



FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION  
**VERMONT**



AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY FOREST PROTECTION

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WELCOME





# OVERVIEW

- About FPR
- Municipal Conservation Values
- History
- Funding Opportunities for Community Forest Protection
  - Community Forest Program
  - Forest Legacy Program
  - Land And Water Conservation Fund
  - Vermont Housing And Conservation Board
- Examples
- Navigating the Path to a New Town Forest
- Tips for Community Forest Projects



# ABOUT FPR



- **Mission:** to practice and encourage high quality stewardship of Vermont's environment by monitoring and maintaining the health, integrity and diversity of important species, natural communities, and ecological processes; managing forests for sustainable use; providing and promoting opportunities for compatible outdoor recreation; and furnishing related information, education, and service.
- Three divisions
  - Forestry
  - Parks
  - **Lands Administration and Recreation**
- Owns, manages and stewards public lands and conservation easements
  - 196,000 acres State Forests
  - 54,000 acres State Parks
  - 162,000 acres Easement
- Administration of federal funding programs for conservation and recreation



Mount Mansfield State Forest. Photo – Gunnar Nurme, FPR

# MUNICIPAL CONSERVATION VALUES

Potential conservation values that could be important for your municipality may include:

- Recreation
- Working lands
- Wildlife habitat and connectivity
- Ecological services
  - Flood resilience
  - Water quality
  - Climate resilience
  - Carbon sequestration and storage
- Open space
- Scenic values
- Community character
- Historical and Cultural values



Barre Town Forest. Photo – Vermont Land Trust



# A BIT OF HISTORY

- In 1915 – Town Forest concept made official when the Vermont Legislature passed the Municipal Forest Law, authorizing towns to purchase lands for growing timber
- Current statute defines a “municipal forest” as being:
  - *“...a tract of land primarily devoted to producing wood products, maintaining wildlife habitat, protecting water supplies, providing forest recreation and conservation education.”*



Photo by Neal Bungard, Forest Service

- 1950s – 70 towns had municipal forests. Department of Forests and Parks had two staff foresters providing technical assistance to municipalities
- Today – over 67,000 acres of forestland is owned by 168 municipalities. Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation continues to serve a role in technical assistance





# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

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# BUYING THE LAND – WHERE TO LOOK FOR FUNDS!

There is typically a mix of funding brought together for the successful purchase of land for a “Town forest” or “Community Forest”.

Funding may come from federal, state or local funds, private foundations, small grants, local fundraising, bake sales...

There may be a landowner donation component – either in full or a “bargain sale”



Brushwood Community Forest. Photo – Kate Sudhoff, FPR



# COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM



- Federal grant funding through the USDA Forest Service
- 50/50 federal/match
- CFP was established in the 2008 Farm Bill
- Projects selected through a nationally competitive process
- For land acquisition, not conservation easements
- Implemented at the local level

