

# **INTEGRATED HARTFORD TOWN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**for the Town of Hartford, Vermont**

**Adopted by the Hartford Conservation Commission**

**on November 7, 2022**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Section 1: History and Description of the Hartford Town Forest</b>	
<b>I. History</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Resource Description</b>	
<b>A. Soils</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>B. Water Resources</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>C. Biological Diversity</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>D. Timber Resources</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>E. Wildlife Resources</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>F. Forest Health</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>G. Archeological, Cultural, and Historic Sites</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 2: Timber Resource Management</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 3: Forest Integrity</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>I. Bird Habitat</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>A. Summary</b>	
<b>B. Recommendations</b>	
<b>II. Amphibian Habitat</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>A. Summary</b>	
<b>B. Recommendations</b>	
<b>III. Bat Inventory</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Section 4: Hartford Town Forest Recreation Management Plan</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>II. Management and Rules of Use</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>III. Recreational Uses</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>IV. Recreational Planning in the Town Forest</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>V. 2021-2023 Work Priorities</b>	<b>17</b>

## **APPENDICES**

- A. Trails Map of the Hartford Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge, November, 2021.
- B. Map of Boundary and Forest Management Units, Harwood Forestry Services, 2011.
- C. Hartford Town Forest Resource Assessment and Forest Management Plan. A.J. Follensbee Windsor/Orange County Forester. Adopted by Selectboard 11/02/2020.
- D. Map of Town Forest Boundary and Forest Management Units, A.J. Follensbee, January 31, 2022.
- E. Enactment of Permanent Conservation Plan for Wetland Property in Hartford Town Forest/Imposition of Covenants and Restrictions on a Portion of the Town of Hartford Town Forest, 2016.
- F. Forest Bird Habitat Assessment Hartford Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge, Audubon Vermont, 2010.
- G. Biological Inventory of Amphibians at the Hartford Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, July 2010.
- H. Bat Inventory Hartford Town Forest, Northern Stewards, 2011.
- I. Hartford Town Forest Recreation Management Plan, Adopted by the Hartford Selectboard, November 2, 2021.
- J. Hartford Town Forest Recreation Plan, SE Group 2018.
- K. Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Natural Resource Guide, 2018.
- L. Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association Member Network/Town of Hartford Memorandum of Understanding 2022.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Through the years the Hartford Conservation Commission has commissioned studies pertaining to forest resource management including habitat assessments and inventories, timber management, and recreational management. The purpose of this document is to: 1) summarize the contents of all the historical documents; 2) organize the summaries into one document; and 3) include an annually updated current work plan.

## Section 1. History and Description of the Hartford Town Forest

### I. History

The Hartford Town Forest (Town Forest) is approximately 423 acres running along a north/south ridge between Route 4 and Route 5. Its primary access is from Route 4 to Center of Town Road, to King's Highway and Reservoir Road. It can also be accessed from the adjacent Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge (Wildlife Refuge) off Route 5 which is a contiguous parcel of an additional 142 acres. There are approximately 9 acres of land that were formerly two Town of Hartford reservoirs which were drained in 2010 and 2012. Otherwise, the land is primarily forested.

The Hurricane watershed (which includes both the Hartford Town Forest and the adjacent Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge) rises from a low point of about 700 feet above mean sea level along the eastern boundary line just below Wright Reservoir in the Wildlife Refuge to a high point of 1,312 feet at the top of Neal's Hill in the southeast corner of the Town Forest. A decommissioned FAA communication tower site straddles the line between the Town Forest and the Wildlife Refuge where the elevation is 1,271 feet. Topography within the property is generally gentle to moderately sloping with a predominately southeastern aspect.

Much of this watershed parcel has been in the ownership of the Town or the Hartford Water Company since about 1890. Around 1900, the Water Company began the construction of the Upper and Lower Reservoirs along with Wright and Simonds Reservoirs. For many decades, these reservoirs provided for the domestic water needs of the people of the Town of Hartford. Around 1950, a replacement well was established in Wilder marking the beginning of the phasing-out of the use of these reservoirs for domestic water purposes. The last use of these reservoirs for that purpose was in 1975.

