

# Catamount Community Forest Community Forest Plan

*Town of Williston  
Chittenden County, Vermont*

*September 2018*



**Submitted by:  
Town of Williston Selectboard**

Prepared by:  
**The Catamount Community Forest Management Plan Committee**  
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Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester; Kate Wanner, Trust for Public Land; Andrea Shortsleeve, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife

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**Special Thanks to**

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Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester  
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and the Catamount Community Forest Study Committee:  
Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Anthony Jordick, Barbara Evans, Benjamin  
King, Ben Norris, Jeff Dickinson, Jay Diaz, Kort Longenbach, Michael Clauss, Rita Dessau,  
Patrice Maloney, Steven Page, Terry Marr

## I. OWNERSHIP AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Easement Names:** Catamount Community Forest Conservation Easement

**Location:** Williston  
Chittenden County, Vermont

**Roads:** Governor Chittenden Rd.

**Landowner:** Town of Williston  
**Address:** Williston Town Offices  
7900 Williston Rd  
Williston, VT 05495  
**Contact:** Rick McGuire  
**Phone:** 802-878-0919  
**Email:** rmcguire@willistonvt.org

**Easement Co-Holder:** Vermont Land Trust  
**Address:** 226 Bridge Street  
Richmond VT 05477  
**Contact:** Cara Montgomery, Regional Stewardship Manager  
**Phone:** (802) 861-6406  
**Email:** cara@vlt.org

**Easement Co-Holder:** Vermont Housing and Conservation Board  
**Address:** 58 East State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05602  
**Contact:** Mark Martin  
**Phone:** (802) 828-5068  
**Email:** markm@vhcb.org

**Licensee:** Catamount Outdoor Family Center  
**Address:** 592 Governor Chittenden Rd  
**Contact:** Abbie Bowker  
**Phone:**  
**Email:** abbiebowker@gmail.com

## II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

### Introduction

This Community Forest Plan for the Catamount Community Forest is submitted on behalf of the Town of Williston, Vermont. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) helped the Town of Williston obtain 393 acres as a new municipal forest (hereafter “the Property”) in Williston, Vermont. The Catamount Community Forest is made up of 3 parcels: 92 acres owned by Jim and Lucy McCullough south of Governor Chittenden Road, as well as 284 acres owned by the McCulloughs and 17 acres owned by Steve and Debbie Page to the north of Governor Chittenden Road, as shown in Appendix A: Survey titled: “Plat of Lands of Lucy and Jim McCullough, LLC”. The Pages have generously agreed to donate a portion of their property to the project. These parcels include an extensive trail system built and maintained by the McCulloughs and the Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC) over the last 40 years.

This project was completed as part of the Trust for Public Land’s Community Forest Program and the Vermont Town Forest Project. Funding was provided by USFS Community Forest and Open Space Program, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Open Space Institute Community Forest Fund, The Nature Conservancy/Keurig Green Mountain, Conservation Alliance, the Town of Williston and many other foundations and private individual donors. A conservation easement was conveyed to Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to protect the Property from development and ensure it is open for public use in perpetuity.

Acquisition and conservation of this property is consistent with the Williston Town Plan (2016), and compatible with the following goals and objectives:

- sustain rural landscapes by requiring an open space pattern for subdivisions, conserving lands identified in Chapter 13 - Open Space and Working Landscapes through acquisitions or easements; and finding ways to help the owners of working lands continue their stewardship;
- invest in new facilities, including utilities, roads, schools, parks, and trails, as necessary, while managing the location and pace of development to ensure that growth does not outstrip the capacity of public facilities and services; and
- use regulatory and non-regulatory tools, including funding for the acquisition of development rights or land, to protect water quality, wildlife habitat, scenic views, and other natural and cultural resources.

The scenic vistas, recreational opportunities, timber production, wildlife habitat and water protection that this Community Forest provides are important assets to the Town.

In 1990, the Town established the Environmental Reserve Fund (ERF), supported through an annual allocation in the Town’s budget and used to match other funding sources for the acquisition of land or development rights. In 2013 the Town used GIS technology and scoring criteria to develop a prioritization matrix to identify and prioritize key areas for long-term protection through the use of the Town’s Environmental Reserve Fund. Parcels were evaluated on criteria including watershed protection, wildlife habitat, viewshed protection, desired trails and trail connections, agricultural soils, and proximity to other conserved parcels. Due to the

property's high scoring on nearly all criteria, it is ranked it as one of the Town's top priorities for conservation.

The Town of Williston will manage the Property as a municipal forest for wildlife habitat, timber harvesting and management, public recreation, education, and water quality protection. Protection of the land as a conserved Town Forest also ensures public access, safeguards drinking water resources, supports the local timber, recreation, and tourism economies, provides occasional timber revenue to the Town, and restores and protects connectivity through the conservation of a large, intact forested parcel that links to nearby conserved land. The property's extensive network of trails is a regional destination for mountain biking and other human-powered recreation, providing unique economic and health-related values to the people of Williston and surrounding communities.

The purpose of this Community Forest Plan is to identify known information relative to the Property, present the goals of the Town of Williston, and put forth prescriptions for management and conservation activities for the next ten (10) years. Completion of a Community Forest Plan is a requirement of the federal Community Forest and Open Space Program and the conservation easement held by VLT and VHCB. This plan shall be updated as needed, at least every ten years.

### **History**

The origins for Catamount stretch back to the late 1700's, when Vermont's first governor, Thomas Chittenden built the stately two-story brick house that has since become the home for the McCullough family. The house is listed by the Vermont Division for Historic Places and the national Register of Historic Places as the "Giles Chittenden Homestead".

From the late 18th century until the early 1900's the land was used for livestock operations such as sheep, dairy, cattle, and poultry. Crops were also cultivated as well as apple orchards. Portions of the forest were formerly harvested for fuel wood until the 1940's. The family operated a dairy farm from the homestead and on the land until the 1950's.

In 1979, Jim and Lucy McCullough opened the Catamount Outdoor Family Center for Nordic skiing. It was their shared vision to keep the family's farm and forest open for a multitude of annual visitors to enjoy, instead of building houses for only a few. They transitioned from traditional farmers to "farmers of fun." Since that time Catamount has grown to include summer season activities such as mountain biking, hiking, trail running and winter season activities of snowshoeing and sledding. Catamount also hosts numerous events, weekly races and an extensive summer camp program that currently serves over 400 campers each summer. The trail



network has grown as well and now includes a diverse variety of trails covering about 20 miles in total.

Besides making the property available for public recreation, the McCulloughs also have managed the property for conservation and wildlife. This won them the title of Vermont Tree Farmers of the Year in 1989. In 1990, through the Partners for Wildlife program of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the McCulloughs restored agriculturally drained wetlands, now visited by numerous migratory waterfowl. Their habitat management has also allowed threatened forest songbirds safe places to nest, so the public can continue to enjoy sights and sounds rapidly disappearing in Vermont.

In fall 2016, the McCulloughs connected with the Vermont Land Trust and the Trust for Public Land to discuss conservation options for their property. Meetings were subsequently convened with the Williston Conservation Commission (WCC) and the Williston Selectboard to gauge Town support for the project. Having secured initial support for the project from these two boards, the Trust for Public Land, with the town’s assistance, has led the effort to secure the funding and seek community support for the creation of the Town Forest.

On July 11, 2017, the Selectboard appointed a Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee, which includes representatives from the WCC, Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC), Williston Recreation Committee, and members of the community. During the course of the next year and a half, the Committee met once (sometimes twice) a month to develop a Community Forest Plan and hosted a series of public meetings (see below) to share information and solicit feedback for the Plan. The public input at these meetings demonstrated the strong town-wide support for the Catamount Community Forest.

**Public Outreach**

February 2, 2017	Public Meeting
May 6, 2017	Open House
August 10, 2017	Walk and Talk
December 9, 2017	Open House
February 10, 2018	Open House
March 5-6, 2018	Town Meeting information table

**Local and Regional Significance**

The most direct beneficiaries of the Catamount Community Forest will be the 9,400 citizens of Williston, and the 125,000 people in neighboring towns who live within a 20 minute drive of the property. As of 2016, approximately 20,000 people were visiting the property annually, who treasure this property for its trail network, historic and cultural features, and scenic views of Camel’s Hump and the Green Mountains.

**Local Significance**

➤ ***Recreational Opportunities***

Catamount not only offers close-to-home recreation for thousands of people, but also a place to engage with their community, and connect with nature. The trail system at Catamount has been well-loved for nearly 40 years. The 20 miles of trails throughout the Catamount network connect people to the landscape, local history, and each other by providing a place for year-round recreation. As a town forest, pedestrian access is now free for



everyone. Trails range from short, scenic hiking paths to technical mountain biking routes. In winter, up to 15 miles of groomed trails are open for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and fat biking. The Catamount Outdoor Family Center has developed popular summer children's camps, and environmental learning and conservation studies, all of which are planned to continue under town ownership. The trail network also connects to the Cross Vermont Trail and trails on the adjacent Talcott Forest owned by University of Vermont.

➤ ***Economic Development***

Recreation and tourism are recognized statewide as the fastest growing and cleanest forms of economic development. Outdoor recreation is an important industry in Vermont, annually generating \$5.5 billion in retail sales and services (accounting for 12% of gross state product), supporting 51,000 jobs, and creating \$505 million in state and local tax revenue.<sup>1</sup> Protection of the trail system located on this property, especially within ten minutes of the largest city in the State, will help to protect this vital industry and the culture of outdoor recreation that defines life in Vermont.

Other trail systems in Vermont have demonstrated benefits to the local economy. For example, the mountain bike trails at Blueberry Lake on Green Mountain National Forest bring in \$1.8 million annually to the Mad River Valley<sup>2</sup>. According to another 2016 report<sup>3</sup>, the 10,000 people that use the Catamount Trail each year spend more than \$500,000 annually in the communities that host the trail, and the 94,000 annual users of Kingdom Trails result in total annual spending of \$7.9 million.

A recent economic analysis of the property revealed that 37 percent of visits (7,400) come from visitors living outside Chittenden County who inject new money into the local economy. These new visitors are responsible for more than \$875,000 in total sales each year, which generate more than \$60,000 in sales tax and \$9,000 in income tax for the State of Vermont. The direct sales generated by new visitors to Chittenden County help

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<sup>1</sup> Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: Vermont.

