

## Catamount Community Forest Planning Committee

Minutes of February 26, 2018

Draft

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

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**Members Absent:**

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**Others Present:** Melinda Scott (staff), Kim Coleman (facilitator), Kate Wanner (Trust for Public Land), Andrea Shortsleeve (Department of Fish and Wildlife), Bruce MacPherson (Green Mountain Audubon Society, Tony Shaw (Williston resident).

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Goal: Learn about protection of wildlife habitat. Discuss and develop recommendations for protection of wildlife habitat at Catamount.

1. Housekeeping items:

- Approve 2-12-2018 minutes: The minutes were approved with one minor change. Barb Evans suggested a correction, under 3. Discussion and voting, to the following statement attributed to her: *Barb stated she would like to see some accommodation for hunting; however, in light of the conservation easement on the neighboring Fontaine property **and some adjoiner concerns** (text in bold added), she would consider changing her vote to support a no hunting policy.*
- Kim announced that Jay Diaz has resigned from the Committee.
- Kate Wanner provided a follow-up to the hunting discussion and recommendation. VT Department of Fish and Wildlife has inquired about whether the VLT/VHCB conservation easement would permit a prohibition of hunting on the town forest, given the public funding supporting the project. Kate has asked VLT and VHCB to weigh in on this and for a clarification of the easement's position on prohibiting hunting. VLT has responded that the Management Plan needs to provide reasonable justification for prohibiting hunting and that VLT has the authority to overrule the policy if they feel it's not adequately justified. Kate has not yet heard back from VHCB. Kim suggested that the Committee draft a memo stating the justification for prohibiting hunting and attach it as an Addendum to the Plan. Kim and Melinda will draft some language for the Committee to review.
- Schedule update – Kim suggested the Committee meet twice in March in order to get through the remaining major topics under consideration: horses/dogs, timber management, and 1 meeting in April to tie up loose ends and review the entire plan. Agreed upon dates are March 19, March 26 and April 9.
- Kim suggested that the Plan be presented to the Selectboard with a memo explaining the topics the Committee discussed and items the Committee did not have time to

- discuss, and potentially asking the Selectboard to consider the appointment of a permanent town forest committee to continue developing the management plan.
2. Considerations for wildlife habitat at Catamount 6:15 – 7:00
- Presentation (Andrea Shortsleeve, VT Department of Fish and Wildlife)
    - Andrea's presentation is available on Google Drive and the town website at [http://www.town.williston.vt.us/index.asp?Type=B\\_BASIC&SEC={586A2D02-A079-4720-8C02-7974FFA1AB2E}&DE={686BC843-3D42-49CA-985F-41D8CED40942}](http://www.town.williston.vt.us/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC={586A2D02-A079-4720-8C02-7974FFA1AB2E}&DE={686BC843-3D42-49CA-985F-41D8CED40942})
  - Questions for Andrea
    - Steve Page asked whether VELCO used herbicides as part of its vegetation management program within the powerline ROW. Andrea stated that they do, mostly to control invasives.
    - Terry Marron stated that she and other landowners have requested VELCO not use herbicides in powerlines running through their property, and they have honored that request.
    - Kate Wanner asked whether, if dogs were not allowed on the trails, that would mitigate any impact to the Deer Wintering Area. Andrea stated that even though dogs create a huge impact, having people on the trails during winter is still a big concern.
    - Ben Norris asked about the time frame for amphibian migration. Andrea stated they migrate during March/April and September/October. Melinda clarified that trail closure wasn't being recommended, only no trail construction activities in the 600ft vernal pool protection zone during migration season.
    - Tony Shaw asked, regarding grassland habitat, what the difference is between a perimeter trail and a through trail. Andrea clarified this, and stated that closing the trails that pass directly through a grassland would create a large area of undisturbed habitat, which benefits nesting grassland birds.
    - Kim updated the group regarding the Bobolink Program. She explained that a joint application (with Patrice) was being postponed until after the town takes ownership, to lessen the complications.
    - Patrice asked how long ago and how frequently the Deer Wintering areas are mapped. Melinda stated that it was last updated in 2010, and before that in 2007 (she thinks). The mapping is almost completely based on remote sensing and largely uses vegetation to map these areas. Patrice said she wonders what impact the ongoing activity has had on the Deer Wintering Area and if it is even functioning as such.
    - Kate asked if the DWA was most beneficial in a year with a lot of snow, and whether in years with little snowfall, the DWA provides any benefits. Andrea stated that even in years with little snow, the deer tend to congregate in the same deer wintering areas and it helps with energy conservation.
    - There were questions about the recommendation to monitor the powerline for species of conservation concern. Bruce MacPherson stated Green Mountain Audubon Society can do this in coordination with Audubon Vermont, who has

been monitoring other powerlines and have documented Golden-Winged Warblers and other species of conservation concern.

3. Discussion and voting – Kim reminded the group of the ranking categories and stated that for a recommendation to be passed, it requires nine members to vote either a 5 or a 4.
  - The group voted to accept the overall recommendations for habitat protection.
  - The group discussed the recommendation to close trails in the deer wintering area from December 15-April 15.
    - Kort Longenbach stated that closing the trails in the DWA will have a significant impact on the operations of COFC. The trails in this area are flat and gravel covered, they require little snow cover and retain snow cover well.
    - Anthony asked what percentage of the COFC trails are in the DWA, and Kort stated that about one-third are in the DWA.
    - Andrea asked if there was a way to close off some of the trails so as to maintain the integrity of the Fontaine conservation easement DWA.
    - Terry also wondered if there was a way to compromise.
    - Mike Clauss stated it would be hard to give up these trails in light of the restrictions on developing any new trails.
    - Kate stated that the gravel trail that goes through the DWA is the only sit-skiing trail in the region.
    - Kate asked if there was any difference in the impact of day versus night time trail usage, and Andrea stated that night time trail usage was slightly more impactful.
    - Melinda suggested implementing a monitoring program in the DWA, to assess usage by deer and whether it is currently serving that function. Jeff asked what monitoring's purpose would be and what conclusions could be drawn from it. Melinda stated the purpose would be to gather information that could help inform future management.
    - Steve asked about the recommended Three Rivers trail closure. Melinda stated that VLT Ecologist Allaire Diamond recommended this trail be monitored throughout the year and closed during wet periods. Kort stated they normally close the trail in the summer because it's too wet.
  - The Committee members voted to pass the following recommendations:
    - With the assistance of a qualified wildlife biologist, monitor the deer wintering area beginning in 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.
4. Public Comment: Tony Shaw stated he is a dog owner and will drive 15 minutes or more to areas that allow him to walk his dog off leash. Off-leash dog walking is very important to him and he would like the Committee to consider this use on at least a portion of the Catamount property.
5. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 pm.