In 1942, the land was in six separate parcels: Wright Reservoir and Brown lot which were not contiguous; Pease Estate contained the former Upper and Lower reservoirs, the Morston Farm and Clifford lots which form the southern portion of the forest; and the Coutermarch Farm. In 1974, Winsor and Bertha Brown donated 118 acres which joined the lots, and which constitute the Wildlife Refuge. The Parks and Recreation Department was charged with care and management of the Wildlife Refuge. The property was surveyed by Hathorn Surveys in 1982 (Project #16582). All the lines were blazed and painted after the survey was completed and again re-painted in 2001 by Harwood Forestry. A copy of the plat is in the Planning and Development Department in the Hartford Town Hall. Appendix A is a map of the Town Forest and Wildlife Refuge showing the currently authorized trails.

Prior to the mid-1980s, little directed forest management took place. In 1984, the first Forest Resource Management Plan was adopted providing for a Continuous Forest Management strategy. From a practical standpoint, active commercial management of the forest ended around 1992. An update of the management plan was prepared in 1998 by Harwood Forestry Services, Inc. and active forest management resumed within the Town Forest. The Town Forest was divided into five Forest Management Units (FMU) A,B,C,D,E. (The Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge was designated as FMU F&G). See Appendix B. Winter harvests occurred within the Town Forest in 2005 and 2008 encompassing about 100 acres with plans to continue activities periodically into the future. In 2011, Harwood Forestry Services, Inc.

updated the Forest Management Plan again. As part of the update, the Wildlife Refuge was removed from active forest management following the recommendation from the Hartford Conservation Commission, Ornithologist Steven Hagenbuch and Ecologist Len Reitsma. Since active forest management had not occurred on this property in many decades unlike most of the surrounding forest. A subsequent forest management update of the Town Forest was prepared in 2020 by County Forester A.J. Follensbee (Appendix C) and includes a 20-year schedule of Management Activities).

There was no active recreational management of the Town Forest until 1998 when the Hartford Conservation Commission undertook responsibility for the land and developed the first trail system. In 2002, the first Town Forest Recreational Management Plan was prepared which addressed recreational use of the Town Forest. That plan was updated in 2018 when the Hartford Conservation Commission participated in a grant program administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. That program produced a planning guide for on-going planning for recreation. Section 4 of this document deals specifically with the recreational plan.

## **II. Resource Description**

### **A. Soils**

The underlying geology of this area is heavily influenced by the most recent collision of North America with Africa about 330 million years ago. That collision (plate tectonics) resulted in a soil classification in this area called the Waits River Formation, well known for its calcium rich soil types with fertile soils for agricultural and forestry uses.

The soils found under the surface here were all mapped by the USDA Soil Conservation Service (now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service). The soil types found in the forest are considered fertile, shallow to deep, calcium rich, loam-based soils. Forest productivity, a measure of tree growth potential, is good to excellent on these types of soil. Small, wetland associated sites, can also be found scattered throughout the property.

### **B. Water Resources**

Three watersheds intersect in the Town Forest: White, Connecticut, and Ottaquechee. Two permanent streams, one from each of the former Upper and Lower Hurricane Reservoirs, flow southeastward through the Town Forest and exit the property along the Simonds Way trail. Several small seasonal streams flow into each of the two reservoirs and directly into the permanent streams. Several small wetlands and wet areas and at least two vernal pools are located within the Town Forest and have been mapped. One small seasonal stream flows southwesterly out of the Town Forest onto private lands and into a different physical watershed. Management of the Town Forest is subject to a Wetland Conservation agreement created in 2016. See Appendix E.

### **C. Biological Diversity**

The Hurricane Watershed contains representations of a wide range of vegetation. Hardwoods, including red and white oak, red and sugar maple, beech, white and yellow birch, white ash,

basswood, black cherry, and lesser amounts of other species are found in varying densities with white pine and hemlock throughout. Age and size of this forest component ranges from fully mature, dominant individuals to young dense regeneration on the forest floor.

Riparian forest communities found along water bodies or moving waterways are vital ecosystems in themselves and provide homes to reptiles, amphibians, aquatic insects, birds and both small and large mammals. Wildlife populations have a wide range of habitat needs and this forest contains conditions, at least at some level, that are favorable to most indigenous New England species. The combined Town Forest and Wildlife Refuge with nearby privately owned large parcels, provides an important wildlife travel corridor for larger, more mobile species such as moose, black bear, deer, and coyote.

#### **D. Timber Resources**

In 1900, Vermont was about 80% open land and only 20% forested. By 2000, the numbers had switched, and Vermont was 80% forested and only about 20% open. Thus, most of the forestland we see today resulted from agricultural land abandonment that began during the late 1800s. Stone walls, cellar holes and smoother land surfaces indicate an agronomic past consistent with this history.

