

Community feedback and committee response regarding ACF trail network proposal

Spring 2022

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Introduction

In March 2022 the Andrews Community Forest Committee (hereafter ACFC) posted a trail network design for public consideration and feedback (see figure below; also available at: http://www.richmondvt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ACF_trails_proposal_220306.pdf). During the following weeks, community members shared their views about the proposed route via an online form. This document presents the comments submitted during that period and the Committee's response to the statements, questions, and concerns those comments contain.

This document includes:

- A description of the method the Committee used to categorize topics. This categorization helped make this large set of comments submitted by the community more readily understood.
- A list of the topics present in the comments.
- The ACF Committee's response to each topic present in the comments.
- All comments submitted, organized by the topic(s) contained in each.

This approach provides a practical means for the committee to understand and address the range of sentiments held by community members related to this particular trail network design in ACF. This form-based feedback does not comprise a holistic public engagement process, nor was it intended to be a quantitative vote for or against the proposed design.

Methods

After posting the proposed trail network design, the ACFC asked community members to share their feedback via an online form. The request for feedback was open-ended: the prompt on the feedback form was "Please describe your views on the proposed trail route."

The ACF Committee promoted this opportunity for feedback via Front Porch Forum, the ACF social media pages, and on the ACF web page. At least one community group also promoted the opportunity to its members independent of the ACF Committee. The form closed for comments in late March 2022. During the submission period, the committee received 128 comments via the form, 116 of which came from people who identified themselves as living in Richmond. The 12 other comments came from people who identified themselves as living in Burlington, Hinesburg, Jericho, Montpelier, Underhill, West Bolton, Williston, and Winooski.

After the comment period ended, an ACF Committee member (Nick Neverisky) analyzed comments submitted via the form. The analysis identified topics or themes present in the comments using an approach called thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is a common approach in social science research for analyzing qualitative data. In this approach, a reviewer tags individual comments (i.e., questions, concerns, statements, or recommendations) with each topic or theme present in that comment. Some comments contain a single topic or theme, whereas others comments contain multiple topics or themes.

This approach makes a large data set more readily understood and helps ensure all types of concerns can be addressed. When identifying topics or themes, the committee member analyzing the responses sought to balance specificity with usability – that is, to categorize comments at a high enough

“resolution” that the categories capture the range of sentiments while also constraining the number of topics and themes to a manageable amount.

A second ACF Committee member (Caitlin Littlefield) drafted an initial response to each topic or theme. All other members subsequently commented on the responses, and a third member (Daniel Schmidt) collated those comments, which Caitlin then incorporated. What follows are a section listing the topics or themes (pg. 3), a section with ACFC’s response to each topic or theme (pg. 5), and a collation of all comments that were associated with each topic or theme (pg. 13).

Topics or themes present in community member comments

Topics or themes are listed below in descending order of frequency. All comments associated with each topic or theme can be found at the end of this document.

- General or “other” support for trails in ACF
- Original and/or updated proposal balances ecological benefits and trail-based recreation
- Trails as proposed will damage habitat and/or wildlife
- Process and/or public process has been adequate or good
- Recommendation to include Ridgetop trail
- Planning process needs more transparency and/or public involvement
- Trail proposal is in conflict with easement and/or ecological requirements of management plan
- Trails in ACF will help to offload crowding and/or impact at other local networks
- Concern that this process is taking as long as it is
- Question or suggestion about policies related to trail use (e.g., season closures)
- Concern related to Arrowwood's note that some ecological features may be unidentified (i.e., not represented in the map or route planning) due to ecological evaluation occurring during only one season
- Concern that at least some of the trails as proposed are optimized for mountain biking rather than multi-use (relates to statements about management plan calling for multi-use trails)
- Statement that concern about ecological impact of trails is misplaced because ACF is already ecologically degraded and/or ecological impact of trails is small relative to other activities on the forest (e.g., timber harvest), or a question related to this topic
- Statement that there is not a scarcity of trails in the Richmond area (implication that ACF should therefore be managed more conservatively re: trail miles)
- Recommendation for monitoring of trail use impact over time and adaptive management
- Statement related to importance of increasing Richmond trails on public (rather than private) land for access security
- Statement that trail proposal is consistent with management plan
- Ambiguous or "other" statement
- Trail concern (other)
- Question: What are the tradeoffs associated with two vs. three trails in the northeast quadrant of the parcel (NE)?
- Concern that mountain biking is more harmful than walking (e.g., via higher rate of erosion)
- Statement that ACF process has been adequate because other trails were built with less ecological evaluation and/or community review

- Question: What parameters (i.e., priorities) were the consultants given for trail design?
- Recommendation to reengage consultants to manage tradeoffs in light of concerns raised by community
- Concern about biker vs. walker conflict if two (rather than three) trails in the NE

Committee response to comment topics or themes

General or “other” support for trails in ACF

We acknowledge the considerable support for trails expressed by many respondents, which is consistent with sentiments that were expressed by many members of the community during the initial acquisition of ACF. Other respondents have expressed concerns about trail development, which is also consistent with original sentiments reflecting a strong commitment to protecting wildlife and their habitat. We are therefore not simply tallying statements of support and proceeding. Rather, it is our job, as the Andrews Community Forest Committee (hereafter, ACFC), to address those concerns and to ensure that the trail network complies with the Management Plan (hereafter, MP) and easement (to be confirmed by Vermont Land Trust [hereafter, VLT], holders of the easement).

Original and/or updated proposal balances ecological benefits and trail-based recreation

The committee concurs that the revised proposal strives to balance ecological impacts and trail-based recreation, given what is called for in the MP. In truth, the MP -- though an impressive feat of a robust public-engagement process -- does not provide unequivocal guidance and prioritization on two objectives that are often at odds and that the ACFC is striving to achieve: strong protection of ecological resources (e.g., critical habitat) and multi-user recreation. Trade-offs are inherent to achieving multiple objectives that do not perfectly align. Those trade-offs are what we are grappling with, and we feel that the revised proposal is likely the best scenario to balance the two objectives and mitigate trade-offs.

The revised proposal removes the Ridgetop Trail (western-most trail of the three in the northeast quadrant), which tracked a considerable distance along the edge of the ravine identified as a crucial wildlife corridor. The Ridgetop Trail had been envisioned for all users, but likely would have appealed to mountain bikers as a descent, given its slope and technical features. Given the revision, this descending traffic is now anticipated to be drawn to the Hemlock Valley Trail (central trail of the three in the northeast quadrant), which was also designed to be rideable in a downhill direction, as detailed in the report by Arrowood and Sinuosity (hereafter, A/S). The ACFC feels that the potential trade-offs of aggregating users onto a single trail is worth the ecological benefits of keeping traffic away from the ravine. Prior to trail implementation, the ACFC will consult with A/S to determine if further adjustments to the Hemlock Valley Trail are advised, given the anticipated use of Hemlock Valley Trail as the primary descent for bikers. Note that A/S took advantage of existing disturbed ground in designing this trail, rather than routing it through relatively more intact areas.

Finally, the ACFC feels that the revised proposal better achieves the goals embodied by the Concept Map while acknowledging the technical specifications within the MP than does the Concept Map itself (which was, in fact, never ground-truthed). The Concept Map zones and trails are given in Appendix A.a and A.b. of the MP, respectively, and the goals that the Concept Map strives to

achieve are given on page 27 of the MP. The revised proposal achieves or is in close correspondence with these goals: connectivity between existing trail networks (e.g., Sip of Sunshine, VYCC); one long loop and many shorter loops; lower densities above the powerlines and higher densities below the powerlines; shorter loops at lower grades from the parking area to ensure accessibility; avoidance of sensitive features whenever possible as guided by professional ecologists.

Trails as proposed will damage habitat and/or wildlife.

The ACFC acknowledges this major concern expressed by many members of the community, and we appreciate the deep commitment to safeguarding wildlife and habitat that underpins these concerns. A large body of scientific research tells us that human presence and landscape modification affects many wildlife species, such that minimizing impact would, quite simply, entail prohibiting humans from entering ACF. Untouched reserves are critical to have in this era of unprecedented environmental and climatic changes, and yet ACF was not acquired by the town with that vision in mind. Rather, at the time of acquisition, many residents voiced support for habitat protection and many residents expressed support from multi-user recreational trails; these desires were *both* encoded in the MP, even as the MP offers no clear guidance as to how to navigate these often competing objectives and the trade-offs inherent to them.

As we describe above, we feel that the revised proposal achieves -- and improves upon -- what the Concept Map in the MP seeks to do with regards to ecological impact. In particular, the design at hand concentrates use and therefore leaves more interior forest habitat untouched, whereas the Concept Map would have led people through a considerably larger footprint of land when one considers the sphere of influence imparted by any trail user on wildlife. In addition, the proposal crosses the ravine -- a critical wildlife corridor -- at only one location that coincides with an existing skid trail and that is not deep within the forest, unlike the crossing proposed by the Concept Map. Further the Concept Map tracks very closely to a considerably sized vernal pool just south of the ACF boundary and to the immediate west of the ravine.

The proposal -- especially with the revision that removes the Ridgetop Trail -- gives that vernal pool a much wider berth. The proposal does indeed include a trail -- the Hemlock Valley Trail -- that winds through a hemlock stand identified as a deer wintering area. Locating the trail through this stand was an intentional decision by A/S, as they elected to use areas already impacted -- in this case, a skid trail -- rather than route a trail through an area with less compacted soil and with more developed vegetation that may have additionally expanded the overall footprint of the trails. *This strategic decision typifies the trade-offs necessary to achieving the two objectives of providing recreational trails and minimizing ecological impact.* In addition, deer are most likely to use this particular area in the winter, when far lower human traffic is expected.

The ACFC is identifying and carefully considering tactics that will further reduce impact at this particular time of year (e.g., closing some trails to traffic during winter or not grooming some trails and therefore largely precluding fat-biking use when there is snow on the ground) as well as all times of year (e.g., requiring dogs to be leashed at all times as per the existing town ordinance). As

noted in the report by A/S, their ecological assessment was seasonally constrained such that some flora and fauna apparent in ACF at other times of year were not detectable.

Prior to trail implementation, we will re-engage with A/S to conduct the 50 ft assessment called for in the MP during the summer to identify potential ecological resources (e.g., broad beech fern, as identified by a botanist along the Middle Connector Trail in fall 2021) that may suggest necessary re-routing.

Process and/or public process has been adequate or good

The ACFC is grateful that members of the community feel that our process has been suitable. However, we acknowledge that others do not feel that way and that there are ways we could have improved this process, which we note below in response to the critique that this process needs more transparency or public involvement.

Recommendation to include Ridgetop trail

We acknowledge that a number of community members desire that we retain the Ridgetop Trail. As described above, the ACFC feels that removing this trail better balances both goals of a multi-user trail network and protecting ecological resources. We will seek to minimize potential trail user conflict by modifying the Hemlock Valley Trail as necessary, considering trail closures as necessary, and encouraging the utmost courtesy between users. We recognize that some feel that "the experts have spoken" and that this revision to the original proposal undermines the expertise of A/S. The ACFC would contend that no, we received a product in response to our Request for Proposals (RFP) and it is now our job to decide if and how we accept that product, subject to its evaluation against the mandates of the MP as well as the prevailing sentiments of the community.

Planning process needs more transparency and/or public involvement

We acknowledge that some feel the ACFC's efforts at public involvement and transparency have been insufficient. With regards to transparency, we have striven to keep the ACFC's town webpage up-to-date with relevant materials, but recognize that we have not always, for example, posted meeting minutes in a timely manner. With regards to public involvement, we have left ample space at every meeting (which have all been open) to hear from members of the community. Given, however, the many strong opinions and emotions surrounding trails on the ACF that emerged once the trail design was offered by our consultants, we can now see that it may have been helpful to also invite a formal period of public comment on the proposal prior to the initial committee vote. We hope this forum of answered comments as well as a potential facilitated meeting in the future may assure the public of our committee's commitment to transparency and public involvement.

Trail proposal is in conflict with easement and/or ecological requirements of management plan

We acknowledge that many members of the community feel that the revised proposal is consistent with the MP; others do not. These differing viewpoints reflect, in part, that the MP -- though an incredibly ambitious and impressive undertaking reflecting extensive public engagement -- remains unclear or even contradictory on some points. Above all, the MP does not provide a clear roadmap as to how to prioritize often competing objectives and is structured in such a way that an individual who wants an extensive trail network may find sections of the MP that support that position while another individual who wants the parcel to remain trail-free may also find sections of the MP that seemingly substantiate that position. The ACFC is thus attempting to thread the needle between these two objectives while reducing ecological impact to the greatest extent possible. We are also undertaking a MP revision -- as called for with any deviation to the Concept Map.

Trails in ACF will help to offload crowding and/or impact at other local networks

We can appreciate that developing a sustainable trail network at ACF may alleviate some perceived crowding at other trail networks within Richmond, particularly those on private lands (e.g., Cochrans). We also note that trails and trail networks that are appropriately sited, well-built, well-maintained, closed at appropriate times, and that strongly encourage excellent trail etiquette can accommodate large numbers of people. We say that because it is important to recognize that crowding *per se* is not the only cause of trail degradation and removing individuals will not solve underlying causes of degradation. And so, while we understand there is strong demand by many in the community for more trails, practicing exemplary stewardship and etiquette on the trails we already have may ultimately reduce the perceived problems associated with crowding, too.

Concern that this process is taking as long as it is

We can certainly understand that this process may feel unduly long to some. However, what is under consideration is an enduring modification to this remarkable parcel -- not to mention community relations. We owe it to the forest, the wildlife therein, and the residents of Richmond -- who hold a wide range of viewpoints regarding ACF -- to be conservative, diligent, and thoughtful in our planning and public engagement processes. That simply takes time, and investing time now will help to avoid unintended consequences and conflict farther down the road that other expanding trail networks have experienced.

Question or suggestion about policies related to trail use (e.g., season closures)

Potential trail closures are certainly something that the ACFC is considering, particularly in sensitive areas during times of year when wildlife may be particularly disturbed or expend too much energy trying to evade humans (e.g., the deer wintering area) as well as in areas particularly prone to erosion during mud season and other wet spells. The MP also calls for trail closures during hunting season to accommodate the community that has long enjoyed hunting on ACF (and that is, to a degree, keeping the excessively large deer population in check).

Concern related to Arrowwood's note that some ecological features may be unidentified (i.e., not represented in the map or route planning) due to ecological evaluation occurring during only one season.

As noted in the report by A/S, their ecological assessment was seasonally constrained such that some flora and fauna apparent in ACF at other times of year were not detectable. Prior to trail implementation, we will re-engage with A/S to conduct the 50 ft assessment called for in the MP during the summer to identify potential ecological resources (e.g., broad beech fern, as identified by a botanist along the Middle Connector Trail in fall 2021) that may suggest necessary re-routing.

Concern that at least some of the trails as proposed are optimized for mountain biking rather than multi-use (relates to statements about management plan calling for multi-use trails)

The multi-use trail network proposed by A/S is designed to accommodate a range of users and reduce potential conflict. This means that some trails *within* the network were built with an eye for particular user group needs (e.g., low slopes for climbing on a bicycle or skis) while other trails *within* the network were built with an eye for other user group needs. That said, *all trails and the network at large have been designed to accommodate all users*, and no trail has been optimized for any single user group to the exclusion of any other. For example, the East Climb, which is advised for uphill travel given its low slope with numerous switchbacks, will likely appeal to bikers, skiers, trail runners, hikers, and walkers alike. A/S advises minimalist trail building techniques (i.e., hand-building) for nearly all trails except for several sections closer to the trailhead. We can assure concerned residents that *this will not be a bike park with large features such as those found on several trails at Cochran's (e.g., Skully's, Chutes and Ladders)*. Sinuosity *does* design and build those sorts of trails, but that will not be happening on ACF. For a sense of what the trails at ACF will be like, consider Urbanik Way (already built on ACF) and the Preston Loop off Cochran Rd.

Statement that concern about ecological impact of trails is misplaced because ACF is already ecologically degraded and/or ecological impact of trails is small relative to other activities on the forest (e.g., timber harvest), or a question related to this topic.

ACF indeed has a long history of human impact -- nearly all of Vermont does. That fact does not, however, absolve us of being outstanding stewards of this critical parcel -- or of any land for that matter -- particularly in this era of unprecedented global change and biodiversity loss. We are thereby seeking to reduce the inevitable impacts of trails and trail users on habitat and wildlife to the greatest extent possible. Depending on the wildlife species in question, these impacts may have enduring implications for species persistence on the parcel and, indeed, on the landscape at large. We can understand that some may perceive the timber harvest that has unfolded over the past 12 months to be even *more* impactful. Rather, the impacts of harvesting equipment in the forest are largely transient and mitigated by limiting harvest to periods when the ground is frozen and when birds aren't breeding. Furthermore, the timber harvest followed the principles of ecological forest management, which is motivated by a) improving habitat conditions for a range of wildlife species, b) mitigating invasive plant, pest, and disease impacts (e.g., emerald ash borer, beech bark disease),

c) enhancing the health and resilience of forest conditions in the face of climatic change (e.g., by encouraging the growth of climate-adapted species), and d) providing a modest volume of local wood products and fuels that reduce our reliance on materials from elsewhere that may not have the high standards of ecological protection we adhere to.

Statement that there is not a scarcity of trails in the Richmond area (implication that ACF should therefore be managed more conservatively re: trail miles)

The broader Richmond area is indeed growing with regards to publicly-accessible trails, and we acknowledge that there are members of the community who feel mileage within ACF ought to be conservative (i.e., minimal). We are relying on the MP -- though conflicting in some sections -- to guide us with regards to mileage as well as the expertise brought to bear by A/S in actually routing the trails through this parcel of challenging terrain. The Concept Map and associated zones set forth in the MP (Appendices A.a and A.b) recommends approximately 2.3 miles of trails below the powerline and 4.0 miles of trails above the powerline. By comparison, our revised proposal features 3.2 miles above (plus 1.0 miles of existing VAST trail) and 1.6 miles below (plus 0.6 of existing VAST trail, 0.6 of existing access/VELCO road). So our revised proposal is within the bounds of what was advised and, in fact, lower in trail density in some areas.

Recommendation for monitoring of trail use impact over time and adaptive management

We very much appreciate this suggestion and will strategize about the best approach to monitoring trail use impact (e.g., installing trail cameras to count users; hiring an ecological consultant to evaluate erosion and impacts to vegetation, etc.). We appreciate the availability of Conservation Reserve Funds to make such monitoring possible. We are keen to finalize very soon a trail network design that will persist with the land for as long as Richmond owns it.

Statement related to importance of increasing Richmond trails on public (rather than private) land for access security

Many residents and visitors benefit tremendously from the trail access that private landowners generously afford, and we acknowledge the concern that this access is not guaranteed. For example, a landowner may sell their land, close trails to users, and/or develop it. Therefore, it is very important that we acquire and invest in public lands like ACF that ensure enduring benefits such as trail access. This is particularly true in places like Vermont and other New England states where public lands are minimal, in great contrast to the large swaths held by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service in the western US. But it is also true that this very argument about the insecurity of trails and trail access on private lands holds for wildlife habitat, as well. Private land is far more likely to have its natural land cover permanently converted (e.g., via low- or high-density real estate or commercial development) than is publicly held land. Thus one could just as easily argue that protecting habitat to the greatest extent possible on public land is of paramount concern. Herein lies the challenge the ACFC is grappling with: ensuring public

access while reducing ecological impacts to the greatest extent possible. We feel that the revised proposal best threads the needle between these two objectives.

Statement that trail proposal is consistent with management plan

We acknowledge that some members of the community feel that the revised proposal is consistent with the MP; others do not. These differing viewpoints reflect, in part, that the MP -- though an incredibly ambitious and impressive undertaking reflecting extensive public engagement -- remains unclear or even contradictory on some points. Above all, the MP does not provide a clear roadmap as to how to prioritize often competing objectives -- both trail supporters and those who wish to see no trails could find multiple locations in MP to substantiate their position. That is the crux of the challenge that the ACFC faces, and we feel that the proposed design represents a suitable compromise.

Ambiguous or "other" statement

NA

Trail concern (other)

Addressed elsewhere

Question: What are the tradeoffs associated with two vs. three trails in the NE?

We put this exact question to A/S. Their response is available here:

<http://www.richmondvt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Expanded-Additional-Responses-to-ACF-Committee-Re-ACF-Ecological-Trail-Design.pdf>

Concern that mountain biking is more harmful than walking (e.g., via higher rate of erosion)

The extensive public engagement process undertaken during the acquisition of ACF revealed that many town residents were keen to see these trails designed for multiple user groups; mountain bikers are one such user group and so that is how the trail network has been designed. We have confidence that A/S took great care in laying out the trails -- for example, they even indicated which side of a given tree to go on. They have made clear recommendations as to how each trail ought to be constructed and what structures (e.g., bridges) may be necessary to further reduce impacts during ongoing use. In addition, the ACFC is considering what monitoring ought to look like to ensure we are able to maintain the trails and implement closures whenever necessary. We will also anticipate future trail use considerations (e.g., e-bikes) and implement policies that are as conservative as possible to ensure trail sustainability and longevity.

