

Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of November 27, 2017

Approved

Members Present: Terry Marron, Michael Clauss, Jeff Dickinson, Barb Evans, Ben King, Patrice Maloney, Ben Norris, Anthony Jordick, Jay Diaz, Steve Page, Kort Longenbach.

Members Absent: Rita Dessau

Others Present: Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Lands), Andrea Shortsleeve (Department of Fish and Wildlife), Ethan Tapper (Chittenden County Forester), Aron Merrill (Williston resident, present for public comment).

Goal: Discuss and develop recommendations for integration of multiple recreational uses.

1. Kim reviewed the meeting goals and objectives. Tonight the group will be digging into more content with a focus on recreation.
2. **Housekeeping items:**
 - Approve 10-23-2017 minutes – The minutes of 10-23-2017 were approved with one revision clarifying a statement by Patrice on page 4 regarding Little Bellas use of an open meadow.
 - Melinda stated that the 4th Monday in December falls on Christmas Day, therefore the Committee meeting would need to be rescheduled for another day. She suggested 12/11 or 12/18. Meeting on 12/11 would allow the UVM Capstone students a chance to present their work on the trail inventory and assessment. Are there any conflicts with either date? None were stated, so the meeting date was scheduled for December 11.
 - Public Outreach Subcommittee provided an update to the group. Barbara Evans stated that the group decided to post on Front Porch Forum prior to every meeting, and was planning an open house event for Saturday, December 9.
3. **Public Comment** – One member of the public, Aron Merrill, spoke in support of hunting. Catamount is a large property, and it would be nice to be able to continue hunting there. Other towns' public lands do allow hunting and he wished there was public land in Williston that allowed hunting.
4. **Overview of tonight's process (Kim)** – Kim reminded the group of the voting procedure using the 85% rule. The group would begin by each member placing sticky dots next to the options they most prefer for the proposed new recreational uses, then those options would be ranked from 1-5. A recommendation goes forward with 85% 4 and 5 rankings. There is the option for anyone to write a dissenting opinion if they strongly object to any recommendation the group has made. Kim gave an overview of the sequence of presentations and discussions for tonight.

5. Multi-use forestry and local examples (Ethan)

- Multiple use forestry concept first introduced by US Forest Service in the 1960s. Previously, USFS managed federal public lands for timber only, without considering other uses. No town forest has a single use. The challenge is how to incorporate forest stewardship into a management regime that honors different uses and doesn't significantly detract from any of them. Successful management does not impede the productive capacity of the site to provide timber, clean water, habitat, recreation, aesthetics, etc. It is not possible for everyone to get everything they want all the time, everyone has to give a little.
- How do we balance for all the different uses? Challenge with Catamount is that it is not a huge piece of property, and as a result there are many people in a small area. You can manage uses through spatial or temporal segregation. For example, Hinesburg Town Forest does allow hunting, but during the hunting season they ask that people stay off the trails. Hinesburg TF separates their forest into different areas that are managed for different goals/uses: Intensive Use, Moderate Use, and Reserve Area.
- Saxon Hill Forest – was supposed to be managed for timber but has become a mountain biking park because the timber management was not well thought out from the beginning.
- Mud Pond Country Park – example of a partner organization to manage the trails and mitigate concerns. For Catamount, the partner is COFC.
- Mike Clauss asked how hunting is managed at Hinesburg Town Forest. Is someone making sure that hunters have licenses? Ethan stated that it is not policed. Kate Wanner mentioned Barre Town Forest allows hunting and closes its recreational uses during this time.
- Ben asked whether the goal of forest management is revenue generation or forest health. Ethan stated both can apply. Ethan stated that hopefully timber management would satisfy other benefits such as wildlife, forest health, recreation, as well as provide revenue.
- Kim stated there are some forest management strategies that would end up costing money, such as invasives removal.
- Steve Page asked how you weigh the need for resource protection versus the needs of user groups.
- Patrice asked, based on the existing forest management plan, is there any identification of existing trails and how forest management affects them and vice versa? Ethan stated this not addressed in the existing plan but should be looked at as the next plan is developed. A good starting point would be to look at where existing logging trails and recreation trails are to see whether a dual use is possible. Terry asked whether under the existing plan, active timber management (logging or other treatment) was happening every year. Ethan stated the plan is based on 100-year rotation, so the forest is not actively harvested every year, only about every 5 years.
- Kim suggested that since there would be a future meeting focusing on timber management, in the interests of time, the group move on to the next topic.

6. Multi-use recreation management strategies - examples from other Vermont outdoor centers (Kort)

- Kort's PowerPoint presentation has been uploaded to Google Drive
- **Dogs**
 - Kort explained the current policy regarding dogs at Catamount - that dogs are not allowed, and stated this policy is not radically different from other outdoor center policies on dogs. He presented a few examples, focusing in greater detail on the Kingdom Trails policy.
 - Kort stated the main issue is that dogs and mountain biking presents inherent conflict, and there is no revenue benefit for the Outdoor Center to allowing dogs. A dog park has the benefit of spatial containment, but there are challenges in locating it, constructing a fence, as well as ongoing maintenance.
 - Of the other proposed options for allowing dogs, temporal segregation is the most workable. Kort suggested limiting dogs to the shoulder season (fall).
- **Horses**
 - Kort stated that similarly with horses, it is difficult to integrate that use with mountain biking. The upside is that there is a potential revenue generating opportunity in allowing horseback riding.
- **Hunting**
 - Historically, hunting has been allowed at Catamount from November – early December
- **Strava Heat Maps**
 - Kort displayed the Strava heat maps for the different uses and seasons at Catamount. Kim explained what a heat map is. Users run a GPS while they are engaging in recreation, creating a real-time map of their use. Users can choose from either running or biking. Strava overlays all user activities to show patterns of use for any given area.
 - Mike Clauss asked if the App shows actual numbers of people, or just relative usage. Melinda stated it is possible to get the data behind the maps, although she has yet to work with it.
- **Questions for Kort and Discussion**
 - Ethan stated most town forests allow dogs on leash or under voice control, and stated most town forests allow hunting during rifle season (mid-November to early December – 3 weeks)