<sup>2</sup> MRV Moves Active Transportation Plan, 2016. Available at [https://mrvmoves.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/mrv-active-transportation-plan-doc\\_final\\_opt.pdf](https://mrvmoves.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/mrv-active-transportation-plan-doc_final_opt.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Economic and Fiscal Impact Analysis of the Vermont Trails and Greenway Council Member Organizations. 2016. Available at [http://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Recreation/Learn\\_More/Library/Final%20Report-%20Impact%20Analysis%20-%20VT%20Trails%20and%20Greenways.pdf](http://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Recreation/Learn_More/Library/Final%20Report-%20Impact%20Analysis%20-%20VT%20Trails%20and%20Greenways.pdf)

support an estimated 14 jobs in the local economy, not including the five full-time positions created directly by the outdoor center.<sup>4</sup>

➤ ***Forest Management***

Forest management can continue on the property under the Town's ownership, which can support local resource-based jobs and provide periodic timber revenues to the Town. The Town will work with the Chittenden County Forester and COFC, with public input and review by the easement holders, to create a forest management plan that finds an appropriate balance between recreation, wildlife habitat, water quality protection and timber harvesting.

➤ ***Health Benefits***

Protection of the property contributes to the health of local and regional residents by providing a close-to-home destination for outdoor recreation. This acquisition nearly doubles the amount of publicly owned forestland in Williston. As the largest trail network in town, the Catamount Community Forest is essential to the long-term health of its residents. The property's trail network also provides unique health-related values to the people of northern Vermont and visitors to Burlington from all over New England, including opportunities for all ages and abilities. The trail network includes 2.5 miles open to wheelchairs in the summer and sit-skiing in the winter, offering opportunities to all abilities.



Having public land close to population centers is important not only to the physical and mental health of the community, but having protected areas within walking or biking distance reduces car travel, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the accidents and stress that are by-products of driving.

➤ ***Educational Uses***

Local high school cross-country ski teams practice and hold races on the property. Local elementary schools visit the property on field trips, and classes from University of Vermont have studied the property's ecology and natural resources. Green Mountain Audubon Society has held frequent birding field trips at Catamount for several years. The Town and COFC intend to expand educational opportunities in future programming.

Statewide Conservation Significance

Protection of this property's 29 acres of riparian areas and 7.8 acres of wetlands contributes to the State's goals to increase flood resiliency and decrease sedimentation in to Lake Champlain.

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, Kyle, M.P.S. Candidate. "An Economic Impact Analysis of the Proposed Catamount Community Forest in Williston, Vermont, SUNY-School of Environmental Science & Forestry, 2017.

Conservation of the property links together adjacent conservation lands, creating one of the largest protected forest blocks in town. According to Vermont Conservation Design (VT Fish & Wildlife, 2015), the Property is:

- part of priority areas within the Ecological Functional Landscape
- within a Priority Interior Forest Block
- Within a Highest Priority Surface Water and Riparian Area
- Within a Riparian Wildlife Connectivity Block
- overlaps with a Physical Landscape Diversity Block, which contains landscape features either rare or under-represented in other block types for an ecologically functional landscape.

The 2010 Vermont Forest Resources Plan identifies lands important in maintaining Vermont's statewide recreation trail network to be a key priority area for conservation. Forest-related recreation and forest management are central to the economy and way of life in Vermont. Seventy percent of Vermonters participate in non-mechanized outdoor recreation, supporting 35,000 jobs across Vermont and accounting for 12% of gross state product.

The Chittenden County Regional Plan (ECOS) (2016) also recognizes the importance of conserving natural lands, open space, ecological systems, wildlife habitats, and recreational opportunities. The Plan strongly supports efforts to maintain existing natural systems throughout the county, minimize fragmentation of habitats and maintain wildlife corridors. The Plan also calls for maintaining and improving access to valued scenic, recreation and historic resources for all residents and visitors.

#### *Vermont Town Forest Project*

In 2004, the Northern Forest Alliance and a wide ranging team of twenty public and private partners, including the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, The Trust for Public Land, and the University of Vermont, launched the Vermont Town Forest Project designed to create new town forests and improve stewardship of existing town forests. The Catamount Community Forest is another successful example of land conservation through local control and ownership.

#### *The Trust for Public Land's Community Forest Program*

The Catamount Community Forest project is an important component of TPL's Community Forest Program, an effort to reconnect communities to the forests that define and sustain them. The Trust for Public Land has helped establish or expand twenty-two community forests in northern New England, totaling nearly 30,000 acres.

#### National Conservation Significance

The Cross Vermont Trail, which spans the state, running east-west from the Connecticut River to Lake Champlain, passes through the Catamount Community Forest, along Governor Chittenden Road, a rural dirt road bisecting the property. The Cross Vermont Trail was designated as part of the Vermont Trails System in 1996 and was designated a National Recreation Trail in 2003.

The property is just a half a mile from the main stem of the Winooski River, a state focus area in America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Land conversion and poor agricultural and forestry

management practices negatively affect the health of the Winooski River, thus acquisition and conservation of the property will enhance the goals of the Winooski River Focus Area.

As Vermont deals with a changing climate, and more frequent, violent, and destructive storms, protection of our headwater streams and high- and mid-elevation forests are even more essential. Forestland conservation and maintenance of forest cover were identified as central strategies in increasing flood resiliency as part of the 2011-2012 America's Great Outdoors Initiative. The Catamount Community Forest acquisition limits future forest fragmentation, which is an extreme stressor in the Winooski River watershed given the high development pressure.

### **Purposes of the Conservation Easement**

*Please see appendix B for the full recorded copy of the Conservation Easement.*

The entire Catamount Community Forest is protected by a Conservation Easement co-held by Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. The Easement seeks to conserve managed forest, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty, protect water quality, encourage sustainable management of soil resources, and provide environmentally sustainable recreational opportunities to the public. This protection serves the natural communities of the forest, the forest industry, wildlife, and the people of Vermont.

The primary purposes of the easement are as follows:

1. To conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality and native flora and fauna on the Protected Property and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values as they exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future;
2. To provide for non-motorized, non-commercial recreational, educational and other appropriate community uses on the Protected Property;
3. To conserve open space values, and scenic resources associated with the Protected Property for present and future generations; and
4. To require that management of the Protected Property be guided by a public management planning process.

### **Management Plan required under the Conservation Easement**

The Conservation Easement requires the development of this Management Plan. The Management Plan shall:

1. Provide for the use and management of the Protected Property in a fashion which is consistent with and advances the Purposes of the (VHCB) Grant; and
2. At a minimum, the Management Plan shall include the provisions required under this Grant, identify actions necessary to accomplish the following and shall appropriately balance all the resource attributes of and human uses for the Protected Property, and shall:

- a. identify the objectives for the community forest;
- b. provide for the permitted uses as set forth in Section III of the Easement and reasonable regulation of those of such uses set forth in Section III(1) – (11) of the Easement, including identifying and addressing the management needs of those recreational uses that may need special or more intensive management focus;
- c. provide for public access and meaningful recreational links to private and public lands;
- d. include a forest management plan approved by Grantees in accordance with Section I(C) of the Easement, if the Grantor proposes to harvest timber or commercial non-timber forest products;
- e. provide a plan for road, sign, trail and sanitary facility use that has minimal impact on water quality and plant, wildlife and aquatic habitat resources and historic and cultural features;
- f. provide for the sustainable use of fish and wildlife resources;
- g. provide for the identification and protection of natural communities, plant, wildlife and aquatic habitat and other ecologically sensitive or important areas;
- h. provide for use by the University of Vermont and local school outdoor educational programs;
- i. provide for the construction and use of any minor recreational structures and any other structures permitted under this Grant;
- j. provide, as necessary, for any proposed use of the Vernal Pool Ecological Protection Zone, Wetland Protection Zone and Riparian Buffer Zone consistent with Sections V, VI and VII of the Easement;
- k. Include or allow for a license or management agreement approved by Grantees in accordance with Section III(10) of the Easement, if the Grantor proposes to have all or some of the permitted uses described in Section III conducted, operated or managed by a qualified holder or qualified organization or other non-profit entity; and
- l. Otherwise be consistent with this Grant.

### III. TOWN OBJECTIVES

The creation of the Catamount Community Forest is an effort by the Town to protect this land from development, put it into open public ownership, and manage it for timber, wildlife habitat, and public recreation and education. The Town of Williston values the complex suite of both monetary and non-monetary benefits that forests provide including timber revenues, non-timber

forest product revenues, tourism and recreation, water supply and water quality protection, carbon sequestration, open space protection, education, wildlife habitat protection, and a sense of community and increased civic pride.

### **Administration of the Catamount Community Forest**

In June 2017 the Williston Selectboard appointed members of the Catamount Community Forest Study Committee to develop this Management Plan. After the adoption of the Management Plan, the Selectboard will appoint a new Committee to assume responsibility for managing the Property and implementing the goals established by this Community Forest Plan, with assistance from the County Forester and COFC. The Williston Selectboard will have ultimate decision-making authority over the Property after receiving recommendations from the Catamount Forest Committee. The Catamount Forest Committee will handle all management decisions and will submit annual action plans and budgets to the Selectboard for approval. By agreement, Catamount Family Outdoor Center, Inc. (“COFC”) will continue to maintain the mountain bike and ski trails on the Catamount Community Forest, hold public events, races, camps and educational opportunities and continue to educate users about “leave no trace” ethics. The License Agreement between the COFC and the Town of Williston is provided as Appendix C to this plan. Chittenden County Forester will provide assistance and advice pertaining to forest management. Overall management will be done in accordance with the Conservation Easement and this Community Forest Plan approved by the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

### **General Purposes:**

- Preserve and conserve 383 acres of forested land and scenic and historic vistas, in perpetuity under Town ownership, for the enjoyment and education of the general public.
- Provide for the continuation of traditional forest uses including sustainable forest management and outdoor recreation.
- Protect and enhance wildlife habitats, rare and exemplary plants and natural communities, and the ecological processes that sustain the natural heritage of the Property.
- Preserve cultural and historic resources.
- Provide public pedestrian access on the Property which will allow the general public to hike, snowshoe, observe wildlife and participate in other low impact outdoor recreational activities.
- Provide for mountain biking and Nordic skiing on designated trails of the property.

