

**Management Plan
for the
Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park and Adjoining Trail Easements
Town of Williston, Vermont**



Approved by the Williston Conservation Commission: October 16, 2019
Approved by the Williston Selectboard: November 5, 2019

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1. Purpose

A. Goals of the Management Plan

This Management Plan is intended to be a guiding document for the management of a 19.69-acre parcel of land located at 5035 St. George Road (VT 2A) in Williston, Vermont (see Location Map in Attachment A). This property is owned by the Town of Williston (hereinafter referred to as "the Town"). Mr. and Mrs. Robert and Jeanette Hill of Bristol, Vermont donated the property to the town in May 24, 2004. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) and the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) co-hold a conservation easement on the property (see Attachment B). In addition, this Plan outlines management of the Boomhower Trail Easement (see Attachment C), which is located on the abutting 76-acre parcel of land and is currently owned by Daniel Boomhower, and the Bartlett Trail Easement (see Attachment D), which is located on the abutting 50-acre parcel south of the Boomhower parcel and is currently owned by Steve Bartlett (formerly the O'Brien Property). The Town will manage the 19.69-acre parcel and adjoining trail easements for, 1) the enhancement of outdoor recreational opportunities; 2) the preservation of natural and scenic resources; and 3) the restoration and maintenance of the Sucker Brook.

i. Drafters of Management Plan

The Management Plan was drafted by the Williston Conservation Commission (WCC). Williston Department of Public Works was consulted in the process. Public comment was taken on the document as part of the Selectboard approval process.

ii. Authority for Management

The Selectboard must approve the management plan before it can be implemented. Approval of large appropriations to make improvements on the property comes from the Selectboard. VHCB and VLT, as co-holders of the conservation easement, will also be consulted regarding any changes to the Hill Conservation Area. The WCC is responsible for general management and maintenance, with limited assistance from Public Works as needed. The management plan shall be consistent with conditions of the conservation easement.

B. Purposes of Property Acquisition and Easements

The purpose of the Conservation Easement held by VHCB and VLT on the town-owned land, as stated in the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement dated May 24, 2004, is:

As primary purposes, to conserve non-motorized, non-commercial recreational opportunities, open space values, scenic resources associated with the Protected Property for present and future generations.

As secondary purposes, to conserve agriculture, forestry values, wildlife habitats, and riparian buffers on the Protected Property, and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values as these values exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future, associated with the Protected Property for present and future generations.

These purposes will be advanced by conserving the Protected Property because it possesses the following attributes:

- (a) trails or paths used by the public, including recreational trail linkage between the Town of Williston's Five Tree Hill property and Vermont Route 2A;*
- (b) 6 acres of Site Class 1 forest soils;*
- (c) 695 feet of frontage on St. George Road, a public highway with scenic vistas;*
- (d) traversed by 800 feet of Sucker Brook;*
- (e) is in the vicinity of other lands being simultaneously protected by Grantees; and*
- (f) wetlands, plant life and wildlife habitat.*

The purpose of both the Boomhower Trail Easement, as stated in the Grant of Trail Easement, dated May 24, 2004, and the Bartlett Trail Easement, as stated in the Grant of Trail Easement, dated June 27, 2008 is:

"to provide permanent and perpetual public, recreational use of the Corridor, and to locate the Corridor so that it provides public recreational access across the Property in a manner that enhances the outdoor experience, to establish a Trail without undue expense, and to implement these purposes while substantially preserving Owners' quiet use and enjoyment of the property".

C. Country Park

The 2016-2024 Williston Comprehensive Plan (Chapters 9 and 13) identifies the former Hill property as a Country Park. Country Parks are described in the Town Plan as follows:

"Country parks provide public access to natural areas. They offer Williston residents opportunities for a hike in the woods, a quiet snowshoe walk, or a few minutes enjoying a scenic view."

The Town Plan calls for the continued maintenance of Country Parks in accordance with regularly updated management plans. The management plans should establish an appropriate level of recreational use and development, and aim to strike a balance between recreational use and conservation values. Additional objectives for management plans are:

- Forests should be managed to promote healthy stands and wildlife habitat, including diverse vertical structure. Selective logging may be appropriate in some places. Mowing may be required where a country park includes an open scenic vista.

