ascutney Outdoors, Paradise Sports, Windsor Bike Club, UVTA, Chamber of Commerce	Graphic design, cartography	\$-\$	RTP	-Mapping and Promotion Toolkit
Building a coalition of volunteers	Have a group of volunteers on hand for activities such as trail maintenance, events or other needs of the Forest. Look to engage the Ascutney Trails Association, Weathersfield Pathfinders, Sports Trails of Ascutney Basin, Springfield High School/Hartford/Claremont VOTEC.	Trails Collaborative	Ongoing	Ascutney Trails Association, Weathersfield Pathfinders, Sports Trails of Ascutney Basin, Springfield High School/Hartford/Claremont VOTEC., UVLT	--	\$	NPCB	-Volunteer Development and Recruitment Toolkit
Outdoor Recreation Business Roundtable	Host an Outdoor Recreation Business Roundtable to share "trail friendly business" ideas that can help support trail use in the community, connect Forest visitors with local businesses, and help support Town Forest efforts.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Long-Term	Chamber of Commerce, local businesses	--	\$	VCF	-Trail Friendly Business Toolkit



Strategy or Action	Description	Responsibility	Timing (Ongoing, short, medium, and long-term)	Partners Involved	Planning required	Relative Cost (\$-\$-\$-\$-\$-\$-\$)	Funding Opportunities	Toolkit & Support Resources
Online presence	Improve the online presence of the Forest with a Forest specific website. Work with Chamber of Commerce and UVTA to coordinate activities to promote the Forest.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Short-Term	Chamber of Commerce, UVTA, Ascutney Outdoors	Website design	\$-\$	RTP, VCF	-Mapping and Promotion Toolkit
7. Administrative Actions								
Management plan	Develop a Forest management plan for the long term success of the Forest. Ensure it includes provisions for partnerships and revisions. Coordinate with management zones in the Forest.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	UVLT	--	\$	CCG, MPG, ERG, VCF, VHCP, BJJ	- Sustainable Facility Standards
Management zones	Consider management zones of the Forest to consider and plan for all uses. Designate areas more suitable for wildlife habitat, hunting, or mountain biking, for example.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Medium-Term	UVLT	Management Plan	\$	CCG, MPG, ERG, VCF, VHCP, BJJ	-Management Zones Toolkit
Adopt formal process for proposing and reviewing new trails and facilities	Process will include ecological concerns and will provide all stakeholders and user groups an opportunity to propose new trails and facilities.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Short-Term	UVLT	Review, adjustment and adoption of model process	\$	--	-Model Proposal Process -Natural Resource Guidance Toolkit
Work with Upper Valley Land Trust	As the Town Forest is under a conservation easement held by the UVLT, the town must work with UVLT on future projects to ensure that they abide by the terms of the easement. Also engage UVLT for technical assistance and volunteer recruitment.	Town Forest Steering Committee/ Conservation Commission	Short-Term	UVLT	--	\$	--	-Programming Partnerships Toolkit



Chapter 6: Implementation

Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit

The Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit has been developed in concert with this plan and the nine other town forest recreation plans currently underway through the overall US Forest Service grant. The intent behind the toolkit was to build up a replicable process and a set of tools that could be used for both the professionally-facilitated process with the first ten communities, of which Weathersfield is one, and for other towns to do their own recreation plans after this project has ended.

Perhaps more importantly for Weathersfield, the toolkit includes a number of guidance documents, designs, case studies, best practices, and standards the Town can use to implement strategies identified in this plan. The action plan table and detailed project pages identifies the most relevant toolkit resources for each strategy. In addition, the full list of toolkit resources is described below.

The toolkit is organized through six (6) specific “pods.” These include an existing conditions and assessment pod, a public engagement pod, a natural resource pod, a plan development pod, an implementation pod, and a stories pod. Each are described below.

The Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit is available on Urban and Community Forestry’s website at: <https://vtcommunityforestry.org/>



Existing Conditions Pod

The existing conditions and assessment pod provides a checklist to communities to identify background information and municipal plans that should be considered in developing their plan. This pod also includes trail counting forms and extrapolation sheets modified for Vermont from the National Bike and Pedestrian Documentation Project materials. Trail and facility assessment checklists are also included, so the baseline conditions of the town forests can be well understood. Information about available resources such as VT UCF and the county foresters are also provided. Instructions on how to use the VT Center for Geographic Information (VCGI) interactive map viewer to produce basic maps is also included in this pod.



Public Engagement Pod

The public engagement pod provides a series of promotional material templates, such as flyers and press releases, and public meeting materials, like informational boards and handouts, that communities can use to explore concepts and constraints with the public. Informational board templates provide opportunities to both present information and gather feedback through write in questions, dot exercises and similar interactions. Surveys and visioning materials that allow towns to identify their priorities for use of their forests are an integral part of this pod. Finally, guidance and best practices on how to facilitate steering committee and public meetings round out the range of materials available in this pod.