The Forest Resource Management Plan prepared in 1984 prescribed an even-aged management approach throughout; a strategy that suggests trees within a given stand would be grown as a single age group, then harvested fully at a pre-determined age, say 20 years. The Forest Resource Management Plan adopted in 1999 redirected the management emphasis toward the creation of an uneven-aged forest which would perpetuate a forest cover represented by trees of all ages and eliminate the final overstory removal. It has been determined that the forest resources within the Wildlife Refuge will not be managed for timber products and no harvesting activities will be scheduled here for the foreseeable future. Tree cutting within the Wildlife Refuge will be limited to wildlife habitat manipulation, recreational trail construction and maintenance and hazard tree mitigation.

#### **E. Wildlife Resources**

This remote, generally forested portion of town provides great habitat opportunities for a host of wildlife species. Specifically, the Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge is part of one of the largest unfragmented parcels in town and provides at least seasonal habitats for most of the upland mammal and bird communities indigenous to this part of Vermont. Reptiles and amphibians that favor water features such as wetlands, vernal pools and streams have many opportunities to satisfy their life requirements here. It is advisable to develop future timber management activities based on a goal of creating/perpetuating low forest cover to retain healthy wildlife populations.

Wildlife populations within and adjacent to riparian corridors are extremely important to a vibrant wildlife community. This property contains a substantial amount of such riparian ecosystem conditions and the habitat benefits provided to many species is notable.

The importance of the Hurricane Watershed for its wildlife habitat and connectivity has been recognized by the Linking Lands Alliance (LLA) through its Wildlife Initiative Project. The LLA is a grassroots group of community members from ten neighboring towns.

## **F. Forest Health**

The forest resources of the Hurricane Watershed could be classified as healthy. However, non-native and invasive plants have become common to the forest in our region and throughout New England. Species commonly found in this area include Oriental and bush honeysuckle, Oriental barberry, common and glossy buckthorn, autumn olive, wild chervil, Japanese knotweed, and purple loosestrife to name a few. These plants can out-compete our native species and often become the dominant vegetation cover. These aggressively growing plants, in many situations, can out-compete native regeneration important to wildlife habitat, biodiversity and timber production often become the dominant vegetation cover.

During the field examination of this property, varying amounts of bush honeysuckle and Oriental barberry were noted, most commonly in the Wildlife Refuge area around Wright Reservoir.

## **G. Archeological, Cultural and Historic Sites**

Several segments of stone walls can be found along the boundary lines and within both the Town Forest and Wildlife Refuge parcels. These stand as a testament to the past agricultural nature of life on this hill. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) established two communication towers on a height of land straddling the Town Forest and Wildlife Refuge boundary which are no longer operational. No archeological sites, mines or unique geological features have been noted within this property.

## Section 2. Timber Resource Management

The first evidence of timber harvesting dates to 1945 where the northern section was noted as “logged off” or “burned over” and the southern parts recently cut or burned down. In 1959, a timber sale was marked. In 1984, the first forest management plan was developed for the Town Forest noting that the white pine was approaching maturity and should be regenerated with a multi-staged harvest which was carried out in the 1980s. Butt scars, woods roads, and rotting pulpwood bear witness to the harvest based on even-aged management strategy.

In 1998, Harwood Forest Services updated the Forest Management Plan which was less intrusive and more natural based on an uneven-aged management strategy. This allowed for retention of large, older trees while creating enough openings to allow younger trees to flourish. Harwood Forest Services recommended using a low-impact, cut-to-length, forwarder-based logging systems which results in less damage to the site and residual trees.

Harwood divided the Town Forest into five separate management units (A, B, C, D and E) called Forest Management Units (FMU's). Each FMU was created to represent logical, physical timber harvesting units that minimize stream or waterway crossings, concentrate recreational impacts during treatment periods, involve economically viable timber volumes/values to assist in attracting bids from reputable timber harvesting contractors and use topographic and physical features to optimize log landing locations.

Timber harvesting activities in 2005 and 2008 were conducted within FMU's A and B. Winter condition operations were required and ground skidding of timber products from the stump to the log landing was prohibited. The use of a forwarder was required to bring products to the log landing/loading site to minimize soil disturbance and residual stand damage which often results from ground skidding. Subsequent harvests in other FMU's recommended for the 2010's did not occur.

In 2020, Allen Follensbee, the Windsor County Forester for the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, prepared an updated Resource Assessment and Forest Management Plan (Appendix C) in which the forest was divided into five stands with detailed recommendations for management of each stand (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 which approximately correspond to the previous designations of FMU's A, B, C, D and E). See Appendix D for the 2020 FMU map. The harvesting methods recommended by Harwood Forestry Services continued in the 2020 plan including harvesting during winter conditions.

Generally, the principles covering future forest management are as follows:

- The cutting cycle in areas managed will be 20 years.
- 4 cohorts or age classes will be managed for in each stand.
- Long rotations will allow for large trees to develop using the following diameter objectives for the most common species as a guide: White pine 26-30", Red oak 24-28" Sugar maple, 24"-28", Hemlock 24"- 28", red maple: 18-22", white ash 16".
- Snag retention and recruitment of snags through planning and girdling, with a goal of 1-3 current snags an acre.



- Course woody debris recruitment through deliberately felling trees and leaving them on the forest floor. Goal of 3 stems per acre.
- Leave tops of trees unlopped in groups to deter deer browse.
- Apply for deer fence grant through Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.
- Apply Vermont Acceptable Management Practices during any logging operations.
- Increase the amount of early successional habitat overall, by 1-2% of the total public acreage or by 5-10 acres.

A recommended schedule for future harvesting was also developed and is included in the Appendix C report.

## Section 3 Forest Integrity

The following is a summary of the various studies obtained by the Conservation Commission. Each of the reports summarized in this section are attached in their entirety as Appendix F Bird Inventory, Appendix G Amphibian Inventory and Appendix H Bat Inventory.

### I. BIRD HABITAT

#### A. Summary

Birding habitat is assessed within a "landscape: consisting of 2,500-acres of fragmented land. An important feature of the Town Forest is a core interior forest. Habitat is assessed based on the combined acreage of the Wildlife Refuge and the Town Forest, which, when combined with adjacent lands, constitutes a core interior forest. This core interior forest is in a heavily fragmented landscape. To preserve the core interior forest, it requires developing a more mature forest with a closed canopy together with smaller canopy gaps to maintain and/or enhance structural complexity. Fragmentation should be avoided and existing areas of early-successional habitat should be maintained.

#### B. Recommendations

Overall: Retain yellow birch, conduct harvesting operations outside the bird breeding season, retain standing snag, retain large diameter aspen, and birch, retain coarse and fine woody material, minimize extent of forest access roads, soften edges between field and forest habitats, retain stream-side buffers.

Distinct habitat units

Mixed Forest 370 acres (FMU A,B,C,D,E per Harwood Plan)

- a. Enhance Structural Complexity of Interior Forest
  - i. Maximize diversity of foliage heights.
  - ii. Create Canopy openings
- b. Create Early-Successional habitat
  - i. Open Canopy areas with high densities of seedlings, saplings, and shrubs.
  - ii. <1 acre in size, 1- 15 years of age, residual canopy cover <30%. Circular or square harvest area preferred.
- c. Early Successional 7 acres. (C&E)
  - i. Allow natural succession to take place
  - ii. Reassess in 12-15 years
- d. Forest Wetland 2 acres (B)
  - i. Maintain and protect current features to develop naturally without human intervention.
  - ii. Desire development of dense shrub and sapling growth and coarse and fine woody material.
- e. Mixed Forest Reserve/ Wildlife Refuge 180 acres (FMU F&G per Harwood Plan)

## II. AMPHIBIAN HABITAT

### A. Summary

#### Vernal Pools

Two woodland vernal pools support breeding of Wood Frogs and Spotted Salamanders: Saddle Vernal Pool on the southern end near the intersection of Reservoir Road and Southside Trail, and NW Vernal Pool in the northwest corner.

#### Permanent Ponds

*Upper Hurricane Pool.* This pool does not have the benefits of a forest canopy but can provide breeding habitat for small numbers of some pool-breeding species: American Toad, Spring Peeper, Pickerel Frog, Wood Frog, and Spotted Salamander. *Note:* The amphibian report was based on observations just a few months after the former Upper Reservoir was drained and from the photos at that time there were two pools, but the water now is higher and there is just a single pool.