### **Wildlife Habitat and Natural Resource Goals:**

- Maintain and protect native biodiversity and ecological integrity.
- Conserve rare and exemplary natural communities.
- Preserve and conserve the quality and quantity of ground water and surface water.
- Protect or enhance water quality, forested and non-forested wetlands and aquatic habitats.
- Protect and enhance a variety of habitats for native species through timber management.
- Provide a healthy mix of natural communities throughout the Property.
- Contain the current populations of invasive species present on property, and prevent further infestation from invasive species in the future.

- Manage to each of the wildlife habitat and natural resources goals by following established current best practices as defined by pertinent State, Federal, and private entities.

### **Recreation, Educational and Cultural Goals:**

- Promote and encourage traditional forest uses including low-impact outdoor recreation from novice to expert skill levels for residents and visitors.
- Construct and maintain recreational trails using sustainable trail management practices that protect soil, water and ecological resources.
- Maintain the tradition of public forested land available for low-impact recreation.
- Educate the citizens of the region about natural communities, biodiversity, the working forest, and good stewardship practices.
- Maintain parking facilities for access to the Catamount Community Forest.
- Manage any recreational uses in accord with the wildlife and natural resource goals of the Community Forest Plan.

### **Forest Management Goals (all goals may not be applicable to all sections of the property)**

- To maintain a healthy and productive forest
- To maintain and encourage a diversity of native species, of all taxa
- To maintain a structurally complex forest
- To protect sensitive natural resources, including water resources, significant natural communities and rare, threatened and endangered species
- To manage for the long-term health of the forest
- To protect the forest from the invasion of exotic, invasive species
- To use -timber harvesting, when appropriate, to advance the above-listed objectives
- To strike an equitable balance between recreational and forest management objectives that does not jeopardize our adherence to any of the objectives listed above

### **Consistency with Regulations**

All activities and uses of the community forest shall be in conformance with local, state and federal regulations. Any new proposed use or infrastructure on the property will require that the Town and COFC obtain all necessary local, state and federal permits, or otherwise document that the proposed activity, use or infrastructure is in conformance with local, state and federal regulations.

### **Local Regulations**

Uses and activities on the community forest are regulated by the Williston Development Bylaw, specifically in Chapter 31 *Agricultural/Rural Residential Zoning District*. The uses described under this Management Plan are in conformance with Williston's zoning regulations.

The Town may wish to consider the development of a Specific Plan for the Catamount Community Forest, to ensure that existing and proposed uses are permitted through the proper channels and are consistent with local regulations. A specific plan is a set of amendments to the town's Comprehensive Plan and/or the Williston Development Bylaw that has been developed by one or more landowners working with the Planning Commission and the public, and which

must result in a substantial public benefit. Specific Plans are described in detail in Chapter 9 of the Williston Development Bylaw.

A Specific Plan for Catamount should incorporate existing as well as contemplated future uses of the property – for example, the construction of a building used for indoor recreation or education. Whether or not a Specific Plan has been adopted, proposed new infrastructure, uses or activities at Catamount are required to obtain permits and are subject to site plan approval by the Williston Development Review Board and/or the Zoning Administrator.

Special events held at Catamount by the Town, the Catamount Outdoor Family Center or other groups are subject to the Town's Special Events Ordinance and will require obtaining a Special Events Permit. Applications must be submitted to the Town Planning Office at least 30 days prior to any scheduled events.

### State Regulations

The Catamount Community Forest is subject to an existing Act 250 Land Use permit and associated amendments. Future improvements on the property may require an Act 250 permit amendment as best determined by the District 4 Environmental Commission. A Project Review Sheet should be requested from the District 4 Office when planning future improvements to help determine what state regulatory permits will be required.

### Federal Regulations

Because the acquisition of the Catamount Community Forest was partially funded through the US Forest Service Open Space and Community Forest Program, the Town must comply with perpetual requirements of the Community Forest Program, as follows:

- Maintain the community forest consistent with the program and application purposes. If a grant recipient sells or converts the acquired community forest to nonforest uses or a use inconsistent with the purposes of the CFP, the grant recipient shall:
  - Pay the United States an amount equal to the current sale price or the current appraised value of the parcel, whichever is greater; and
  - Not be eligible for additional grants under the CFP.
- Provide appropriate public access.
- Submit every 5 years a self-certifying statement that the property has not been sold or converted to non-forest uses.
- Be subject to a spot check conducted to verify that Community Forest has not been sold or converted to non-forest uses.
- Periodically review and update the Community Forest Plan as necessary.

Additionally, the administration of the Community Forest must comply with federal Civil Rights laws. This means that the Town must provide equal opportunity for all people to participate in the programs and activities offered at the Community Forest, and must not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (in educational programs or activities), age, and disability. Also, the Town must not retaliate in any manner against a person who files a complaint or opposes any unlawful or discriminatory practice. These requirements are outlined in Appendix D: *Complying with Civil Rights Requirements: Your Responsibilities as a Partner with the Forest Service*.

Additional federal regulations such as National Environmental Policy Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act will apply to future projects on the Community Forest funded through federal sources.

Finally, projects within or in close proximity to Class 1, 2 or 3 wetlands are under jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers and may require additional permitting.

## IV: INFRASTRUCTURE (see also Baseline Documentation Report)

### **General Topographic Description**

The Catamount Community Forest is located along both sides of Governor Chittenden Road in Williston (see Map A). Williston is the fastest growing town in Chittenden County, which is the most heavily urbanized and most populous region of Vermont, containing over a quarter of the state's population. Set in the foothills of the Green Mountains and having evolved from a working farm, the Property's 393 acres encompass a diverse landscape including open meadows and forested ridges, wetlands and wildlife habitats, as well as an outstanding combination of scenic, natural and economic resources. The Property is located approximately two miles northeast of the Williston village center, and 10 miles from the center of Burlington, Vermont's largest city.

Topography on the property ranges from fairly flat in the western portion to steep slopes in the eastern portion of the property around Indian Lookout (see Map B). The land was previously used for agriculture as evidenced by stone walls, barbed wire, rock piles, and pioneer stands. Access throughout the property is good with a network of recreational and skid trails throughout.

### **Access**

Pedestrian access to the Property is via Governor Chittenden Rd. There is a large gravel parking lot that services 90 cars. The parking lot is in serviceable condition, but drainage could be improved by the addition of gravel.<sup>5</sup> The parking lot is not currently under jurisdiction of a State stormwater permit, however, such a permit would be required if the impervious surface on the property increased by greater than 5,000 square feet **and** if no best management practices such as porous pavement or other infiltration techniques were employed.<sup>6</sup> The Town may wish to consider improvements such as porous pavement, or the addition of landscaped islands to more clearly delineate parking spaces and integrate stormwater management. From the parking lot there is direct access to the trails on the north side of Governor Chittenden Rd, and a pedestrian easement provides access to the trails on the south side of the road. After conveyance of the property to the town, a trail will be developed through this easement.

### **Structures**

Adjacent to the parking lot is a new 10x12 shed structure currently used for storage, as well as ticket sales during the summer months. With a small propane heater, this structure could serve as a warming hut for cross-country skiers. A 50 ft by 20 ft barn to the east of the shed is used for storage of maintenance equipment. The COFC ticket sales office, camps, and bike and ski rental

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Bruce Hoar, Williston's Director of Public Works.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with James Sherrard, Williston's Stormwater Coordinator.

has operated out of a structure on the south side of the road attached to the McCullough residence, which is not part of the Catamount Community Forest Property. For the short term, The COFC will continue to lease this space from the McCulloughs for support of their operations. For the long term, a plan is being developed to construct a building either within or adjacent to the Community Forest, to support the COFC's operations. The design and costs of such a building need to be determined. Plans will be sent to VLT, when complete, for review and approval. The property also contains two small sheds in the forest interior, which Haunted Forest has used as part of its outdoor theatre events. These structures will be removed from the property if and when The Haunted Forest ceases to operate. All structures within the Catamount Community Forest will be maintained in a safe and serviceable condition. Under the Corridor Management Agreement, the COFC is responsible for the maintenance of all structures it uses on the property. At present, the ticket kiosk and forest sheds require only periodic minor maintenance such as painting/staining. The barn, considered a historic structure, will require more extensive maintenance over time. The most cost effective way to address this is to complete repairs to the various components (roof, siding, framing, foundation) incrementally over time utilizing volunteer labor, grants and donated materials where possible.

### Trails

The 20-mile trail network on the property, shown on Maps C and D, has been built and maintained by the landowners and the non-profit Catamount Outdoor Family Center (COFC). The trail network includes 13.5 miles of multiuse trails, 6.5 miles of single-track for mountain biking, and 2.5 miles of trail open to wheelchairs in the summer and sit-skiing in the winter.



Trails have been located to minimize effects on streams and ponds. No additional trails are planned at this time, except for a pedestrian trail from Governor Chittenden Rd south to the Community Forest, through the easement granted by the McCulloughs as part of the conveyance of the Community Forest to the town. Any new trails will need to be constructed using sustainable design, construction and management practices, and will require the approval of the Town, the Vermont Land Trust and VHCB. Additionally, new trails must be in conformance with all local, state and federal regulations. With approval, trails may be rerouted from their current location to decrease erosion and avoid hazards, wetlands, riparian areas or other sensitive natural features, or to create a larger buffer between trails and adjacent private land.

By agreement with the Town, the COFC will continue the maintenance and operation of groomed cross-country ski and mountain biking trails, and fees will be charged to use these facilities commensurate with maintenance expenses. However, dispersed pedestrian public access is free, in accordance with grant funding from the federal Community Forest Program and

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. For more information pertaining to trail usage and fees, see the Recreation section of this Plan.

In fall 2017 the Town contracted with a group of students enrolled in the UVM Rubenstein School of Natural Resources to complete an inventory of trail structures, trail conditions and need for improvements. The resulting inventory, included in Appendix E, identifies over 70 points on the trail system that are trail features, points of interest, or places where improvements are recommended. The recommended improvements range from minor drainage improvements to additional signage to trail bridge replacements. Notably, there are seven (7) state-mapped stream crossings within the 20-mile trail network that are recommended for upgrading or replacing. The Town is responsible for the initial upgrade of these identified structures; once upgraded, the COFC is thereafter responsible for maintaining these crossings in good condition.