7. Possible new recreational uses at Catamount (Michael, Patrice, Kort)

- Kate Wanner gave a brief overview of the COFC/Town lease agreement governing the continuation of current activities at Catamount under the management of the COFC.
- Kort stated a major issue with adding new activities is the potential costs involved and who bears that cost.
- Mike Clauss asked about Disc Golf – is that something the COFC would take on and charge for? Kort stated that COFC would be willing to do this if feasible.
- **Snowmobiling**

- There is currently a VAST trail that runs roughly north/south through the property but has not been used for the last 15 years.
- Patrice stated that her experience with the VAST trail on her land was generally positive, saying that they have helped out with clearing downed trees.
- Melinda reiterated that, stating that VAST has trails running through Five Tree Hill and Mud Pond Country Park. VAST has been helpful in maintaining these trails and she is unaware of any conflicts between snowmobilers and other users.
- **Horseback Riding (Patrice)**
 - Patrice discussed potential options for horseback riding at Catamount. She stated the degree to which it could generate revenue will depend on the quality/quantity of trail riding asset provided. This would need further exploration.
 - Patrice stated the conflict between horseback riding and other users is minimal, especially given that there won't be winter riding and she anticipates the number of users won't be large. Users generally know how to handle their horses around other users. The only potential safety issue Patrice foresees is with fast-moving bikers that are quiet.
 - Patrice suggested the potential establishment of a new trail along the perimeter of the property, and the exploration of connecting trails to adjacent properties such as Talcott Forest, Pine Ridge or her own property.
 - Patrice distributed to the group a handout with information related to common concerns and perceptions about horses on trails.
 - Kim noted that horse manure is very different from dog waste in terms of impact on water quality and the environment.
 - Patrice mentioned that other town forests have very little restrictions on horseback riding.
 - Kate Wanner asked how many horse owners in the immediate area would use the trails. Patrice stated the Windswept Farm may use it as well as a handful of other people in Town. Patrice stated the best opportunity for revenue generation is likely through special events.
 - Ben Norris asked about the expectation of a good horseback riding trail. Patrice felt that an hour or two of riding is possible at Catamount (6-12 miles) but connections to other properties would improve the likelihood of decent trails with sufficient length.
 - Jeff Dickenson asked whether Patrice would open up her trails to others who got access from Catamount. She stated that's a possibility. Jeff asked what about people coming from Patrice's trails to Catamount – would they have to pay to use the Catamount trails? Patrice stated that would need to be worked out.
 - Jay asked about how many and what types of users would show up for an event. Patrice stated 30-40 could be expected for this size area. A Tunbridge event attracts up to 150.
 - Steve Page asked Kate whether she had any experience with horses in town forests. Kate stated she knew of only one that did allow horseback riding.

8. 10 minute break

9. Discussion on adjusting the meeting schedule: Kim asked whether the group would be opposed to having an extra meeting to give the recreation discussion the time it deserves. She proposed a meeting on Dec. 11 and 18. Some members were not in favor of an additional meeting. Mike Clauss suggested using an online poll, then having a 3 hour meeting in December for follow-up discussion. Jay Diaz asked whether more ideas could be proposed and put up on Google Drive, and Kim stated yes, and suggested assigning a due date of Friday, Dec. 1 for proposal of other options. Kim and Melinda will compile the current and any additional options into a survey/poll for Committee members to complete by the end of the following week (December 8).

10. Possible new recreational uses at Catamount (continued)

- **Dogs** – Spatial or temporal separation, or no dogs allowed.
- **Disc Golf** – There has been some interest from community members in setting up a new disc golf course at Catamount. Kort stated there was a disc golf event last summer that was very successful. Melinda stated the State Department of Historic Preservation may require archaeological surveys prior to establishing a disc golf course.
- **Ice skating on the pond** – questions include whether ice skating should be allowed; and if so, whether fees should be charged, who collects revenue, liability concerns, who maintains the pond for skating? Mike Clauss stated he would recommend skating be free and the town install “skate at your own risk” signage to limit liability.
- **Camping** – The Committee members felt camping should either not be allowed or allowed only in certain designated areas. There was general consensus that camping should be allowed only as part of an event, but not normally allowed to the public. Kate doesn’t know of any town forests that allow camping. Patrice mentioned that camping was part of some events she’s been to, and that individual fires were not allowed but that there was a communal bonfire.

11. The hunting discussion, pedestrian options and ranking was tabled until the next meeting.

On the agenda for next month:

- Consideration of other recreational uses (continue discussion and rank)
- Infrastructure/Trail Maintenance
- Review and discuss COFC lease agreement

Meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM.