

## TIMBER HARVEST UPDATE. May 5, 2022

As stated in the April 14, 2020 Hartford Town Forest (hereinafter HTF) Resource Management Plan update, the goals of this project in order of importance are increasing forest and wildlife diversity, education, and the lowest priority is income.

The proposed timber harvest follows and implements all recent governmental environmental plans.

The HTF is allowed to be managed with selective timber harvests in contrast to the adjacent Hurricane Wildlife Refuge which is 142 acres managed to become old-growth forest. This provides a side-by-side comparison of forestry management best practices with natural development of old growth forest which is a wonderful teaching opportunity.

**Below are responses to some questions and concerns that have been raised in public conversation.**

**ON APRIL 22, 2022 PRESIDENT BIDEN ISSUED AN EXECUTIVE ORDER ON STRENGTHENING THE NATION'S FORESTS, COMMUNITIES, AND LOCAL ECONOMIES. DOES THIS ORDER BAN OR SUGGEST THAT MATURE TREES NOT BE CUT?**

**REPLY:** No. The Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) agrees that old growth forests are an important natural resource that need to be protected and increased. But that does not mean a ban on cutting mature trees. We agree that an inventory and assessment of ability to store carbon in the context of our interior forest is important and we will participate in that endeavor.

**DOES THE HCC TIMBER HARVEST PLAN CONFLICT WITH THE VERMONT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN SPECIFICALLY THE GOAL OF INCREASING OLD GROWTH FORESTS TO 9%?**

**REPLY:** The Vermont Climate Action Plan identifies highest priority forest blocks statewide for particular action some of which are in the Hartford Town Forest. <sup>1</sup> All of the highest priority forest block areas in the Hartford Town Forest are excluded from the timber harvest; therefore, the timber harvest is not in conflict with the Vermont Action Plan.

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources *Biofinder* public access program can be used to view and compare the areas targeted by the Vermont Action Plan and the areas designated for harvesting in the Hartford Town Forest.

<sup>1</sup>See strategy 3.c on page 196 of the December 2021 initial Vermont Climate Action Plan which states: "permanent conservation on both public and private lands to allow approximately 9% of Vermont's forest to become (or be maintained as) old forest, specifically targeting 15% of the matrix forest within the highest priority forest blocks identified in Vermont conservation design to achieve this condition"

**DOES THE TIMBER HARVEST CONFLICT WITH THE HARTFORD SELECTBOARD APPROVED CLIMATE ACTION PLAN, WHICH REQUIRES THAT HARTFORD INCREASE ITS TREE CANOPY BY 90 ACRES?**

**REPLY:** No. The Strategy GT 1 of Section 7 Green Space and Trees of the [Hartford Climate Action Plan](#) reads: "Increase Tree **Cover and Diversity**, achieve an increase of 90 acres by 2030 (approximately 3% of developed land area)." The Hartford Town Forest will remain forest with the same amount of cover. Furthermore, this selective cut will directly support the "diversity" portion of Strategy GT 1 and will additionally implement strategy GT 2-7 of section 7 "to manage publicly-owned natural areas to enhance and maintain diverse native communities".

At this point, the even aged canopy of trees in the HTF is crowding and shading out almost all seedlings except for beech trees. This is creating a monoculture forest understory. With the current amount of disease and

invasive insect pressure, the forest needs different types of trees to ensure that a diverse canopy will persevere into the future and the forest will continue for future generations. A selective cut will enable trees of various species to flourish and take hold. The selective cut is strategically planned to encourage red and sugar maples, red oaks, white pine, and eastern hemlock to grow back, ultimately providing a more diverse canopy than what is poised to grow under current conditions.

**IS THE PROPOSED TIMBER HARVEST CONSISTENT WITH THE NEED TO INCREASE CARBON STORAGE AND REMEDIATE THE CLIMATE CRISIS?**

**REPLY:** The HCC agrees that trees are essential for storing carbon and remediating our climate crisis. But that does not mean a ban on cutting trees. The following are useful resources utilized in planning the timber harvest and planning for carbon storage. For example, the following references state that more total carbon can be stored and sequestered in managed compared to unmanaged forests if long term carbon storage in wood products, and substitution of wood for more carbon intensive materials is considered.