Trail maintenance objectives include:

- ensuring safe conditions for a variety of uses, including mountain biking and passive recreation;
- minimizing erosion and runoff;
- preventing the spread of invasive plants along trails and roads, and
- minimizing disruption of wildlife habitat.

To achieve these objectives, the following trail Best Management Practices shall be followed:

- Trail construction and maintenance in the Catamount Community Forest will have erosion control as a high priority.
- Trails will adhere to relevant trail and recreational standards and the best available professional judgment to protect soils, water quality, and other natural resources; for example, rotating race courses on a regular basis.
- Trail conditions causing degradation to an aquatic habitat must be remediated by installing drainage features, closing or rerouting.
- Stream crossings will be designed so as not to impede stream function and to avoid impacting the natural plant communities in the riparian zone.
- Size crossing structures according to the VT DEC River Management Program guidelines and Guidelines for the Design of Stream/Road Crossings for the Passage of Aquatic Organisms in Vermont (VT DFW) and/or consult with the District Stream Alteration Engineer and District Fisheries Biologist for sizing, placement, and permitting requirements.
- Monitor the condition of the Three Rivers trail throughout the year and restrict recreational access during wet periods as necessary.
- Concentrate recreational use on existing trails and limit the creation of new trails except as needed to 1) bypass wet, steep, ecologically sensitive or otherwise unsuitable stretches of existing trails, 2) connect trails segments interrupted by acts of nature or forest management activities, 3) connect to trails on adjacent land, or 4) allow restoration of highly degraded trails.
- There will be on-going collaboration between the town, COFC and any other user groups deemed responsible to use and maintain the trail system.

**Signage**

There is currently a large **Catamount Outdoor Family Center** sign at the parking lot entrance, additional signage posted at the ticket kiosk, and multiple directional signs along the trail system. Due to the complexity of the trail network and numerous unsigned intersections, there is a tendency for people to get lost on the trails. To address this, the COFC is currently working with a UVM Environmental Problem Solving class to develop a plan for improved signage on the trail network, which will be implemented in summer 2018.

The Town’s acquisition of the property as the new Catamount Community Forest, along with the integration of free pedestrian access and other uses, will necessitate new signage to inform and educate visitors to the property about trail etiquette and other rules and regulations governing the integration of different uses, to minimize conflicts between different user groups.

**Boundary Lines**

The Catamount Community Forest boundaries have been surveyed and will be marked as soon as possible after conveyance to the Town, to avoid inadvertent trespass on adjacent private properties. With landowner permission, trails may connect and continue on to private land. The boundaries will be periodically walked and remarked as needed.

**Costs of Infrastructure Maintenance and Improvements**

The table below summarizes the estimated approximate costs of infrastructure maintenance and recommended improvements within the Catamount Community Forest. The costs are for materials only, and assume that labor will be done by the COFC or town staff with volunteer assistance.

<b>Maintenance or Improvement</b>	<b>Responsible Party</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Parking lot additional gravel (5 year intervals)	Town	\$12,000
Parking lot stormwater improvements	Town	TBD
Ticket kiosk and forest sheds maintenance	COFC	\$300 annually
Sheep barn maintenance	COFC/Town	\$2,000 annually
Trail maintenance	COFC	\$12,000 annually
New access trail from Gov Chit Rd	Town	\$500 initially
Stream crossing structure upgrades	Town	\$5,000 initially
Signage - general	Town	\$2,000 initially
Signage – trail network	COFC	\$1,000 initially, \$250 annually
Boundary posting	Town	\$300 initially
New building	TBD, could be shared cost	TBD

Some costs, for example the crossing structure upgrades, signage and boundary posting, are relatively minor and could be financed through the annual Conservation Trails budget. Other costs are more substantial and could be financed over time through the Capital Budget and/or grant funding. The parking lot stormwater improvements, though not required, could utilize green infrastructure techniques like bioswales and infiltration basins to capture runoff. Several State grant sources are available to fund this type of project.

## V. FEATURES OF ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE<sup>7</sup>

### **Geology, Topography and Soils**

The Catamount Community Forest occupies nearly 400 acres of field, forest, wetland, and stream on both sides of Governor Chittenden Rd. in Williston. Much of the acreage is on flat or gently sloping land that drops dramatically off to the north, east, and south before reaching the Winooski River valley below. Catamount's elevations range from a high point of about 780' on the ridge near its eastern boundary, to about 420' in a northeastern spur, in a steep-sided ravine that winds down to the Winooski floodplain. The surficial geological deposits in this area, many of which are postglacial in origin, help one understand the distribution of natural communities, wetlands, and other natural features here. Beginning about 13,500 years ago, as the Wisconsin ice sheet slowly retreated northward, Glacial Lake Vermont formed from its meltwater, inundating elevations below 600 feet throughout the Champlain Valley. The lake later receded and a smaller saltwater body, the Champlain Sea, filled the valley to an elevation of about 320'. As the lake level dropped, the Winooski River, cutting a new channel through recent lacustrine deposits, produced a large delta with sands and gravels as well as plumes of finer materials: fine sand, silt, and clay.

Much of the Catamount property lay beneath Lake Vermont's waters, with two islands emerging: the eastern ridge, which is the site of today's 'Indian Lookout' and trail, and the wooded hilltop near the southern boundary, south of Governor Chittenden Rd. Both of these former islands are characterized by dense glacial till soils and bedrock outcrops, while the lower areas of the property retain sediments deposited by water. An area of wave-washed till sits along the southwestern property boundary, recalling the land's lakeshore era. During the Champlain Sea period, the entire property was above the water, and was in fact part of the Winooski River delta for a time, as evidenced by the sandy soils in its northwestern portion ('Sandman's' trail). Catamount now sits high above the river's current elevation of about 300' as it winds along the Williston border (less than a mile away), but one could at one time walk from there across the Winooski valley to Jericho on fairly flat ground. The till islands, both of which are associated with exposed bedrock, would have presented barriers to the Winooski's postglacial meandering and caused it to deposit sediment differently. Today, silt loams and other fine hydric soils occur 'downstream' of these rocky islands when considering the course of the ancient river, while sandy loams and loamy sands are more common in the northwestern deltaic area. A spur of bedrock ledge emerges in the western 'sandy' section of the property and may be associated with the formation of wetland areas nearby. Surficial geology is depicted in Map F.

### **Natural Communities**

Approximately 40 acres (10%) of Catamount is comprised of open hay fields. An additional 55 acres (14%) is currently early successional habitat, including grasslands, shrublands – notably those within the power line right-of-ways, young forest and old Christmas tree plots. The other 288 acres (75%) is a mosaic of forested natural communities that include northern hardwood, white pine, hemlock, red oak mixed with northern hardwood, and transition hardwoods. Catamount contains at least seven different natural communities and is an excellent example of a multiple-use working Vermont landscape.

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<sup>7</sup> This section was derived from *Ecological Report: Catamount Family Center, Williston*, Allaire Diamond, Vermont Land Trust Conservation Ecologist, 2017.

In April 2017, Vermont Land Trust Ecologist Allaire Diamond conducted a rapid field survey for the purposes of identifying features of ecological significance, shown in Map G - Natural Features Map. The following summarizes her observations. A more comprehensive natural resources inventory including a delineation of ecological community types should be completed sometime during the first few years of town ownership.

Hemlock and hemlock-hardwood forest dominate the sandy area in the northwestern part of the property, interspersed with patches of white pine that may be legacies of historic clearing or agricultural use. This part of the property is distinctive in its topography: flat to gently rolling terrain is dramatically fissured by steep-sided ravines carved by small, sometimes intermittent streams in easily erodible soil. Several small wetlands and vernal pools occur northwest of the bedrock spur. Hemlock, yellow birch, red maple, and white pine form the overstory around these wetlands, while spiraea, winterberry holly, cinnamon fern, and sensitive fern fill the understory and herbaceous layers. In the highest-quality pool, 39 wood frog egg masses were noted on a mid-April visit. The hydric nature of the soils here means that heavy equipment can have a lasting effect: some historic ruts have altered the hydrology of one of the smaller vernal pools, causing water to flow into the rut and form a tiny, deep pool in it. Though spotted salamander spermatophores were noted in this rut-pool, it is low-quality breeding habitat for these animals. However, hydric soils occur in a mosaic fashion, with well-drained and sandy areas nearby presenting easier routes for travel. In the northwestern corner, a wetland area with vernal pool characteristics extends off the property, and had no amphibian sign on the spring visit. Near the western bedrock ridge, a 0.9-acre Hemlock-Balsam Fir-Black Ash Seepage Swamp sits in a gentle depression, characterized by well-developed hummock-hollow microtopography, and gives rise to an intermittent stream that forms the head of one of the aforementioned ravines.

The north-central portion of the property, below the Indian Lookout ridge, is a gently-sloping hardwood forest with abundant seeps, wet organic soils, and ephemeral channels. Bitternut hickory, white ash, red maple, American basswood, eastern hophornbeam, and musclewood are common overstory and midstory species here, while sensitive fern, foamflower, and mosses... occur in the gentle hollows. Trails and logging access roads have areas of wet, mucky soils that need continual maintenance for use. The southern part of this forested section, close to the power line, has gently sloping pockets of early-successional forest dominated by invasive buckthorn, honeysuckle, and barberry, on wet soils crossed by ephemeral streams. South of and parallel to the power line is a chain of wetlands in historic, recovering pasture and shrubland, culminating in a pond near the western boundary retained by an historic beaver dam. Wetland types associated with this sprawling complex include areas of cattail marsh, shallow emergent marsh, and shrubby swamp areas with willows, gray dogwood, speckled alder, and spiraea. Historic ditching appears to continue its hydrological impact on the property, with linear wet swales running north from Governor Chittenden Rd. toward this open-shrub complex. Parts of this area were cow pasture through at least the late 1970s.