*Lower Hurricane Pool.* This pond is stream fed and it is likely that it will support predaceous fish thus reducing its value to vernal pool-breeding amphibians. But like the Upper Hurricane Pool, it will support pool breeding species.

*Stream Salamander Habitat:* Three permanent streams and small ephemeral streams provide excellent habitat for stream-side salamanders. Both Northern Dusky and Northern Two-lined salamanders were found. The Spring Salamander was not found but suitable habitat does exist.

*Forest Habitat:* The forest upland habitat provides important year-round habitat for the Eastern Red-backed Salamander as well as non-breeding and over-wintering habitat for several other amphibians.

### B. Recommendations

#### *Vernal Pools and Amphibian Life Zones*

Vernal pool breeders spend most of their life in the forested habitat. Management plans should protect not only the pools but the surrounding forests. Amphibian aggregations at individual breeding pools rarely represent distinct (closed) populations. Regular dispersal between pools commonly occurs.

The two vernal pools likely represent two meta-populations of Spotted Salamander and Wood Frogs. Conservation is best achieved by considering the two identified vernal pools and forest stand between them as the management unit.

### Specific Recommendations:

1. Avoid timber harvests within 75 meters.
2. Minimum average of greater than 75 percent canopy cover of trees at least 30' tall within 200m of the pool.
3. Consider same canopy cover in forest block between pools.
4. Harvest only when ground is frozen, avoid creating ruts, minimize soil compaction, and maintain closure of Reservoir Road between March 1 and June 1.
5. Encourage coarse woody debris.
6. Inform adjacent landowners of pools on their land and encourage and assist in developing managing plans that consider the existence of the vernal pools on their lands.

### *Stream Riparian Zones*

Maintenance of a well-shaded riparian zone along the three permanent streams along with abundant coarse woody debris and leaf litter, free from excessive erosion, is required for the persistence of the Northern-Two lined and Northern Dusky salamanders.

1. A 60-meter buffer on each side of the streams is recommended.
2. Avoid timber harvests and herbicide/pesticide use.
3. Encourage coarse woody debris on the forest floor.
4. Avoid activities that will increase erosion such as new trail construction.
5. Divert trail drainage and water bars away from the riparian zone.

### **III. BAT INVENTORY**

Six species of bats use the former Lower Hurricane Reservoir area for foraging. It is likely that the little brown bats, eastern red bat, and hoary bat are roosting in the Hartford Town Forest and Hurricane Forest Wildlife Refuge.

The Northern Stewards Bat Inventory recommends:

1. Promote mature forest.
2. Promote large diameter roost trees with exfoliating bark.
3. Uneven aged: small ground .25 acres to 1 acre opening.
4. Even-aged: 1 acre patch.

## **Section 4. HARTFORD TOWN FOREST RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Recreational activity in the Hartford Town Forest has occurred for many decades. Yet, the Town Forest wasn't actively managed until the late 1990s when the Hartford Conservation Commission began managing the property and it became evident that rules regarding recreational use were needed. The first Recreation Management Plan was adopted in 2002 following a year-long effort initiated by Town staff and the Conservation Commission that included an extensive public process, a Steering Committee made up of different user groups and several community meetings. The Plan resulted in the first set of rules governing recreational use in the Town Forest.

The 2002 Recreation Management Plan was updated in 2021 and approved by the Hartford Selectboard. See Appendix I. Since 2002, recreational use in the Town Forest has increased and evolved and it was clear that the Plan needed to be updated. In 2018, the Town was selected as part of a 10-town pilot program to look at recreational use in Vermont's town forests. The Plan was developed by consultant SE Group and an initial draft was presented to the Hartford Selectboard in October, 2018 and then subsequently incorporated as Part II of the 2021 Recreation Management Plan update. See Appendices J and K.

#### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to implement the recreational goals, strategies and actions outlined in the Natural Resources Chapter of the 2019 Hartford Town Plan and to present a plan for recreational use of the Town Forest consistent with the other management plans and reports developed for the Town Forest as outlined in previous sections of the Integrated Town Forest Plan.

#### **B. Public Process and Plan Updates**

The development of the 2002 Town Forest Recreation Management Plan and the 2018 Town Forest Recreation Plan included extensive public input. In the future, the Conservation Commission will review the Town Forest Recreation Management Plan on a regular basis. Every ten years, or in the event of substantial changes in management strategies, the Conservation Commission will undertake an update sooner and solicit public input.