- September 29, 2021 Managing Lands for Forest Carbon webinar as part of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC) 2021 Annual Conservation Summit. Dr. Keeton's hour long webinar is available for viewing on YouTube from the AVCC website and the direct link is [AVCC Summit 2021: Managing Land for Forest Carbon with Dr. Bill Keeton - YouTube](#)
- "FOREST CARBON An essential natural solution for climate change" by UMass Amherst, Paul Catanzaro and University of Vermont, Anthony D'Amato, 2019. This can be downloaded at <https://www.uvm.edu/rsen/tonydamato/pubpdfs/Catanzaro%20and%20D%27Amato%202019%20Forest%20Carbon.pdf>
- "Healthy Forests for Our Future: A Management Guide to Increase Carbon Storage in Northeast Forests", by The Nature Conservancy and Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, 2021. Note that practice 10 is what is incorporated into the HTF Management Plan. This can be downloaded at [Healthy Forests for our future: a management guide to increase carbon storage in Northeast forests \(fs.fed.us\)](https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2021/nrs_2021_marx_001.pdf) [https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2021/nrs\\_2021\\_marx\\_001.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2021/nrs_2021_marx_001.pdf).
- Much information on forest carbon that explains the approach in the HTF Management Plan is available from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, website <https://forestadaptation.org/focus/forest-carbon-management>, including a useful one page summary.

**DO WE REALLY NEED A 4 ACRES PATCH CUT TO DEVELOP MORE WILDLIFE HABITAT?**

**REPLY:** In March the HCC reviewed the Habitat Assessment prepared in 2011 which recommended an increase in early successional habitat forest (trees 0-10 years of age) to increase wildlife habitat diversity within the HTF. In the Habitat Assessment it is noted that early successional habitat exists only at the current edges. Even so, after much discussion the HCC felt that because of the amount of open landscape in the immediate vicinity of the HTF the recommendation was not warranted. Therefore, we have eliminated the 4-acre patch cut from the proposed harvest.

**ISN'T NATURAL PROGRESSION OF THE FOREST PREFERABLE TO CUTTING TREES? WON'T DIVERSIFICATION HAPPEN NATURALLY?**

**REPLY:** The proposed selective harvest will accelerate the structural and species diversity of this currently even aged portion of the forest by a century or more. This will allow it to more quickly adapt to our climate

which is projected to change rapidly in the next few decades. The planned selective harvest has identified dead trees that will stay standing due to their habitat. There will be woody debris left on the ground to return nutrients to the soil and provide habitat. Please refer to the many resources cited above.

**WON'T THE LOGGING BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE ASTHETICS AND RECREATIONAL ENJOYMENT OF THE FOREST?**

**REPLY:** Most of the harvest will utilize existing woods roads. As the work nears completion the HTF trails working group, comprised of Hartford citizens and two HCC members, will collaboratively assess a course of action. The one new 3/8-mile-long skid road will parallel a muddy portion of the Moose Brook Trail and will either replace this portion of the Moose Brook Trail or the new skid road will be abandoned. Many previous similar selective cut harvests, including the 2005 and 2008 HTF harvests, have not caused rutting problems or long-term aesthetic disturbances. Careful consideration by the HCC deemed the use of a forwarder for tree removal, in place of a traditional skidder, to minimize mechanical impacts to the soil and other vegetation.

**WILL ACCESS TO THE HEMLOCK REQUIRE A NEW PATH UP A STEEP TERRAIN ELIMINATING OTHER TREES?**

**REPLY:** No. The hemlocks will be accessed from the northern portion of the existing Simonds Drop Trail, which is less of a slope than the steep south portion of the Simonds Drop Trail down to the Simonds Way Trail.

**WHY CAN'T THE FORESTER USE PRIVATE LAND TO TEACH GOOD FORESTRY TECHNIQUES?**

**REPLY:** The county forester can only approve a private landowner's forest management plan within wide legal and best practice parameters and does not have the authority to determine and/or direct the actual scope of work. For this project the county forester is doing that, and so he will be able to orchestrate a better example of sustainable forest techniques. He is also involving the local Hartford Area Career and Technical Center natural resource students in this project.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THERE IS A SHORT WINTER?**

**REPLY:** The experience of actual harvesting projects has shown that winter harvesting minimizes soil damage. Logging will only occur when the ground is frozen, and a winter with an unexpectedly short period of frozen conditions could require that the work be finished the following winter.