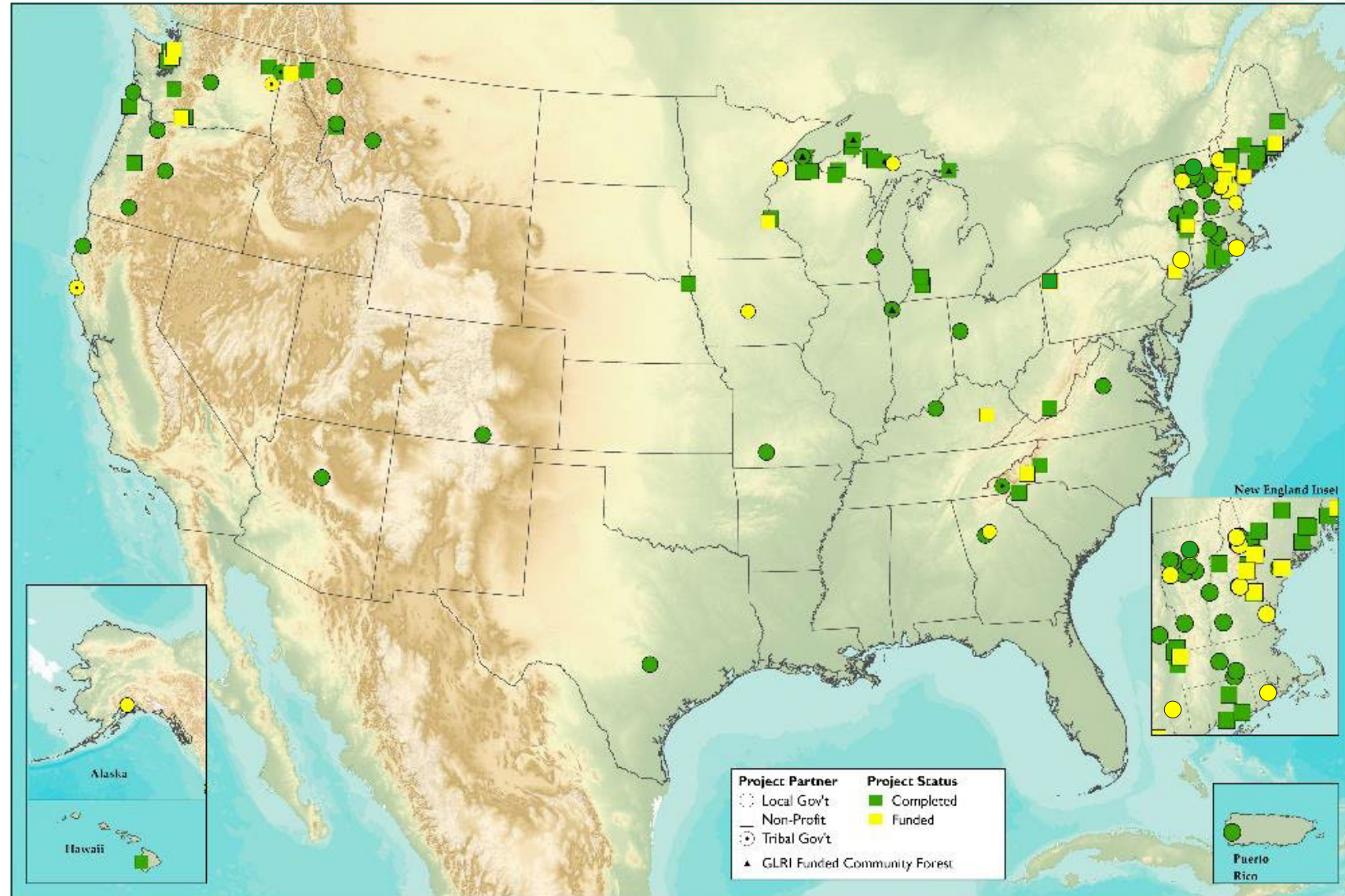
Purpose is to provide financial resources to tribal entities, local governments, and conservation non-profit organizations to acquire and establish community forests through fee simple acquisitions.





# CFP Projects Across the Country

- 126 projects funded
- Over 38,500 acres conserved to date
- 31 states and territories