The ridge rising to Indian Lookout, covered with glacial till that is in areas droughty or shallow to bedrock, is forested with Mesic Maple-Ash-Hickory-Oak Forest. Bitternut hickory, red oak, eastern hemlock, white ash, hophornbeam, and red maple are common overstory species. Some small areas on the ridges may be better described as Dry Oak-Hickory-Hophornbeam Forest. South of Governor Chittenden Rd., a constructed pond drains northeast through an open wetland

swale near the eastern corner facing the road. In the southeastern corner, a stream emerges in hemlock forest and flows south off the property.

## VI. UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT

### Overview

Williston is located at a spatial crossroad for wildlife. To the east lies relatively intact forest habitat along the foothills of the Green Mountains – a reservoir of animal populations, such as moose and bear. To the west is situated the largest developed area in Vermont. The *Assessment of Wildlife Habitat in Williston, VT* (University of Vermont SAL, 2005) identifies seven wildlife habitat “units” – blocks of land characterized by relatively low development densities - that comprise functional habitat for many identified wildlife species. The Catamount Community Forest is a core component of one of these identified large, diverse wildlife units which form one of the largest contiguous blocks of forested habitat in Williston. Additionally, a portion of the property is located in one of 66 “Biodiversity Hotspots” designated by the Vermont Biodiversity Project.

The Vermont Conservation Design (2015), a landscape-level conservation prioritization from Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, considers the forested portions of Catamount to be part of a ‘Priority Interior Forest Block’ providing critical ecological function on a statewide level. The wetland areas are recognized by Vermont Conservation Design for providing riparian wildlife connectivity and physical landscape diversity. According to Vermont Fish & Wildlife, the Property contains 84 acres of a 714-acre deer wintering habitat, one of the largest wintering areas in the increasingly fragmented towns surrounding Burlington. Significant Wildlife Habitat is shown on Map H.

Green Mountain Audubon Society named the Catamount Family Center an “Important Bird Education Site.” They have documented over 136 species of birds on the property, including the state-endangered bald eagle and 24 Species of Greatest Conservation Need, according to Vermont Wildlife Action Plan (2005, updated 2015). GMAS has also documented successful breeding at Catamount for 53 species of birds. According to Audubon Vermont’s Forest Bird Habitat Assessment, the mix of mature softwood and hardwoods supports a great diversity of bird species, including Wood Thrush, Black-Throated Blue Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Scarlet Tanager and Blue-Headed Vireo—all species in decline.

The higher elevations on the property attract a large variety of migrating warblers and other songbirds, especially during spring.” The property is also within a Focus Area of Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, one of the most important area for migratory bird habitats. There are two ponds on the property where Canada Goose and Mallard often nest, and where Pied-billed Grebe, Green and Great Blue Heron can be seen. The fields on the south side provide excellent habitat for grassland species such as Chestnut-sided Warbler, American Woodcock, Savannah Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark and Field Sparrow. Prior to the commencement of seasonal mowing, Bobolink nesting was very successful. If mowing was timed so as not to occur during the nesting season, Bobolinks might resume breeding here.

## Objectives

- To conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality and native flora and fauna on the Protected Property and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values as they exist today and as they may evolve in the future.
- Provide and maintain high quality amphibian habitat, including critical breeding habitat, by promoting and maintaining high levels of shade and coarse woody debris.
- Maintain native plant communities along streams, wetlands and vernal pools.
- Maintain forest connectivity between upland habitats and aquatic habitats.

## Management Guidelines

### Forests

The Catamount forest has benefited from an active forest management plan intended to optimize the landscape for wildlife. This practice will be continued under the guidelines of a new Forest Management Plan drafted by the Chittenden County Forester and approved by VLT. Audubon Vermont completed a systematic assessment of the Catamount forest focused mainly on the habitat requirements of forest birds in 2009-2010 (see Appendix G). This assessment should be updated after the property transfer is completed. Audubon's recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- Where not hazardous to recreational trail use, retain snags, dead or dying trees, and fallen timber.
- Encourage the development of understory trees and shrubs.
- Control invasive species.
- Replace Christmas tree plantation with native forest over time.
- Limit active management activities during the breeding season (mid-April through July). Logging should be avoided during this time.
- Minimize wide trail openings into the forest.
- Maintain a soft edge between fields and forest.

### Deer Wintering Area

- With the assistance of a qualified wildlife biologist, monitor the deer wintering area beginning winter 2018-2019 to assess the level of usage by deer, in order to inform future management.
- The area north of the tributaries will remain as is, with no winter trails.

### Shrublands

About 15 acres of early successional habitat/shrubland at Catamount is included in the VELCO power line that cuts through the property. Recently, managed power line habitat has been recognized as an important resource for breeding birds of conservation concern in Vermont such as Golden-winged Warblers, Brown Thrashers, Field Sparrows, and Eastern Towhee. VELCO has developed management guidelines that conform to best practices for protecting wildlife in the habitats they maintain. These guidelines should be followed at Catamount.

The GMAS and Audubon Vermont have not systematically surveyed the power line habitat at Catamount for species of conservation concern. A monitoring survey focused on this habitat should be conducted during the breeding season in 2018 and beyond in conjunction with Audubon Vermont's VELCO survey program.

### Grasslands

- Mowing the field southeast of the skating pond will be avoided from May 15 to August 15 to encourage bobolink and other grassland bird nesting habitat.
- A reroute of the through trails in this field will be implemented in consultation with Green Mountain Audubon Society.
- Continue to monitor the fields to assess usage by bobolinks and other grassland birds to inform future management.
- In the event that there is no longer an active hay harvesting program at Catamount, all fields should be mowed or brush-hogged once a year in the autumn.

## VII. WETLAND AND RIPARIAN WILDLIFE

Vermont Agency of Natural Resource's major focus to conserve riparian corridors to enhance flood resiliency in the Winooski River Watershed and across Vermont, is aided by protection of the 29 acres of riparian areas and nearly a mile of headwater streams on the property. According to the *2012 Winooski River Basin Water Quality Management Plan*, the water quality problems in this basin tend to be associated with decreasing amounts of natural land cover. Land conversion and poor forestry management practices negatively affect the health of the Winooski River, and thus, Lake Champlain.

### Rivers and Streams

The Catamount Community Forest is situated in the Winooski River watershed. The Property contains nearly a mile of headwater streams and 29 acres of riparian areas, according to GIS analysis of the state hydrology data. Areas west of Goose hill and south of the powerline drain southwest into Allen Brook, which joins the Winooski River just east of the Burlington airport. All other areas drain east and north directly into the Winooski River.

The property is characterized by a number of ephemeral streams and a few more year-round streams (see Map E). The persistent streams are found in lower lying, poorly drained areas and are associated with the Property's wetland communities. The Conservation Easement establishes protection of these streams through a Riparian Buffer Zone, shown in Appendix B, Exhibit A.

### **Wetlands**

A wetland restoration project at Catamount was completed in the 1990's, resulting in a wetland complex of three ponds running east-west in the center of the property as well as the small marsh just south of Governor Chittenden Road, previously described in the Natural Communities section.

The outflow from these wetlands enters the Winooski River a short distance from the Catamount boundary and ultimately flows into Lake Champlain. Wood Ducks, Canada Geese, and Mallards are confirmed breeders in these wetlands. Nesting American Woodcock have been identified in this wetland, as well. Great Blue Herons and Green Herons are regular residents of the cattail marshes. Pond and streamside buffers should be retained to protect water quality in these wetlands and provide potential nesting sites for marshland birds.



The Conservation Easement establishes protection of wetlands through a Wetland Protection Zone, shown in Appendix B, Exhibit A.

### **Vernal Pools**

There are several vernal pools identified on the Property, as shown on Map G: Natural Features Map. Vernal pools are essential habitat for at least one life history stage of three varieties of salamanders; Jefferson's, spotted and blue spotted, all Species of Greatest Conservation Need, according to the Vermont Wildlife Action Plan (2015).

Woodland vernal pools are not protected under state or federal wetland legislation. Their occurrence at Catamount demonstrates effective conservation provided by keeping the area undeveloped. The Conservation Easement establishes protection of the highest quality vernal pool through a Vernal Pool Ecological Protection Zone (EPZ), shown in Appendix B, Exhibit A. There is an existing trail that passes through the EPZ Secondary Zone, a 500-foot buffer around the pool. When the pools are active, from March through April and September through October, the trail adjacent to the pool will be closed. No new trails will be constructed within 100 feet of the pool.

### **Objectives**

- Preserve and restore the natural value of streams, wetlands and vernal pools. Maintain and improve the natural functioning of these aquatic environments and habitats by restricting human impact on these aquatic environments.
- Allow stream channels to continue to adjust (migrate, erode, deposit sediment, etc.) in order to reach equilibrium conditions (slope, channel dimensions) over the long term through a passive management approach.
- Reduce erosion hazards by allowing streams to maintain natural (equilibrium) form and thereby reduce water speeds during high flows.

- Maintain native plant communities along streams, wetlands and vernal pools.
- Maintain forest connectivity between upland habitats and aquatic habitats.
- Protect the water quality of the streams and their tributaries.
- Conserve, protect and/or restore wetlands.
- Conserve and protect vernal pools.

## **Management Guidelines**

### **Streams**

- Any management or use of the RBZ shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect soil integrity and minimize erosion, shall incorporate up-to-date ecological knowledge and management practices, and shall be consistent with the principal goal detailed above.
- Agricultural activities (including without limitation the grazing or pasturing of animals) are not allowed within the RBZ.
- Forest management activities within the RBZ should be avoided.
- The development of new trails or roads within the RBZ, other than perpendicular crossings, is not permitted.
- Existing trails within the RBZ should be rerouted where feasible.
- Size crossing structures according to the VT DEC River Management Program guidelines and Guidelines for the Design of Stream/Road Crossings for the Passage of Aquatic Organisms in Vermont (VT DFW) and/or consult with the District Stream Alteration Engineer and District Fisheries Biologist for sizing, placement, and permitting requirements.

### **Wetlands**

- All management activities, including without limitation forest management and ecological management, shall focus on the goals of a) maintaining or restoring soil integrity, natural hydrology, and water quality, and b) maintaining the natural structure and species composition of the natural communities present or communities that may develop naturally over time, as informed by the best current ecological science.
- Agricultural activities (including without limitation the grazing or pasturing of animals) are not allowed within the WPZ.
- The development of new trails or roads within the WBZ, other than perpendicular crossings, is not permitted.
- Existing trails within the WBZ should be rerouted where feasible.