- Wherever possible, country parks should be linked into the town’s system of paths and trails. Trails should be sited, designed, and built to minimize erosion. Trail networks should also minimize conflict among users and with adjoining properties. Permitted activities – hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobiling – will vary with the terrain and surrounding land uses. Separate trails may be needed for different uses. Trails may be closed seasonally to prevent erosion, avoid flooding, or prevent user conflict with wildlife.
- Small gravel parking areas and informational kiosks may be provided at country park trailheads. At scenic overlooks, the installation of benches and picnic tables, and limited selective clearing may be acceptable. All facilities should be sited and designed to visually blend into the natural environment.

D. Responsibilities

- On May 24, 2004 the Town took fee title to the property and acquired the grants for trail easements.
- The WCC took the lead in drafting the Management Plan and will be primarily responsible for implementing the management of the property.
- Public Works will provide limited assistance with property maintenance as needed. Local police provide security patrols as needed.
- VLT and VHCB, the easement holders, will monitor the property on a regular basis for adherence to allowed uses.
- The WCC and VLT will maintain contact with Daniel Boomhower in regards to the trail easement located on his 76-acres of conserved land. These trails will also be monitored on a regular basis for adherence to allowed uses.

2. General Description of Property

The property is comprised of 19.69-acres with 695 feet of frontage on the eastside of Route 2A. The Sucker Brook crosses the property in a north – south direction through a 30 to 50-foot deep ravine. Land east of the brook is heavily wooded, and generally slopes westerly towards the ravine. An unnamed tributary to Sucker Brook has its headwaters in the eastern portion of the property. The majority of stormwater runoff discharges from the property via this tributary and the main stem. Little if any drainage flows onto the property from other adjacent lands. The subject property is located within the greater Winooski River drainage basin. The Sucker Brook and its tributaries discharge into Muddy Brook, which is a first order tributary of the Winooski River.

The property is located in the Agricultural/Rural Zoning District (ARZD) where there is evidence of habitat fragmentation, as many small lots have been subdivided from large ones. This change to the landscape occurs in a piecemeal way as individual landowners sell off 2-5 acre lots from parcels that were once large farms or forestland. Conservation of the property will insure that the land will not experience development in the future. The Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park will provide an effective buffer for the stream and recreation, as well as protect pastoral scenic resources along Route 2A.

The property contains a 10 car gravel parking lot with access off Route 2A. The parking lot serves a one mile long primitive trail that leads hikers to the Five Tree Hill Country Park vista. From the parking lot the trail crosses the Sucker Brook and meanders through the property until it crosses onto the abutting 76-acre parcel, which is owned by Daniel Boomhower. The Boomhower property is encumbered by a separate conservation easement held solely by VLT. The town holds an easement for a primitive trail through the Boomhower property, which leads hikers to the northwestern corner of the Five Tree Hill County Park. The town holds a second trail easement through the Becker property south of Boomhower's. The Becker property is also encumbered by a separate conservation easement held solely by VLT. The Becker trail leads hikers to a proposed public trail easement on the Hayes property, which connects to Butternut Road. The latter easement was drafted in 2014 but has not been executed. Both the proposed Becker and Hayes trails are mostly undeveloped (see Appendix A for a map of the existing and proposed trails). Note that public access through the Boomhower and Becker properties is granted **only** within the designated, marked trail corridor, and not on other areas of the properties. At this time public access has **not** been granted on the Hayes property. This trail system is intended to accommodate non-motorized, non-mechanized recreational use. These trails are part of a larger trail system, which is shown in Williston's Comprehensive Plan.

3. Background

Originally, the property (formerly known as the "Hill Property") was 96 acres in size. This property was subdivided into two parcels which were transferred to the town with easements on both. The final subdivision of the parcel from the larger Hill property was approved by the Town Development Review Board (DRB) following a public hearing held March 23, 2004 (see SUB 04-18). The 19.69-acre parcel with frontage along Route 2A was donated the Town to provide recreational linkage to other Town lands and to protect the Sucker Brook, which runs through the property. The remaining 76 acres was purchased by Daniel Boomhower, Robert Hill's nephew. The VLT has acquired development rights on the lands that are currently owned by Mr. Boomhower. The trail easement, which is managed by the Town, is located on this larger, adjacent property. The lands were transferred on May 24, 2004.

In 2008, the former single-family residence was demolished and the property was cleared of debris. The disposal of the house and debris piles were conducted in accordance to applicable state, local, and federal regulations and as outlined in Section 6, Subsection D, Removal of Buildings and Other Structures, of the 2004 Interim Management Plan for the Hill Property.