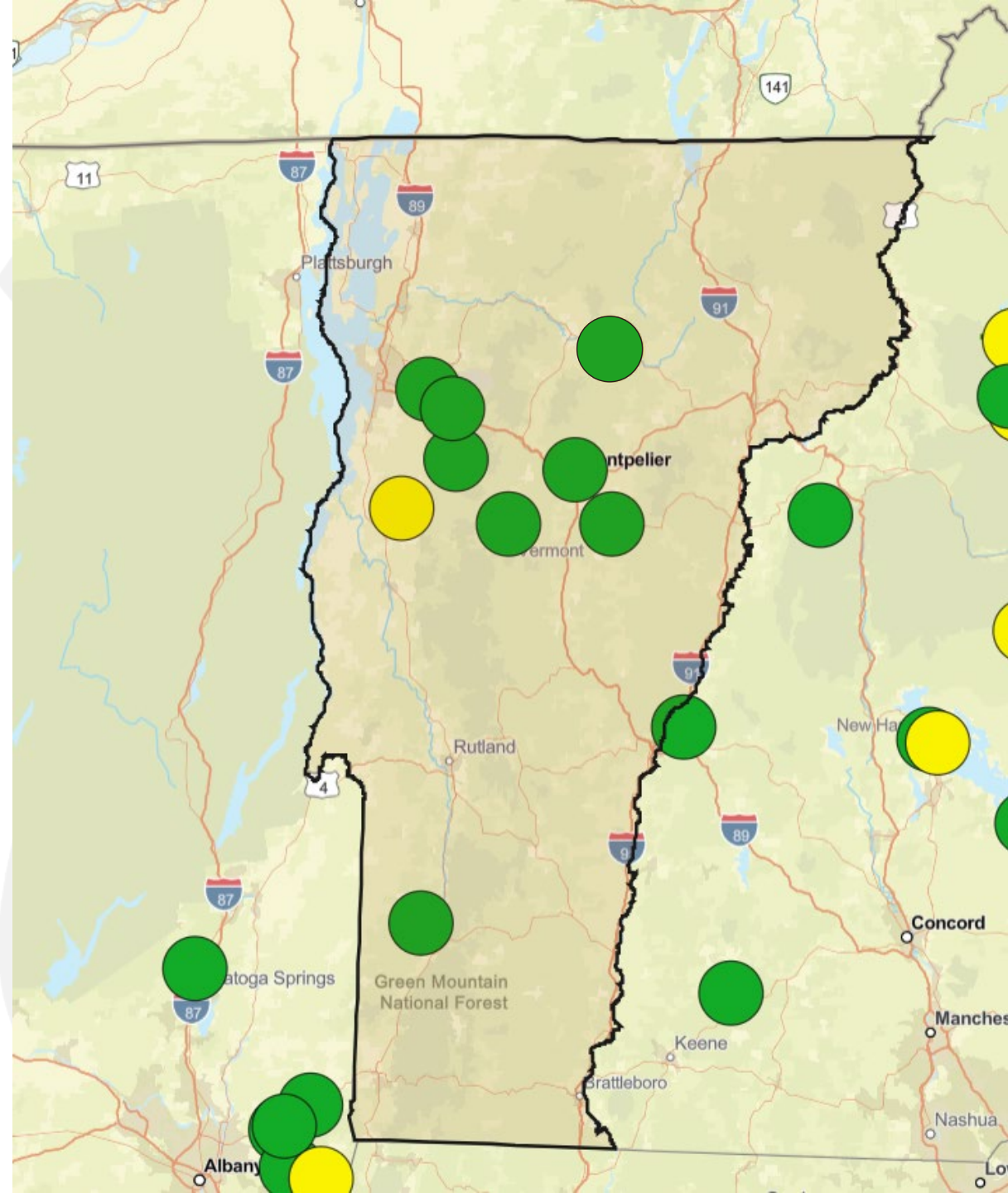




# CFP Projects Across Vermont

- 9 projects funded
- 2,620 acres conserved to date
- Across 9 Towns and Cities
  - Barre
  - Dorset
  - Huntington
  - Monkton
  - Montpelier
  - Richmond
  - Waitsfield
  - Williston
  - Wolcott

Slide from Neal Bungard, USDA Forest Service





# COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM

## Eligible Land:

- At least 75% forested
- At least 5 acres in size
- Threatened by conversion to non-forest uses
- If acquired by an eligible entity, can provide defined community benefits under the CFP
- Will allow public access

## Public Benefits:

- Economic
- Educational
- Environmental
- Recreational



View from Owl's Head Community Forest, Dorset VT  
USDA Forest Service photo by Neal Bungard

\*\*\*Projects must have Community Engagement\*\*\*



# COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM



## Eligible Entities:

### Local governments

- Any municipal government, county government, or other local government with jurisdiction over local land use decisions.