### **Vernal Pools**

- Vernal pools will be protected with a 100-foot buffer (Ecological Protection Zone, or EPZ Primary Zone) to create a 'No Disturbance' zone. Within this zone, there will be no trail construction or machinery allowed.
- Control of exotic species and activities that enhance amphibian habitat may be permitted within the EPZ Primary Zone only with written approval from Vermont Land Trust.
- Within 600 feet of vernal pools (the EPZ Secondary Zone), ground disturbance will be avoided as much as possible during times of amphibian movement. Trail maintenance or new construction that would alter the amount of water held in the pool or change the runoff into the pool will be avoided.
  - Bridges would be acceptable to avoid any impacts to amphibians

- Timber harvest is permitted in the EPZ Secondary Zone, but amphibian habitat needs such as coarse woody debris and shade must be considered. The forest management plan must state specific measures to protect and enhance amphibian habitat.

## VIII. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The origins for Catamount stretch back to the late 1700s, when Vermont's first governor, Thomas Chittenden built the stately two-story brick house that has since become the home for the McCullough family. The house is the oldest standing house in Williston and listed by the Vermont Division for Historic Places and the national Register of Historic Places as the "Giles Chittenden Homestead." The homestead will continue to be owned privately, but surrounded by the community forest, thus helping to protect the original character and open land around this historic treasure.

Giles Chittenden settled the land that is now Catamount Family Center in the late 18th century. Farming activity was the dominant force shaping the landscape for the next two centuries up to the 1970's, when the McCulloughs opened the center as a recreation facility.

The landscape retains many indicators of its early agricultural heritage including stone walls and regenerating fields. On the northeast end of the property an historic vista, known as "Indian Lookout", has panoramic views over the Winooski Valley to the east as far as Camel's Hump and Mount Mansfield, the two highest and most scenic peaks in the state. This may have prehistoric significance, hypothesized to be an area where Native Americans would watch the "traffic" on the river. Its name and location indicates cultural importance to Native Americans in the region.

The Vermont Division of Historic Preservation (VDHP) recently surveyed the property as part of Act 250 review of the subdivision of the McCullough's land holdings prior to the Town's acquisition of the Community Forest. VDHP noted the potential presence of archaeological sites along the north side of Governor Chittenden Rd, and requested they have the opportunity to review and comment on any future modifications to the property. This would include construction of new trails, water or wastewater systems, or any other activity involving excavation or ground disturbance.

### Objectives

- Maintain and preserve the cultural resources on the property
- Avoid disturbance or negative impacts to the cultural resources on the property
- Inform and educate visitors about the cultural resources and history of the property

### Management Guidelines

- Inventory and map the cultural and historic features on the property, including stone walls, cellar holes, historic structures, and other landmarks.
- Develop interpretive materials to help inform and educate visitors about the cultural resources on the property
- Prior to implementing trail or structure improvements that involve significant ground disturbance, as requested by VDHP, an archaeological resource assessment will be conducted by a qualified archaeologist, to determine areas of archaeological sensitivity

- Avoid or limit ground disturbance in archaeologically sensitive areas
- Limit timber management activities to periods when the ground is frozen in order to avoid disturbance

## IX. RECREATION AND EDUCATION

Outdoor recreation is very important to the quality of life of Williston's residents and to the region's tourist economy (2016-2024 Williston Town Plan). The mission statement of the Recreation and Parks Department reflects this: "To enhance the lives of our citizens and visitors, by providing a variety of leisure opportunities that are safe and enjoyable, and in maintaining the parks so they are safe and physically attractive, while preserving and enhancing the natural resources".

Trails throughout the Catamount Community Forest connect people to the landscape, to the local history of Williston, and to each other, by providing a place for year-round recreation and cultural education. Due to its proximity to residential areas and local schools, the Catamount Community Forest is easily accessible to a large number of residents for recreation and draws visitors from around northern Vermont, New England, and beyond.



Recreation and recreation management must be guided by the permitted and restricted uses set forth in the conservation easement (Appendix B) and also should adhere to several other guiding principles. Public access for passive, non-commercial recreation is protected under the conservation easement, provided it does not conflict with the other purposes of the Easement. Public access will benefit the local and regional tourist economy, provide educational and cultural opportunities, and provide health benefits for residents and visitors alike.

All users of the Forest are required to abide by the Leave No Trace ethic (See Appendix H). Users must confine their activities to durable ground, carry out all trash, respect other users, respect wildlife and wildlife habitats, avoid protected areas, and minimize impact on natural resources.

### **Pedestrian Recreation Allowed at No Cost**

In accordance with the Easement, the Property shall be available to the public for all types of non-commercial, non-motorized, non-mechanized, non-equestrian, dispersed recreational purposes, including hiking, fishing, birding and wildlife viewing, skiing, snowshoeing, and environmental education. Hours and location for these activities may be restricted at times to facilitate recreational activities such as bike racing and running events. Under the License Agreement, pedestrian use is defined as walking/hiking/running/snow shoeing (dispersed

throughout property or on trails) and also includes sledding in designated areas and ice-skating on the pond south of Governor Chittenden Rd. All pedestrian access shall remain free of charge unless there is an organized event for which the user is getting additional service from the organization (including but not limited to races, guided tours, clinics and camps). Pedestrian access does not include backcountry or cross-country skiing. General policies for pedestrian use are as follows:

- Catamount Community Forest is open for pedestrian access (which is defined to mean walking/hiking/running/snowshoeing) free of charge, except that fees may be charged as provided Section 12(d) of the License Agreement between COFC and the Town of Williston, attached as Exhibit C.
- Pedestrian users are encouraged to "sign in" daily at the Catamount information center (with date of sign in, names, number in party, and town of residence).
- Trails are open from dawn until dusk, conditions permitting. COFC will provide trail related services during hours posted on its website.
- Trails are subject to closure as warranted by conditions such as spring thaw and other weather conditions/events.
- Walkers should be aware of other users, races, camps, and special events, and exercise caution accordingly.
- During winter when trails are snow-covered, snowshoes must be used by pedestrians to protect the surface of the trails.
- Sledding is allowed on the designated sledding hill, at the user's own risk.
- Ice skating is allowed on the pond south of Governor Chittenden Rd, at the user's own risk.

### **Paid Activities Operated Under the Catamount Outdoor Family Center**

#### **Mountain Biking/Fat Biking/Cyclocross**

Mountain biking, fat biking and cyclocross, including individually and in races or other organized activities and events, are permitted at Catamount on designated trails under the management of COFC. Fees are charged for these activities as provided in the License Agreement between COFC and the Town of Williston, attached as Exhibit C. Trails are open, as conditions allow, during times as posted on the COFC Website. Bikers are required to wear a helmet, ride in control and yield to other trail users. To minimize trail erosion, riding in muddy conditions is prohibited.

#### **Nordic Skiing**

Nordic skiing, including individually and in races or other organized activities and events, is permitted at Catamount on designated trails under the management of COFC. Fees are charged for this activity as provided in the License Agreement between COFC and the Town of Williston, attached as Exhibit C. Trails are open, including on a lighted night loop, as conditions allow, during times as posted on the COFC Website.

### **Activities Currently Not Permitted**

#### **Hunting**

Hunting is not permitted in the Catamount Community Forest. The rationale to not allow hunting at the Catamount Town Forest, first and foremost, is a safety issue. The Catamount Community Forest is designed as a recreation area for Mountain bikers, hikers, walkers, xc skiers etc. Given ideal conditions any of these activities could be taking place during the hunting season. There are

few places where these activities can take place without sharing the land with hunters during hunting season and Catamount would be a safe haven from gun fire during this time. It is also an area of land that has many houses situated not only along the borders of the town forest but surrounded by the forest as well. The majority of the residents of the western end of Governor Chittenden Road as well as Giovanna Lane, when informally polled about their opinion on allowing hunting in the Town Forest, all but one were strongly against it, with one voicing their opinion in favor of allowing it. The fear of stray bullets and hunters not being familiar with where houses are located in relation to where they are firing had most of these residents feeling that this would be unsafe. The Town of Williston has traditionally not allowed hunting in any of its town-owned parks or nature areas.

The reason hunting is not allowed is primarily for public safety. Because trails cover the entirety of the property and are used for multiple recreational uses year round, hunting would conflict with the other recreational uses. The Town shall be responsible for posting and maintaining signs prohibiting hunting in the Catamount Community Forest as provided in Title 19, Vermont Statutes Annotated, Section 5201, as it may be amended, and any successor statute, and complying with related provisions of that statute.

#### Alcohol Use

Alcoholic beverages are prohibited within the Catamount Community Forest as indicated on all Williston public properties, except when managed at a special event by a business licensed to serve alcohol under state statutes.

#### Dogs

Dogs are currently not allowed on the property. The Catamount Forest Committee has heard a range of viewpoints related to dog access at Catamount (see Appendix H). The Committee has concerns about the following: safety, dog waste, enforcement of rules, effect on wildlife, trails, and erosion of existing user base.

The Committee and/or Selectboard will consider future proposals for dog walking at Catamount from an organized user group, provided any such proposal addresses the following considerations:

- Scope of use (space and time considerations) in order to coordinate with other user groups;
- Animal control for safety and environmental concerns;
- Rules and enforcement;
- Coordination with the Town and COFC, and
- Any costs and potential impact on current activities.

Satisfaction of the above issues shall be a high burden given that historically, the integration of dogs has not happened due to the numerous concerns raised above.

#### Horseback Riding

Currently horseback riding is not allowed and there are no designated horseback riding trails. The Committee and/or Selectboard will consider future proposals for horseback riding at Catamount, provided any such proposal addresses the following considerations:

- Identifies appropriate trails at Catamount for horseback riding - wider multi-use trails rather than single-track mountain biking trails;

- Identifies potential connections from the Catamount network to existing trails on neighboring properties such as the Talcott Forest, Pine Ridge Forest and/or Riverhill Farm;
- Provides for adequate parking, safe access and horse waste removal;
- Provides a plan for adequate trail maintenance and a reasonable fee structure to cover the costs of additional trail maintenance and liability insurance;
- Describes how collaboration with other stakeholders will be achieved and user conflicts minimized; for example, restricting horseback riding to certain days of the week or certain times of day, posting educational signage, or organizing a volunteer trail work day.