In 2009 the town hired Engineering Ventures of Burlington, Vermont to design the 57-foot long Sucker Brook footbridge and the parking lot. On February 8, 2011 the Development Review Board approved the designs (see DP 11-13). From 2009 – 2011 the town utilized multiple state and federal grant funds to design and construct the footbridge, parking lot, and trail. The Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park officially opened on July 19, 2013.

4. Boundary Marking and Posting

A survey of the 20-acre parcel was conducted by O'Leary Burke Civil Associates of Essex Junction, Vermont for the Town during February 2004. Following acquisition, the boundaries of the Town-owned parcel were marked by orange tree blazes for permanent and easy identification. In 2011, the Selectboard prohibited the discharge of firearms on the property and "No Hunting" signs were posted along the property boundary according to state requirements. The boundaries are walked once a year and signage is replaced and updated as needed. Vermont posting law requires the signs be dated each year.

5. Current Physical Improvements to Property

A. Access & Parking Area

In 2013, the original access off Route 2A was improved to accommodate the new 10 car gravel parking lot and trail head.

B. Trails & Bridges

A primitive trail exists from the parking lot off Route 2A to the vista at Five Tree Hill Country Park. The Five Tree Hill vista is approximately 1 mile from the parking area. The trail includes a 57-foot long footbridge, two smaller footbridges, and a series of stone stairs and wooden puncheons.

C. Signage

Two freestanding signs are located on the property, which guide users to the trail. The signs were approved by the Development Review Board on July 9, 2013 (see DP 13-27). Signs include information pertaining to permitted uses, non-permitted uses (e.g. motorized vehicles), trail locations, and acknowledgement of VHCB and VLT in conserving the land. The wooden kiosk includes a map box to hold paper trail guides, provided by the Town for recreational users.



Figure 1: Newly constructed footbridge (2012)

D. Sucker Brook Restoration

In 1985 the Sucker Brook changed its course during a large rain storm, abandoning a 30 foot waterfall, and traveling instead over erodible sands, silts, and clays. Severe erosion sent thousands of cubic yards of sediment downstream leaving behind a large, growing, and unstable canyon. In 2003 the Town hired the engineering firm Dubois & King to develop plans to stabilize the new channel. The plans called for the construction of a new 880± foot stone-lined channel through the canyon, creation of a new floodplain, and re-vegetation of the site. From 2004 to 2007 the Town applied for and received multiple state and federal grants to pay for several phases of construction. Work was successfully completed in 2008 and the brook appears to be stable.



Figure 2: Restored channel of the Sucker Brook, circa 2008.

6. Proposed Improvements to Property

A. Adjacent Trail Linkages

Extending the existing trail system to Butternut Road was an initial goal stated in the previous management plan. A trail easement exists on the property that abuts the Boomhower parcel to the south. That property is owned by James Becker, who manages the conserved parcel as an active woodlot. The Becker easement connects to a proposed trail easement on the Hayes property that leads to Butternut Road. The latter easement was drafted and verbally accepted by the town and the Hayes, but never executed. The town should pursue the execution of the Hayes trail easement. However, the trail linkage will not be developed until demand for new trails and/or trail access in this area warrants it. A future trail on the Becker property should be located as depicted on the conservation easement map. If an alternate route is identified then written permission should be obtained from the VLT for the new location.

A second goal is to extend the existing trail system to Brownell Mountain to the west (see Location Map in Attachment A). The WCC should scope out the feasibility of this potential connection, and if determined feasible and desirable, work to negotiate future trail easements with private landowners. Easements should be pursued on property currently owned by Kermit LaClair on the eastside of Route 2A or along the VT electric power substation right-of-way (ROW).

Any trail extensions and improvements should be mapped via GPS and developed for non-motorized recreational use. Portions of the existing VAST trail could also be used to site future trails. Design and planning should take into account anticipated trail uses. Types of uses should be carefully considered and multi-use trails should only be allowed if they are determined to be

appropriate. All trails should be laid out in a manner that minimizes potential environmental degradation on the site. In the case of multi-use trails, they should be designed to minimize user conflicts. The Green Mountain Club's *Trail and Shelter Maintenance Manual* should be used as a guiding technical document in designing trails. Another useful technical document that could be utilized in trail planning is the U.S. Forest Service's *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*. Consultation with the county forester should also be considered if there are concerns about the impact of the trail on forest health. In addition to the technical assistance that will be needed, community involvement should be encouraged in developing trails.

B. Parking

The use of the existing parking lot should be monitored to assess the need for expansion.