#### **C. Guidelines/Principles**

The following principles are the basis for the management of recreation in the Town Forest:

- i. The Town Forest is open for appropriate use and enjoyment in a variety of ways that do not create forest fragmentation, diminish the quality of wildlife habitat, impede wildlife migration, or negatively impact forest resources including wetlands, vernal pools, and timber.
- ii. Provision will be made for seasonably appropriate and multi-purpose uses of a sustainably maintained trail system.

- iii. The Town Forest is a local resource for Hartford residents and our Upper Valley neighbors. It is appropriate for individuals and small group uses that do not interrupt or diminish the peaceful and quiet atmosphere and experience of a forest. It is not an appropriate venue to be advertised beyond the Upper Valley.
- iv. Access to the Town Forest and activities that include of a variety of community perspectives and uses will be provided.
- v. Education and learning activities are strongly encouraged.

## **II. MANAGEMENT AND RULES OF USE**

- A.** The Town Forest shall be open for public use from sunrise to 10:00 p.m.
- B.** No motorized traffic is permitted in the Town Forest except on the Class 4 Section of Reservoir Road and snowmobiles on Reservoir Road and other designated trails. The Class 4 section of Reservoir Road begins at the trailhead parking lot and extends to Neal Road.
- C.** The Hartford Conservation Commission will:
  - i. Maintain clearly posted/blazed boundaries around the perimeter of the Town Forest.
  - ii. Post signs where any trail leaves the Town Forest and goes onto private land.
  - iii. Communicate with adjacent landowners on a biennial basis.
  - iv. Work with the Hartford Police Department to ensure enforcement of local and state laws.
  - v. Work with the Town of Hartford Department of Public Works to maintain the trailhead parking area including snow removal.
  - vi. Maintain an information kiosk at the trailhead parking area with appropriate and current maps, rules of use, and other seasonally appropriate information.
  - vii. Information will also be posted on the Town website.
  - viii. Promote “Leave No Trace/Pack It In – Pack It Out” practices.

## **III. RECREATIONAL USES**

### **A. Reservoir Road**

Reservoir Road runs through the Town Forest. From Kings Highway to the trailhead parking area, it is a Class 3 Road. As a Class 3 Road, it is regularly maintained and plowed by the Town. Entering from Neal Road, Reservoir Road immediately becomes a Class 4 road. According to Section 75-24 of the Hartford Transportation Ordinance, “in accordance with 19 V.S.A. § 310(b), the Town does not provide any regular maintenance on Class 4 Town highways. The Town is not obligated to perform winter maintenance on any Class 4 Town highway. As a result, the Class 4 section of the Reservoir Road is not maintained by the Town. In addition, the Class 4 portion of Reservoir Road is posted prohibiting travel from March 1 through June 1. The use of the Class 4 road is governed by Vermont State Statutes. All traffic must comply with State Statutes including licensing and registration. During the winter months when there is snow, the Hurricane Riders, the local Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) Club grooms the Class 4 section of Reservoir Road for snowmobiles.

## B. TRAILS

### 1. Permitted Uses

- a. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including Class 1 e-bike are allowed on all trails.
- b. Class 1 e-bikes will be allowed in the Town Forest for a one-year trial basis beginning with the adoption of this plan. Following the end of that year, the HCC will evaluate the impact of e-bikes and determine whether they should continue to be allowed on Town Forest Trails.
- c. In the spirit of the 2002 Town Forest Recreation Plan, snowmobile pass-thru traffic is allowed. In addition to the Class 4 section of Reservoir Road, snowmobiles are allowed on the WB Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, Wright Farm Trail and the connector between the Wright Farm Trail and Reservoir Road. Snowmobiles are also allowed on the Snowmobile Cut-off, the connector between Reservoir Road and the VAST Trail on private land on the northwest section of the Forest. The Snowmobile trails are clearly marked for snowmobile traffic by the Hurricane Riders.
- d. In the spirit of the 2002 Town Forest Recreation Plan, pass-thru all-terrain vehicle (ATV), access is allowed in the Town Forest. ATV's are allowed on WB Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, West Side Loop, South Side Trail, Simonds Way and Reservoir Road except during the late winter and spring wet season between March 1 and June 1.
- e. ATV use for trail maintenance purposes is allowed throughout the Town Forest by permission of the Hartford Conservation Commission.
- f. Dirt bikes and motorcycles are not permitted on Town Forest trails.
- g. Horseback riding is permitted on the W.B. Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, Reservoir Road, Wright Farm Trail, West Side Trail and Southside Trail.
- h. The Town Forest can be enjoyed by a wide variety of activities such as hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, dog walking, etc.
- i. Dogs are not required to be on a leash IF the dog is responsive to voice commands. For the enjoyment of others, please clean up after your dog and carry the waste home.
- j. Hunting is permitted throughout the Town Forest during hunting season as prescribed by law. The Conservation Commission will post hunting notices annually of the Vermont Hunting Schedule for the safety of the general public. Hunting licenses are required to hunt in the Town Forest.