After consideration of the above points, the Town shall consider on an individual basis, a few days per year when horseback riding would be allowed. Any such days would need to be scheduled well in advance as a Special Event, mutually agreed upon by the town and the COFC.

#### Snowmobiling

Snowmobile usage is not currently permitted except for ski trail grooming/maintenance purposes. This policy may be subject to change as follows. A snowmobile trail formerly operated by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) and locally managed by the Williston Hill Hawks, runs roughly south/north through the center of the Property (see Map C: Access and Recreation Map). That trail has since been closed to snowmobile usage and was rerouted through an abutting property. While snowmobiling is currently not permitted at Catamount, the town should consider reopening the VAST trail through Catamount if necessary to maintain the current north-south corridor. Snowmobile trails can provide access to the Property to those who are disabled, elderly, or otherwise physically challenged. If the VAST trail is relocated through Catamount, it should be aligned to the existing designated VAST trail, and be restricted to snowmobile travel only, including VAST grooming equipment. Any future snowmobiling trail through Catamount will be included under and subject to the town's annual Use of Public Lands agreement with VAST.

#### Other Motor Vehicles

Motor vehicles may not be operated on the property except for uses specifically permitted under the Easement such as wildlife and habitat management, timber management, trail grooming, maintenance, handicap access, safety, or emergency purposes.

### Trails

The Catamount Outdoor Family Center maintains trails for walking, snowshoeing, mountain biking and cross-country skiing. Except for a limited number of designated snowshoeing trails, there has been no formal delineation of specific uses by trail; in other words, for most trails all of these uses are allowed. However, there are some trails on the northern section of the property that are only open in winter when the ground is frozen because they are a bit wet during the rest of the year.



The Town will assess trail usage by different user groups and determine if certain trails need to be restricted to certain uses in order to minimize conflicts. Mountain biking and cross-country ski trails have been created for three abilities: beginners, intermediate and expert, and are marked as such on trail maps and in the field. Expert trails may contain bridges, steep descents, and challenging terrain.

### License Agreement

A License Agreement has been created for the COFC to continue to be the primary managers of the recreational use of the property. This agreement authorizes the COFC to operate the recreational center and maintain the trail network consistent with past practices, so that town residents and visitors may continue to enjoy these recreational amenities with minimal additional resource allocation from the Town. The term of the License Agreement is through October 31, 2023, renewable upon mutual agreement of the Town and the COFC. All uses of the property under the License Agreement must adhere to the conditions of the conservation easement and the community forest management plan. Any amendments to the Plan affecting the License Agreement will be made by mutual agreement of the Town and the COFC, and approved by VLT. The License Agreement is provided as Appendix C.



Town staff and a representative of the COFC will conduct an annual October inspection of the trail system to monitor trail condition and to identify any needed repairs or improvements. The COFC and the Town will cooperate to develop an Annual Maintenance Plan, and to implement identified repairs and improvements during the following summer and fall. The COFC will be responsible for overseeing any repairs or improvements to existing trails and coordinating with other user groups as necessary.

Trails will be routed to avoid any adverse impact on wetlands, springs, riparian areas, and other sensitive natural features. To prevent increased predation of birds and nest parasitism, trails will be less than 25 feet in width and, if possible, a forest canopy closure of greater than 70% will be maintained. Bridges, culverts, and other trail amenities will be installed and maintained as needed to minimize impacts on soil, water, and other resources, with approval by the Town Forest Committee. The Easement prohibits manipulation of natural water courses or other water bodies. All trails will be maintained in a manner to minimize environmental impact, be compatible with other uses in the forest, and be in accordance with the Easements, the Vermont Trails and Greenways Manual (2007), and other appropriate trail standards established by recognized recreational groups.

The Town Forest Committee with the COFC's cooperation will periodically monitor the forest, particularly the trails, for evidence of abuse or damage to natural systems due to recreational activities and will modify management recommendations and actions appropriately.

#### Trail Signage

In coordination with the Town Forest Committee, the COFC will clearly mark designated trails. Trails that continue onto private property will have signs that indicate a user is leaving the Town Forest. Such signs indicating that a user is leaving the Catamount Community Forest are subject to approval by the Town Forest Committee. Trail maps of the Catamount Community Forest can be obtained at the Town office and the Town of Williston's website.

#### Trapping and Collecting

Trapping is allowed by permission from the Selectboard.

The killing of non-game animals or permanent removal of nests or plants, including wildflowers, is prohibited. Activities such as the limited collection of tree leaves, fern fronds, berries, fungi, fruits, algae, and lichen specimens are permitted for non-commercial, educational, and individual use. The Town may require a special use permit if there is concern for depletion of the resource, or if uncontrolled harvesting may have an adverse impact on the health of the forest.

#### Camping

There are currently no campgrounds or camping areas located on the Property and camping is only in the fields with prior permission from the Town of Williston, during events or for groups like the Boy/Girl Scouts. All authorized camping must follow the Leave No Trace guidelines (see Appendix G).

Due to the risk of wildfires, campfires are prohibited. If a formal camping area is developed in the future, small campfires may be allowed under ideal conditions and in designated confined areas. Permission of the Fire Warden would also be required.

#### Other Activities

Individuals may choose to engage in other lawful activities which have minimal impact on the natural condition of the land, such as sledding and ice skating, at their own risk. The Town of Williston and the Catamount Outdoor Family Center assume no maintenance responsibility or

liability for these uses. All users should follow Leave No Trace Guidelines by packing out all trash including cigarette butts, and keep noise to a respectful level.

Organized user groups of a particular activity can petition the Williston Selectboard to consider additional recreational activities, if they are consistent with the purposes of the Easement. However, activities more suitable to open, non-forested land and with recreation facilities that currently exist elsewhere in Williston (such as volleyball courts, disc golf or community gardens) are not considered appropriate in the Town Forest.

If there is an interest in developing other uses, enthusiasts of a particular activity could request a license from the Town to develop this activity, assuming it is consistent with the Conservation Easement. The cost of establishing these activities and the responsibility of maintaining them rests squarely on the groups interested in these activities and not on the town taxpayers. User groups must provide proof of insurance which names the Town and the COFC as additional insured. If the Selectboard is not satisfied with the way these activities are being managed, they could withdraw the license.

### **Public Events**

The Town, COFC or a user group may conduct periodic, temporary, non-commercial, community, and public gatherings and events on the Catamount Community Forest, assuring that there is adequate provision for parking and septic disposal, and that there will be no lasting harm to natural systems. Such events shall comply with the terms of the License Agreement and may also require a Special Events Permit from the Williston Planning Office. The Town may charge user groups a reasonable event fee if police services or traffic control are needed or other costs to the town or COFC are incurred. User groups must provide proof of insurance that names the Town and COFC as additional insured. Trails may be closed during races or events to ensure public safety. Fires may be allowed during special events with permission of the Fire Warden and the town.

### **Managing Public Access**

The Town of Williston will monitor public access to and use of areas that are ecologically fragile to ensure that the current ecological conditions and the purposes of the Easements are not diminished or degraded by the public. Access to the property may be closed or restricted by the Town of Williston for public health and safety reasons or to protect the Property's natural resources and ensure compliance with the terms of the Easement. Concentrated public use causing erosion or degradation of the landscape, threat of fire, or danger from active timber harvesting operations are all examples of issues that may require the Town of Williston to restrict public access. The Town of Williston will work in good faith to manage and maintain public access to the Property according to the terms of the Easement and the License Agreement.

The Town of Williston will notify the COFC according to the terms of the License Agreement, as well as VLT and VHCB, if restriction of public access is deemed necessary. The Town of Williston will alert the public by the use of temporary signs regarding any active timber harvesting operations on the Property. The Town of Williston will exercise care during timber harvesting operations to avoid affecting or blocking public trails as much as possible.

There is one 90-space parking lot on the property north of Governor Chittenden Rd that provides adequate parking for normal visitor use of the property. The Town will maintain this parking areas as needed. This parking area shall be used for such uses as are permitted in the Easement. The Town will monitor Special Events to ensure that designated parking can accommodate usage during such events. If needed, the Town will explore alternatives for additional parking, so as to avoid vehicle congestion and unsafe conditions on Governor Chittenden Rd.

From the parking lot there is direct access to the trails on the north side of Governor Chittenden Rd. Currently, the parcel south of Governor Chittenden Rd is accessed via the driveway adjacent to the McCullough residence. For the short term, the McCulloughs have agreed to continue allowing use of their driveway for access. An easement across the McCulloughs retained land will allow permanent recreational access to the southern parcel (see Appendix A – Survey). After conveyance of the property to the town, a trail will be developed through this easement. The Town plans to utilize the kiosk next to the parking area for display of trail map, and appropriate cautions, rules and expectations of those using the Property. Especially during the transition to town ownership, there will likely a need for public outreach regarding the use of the town forest. Such outreach may include brochures with trail maps, days and times of COFC operations like summer camps and clinics/races/special events, and rules of etiquette; Front Porch Forum postings; information on the town’s website and Facebook page; and volunteer town forest ambassadors stationed at the parking lot to offer information to new users.

The Town of Williston will coordinate the creation of any parking areas with COFC, VLT and VHCB. Parking areas will be clearly marked. The Town will be responsible for maintaining the parking areas except for snow plowing, which will be the responsibility of the COFC. Parking areas will be open from dawn until 10 PM and be monitored in accordance with other municipal parking facilities (see Map C: Access and Recreation Map).

### **Education**

Catamount Outdoor Family Center has been a valuable educational resource for the local community and beyond, including school groups, research scientists and classes from University of Vermont. Both the natural resources and the history of the land provide a variety of opportunities for educational purposes. The intent of the Town is to continue to make the Town Forest fully available to all schools and students and to encourage educational field trips. Some ways the Forest can be used as an educational resource include:

- Teaching residents about trail maintenance and stewardship through annual work days;
- Posting interpretive information about forest ecology and management;
- Encouraging teachers to use the Forest as an outdoor classroom; and
- Erecting interpretive signs throughout the Property giving information about the historical landmarks such as Indian Lookout.
- Local naturalists or high school/college biology classes could add to the biological knowledge about the Property by:
  - Performing an inventory of the vernal pools;
  - Updating the inventory of natural communities;
  - Adding observations to the Green Mountain Audubon Society bird survey data.
  - Inventorying wetland plants; and
  - Tracking surveys to look at animal activity in the winter throughout different areas and habitats on the Property.