### Indian tribes

- Federally recognized Indian tribes and Alaska Native Corporations.

### Qualified nonprofit organizations

- An organization that is described in Section 170(h)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and operates in accordance with one or more of the conservation purposes.



# COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM

- CFP funding is highly competitive
- Funding maximum is \$600,000 per project
- In FY24, \$5.5M was available nationwide
- FY25 – waiting on federal clearance process before CFP awards are announced
- Working with land conservation partner is a strong benefit for municipalities seeking funding



Wolcott Community Forest, Wolcott VT  
USDA Forest Service photo by Neal Bungard



# COMMUNITY FOREST PROGRAM



## Process overview:

- Grant round published on the Forest Service webpage (For FY25 grants, this occurred in October 2024)
- Applications due to FPR (January 2025)
- State Forester, FPR, submits all applications (February 2025)
- National Team reviews and ranks projects (Spring 2025)
- Grants announced after federal clearance process
- If funded – goal is to complete the project in 2 years
- Community Forest Plan required. Multi resource plan with public engagement.



# FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

- The Forest Legacy Program was authorized through the 1990 Farm Bill
- 35 years later, the program has conserved over 3 million acres across the states and US Territories
- Administered by USDA Forest Service in partnership with State agencies
- Federal grants for land protection
- Purpose is to “protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest use...”





# FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

- Projects are selected through a nationally competitive process
- For purchase of land in fee or conservation easement
- Grants are to State Lead Agency (FPR) for up to 75% of project costs
- Land acquired may be owned by the state or a municipal government
- Easements are held by FPR
- Land Conservation organizations play an important role in facilitating projects, but don't hold an interest



Photo – Kate Sudhoff, FPR



# FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

## Eligible Land/Requirements

- At least 75% forested
- Located within the designated Forest Legacy Area
- Threatened by conversion to non-forest
- Project must include public access
- To compete well for funding – large acreage is typically necessary
- Multi-resource management plan required, with 10-year updates





# FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

- Very competitive funding
- One annual funding round
- Process overview
  - Pre-applications to FPR in May
  - Final applications in September
  - If funded, grant award typically in place 18 months after application, after congress passes the budget
- Funding maximum - \$20M



Eden Forest Easement – Photo, Kate Sudhoff, FPR



# QUICK COMPARISON - DIFFERENCES



## Community Forest Program:

- Maximum \$600k in federal CFP funds
- Program funds total FY24 \$5.5M
- 50/50 match
- Municipality administers the grant
- Grants awarded more swiftly after application
- Not limited by a designated area
- Small acreage eligible – 5 acre minimum

## Forest Legacy Program:

- Maximum grant \$20M
- Program funds LWCF – approx. \$94M annually
- 75/25 match
- State Administers the grant
- Grant award process is very long
- Projects must be located within the designated Forest Legacy Area
- Large acreage projects – 500+ acres is ideal



# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## ABOUT LWCF

- Funded by the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (NPS).
- Administered at the state level by FPR.
- Established in 1964. Fully and permanently funded by the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020.

## LWCF FUNDING GOALS

- Safeguard natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage.
- Provide recreation opportunities to all Vermonters.
- Advance the vision and priorities of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).



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# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW

- LWCF is a reimbursement program
- Minimum 50% match
- Recreational spaces acquired or developed using LWCF must be maintained and remain open for public outdoor recreation **in perpetuity**

## APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

- Municipalities
- State Government Agencies
- Other Governmental Agencies (e.g Tribal Governments)



# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

- Acquisition of land for parks and public outdoor recreation
- Development of new outdoor recreation facilities
  - Renovation of existing facilities for outdoor recreation
- Combination of the above



*Island Pond, Brighton  
2024 LWCF*





# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## ACQUISITION PROJECTS

Purchasing of land to create a new park or expand an existing park

### Example Eligible Projects

- Community Parks
- Public purchases of previously private recreation facilities
- Linear parks
- Natural and scenic areas
- Water-oriented recreation sites