Statement that ACF process has been adequate because other trails were built with less ecological evaluation and/or community review

We strove to set a high bar for this trail design process by including professional ecologists and trail designers from the outset. As these commenters suggest, doing so has rarely -- if ever -- been done at other trail networks. And we agree that other trail networks may not be subject to as much community review as ours has been. We would point out though that simply exceeding what other communities have or have not done does not simply mean we get to rest on our laurels and say "good enough". Rather, we are striving for excellence as we pursue a sustainable, multi-user trail design that minimizes ecological impacts -- not simply being better than elsewhere.

Question: What parameters (i.e., priorities) were the consultants given for trail design?

The RFP which includes the parameters to which A/S responded is available at the link below. We acknowledge that we ought to have engaged in a more iterative process with A/S during trail development to evaluate multiple drafts, the pandemic notwithstanding.

http://www.richmondvt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ACF_EcologicalTrailDesign_RFP_Oct2020.pdf

Recommendation to reengage consultants to manage tradeoffs in light of concerns raised by community

This is an excellent recommendation and we have already done so. See link below.; see appended correspondence with A/S. Additionally, we are considering next steps with regards to hiring a facilitator to shepherd us through the next phase of public engagement regarding the revised MP (in which the Committee's trail proposal will be imbedded) prior to bringing a recommendation before the Selectboard. <http://www.richmondvt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Expanded-Additional-Responses-to-ACF-Committee-Re-ACF-Ecological-Trail-Design.pdf>

Concern about biker vs. walker conflict if two (rather than three) trails in the NE

We acknowledge this concern but feel that the relatively small volume of users anticipated at ACF will simply mean that conflict is not a major issue. Furthermore, we will encourage utmost courtesy among trail users such that all users, whether on two feet, four feet, skis, or wheels, can enjoy the trails together -- as on the Preston Loop -- and not in an antagonistic manner. In addition, the ACFC is considering a monitoring plan to ensure that the trails do indeed meet the needs of all users, that conflict is avoided, and that we are able to maintain the trails and implement closures whenever necessary to ensure the sustainability, longevity, and ecological sensitivity of the network.

Comments associated with each topic

General or “other” support for trails in ACF

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| Plan looks good. Is there a way to connect to sip of sunshine? |
| I think they’re proposed to take into consideration various stakeholder perspectives. This plan looks reasonable to me. |
| The potential health benefits from providing trail access to a diversity of users are enormous. Local recreational options are important for the community to provide and will encourage local young people to stay in both Richmond and the larger Vermont community. |
| We love using local trails to walk and run. The networks allow us access to other areas of Richmond that would be tough to travel on the roads. The proposed route would be a wonderful, recreational addition to our town. |
| I support moving forward now with building the original trail plan. The ridgetop trail should be included. I also support winter snowmobile use of the existing VAST trail through the forest. Overall, the trail system could be improved with additional trails. It would benefit from more loops and less out and back walks. The highly regarded Hinesburg Town Forest has significantly more trail miles per acre and a better overall layout for recreational use. If most of our forest is left without official trails, users will create their own “herd paths”. Ecologically, it would be better to have trails built and marked. Building the original trail plan is a good starting point. Going forward, the town should evaluate options for additional trails in other parts of the forest. The Andrews Community Forest was never intended to be a wildlife preserve. |
| One of Richmond’s best characteristics is the opportunity to enjoy a variety of trails without traveling far. The original discussion of the town forest always included the idea that a collection of trails would be built. In order to prevent crowding, overuse, and stress on the environment, it is imperative that that there is a large selection of trails from which to choose. I support the development of the proposed trails in the plan. |
| We are in support of the original proposed trail system. |
| I am supportive of the current trail plan and think the ATF Committee and vendors have done an exemplary job in navigating this process. I'm looking forward to having the trail network available to our awesome community! |
| I would like to submit my full support of the original trail plan submitted by Arrowwood and Sinuosity. The ATF Committee has been extremely thorough, thoughtful, diligent, and patient in this multi-year process. I believe those supporting the recreational aspect of the Town Forest Recreation Plan have been incredibly patient as well. The Committee delivered a clear majority vote (6 in favor, 2 against, 1 abstaining) to approve the multi-use trail design plan back in August, 2021. Yet here we are, continuing to gather and filter more public input. The public has had ample opportunity to be involved and voice opinions every step of the way, over the past four years. As an aside, I’d also like to express my personal opinion that it is unrealistic to expect the ATF committee members to individually become expert ecologists or expert trail designers -- to digest hundreds of pages of content forwarded to them. The Committee selected and paid two highly respected, professional, local companies to bring that expertise to the table. It was an unprecedented process to hire a joint ecologist / trail design team to balance recreation and ecological concerns. I support the expertise Arrowwood and Sinuosity delivered, and respectfully request that the Committee and the Select Board approve that plan as well. |
| Completely in support. I feel the ACF completed a thorough and deliberate process that considered all stakeholders and public interests. This will be another wonderful resource for our community to access and use. |

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| <p>I appreciate the thought that has gone into this plan and the investment in recreation. It does seem like the Ridgeline trail would be great to keep as it's impact in the wide life corridor is small. I fully support this direction</p> |
| <p>Yes please! More trails. I cant think of any trails in Richmond that have done as much homework and had as much scrutiny as these proposed trails. Yet the others were built. Look at the positive impact to our community of the existing trails. Fully support these new trails.</p> |
| <p>I think the trail route is great. From walking my dog many times in the forest, I wish there were more trails to explore.</p> |
| <p>I fully support the original plans with the additional trail. I'd love to get my 6 year old daughter into mountain biking this year. Less trails in the Richmond area means people like us are driving further to bike and hike. Using more fossil fuels and harming the environment. A few more trails please!</p> |
| <p>After reviewing the materials and plans it appears that the plan is thoughtful and comprehensive of all needs. I support the plan.</p> |
| <p>I am in full support of the trail plan for ACF. The committee did a great job coming up with this proposal. We should move forward with these trails as soon as we can.</p> |
| <p>For over 30 years I have been using that area...VAST trails in the early days... and in the recent times have been walking there often with family and friends. I am in support of trails for use of the public. What a treasure it is.</p> |
| <p>It seems that the committee has invested in significant research and has heard many different views. I 100% support the proposal and look forward to the expanded access of the 'sunny side' of Richmond in the darker months.</p> |
| <p>As a resident and local business owner, I would like to express my whole-hearted support for either trail plan put forth by the committee. I applaud the Committee's goal to balance recreation and ecological conservation considerations in the development of the proposed plan. I have seen first-hand the economic effects of the improved recreational opportunities in town. We need to keep this momentum going as we continue with the renaissance our village core is seeing. Please consider the economic impact for the town.</p> |
| <p>I support the design plan as submitted and approved - I am hoping the proposed trails do not get cut - looking forward to when the project is completed - I use the Preston Legacy Forest trails extensively and love living here in Richmond - thanks!</p> |
| <p>I think people protect the land more when they actively get out to enjoy it. A trail can be made in a thoughtful way. I support making a trail for people to enjoy.</p> |
| <p>I support the proposed trail route.</p> |
| <p>I am fully supportive. Not only does it increase availability of exercise opportunities for the well being of Richmond citizens, but it does so in an environmentally responsible way. I see no down side to this. The upside is citizen satisfaction, potentially more traffic through the town of Richmond buying services and goods at our local shops/restaurants, and is a good compromise in the name of balancing our opportunities with our environmental footprint.</p> |

The original trail design plan would be AMAZING if it came to fruition. It would connect to town via Sip trail without having to ride on the treacherous twisty section of Rt 2. Love that I can park or ride to town and connect Chamberlain, Preston, & Cochran's without spending too much time on the road. At Andrews to that---sweet!!! But if the Sip connector can't be...it's a blow....not a critical blow for me, but I assume it could be for residents in the proximity close to Sip.

I am concerned that not having enough trails to spread users out on the descents (specifically gravity oriented riders) could potentially cause significant conflict or at least some potential disharmony with different users' flow types. As one commenter anecdotally stated in the meeting, the users at Preston are generally always polite and smiling when they cross each other, no matter what their mode of transportation. I 100% agree with this statement. BUT 2 notable differences between Preston and this revised Andrews design are: (1) Preston has 3-4 descending options (LungTa, Preston Loop, Visceral, and Graveyard). (2) Aside from descending, users also are able to exit the Preston trail network in 4 separate exit points which significantly spreads users out (A-Day, Connector, Lower Connector, and out Merritt). I spend an unhealthy amount of time scouring Trailforks and Strava routes, and I find users travel Preston (often paired with Cochran's) in so many different ways and in all directions. There really isn't 1 standard top-to-bottom loop or route that everyone takes. How many hikers do you see on Graveyard or Visceral? None right!? They obviously opt for more hiking-friendly routes/exists (Preston and Merritt). So to wrap up my point--yes--most trail users jive in harmony at Preston, but they are not all forced/funneled onto 1 trail ascent or descent and their typical routes vary significantly even among the same type of user groups.

I've spent a lot of time this winter grooming the fat bike trails at Andrews and I see how much potential that land has. Descending Urbanik trail I envision the future of Andrew's downhill being 3x longer--wow that will be fun!! And having fun climbing trails too--yes please! A full top-to-bottom loop is sure to be a real fun addition to the Richmond Trail network for any trail user. Even the most basic top to bottom loop is sure to be AMAZING and I can't wait.

If I can add my two cents as fat bike trail groomer...Having 'boot friendly' trails at Andrews could make the winter grooming last much longer and better. I know PRKR mountain in Little NH does this. There is so much boot traffic at Andrews, which is great that people like to hike there, but it's almost impossible to maintain a fat bike friendly route. Boot friendly routes could help make the trails better for bikers, and could continue to make the trails more equitable without requiring users to use snowshoes on all groomed trails (which they don't at Andrews anyway as you know). The boot trails can even be groomed. Options and signage could go a long way.

Thanks!

I support the original trail design by Arrowwood/Sinuosity. Trust the experts you hired to design a trail network that minimizes environmental impact. It's time to move the process forward after 4 years of debate and planning.

I feel so lucky to live here in Richmond, I am behind the proposed trail construction and think it's a great addition to the many walking/hiking/biking and x/c-snowshoe-snowmobile trails private and public that Richmond offers. I am firmly behind anything that gets our society outside and off screens, I am guilty as well.

As I mentioned on FPF I hope we can incorporate at least one route through Andrew's town forest for official and insured VAST trail, we hope to get a route open from Perfection trailers up and back connected with VAST route to Essex. A group of local riders, just took over the local club and once we get up and running might not be a bad idea to meet and see if there is any crossover that would benefit the community as a whole. If we get a VAST trail back on the map it would be groomed, that might be something we could somehow work out to keep a winter loop in Andrew's forest groomed for general public use, motorized or not.

Hope this project moves forward regardless! Rob

I support the proposed trail route. Thanks!

I believe that with the extensive collaboration that was built into the original design, with a professional ecological firm, AND a trailbuilder, that it already was designed with a considerable compromise, when comparing the proposed trail density with other local town-forests (and recognizing the amount of additional non-interrupted land nearby).

But since that has been deemed potentially too intrusive, I support the current compromise as a means to allow both wildlife to thrive, and people to enjoy the land.

It is generally through the use of land that most people gain an appreciation for it, and will continue to drive towards further preservation and conservation efforts. If conservation is seen as only taking away, or limiting people, it will inhibit further conservation efforts.

Hi All-

I served on the Andrews Town Forest Committee in 2017 and 2018. I am on the board of Richmond Mountain Trails. I am a member of the Conservation Alliance, which helped fund purchase of Andrews Town Forest

As you work towards a proposal for the Richmond Selectboard re: trails in Richmond's Andrews Town Forest, I wanted to share some quotes with you I collected as I was researching a story on trail-based recreation in Vermont for a national publication. The quotes are from a Vermont Federal Forester, a Program Manager at conservation non-profit Trust for Public Land, and from a representative of the Lintilhac Foundation.

As a journalist, I turn to experts to help me understand whatever topic I am writing about. I hope that the Town of Richmond will also defer to experts as we come up with a plan for the Richmond Town Forest that will serve the needs of flora and fauna, as well as the needs of the community.

At the last two ATF Committee meetings, committee members used the trails proposal created by the experts the town hired to develop a plan to care for wildlife and serve community user groups as a starting point for compromise, when in fact that plan was the result of compromise, which is what both Arrowwood Consultants and Sinuosity Trail Designers explained it was, detailing their iterative process over the course of a four plus hour public meeting.

The Sinuosity/Arrowwood plan was developed by expert ecologists and expert trail designers in a landmark collaboration that could serve as a model for how trails are built throughout Vermont in the future, satisfying trail users and protecting wildlife and Vermont's ecology.

But it doesn't appear that the majority of the committee is willing to trust the experts the Town of Richmond hired.

It's ironic. When Ethan Tapper, our county forester, makes a recommendation to the ACTF committee, all defer to him as the forestry and logging expert. When Arrowwood and Sinuosity made a recommendation, members of the committee and the community asserted their own expertise trumps that of the experts we hired.

I am a conservationist, an avid nature lover and a lover of outdoor activity. I strongly believe we should establish wilderness--land with the least human impact possible.

Richmond Town Forest is not that land. It's a small parcel bisected by a power line, a piece of land where there has been extensive logging, and a parcel with an existing network of logging roads that are heavily used by the public. Andrews Community Forest was purchased to serve as a wildlife corridor and also a place for Richmond residents to recreate. It was purchased as a community resource, a place for Richmond residents to be in nature, to breath fresh air, to stretch our legs and lungs. The Arrowwood/Sinuosity proposal represents a dramatically scaled down trail system from what was first proposed by SE Group, consultants the town hired to help us determine what town residents want our town forest to be.

I strongly encourage the selectboard to approve a plan that will balance the interests of as many community interest groups as possible. I strongly encourage you to adopt the proposal put together by Arrowwood and Sinuosity, and to approve the modest network they proposed for immediate construction.

The trails discussion has been going on since 2017. It's time that we move forward with a fair and balanced plan, and end the infighting in our town that wants to give some user groups access and bar other users. A scaled down version of the Arrowwood/Sinuosity plan will create unnecessary trail crowding and potential conflicts. Please allow the three trails laid out in the proposal we hired Arrowwood and Sinuosity to create.

As a private landowner whose parcel provides a key link in the Preston Loops, I ask the town to please allow trail-based travel in our town forest.

Thanks for reading.

Warmly, Berne

“Having trails affects a community’s pride and identity,” said Holly Knox, Federal Forester from Vermont’s Rochester Ranger District. “The public health, economics, and transportation benefits extend beyond the public investment we’re making in trail infrastructure. When a company decides to move to Vermont because of the recreation opportunities it offers—the economic impact is not always accounted for when we talk about trail networks. Trails preserve the rural and scenic quality of life that we see. They provide a link between people and natural resources. When people feel connected to the landscape, they’re more likely to respect and care for public lands and natural resources. Trails provide the respite people are seeking.”

“We see mountain biking as a way to evolve how we interact with land use in the state of VT,” said Louise Lintilhac of the Lintilhac Foundation. “We are constantly looking for new ways to involve communities with conserved land. Mountain biking is part of that picture. When people get involved, they care more about the land’s future, about climate change, about protecting that land. They become more engaged in town land use policies and management plans. In Vermont, we pride ourselves on healthy landscapes. Our viewsheds are what attract visitors. And mountain biking is an important tool in keeping farms and forests dominant.”

“People need to know the land to want to put money and time behind it,” said Kate Wanner, Project Manager at the Trust for Public Land. “Mountain biking is one way to get people to fall in love with a forest, and to have respect when they come around a corner and startle a fisher or see a porcupine climbing a tree. Without recreationists, we don’t have strong political power behind us to protect places we need to protect. Here, like everywhere, an increasing number of recreational enthusiasts means it’s easy for some trails systems to be “over loved.” We need more places to get people outside. It improves the health of the individual and of the community. Mountain biking needs land, and in many cases land needs people to conserve it and to care for it.”

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| <p>I have reviewed the proposed maps and associated documents, and support the plan to build the trails.</p> |
| <p>As a trail runner I am in support of the proposed trail plan. I do hope these are true multi use trails and not just mountain bike trails that people are allowed to walk and run on like so many of our local trails are.</p> <p>Having a connection north to the Sip of Sunshine trail seems like a great way to access the trails without having to use Rt2.</p> |
| <p>I can tell a great deal of care has gone into the design and ecology of this project. During these times of isolation and quarantine our goal should be to get our kids outside to enjoy nature and develop avenues to alleviate stress.</p> <p>The focus of this forest should be increasing accessibility to the wonders of Vermont.</p> <p>Thank you as a parent and as community member of Richmond for developing this trail network!</p> |
| <p>I support the proposed trail plan.</p> |
| <p>I do not see the need to eliminate the proposed ridge line trail, however, I support the plan as described and encourage the town to begin the next phase of the project.</p> |
| <p>I strongly support the trail plan. Thank you!</p> |
| <p>100% in favor of the current proposed plan. The committee has done a great job researching the impact and taking all viewpoints and needs into consideration. This plan represents excellent work and the best balance possible for all parties.</p> |
| <p>I strongly favor the trail plan at ACF. I was in favor of the original plan with the 3 trails and believe that was the best plan given the input and efforts put forth. That plan did a great job of compromising the desires and needs of the diverse views put forward. I am less enthusiastic about this further compromise, however I still submit a resounding YES to the proposed ACF trail route. Thanks to the committee for their hard work.</p> |
| <p>As a resident who bikes, skis, runs and hunts in the town forest, I think the proposed trails offer a great balance of use for a wide variety of Richmond residents. Sinuosity has a wonderful reputation building trails that are durable, sustainable and fun to ride/run. The connection to the Sip of Sunshine trail is also an important part of Richmond's town vision to connect to other trail networks. The popularity of the trails in Richmond is vital for our town's vibrant culture and economic vitality.</p> |
| <p>The proposed trail network looks like a great community resource for riding, running, walking. this will create broader opportunity for the Richmond community to enjoy exercise and nature.</p> |
| <p>The proposed trails look great! Connecting to the neighboring trails definitely provides exciting opportunities for longer and more adventurous bike rides and hikes, whereas the trails near the parking lot provide nice variety for people of all abilities. Great work done by everyone so far! I'm very excited to see this come to fruition as someone who lives nearby and already regularly recreates at ACF.</p> |
| <p>As a land owner to the north of the ACF I believe a balance of the competing interests is necessary. I want to see the trail proposed the goes north and connects to the trails on the land I own with my spouse be retained and approved.</p> <p>I also agree that eliminating one of the proposed three trails in order to assist in preserving the ecological zone is a good solution.</p> |

Original and/or updated proposal balances ecological benefits and trail-based recreation

I think the proposed route will serve the needs of all concerned. It will create public land that can be used for a variety of recreational activities, and it will maintain a wildlife corridor as well. I am a native Vermonter and I have seen public land for recreational use dwindle over the years. To have a piece of municipal land protected for public use is a gift for any town. Trails on private land can be repurposed at any time so it is important to have public land accessible for use by all. It is my experience that people who love the outdoors are respectful of the land and the wildlife on it. Use of land like this is why most of us live in Vermont

I am a local resident, I appreciate the balance between preservation, conservation and recreation. I support the trails plan that was designed by Arrowwood and Sinuosity. Thanks

I fully support the ACF committee and their plans on the proposed trail route. ACF did what many would have done and hired Arrowwood and Sinuosity, professionals in their fields, to build out a plan that makes sense for the forest. Being a person that works for a local conservation organization (VYCC) I see the importance of what ACF is trying to do in our community.

We support the new plan that would avoid wildlife sensitive areas. We don't want the earlier plan that shows trails going through the deer yards, etc.

The Richmond Trail Committee would like to lend our support to either the original trail plan or the amended trail plan for the Andrews Community Forest. The trail committee has been involved over the last 5 years in helping shape the future of the Andrews Community Forest. The process that the Andrews Community Forest Committee has been through to get to this trail design has been long, extensive, precedent setting, and public. Trails are how the majority of townsfolk, students, and visitors are going to use and enjoy our new Town Forest. It has been a long, deliberative process to get to this point. By working with a professional ecological firm and a professional trail design firm, we feel the plan put forth finds the optimal balance for recreation and conservation. Some of the Trail Committee's key goals are interconnecting neighborhoods and interconnecting towns via trails to avoid roads. This plan helps to accomplish this. Moreover, we strongly believe having a loop option in the upper forest for exploration is a key design feature for forest visitors, so even with losing one of the upper trails, a loop option still remains. Compared to our neighboring towns with Town Forests, the proposed trail density in this design is extremely low. Currently, the majority of trails we enjoy in Richmond are on private land, and access is provided by landowner generosity, but is not guaranteed in the future. The ACF was bought by the town with recreation as a key component, and ensuring well crafted, thoughtful, and sustainable trails is key to having a town resource for the future. For these reasons and more, we are excited for and support either plan.