C. Signage

The existing park entrance sign is difficult to see from Route 2A. That sign should be improved and/or, with permission from the Vermont Agency of Transportation, directional signs should be installed along Route 2A. Signs reading "Leaving Town Property" should be placed along the trail where the trail crosses onto private property.

7. General Management of Parcel

General management practices for the Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park and Trail Easement, including best use of land, structures, vehicular traffic, property upkeep and damage, hunting, plant harvesting, and management for invasive species is outlined below.

A. Best Use of Land

Intensive uses with negative resource impacts are prohibited. The best use of the land is for passive recreational use such as hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and wildlife viewing. If trails are intended to be utilized for more intensive uses such as snowmobiling, mountain biking, and horseback riding the trails should be built to minimize environmental impacts and maintain these uses while maintaining the integrity of the land. Trails should be clearly marked with the allowed uses.

B. Structures

No new physical improvements or structures are permitted except as outlined in the Conservation Easement and this Plan, or future approved Management Plans.

C. Vehicular Traffic

No motorized vehicles are allowed outside designated parking areas except snowmobiles during the time of year specified in the VAST agreement within the designated snowmobile corridor, as delineated on the attached map. If vehicles are found to be entering the land in the future, gates should be erected.

D. Upkeep, Damage, and Illegal Uses on the Property

The WCC is responsible for property maintenance. The WCC monitors official town trails and associated improvements approximately once a month. Each summer the Conservation Intern conducts trail and park assessments to document any maintenance needs, which are compiled into an annual maintenance plan. The WCC and Conservation Planner are responsible for implementing needed maintenance using hired contractors or volunteers. Town trail users generally call when there are downed trees or other problems. Beginning in 2019, the town has an Adopt-A-Trail program with an official protocol to report conditions. Reported problems should be dealt with in a timely manner. The Williston Police can also be contacted if serious or recurrent problems occur.

E. Hunting

Hunting is not allowed in the Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park. The Town of Williston Firearm Discharge Ordinance (10/15/2011) prohibits hunting, shooting, and trapping on this property.

F. Harvest of Trees or Plants

Cutting, removal, or harvesting of native plant and animal species is prohibited unless specified in this or future management plans. If any logging operations are to occur on the land, a forest management plan must be prepared by a certified forester. At present there are no plans to use the property for this purpose. Some cutting may be done in the creation and maintenance of hiking trails, but this should be kept to a minimum.

G. Invasive Species

In 2018, the Williston Conservation Intern conducted an assessment of invasives on the property and developed a management plan, included as Appendix E. The assessment noted the presence of eleven (11) species of invasive plants including common buckthorn, honeysuckles, garlic mustard, wild parsnip, multiflora rose, common barberry, Japanese barberry, black locust, purple loosestrife, reed canary grass, and common reed. Recommended management strategies are based on a prioritization of actions that yield the highest ecological benefit for the lowest cost/effort. Generally, the most effective way to manage an invasive species is when it is first introduced because it is easiest and most cost effective to eradicate (Early Detection/Rapid Response) before the population exponentially grows to the point where it can only be contained by an aggressive and costly management program over the long term.



Figure 3: Invasive common buckthorn is prevalent at SBHCP.

Garlic mustard is the highest priority because it occurs in small populations in a centralized location and could relatively easily be controlled for a large benefit. Common buckthorn is also of particular concern, however due to the extent of the infestation, would be expensive to effectively manage. Low priority species include species such as black locust and common reed. The management of these low priority species have benefits that would likely not outweigh the costs (financial and ecological) of management.

The invasives management plan lists a number of resources that can be used in implementing future management actions. The WCC should solicit guidance from this plan, the Vermont Invasives Coordinator, Chittenden County Forester, and independent contractors to further develop appropriate management strategies. The property should also be monitored into the future to track current populations as well as for introduction of new invasive species, particularly surrounding the roadsides and parking area.

8. Trail Management

Management for potential trail user groups (including mountain bikers and horseback riders), procedures for trail closures, and trail management around environmentally sensitive natural resource areas (such as steep slopes and wet areas) within the Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park and adjoining trail easements are described below.

A. Passive Recreation

Hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and wildlife viewing are appropriate uses for the trail on this parcel. Horseback riding, mountain biking, and snowmobiling are more intensive uses and are prohibited unless approved by the WCC.