### Example Eligible Costs

- Purchase costs of real property costs
- Cost of easements



# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Construction or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation facilities

### Example Eligible Projects

- Sports and playfields
- Playgrounds
- Camping facilities
- Picnic facilities
- Boating facilities
- Swimming areas
- Boating Facilities
- Fishing/hunting facilities
- Winter sports facilities
- Community gardens
- Recreation support facilities, such as restroom buildings, roads, parking, landscaping, and walkways

### Example Eligible Costs

- Construction costs: labor, materials, equipment, supplies, engineering, inspections
- Permanently installed recreation equipment
- Informational and directional signs
- Pre-award planning costs within 3 years only (no pre-award construction!)





# LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND



## HOW TO APPLY

- FPR administers LWCF at the state level
- Community funding rounds offered every two years
- Next community funding round will be in Fall 2026
  - Outreach will take place closer to then

### Email

[ANR.FPRrecreationGrants@vermont.gov](mailto:ANR.FPRrecreationGrants@vermont.gov)



Wheeler Mountain, Sutton  
LWCF 2024  
Photo - FPR



# VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION BOARD



- Established in 1987
  - The Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act, 10 V.S.A. Chapter 15, §§302-325a
- Dual goals
  - Creating affordable housing for Vermonters
  - Protecting Vermont's agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands that are of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State
- Has awarded \$400 million to nonprofit housing and conservation organizations, towns, municipalities and state agencies





# VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION BOARD



## VHCB Conservation Programs

- Forestland
- Natural Areas
- Outdoor Recreation
- Historic Preservation
- Farmland
- Privately Owned Working Forestland

## VHCB Application Process and Timeline

- 4-5 funding rounds per year
  - Typically January, March, June, October, December
- Applications can be found online
- Applications are reviewed at VHCB board meetings



# VERMONT HOUSING AND CONSERVATION BOARD



## VHCB Project Eligibility and Requirements

- Match requirement: at least 33%
- VHCB requires that they hold a conservation easement on any lands they contribute funding to
- Who is eligible?
  - Non-profit conservation organizations with 501(c)(3) status
  - Municipalities
  - Certain state agencies

## VHCB Contacts

- Bill Dell'Isola – Conservation Analyst
  - (802) 828-3252 – [bdellisola@vhcb.org](mailto:bdellisola@vhcb.org)





### **Community Forest Program:**

- Federal funds
- Forestland focus
- Grant Maximum \$600k
- 50/50 match
- Municipality administers the grant
- Small acreage eligible – 5 acre minimum
- Community Engagement required

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund:**

- Federal funds
- Recreation focus – land and infrastructure
- Recommended grant max - \$1M federal
- 50/50 match
- State administers the grant
- No acreage minimum
- Must align with SCORP

### **Forest Legacy Program:**

- Federal funds
- Forestland focus
- Maximum grant \$20M
- 75/25 match (75 federal/25% non-federal)
- State Administers the grant
- Large acreage needed for competitive ranking
- Grant award process is very long
- Projects must be located within the designated Forest Legacy Area

### **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board:**

- State funds
- Various focus areas for funding – Natural Area, Recreation, Forestland
- Grant match – plan on 33% or more
- Requires easement







# EXAMPLES

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# BARRE TOWN FOREST

- Owner: Town of Barre
- Project facilitated by Trust for Public Land
- 355 acres
- Acquisition Completed 2013
- Funding total \$1,030,000
  - Federal - CFP: \$400k
  - State – VHCB: \$310k
  - Open Space Institute: \$200k
  - Town of Barre: \$100k
  - VT Rec Trails: \$20k



Photo courtesy of Trust for Public Land

# SCRAG MOUNTAIN TOWN FOREST

- Owner: Town of Waitsfield
- Project facilitated by Vermont Land Trust
- 110-acre addition – 750-acre Forest
- Acquisition of “Gateway Parcel” Completed in 2017
- Funding total \$707,000
  - Federal – CFP: \$267k
  - State – VHCB \$125k
  - Town - \$40k
  - Bargain Sale - \$200k
  - Community Fundraising - \$75k +



