

Hartford Town Forest Resource Management Plan Update, April 14, 2020

A stated goal outlined in Hartford's Town Plan is to "maintain and enhance Hartford's heritage of working farm and forest lands as part of a sustainable, environmentally sound, resource based-economy. The plan encourages sound forest management practices for private and public owners including adherence to the State of Vermont Required Acceptable Management Practices to protect natural resources. The Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC), having been authorized by the Selectboard to manage the Town Forest recommends that the Town apply these management and conservation goals to the Town Forest.

The Town of Hartford owns and manages forest land in the Hurricane Watershed. This includes the 423-acre Hartford Town Forest (HTF) and the 142-acre Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge Park. The Hurricane Watershed will continue to be managed for a variety of uses including wildlife habitat, forest resources and recreation. Periodically, the Forest Management Plan for these properties is updated. The first Forest Management Plan, completed in 1984, was followed by a timber harvest. The Forest Management Plan was updated in 1998. Two small, selection timber harvests, including a salvage of windblown oak occurred in 2005 and 2008. The most recent update was completed in 2011. In addition, in 2002, the Town developed a Recreation Management Plan for the Hartford Town Forest to guide the increasing amount of recreation that occurs in the largest piece of Town-owned forestland and balance recreation with the natural resource qualities. Other studies commissioned by the HCC for the Hurricane Watershed include:

- Biological Inventory of Amphibians, 2010
- Forest Bird Habitat Assessment, 2010
- Habitat Assessment and Bat Inventory, 2011

The Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge Park will continue to be managed by the Hartford Recreational Department in a non-intrusive manner that does not include hunting and future tree harvesting. This will allow the Park to continue to naturally develop old forest characteristics. The Hartford Town Forest is managed by the HCC and in October 2019 the HCC approved a motion to update the existing 2011 Forest Management Plan including planning for a timber harvest in Section E of the attached map for the winter of 2021. Windsor County Forester, Mr. A.J. Follensbee, has agreed to review and update the Forest Management Plan and assist in the planning of the 2021 timber harvest.

Purposes

The reasons for a timber sale are:

- Increase Diversity:** Increasing the diversity of tree species and habitats will improve the forest's resilience to future disturbances such as climate change and natural disruptions (e.g. Emerald Ash Borer; windstorms; species migrations).
- Wildlife:** To maintain diverse bird and wildlife habitat.

- ❑ **Education:** Public demonstration of sustainable forestry practices and local renewable forest products.
- ❑ **Income:** Any decision on income generated from tree harvesting will be made by the Hartford Selectboard. The HCC will recommend that funds be added to the Hartford Conservation Fund which is used on local Hartford conservation projects, such as trail maintenance, invasive species control and conservation of parcels to protect important natural resources.

Proposed Schedule: The proposed schedule below was developed in the winter of 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions. Since it is presently unknown when public meetings will be allowed, this schedule will need to be adjusted. Note that two primary requirements: public input will be solicited at least twice before the Resource Plan is finalized and any actual logging will need to be performed during the winter to minimize forest impacts.

To solicit resident input on the Hartford Town Forest Resource Management Plan the HCC is proposing the following public outreach and schedule.

- ❑ **Initial Public Meeting:** In late April to early May 2020 the HCC will host an initial public meeting in the HTF to present the purpose, scope, and schedule for the proposed plan update to obtain Hartford resident input.
- ❑ **Prepare Draft Plan:** May 2020 Mr. Follensbee prepares draft updated plan and harvesting documents.
- ❑ **June/July 2020:** A second public meeting to present the draft updated Resource Plan and tree harvesting documents.
- ❑ **Early July 2020:** Mr. Follensbee finalizes Resource Plan and harvesting documents.
- ❑ **Late July 2020:** Hartford Selectboard approval of Resource Plan and harvesting documents.
- ❑ **August 2020:** Timber sale is marked.
- ❑ **September 2020:** Logger bidding of harvesting.
- ❑ **Early to mid-November 2020:** Public meeting No. 3 on-site to present plan of apparent winning logger.
- ❑ **By November 30, 2020:** Approval of logging contract by Hartford Town Manager and awarding contract.
- ❑ **Jan-Feb 2021:** Logging performed, including on-site Public Meeting No. 4 showing the logging in progress.
- ❑ **March-April 2021:** Selected trees are sawn in a public demonstration by a local sawmill.
- ❑ **May – Summer 2021:** Some of the wood cut from the harvest is used by local woodworker(s) to build useful item(s) that are recognized as wood from the HTF and publicly displayed.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is running this project?

The HCC with assistance from the Department of Planning and Development Services manages the Town Forest and will manage this project. Technical assistance will be provided by the Windsor County Forester Mr. A.J. Follensbee whose responsibilities include assisting

municipalities with forest management in town forests. He has spent time in the Hartford Town Forest and has reviewed previous Forest Management Plans. He reports that white pine trees are developing internal damage from wounds and their vigor is low due to regional needle diseases. Now is a good time for the Town to open up the crowns to allow more air movement which can help needles escape being infected with fungal spores. Cutting would also harvest some trees before their value decreases because of internal discoloration and decay. Mr. Follensbee is willing to update the current Forest Management Plan and provide documents for a logger to perform a winter 2021 timber harvest.

Can the public use the forest during the harvest?

During the harvest some trails will be closed, but the majority of the forest will be available for public use.

Will logging damage the forest?

To limit impacts on the Town Forest, Mr. Follensbee suggested harvesting in the winter and using a forwarder instead of a skidder. A forwarder carries logs clear of the ground, which reduces soil impacts and damage to trees next to skid/logging roads.

What can be done to limit the impact of the treetops that are cut? They can be messy.

“Mess is best.” Leaving pieces of trees in the woods is good for the forest. Wildlife depend on woody structures of fallen branches and trees for cover, nesting, etc. Decay fungi and insects depend on dead wood and, in turn, are food for wildlife. Decayed wood also adds organic matter (like compost) to the soil, storing carbon while enriching the soil. The HCC can specify how the tops will be handled in the logger bidding forms and contract so most branches are removed from trails. However, trails will certainly have smaller pieces of wood from broken branches that will need to be removed by hand. The HCC will put out a call for volunteers to help with clean-up as needed to reopen trails and reduce impact on recreationists.

Will the logging make money?

Income generated by the harvest depends on the quality of the trees being harvested. Liquidating the accumulated timber value is not the primary goal for this harvest. While some very large trees will be harvested, the proposed harvest will cut many trees that compete for sunlight with well-formed, good-quality trees which will, in turn, respond with healthy growth. A subsequent harvest in about 20 years within this harvest area will yield higher value trees.

Will there be a way for the public to submit comments in addition to the public meetings?

Yes. Comments, concerns and questions should be sent via email to town planner Matt Osborn. mosborn@hartford-vt.org