Natural Resources Pod

The natural resources pod, developed by Arrowwood Environmental includes guidance for using ANR's Natural Resource Atlas for general resource mapping, a process for inventorying natural resources in the forest, workshop and survey questions for natural resources, and a model process for proposing and evaluating new trails or facilities. Most importantly, the natural resources pod also includes the Natural Resources Guidebook and associated activities and resources matrix. The guidebook includes information and links to relevant regulatory documents and contact information at both the State and Federal level for each of the following natural resource areas: Vernal Pools, Deer Wintering Areas (DWA), Ledges/Cliffs/Talus, Mast Stands, Interior Forest, Significant Natural Communities, Wetlands, Rare, Threatened or Endangered Species, Floodplain Forests, Streams/Rivers, Early Succession Forests, and Lakes and Ponds. The guidebook also includes an activities matrix for each of these resources that provides compatibility, management information and recommended buffers for a range of activities and facilities, including: Hiking Trails, Biking Trails, X-C Ski Trails, ATV trails, Snowmobile Trails, New Access Roads, Structures/Buildings, Parking Lots, Forestry/Logging, Camping, Sugaring, and Extraction (gravel, sand).



Example Content from the Natural Resources Guidebook

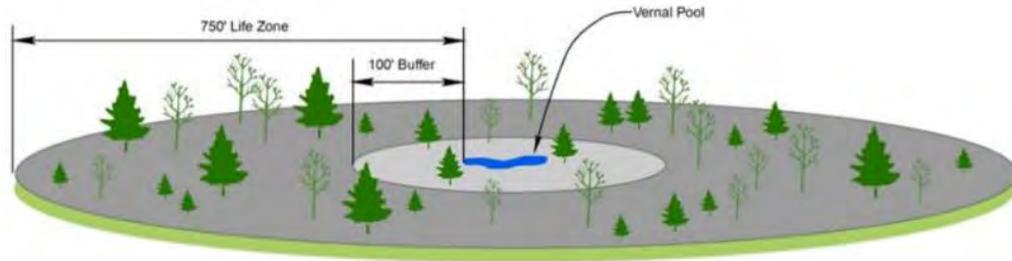


Figure 1. Vernal Pool management zones

Vernal Pool Management Matrix

Activity	Compatibility in Pool*	Compatibility in 100' Buffer*	Compatibility in 750' Buffer*	Comments (seasonal restrictions, buffers, mgmt.)
Hiking Trails	N	Y	Y	Avoid creating ruts or standing water
Biking Trails	N	Y	Y	Avoid creating ruts or standing water
Ski Trails	N	Y	Y	Avoid creating ruts or standing water
ATV trails	N	N	Y	Avoid trails through wet areas. Avoid creating ruts or standing water. Close trails during spring migration period.
Snowmobile Trails	N	Y	Y	Avoid trails through wet areas. Avoid creating ruts or standing water. Close trails during spring migration period.
New Access Roads	N	N	Y	Avoid roads through wet areas. Avoid creating ruts or standing water. Close roads during spring migration period.
Structures/Buildings	N	N	Y	See guidelines in text and links provided. Only appropriate if most of buffer remains forested.
Parking Lots	N	N	Y	See guidelines in text and link provided. Only appropriate if most of buffer remains forested. Runoff needs to be managed.
Forestry/Logging	N	N	Y	Some forestry activity compatible with vernal pools, see text and links provided.
Camping	N	N	Y	Camping may be compatible in larger buffer zone. See general guidelines in text.
Sugaring	N	Y	Y	Refer to forestry guidelines in text and links provided.
Extraction (gravel, sand)	N	N	N	Extraction can disrupt local hydrology and negatively impact nearby pool. See development guideline in text and links provided.

* In many cases, an activity is deemed compatible only if the management recommendations listed in the comments, text and links provided are adhered to.



Plan Development Pod

The plan development pod can help facilitate the development of a Town Forest Recreation Plan by other interested communities, or update this existing recreation plan. The pod includes templates and guidance on crafting a vision statement for a town forest as well as case studies of each of the 10 selected communities and their plans highlighting the process they undertook. The plan development pod also includes a recreational improvements strategy database that allows communities to search sample implementation actions based on resources, topics or activities. This database includes all strategies contained in the 10 established plans, and their relative cost. Template action plan tables and bubble diagram map guidance is also included.



Implementation Pod

The implementation pod contains a number of tools to aid in implementation of this plan. In addition to a list of available grant, funding and support resources relevant to town forests, the pod also includes grant writing best practices to help make sure you get the necessary funds to move forward. Design guidance and standards for building sustainable trails and facilities for a wide range of user types is also provided. Guidance on acquiring additional lands or easements is also included. Volunteer designs, materials lists, and construction instructions are also provided in this pod.