I support both of the proposed trail plans from Sinuosity/Arrowhead. The ACF Committee have done an excellent job coming up with a trail plan that balances public recreational access as well as ecological preservation that is aligned with the Management Plan. The Community Forest is a valuable resource that can provide members of our community access to the outdoors, which leads to strong bonds and a drive to protect these natural areas. Arrowwood and Sinuosity are experts in their fields, and carefully created a solution that allows public access with minimal intrusion on the environment.

I am in full support of the Andrews Community forest plan between Sinuosity/Arrowwood! This plan was well thought out, with great consideration to the local habitat and wildlife. Richmond desperately needs more places for folks to safely walk, bike, and recreate with established parking.

Trails are a big part of recreation and help getting people outside to enjoy the nature and breath fresh air. The trails proposed by Arrowood and Sinuosity is the perfect example of balancing ecology with providing access to nature and satisfy the need of diverse users in the community. The plan was proposed by professional ecologists and trail builders who where specially hired to provide the best plan that takes in account all users. The scaled down plan is acceptable but not preferred. It sounds unreasonable to think that a well designed network of trails as the one proposed will have a bigger impact than the massive power lines and logging operations that have already taken place in this area.

It seems clear to me that the ACF property has a history of serving many needs. It is also clear, from the years-long planning process and more recent discussions, that the Richmond community would like the ACF property to continue to serve many (sometimes opposing) needs. I support the trail plan as proposed (with or without the ridge trail) as I believe it balances the communities varied desires.

I am fully in support of sustainable recreational trails being built on the ACF and am in favor of the original trail layout designed and presented by Arrowood and Sinuosity initially. This design between ecologists and trail designers was iterative and ended up with a compromise solution that was better than the first plan laid out by the SE Group and strikes the appropriate balance between preserving delicate areas of the land with creating an engaging and educational trail layout for nature lovers, walkers, runners, bikers, snowshoers and others.

I was at the public meeting in August 2021 where the trail proposal was presented and discussed and I was impressed by the thought and expertise of the professionals the ACFC hired to create a collaborative and responsible plan setting aside significant portions of the property for wildlife and condensing the trails into smaller blocks to meet the varied goals of the management plan. The plan was approved at that meeting after extensive deliberation on top of years of public input, so I feel like it it time to move forward and create the sustainable and clear trail infrastructure that will both benefit the town as well as protect the forest by keeping users to established trails.

Thanks to the committee, volunteers who have volunteered their time to make our town a better place. It is an important job to make sure the ACF is a valuable resource for the town as one of the few pieces of truly public land in Richmond!

I think this trail is going to be great for local recreation. It's thoughtfully designed and had some really great input from people concerned with the potential impact on the watershed and animal habitat. I feel really good about riding a trail that was designed having done everything possible to address these concerns.

Further, because there will be little to no new parking opportunities, I believe that this trail will be ridden mostly by locals who live near either of the trail heads. That means that the kind of people who will ride this trail are likely to be people who appreciate the beauty and delicateness of the ecosystem on which they are treading. Because the trail is uphill both ways (literally!), it will be ridden by mountain bikers who are interested not only on the gravity focused portion but on the uphill as well. While there are no hard and fast rules about what kinds of mountain bikers like what kind of trails, I believe that generally speaking this will filter out bikers who might be less inclined to appreciate the importance of respect for trail conditions and other, non-cycling, recreationists.

Finally, this new trail will provide some much needed relief to the pressure that is mounting on our existing trail systems. I'm delighted to see mountain biking grow in popularity as I think it correlates with healthier lifestyles and an appreciation of nature and, in particular, our forests. That said, the increasing number of bikers means we need more trails to distribute the load and to properly care for the existing networks.

Thank you for conducting such an open, transparent and thoughtful design and consultation process around this trail.

I believe in wild places. They are sacred and difficult to defend. I understand the desire to steer ACF towards a more wild state. I also trust the trail plan. It is well thought out and represents a deep understanding of recreational and ecological needs. I look forward to exploring the new trails and spending time in ACF. I also hope those on all sides can come together for a picnic when the dust settles. We are lucky to have such care and interest in this place.

I trust the ecologist and trail builder and the original plan they proposed. It feels important to honor the work of the experts that the town hired. We need town recreation trails for those of us that don't own land. I don't see a need to amend the original trail plan because of an extremely vocal minority.

I support the plan to build trails in the ACF. I think the plan was approached in a thoughtful way and does its best to balance recreational and environmental interests.

I support the trails. They provide recreation while respecting the natural habitat. The trail committees in Richmond have done an outstanding job. I fully support and appreciate all their work.

I would like to first commend the ACF Committee on their thoughtful and inclusive approach to this process as well as their intent to create "an exemplary trail network, with ecological considerations paramount in trail design." I am strongly of the opinion that the proposal as put forth by Arrowwood and Sinuosity was meticulously crafted with an appropriate focus on both ecological preservation and recreational opportunities. I fully support this plan including the Ridgeline trail as it was initially included.

Some time ago, our community took the opportunity to purchase the Andrews property with the vision to conserve part of the forest as farm land and open areas to recreation. The promise was to expand the need for recreation in Richmond, bring in business and extend the educational growth of forest management and nature. This vision was enshrined in a document called : Town Forest Recreation Plan Richmond -->
https://vtcommunityforestry.org/sites/default/files/pictures/richmond_plan_document_final.pdf . The framework of this vision helped enable the development of the ACF "Management Plan"

Take note on page 24 and 25 of the document that our desires at the time focused on conservation, recreation, forest management and education. The forest has been logged, the farm land leased and now it's time for recreation. It's been over five years now that the ACF committee and community has gone through the deliberations to achieve the management plan goals.

The ACF committee has a sound trail design approved by three ecologists an expert trail design consultant, and large community support. So now is the time to fulfill the promise to those who have waited the longest to have more recreation in the forest. Please give your input now so the ACF Committee can close on public opinion and represent the findings to the Select board and trails can be started this year.

I support the proposed trail design as presented. The forest as part of the 10,000 acre tract of conserved land, has ample room for humans and wild life to co-exist. We have hundreds of miles of trails in Vermont similar to the ACF landscape. Now is the time to move forward with our trails and keep the promise to ourselves.

Pete Halvorsen
VT Master Naturalist
Certified National Recreational Trail Designer

I am in full support of the new revised plan for trails in the ACF. I am glad to see the initiative that the trails committee has taken in response to the increased recreation in our town. I think it is imperative that the town takes actions to provide new areas of recreation for all types of use. I am very happy with the care that has been put in to understand the ecological impacts of the trails and the resulting plan. I think this is a great resources for the town to access natural areas which in turn creates a broader awareness of respect for our natural areas.

I feel as though the ecological study has been thorough and the trail design well thought, that the committee should move forward with the plan for trails.

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| <p>I think the proposed trails network honors the character of the Andrews Community Forest as it exists today, restricting and containing human travel in an appropriate and sustainable manner. As a nearby property owner and frequent visitor, I am glad to see how much of the parcel was left untouched. I am glad that our town chose to participate in the years-long, community-focused and -supported deliberative process, involving citizens throughout. I support honoring this valuable work by implementing the trails network (and preservation of the rest of the ACF!) as proposed.</p> |
| <p>I fully support the trail plan and appreciate the extensive work done to understand the existing wildlife and flora in the ACF. Integrating this understanding into trail development is explained in detail in the Management Plan, and opportunities for public feedback are included as part of the required assessment protocol. Thank you to all who have put so many hours into the ACF and for making such an easily accessible and extensive record of documents and reports for the public.</p> |
| <p>I would like to submit my full support of the trail plan put forth by the committee. I am a Richmond resident and manager of the Cochran Ski Area and in my opinion, the original trail plan should be supported by the Committee and approved by the Select Board. With public trails and ample parking, Cochran's ski area and my family's land is currently a host to many multi-use trails. While it has been tremendously positive to host trails and be a central location for recreation in Richmond, there is a limit on how much we can do. By approving the proposed ATF plan, the Town would share the role of providing recreational opportunities for the community, on public land. I appreciate the detailed ecological study that helped determine the proposed trail design. I encourage the ATF Committee and Select Board to approve the plan that was developed by paid, vetted, and experienced professionals.</p> |
| <p>I am fully supportive. Not only does it increase availability of exercise opportunities for the well being of Richmond citizens, but it does so in an environmentally responsible way. I see no down side to this. The upside is citizen satisfaction, potentially more traffic through the the town of Richmond buying services and goods at our local shops/restaurants, and is a good compromise in the name of balancing our opportunities with our environmental footprint.</p> |
| <p>Habitat protection in the Andrews Community Forest with an allowance for reasonable recreation was achieved with the original plan and it should remain unchanged. The original management plan was the result of many thoughtful sessions and input from all the interested parties. Coming after the fact and attempting to amend the plan ,which effectively guts it, is counterproductive to all the efforts the original planners made to protect the environment and wildlife.</p> |
| <p>I fully support the trail plan as originally proposed and recommended by the progressional entities hired and then agreed upon by the ACF committee. I am a strong proponent of research, data, and subject matter experts or professionals who can interpret and make recommendations given their experience and expertise. From my understanding, that is what the town hired these professionals to do given requirements and best practices of understanding all of the variables that go into trail design through sensitive environments. What are the impacts of a multi-use single track trail to the surrounding forrest? Lots of opinions exist throughout our community, but the professionals based their recommendations off of research, expertise, and best practices. I stand by that, as well as the ACF committee who seems to have gone through a rigorous process to ensure the best interests of the town and environment were considered.</p> |
| <p>My husband Bob and I host and maintain miles of public trails on our private land. While we are happy to share our land, I do want to point out that currently the vast majority of town wide trails are on private land. The Andrews Committee has done a very thorough job vetting and hiring the professional ecologist and trail design team to arrive at a plan that allows the Town to support multi-use trails on public land, in an ecologically-minded way. Personally I would prefer the original trail plan to spread out rather than condense users onto fewer trails, but if compromise is necessary, I also support the Committee's amended plan. Many thanks to the ATF committee for all of its hard work!</p> |
| <p>I think the updated proposed trails will still be a great addition to the trail system in Richmond. Excluding the ridge line trail is a good call to be sure that sensitive ecological zone is not disturbed, especially for the long-term sustainability of the project. We read all the material provided and think the justification is valid.</p> |

I am so excited by it! I liked the previous proposal with more trails but understand the reason for change due to environmental impact and am supportive of that. A random thing of note, as someone who is actively trying to purchase a home in richmond (within riding distance of trails) this has made the Jonesville area an awesome potential place to purchase a home -- I really feel it adds significant value to that side of town and will be interested to see if that changes for others too.

Based on the language found on page 28 of the 2018 ACF management plan which identifies it's recreational objectives as 1) Provide a forest that has opportunities for all interested users (hunters, mountain bikers, walkers, etc.), 2) Preserve sensitive areas of the forest and route trails around those areas, and 3) provide a trail system that is well-connected to trails on adjacent properties and Richmond Village, I feel the committee has done an exemplary job in meeting their objectives with the original plan as it was put forth inclusive of the now in question "Ridgetop Trail". I support the plan and the great work that the ACF committee has done thus far.

The ACFC should adopt the original trail design by arrowood and sinuosity. The trails as designed will serve the intended users and the forest equally. The trail design was a compromise between ecological and recreational priorities. Many trail users would gladly see more trails than those proposed put into the ACF. Likewise, folks prioritizing minimal impact to the forest would see fewer trails. The design with 3 trails that allows for looped use and multiple trail users, while protecting habitat to the west is the best possible outcome.

Removing the "ridgetop" trail in the already compromised trail plan is unnecessary from an ecological standpoint, and harmful from a recreational standpoint. The trail as flagged is largely shielded from the wildlife corridor in the adjacent ravine due to the topography. Only at small intervals does the trail run close to the ravine, and in those instances it is along cliffs that still provide adequate shielding for wildlife to utilize the corridor. The ridgetop trail also provides those visiting the forest with a glimpse into these areas while concentrating the use onto the trail vs. dispersing it through the forest which may have a more deleterious effect.

I am a member of the Richmond conservation commission and of the Richmond mountain trails board. I have an undergraduate degree in ecological studies and a law degree in environments law. I believe the compromise as originally proposed is a tremendous win for ecology and recreation and can be used as a beacon for other projects to emulate. Further curtailing the vision of arrowood and sinuosity may make this model less appealing to future users. Recreational Trail developers may be less likely to want to collaborate with ecological consultants if the fruit of that labor is ignored.

If the committee is intent on changing the plan, I would propose keeping the ridgetop trail but moving it further away from the ravine in the places where there is concern it may impact the wildlife corridor. I have hiked the trail and believe there is adequate space to provide topographical shielding to the corridor from the trail. This would allow the arrowood/sinuosity vision to be fulfilled.

If the committee is intent on removing the ridgetop trail all together, I would ask that they commit to designing the remaining western most trail as a descending trail for mountain bikes, as well as design the eastern most trail to be a climbing and descending trail for all trail users.

Regarding the mileage issues and need for a connection to VYCC, I would be in favor of removing some of the ancillary trails below the powerline to allow for additional connective mileage to VYCC.

Passions regarding this project are high, and rightfully so. I appreciate the committee doing the hard work of listening to the public and trying to fulfill their vision. That being said, the committee and community hired experts to create the trail plan. Their product is backed by years of expertise and months of on-the-ground work. I believe their plan is the best we can hope for going forward.

Thank you again for your time and attention!

I fully support the opinion of the ACF committee and, having an ecology background, see the plan as erring considerably on the conservative side, in that I don't see an additional trail causing ecological stress.

Trails as proposed will damage habitat and/or wildlife

I believe that the trails should be constructed in keeping with the Andrews family conservation easement: respecting the ecological integrity of the land and protecting the habitats where other living species dwell. As a user of Richmond's wonderful trail networks, I think it is important to expand recreational usage wisely, building new trails with minimal impact to plants, animals and waterways. Fortunately, there are strong wildlife advocates in our town who drew attention to this matter and the dangerous consequences the currently proposed trails could have on sensitive creatures living in and around the routes. Making this debate more transparent is an important step to finding a solution that respects the desire for human recreation and the wild ones living on these lands.

I've watched the short video that shows the proposed trails and have read Sue Morse's letter. It's clear that several of the proposed trails go through ecologically sensitive areas. I am not in favor of having trails in the sensitive parts of ACF. In her letter, Sue Morse emphasized the importance of ACF as a critical part of a larger vital block of wildlife habitat needed by many species. ACF also provides an important wildlife corridor. With too much use by humans, these ecological assets would be lost. Each year, because of human incursion, wildlife habitat is lost in Vermont and across the country. I'm willing to give up my ability to hike in and enjoy certain areas so they can continue to thrive and provide the vital habitat needed by many animals and plants (some of them rare). We are so fortunate to have ACF and all the species that inhabit it. My hope is that we'll steward it wisely so it'll be good habitat for them long into the future.

Thanks ACFC for allowing time to share views on the trail route proposal. While I support carefully planned recreation at ACF I am in favor of relocating trails in the upper portion of ACF to less sensitive areas. PLEASE take as much time as necessary to assess trail route proposals and public input.

Ian Stokes has offered an alternative trail design in these comments. I think they are worthy of your consideration.

The Arrowwood/Sinuosity report offers much to consider as long as the ACF Management Plan and Conservation Easement requirements can be met. As an aside but probably relevant ... Richmond's Preston Forest Legacy trails, although well made, were sited without the benefit of a management plan or formal environmental assessment. It shows in my view: Some well-developed game trails have been converted to single-track multi-use trails; To some extent the desire for connectivity to other trails seems to have determined the number of trails and their locations; 'features' (large berms, 'balance beam') have been added to at least one trail (Visceral) clearly out of compliance with the conservation easement. (The easement actually calls for non-mechanized public use of this land.) As a former member of the town Trails Committee I learned how difficult it is to get valuable committee time to discuss and act on such concerns after the fact when more immediate things have to get done. It highlights for me the importance of getting ACF done right the first time, however long it takes.

It is important that the desire to connect to other trails does not always take precedent over other factors in deciding trail location at ACF. While I generally support the idea of trail connectivity it does increase the challenge of managing trail USE and its EFFECTS when there are multiple points of entry. Looking at the cumulative impact of trails at ACF and connecting trails off of ACF has to be a priority.

On a more personal note, a forest loses some of its magic when a permanent trail runs through it. Keep it small. There are lots of trails in the area. ACF is a special place as it is.

Thanks again for your time.

Please help me understand why we would not listen to Sue Morse. She has a great deal of information based on research and experience in wildlife habitat. Is Richmond being singularly minded for the benefit of a small minority?
I stand with the flora and fauna. Thank you

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?

- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:

- o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.

- o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic?)

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible..."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?

- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?

- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.

- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?

- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?

- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable

small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral flush.” Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

I would like to see effective wildlife corridors and sensitive forest areas protected. I support the recreational use of Andrew's forest, but I think that the original plan for the forest is a good one, and should not be amended to allow more incursion into wild lands than already exists unless it can be done without disturbing the biological balance of the forest.

The Andrews Community Forest Management Plan states that our community forest is a critical wildlife corridor and is ranked in the top 3% of Vermont's wildlife blocks. The current amended trail proposal and many of the comments to this page rely on the work of Arrowood Environmental to verify trail locations as being ecologically sensitive and environmentally sound. Yet the Arrowood report states on page 2, "This project was limited in temporal scope and could not accommodate a comprehensive on the ground natural resources inventory, therefore additional resource features are expected to be present." In fact, the "Middle Connector Trail" would run right through a stand of the Broad Beech Fern, *Phegopteris hexagonoptera*, which has been identified as a rare fern in Vermont. Another example is on the proposed "Hemlock Trail" which would funnel traffic into the forest's largest winter wildlife refuge area.

Richmond Residents have not been presented with the full scope of the pros and cons of the proposed amended trail plan for public comment. Nor have they been presented with a map that identifies the wildlife corridor, and sensitive ecological areas as they relate to the proposed trails. There is also no mention of the 200' trail buffer zone as discussed in the Andrews Community Forest Management Plan. I believe proposed trails should be ground truthed, and that they must conform to the Forest Management Plan.

The Andrews Community Forest Committee deleted one proposed trail that ran through an ecologically sensitive area, and should be recognized for their work. We now hope our committee will work together to protect the ecologically sensitive areas where trails are still proposed. As a trail user and frequent visitor to Andrews Community Forest, I know creating recreation opportunities in the Andrews Community Forest is important, but not at the expense of critical wildlife habitat and ecologically sensitive areas. The Conservation Easement emphasizes minimizing ecological impacts over developing recreation. There would be greater community support for trail placement that locates trails away from ecologically sensitive areas and wildlife corridors.

As I have become aware of the AFC's proposed trails, I am dismayed at the dismantling of the original management plan. Please do not allow any trails in/near the vital wildlife habitat located in the northeast section of the forest.

As an outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to use thoughtfully designed multi-use trails in the Andrews Community Forest. Thank you to the committee for your work on this.

I am impressed that our community is taking the time needed to plan minimum impact trails that we can feel good about using. After extensive community involvement, a trail concept and forest management plan were created that reflected a true compromise of many interested parties to honor the conservation easement and forest management plan. The hard-earned compromise was to focus on wildlife habitat protection (the number one reason stated in public input for purchasing this land), while also providing recreational uses that do not impact the land's fragile areas including: wildlife travel corridors, wetlands, and deer yards.

The ecologists were hired to map the ecological sensitive areas. While they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly assess all the critical wildlife features and endangered species, they were able to map most of the ecologically sensitive areas. It is concerning that the proposed trails were then located right through the middle of these very areas we had agreed to protect.

The proposed trails are also specifically not designed to be multi-use. It seems we need some thoughtful compromise to both honor the Conservation Easement that comes with this land and to provide low-impact recreational opportunities. Maybe it would be better to keep the Mt. Bike Park below the powerlines, where the terrain is more suitable, and only put a simple low-impact footpath through the upper portion of the forest or

keeping all the trails below the power lines would be consistent with our minimum impact commitment. This would provide trail options while still protecting the habitat and conservation priorities for the land.

There would be greater community support if trails were located that protect the ecological value of our forest: avoid the sensitive areas identified by the ecologists, minimize the number of trails above the powerlines, as agreed to in the management plan, and design trails that are truly multi-use and appropriate for hikers, runners, cross-country skiers, bikers, hunters and birdwatchers. Thank you.

