

Catamount Community Forest Annual Report July 1 2022 - June 30 2023

The Catamount Community Forest is a rich community resource used for walking, biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, birding, outdoor education and many special events. We hope all community members can experience the forest and take advantage of its offerings. The Catamount Forest Committee (CFC) is a five-member volunteer board who manage the forest.



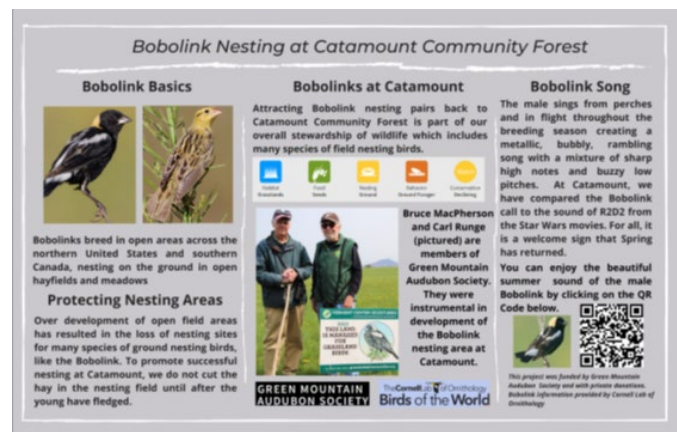
1 Ethan Tapper leading a guided forest walk. Photo credit: Terry Marron

CFC prepared for a forest management project that will take place next financial year. Public outreach, led by the Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper, included guided walks and explanatory signage. The project area has a dense network of trails. The CFC, Chittenden County Forester and Outdoor Family Center collaborated on trail protection, and had a fun snow shoe walk to select trees to be retained to preserve the trail aesthetics. Based on their experience working on high profile recreational land and ability to complete the project quickly, the CCF recommended LaFoe's Logging to the

Selectboard. The project is expected to complete in late summer / early fall 2023.

Our forest is home to a diverse range of native species. However, they are being outcompeted by invasive plants which results in a poorer diversity of plants and wildlife, reduced quality wildlife habitat, and decreased resilience to climate change. Controlling invasives was a top priority this year. Operating funds secured professional invasive control. Volunteer work days were promoted (including poison parsnip control) and the Williston Scouts led a very successful cut stump operation to remove buckthorn near Woods Trace. Invasive plants were also managed by two town volunteer licensed herbicide applicators, mainly Common Buckthorn, Honeysuckle and Japanese Barberry.

The non-forested areas of Catamount, particularly grasslands, are being managed as bird habitat with the assistance of members of the Audubon Vermont. NestWatch is a nationwide nest-monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds. This was the 5th year of bobolink monitoring. Bobolinks were observed throughout the summer by volunteers with the major mystery revolving around the apparent late arrival of the adult female bobolinks. But the nesting season was successful!



2 Bobolink sign created by Reed Parker

At Catamount Community Forest 9 volunteers monitored 45 nest boxes which attract Bluebirds, Tree Swallows and House Wrens. There were 150 eggs with 80 young that fledged this year. Drought, wet weather, wildfire smoke and predation all attributed to a low success rate this year. We also monitor duck nesting with 1 successful nest with 10 wood duck eggs.

Several bird walks were held including a Green Mountain Audubon Society walk where 20 participants attended; a North Branch Nature Center walk where 15 folks participated and saw 52 species in 2 hours; and a Williston library walk where 24 participants learned all about the birds at Catamount. On June 3, 2023 over 30 folks come out to the Audubon VT bird banding event and GMAS bird walk

Educational signage was installed including signs about duck nesting, nestwatch, the bobolink program, geology and the vernal pools.

The Catamount Outdoor Family Center has a license with the town forest that expires in October 2023. This partnership has been working well since the town acquired the forest in 2019. The CCF initiated license renewal discussions on behalf of the town and made several recommendations to Selectboard. The Town anticipates signing the new license in the fall of 2023.

At the Catamount Outdoor Family Center John Atkinson was appointed as the new Director. He brings a wealth of experience in outdoor recreation. The Center was delighted to bring the winter nighttime trails back into use. The Outdoor Family Center attends all CFC meetings to participate in management of the forest.

The 25-mile trail network within the 393-acre Catamount Community Forest is maintained by the non-profit Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC). Programs this season included the 24 weeks of race series for Mountain Biking, Trail Running, Dual Slalom, and Cyclocross; Summer Camps for mountain biking and nature exploration; Catamount Cycling Club; Winter Wanders Camp, SnowSchool, TRY ski and bike clinics and lessons, clinics and group guided outings for all offered sports and race series skills. Bird, forestry, fungi, invasive plant and bug, & tick talks/walks, Wilderness First Aid training location, trail work series in spring and fall. COFC expanded community partnerships and group offerings to include Vt Adaptive, Catamount Trail Association, Richard Tom Foundation, Burlington Parks and Recreation Waterfront, Leave No Trace, PrideRidesVT, ArtAdventureBox, Dealer.com, City Market, locals schools, colleges, small businesses, and more. Large events included a GMCX 2022, Halloween Spoktacular 2022, RUTFest 2022, 2023 Winter Fat Bike Rally with the Richard Tom Foundation, and a Spring Launch Party with VMBA.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the FY2023 CFC members: Hans Buehler, Danielle Doucette (Vice Chair), Jeff Fehrs, Mike Isham, Terry Marron (Chair), Reed Parker.