

TOWN OF WILLISTON

MEMORANDUM

June 15, 2016

TO: Rick McGuire
CC: Williston Conservation Commission
FROM: Melinda Scott
RE: Catamount Forest Study Committee

This memo pertains to the composition of the Catamount Community Forest Study Committee. On May 2, 2017, the Selectboard approved the establishment of a Committee to develop a Community Forest Plan for the proposed Catamount Community Forest. The Committee Charge adopted by the Selectboard recommended a membership consisting of 7-10 people appointed by the Selectboard, including representation from Town Boards/Committees as well as other stakeholders. Stakeholders include mountain biking users, Catamount Outdoor Family Center, Winooski Valley Park District, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, abutting landowners and Williston residents. Selectboard members felt that a majority of the Committee should be Williston residents, and that non-resident representatives of State agencies serve as advisors to the Committee.

Conservation Planner Melinda Scott solicited participation on the Committee via posting on the Town website, Front Porch Forum, letters to abutting landowners, and individual emails to State agency representatives. There has been much interest from Williston residents and others. Four applications have been submitted from abutting landowners, three from Williston residents (not including Boards/Committees), one from a COFC Board member (also a Williston resident), Department of Fish and Wildlife staff Andrea Shortsleeve, and Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper. Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land) would also like to serve as an advisor to the Committee. For Town Boards, Planning Commission is represented by Ben King, Conservation Commission by Anthony Jordick, Recreation Committee by Mike Clauss and Winooski Valley Park District by Rita Dessau.

The Williston Conservation Commission is advocating that Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper be a voting member of the Committee, as his role will be important in the establishment of the Community Forest, and he is obligated by statute to assist in the planning of municipal forests (10 V.S.A. § 2654). The WCC feels that voting authority will elevate his presence on the Committee.

The Conservation Planner feels it's equally, if not more important for Catamount Outdoor Family Center to have representation on the Committee, including voting authority. COFC representation is critical to the development of sound management strategies, as they have been managing the property for three decades, and to foster a strong partnership between the Town and COFC for sustaining programming and services into the future. Although this was not discussed at the most recent WCC meeting, the WCC has previously expressed support for COFC representation. If there is a concern about the Committee getting too big, the Conservation Planner recommends that Ethan Tapper (County Forester), along with the other outside agency representatives, serve in an advisory capacity. This will open up more Committee spots for Williston residents.