I am very concerned that the proposed trails would be harming local wildlife and plants. No trail should infringe on wildlife corridors, or areas with sensitive plants. While mountain biking is popular, it specifically creates more erosion than foot traffic does on trails. I am a regular trail user and have been shocked at the damage to the Preston Legacy Trails since more mountain bikers have been using it. We cannot have that happen to the Andrews Forest, as well. We as a town are the new land stewards of this parcel and are responsible for preserving sensitive wildlife areas within it. For that reason it is essential that trails are carefully planned to avoid damage to the land and current inhabitants. The process of planning should continue, with another look at how trails could be better placed. Thank you.

From the comments submitted to date, it is clear that Richmond has a robust biking community. Some might think the Andrews Community Forest is a blank slate, and there are no restraints on the trail proposal. However, the 428 acre Andrews Community Forest was conveyed to the Town of Richmond subject to a Conservation Easement. The legal document is a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement. It specifies the purposes of the Grant and the attributes of the land. While the Easement provides for recreational uses, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on protecting the ecological values of the property (see pages 1-3).

The Easement also requires a Management Plan as well as a Forest Management Plan. Both plans are approved and in effect. (The Management Plan supersedes a Recreation Plan that has been mentioned in prior posts. The Conservation Easement is separate from, and independent of, the Conservation Easement that encumbers the Maple Wind Farm land, which was also part of the Andrews Farm.)

The reason there is controversy surrounding the present trail proposal is that there are people in Richmond who feel that it is not consistent with the provisions of the Conservation Easement or the Management Plan. Specifically the trail plan appears to encroach on ecologically sensitive areas in the upper parts of the property that are to be protected under the terms of the Easement. The Management Plan clearly states that the trail plan can not be revised without a full revision to the Management Plan (page 27).

The Management Plan has not yet been revised. We do not know what's intended for the trails in question. Will there be limits on their use? Will Vermont Land Trust, a holder of the Easement, approve the changes if they're shown to contradict the terms of the Easement?

There are also questions about the process used to get to this trail proposal. There has not been much opportunity for open dialogue and even this system for gathering responses does not result in discussion of the issues.

I urge the committee to give further consideration to the trail proposal and look for alternatives that may have less impact on the ecologically sensitive areas. Also, I hope the committee will consider the substance of the comments received. Do the people in favor of this plan understand that we are not dealing with a blank slate?

I thank the committee for their work on this and hope the result is a proposal that is consistent with the Conservation Easement, for the sake of the species that call this area home.

I believe the addition of new trails threaten the viability of the ACFs central wildlife movement corridor causing further fragmentation to multiple sensitive areas and jeopardize natural communities. These newly proposed bike trails (particularly Hemlock Valley) go right through a winter deer range habitat, another proposed trails runs right over a recently discovered patch of rare plants, consultants were not able to conduct a full-scale work up on these proposed routes. Clearly there are real issues to consider here that are not being fully vetted before moving forward with such a plan. More than ever want this forest to benefit our wildlife and preserve their natural communities. Look around there are many recreational areas in Richmond and supporting town around. We ALL need to continue to serve as better stewards for this sensitive forest.

Keep trails out of ecological sensitive areas. There are plenty of places to recreate outside of this forest. More and endless building of infrastructure is not needed.

When I think of a Community Forest, I envision a wildness that we pledge to preserve as our gift to humanity, not something to conquer. We have parks for that and many of them contain their own forests, just so we don't forget.

As the human busyness of the forest increases, the wildlife will move on. It won't be the same for long. People should be encouraged to explore the forest in moderation at their own risk, quietly and slowly on game trails that already exist. Just like the creatures which already call it home.

Hello Andrews Community Forest Management Committee,

I saw the solicitation for participation in a process around the latest trail proposal on the Andrews forest. I don't know if as a resident of Jericho I have any standing in the process, but wanted to pass along some new research that I thought is relevant and you may not have seen. I have been visiting the area where the Andrews forest is now as well as adjacent properties for many years, so it's an area I have a significant connection to and I'm very interested in helping to ensure that the development of the property is done in a way that minimizes the inevitable impact this will have on the ecology of the property as well as on other users.

I am concerned about the new trail proposal, which appears to put a relatively significant new trail system in the upper Andrews forest, occupying a significant percentage of the upper property, especially along the eastern edge of the central drainage where the identified wildlife travel corridor, some evergreen winter habitat and oak feeding areas are located. It appears from the map that much of this new trail network is well-within the "flight distance" of many wildlife species from the important south-facing hillside for wintering habitat, fall food-sources in preparation for Winter, or for the vernal pools or water sources. I see the comments in the "Follow Up Report" document from the trail designer essentially said they proposed this trail configuration knowing there would be a greater negative impact and footprint than intended, (the report noted the hemlock trail is routed directly through deer wintering habitat and the trail locations diverged from the intent of the original request and were more numerous than originally intended) but that it was required in order to connect to the other trail system North of there (sip of sunshine), which was a stipulation of the project. My understanding of their response is that the necessity of accomplishing a connection to the Sip of Sunshine trail, combined with the difficulties in trail routing due to the terrain, caused them to alter the originally-intended balance between recreational infrastructure development and maintaining ecological integrity, in favor of the new development.

I know you have been sensitive to these concerns during the planning process, so I also wanted to pass along some new research I ran across on this topic. There is an unpublished UVM thesis from this past Fall cataloging New England-specific negative impacts to various wildlife and habitat from trail-based recreation. I don't have the final thesis to pass on, but the author did a presentation at the last Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative meeting, which I've linked-to here.

https://www.uvm.edu/femc/attachments/project/999/annualMeeting/2021/presentations/Meredith_Naughton.pdf

My worry is that with a significant connector trail to another trail system, within a few years usage of these trails will inevitably wind up being much, much heavier than today. I also worry that with bc skiing being so popular, or if the trails were ever to be groomed for fatbike use as other local trail systems have begun doing, that it's inevitable the trails will see a similar increase in use during the winter when any impact is potentially more harmful to wildlife. It seems clear from the available research this impact is real and significant, and would degrade the value of that wintering habitat as well as negatively impact wildlife's ability to access some of those important habitat features and the movement corridor along the central drainage. I think it would be highly worth considering a more difficult to construct trail location if that means it is less-impactful on the highest-value habitat features and the areas connecting them and allowing wildlife to move through the area un-hindered.

Personally, given the terrain constraints mentioned by the trail builders, if a suitable alternative that is less impactful can't be found I think the goal of linking to sip of sunshine should be reconsidered altogether in order to maintain a balance between ecological integrity and new development of recreational infrastructure. In this event, further development of trails on the lower portion of the property below the power line would not significantly increase the impact to wildlife since that area already sees relatively heavier use. In my experience trail development projects become a matter of incremental degradation, as the initial development is usually reasonable, but then every few years another "limited, reasonable addition" gets added, whether officially or not. No one addition is ever unreasonable, but collectively over time the result is far more impactful than anyone intended from the beginning. Regardless of the eventual decision the committee and the community makes now, in order to maintain the intended balance between ecology and development in the long-term I believe some

trail-less areas should be officially designated now to maintain ecological integrity and maintain the opportunity for dispersed users, so the extent of development doesn't become a moving target over time. This would give both trail advocates and trail-based recreationists a clearer understanding of what is on and what is off the table not only now, but in the future.

Thanks very much, I hope this is helpful feedback.

Dave Furman
Jericho, VT

I'm concerned about the wildlife and hope that no further trails will be established. I viewed the letter from Sue Morse, and hope that others will. That letter validated my view on the matter. Thanks for the opportunity to share my views.

I think it is a good proposal to cut out the last trail on the NE corner of the of the AFC property. I think you should also look at closing trails that go down the steep ridges of hemlock and spruce in the late fall and winter time when the deer herds are living there.

I also feel that the trails should be following the suggestions of the described parameters and goals under which the ecologists (Arrowwood) and trail designers (Sinuosity) developed their proposal. We must protect sensitive areas of fauna as well as animals. There is a dry oak forest that a trail goes through that is not commonly found on our corner of the state according to Kit Emery. These are the kinds or areas the AFC should look at as well.

I realize these trails are used not just for mountain bikers but also hikers and hunters and VAST members. I hope school classes will as well.

The Richmond area is rich with mountain bike trails and that is why we see the heavy traffic through town and enjoy the support these people bring to our local businesses.

The Andrews Community Forest should be more protected from trails being built on them then the hills surrounding us that have trails on them already.

Thank you for the opportunity to add to this public discussion.
John Hamerslough.

I am a citizen of Richmond. I m very concerned that there are too many trails being proposed . Much of the proposed trail routes will negatively impact wildlife. I would like to see the addition of new trails done over a long time period so we will know when there is visible negative impact without effecting the whole parcel.

I would like to return to the original plan where all wheeled vehicles would be prohibited.

You can't fully appreciate nature traveling 20mph through the woods.

I do want limited hikers and hopefully school groups to learn about the forest.

I fully support selective logging. We need differing habitat and logging is essential to protect various species.

I would support haying some of the meadow but even then it should be cut late in the traditional first cut so meadow larks may once again nest.

I would like to see the majority of the traffic limited to the area below the power line.

I strongly believe that there should be no bridges or jumps that litter the woods on the south side of town.

I would also like to see the deer yards off limits for all users from Jan 1 to March 1.

I want people to walk on and enjoy the land. Some trails are essential to that goal.

I want to return to the upper section to hunt again as I did years ago. It may sound selfish but I would like to see sections off limits to hikers and bikers if we must have them during the traditional rifle deer season. Many places do this. It does increase safety in the woods.

I believe the trails should be WALKING trails only. No wheeled vehicles allowed. ACF should be a wilderness preserve with as little human impact as possible. This is a wilderness preserve for the animals to exist and live.

Page 7 of the Andrews Community Forest Management plan states that the land in question is a "critical wildlife corridor and is ranked top 3% of the states wildlife habitat blocks." Additionally page 8 states that the different water sources found on ACF is also critical - as it directly correlates to the health of the surrounding forest.

Therefore,

as a critical block, linking Mt.Mansfield and Camels hump blocks, this land should have minimal impacts, which includes minimal to no biking. Hikers can more easily tread lightly- able to step aside and avoid harmful and long term negative impacts to the ACF.

The proposed plan ignores the corridor buffer zones (200') and puts trails on over and adjacent to the corridor.

The surveys mention deer- what about studies for all the other environmentally sensitive species/habitats/ insects/amphibians etc. The May 23 survey ignores the environment at different times of the year (breeding times, migrating times for other species) and ignores specifics to other habitats and creatures.

As much as possible use preexisting trails and logging roads IN COLLABORATION with VAST and VYCC - so as to preserve as much ACF as possible. I support eliminating the ridge trail, and as cited in the minutes from 2/28/22 from Amy's comments - eliminate the RAvine trail too - as it goes against the management objective as noted by CL, minimize impact to wildlife and natural resources. Thus again, supporting low to no biking. Moreover, Are there studies presented about the impacts of biking, vs. hiking? This seems highly relevant.

While I'm not a WL biologist, I believe the steep slopping landscapes, numerous ravines with narrowing ridgetops on this particular piece of land does not seem conducive for additional bike trails and should be limited to one trail only. I believe additional trails will permanently impact wildlife and interrupt their corridor movement causing further fragmentation to this sensitive habitat. We all need to continue to serve as better stewards for our land and avoid putting our recreational desires ahead of preserving our wild and natural communities. More than ever we want these forests to benefit our wildlife and their natural habitat. Look around there are many recreational areas in Richmond and supporting towns around.

People intending to submit comments about the proposed trail route should be aware that the information about proposed trails at the Town website for the ACF <http://www.richmondvt.gov/boards-minutes/conservation-commission/richmond-town-forest/> is very difficult to navigate. To see a map of the proposed trails the link <https://arrowwoodvt.com/acf/> is given to the initial report from ecology consultant (Arrowwood) and trail designer (Sinuosity). This link displays a map of the terrain with proposed trails superimposed. To see the ecological considerations you select the blue box below, that links to an "Interactive Map" at <https://aevt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a8f6b1539eb84e308fd78e36fc093e7a> . This map includes ecologically sensitive areas, but they are difficult to distinguish from the background image. Features such as 'Hemlock and Red Pine Forests' are much more evident if you select the Topographic Basemap. Then you can see that some of the proposed trails pass through areas identified by Arrowwood consultants as ecologically sensitive, a prime concern specified in the Management Plan. One trail that was invading ecological sensitive areas was dropped from the plan at the February 28th meeting of the Andrews Community Forest Committee, raising questions about the competence of the consultants who had proposed it.

The trails plan was developed jointly by Arrowwood (<https://arrowwoodvt.com>) and Sinuosity (<https://www.sinuosity.net/> - a company specializing in designing mountain bike trails.) Blunders such as planning for trails right through ecologically sensitive areas is very troubling and I question how much communication there was between these two consultants. Why did Arrowwood let the trail plan go ahead when it seems to be very damaging to the Town Forest and to their reputation?

The primary goal of the ACF should be preservation of natural areas to benefit wildlife.

While recreation is a secondary goal, it should not interfere with the primary goal.

There are plenty of opportunities for recreation in the Richmond area. But as development expands, areas devoted to preservation of wildlife habitat are growing smaller.

We need to protect these wildlife habitats.

Respectfully,
Maria (Chichi) Barrett
Frederick (Rick) Barrett
Richmond, Vermont

As a nature educator and outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to hike, run, ski, bike and guide educational programs in the ACF on trails that reflect the principles and spirit of the conservation easement that the Andrews Family entrusted our community to honor. The Andrews Family sacrificed millions to primarily ensure that their land be forever wild and shared in a manner that respects the ecological integrity of the forest for generations to follow. The original management plan, reflecting the guiding principles of the easement, is the bedrock for this planning process and should not be compromised to fulfill a vision different from the original one. I urge the ACF committee, our Richmond Selectboard and the VLT to hold us to the promises we made.

I chose to live in Richmond 25 years ago because of the abundant trails and natural areas not just here, but in surrounding towns. While it has been inspiring to see an explosive interest in seeking solace and adventure in nature during the pandemic, new threats to healthy, thriving forest habitats have emerged due to over-use in the backcountry. Spreading out our robust interest for woodland exercise and adventure with new trails will not solve the problems of congestion, severe erosion, sprawl and impact in a forest that the conservation easement specifies we agreed to manage with minimal impact.

The ACF Committee has done an admirable job identifying some of the critical wildlife habitat features to help us carefully select appropriate places to explore and play. The ecological assessment that Arrowwood conducted shows boundaries or buffers between 200 and 400 feet for high value ecological zones we should not intrude. They mapped the following parts of the forest:

- 1) Significant wildlife movement corridors, assessed as among the top 3% most important to protect in the state of Vermont.
- 2) High value Southwest facing deer yards critical for winter refuge.
- 3) Several riparian zones bordering streams that are super important for water quality and rich in biodiversity.
- 4) Interior and remote core forest many species need to feed, breed, and protect their young.
- 5) Mast trees for Black Bears, Vernal Pools for frogs and salamanders and high value uncommon natural communities such as Dry Oak Forest patches that many animals need to thrive.

While I share the desire to access the wilds close to home, many of us are thinking more critically about where, when and how we visit them because of the intense development and global warming assaults the wild ones face. The Andrews Family and the forest inhabitants would want us to take the necessary time we need to plan with care while bearing in mind multiple other developed trail networks in the area. We already have 100 miles of mountain biking trails and turning the ACF into a popular mecca similar to Cochran's and Chamberlin Hill is not the right fit for this integral habitat link within the 10,000 acres Chittenden County Uplands Forest we have already committed to protecting.

Responsible recreational expansion according to the original minimum impact plan means concentrating trails in higher density zones and allowing nature to restore old roads and timber damage to recover a healthy ecosystem we and wildlife need more than ever. Trail options for hops, pops, drops and advanced riding exist below the power lines and out of the wildlife hot spots. By keeping high intensity use out of critical wildlife habitat, we would satisfy our quest for a multi-use trail system while achieving the balance the Andrews Family had in mind.

I hope the ACF Committee will do the following: 1. Complete our planning process by inviting comprehensive public engagement representing the diverse range of interests including wildlife who do not have seat at the table. 2. Follow Arrowwood's recommendation to finish the full habitat assessment including an inventory for rare and endangered species during the appropriate season which they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly complete. 3. Ground-truth alternative trail options away from habitat hot spots. 4. Exhaust all the existing trails and impacted areas before breaking ground, cutting trees and displacing wildlife in new ones. 5. Promote a culture of responsible recreation including seasonal trail closures near vernal pools and safeguarding this forest from severe erosion and unauthorized rogue side trails seen on many other trail networks in Richmond.

Thank you ACFC for taking time to make sure the final outcome is something we can all feel good about long into the future.

We have A LOT of mountain biking trails in Richmond. People come from all over to bike here. I'm not a mountain biker but a road biker. I don't appreciate all of the folks who DRIVE to Richmond to go biking. They drive too fast, They don't look out for walkers/runners/ road bikers. We DO NOT NEED MORE MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS HERE!. We need to keep as much of the forest as animal habitat and as a wild place. THIS is what will become scarcer and scarcer over the next 50 years. Thank you

Process and/or public process has been adequate or good

The Richmond Trail Committee would like to lend our support to either the original trail plan or the amended trail plan for the Andrews Community Forest. The trail committee has been involved over the last 5 years in helping shape the future of the Andrews Community Forest. The process that the Andrews Community Forest Committee has been through to get to this trail design has been long, extensive, precedent setting, and public. Trails are how the majority of townsfolk, students, and visitors are going to use and enjoy our new Town Forest. It has been a long, deliberative process to get to this point. By working with a professional ecological firm and a professional trail design firm, we feel the plan put forth finds the optimal balance for recreation and conservation. Some of the Trail Committee's key goals are interconnecting neighborhoods and interconnecting towns via trails to avoid roads. This plan helps to accomplish this. Moreover, we strongly believe having a loop option in the upper forest for exploration is a key design feature for forest visitors, so even with losing one of the upper trails, a loop option still remains. Compared to our neighboring towns with Town Forests, the proposed trail density in this design is extremely low. Currently, the majority of trails we enjoy in Richmond are on private land, and access is provided by landowner generosity, but is not guaranteed in the future. The ACF was bought by the town with recreation as a key component, and ensuring well crafted, thoughtful, and sustainable trails is key to having a town resource for the future. For these reasons and more, we are excited for and support either plan.

I am writing to express my support for the new trail network that has been proposed by the ACF committee. I am supportive of the trail network compromise as as proposed in the February 28th meeting minutes.

I realize there is significant public interest in this trail network and there hasn't been a shortage of opinions expressed publicly through Front Porch Forum during the current open comment period. At the end of the day, the committee is abiding by the spirit of the ACF management plan. The committee is obligated to build a network of multi-use trails in the forest. It's written very clearly in the plan. It was the voice and will of the people through extensive outreach and public involvement. There are several people in our community who have expressed great concern that the new trail system would require an amendment to the management plan. I'm writing to assure you that this is not a big deal. Management plans change! When the original management plan was written, it was written with great specificity, arguably too much specificity for the level of ground assessments that had actually been done. Conditions on the ground were not fully understood or vetted when the management plan was written. What I love about the current proposal is that it involved the review of ecologists who actually evaluated the ground conditions in great detail. The fact that the committee has been responsive to public concern and eliminated the ridge trail shows that the committee is willing and able to make hard decisions and make compromises when necessary. Managing public lands requires a strategy that balances conflicting values. I feel that balance has been achieved here, and I'm really grateful to the committee for working so hard to develop a trail network with the resources of trained professionals. I attended the very first public involvement meeting with the SE Group up at CHMS many years ago now. From day one, there has been strong public support behind multi-use trails and recreation. Now, years later, the time to act is now. Please move forward with this recommendation to the selectboard.

I would also like to thank the members of the ACFC who are public servants not being paid a penny to work behalf of the residents of our town. The committee deserves recognition and praise for their hard work in moving this town forward. I'm incredibly grateful for all of your hard work and thoughtful compromise. Keep your heads up! You are doing great!

Sincerely,

Rob Peterson
Stage Road

I think this trail is going to be great for local recreation. It's thoughtfully designed and had some really great input from people concerned with the potential impact on the watershed and animal habitat. I feel really good about riding a trail that was designed having done everything possible to address these concerns.

Further, because there will be little to no new parking opportunities, I believe that this trail will be ridden mostly by locals who live near either of the trail heads. That means that the kind of people who will ride this trail are likely to be people who appreciate the beauty and delicateness of the ecosystem on which they are treading. Because the trail is uphill both ways (literally!), it will be ridden by mountain bikers who are interested not only on the gravity focused portion but on the uphill as well. While there are no hard and fast rules about what kinds of mountain bikers like what kind of trails, I believe that generally speaking this will filter out bikers who might be less inclined to appreciate the importance of respect for trail conditions and other, non-cycling, recreationists.

