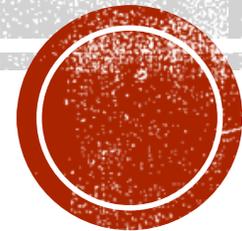


TOWN FORESTS 101

The history, culture, and challenges of municipal forests
and municipal forest planning.



OVERVIEW

- History of municipal forests in VT
- What are municipal forests?
- Local examples
- Challenges and opportunities in the planning process.



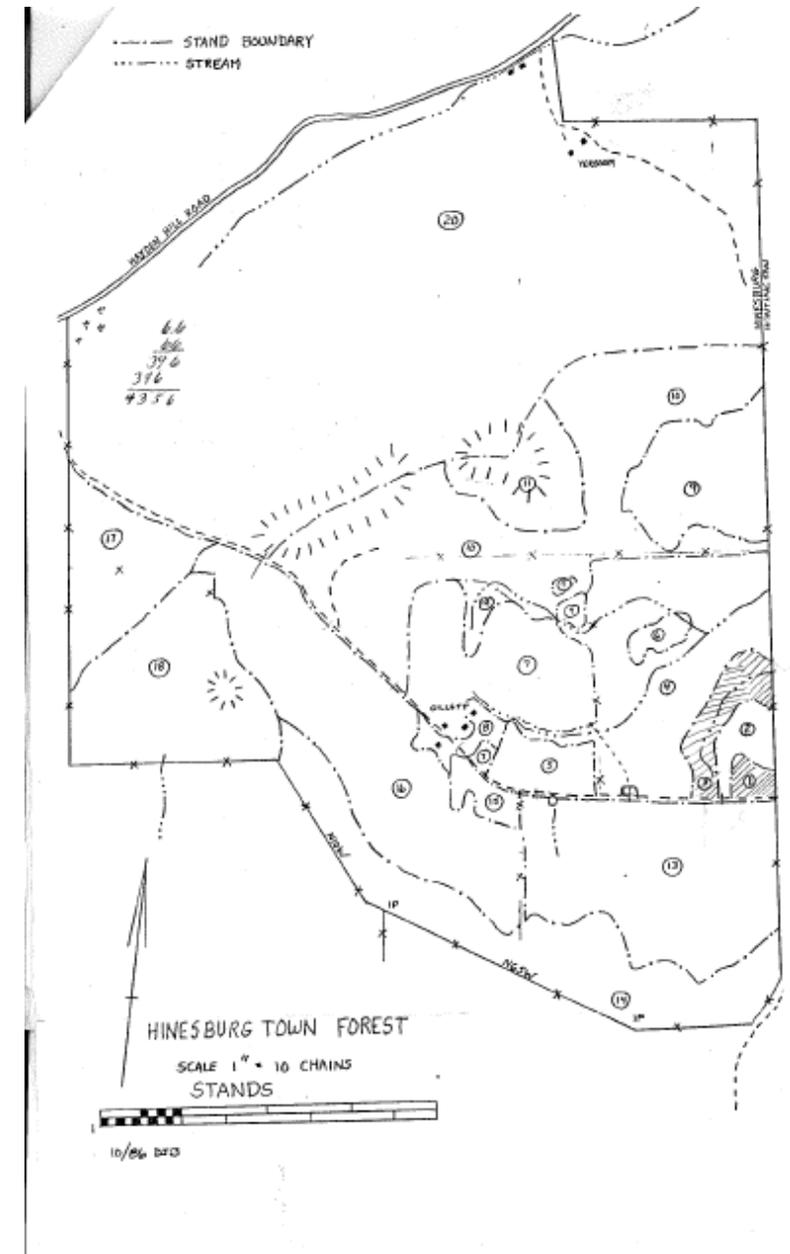
HISTORY...

- The first Municipal Forest Bill was passed in 1915, which gave municipalities the right to purchase forestland “not less than 40 acres,” and guaranteed help by the state in their management.
- The “suitability” of these lands was to be judged by the Commissioner of Forests and Parks.
- The statute describes municipal forests as being “a tract of land primarily devoted to producing wood products, maintaining wildlife habitat, protecting water supplies, providing forest recreation and conservation education.”
- The statute also stated that each town without a town forest must put the question of whether to establish a town forest in each town meeting.
- For a period of time starting in 1945, the state was paying one half of reforestation or acquisition costs for these town forests, up to \$600 per biennium.



EARLY TOWN FORESTS: HINESBURG TOWN FOREST

- 837 Acres
- From 1936 – 1958 Hinesburg acquired abandoned farms and farms with delinquent taxes.
- Has been listed for National Register of Historic Places for its cultural features and significance to the town.



EARLY TOWN FORESTS: SAXON HILL

- Formerly the Essex Junction Village Forest
 - Once 889 Acres (now 90 Acres)
 - Acquired in 1900 as a water management forest
 - Tree planting began following a “water famine” in 1923
 - Was known nationally as a example of excellent public forest management.



WHAT ARE MUNICIPAL FORESTS?

- Community Forests, Town Forest, Natural Areas, Conservation Areas, Country Parks
- Can serve a variety of functions:
 - Eagle Mountain Natural Area – Milton
 - No management except for light (walking) recreation along trails with a large area of no management/no recreation.
 - Mud Pond Country Park/Conservation Area - Williston
 - One portion used for recreation and forest management, one portion used for conservation/no management but with light recreation along trails.
 - Preston Pond Conservation Area - Bolton
 - Used for recreation and forest management with specific areas of ecological concern reserved for no management.
 - Hinesburg Town Forest
 - Used extensively for recreation, forest management and hunting.