## 2. Activities Requiring the Express Permission of the Town of Hartford.

- a. **Orienteering.** Groups desiring to set up an orienteering activity may apply for a permit to the Conservation Commission to use the Town Forest.
- b. **School based or Other Educational Activity.** Groups that intend to conduct projects or educational activities in the Town Forest must apply for a permit from the Hartford Conservation Commission and specify the details of their proposed project. Educational activities that involve the killing of animals or the permanent removal of nests or plants, including wildflowers are prohibited. Activities such as the limited collection of tree leaves, fern fronds, fungi fruits, algae and lichen specimens are permitted. Any educational activity that involves the placement of stakes, ropes, wires, fencing, netting, flagging, signs, paint, branches, brush, vines, or other such materials must be done so as not to endanger humans, pets, or wildlife. All such materials must be considered temporary, must be clearly marked with the name and address of a contact person for the school group, and must be removed by members of the school group in a timely manner. Structures that significantly impound water or impede the flow of water in the Town Forest are prohibited. Any holes dug in the soil by school groups must be filled in with the original soil in a timely manner and directed away from trails or roads.
- c. **Special Events to which the General Public is Invited.** For those interested in using the Town Forest for a special event, an application for a Special Events Permit is required to be submitted to the Hartford Selectboard with notice provided to the Conservation Commission. For example, for several years, the Parks and Recreation Department has held an annual running race in the Town Forest and has worked closely with the Conservation Commission. Care must be taken so that if events do occur, their use does not negatively impact the character of the Town Forest.
- d. **Camping.** Use of the Town Forest for camping is permitted for educational purposes and for work crews only. Camping for these organizations will be limited to areas designated by the Conservation Commission. A permit from the Conservation Commission is required.

## 3. Prohibited Activities

- a. Trapping.
- b. Campfires unless they are part of an approved educational activity and are permitted by the Hartford Fire Department and any remains of the campfire are promptly removed following their use.
- c. Commercial recreational use.
- d. Target shooting.
- e. Alcohol consumption.
- f. Establishing new trails without the authorization of the Conservation Commission.



- g. Cutting or damaging trees or vegetation without the authorization of the Conservation Commission.

#### **PART IV. RECREATIONAL PLANNING IN THE TOWN FOREST**

Appendix J the Town Forest Recreational Plan prepared by SE Group in 2018 and adopted by the Conservation Commission as a planning guide.

Appendix K contains a Natural Resources Guidance Toolkit. Additional resources can be found at <https://vtcommunityforestry.org>.

Appendix L is a working agreement with the Upper Valley Mountain Biking Association regarding recreational planning and use in the Town Forest.

#### **PART V. 2021-2023 WORK PRIORITIES**

As part of the 2018 recreation planning process, the Town of Hartford retained the services of the Upper Valley Trails Alliance to assess the condition and sustainability of all trails in the Town Forest and to make recommendations for future trail work. That report is currently and will continue to be the basis for the ongoing work to improve and maintain trails.

In addition to the work proposed by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, the Conservation Commission has adopted the following goals for 2021-2023:

1. Way-finding signage on Route 4 for the Town Forest with directional signage at Center of Town Road, King's Highway and Reservoir Road.
2. The Trails Working Group will continue to make recommendations to the Conservation Commission regarding trail maintenance. The Trails Working Group shall be comprised of representatives of various user groups.
3. Create pause places (two-person benches) in appropriate wildlife viewing areas.
4. Create educational and access restriction signs for vernal pool areas, tree identification signs, wildlife viewing areas, etc.
5. Post a trails map in the kiosk, on-line and at major intersections throughout the Town Forest.
6. The Conservation Commission will review 2021 Town Forest Recreational Management Plan annually.
7. The Conservation Commission will continue to work closely with the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department.