Finally, this new trail will provide some much needed relief to the pressure that is mounting on our existing trail systems. I'm delighted to see mountain biking grow in popularity as I think it correlates with healthier lifestyles and an appreciation of nature and, in particular, our forests. That said, the increasing number of bikers means we need more trails to distribute the load and to properly care for the existing networks.

Thank you for conducting such an open, transparent and thoughtful design and consultation process around this trail.

I would like to submit my full support of the original trail plan submitted by Arrowwood and Sinuosity. The ATF Committee has been extremely thorough, thoughtful, diligent, and patient in this multi-year process. I believe those supporting the recreational aspect of the Town Forest Recreation Plan have been incredibly patient as well. The Committee delivered a clear majority vote (6 in favor, 2 against, 1 abstaining) to approve the multi-use trail design plan back in August, 2021. Yet here we are, continuing to gather and filter more public input. The public has had ample opportunity to be involved and voice opinions every step of the way, over the past four years.

As an aside, I'd also like to express my personal opinion that it is unrealistic to expect the ATF committee members to individually become expert ecologists or expert trail designers -- to digest hundreds of pages of content forwarded to them. The Committee selected and paid two highly respected, professional, local companies to bring that expertise to the table. It was an unprecedented process to hire a joint ecologist / trail design team to balance recreation and ecological concerns. I support the expertise Arrowwood and Sinuosity delivered, and respectfully request that the Committee and the Select Board approve that plan as well.

Completely in support. I feel the ACF completed a thorough and deliberate process that considered all stakeholders and public interests. This will be another wonderful resource for our community to access and use.

It seems that the committee has invested in significant research and has heard many different views. I 100% support the proposal and look forward to the expanded access of the 'sunny side' of Richmond in the darker months.

I think the proposed trails network honors the character of the Andrews Community Forest as it exists today, restricting and containing human travel in an appropriate and sustainable manner. As a nearby property owner and frequent visitor, I am glad to see how much of the parcel was left untouched. I am glad that our town chose to participate in the years-long, community-focused and -supported deliberative process, involving citizens throughout. I support honoring this valuable work by implementing the trails network (and preservation of the rest of the ACF!) as proposed.

I fully support the trail plan and appreciate the extensive work done to understand the existing wildlife and flora in the ACF. Integrating this understanding into trail development is explained in detail in the Management Plan, and opportunities for public feedback are included as part of the required assessment protocol. Thank you to all who have put so many hours into the ACF and for making such an easily accessible and extensive record of documents and reports for the public.

I fully support the trail plan as originally proposed and recommended by the professional entities hired and then agreed upon by the ACF committee. I am a strong proponent of research, data, and subject matter experts or professionals who can interpret and make recommendations given their experience and expertise. From my understanding, that is what the town hired these professionals to do given requirements and best practices of understanding all of the variables that go into trail design through sensitive environments. What are the impacts of a multi-use single track trail to the surrounding forest? Lots of opinions exist throughout our community, but the professionals based their recommendations off of research, expertise, and best practices. I stand by that, as well as the ACF committee who seems to have gone through a rigorous process to ensure the best interests of the town and environment were considered.

Due diligence has been done. It's time to move on the extremely well thought out and clear plan that the committee has come up with. I strongly support this plan.

I strongly urge the town to approve this trail plan. It is time. There has been more than enough compromise and all parties and stakeholders have had ample opportunity to comment and participate. I personally feel there should be more approved trails, but can live with the reduced number in the name of compromise and moving forward. Please approve this plan!

100% in favor of the current proposed plan. The committee has done a great job researching the impact and taking all viewpoints and needs into consideration. This plan represents excellent work and the best balance possible for all parties.

Recommendation to include the originally proposed Ridgetop trail

I support moving forward now with building the original trail plan. The ridgetop trail should be included. I also support winter snowmobile use of the existing VAST trail through the forest. Overall, the trail system could be improved with additional trails. It would benefit from more loops and less out and back walks. The highly regarded Hinesburg Town Forest has significantly more trail miles per acre and a better overall layout for recreational use. If most of our forest is left without official trails, users will create their own "herd paths". Ecologically, it would be better to have trails built and marked. Building the original trail plan is a good starting point. Going forward, the town should evaluate options for additional trails in other parts of the forest. The Andrews Community Forest was never intended to be a wildlife preserve.

We are in support of the original proposed trail system.

I would like to submit my full support of the original trail plan submitted by Arrowwood and Sinuosity. The ATF Committee has been extremely thorough, thoughtful, diligent, and patient in this multi-year process. I believe those supporting the recreational aspect of the Town Forest Recreation Plan have been incredibly patient as well. The Committee delivered a clear majority vote (6 in favor, 2 against, 1 abstaining) to approve the multi-use trail design plan back in August, 2021. Yet here we are, continuing to gather and filter more public input. The public has had ample opportunity to be involved and voice opinions every step of the way, over the past four years.

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I appreciate the thought that has gone into this plan and the investment in recreation. It does seem like the Ridgeline trail would be great to keep as it's impact in the wide life corridor is small. I fully support this direction

I fully support the original plans with the additional trail. I'd love to get my 6 year old daughter into mountain biking this year. Less trails in the Richmond area means people like us are driving further to bike and hike. Using more fossil fuels and harming the environment. A few more trails please!

I support the design plan as submitted and approved - I am hoping the proposed trails do not get cut - looking forward to when the project is completed - I use the Preston Legacy Forest trails extensively and love living here in Richmond - thanks!

The original trail design plan would be AMAZING if it came to fruition. It would connect to town via Sip trail without having to ride on the treacherous twisty section of Rt 2. Love that I can park or ride to town and connect Chamberlain, Preston, & Cochran's without spending too much time on the road. At Andrews to that---sweet!!! But if the Sip connector can't be...it's a blow....not a critical blow for me, but I assume it could be for residents in the proximity close to Sip.

I am concerned that not having enough trails to spread users out on the descents (specifically gravity oriented riders) could potentially cause significant conflict or at least some potential disharmony with different users' flow types. As one commenter anecdotally stated in the meeting, the users at Preston are generally always polite and smiling when they cross each other, no matter what their mode of transportation. I 100% agree with this statement. BUT 2 notable differences between Preston and this revised Andrews design are: (1) Preston has 3-4 descending options (LungTa, Preston Loop, Visceral, and Graveyard). (2) Aside from descending, users also are able to exit the Preston trail network in 4 separate exit points which significantly spreads users out (A-Day, Connector, Lower Connector, and out Merritt). I spend an unhealthy amount of time scouring Trailforks and Strava routes, and I find users travel Preston (often paired with Cochran's) in so many different ways and in all directions. There really isn't 1 standard top-to-bottom loop or route that everyone takes. How many hikers do you see on Graveyard or Visceral? None right!? They obviously opt for more hiking-friendly routes/exists (Preston and Merritt). So to wrap up my point--yes--most trail users jive in harmony at Preston, but they are not all forced/funneled onto 1 trail ascent or descent and their typical routes vary significantly even among the same type of user groups.

I've spent a lot of time this winter grooming the fat bike trails at Andrews and I see how much potential that land has. Descending Urbanik trail I envision the future of Andrew's downhill being 3x longer--wow that will be fun!! And having fun climbing trails too--yes please! A full top-to-bottom loop is sure to be a real fun addition to the Richmond Trail network for any trail user. Even the most basic top to bottom loop is sure to be AMAZING and I can't wait.

If I can add my two cents as fat bike trail groomer...Having 'boot friendly' trails at Andrews could make the winter grooming last much longer and better. I know PRKR mountain in Little NH does this. There is sooo much boot traffic at Andrews, which is great that people like to hike there, but it's almost impossible to maintain a fat bike friendly route. Boot friendly routes could help make the trails better for bikers, and could continue to make the trails more equitable without requiring users to use snowshoes on all groomed trails (which they don't at Andrews anyway as you know). The boot trails can even be groomed. Options and signage could go a long way.

Thanks!

I support the original trail design by Arrowwood/Sinuosity. Trust the experts you hired to design a trail network that minimizes environmental impact. It's time to move the process forward after 4 years of debate and planning.

Hi All-

I served on the Andrews Town Forest Committee in 2017 and 2018. I am on the board of Richmond Mountain Trails. I am a member of the Conservation Alliance, which helped fund purchase of Andrews Town Forest

As you work towards a proposal for the Richmond Selectboard re: trails in Richmond's Andrews Town Forest, I wanted to share some quotes with you I collected as I was researching a story on trail-based recreation in Vermont for a national publication. The quotes are from a Vermont Federal Forester, a Program Manager at conservation non-profit Trust for Public Land, and from a representative of the Lintilhac Foundation.

As a journalist, I turn to experts to help me understand whatever topic I am writing about. I hope that the Town of Richmond will also defer to experts as we come up with a plan for the Richmond Town Forest that will serve the needs of flora and fauna, as well as the needs of the community.

At the last two ATF Committee meetings, committee members used the trails proposal created by the experts the town hired to develop a plan to care for wildlife and serve community user groups as a starting point for compromise, when in fact that plan was the result of compromise, which is what both Arrowwood Consultants and Sinuosity Trail Designers explained it was, detailing their iterative process over the course of a four plus hour public meeting.

The Sinuosity/Arrowwood plan was developed by expert ecologists and expert trail designers in a landmark collaboration that could serve as a model for how trails are built throughout Vermont in the future, satisfying trail users and protecting wildlife and Vermont's ecology.

But it doesn't appear that the majority of the committee is willing to trust the experts the Town of Richmond hired.

It's ironic. When Ethan Tapper, our county forester, makes a recommendation to the ACTF committee, all defer to him as the forestry and logging expert. When Arrowwood and Sinuosity made a recommendation, members of the committee and the community asserted their own expertise trumps that of the experts we hired.

I am a conservationist, an avid nature lover and a lover of outdoor activity. I strongly believe we should establish wilderness--land with the least human impact possible.

Richmond Town Forest is not that land. It's a small parcel bisected by a power line, a piece of land where there has been extensive logging, and a parcel with an existing network of logging roads that are heavily used by the public. Andrews Community Forest was purchased to serve as a wildlife corridor and also a place for Richmond residents to recreate. It was purchased as a community resource, a place for Richmond residents to be in nature, to breath fresh air, to stretch our legs and lungs. The Arrowwood/Sinuosity proposal represents a dramatically scaled down trail system from what was first proposed by SE Group, consultants the town hired to help us determine what town residents want our town forest to be.

I strongly encourage the selectboard to approve a plan that will balance the interests of as many community interest groups as possible. I strongly encourage you to adopt the proposal put together by Arrowwood and Sinuosity, and to approve the modest network they proposed for immediate construction.

The trails discussion has been going on since 2017. It's time that we move forward with a fair and balanced plan, and end the infighting in our town that wants to give some user groups access and bar other users. A scaled down version of the Arrowwood/Sinuosity plan will create unnecessary trail crowding and potential conflicts. Please allow the three trails laid out in the proposal we hired Arrowwood and Sinuosity to create.

As a private landowner whose parcel provides a key link in the Preston Loops, I ask the town to please allow trail-based travel in our town forest.

Thanks for reading.

Warmly, Berne

“Having trails affects a community’s pride and identity,” said Holly Knox, Federal Forester from Vermont’s Rochester Ranger District. “The public health, economics, and transportation benefits extend beyond the public investment we’re making in trail infrastructure. When a company decides to move to Vermont because of the recreation opportunities it offers—the economic impact is not always accounted for when we talk about trail networks. Trails preserve the rural and scenic quality of life that we see. They provide a link between people and natural resources. When people feel connected to the landscape, they’re more likely to respect and care for public lands and natural resources. Trails provide the respite people are seeking.”

“We see mountain biking as a way to evolve how we interact with land use in the state of VT,” said Louise Lintilhac of the Lintilhac Foundation. “We are constantly looking for new ways to involve communities with conserved land. Mountain biking is part of that picture. When people get involved, they care more about the land’s future, about climate change, about protecting that land. They become more engaged in town land use policies and management plans. In Vermont, we pride ourselves on healthy landscapes. Our viewsheds are what attract visitors. And mountain biking is an important tool in keeping farms and forests dominant.”

“People need to know the land to want to put money and time behind it,” said Kate Wanner, Project Manager at the Trust for Public Land. “Mountain biking is one way to get people to fall in love with a forest, and to have respect when they come around a corner and startle a fisher or see a porcupine climbing a tree. Without recreationists, we don’t have strong political power behind us to protect places we need to protect. Here, like everywhere, an increasing number of recreational enthusiasts means it’s easy for some trails systems to be “over loved.” We need more places to get people outside. It improves the health of the individual and of the community. Mountain biking needs land, and in many cases land needs people to conserve it and to care for it.”

I do not see the need to eliminate the proposed ridge line trail, however, I support the plan as described and encourage the town to begin the next phase of the project.

Based on the language found on page 28 of the 2018 ACF management plan which identifies it's recreational objectives as 1) Provide a forest that has opportunities for all interested users (hunters, mountain bikers, walkers, etc.), 2) Preserve sensitive areas of the forest and route trails around those areas, and 3) provide a trail system that is well-connected to trails on adjacent properties and Richmond Village, I feel the committee has done an exemplary job in meeting their objectives with the original plan as it was put forth inclusive of the now in question "Ridgetop Trail". I support the plan and the great work that the ACF committee has done thus far.

The ACFC should adopt the original trail design by arrowood and sinuosity. The trails as designed will serve the intended users and the forest equally. The trail design was a compromise between ecological and recreational priorities. Many trail users would gladly see more trails than those proposed put into the ACF. Likewise, folks prioritizing minimal impact to the forest would see fewer trails. The design with 3 trails that allows for looped use and multiple trail users, while protecting habitat to the west is the best possible outcome.

Removing the "ridgetop" trail in the already compromised trail plan is unnecessary from an ecological standpoint, and harmful from a recreational standpoint. The trail as flagged is largely shielded from the wildlife corridor in the adjacent ravine due to the topography. Only at small intervals does the trail run close to the ravine, and in those instances it is along cliffs that still provide adequate shielding for wildlife to utilize the corridor. The ridgetop trail also provides those visiting the forest with a glimpse into these areas while concentrating the use onto the trail vs. dispersing it through the forest which may have a more deleterious effect.

I am a member of the Richmond conservation commission and of the Richmond mountain trails board. I have an undergraduate degree in ecological studies and a law degree in environments law. I believe the compromise as originally proposed is a tremendous win for ecology and recreation and can be used as a beacon for other projects to emulate. Further curtailing the vision of arrowood and sinuosity may make this model less appealing to future users. Recreational Trail developers may be less likely to want to collaborate with ecological consultants if the fruit of that labor is ignored.

If the committee is intent on changing the plan, I would propose keeping the ridgetop trail but moving it further away from the ravine in the places where there is concern it may impact the wildlife corridor. I have hiked the trail and believe there is adequate space to provide topographical shielding to the corridor from the trail. This would allow the arrowood/sinuosity vision to be fulfilled.

If the committee is intent on removing the ridgetop trail all together, I would ask that they commit to designing the remaining western most trail as a descending trail for mountain bikes, as well as design the eastern most trail to be a climbing and descending trail for all trail users.

Regarding the mileage issues and need for a connection to VYCC, I would be in favor of removing some of the ancillary trails below the powerline to allow for additional connective mileage to VYCC.

Passions regarding this project are high, and rightfully so. I appreciate the committee doing the hard work of listening to the public and trying to fulfill their vision. That being said, the committee and community hired experts to create the trail plan. Their product is backed by years of expertise and months of on-the-ground work. I believe their plan is the best we can hope for going forward.

Thank you again for your time and attention!

I strongly favor the trail plan at ACF. I was in favor of the original plan with the 3 trails and believe that was the best plan given the input and efforts put forth. That plan did a great job of compromising the desires and needs of the diverse views put forward. I am less enthusiastic about this further compromise, however I still submit a resounding YES to the proposed ACF trail route. Thanks to the committee for their hard work.

The original trail design seems to reflect a balance between recreational opportunity and ecological considerations as intended. Arrowhead and Sinuosity have explained the process of their collaborative decision-making that resulted in this specific design in writing and at public meetings. Therefore I am not in favor of the ATF committee removing a segment of the designed trails on their own (since they presumably do possess trailbuilding or ecological assessment expertise) in response to concerns expressed by some community members. If there is a desire to adjust the trails and our community feels this is justified, they should be re-designed by Arrowwood and Sinuosity so that they remain multi-use as intended while optimally balancing the town's intention to protect the forest while permitting recreation there (which is uncertain if ATF selects trails to remove from the original design without consultant input and redesign of what remains).

Planning process needs more transparency and/or public involvement

I believe that the trails should be constructed in keeping with the Andrews family conservation easement: respecting the ecological integrity of the land and protecting the habitats where other living species dwell. As a user of Richmond's wonderful trail networks, I think it is important to expand recreational usage wisely, building new trails with minimal impact to plants, animals and waterways. Fortunately, there are strong wildlife advocates in our town who drew attention to this matter and the dangerous consequences the currently proposed trails could have on sensitive creatures living in and around the routes. Making this debate more transparent is an important step to finding a solution that respects the desire for human recreation and the wild ones living on these lands.

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:
 - o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.
 - o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic?)

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible...."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?
- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?
- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.
- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?
- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?
- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable

small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral flush.” Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

The Andrews Community Forest Management Plan states that our community forest is a critical wildlife corridor and is ranked in the top 3% of Vermont's wildlife blocks. The current amended trail proposal and many of the comments to this page rely on the work of Arrowood Environmental to verify trail locations as being ecologically sensitive and environmentally sound. Yet the Arrowood report states on page 2, "This project was limited in temporal scope and could not accommodate a comprehensive on the ground natural resources inventory, therefore additional resource features are expected to be present." In fact, the "Middle Connector Trail" would run right through a stand of the Broad Beech Fern, *Phegopteris hexagonoptera*, which has been identified as a rare fern in Vermont. Another example is on the proposed "Hemlock Trail" which would funnel traffic into the forest's largest winter wildlife refuge area.

Richmond Residents have not been presented with the full scope of the pros and cons of the proposed amended trail plan for public comment. Nor have they been presented with a map that identifies the wildlife corridor, and sensitive ecological areas as they relate to the proposed trails. There is also no mention of the 200' trail buffer zone as discussed in the Andrews Community Forest Management Plan. I believe proposed trails should be ground truthed, and that they must conform to the Forest Management Plan.

The Andrews Community Forest Committee deleted one proposed trail that ran through an ecologically sensitive area, and should be recognized for their work. We now hope our committee will work together to protect the ecologically sensitive areas where trails are still proposed. As a trail user and frequent visitor to Andrews Community Forest, I know creating recreation opportunities in the Andrews Community Forest is important, but not at the expense of critical wildlife habitat and ecologically sensitive areas. The Conservation Easement emphasizes minimizing ecological impacts over developing recreation. There would be greater community support for trail placement that locates trails away from ecologically sensitive areas and wildlife corridors.

I have been following development of a Trails Plan for the Andrews Forest (<https://arrowoodvt.com/acf/>). I have not found it possible to come to an opinion regarding that Plan without knowledge of proposed changes to the ACF's governing Management Plan, which states that "The Trail Concept Map shall not be revised independent of the Management Plan" (verbatim including underlining). I feel the two must come forward together.

For example, it no doubt was essential to somewhat relocate the proposed trail in the North-East quadrant, as described in the Management Plan Concept Map, based on a feet-on-the-ground examination as carried out by Consultants.

However, a single trail was specified in the Management Plan for that area. The initial Forest Committee Trails Plan called for three. One, I think wisely, was removed, but still leaving two trails, not the single trail specified.

I need to understand how two remaining trails can be justified in what is considered the ecologically most sensitive area in the Forest - how the Trails and Management Plans can be reconciled. How can two trails provide the appropriate balance of ecological / wildlife protection with recreational opportunity? I need to hear the reasoning.

I feel very conflicted about this project, particularly after reading the letter written by Sue Morse. While I think it is important that we have the chance to enjoy the outdoors, I worry about disrupting more and more of our natural areas. Where does it end? Where is the balance? I am glad to hear that compromises have been made and feel that I need to research a bit more about the revised plan.

From the comments submitted to date, it is clear that Richmond has a robust biking community. Some might think the Andrews Community Forest is a blank slate, and there are no restraints on the trail proposal. However, the 428 acre Andrews Community Forest was conveyed to the Town of Richmond subject to a Conservation Easement. The legal document is a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement. It specifies the purposes of the Grant and the attributes of the land. While the Easement provides for recreational uses, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on protecting the ecological values of the property (see pages 1-3).

