**MEMO**

To: Erik Wells
From: Catamount Community Forest Management Committee
Date: September 15, 2023
**Re: ARPA Funding Suggestions**

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The Catamount Community Forest Committee recommends the following priorities for ARPA funding (priority 1, 2 or 3):

**1. Trail Improvement Projects**

The forest's 26 miles of trails are heavily used by residents. The Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC), have identified several trail projects. The town could supplement COFC funds and/or help with financial match for grant applications. Two potential projects are:

a) The Lookout summit has great views. But, the route up and down for hikers, bikers and skiers is difficult which dissuades many people from visiting it. Trail improvement would include reducing pitches and smoothing tread to broaden the range who can get to it.
b) A grant condition prohibited ground disturbance at the forest until July 2023 – so it has not been possible to improve drainage on trails. The Three Rivers trails would benefit from drainage improvement to reduce environmental impacts and make it more usable for hikers, snow shoers, skiers and bikers throughout the year.

**1. Invasive Treatment**

Large areas of the forest are infested with invasive plants. The Community Forest Plan (2018) states management is vital to maintaining a healthy and ecologically diverse forest. To date we have been controlling invasives through:

- Volunteer work,
- $1,000 annual expenditure on professional herbicide treatment from our management budget,
- Working with VELCO on invasive treatment in their right of way, and
- $3,000 from the stewardship fund for treatment following the forestry project.

These actions may not be sufficient to control the invasive plants. The County Forester has estimated we'd need to spend $50,000 over the next 10 years to control invasives properly. ARPA funding for professional treatment would help the town to get ahead of invasives to manage them in the long term.

**1. Parking Lot Improvements**

The Community Forest Plan (2018) identified that drainage in the parking lot could be improved with the addition of gravel (estimated cost in 2018 was $12,000). This would reduce its muddiness which is a frequent problem. The Committee would coordinate with Public Works over implementation.

**2. Wayfinding Signage**

The forest can be difficult to navigate. The Community Forest Plan envisions improved wayfinding signage and educational/regulatory signage. Committee members have been developing educational signage, but wayfinding needs to be developed professionally. In 2020 COFC developed a wayfinding

package. At that time its cost was $33,000 but funding was not available. APRA funding would enable the Committee to work with COFC to revisit this project.

**2. Nature Projects**

Members of the Committee have installed bird boxes using volunteer labor and materials; and manage and observe nesting as time permits throughout the nesting season. Nesting data is logged to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology "Nest Watch" site where the data is aggregated for scientific studies of bird migration and nesting. ARPA money could purchase game cameras to be installed near or inside nesting boxes, and to monitor wildlife movement in the forest for larger animals. This would accurately assess the success of bird nesting and through video streaming enhance education. Other nature projects could be implemented including bat boxes (purchase or the lumber, poles and other materials to construct). Estimated nature project cost: $5,000

**2. Sheep Barn Repair**

In 2021 the town received a report on the condition of the Sheep Barn (historic structure). The work required to make it secure and stable for the long term was estimated at $100,000.

**2. Right of Way to Southern Parcel**

The southern part of Catamount is currently accessed over the former owner's land through informal agreement. The town has an easement to the southern parcel and funds would help develop and construct this into a formal trail for pedestrian/bike access.

**3. Trail Counters**

The Town has long sought to monitor trail usage. Trail counters would give us accurate data on how much the forest is being used and which are the most popular trails. Estimated project cost: $10,000 for 5 trail counters to deploy at the entrances to the forest.

**3. Recreational projects**

During recent winters the quality and quantity of snow has been patchy. A snow making loop around Goose Hill would create a more consistent experience for skiers and snow shoers and allow the forest to host races with more certainty. COFC would take responsibility for running / maintaining the equipment. Estimated project cost of $250,000.

There is a sledding hill and skills area on the property that is popular with camps, groups, schools, the library and residents. A magic carpet lift would make this hill more usable for a wider range of people year round COFC would take responsibility for running / maintaining the lift. Estimated project cost of $750,000.