Photo Kate Sudhoff - FPR



# HUNTINGTON COMMUNITY FOREST



- Owner: Town of Huntington
- Project facilitated by Trust for Public Land
- 245 acres (adjacent to Elementary School)
- Acquisition Completed 2021
- Funding total \$909,000
  - Federal - CFP: \$385k
  - State – VHCB: \$75k
  - Town of Huntington: \$140k
  - VT Clean Water Revolving Fund: \$309k

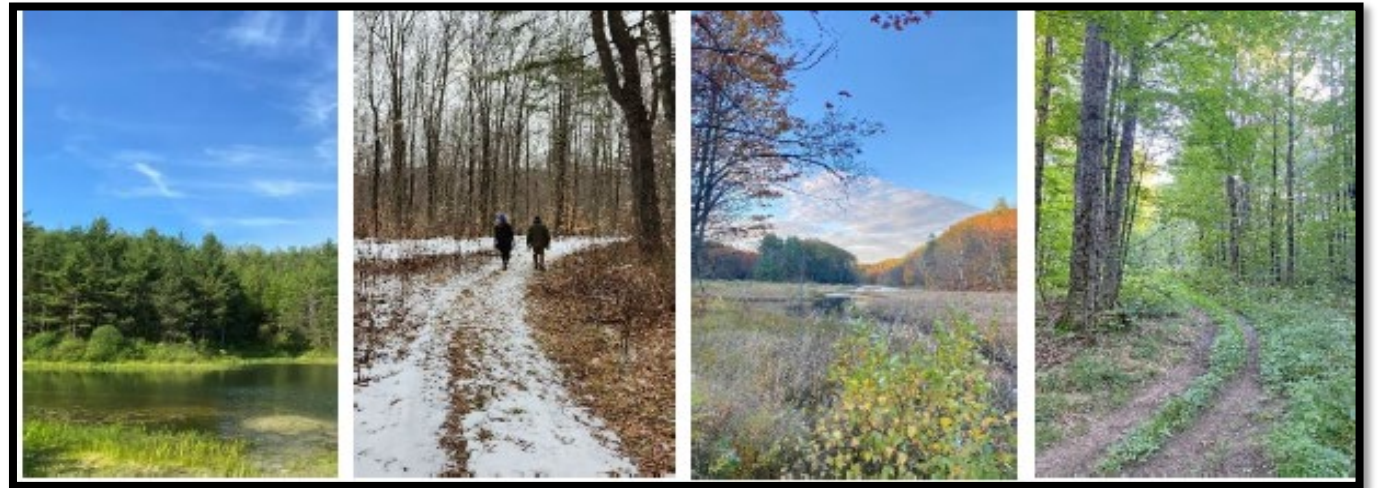


© Cirilli Photo, courtesy of Trust for Public Land

# MONKTON TOWN FOREST

- Owner, Town of Monkton
- Project facilitated by: Vermont Land Trust
- Acquisition: November 2024
- Funding total \$1,118,000
  - Federal – CFP: \$400k
  - State – VHCB: \$371k
  - Town: \$195k (ARPA and other town funds)
  - Bargain sale: \$100k
  - Community fundraising: \$52k

(\$ info from VLT website)



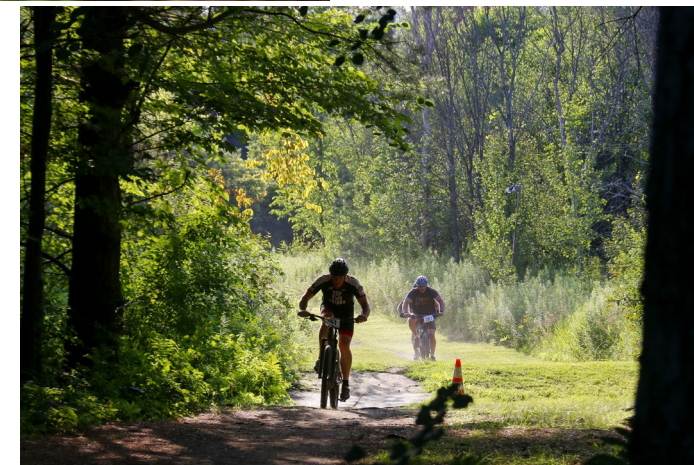
Photos from Monkton Town Forest Committee website