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The Management Plan has not yet been revised. We do not know what's intended for the trails in question. Will there be limits on their use? Will Vermont Land Trust, a holder of the Easement, approve the changes if they're shown to contradict the terms of the Easement?

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I urge the committee to give further consideration to the trail proposal and look for alternatives that may have less impact on the ecologically sensitive areas. Also, I hope the committee will consider the substance of the comments received. Do the people in favor of this plan understand that we are not dealing with a blank slate?

I thank the committee for their work on this and hope the result is a proposal that is consistent with the Conservation Easement, for the sake of the species that call this area home.

Before sound decisions can be made about routing more trail traffic into remote parts of the Andrews Community Forest, the public needs more clear and objective information about the proposal's impacts on the Forest's wildlife and ecological health. We also need to know what changes the proposal would require to be made to the Management Plan and the long-term implications of those changes.

Solid, science-backed information is key if the Town is to meet its stewardship responsibilities for this wonderful place. The ACF's 428 acres are recognized as "an integral part of a large contiguous block of forestland that ranks in the highest 3% of Vermont's wildlife habitat blocks as ranked by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife....The property abuts adjacent conserved land totaling more than 5,000 acres that connect to Mt. Mansfield State Forest, itself comprising 44,444 acres, helping to create a critical wildlife corridor on a statewide scale." The forestry project underway there will only further enhance its ecological contributions.

Accordingly, Richmond's Town Plan, the ACF Management Plan and other important documents all stress the need for balancing recreational development with wildlife protections. But balanced outcomes require balanced information. The public needs independent, objective information to be able to judge what inserting more people into remote and sensitive areas of the Forest than originally envisioned would mean to its ecological health.

I was on the committee that developed the Management Plan. We spent months collecting, compiling and responding to extensive public input on how the Forest could best be protected and still used and enjoyed by town residents. After countless compromises in the Management Plan's development, the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust approved it and put its requirements and recommendations into force.

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Here are some links intended to help fill the information gap.

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- Letter from Sue Morse to the ACF Committee – A naturalist familiar with the Andrews Community Forest describes her concerns about the proposal: <https://tinyurl.com/MorseLetterAFC>
- "Wildlife and Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife" – New research and guidance for locating and managing low-impact recreation trails. From Vermont Forest, Parks and Recreation, and Fish and Wildlife departments: <https://tinyurl.com/LocatingTrails>
- For a Deeper Dive: Links to maps, research, articles, videos, correspondence and other materials about the Forest and the proposal's likely effects. <https://infoacf.wordpress.com/>

An important opportunity is before the Richmond community to develop a plan for recreational trails in the Andrews Community Forest. It is critical that this is done right, balancing the needs to preserve the ecological integrity of the Forest with the desire to create recreational opportunities, as described in the Forest Easement and community-developed Management Plan.

The Andrews Community Forest Committee (ACFC) has initiated a Google survey to obtain public opinion regarding the Trails Plan it has developed, currently in its second iteration. This is an important step.

However, I do not feel that such a survey alone satisfies the degree of public discourse clearly called for in the Forest Easement and Management Plan. It does not reflect the widespread public input through many venues that went into establishing the governing Management Plan.

I suggest the Andrews Forest Committee might arrange for a noticed public hearing where it presents its most recent Trails Plan to the public, summarizes feedback it will have thus far received and asks for further feedback in public. The ACFC might then consider that public feedback and then hold a second noticed public hearing detailing how public input has further shaped the Plan and the rationale behind its trails decision. It is only then that I feel the required degree of public input to the process can be satisfied.

I support the development of multi-use trails as outlined in the latest plan. While recreational use does have impacts - they are both positive and negative. By providing access to natural areas folks develop a deeper connection to the land and usually become much more invested in protecting more land - a major positive benefit that can extend beyond the ACF. Also, the majority of trails in Richmond are on private land - the ACF represents a generational opportunity to provide a place for Richmond residents to enjoy all that this public property has to offer.

Dear members of the Andrew's Community Forest Committee,

As a professional wildlife biologist, I cannot evaluate the adequacy of Andrew's Community Forest Committee's trails proposals based on the partial information the committee has provided so far. As a citizen who has volunteered on several of Richmond's standing and ad hoc committees (e.g., Selectboard, Transportation Committee, Science to Action, Town Governance, Volunteers' Green), I know that the ACFC's efforts to inform and involve the public in trail design and review fall well below our community's standards.

If your proposal package is left as is, you risk further confusing your audience while compromising the validity of any comments you receive. Moreover, I cannot believe that the Selectboard would consider reviewing an ACFC trail plan (and any associated management plan amendment needed to justify the trail plan) coming out of your process.

Doing better does not have to be difficult, or time consuming, but you need to try. Therefore, please consider withdrawing or closing the current public comment request as soon as possible and begin developing a functional and meaningful public information and participation program.

A tenet of public participation is that sufficient and objective information must be provided in an understandable format to foster a genuine understanding of a project's need, and the pros and cons of any proposals. The ACFC's process for the past nine months does not achieve this.

To expect the public to digest the 6/1/2021 Trail Project Summary Report, the consultants' undated "Expanded Additional Responses to ACF Committee", 2/28/2022 draft meeting minutes, and the Forest Management Plan is misguided. In your February 28th meeting, several of you said you didn't understand the consultant's responses—and you know the relationship of these documents and have been discussing them for months. How can you expect someone outside the committee to even begin to grasp the issues, let alone know which questions to ask?

Moreover, it's only deep in the meeting minutes that readers begin to learn that some committee members questioned the amended proposal's ability to meet the Management Plan's goals and requirements, and that the initial trail design request-for-proposal and subsequent contract might have been poorly designed (see "subject to the parameters you gave us"). And you don't share the concerns and questions expressed by the public so far.

The only trail design information you provide are those from the consultants. Where is the Committee's stand-alone summary linking the reports, questions, discussions, and management plan goals/requirements to your proposal (along with a discussion of the pros and cons)?

What might a substantive participation look like? Richmond offers many. For example: the Transportation Committee (of which I am a member) recently began an effort to make Bridge Street safer and more inviting for bicyclists and pedestrians. The project outreach plan includes two public meetings to gather input and report findings (in addition options for online comment submission). During the first meeting we (the Committee, liaisons from the CCRPC and the hired consultants) explained the project and asked the public many questions, starting with "are we asking the right questions?". We followed by asking people to share their experiences, concerns, and needs. Then we zoomed in for a block-by-block, and even a crosswalk-by-crosswalk, exploration, asking the same questions and answering the public's questions the entire time.

When the draft designs are ready (~3/17), we will hold another public meeting in which we will present the designs and ask the same questions again, as well as "Did we get it right?" "Does it address your concerns/needs?" "Did we miss anything?"

The Planning Commission uses the same basic template to engage the public on zoning questions, except the Planning Commission will often hold multiple sessions for both input and reporting out. The Conservation Commission, Selectboard and others do the same.

The contrast with the ACFC's poorly organized and partial documentation and comments webpage as public engagement is stark. If you wish to get the public's informed consent, you need a process capable of achieving this objective.

I understand that the ACFC has invested a lot of time and thought in the trail design effort and that many of you are eager to move on to other pressing ACF management issues. Please understand that your current process is the cause of the delays—not the people asking for more information.

Having participated in many public decision-making processes, I promise you that the fastest path forward is one that is transparent and that fully addresses questions and concerns at each important step in the process—before moving on to the next step. I shared this same statement during an ACFC meeting months ago. It hasn't changed.

Getting public participation right is also critical to maintaining the Committee's credibility.

If you want help, you can reach out to our Town Planner, Ravi Venkataraman (rvenkataraman@richmondvt.gov), Town Manager Josh Arneson (jarneson@richmondvt.gov), or any of the people who have offered to help with advice and funding (myself included).

I hope to have a chance to offer my thoughts on your trail design proposal. Your current process does not allow for it.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the Andrew's Community Forest.

Sincerely, Jon

Having had the opportunity to walk along the flagged proposed trails on the ACF my overwhelming impression is that the number of trails is excessive, since many routes are duplicated. The Trails plan provides little information about the need for this. We are mostly relying on the information from the expert consultants. While it seems that Arrowwood people have done a thorough job of documenting present conditions, I am concerned about the trails plan. The website of Sinuosity shows their specialization in building trail systems catering to mountain bike users seeking thrills on downhill routes (see <https://www.sinuosity.net/home#work>)

I am also concerned that the assessment of trail routing does not address the human impact that will increase as the numbers of trail users increases. The impact of trails depends the amount of use as well as their location. The Conservation Easement and Management Plan both emphasize conservation of habitat and natural resources as the highest priority for ACF with public access only to the extent that minimal impact on that habitat and resources occurs. While the number of people expected to use the new trails is unknown, precedents (e.g. Preston Preserve, Chamberlain Hill, Cochran's) suggest a high level of year-round human activity. There are already about 30 miles of multi-use trails within Richmond, and an additional 70 miles in neighboring Towns. It's unclear why we need so many more trails in this crucial component of the Chittenden County Uplands that demands our best efforts to protect it.

People wishing to study the ACF proposals in detail don't find a lot of easily accessible or in-depth information from the ACF Committee's web page. So Richmond residents have assembled a resource for maps and documents about the ACF and about the impacts of human activity – see <https://InfoACF.wordpress.com>. I encourage Committee members and others to study that resource before coming to any simplified 'yes/no' about the proposed trail plan.

Having served as a member and chairperson of the Richmond Trails Committee some years ago, I had the opportunity to learn a lot from a wide range of hikers, hunters, landowners, land stewards and others about many aspects of trails on private, public and conserved lands. But things have changed a lot in recent years – the predominance of hikers with backpacks and binoculars seem to have been outnumbered now by people riding mountain bikes. Bikes make access and range a lot easier.

In particular, the doubling or tripling of trail routes above the power lines contradicts stated principles in the Conservation Easement (CE) and Management Plan (MP) to minimize impact.

The following changes regarding new trails can be made without substantially reducing opportunities for trail users:

- Where they parallel each other, consolidate Rocky View (#11) and Cascade Trail (#12) to avoid duplication; also avoid the short loop at the top that requires two stream crossings.
- Omit: the unnecessary Roadside Trail (#8)
- Retain: Lower Traverse (#9), Stream View (#13) and Middle Connector (#14);
- Retain: East Climb (#17); Omit Hemlock Valley (#16) and Ridge Top (#15)
- Retain: Sip of Sunshine Connector (#18).

Another important point: it is suggested that Richmond can benefit economically from becoming a destination for trail users. This is a dangerous concept since it implies that trail use should be maximized along with economic impact.

I would welcome any opportunity to explain and elaborate on these points to the ACF Committee, and thank them for the huge amount of work already done.

Trail proposal is in conflict with easement and/or ecological requirements of management plan

I believe that the trails should be constructed in keeping with the Andrews family conservation easement: respecting the ecological integrity of the land and protecting the habitats where other living species dwell. As a user of Richmond's wonderful trail networks, I think it is important to expand recreational usage wisely, building new trails with minimal impact to plants, animals and waterways. Fortunately, there are strong wildlife advocates in our town who drew attention to this matter and the dangerous consequences the currently proposed trails could have on sensitive creatures living in and around the routes. Making this debate more transparent is an important step to finding a solution that respects the desire for human recreation and the wild ones living on these lands.

Thanks ACFC for allowing time to share views on the trail route proposal. While I support carefully planned recreation at ACF I am in favor of relocating trails in the upper portion of ACF to less sensitive areas. PLEASE take as much time as necessary to assess trail route proposals and public input.

Ian Stokes has offered an alternative trail design in these comments. I think they are worthy of your consideration.

The Arrowwood/Sinuosity report offers much to consider as long as the ACF Management Plan and Conservation Easement requirements can be met. As an aside but probably relevant ... Richmond's Preston Forest Legacy trails, although well made, were sited without the benefit of a management plan or formal environmental assessment. It shows in my view: Some well-developed game trails have been converted to single-track multi-use trails; To some extent the desire for connectivity to other trails seems to have determined the number of trails and their locations; 'features' (large berms, 'balance beam') have been added to at least one trail (Visceral) clearly out of compliance with the conservation easement. (The easement actually calls for non-mechanized public use of this land.) As a former member of the town Trails Committee I learned how difficult it is to get valuable committee time to discuss and act on such concerns after the fact when more immediate things have to get done. It highlights for me the importance of getting ACF done right the first time, however long it takes.

It is important that the desire to connect to other trails does not always take precedent over other factors in deciding trail location at ACF. While I generally support the idea of trail connectivity it does increase the challenge of managing trail USE and its EFFECTS when there are multiple points of entry. Looking at the cumulative impact of trails at ACF and connecting trails off of ACF has to be a priority.

On a more personal note, a forest loses some of its magic when a permanent trail runs through it. Keep it small. There are lots of trails in the area. ACF is a special place as it is.

Thanks again for your time.

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?

- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:

- o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.

- o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic)?

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible..."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?

- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?

- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.

- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?

- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?

- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable

small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral flush.” Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

I would like to see effective wildlife corridors and sensitive forest areas protected. I support the recreational use of Andrew's forest, but I think that the original plan for the forest is a good one, and should not be amended to allow more incursion into wild lands than already exists unless it can be done without disturbing the biological balance of the forest.

The Andrews Community Forest Management Plan states that our community forest is a critical wildlife corridor and is ranked in the top 3% of Vermont's wildlife blocks. The current amended trail proposal and many of the comments to this page rely on the work of Arrowood Environmental to verify trail locations as being ecologically sensitive and environmentally sound. Yet the Arrowood report states on page 2, "This project was limited in temporal scope and could not accommodate a comprehensive on the ground natural resources inventory, therefore additional resource features are expected to be present." In fact, the "Middle Connector Trail" would run right through a stand of the Broad Beech Fern, *Phegopteris hexagonoptera*, which has been identified as a rare fern in Vermont. Another example is on the proposed "Hemlock Trail" which would funnel traffic into the forest's largest winter wildlife refuge area.

Richmond Residents have not been presented with the full scope of the pros and cons of the proposed amended trail plan for public comment. Nor have they been presented with a map that identifies the wildlife corridor, and sensitive ecological areas as they relate to the proposed trails. There is also no mention of the 200' trail buffer zone as discussed in the Andrews Community Forest Management Plan. I believe proposed trails should be ground truthed, and that they must conform to the Forest Management Plan.

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As I have become aware of the AFC's proposed trails, I am dismayed at the dismantling of the original management plan. Please do not allow any trails in/near the vital wildlife habitat located in the northeast section of the forest.

From the comments submitted to date, it is clear that Richmond has a robust biking community. Some might think the Andrews Community Forest is a blank slate, and there are no restraints on the trail proposal. However, the 428 acre Andrews Community Forest was conveyed to the Town of Richmond subject to a Conservation Easement. The legal document is a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement. It specifies the purposes of the Grant and the attributes of the land. While the Easement provides for recreational uses, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on protecting the ecological values of the property (see pages 1-3).

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I thank the committee for their work on this and hope the result is a proposal that is consistent with the Conservation Easement, for the sake of the species that call this area home.

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- Letter from Sue Morse to the ACF Committee – A naturalist familiar with the Andrews Community Forest describes her concerns about the proposal: <https://tinyurl.com/MorseLetterAFC>
- "Wildlife and Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife" – New research and guidance for locating and managing low-impact recreation trails. From Vermont Forest, Parks and Recreation, and Fish and Wildlife departments: <https://tinyurl.com/LocatingTrails>
- For a Deeper Dive: Links to maps, research, articles, videos, correspondence and other materials about the Forest and the proposal's likely effects. <https://infoacf.wordpress.com/>

Having had the opportunity to walk along the flagged proposed trails on the ACF my overwhelming impression is that the number of trails is excessive, since many routes are duplicated. The Trails plan provides little information about the need for this. We are mostly relying on the information from the expert consultants. While it seems that Arrowwood people have done a thorough job of documenting present conditions, I am concerned about the trails plan. The website of Sinuosity shows their specialization in building trail systems catering to mountain bike users seeking thrills on downhill routes (see <https://www.sinuosity.net/home#work>)

I am also concerned that the assessment of trail routing does not address the human impact that will increase as the numbers of trail users increases. The impact of trails depends the amount of use as well as their location. The Conservation Easement and Management Plan both emphasize conservation of habitat and natural resources as the highest priority for ACF with public access only to the extent that minimal impact on that habitat and resources occurs. While the number of people expected to use the new trails is unknown, precedents (e.g. Preston Preserve, Chamberlain Hill, Cochran's) suggest a high level of year-round human activity. There are already about 30 miles of multi-use trails within Richmond, and an additional 70 miles in neighboring Towns. It's unclear why we need so many more trails in this crucial component of the Chittenden County Uplands that demands our best efforts to protect it.

People wishing to study the ACF proposals in detail don't find a lot of easily accessible or in-depth information from the ACF Committee's web page. So Richmond residents have assembled a resource for maps and documents about the ACF and about the impacts of human activity – see <https://InfoACF.wordpress.com>. I encourage Committee members and others to study that resource before coming to any simplified 'yes/no' about the proposed trail plan.

Having served as a member and chairperson of the Richmond Trails Committee some years ago, I had the opportunity to learn a lot from a wide range of hikers, hunters, landowners, land stewards and others about many aspects of trails on private, public and conserved lands. But things have changed a lot in recent years – the predominance of hikers with backpacks and binoculars seem to have been outnumbered now by people riding mountain bikes. Bikes make access and range a lot easier.

In particular, the doubling or tripling of trail routes above the power lines contradicts stated principles in the Conservation Easement (CE) and Management Plan (MP) to minimize impact.

The following changes regarding new trails can be made without substantially reducing opportunities for trail users:

- Where they parallel each other, consolidate Rocky View (#11) and Cascade Trail (#12) to avoid duplication; also avoid the short loop at the top that requires two stream crossings.
- Omit: the unnecessary Roadside Trail (#8)
- Retain: Lower Traverse (#9), Stream View (#13) and Middle Connector (#14);
- Retain: East Climb (#17); Omit Hemlock Valley (#16) and Ridge Top (#15)
- Retain: Sip of Sunshine Connector (#18).

Another important point: it is suggested that Richmond can benefit economically from becoming a destination for trail users. This is a dangerous concept since it implies that trail use should be maximized along with economic impact.

I would welcome any opportunity to explain and elaborate on these points to the ACF Committee, and thank them for the huge amount of work already done.

Trails in ACF will help to off-load crowding and/or impact at other local networks

I think this trail is going to be great for local recreation. It's thoughtfully designed and had some really great input from people concerned with the potential impact on the watershed and animal habitat. I feel really good about riding a trail that was designed having done everything possible to address these concerns.

Further, because there will be little to no new parking opportunities, I believe that this trail will be ridden mostly by locals who live near either of the trail heads. That means that the kind of people who will ride this trail are likely to be people who appreciate the beauty and delicateness of the ecosystem on which they are treading. Because the trail is uphill both ways (literally!), it will be ridden by mountain bikers who are interested not only on the gravity focused portion but on the uphill as well. While there are no hard and fast rules about what kinds of mountain bikers like what kind of trails, I believe that generally speaking this will filter out bikers who might be less inclined to appreciate the importance of respect for trail conditions and other, non-cycling, recreationists.

Finally, this new trail will provide some much needed relief to the pressure that is mounting on our existing trail systems. I'm delighted to see mountain biking grow in popularity as I think it correlates with healthier lifestyles and an appreciation of nature and, in particular, our forests. That said, the increasing number of bikers means we need more trails to distribute the load and to properly care for the existing networks.

Thank you for conducting such an open, transparent and thoughtful design and consultation process around this trail.

One of Richmond's best characteristics is the opportunity to enjoy a variety of trails without traveling far. The original discussion of the town forest always included the idea that a collection of trails would be built. In order to prevent crowding, overuse, and stress on the environment, it is imperative that there is a large selection of trails from which to choose. I support the development of the proposed trails in the plan.

I think that this would be a great addition to the Richmond trail systems. Richmond bike community is so strong, and this would give people space to spread out, rather than crowd the area of Cochran's and Chamberlin.

I support this trail plan and hope that the town is able to move forward with it. Adding these trails to the existing network will spread out the traffic and improve the trail user and residential experience. Thanks for the hard work in crafting a thoughtful plan.

I am supportive of both the original trail network and now the revised plan. It would be great to offload some of the trail and land users from our side of Richmond (Cochran's and surrounding land) and spread all the humans out. It seems that both sinuosity and arrowhead were quite professional in their approach to developing this trail plan; let's make it happen!

I would like to submit my full support of the trail plan put forth by the committee. I am a Richmond resident and manager of the Cochran Ski Area and in my opinion, the original trail plan should be supported by the Committee and approved by the Select Board. With public trails and ample parking, Cochran's ski area and my family's land is currently a host to many multi-use trails. While it has been tremendously positive to host trails and be a central location for recreation in Richmond, there is a limit on how much we can do. By approving the proposed ATF plan, the Town would share the role of providing recreational opportunities for the community, on public land. I appreciate the detailed ecological study that helped determine the proposed trail design. I encourage the ATF Committee and Select Board to approve the plan that was developed by paid, vetted, and experienced professionals.

