

Forest Management Plan
For the
Catamont Community Forest
Williston, VT

---- Executive Summary ----

June 17, 2020

Plan Summary

The purpose of this Forest Management Plan (“FMP”) is to serve as an addendum to the Catamont Community Forest (CCF)’s September 2018 Management Plan (“MP”), adopted by the Williston Selectboard on September 4, 2018. This FMP will add to the MP by providing detailed, specific recommendations for the management of forests at the CCF. This FMP provides no binding mandates; however, the management recommendations in this document are intended to satisfy the goals and objectives put forth in the MP, in addition to best practices for the responsible management and stewardship of forests.

Ecological Protection Zones (EPZ’s) are areas defined, mapped and afforded special protections in the CCF’s conservation easement. These EPZ’s include streams, wetlands and vernal pools, and buffers around these features with special rules. These rules can be found on pages 12-15 of the CCF’s conservation easement. They are addressed with special protections in the CCF’s MP, and in this FMP.

Invasive exotic plants are an enormous threat to the continued health and productivity in the CCF. These species outcompete native plants, resulting in decreased biodiversity, decreased wildlife habitat quality, decreased ecosystem resilience and diminished ecosystem function. Invasive exotic plants are well established in the CCF. It is recommended that these plants be controlled aggressively using an Integrated Pest Management approach, including the minimal, targeted usage of herbicide.

In the CCF, deer browse damage is extremely evident and troubling. The over-abundance of deer is a concern for forest health and resilience, wildlife habitat, water quality, and long-term ecological and economic productivity. While the MP does not allow for hunting for safety reasons, it is recommended here that options for safely hunting deer, especially antlerless deer, on the CCF be considered in the future. Deer management on the CCF should be nuanced, striving to provide excellent habitat for a healthy population of deer while keeping their population at a low enough level that forest growth and regeneration can occur unimpeded.

The prescriptions in Stand 2 and 3 of this management plan, and in the work in the adjacent Talcott Forest, are intended to be applied as part of a project called “Adaptation and Restoration of Northern Forests: Collaborative Management of Forests at Risk Across the Urban to Rural Gradient.” in partnership with the University of Vermont Forestry Department, in particular Williston residents Tony D’Amato and Gary Hawley. CCF will serve as one of 6 demonstration sites across the nation, helping us understand how forests adapt to climate change. This project will include active forest management both in Stands 2 and 3 and on adjacent Talcott Forest (owned by UVM), which will require the usage of a truck road and log landing in the south of the CCF.

In partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (USFWS), Vermont Fish and Wildlife (VTFW) and Audubon Vermont, the CCF will conduct wildlife habitat enhancement work in 2020 or 2021. This will include creating wildlife “patch cuts” in Stand 5 and shrubland habitat management for golden-winged warbler in several areas of the CCF. This work will

be followed by invasive species treatment. All this work will be non-commercial, funded by USFWS and perhaps VTFW.

The work prescribed in this FMP has implications for recreational trail usage by the Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC). Some trails will need to be closed while forest management work is underway, and some trail restoration and clearing will need to occur following forest management work. Per the Town's license agreement with the COFC, trails must be impacted as little as possible and brought back up to their previous condition following forest management, and a detailed plan should be made with the COFC for how this is to be done in advance of the work. The "Recreation" section of this plan features a detailed strategy for this, which is the result of extensive discussion and communication with the COFC.

A major goal of this FMP is to improve public understanding of responsible forest stewardship. Every activity prescribed in this FMP is intended to be applied in conjunction with public events, forums, educational tools and activities that will showcase and build understanding around these practices. Care should be taken to cultivate an open, transparent, and inclusive process around these events, providing many opportunities for members of the Williston community (and those in surrounding communities) to ask questions, comment, and be heard in different ways.

Community Impact on the FMP

Several actions were taken to raise awareness of the FMP and gather community feedback on the plan. First the FMP was posted on the Town of Williston website for any interested parties to read. This was publicized locally and in a press release written by the Chittenden County Forester and put out by Vermont's Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, stating the existence of the FMP, the desire to solicit public input (and how to submit it), and where the draft FMP could be read.

Two virtual public events were held in May, attended by 94 people, with the videos posted on YouTube for those who could not attend. These were jointly hosted by the Chittenden County Forester, UVM, Audubon Vermont, Vermont Fish and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Each highlighted different components of the work proposed in the FMP.

Finally, a web-based survey was created by Kim Coleman, Chair of the Williston Conservation Commission, Laura Meyer, Catamount Community Forest Management Committee, and Ethan Tapper, the Chittenden County Forester. The survey asked respondents demographic information, background information regarding respondents' use of both Catamount Community Forest and other Vermont town forests, and respondents' thoughts and reactions to the content of the FMP.

Because the FMP is considered an addendum to the 2018 "Catamount Community Forest Management Plan" (adopted by the Williston Select Board on September 4, 2018), which was developed with an extensive public process, the purpose of this survey was not to re-assess all the provisions of the 2018 Management Plan. Rather, the goal of the survey was to solicit input on the new topics and concerns raised, and activities proposed, in the FMP, all of which occur within the goals, objectives and standards detailed in the 2018 Management Plan.

The survey was posted on the Williston Town website, and was advertised on Front Porch Forum, on the Catamount Outdoor Family Center Facebook page, via the Vermont Master Naturalists email list, and to webinar participants. Information about the survey was published multiple times through each of these platforms. Kim Coleman, who has a Ph.D. in human dimension of forestry, analyzed the survey results.

Sixty-eight individual respondents completed the survey, 50 of whom self-identified as Williston residents. Three respondents reported that they had never been to Catamount Community Forest

and 15 respondents reported that they did not visit regularly. The majority of respondents (40) reported that they visited monthly or several times throughout the year. The remaining respondents (10) reported that they visited daily or weekly. Forty respondents (roughly 59% of all respondents) identified as mountain bikers.

When Respondents were asked what concerns they had about the FMP, three reoccurring themes emerged from their respondents' answers. These themes were concerns regarding possible negative impact to the existing trail network, concerns regarding possible negative impact to Catamount Outdoor Family Center programming, and concerns regarding the cost associated with restoring the trail network post-timber harvest. Based on this feedback, Ethan Tapper revised the section of the FMP that details the impact to and restoration of trails, and will work closely with the Catamount Community Forest Management Committee and Catamount Outdoor Family Center Board to ensure impact to the trails are minimized.

When Respondents were asked what elements of the FMP they were excited about, four recurring themes emerged from respondents' answers. These themes were: support for the overall focus on forest health, support for the removal of invasive species, support for the focus on wildlife habitat, and support for the potential to conduct more forest-based community outreach and education at Catamount Community Forest.

Finally, we received comments not relevant to the FMP, but relevant to the broader ongoing management of the property. Those comments will be synthesized and made available to the Catamount Community Forest Management Committee.