Educational activities organized or led by COFC may involve fees as provided in the License Agreement between COFC and the Town of Williston, attached as Exhibit C.

### **Other Guiding Principles**

The Town Forest Committee will conduct on-site investigations, have discussions with experts, and solicit public input to develop a list of additional principles to guide the management of recreation within the Catamount Community Forest. The following is a suggested starting point:

1. Encourage recreational use that:
  - Is consistent with protection and enhancement of natural systems;
  - Adheres to the terms of the Easement;
  - Minimizes conflict between recreational uses; and
  - Respects the rights and privacy of adjoining landowners.
2. Temporarily restrict or curtail recreational activities when needed to allow for other management activities provided for by this plan (e.g. forest management) or when conditions are not suitable (too muddy or wet). Trail closures will be posted on the town website, COFC's website and at the parking area kiosk.
3. Update recreation recommendations as needed to reflect changes in recreational demand and changes in natural systems within the Catamount Community Forest.
4. Recognize and take advantage of the educational opportunities created by recreational use of the Catamount Community Forest.
5. Concentrate recreational use on existing trails, and avoid the creation of new trails except to replace unsuitable trails.
6. Adhere to sustainable trail and recreational standards and the best available professional judgment to protect soils, water quality, and other natural resources.

## **X: FOREST MANAGEMENT**

### **Forest Management Plan:**

Data for the McCullough property's current Forest Management Plan (FMP) was collected, and the plan written by Greenleaf Forestry, in summer/fall of 2009. The standard practice for FMP's in Vermont is to collect new data every 10 years, and so the town's goal should be to update this FMP, with fresh data, in 2019. Ownership objectives greatly influence management activities, and so this new FMP should recommend new management strategies based on the objectives of the new owners (the Town of Williston), as laid out in this Community Forest Plan.

Because public land cannot be enrolled in the Use Value Appraisal ("UVA" or "Current Use") program in Vermont, the 2009 FMP will cease to have relevance, except for reference purposes, once the property is conveyed to the town. No harvesting will occur on the property until the updated FMP is drafted and approved by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust. The only

exceptions to this rule should be hazard and downed trees along and across recreational trails, which may be removed as needed to ensure safe usage of the trail system. This is similar to the provision in the Mud Pond Country Park Management Plan.

### **Forest Management Goals:**

- To practice active and sustainable forest management. Forest management has importance for:
  - Educational purposes --- demonstrating responsible, sustainable timber harvesting to residents of Williston and beyond.
  - Wildlife habitat enhancement --- there are a number of opportunities to create unique habitat conditions on the property, using timber harvesting as a tool.
  - Cultural and historic importance --- demonstrating the responsible stewardship of forested land on a property with a tremendous history, of which forest management has been a part for centuries.
  - Periodic income generation --- forest management can be part of how we fund other projects on the property, such as wildlife habitat enhancement, invasive species control and habitat restoration.
- To maintain a healthy and productive forest
- To maintain and encourage a diversity of native species, of all taxa
- To maintain a structurally complex forest
- To protect sensitive natural resources, including water resources, significant natural communities and rare, threatened and endangered species
- To manage for the long-term health of the forest
- To protect the forest from the invasion of exotic, invasive species
- To use the timber harvesting, when appropriate, to advance the above-listed objectives
  - To strike an equitable balance between recreational and forest management objectives that does not jeopardize our adherence to any of the objectives listed above.

### **Forest Management Policies**

- Conduct forest inventory and update the Forest Management Plan (FMP) with new data in 2019.
- No harvesting will occur on the property until the updated FMP is drafted and approved by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.
- The new FMP should recommend new management strategies based on the objectives of the Town of Williston, as laid out in the Community Forest Plan.
- Management activities will promote a forest that reflects a diversity of stand ages and naturally occurring forest types in the majority of the forest. Special attention will be given to the conservation of rare and exemplary natural communities, and the conservation and enhancement of native plant and animal species and their habitats, including the establishment and retention of a range of sizes and types of downed woody debris, snag trees, cavity trees, occasional very large or old trees, and a small amount of early successional habitats.
- Contain the current populations of invasive species present on property, and prevent further infestation from invasive species in the future.
- Forest management activities should be done only when the ground is frozen to minimize impacts to birds and amphibians, as well as to wetlands and vernal pools.

- Forest management needs to be done in conformance with the policies stated in the “Protection of Water Resources” sections above.
- If forest management is to take place near trails, efforts will be taken to mitigate impacts to the trail, when possible. Where sections of trail are located on historic skid trails, and no feasible alternative exists, these trails may need to be used by logging equipment to avoid adversely impacting other areas. These trails should be restored to their previous condition as soon as possible following timber harvesting, which may entail additional costs to the town or the timber harvest.
- In situations where impeding a trail is unavoidable, trails will be temporarily closed or rerouted. The location of the rerouted trails will be at the discretion of the Town of Williston in coordination with the Designated Trail Corridor Manager, reflecting relevant site conditions at the time of harvest, and will be routed to avoid impacts on wetlands, springs, riparian areas, and other sensitive natural or cultural features.

The overarching goal is to manage the Property as “healthy forest,” which is defined as “resilient forest ecosystems that possess the long-term capacity for self-renewal of their ecological productivity, diversity, and complexity” (Sustainable Forestry Task Force, Field Staff Report, October 2007). Management activities will promote a forest that reflects a diversity of stand ages and naturally occurring forest types in the majority of the forest. Special attention will be given to the conservation of rare and exemplary natural communities, and the conservation and enhancement of native plant and animal species and their habitats, including the establishment and retention of a range of sizes and types of downed woody debris, snag trees, cavity trees, occasional very large or old trees, and a small amount of early successional habitats.

In general, uneven-aged silvicultural methods will be used, through single-tree and group selections of less than 5 acres. Harvesting during frozen ground conditions is preferred, but if summer harvesting is required, it will be scheduled before the start of the bird breeding season or after the second week of July. As a general rule, dead snags and current “biological legacies” (old pasture trees, so-called wolf pines, old growth trees that have been spared in the past) will be retained for the benefit of wildlife and stand diversity, as well as for their educational and aesthetic value.

All activities on the Property shall be performed in accordance with current, generally accepted best management practices for the sites, soils and terrain of the Property as described in “Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont”, a Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation publication dated August 15, 1987 (hereafter “AMPs”) and successor documents. Timber harvests will be focused in areas that can be managed easily, with simple access and few impediments due to site or topography. Areas with steep slopes, difficult access, or ecological sensitivity such as riparian or wetland ecosystems, will be managed in order to protect their ecological qualities and to limit any and all environmental impacts from timber harvesting. To accommodate market and climatic (and related soil) conditions, changes may be necessary over the lifetime of this Community Forest Plan. Any changes to this Timber Management section of the Catamount Community Forest Plan will occur in accordance with the Easement and in consultation with the Chittenden County Forester.

## XI. PROPOSED ACTION SCHEDULE

**THE FOLLOWING SCHEDULE IS ONLY A PLAN AND MAY CHANGE DUE TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES.**

### **Year 1 (of town ownership)**

- Mark boundary with signs at regular intervals and where trails leave the Property
- Plan for development of access trail from Governor Chittenden Rd to south parcel
- Create trail map
- Post trail map and information about etiquette, rules and regulations at parking lot kiosk
- Post trail information on Town website
- Evaluate trails for sustainability and develop annual maintenance plan in cooperation with COFC
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Begin to implement stream crossing upgrades on trail network
- Begin monitoring the deer wintering area, under the guidance of VT DPW

### **Year 2**

- Update natural resources inventory
- Conduct forest inventory and develop forest management plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Implement stream crossing upgrades on trail network
- Continue planning for development of access trail from Governor Chittenden Rd to south parcel
- Develop new meadow mowing lease agreement
- Update trail information on Town website
- Apply to the Bobolink Project

### **Year 3**

- Implement Forest Management Plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Develop access trail from Governor Chittenden Rd to south parcel
- Update trail information on Town website

### **Year 4**

- Implement Forest Management Plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

### **Year 5**

- Implement Forest Management Plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

### **Year 6**

- Implement Forest Management Plan

- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

**Year 7**

- Implement Forest Management Plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

**Year 8**

- Implement Forest Management Plan
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

**Year 9**

- Reevaluate conditions and management of property, including License Agreement
- Hold public meetings to share information and solicit input for Community Forest Plan
- Begin Community Forest Plan revision
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

**Year 10**

- Complete Community Forest Plan revision
- Maintain parking area, trails, and signs, as necessary
- Update trail information on Town website

## XII. REFERENCES

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### XIII. SIGNATURE PAGE

Stewardship is an ethic recognizing that the land and its natural inhabitants have an inherent worth and that we have a responsibility to manage our actions as part of that. It guides us to manage our activities to the utmost of our abilities, to insure the future health, productivity, and well-being of the land and its natural communities and species, and to allow our successors' opportunities at least equal to ours to use the land and its resources. This Community Forest Plan will help to guide the Town of Williston in actively protecting and managing their forestland and related resources.

The signatures below indicate the approval and certification of this Community Forest Plan by the following parties.

FEE OWNER  
Town of Williston  
Selectboard

EASEMENT CO-HOLDER  
Vermont Land Trust

  
By: Terry Macaig, Selectboard Chair 9/4/18  
Date

  
By: Jeff Fehrs, Deputy Chair 9/4/2018  
Date

  
By: Ted Kenney, Selectboard Member 9/4/2018  
Date

  
By: Joy Dmoge, Selectboard Member 9.4.18  
Date

  
By: Theresa Zittritsch, Selectboard Member 9-4-18  
Date

  
By: Cara Montgomery, Vermont Land Trust  
Stewardship Coordinator 9-6-18  
Date