As an active resident in the town of Richmond I am in favor of proposed trail routes at the Andrews farm. My primary sport is trail running and the trail network in this town is one reason that I reside here. I appreciate that studies and consulting has been done on the proposed area for trail development and have read through the Management Plan. Nature is something that I value and want to see utilized, but at the same time respected.

I believe that the trails in our area provide value to our personal health and our communities. I also see the demand for more trails and think that this proposal will help elevate some of the overcrowding on some of the current "hot spots" while also helping connect an existing trail to others (Sip of Sunshine).

As a local mountain biker, I would greatly enjoy having more trails to spread out the biker traffic that Richmond has been experiencing. I have walked this land numerous times and would love to have trails in the beautiful forests.

I am in favor of the proposed plan. Multi use trail networks and continuing to connect with existing trail corridors provides people the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and access nature without overcrowding of existing trails.

Concern that this process is taking as long as it is

I am fully in support of sustainable recreational trails being built on the ACF and am in favor of the original trail layout designed and presented by Arrowwood and Sinuosity initially. This design between ecologists and trail designers was iterative and ended up with a compromise solution that was better than the first plan laid out by the SE Group and strikes the appropriate balance between preserving delicate areas of the land with creating an engaging and educational trail layout for nature lovers, walkers, runners, bikers, snowshoers and others.

I was at the public meeting in August 2021 where the trail proposal was presented and discussed and I was impressed by the thought and expertise of the professionals the ACFC hired to create a collaborative and responsible plan setting aside significant portions of the property for wildlife and condensing the trails into smaller blocks to meet the varied goals of the management plan. The plan was approved at that meeting after extensive deliberation on top of years of public input, so I feel like it is time to move forward and create the sustainable and clear trail infrastructure that will both benefit the town as well as protect the forest by keeping users to established trails.

Thanks to the committee, volunteers who have volunteered their time to make our town a better place. It is an important job to make sure the ACF is a valuable resource for the town as one of the few pieces of truly public land in Richmond!

I would like to submit my full support of the original trail plan submitted by Arrowwood and Sinuosity. The ATF Committee has been extremely thorough, thoughtful, diligent, and patient in this multi-year process. I believe those supporting the recreational aspect of the Town Forest Recreation Plan have been incredibly patient as well. The Committee delivered a clear majority vote (6 in favor, 2 against, 1 abstaining) to approve the multi-use trail design plan back in August, 2021. Yet here we are, continuing to gather and filter more public input. The public has had ample opportunity to be involved and voice opinions every step of the way, over the past four years.

As an aside, I'd also like to express my personal opinion that it is unrealistic to expect the ATF committee members to individually become expert ecologists or expert trail designers -- to digest hundreds of pages of content forwarded to them. The Committee selected and paid two highly respected, professional, local companies to bring that expertise to the table. It was an unprecedented process to hire a joint ecologist / trail design team to balance recreation and ecological concerns. I support the expertise Arrowwood and Sinuosity delivered, and respectfully request that the Committee and the Select Board approve that plan as well.

Some time ago, our community took the opportunity to purchase the Andrews property with the vision to conserve part of the forest as farm land and open areas to recreation. The promise was to expand the need for recreation in Richmond, bring in business and extend the educational growth of forest management and nature. This vision was enshrined in a document called : Town Forest Recreation Plan Richmond --> https://vtcommunityforestry.org/sites/default/files/pictures/richmond_plan_document_final.pdf . The framework of this vision helped enable the development of the ACF "Management Plan"

Take note on page 24 and 25 of the document that our desires at the time focused on conservation, recreation, forest management and education. The forest has been logged, the farm land leased and now it's time for recreation. It's been over five years now that the ACF committee and community has gone through the deliberations to achieve the management plan goals.

The ACF committee has a sound trail design approved by three ecologists an expert trail design consultant, and large community support. So now is the time to fulfill the promise to those who have waited the longest to have more recreation in the forest. Please give your input now so the ACF Committee can close on public opinion and represent the findings to the Select board and trails can be started this year.

I support the proposed trail design as presented. The forest as part of the 10,000 acre tract of conserved land, has ample room for humans and wild life to co-exist. We have hundreds of miles of trails in Vermont similar to the ACF landscape. Now is the time to move forward with our trails and keep the promise to ourselves.

Pete Halvorsen
VT Master Naturalist
Certified National Recreational Trail Designer

I support the original trail design by Arrowwood/Sinuosity. Trust the experts you hired to design a trail network that minimizes environmental impact. It's time to move the process forward after 4 years of debate and planning.

Hi All-

I served on the Andrews Town Forest Committee in 2017 and 2018. I am on the board of Richmond Mountain Trails. I am a member of the Conservation Alliance, which helped fund purchase of Andrews Town Forest

As you work towards a proposal for the Richmond Selectboard re: trails in Richmond's Andrews Town Forest, I wanted to share some quotes with you I collected as I was researching a story on trail-based recreation in Vermont for a national publication. The quotes are from a Vermont Federal Forester, a Program Manager at conservation non-profit Trust for Public Land, and from a representative of the Lintilhac Foundation.

As a journalist, I turn to experts to help me understand whatever topic I am writing about. I hope that the Town of Richmond will also defer to experts as we come up with a plan for the Richmond Town Forest that will serve the needs of flora and fauna, as well as the needs of the community.

At the last two ATF Committee meetings, committee members used the trails proposal created by the experts the town hired to develop a plan to care for wildlife and serve community user groups as a starting point for compromise, when in fact that plan was the result of compromise, which is what both Arrowwood Consultants and Sinuosity Trail Designers explained it was, detailing their iterative process over the course of a four plus hour public meeting.

The Sinuosity/Arrowwood plan was developed by expert ecologists and expert trail designers in a landmark collaboration that could serve as a model for how trails are built throughout Vermont in the future, satisfying trail users and protecting wildlife and Vermont's ecology.

But it doesn't appear that the majority of the committee is willing to trust the experts the Town of Richmond hired.

It's ironic. When Ethan Tapper, our county forester, makes a recommendation to the ACTF committee, all defer to him as the forestry and logging expert. When Arrowwood and Sinuosity made a recommendation, members of the committee and the community asserted their own expertise trumps that of the experts we hired.

I am a conservationist, an avid nature lover and a lover of outdoor activity. I strongly believe we should establish wilderness--land with the least human impact possible.

Richmond Town Forest is not that land. It's a small parcel bisected by a power line, a piece of land where there has been extensive logging, and a parcel with an existing network of logging roads that are heavily used by the public. Andrews Community Forest was purchased to serve as a wildlife corridor and also a place for Richmond residents to recreate. It was purchased as a community resource, a place for Richmond residents to be in nature, to breath fresh air, to stretch our legs and lungs. The Arrowwood/Sinuosity proposal represents a dramatically scaled down trail system from what was first proposed by SE Group, consultants the town hired to help us determine what town residents want our town forest to be.

I strongly encourage the selectboard to approve a plan that will balance the interests of as many community interest groups as possible. I strongly encourage you to adopt the proposal put together by Arrowwood and Sinuosity, and to approve the modest network they proposed for immediate construction.

The trails discussion has been going on since 2017. It's time that we move forward with a fair and balanced plan, and end the infighting in our town that wants to give some user groups access and bar other users. A scaled down version of the Arrowwood/Sinuosity plan will create unnecessary trail crowding and potential conflicts. Please allow the three trails laid out in the proposal we hired Arrowwood and Sinuosity to create.

As a private landowner whose parcel provides a key link in the Preston Loops, I ask the town to please allow trail-based travel in our town forest.

Thanks for reading.

Warmly, Berne

“Having trails affects a community’s pride and identity,” said Holly Knox, Federal Forester from Vermont’s Rochester Ranger District. “The public health, economics, and transportation benefits extend beyond the public investment we’re making in trail infrastructure. When a company decides to move to Vermont because of the recreation opportunities it offers—the economic impact is not always accounted for when we talk about trail networks. Trails preserve the rural and scenic quality of life that we see. They provide a link between people and natural resources. When people feel connected to the landscape, they’re more likely to respect and care for public lands and natural resources. Trails provide the respite people are seeking.”

“We see mountain biking as a way to evolve how we interact with land use in the state of VT,” said Louise Lintilhac of the Lintilhac Foundation. “We are constantly looking for new ways to involve communities with conserved land. Mountain biking is part of that picture. When people get involved, they care more about the land’s future, about climate change, about protecting that land. They become more engaged in town land use policies and management plans. In Vermont, we pride ourselves on healthy landscapes. Our viewsheds are what attract visitors. And mountain biking is an important tool in keeping farms and forests dominant.”

“People need to know the land to want to put money and time behind it,” said Kate Wanner, Project Manager at the Trust for Public Land. “Mountain biking is one way to get people to fall in love with a forest, and to have respect when they come around a corner and startle a fisher or see a porcupine climbing a tree. Without recreationists, we don’t have strong political power behind us to protect places we need to protect. Here, like everywhere, an increasing number of recreational enthusiasts means it’s easy for some trails systems to be “over loved.” We need more places to get people outside. It improves the health of the individual and of the community. Mountain biking needs land, and in many cases land needs people to conserve it and to care for it.”

I strongly urge the town to approve this trail plan. It is time. There has been more than enough compromise and all parties and stakeholders have had ample opportunity to comment and participate. I personally feel there should be more approved trails, but can live with the reduced number in the name of compromise and moving forward. Please approve this plan!

Question or suggestion about policies related to trail use (e.g., season closures)

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:
 - o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.
 - o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic?)

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible...."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?
- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?
- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.
- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?

- Which “target user groups” were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?
- In the reference to a “sustainable” recreational experience, how is the word “sustainable” used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn't allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to "build trails this upcoming summer...." Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that "...avoidable small, localized elements are likely present" and that it is "additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall." The RFP specifies 50' checks on the trailsides "after the ephemeral flush." Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP's calsl for "multi-use trails" and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

From the comments submitted to date, it is clear that Richmond has a robust biking community. Some might think the Andrews Community Forest is a blank slate, and there are no restraints on the trail proposal. However, the 428 acre Andrews Community Forest was conveyed to the Town of Richmond subject to a Conservation Easement. The legal document is a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement. It specifies the purposes of the Grant and the attributes of the land. While the Easement provides for recreational uses, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on protecting the ecological values of the property (see pages 1-3).

The Easement also requires a Management Plan as well as a Forest Management Plan. Both plans are approved and in effect. (The Management Plan supersedes a Recreation Plan that has been mentioned in prior posts. The Conservation Easement is separate from, and independent of, the Conservation Easement that encumbers the Maple Wind Farm land, which was also part of the Andrews Farm.)

The reason there is controversy surrounding the present trail proposal is that there are people in Richmond who feel that it is not consistent with the provisions of the Conservation Easement or the Management Plan. Specifically the trail plan appears to encroach on ecologically sensitive areas in the upper parts of the property that are to be protected under the terms of the Easement. The Management Plan clearly states that the trail plan can not be revised without a full revision to the Management Plan (page 27).

The Management Plan has not yet been revised. We do not know what's intended for the trails in question. Will there be limits on their use? Will Vermont Land Trust, a holder of the Easement, approve the changes if they're shown to contradict the terms of the Easement?

There are also questions about the process used to get to this trail proposal. There has not been much opportunity for open dialogue and even this system for gathering responses does not result in discussion of the issues.

I urge the committee to give further consideration to the trail proposal and look for alternatives that may have less impact on the ecologically sensitive areas. Also, I hope the committee will consider the substance of the comments received. Do the people in favor of this plan understand that we are not dealing with a blank slate?

I thank the committee for their work on this and hope the result is a proposal that is consistent with the Conservation Easement, for the sake of the species that call this area home.

I think it is a good proposal to cut out the last trail on the NE corner of the of the AFC property. I think you should also look at closing trails that go down the steep ridges of hemlock and spruce in the late fall and winter time when the deer herds are living there.

I also feel that the trails should be following the suggestions of the described parameters and goals under which the ecologists (Arrowwood) and trail designers (Sinuosity) developed their proposal. We must protect sensitive areas of fauna as well as animals. There is a dry oak forest that a trail goes through that is not commonly found on our corner of the state according to Kit Emery. These are the kinds or areas the AFC should look at as well.

I realize these trails are used not just for mountain bikers but also hikers and hunters and VAST members. I hope school classes will as well.

The Richmond area is rich with mountain bike trails and that is why we see the heavy traffic through town and enjoy the support these people bring to our local businesses.

The Andrews Community Forest should be more protected from trails being built on them then the hills surrounding us that have trails on them already.

Thank you for the opportunity to add to this public discussion.
John Hamerslough.

I am a citizen of Richmond. I m very concerned that there are too many trails being proposed . Much of the proposed trail routes will negatively impact wildlife. I would like to see the addition of new trails done over a long time period so we will know when there is visible negative impact without effecting the whole parcel.

I would like to return to the original plan where all wheeled vehicles would be prohibited.

You can't fully appreciate nature traveling 20mph through the woods.

I do want limited hikers and hopefully school groups to learn about the forest.

I fully support selective logging. We need differing habitat and logging is essential to protect various species.

I would support haying some of the meadow but even then it should be cut late in the traditional first cut so meadow larks may once again nest.

I would like to see the majority of the traffic limited to the area below the power line.

I strongly believe that there should be no bridges or jumps that litter the woods on the south side of town.

I would also like to see the deer yards off limits for all users from Jan 1 to March 1.

I want people to walk on and enjoy the land. Some trails are essential to that goal.

I want to return to the upper section to hunt again as I did years ago. It may sound selfish but I would like to see sections off limits to hikers and bikers if we must have them during the traditional rifle deer season. Many places do this. It does increase safety in the woods.

As a nature educator and outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to hike, run, ski, bike and guide educational programs in the ACF on trails that reflect the principles and spirit of the conservation easement that the Andrews Family entrusted our community to honor. The Andrews Family sacrificed millions to primarily ensure that their land be forever wild and shared in a manner that respects the ecological integrity of the forest for generations to follow. The original management plan, reflecting the guiding principles of the easement, is the bedrock for this planning process and should not be compromised to fulfill a vision different from the original one. I urge the ACF committee, our Richmond Selectboard and the VLT to hold us to the promises we made.

I chose to live in Richmond 25 years ago because of the abundant trails and natural areas not just here, but in surrounding towns. While it has been inspiring to see an explosive interest in seeking solace and adventure in nature during the pandemic, new threats to healthy, thriving forest habitats have emerged due to over-use in the backcountry. Spreading out our robust interest for woodland exercise and adventure with new trails will not solve the problems of congestion, severe erosion, sprawl and impact in a forest that the conservation easement specifies we agreed to manage with minimal impact.

The ACF Committee has done an admirable job identifying some of the critical wildlife habitat features to help us carefully select appropriate places to explore and play. The ecological assessment that Arrowwood conducted shows boundaries or buffers between 200 and 400 feet for high value ecological zones we should not intrude. They mapped the following parts of the forest:

- 1) Significant wildlife movement corridors, assessed as among the top 3% most important to protect in the state of Vermont.
- 2) High value Southwest facing deer yards critical for winter refuge.
- 3) Several riparian zones bordering streams that are super important for water quality and rich in biodiversity.
- 4) Interior and remote core forest many species need to feed, breed, and protect their young.
- 5) Mast trees for Black Bears, Vernal Pools for frogs and salamanders and high value uncommon natural communities such as Dry Oak Forest patches that many animals need to thrive.

While I share the desire to access the wilds close to home, many of us are thinking more critically about where, when and how we visit them because of the intense development and global warming assaults the wild ones face. The Andrews Family and the forest inhabitants would want us to take the necessary time we need to plan with care while bearing in mind multiple other developed trail networks in the area. We already have 100 miles of mountain biking trails and turning the ACF into a popular mecca similar to Cochran's and Chamberlin Hill is not the right fit for this integral habitat link within the 10,000 acres Chittenden County Uplands Forest we have already committed to protecting.

Responsible recreational expansion according to the original minimum impact plan means concentrating trails in higher density zones and allowing nature to restore old roads and timber damage to recover a healthy ecosystem we and wildlife need more than ever. Trail options for hops, pops, drops and advanced riding exist below the power lines and out of the wildlife hot spots. By keeping high intensity use out of critical wildlife habitat, we would satisfy our quest for a multi-use trail system while achieving the balance the Andrews Family had in mind.

I hope the ACF Committee will do the following: 1. Complete our planning process by inviting comprehensive public engagement representing the diverse range of interests including wildlife who do not have seat at the table. 2. Follow Arrowwood's recommendation to finish the full habitat assessment including an inventory for rare and endangered species during the appropriate season which they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly complete. 3. Ground-truth alternative trail options away from habitat hot spots. 4. Exhaust all the existing trails and impacted areas before breaking ground, cutting trees and displacing wildlife in new ones. 5. Promote a culture of responsible recreation including seasonal trail closures near vernal pools and safeguarding this forest from severe erosion and unauthorized rogue side trails seen on many other trail networks in Richmond.

Thank you ACFC for taking time to make sure the final outcome is something we can all feel good about long into the future.

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:
 - o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.
 - o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic)?

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible..."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?
- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?
- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.
- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?
- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?
- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable

small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral flush.” Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

From the comments submitted to date, it is clear that Richmond has a robust biking community. Some might think the Andrews Community Forest is a blank slate, and there are no restraints on the trail proposal. However, the 428 acre Andrews Community Forest was conveyed to the Town of Richmond subject to a Conservation Easement. The legal document is a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access Easement. It specifies the purposes of the Grant and the attributes of the land. While the Easement provides for recreational uses, the overwhelming emphasis in the document is on protecting the ecological values of the property (see pages 1-3).

The Easement also requires a Management Plan as well as a Forest Management Plan. Both plans are approved and in effect. (The Management Plan supersedes a Recreation Plan that has been mentioned in prior posts. The Conservation Easement is separate from, and independent of, the Conservation Easement that encumbers the Maple Wind Farm land, which was also part of the Andrews Farm.)

The reason there is controversy surrounding the present trail proposal is that there are people in Richmond who feel that it is not consistent with the provisions of the Conservation Easement or the Management Plan. Specifically the trail plan appears to encroach on ecologically sensitive areas in the upper parts of the property that are to be protected under the terms of the Easement. The Management Plan clearly states that the trail plan can not be revised without a full revision to the Management Plan (page 27).

The Management Plan has not yet been revised. We do not know what's intended for the trails in question. Will there be limits on their use? Will Vermont Land Trust, a holder of the Easement, approve the changes if they're shown to contradict the terms of the Easement?

There are also questions about the process used to get to this trail proposal. There has not been much opportunity for open dialogue and even this system for gathering responses does not result in discussion of the issues.

I urge the committee to give further consideration to the trail proposal and look for alternatives that may have less impact on the ecologically sensitive areas. Also, I hope the committee will consider the substance of the comments received. Do the people in favor of this plan understand that we are not dealing with a blank slate?

I thank the committee for their work on this and hope the result is a proposal that is consistent with the Conservation Easement, for the sake of the species that call this area home.

I think it is a good proposal to cut out the last trail on the NE corner of the of the AFC property. I think you should also look at closing trails that go down the steep ridges of hemlock and spruce in the late fall and winter time when the deer herds are living there.

I also feel that the trails should be following the suggestions of the described parameters and goals under which the ecologists (Arrowwood) and trail designers (Sinuosity) developed their proposal. We must protect sensitive areas of fauna as well as animals. There is a dry oak forest that a trail goes through that is not commonly found on our corner of the state according to Kit Emery. These are the kinds or areas the AFC should look at as well.

I realize these trails are used not just for mountain bikers but also hikers and hunters and VAST members. I hope school classes will as well.

The Richmond area is rich with mountain bike trails and that is why we see the heavy traffic through town and enjoy the support these people bring to our local businesses.

The Andrews Community Forest should be more protected from trails being built on them than the hills surrounding us that have trails on them already.

Thank you for the opportunity to add to this public discussion.
John Hamerslough.

I am a citizen of Richmond. I m very concerned that there are too many trails being proposed . Much of the proposed trail routes will negatively impact wildlife. I would like to see the addition of new trails done over a long time period so we will know when there is visible negative impact without effecting the whole parcel.
I would like to return to the original plan where all wheeled vehicles would be prohibited.
You can't fully appreciate nature traveling 20mph through the woods.
I do want limited hikers and hopefully school groups to learn about the forest.
I fully support selective logging. We need differing habitat and logging is essential to protect various species.
I would support haying some of the meadow but even then it should be cut late in the traditional first cut so meadow larks may once again nest.
I would like to see the majority of the traffic limited to the area below the power line.
I strongly believe that there should be no bridges or jumps that litter the woods on the south side of town.
I would also like to see the deer yards off limits for all users from Jan 1 to March 1.