B. Trail Closures

The Town may, at its discretion, temporarily close trails to all or particular uses due to trail conditions. These conditions could include wet trails, the location of a sensitive nest or den near the trail or other changes in trail conditions that are not the result of human use on the trail. No notice period will be required for these types of trail condition closures. Trail closure notifications shall be placed at trailheads with the reason for the closure and a projected date the trail will be reopen if known. Trails may also be closed temporarily if their use is abused or dangerous conditions result from use. In these cases negotiations to remedy the abuse shall occur with the WCC before the trail is reopened to that use. A two-week notice will be given for abuse closures. However, if a natural resource is determined to be in imminent danger because of the abuse the two-week notice may be waived. If an organized group of the type of users causing the problem is known to exist, it will be contacted during the two-week period to begin negotiations.

C. Steep Slopes and Erosion

Trails should not be sited along steep slopes that could become erosion problems. Green Mountain Club and/or U.S. Forest Service guidelines should be consulted for siting trails in steep areas. If sections of trail are experiencing erosion problems, the trail should be rerouted if possible and the section of trail closed. The reason for the closure should be indicated with a

temporary sign and the new trail clearly marked. Trail closures during mud season can also help decrease erosion problems.

D. Wet Areas

Any low, wet, or poorly drained areas should be avoided for recreation if possible. When the trail must go through such an area, boardwalks or puncheon should be used to protect the soil. Green Mountain Club and/or U.S. Forest Service guidelines should be consulted for siting trails in wet areas.

9. Natural Resources

As previously noted, the Sucker Brook has been researched and monitored by a variety of groups, including the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources River Management Program, Vermont Geological Society, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and University of Vermont. Resulting information was utilized in streambank stabilization efforts. Future natural resource assessments should be conducted by either a private environmental consultant or UVM students.

A visitor log book is available at the trailhead, and is useful to document wildlife sightings and other observations. A bird checklist has also been placed in the map box for birders to record species observed and upload to Vermont eBird.

10. Management Plan Update

The management plan should be reviewed and updated every ten years, with opportunity for public participation in the update process. Review shall be undertaken by the WCC with consultation from the Public Works. The WCC in cooperation with Public Works shall approve the plan and forward it to the Williston Selectboard for final approval. Public comment on the plan shall be taken as part of the Selectboard approval process. Notice should be given in the local newspaper and copies of the plan should be available at the town offices. VHCB and the VLT shall review the plan during the public comment period.

11. Conflict Resolution

Conflicts should be brought the attention of the WCC. The WCC will review the problem and work with the stakeholders to come to a solution. In some cases other town officials such as the Selectboard may be asked to mediate a situation if the WCC cannot come to an acceptable solution or if the WCC is a main stakeholder in the issue. The WCC and VLT should also work directly with Mr. Boomhower or his successor to identify and resolve in a timely manner any user conflicts that may arise on the trail easement across his property.

12. Action Schedule

A. Ongoing/Short Term (1-3 years)

- Evaluate further use of town-owned lands for conservation, educational and recreational purposes.

- Annually re-post and re-date boundary signage.
- Continue to monitor trails and associated structures (e.g. boardwalks, culverts, parking lots, kiosks) for maintenance and repair.
- Utilize Williston’s Adopt-A-Trail program for ongoing monitoring and basic trail maintenance.
- Implement trail improvements as needed using volunteer labor or contracted services.
- Conduct periodic monitoring of invasives on the property.
- Manage invasives with technical assistance from Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.
- Coordinate regular volunteer invasives removal work days on town-owned lands.
- Monitor parking lot usage and assess the need for additional parking or access.
- Seek permission from the Vermont Agency of Transportation to install directional signs along Route 2A.
- Pursue execution of the Hayes trail easement.

B. Long Term (3-5 years)

- Assess the feasibility of a potential trail connection to Brownell Mountain Conservation Area.
- If determined feasible, work with private landowners to secure trail easements from the Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park west to the Brownell Mountain Conservation Area.
- If demand for new trails and/or trail access to Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park warrants, develop and mark formal trails on the Bartlett and Hayes trail easements from the existing Boomhower trail to Butternut Road.
- Review and update the Management Plan every ten years.

13. Appendices

A. Location Map

B. Copy of Conservation Easement

C. Copy of Boomhower Trail Easement

D. Copy of Bartlett Trail Easement (formerly O’Brien Trail Easement)

E. Sucker Brook Hollow Country Park Invasives Management Plan

14. Adoption

This Management Plan becomes effective upon approval of the Selectboard.



Selectboard, Chair

11/5/19
Date