Town Forest Story Pod

The town forest story pod includes personal narratives and how-to webinars from participants in the 10 town forest process on what it actually takes to be a volunteer managing a town forest in your community. The stories share tips, tricks, and pitfalls to help keep you on course, as told by others in the same role!



Grants and Funding Sources

For most of the strategies and projects in this plan, moving them forward will require financial resources. Luckily, Weathersfield and the town budget do not have to go after it alone. There are many grants and alternative funding sources that can help provide the necessary funding. Perhaps the best approach to move a project forward is to select a project with strong community support, secure grant funding, and leverage local resources and volunteers.

The description of each grant below suggests the types of projects the grant funds, the required match from the town if necessary, and a link for more information. Some grants have been identified in the Implementation Matrix using their respective abbreviation.

Federal and State Grants and Programs

Land and Water Conservation Fund State and Local Assistance Program (LWCF)

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) state assistance program provides matching grants to help local communities enhance the outdoor recreation resources on public land. LWCF funding has benefited nearly every county in America, supporting over 40,000 projects. The grants create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness and forests, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Eligible projects are acquisition of land for parks and public outdoor recreation or development and/or renovation of existing facilities for outdoor recreation. This 50:50 matching program is the primary federal investment tool to ensure that families have easy access to public, open spaces. In Vermont, LWCF is administered by Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation.

<http://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/grants/lwcf>

Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)

The State Surface Transportation Program (STP) is the main program of Federal Transportation Funds, managed by VTrans, for transportation improvements on state highways. Possible projects include recreational trails, pedestrian and biking enhancements, sidewalks, and signed routes.

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/specialfunding/stp/>

USDA Rural Development Loan and Grant Assistance (RD)

USDA Rural Development (RD) forges partnerships with rural communities (defined as towns and villages with less than 20,000 inhabitants), funding projects that bring housing, community facilities (including trails and active transportation facilities), business guarantees, utilities and other services to rural America. This program provides funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community. Relevant to this plan, possible projects include transportation facilities, parks, and community gardens



<http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program>

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTC)

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTC) program supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation. Their national network of conservation and recreation planning professionals can partner with community groups, nonprofits, tribes, and state and local governments to design trails and parks, conserve and improve access to rivers, protect special places, and create recreation opportunities. Current projects include trail rehabilitation, interpretive trails, connector trails, trail master plans, trails collaboratives, and rail trail connectors. No monetary grants are made.

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>

FHWA Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funds to communities for development and maintaining recreational trail projects. Grants are awarded to well-planned projects that help to develop, protect, and maintain trails and trail systems that improve connections in the community, livability, user-ability, and are maintained for public recreational use. RTP funds support a wide range of trail activities including hiking, mountain biking, walking, running, cross-country and backcountry skiing, nature-based interpretive trail use, equestrian, snowmobiling, and off-road motorized recreation. Funds can be used for the following types of projects: construction of new trails or trail connections; construction of new trailhead areas/parking facilities; construction of trailside facilities; maintenance, renovation, or restoration of trails; improvements to signage or trail structures along the trail; assessments of existing trail conditions for accessibility and improvements; equipment; and trail-related educational projects (i.e., information about trail safety, appropriate trail use, environmental protection, etc.). The program is administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation in the Agency of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

<http://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/grants/rtp>

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a grant program administered by VTTrans that provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and bicycle infrastructure. These funds will cover a maximum of 80% of the project with the remaining portions most likely coming from the project-sponsoring organization or town. The FY 2019 funds are reserved for environmental mitigation projects.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/transport-alt>



VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program (BPP)

The Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Program (BPP) provides funds managed by VTrans for scoping, design, and construction of bike and pedestrian facilities, sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bike lanes. A local match is required but varies based on the type of project.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/bike-ped>

Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP)

The Vermont Community Development Program provides Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to all Vermont towns and cities, aside from Burlington. The grant provides financial and technical assistance to identify and address local needs in housing, economic development, public facilities, public services, and handicapped accessibility modifications. The four types of grants are Accessibility Modification Grants (AM), Implementation Grants (IG), Planning Grants (PG), Scattered Site Grants (SS). These grants must primarily benefit persons of low and moderate incomes.

http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/funding/vcdp

State Grants and Programs

Vermont Community and Urban Forestry Council Grants (Caring for Canopies Grants, CCG)

These Caring for Canopies Grants (CCG) are awarded to municipalities to aid in taking the necessary actions to developing and sustaining a community-wide tree program, including tree plantings, inventories, maintenance, and planning. There are two grant categories, Caring for the Canopy and Canopy Mini. Caring for Canopy is for projects that help move a community's tree management program towards a sustained level while Canopy Mini is for smaller projects to help move a tree management program forward. The grants range in size from \$500 to \$5,000 and require a 50% match.