# CATAMOUNT COMMUNITY FOREST



- Owner: Town of Williston
- Project facilitated by Trust for Public Land, Vermont Land Trust holds easement
- 393 acres (adjacent to Catamount Outdoor Center)
- Acquisition Completed 2019
- Funding total \$1,900,000
  - Federal – CFP: \$400k
  - Federal - LWCF/National Park Service Stateside: \$280k
  - State – VHCB: \$328k
  - Town of Williston, and many small grants and contributions: \$400k +



Photos courtesy of Trust for Public Land



# WOLCOTT COMMUNITY FOREST



- Owner: Town of Wolcott
- Project facilitated by Trust for Public Land
- 735 acres (adjacent to Elementary School)
- Acquisition Completed Sept 2024
- Funding total \$1,207,000
  - Federal - CFP: \$580k
  - State – VHCB: \$602k
  - Town of Wolcott: \$25k
  - + VOREC - \$198k for trail development



# COW MOUNTAIN POND FOREST

- Owner: Town of Granby and USFS
- Project facilitated by The Nature Conservancy
- 1660 acres +
- Acquisition Completed 1993
- Funding total \$570,000
  - Federal – Forest Legacy: \$271k
  - State – VHCB: \$180k
  - Town - \$119k (Bake sales and bird houses!)



Photos - FPR

# BRUSHWOOD FOREST

- Owner: Town of West Fairlee
- Project facilitated by: Trust for Public Land
- 1,059 acres in 5 parcels
- Acquisition completed in 2 phases, 2008 - 2011
- Funding total \$1,506,000
  - Federal – Forest Legacy: \$1.456M
  - Open Space Conservancy - \$50k
  - State – \$470k (grant match through other conservation projects)



Photos – FPR and TPL



# NAVIGATING THE PATH TO A NEW TOWN FOREST



Acquiring land for a Town Forest is typically a long and careful process with a lot of hard work and patience

- Planning – Input from the town residents
- Partners – Partnering with a land conservation organization is a huge benefit
- Land - Finding the right parcel
- **Seeking and Securing Funding** - Putting together the funding puzzle
- Working through the acquisition process – title, appraisal, assessments, map/survey...
- Planning for management and use of the Town Forest



Photo – K. Sudhoff, FPR

# TIPS FOR TOWNS

- Lean on conservation partners
  - Organizations such as FPR, Trust for Public Land and Vermont Land Trust love helping with community forest projects. Reach out!
- It doesn't need to be much, but any funds towns can contribute as match goes a long way to show commitment to funders
- Dream big! Sometimes the bigger a property is, the easier it is to get funding for
- Always consider budgeting for management and stewardship



Catamount Community Forest, Williston. Photo - TPL



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program Town Forest Stewardship Toolkit

<https://vtcommunityforestry.org/projects/town-forests>

### TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP TOOLKIT



#### Forests for the People ►

Town forests have a rich history in Vermont. Find a forest near you.



#### Protect Land ►

Learn how towns and cities acquire or conserve land for their town or community forest.



#### Community Governance ►

Each municipality steers the future of its own town forest. Pull your community leaders together!



#### Public Engagement ►

Discover the best ways to ensure that your town forest balances community interests.



#### Making a Plan ►

Discover your town forest's unique traits and roles in your community, then dig into a forest management plan.



#### Staying Active ►

County foresters share resources for active management in your town forest.

# THANK YOU!



# CONTACT INFORMATION



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