WHAT ARE THE RULES?

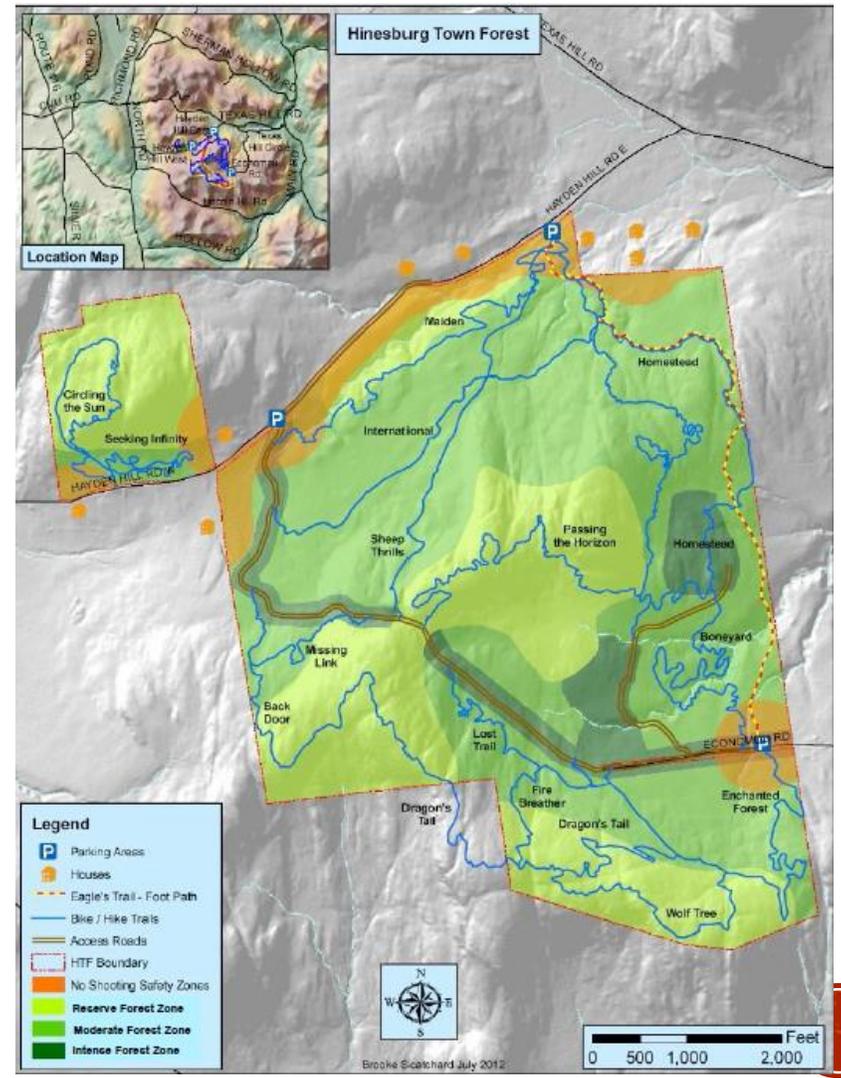
- There are no rules!
 - (Except for those detailed in the terms of the conservation easement, if you have one).
- The form that the town forest will take is generally a function of the specific features of the property, and the desires of the community.
- The ultimate management of a town forest can be guided by primarily one use, several uses, or 'no use'.



CASE STUDY – HINESBURG TOWN FOREST

- In 2012, Hinesburg took on a multi-year management planning process to try to find a balance between different users and user groups.
- The result was a mosaic of different areas, with different uses.:

Zone	Management Goal	Compatible Practices/Uses
Low Intensity Use/Reserves	Protect forest biodiversity and ecologically sensitive sites.	No timber management – unless needed to protect ecological integrity Limit access to wetlands and vernal pools Low-density single-track sustainably-built hike/bike trails where appropriate
Intermediate Use	Protect and enhance biodiversity (primary) through timber management (secondary).	Timber management which mimics small-scale natural disturbance events. Any openings created should be <1acre. Single-track, sustainably-built hike/bike trails.
Intensive Use	Protect and enhance biodiversity through timber management	Timber management which mimics natural disturbance events. Range of recreational opportunities.



CASE STUDY – MUD POND

- Total of 276 Acres
 - 118 Acres of Country Park and 158 Acres of Conservation Lands.
 - Both areas are conserved under a conservation easement.
- Between 1990-92 the areas were acquired from the town, from an area acquired by the Nature Conservancy, in addition to 2 small donations from neighbors.
- Country parks, as defined by Williston: “serve...by striking a balance between human use and conservation of nature...Country parks generally include a minimum of specialized facilities and are for less structured recreation.”



PLANNING: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

- Seek public input from a variety of user groups in the town and region.
- Engage in a transparent and inclusive planning process.
- Establish a clear set of goals for the forest from the outset.
 - What are the management objectives of this forest?
 - These are the values that will guide our specific objectives and action items.
- Establish rules/boundaries for how different user groups will interact.
 - Boundaries can be temporal, spatial, or diffused.
- Establish clear rules for how management decisions for the forest are made.
 - Town forest committee? Conservation Commission?
 - What is the threshold at which the Selectboard becomes involved?
- Be flexible.