<https://vtcommunityforestry.org/programs-0/financial-assistance/caring-canopy-grants>

Municipal Planning Grant Program (MPG)

The Municipal Planning Grants (MPG) are Vermont State grants for a wide range of municipal planning projects including land use plans, zoning and subdivision bylaws, trail networks and walking and biking improvements, resiliency planning, economic plans, and village and neighborhood planning. The range of the grants is from \$2,500 to \$20,000 with a required 10% match.

<http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>



Recreational Facilities Grants Program (RFG)

The Recreational Facilities Grants (RFG) program provides matching state grants for capital costs associated with the development and creation of community recreational opportunities. This program provides last gap funding for shovel ready projects and does not support any ongoing fundraising initiatives. The program requires a 100% match and awards are capped at \$25,000.

<https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>

ANR Ecosystem Restoration Grant Program (ERG)

The ANR Ecosystem Restoration grant program gives grants for design and construction projects that target nonpoint sources of pollution that cause or contribute to the state's surface waters.

<http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/cwi/grants#Ecosystem%20Restoration>

Better Connections Program (BCP)

The Better Connections Program seeks to align state and local investments to increase transportation options, build resilience, and strengthen economic vitality in Vermont's community centers, through an annual grant program administered by Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD). Municipalities annually compete for approximately \$200,000 in projects funds. A 10% local cash match is required. The program supports implementation-focused, municipal planning initiatives that: provide safe, multi-modal and resilient transportation systems that supports the Vermont economy; support downtown and village economic development and revitalization efforts; and lead directly to project implementation. The program has been used for trails and active transportation master plans, village connection planning and other multi-modal planning efforts.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/projects-programs/better-connections>

VOREC Community Grant Program

The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (VOREC) is launching a community grant program for outdoor recreation in Vermont municipalities. The grant is designed to help communities leverage their local outdoor recreation assets and applying communities must have completed some prior planning or mapping of outdoor recreation assets, have identified outdoor recreation as a component of their local economy through previous plans, and have a dedicated staff and/or volunteers to ensure long-term success of the project. The funds can be used for consultants, small scale outdoor recreation infrastructure improvements, materials or equipment to support outdoor recreation programs, marketing relating expenses, community based outdoor recreation planning, and securing public access through acquisition of land, easements, or rights-of-way. Communities are also responsible for making products and deliverables that could be adapted and reproduced by other communities in the state. The program is administered by FPR in partnership with ACCD and VOREC and offers grants between \$10,000 and \$100,000.



Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure Grant (AIG)

The Animating Infrastructure Grant (AIG) funds projects that integrate public art into existing or proposed infrastructure improvements, which could include buildings, recreational paths, parks, bridges, small-scale renewable energy projects, and water treatment facilities.

<http://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants-and-services/organizations/animating-infrastructure>

Ben & Jerry's Foundation (BJF)

The Ben & Jerry's Foundation funds multiple grants programs to help communities in Vermont. The Vermont Economic Justice Program gives grants to non-profits working to address the economic, social, and environmental impacts of poverty. The Vermont Community Action Team Grant is a small grant awarded to non-profits, schools, and municipalities. The Community Action Teams provide general or project support. The CATs fund the following types of community programs: social services organizations, cultural, recreational, arts programs, and community celebrations.

<https://benandjerrysfoundation.org/vermont-grant-programs.html>

National Organizations

PeopleforBikes Community Fund (PBCG)

The PeopleforBikes Community Grant Program (PBCG) provides funding for important and influential projects that build momentum for bicycling in communities across the U.S. These projects include bike paths and rail trails, as well as mountain bike trails, bike parks, and large-scale bicycle advocacy initiatives. PeopleforBikes will fund engineering and design work, construction costs, and reasonable volunteer support costs. The maximum grant award is \$10,000 and the grant cannot make up more than 50% of the total project budget.

<http://www.peopleforbikes.org/pages/community-grants>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grants (RWJF)

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provides grant funds to improve the health and health care of all Americans. For town forest projects, RWJF awards grants for projects creating healthier communities. This funding has gone towards walking and bicycling facilities and upgrading underutilized green space.

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/how-we-work/grants-and-grant-programs.html>

Trails Connecting People with Nature: A program of the Sierra Club's Nearby Nature Initiative (TCPN)

Trails Connecting People with Nature is a Sierra Club initiative that works to ensure that access to the outdoors is increasingly equitable and available to all communities. The Sierra Club Foundation



awards one year trail grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 towards trail creation or maintenance projects that engage new leaders and provide opportunities for communities to connect with nature.

<https://content.sierraclub.org/ourwildamerica/nearby-nature>