I want people to walk on and enjoy the land. Some trails are essential to that goal.

I want to return to the upper section to hunt again as I did years ago. It may sound selfish but I would like to see sections off limits to hikers and bikers if we must have them during the traditional rifle deer season. Many places do this. It does increase safety in the woods.

As a nature educator and outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to hike, run, ski, bike and guide educational programs in the ACF on trails that reflect the principles and spirit of the conservation easement that the Andrews Family entrusted our community to honor. The Andrews Family sacrificed millions to primarily ensure that their land be forever wild and shared in a manner that respects the ecological integrity of the forest for generations to follow. The original management plan, reflecting the guiding principles of the easement, is the bedrock for this planning process and should not be compromised to fulfill a vision different from the original one. I urge the ACF committee, our Richmond Selectboard and the VLT to hold us to the promises we made.

I chose to live in Richmond 25 years ago because of the abundant trails and natural areas not just here, but in surrounding towns. While it has been inspiring to see an explosive interest in seeking solace and adventure in nature during the pandemic, new threats to healthy, thriving forest habitats have emerged due to over-use in the backcountry. Spreading out our robust interest for woodland exercise and adventure with new trails will not solve the problems of congestion, severe erosion, sprawl and impact in a forest that the conservation easement specifies we agreed to manage with minimal impact.

The ACF Committee has done an admirable job identifying some of the critical wildlife habitat features to help us carefully select appropriate places to explore and play. The ecological assessment that Arrowwood conducted shows boundaries or buffers between 200 and 400 feet for high value ecological zones we should not intrude. They mapped the following parts of the forest:

- 1) Significant wildlife movement corridors, assessed as among the top 3% most important to protect in the state of Vermont.
- 2) High value Southwest facing deer yards critical for winter refuge.
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While I share the desire to access the wilds close to home, many of us are thinking more critically about where, when and how we visit them because of the intense development and global warming assaults the wild ones face. The Andrews Family and the forest inhabitants would want us to take the necessary time we need to plan with care while bearing in mind multiple other developed trail networks in the area. We already have 100 miles of mountain biking trails and turning the ACF into a popular mecca similar to Cochran's and Chamberlin Hill is not the right fit for this integral habitat link within the 10,000 acres Chittenden County Uplands Forest we have already committed to protecting.

Responsible recreational expansion according to the original minimum impact plan means concentrating trails in higher density zones and allowing nature to restore old roads and timber damage to recover a healthy ecosystem we and wildlife need more than ever. Trail options for hops, pops, drops and advanced riding exist below the power lines and out of the wildlife hot spots. By keeping high intensity use out of critical wildlife habitat, we would satisfy our quest for a multi-use trail system while achieving the balance the Andrews Family had in mind.

I hope the ACF Committee will do the following: 1. Complete our planning process by inviting comprehensive public engagement representing the diverse range of interests including wildlife who do not have seat at the table. 2. Follow Arrowwood's recommendation to finish the full habitat assessment including an inventory for rare and endangered species during the appropriate season which they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly complete. 3. Ground-truth alternative trail options away from habitat hot spots. 4. Exhaust all the existing trails and impacted areas before breaking ground, cutting trees and displacing wildlife in new ones. 5. Promote a culture of responsible recreation including seasonal trail closures near vernal pools and safeguarding this forest from severe erosion and unauthorized rogue side trails seen on many other trail networks in Richmond.

Thank you ACFC for taking time to make sure the final outcome is something we can all feel good about long into the future.

Concern related to Arrowwood's note that some ecological features may be unidentified (i.e., not represented in the map or route planning) due to ecological evaluation occurring during only one season.

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

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and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that "...avoidable small, localized elements are likely present" and that it is "additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall." The RFP specifies 50' checks on the trailsides "after the ephemeral flush." Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

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- If the plan is to abandon the MP's calls for "multi-use trails" and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

The Andrews Community Forest Management Plan states that our community forest is a critical wildlife corridor and is ranked in the top 3% of Vermont's wildlife blocks. The current amended trail proposal and many of the comments to this page rely on the work of Arrowwood Environmental to verify trail locations as being ecologically sensitive and environmentally sound. Yet the Arrowwood report states on page 2, "This project was limited in temporal scope and could not accommodate a comprehensive on the ground natural resources inventory, therefore additional resource features are expected to be present." In fact, the "Middle Connector Trail" would run right through a stand of the Broad Beech Fern, *Phegopteris hexagonoptera*, which has been identified as a rare fern in Vermont. Another example is on the proposed "Hemlock Trail" which would funnel traffic into the forest's largest winter wildlife refuge area.

Richmond Residents have not been presented with the full scope of the pros and cons of the proposed amended trail plan for public comment. Nor have they been presented with a map that identifies the wildlife corridor, and sensitive ecological areas as they relate to the proposed trails. There is also no mention of the 200' trail buffer zone as discussed in the Andrews Community Forest Management Plan. I believe proposed trails should be ground truthed, and that they must conform to the Forest Management Plan.

The Andrews Community Forest Committee deleted one proposed trail that ran through an ecologically sensitive area, and should be recognized for their work. We now hope our committee will work together to protect the ecologically sensitive areas where trails are still proposed. As a trail user and frequent visitor to Andrews Community Forest, I know creating recreation opportunities in the Andrews Community Forest is important, but not at the expense of critical wildlife habitat and ecologically sensitive areas. The Conservation Easement emphasizes minimizing ecological impacts over developing recreation. There would be greater community support for trail placement that locates trails away from ecologically sensitive areas and wildlife corridors.

There are two key questions the ACFC should consider about the ACF: 1. How critical is it to prioritize the protection and conservation of this particular piece of land? and 2. Given recreation is to be allowed, how should the ACFC balance that use among different types of users?

Unique Importance of ACF parcel:

The ACF parcel is one of the "few, unfragmented, relatively remote habitats left in the state" (Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project) and the Vermont Conservation Design project considers it to be "part of a 'Highest Priority Interior Forest Block' providing critical ecological function at statewide level." The Conservation Easement clearly prioritizes conservation over recreation, and the Forest Management Plan stresses the imperative of 'minimizing impact on natural resources' when recreational trails are considered.

The ACFC's own ecological consultants (Arrowwood) acknowledge ACF's many and unique natural features. In addition, they point out that there are likely even more at-risk areas yet to be discovered in the ACF (in other locations and to account for seasonal changes). They simply had insufficient time to find them before the published report. Furthermore, why is a map with only trail locations on the public ACFC website? It would be more informative and honest about the tradeoffs to show a map with the trails superimposed on one that identifies the eco-sensitive areas, wildlife habitat, and recommended buffer zones.

Trail Use:

Human access to the ACF of any kind is usually via trails. The proposed trail system was developed by a firm (Sinuosity) that specializes (primarily) in mountain bike trail design. Are these proposed trails appropriate for ALL types of users? Can someone use these same trails to walk, birdwatch, mountain bike, hike, and hunt? An emphasis and priority seem to be given to the importance of connecting some mountain bike trails to others, of providing different trails to accommodate different mountain biking skill levels and concern about whether trails are appropriate for ascent or descent on a mountain bike. The ACFC needs to remember this is a COMMUNITY forest, supposedly open to all types of users, and not just prioritize one user group.

The ACF is clearly NOT just a small unimportant parcel of land bisected by power lines nor should it be considered an easy way to extend mountain biking access even further into the forest on the north side of the river. The idea that this public land should be used to take the pressure off heavily used trails in other privately-owned locations is not appropriate. I urge the ACFC to take a 'start low and go slow' approach particularly in its most remote and sensitive areas to:

- Allow time to complete studying the impact of trail development BEFORE any trails are built. Have ecologists complete their analysis and estimate numbers of people using trails by activity and season
- Re-assess the need for and priority attached to developing more mountain biking trails in ACF when in fact, there are already ~ 100 miles of mountain biking trails available in Richmond and nearby
- Take seriously that human recreation in the ACF is supposed to "minimize impact to natural resources." Reject the notion that the ACF should be used as an economic driver for the town. Making money is based on maximizing (not minimizing) human access which is the antithesis both in theory and practice of the overall intent of preservation and conservation of the ACF.

Thank you.

Page 7 of the Andrews Community Forest Management plan states that the land in question is a "critical wildlife corridor and is ranked top 3% of the states wildlife habitat blocks." Additionally page 8 states that the different water sources found on ACF is also critical - as it directly correlates to the health of the surrounding forest.

Therefore,

as a critical block, linking Mt.Mansfield and Camels hump blocks, this land should have minimal impacts, which includes minimal to no biking. Hikers can more easily tread lightly- able to step aside and avoid harmful and long term negative impacts to the ACF.

The proposed plan ignores the corridor buffer zones (200') and puts trails on over and adjacent to the corridor.

The surveys mention deer- what about studies for all the other environmentally sensitive species/habitats/ insects/amphibians etc. The May 23 survey ignores the environment at different times of the year (breeding times, migrating times for other species) and ignores specifics to other habitats and creatures.

As much as possible use preexisting trails and logging roads IN COLLABORATION with VAST and VYCC - so as to preserve as much ACF as possible. I support eliminating the ridge trail, and as cited in the minutes from 2/28/22 from Amy's comments - eliminate the RAVine trail too - as it goes against the management objective as noted by CL, minimize impact to wildlife and natural resources. Thus again, supporting low to no biking. Moreover, Are there studies presented about the impacts of biking, vs. hiking? This seems highly relevant.

As a nature educator and outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to hike, run, ski, bike and guide educational programs in the ACF on trails that reflect the principles and spirit of the conservation easement that the Andrews Family entrusted our community to honor. The Andrews Family sacrificed millions to primarily ensure that their land be forever wild and shared in a manner that respects the ecological integrity of the forest for generations to follow. The original management plan, reflecting the guiding principles of the easement, is the bedrock for this planning process and should not be compromised to fulfill a vision different from the original one. I urge the ACF committee, our Richmond Selectboard and the VLT to hold us to the promises we made.

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I hope the ACF Committee will do the following: 1. Complete our planning process by inviting comprehensive public engagement representing the diverse range of interests including wildlife who do not have seat at the table. 2. Follow Arrowwood's recommendation to finish the full habitat assessment including an inventory for rare and endangered species during the appropriate season which they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly complete. 3. Ground-truth alternative trail options away from habitat hot spots. 4. Exhaust all the existing trails and impacted areas before breaking ground, cutting trees and displacing wildlife in new ones. 5. Promote a culture of responsible recreation including seasonal trail closures near vernal pools and safeguarding this forest from severe erosion and unauthorized rogue side trails seen on many other trail networks in Richmond.

Thank you ACFC for taking time to make sure the final outcome is something we can all feel good about long into the future.

Concern that at least some of the trails as proposed are optimized for mountain biking rather than multi-use (relates to statements about management plan calling for multi-use trails)

As an outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to use thoughtfully designed multi-use trails in the Andrews Community Forest. Thank you to the committee for your work on this.

I am impressed that our community is taking the time needed to plan minimum impact trails that we can feel good about using. After extensive community involvement, a trail concept and forest management plan were created that reflected a true compromise of many interested parties to honor the conservation easement and forest management plan. The hard-earned compromise was to focus on wildlife habitat protection (the number one reason stated in public input for purchasing this land), while also providing recreational uses that do not impact the land's fragile areas including: wildlife travel corridors, wetlands, and deer yards.

The ecologists were hired to map the ecological sensitive areas. While they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly assess all the critical wildlife features and endangered species, they were able to map most of the ecologically sensitive areas. It is concerning that the proposed trails were then located right through the middle of these very areas we had agreed to protect.

The proposed trails are also specifically not designed to be multi-use. It seems we need some thoughtful compromise to both honor the Conservation Easement that comes with this land and to provide low-impact recreational opportunities. Maybe it would be better to keep the Mt. Bike Park below the powerlines, where the terrain is more suitable, and only put a simple low-impact footpath through the upper portion of the forest or keeping all the trails below the power lines would be consistent with our minimum impact commitment. This would provide trail options while still protecting the habitat and conservation priorities for the land.

There would be greater community support if trails were located that protect the ecological value of our forest: avoid the sensitive areas identified by the ecologists, minimize the number of trails above the powerlines, as agreed to in the management plan, and design trails that are truly multi-use and appropriate for hikers, runners, cross-country skiers, bikers, hunters and birdwatchers. Thank you.

There are two key questions the ACFC should consider about the ACF: 1. How critical is it to prioritize the protection and conservation of this particular piece of land? and 2. Given recreation is to be allowed, how should the ACFC balance that use among different types of users?

Unique Importance of ACF parcel:

The ACF parcel is one of the "few, unfragmented, relatively remote habitats left in the state" (Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project) and the Vermont Conservation Design project considers it to be "part of a 'Highest Priority Interior Forest Block' providing critical ecological function at statewide level." The Conservation Easement clearly prioritizes conservation over recreation, and the Forest Management Plan stresses the imperative of 'minimizing impact on natural resources' when recreational trails are considered.

The ACFC's own ecological consultants (Arrowwood) acknowledge ACF's many and unique natural features. In addition, they point out that there are likely even more at-risk areas yet to be discovered in the ACF (in other locations and to account for seasonal changes). They simply had insufficient time to find them before the published report. Furthermore, why is a map with only trail locations on the public ACFC website? It would be more informative and honest about the tradeoffs to show a map with the trails superimposed on one that identifies the eco-sensitive areas, wildlife habitat, and recommended buffer zones.

Trail Use:

Human access to the ACF of any kind is usually via trails. The proposed trail system was developed by a firm (Sinuosity) that specializes (primarily) in mountain bike trail design. Are these proposed trails appropriate for ALL

types of users? Can someone use these same trails to walk, birdwatch, mountain bike, hike, and hunt? An emphasis and priority seem to be given to the importance of connecting some mountain bike trails to others, of providing different trails to accommodate different mountain biking skill levels and concern about whether trails are appropriate for ascent or descent on a mountain bike. The ACFC needs to remember this is a COMMUNITY forest, supposedly open to all types of users, and not just prioritize one user group.

The ACF is clearly NOT just a small unimportant parcel of land bisected by power lines nor should it be considered an easy way to extend mountain biking access even further into the forest on the north side of the river. The idea that this public land should be used to take the pressure off heavily used trails in other privately-owned locations is not appropriate. I urge the ACFC to take a 'start low and go slow' approach particularly in its most remote and sensitive areas to:

- Allow time to complete studying the impact of trail development BEFORE any trails are built. Have ecologists complete their analysis and estimate numbers of people using trails by activity and season
- Re-assess the need for and priority attached to developing more mountain biking trails in ACF when in fact, there are already ~ 100 miles of mountain biking trails available in Richmond and nearby
- Take seriously that human recreation in the ACF is supposed to "minimize impact to natural resources." Reject the notion that the ACF should be used as an economic driver for the town. Making money is based on maximizing (not minimizing) human access which is the antithesis both in theory and practice of the overall intent of preservation and conservation of the ACF.

Thank you.

Having had the opportunity to walk along the flagged proposed trails on the ACF my overwhelming impression is that the number of trails is excessive, since many routes are duplicated. The Trails plan provides little information about the need for this. We are mostly relying on the information from the expert consultants. While it seems that Arrowwood people have done a thorough job of documenting present conditions, I am concerned about the trails plan. The website of Sinuosity shows their specialization in building trail systems catering to mountain bike users seeking thrills on downhill routes (see <https://www.sinuosity.net/home#work>)

I am also concerned that the assessment of trail routing does not address the human impact that will increase as the numbers of trail users increases. The impact of trails depends the amount of use as well as their location. The Conservation Easement and Management Plan both emphasize conservation of habitat and natural resources as the highest priority for ACF with public access only to the extent that minimal impact on that habitat and resources occurs. While the number of people expected to use the new trails is unknown, precedents (e.g. Preston Preserve, Chamberlain Hill, Cochran's) suggest a high level of year-round human activity. There are already about 30 miles of multi-use trails within Richmond, and an additional 70 miles in neighboring Towns. It's unclear why we need so many more trails in this crucial component of the Chittenden County Uplands that demands our best efforts to protect it.

People wishing to study the ACF proposals in detail don't find a lot of easily accessible or in-depth information from the ACF Committee's web page. So Richmond residents have assembled a resource for maps and documents about the ACF and about the impacts of human activity – see <https://InfoACF.wordpress.com>. I encourage Committee members and others to study that resource before coming to any simplified 'yes/no' about the proposed trail plan.

Having served as a member and chairperson of the Richmond Trails Committee some years ago, I had the opportunity to learn a lot from a wide range of hikers, hunters, landowners, land stewards and others about many aspects of trails on private, public and conserved lands. But things have changed a lot in recent years – the predominance of hikers with backpacks and binoculars seem to have been outnumbered now by people riding mountain bikes. Bikes make access and range a lot easier.

In particular, the doubling or tripling of trail routes above the power lines contradicts stated principles in the Conservation Easement (CE) and Management Plan (MP) to minimize impact.

The following changes regarding new trails can be made without substantially reducing opportunities for trail

users:

- Where they parallel each other, consolidate Rocky View (#11) and Cascade Trail (#12) to avoid duplication; also avoid the short loop at the top that requires two stream crossings.
- Omit: the unnecessary Roadside Trail (#8)
- Retain: Lower Traverse (#9), Stream View (#13) and Middle Connector (#14);
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- Retain: Sip of Sunshine Connector (#18).

Another important point: it is suggested that Richmond can benefit economically from becoming a destination for trail users. This is a dangerous concept since it implies that trail use should be maximized along with economic impact.

I would welcome any opportunity to explain and elaborate on these points to the ACF Committee, and thank them for the huge amount of work already done.

I believe the trails should be WALKING trails only. No wheeled vehicles allowed. ACF should be a wilderness preserve with as little human impact as possible. This is a wilderness preserve for the animals to exist and live.

As a trail runner I am in support of the proposed trail plan. I do hope these are true multi use trails and not just mountain bike trails that people are allowed to walk and run on like so many of our local trails are.

Having a connection north to the Sip of Sunshine trail seems like a great way to access the trails without having to use Rt2.

Statement that concern about ecological impact of trails is misplaced because ACF is already ecologically degraded and/or ecological impact of trails is small relative to other activities on the forest (e.g., timber harvest), or a question related to this topic.

Trails are a big part of recreation and help getting people outside to enjoy the nature and breath fresh air. The trails proposed by Arrowood and Sinuosity is the perfect example of balancing ecology with providing access to nature and satisfy the need of diverse users in the community. The plan was proposed by professional ecologists and trail builders who where specially hired to provide the best plan that takes in account all users. The scaled down plan is acceptable but not preferred. It sounds unreasonable to think that a well designed network of trails as the one proposed will have a bigger impact than the massive power lines and logging operations that have already taken place in this area.

This property is now a town forest. The location of the property, with such easy access from Waterbury and Burlington, means that it is going to be heavily used by walkers, joggers, hunter, loggers, birders, foragers, bikers, etc. etc. I'm sorry to say, that the relative location of a single trail to an area deemed "sensitive" to wildlife seems too little/too late for meaningful preservation of wildlife habitat. I also find it amusing how much angst there is about bikers, when so few appear concerned about all the unleashed dogs that will inevitably be running down every moving target in the forest daily- no trails required.

Basically, if you are going to open an area this small up as a designated recreation area and working forest, building parking lots and trails, then make it a recreation area and don't pretend it's also great wildlife habitat. Considering the location of this parcel in proximity to a large % of the Vermont population, I vote to maintain the original trail design. Or, modify the ridge top trail slightly to avoid the minor incursions into the apparent boundaries of the wildlife corridor. I also support the creation of larger areas of undeveloped land in VT!

My first thought is that trails in the woods seem far better than highways, condos, houses, fields for hay in the woods. So bring on the bike trail and more access to this area. I also feel this area it a little less convenient to get to which makes me think it's not going to get super heavy use. My second thought is how much there is to think about when you put something in the woods that might bring more folks into a potentially sensitive area. My gut still says adding more trails is better. I've done a bit of trail running, a bunch of trail walking, and way more mountain biking than both of those combined. I tend to keep my tires on the single track (or directly above it for extremely short periods) and get irrationally mad when folks cut trailer corners. Anyway...more trails, better trails, teach your kids to do trail work and learn about the woods and all it has to offer...and maybe teach them that some woods should just have no humans involved?! I'm just not sure where that should take place. I guess on lots of the private property in VT. Okay this is turning into something that sounds like a late night college thought process. I hope you enjoy it.

Since people have posted more than once here I decided to post again, as I'm thinking I may be speaking for many who have not posted. I've been reading all the comments with interest, while trying to be open-minded and as agnostic as possible. I will state outright my bias is that the ACF should have some trails, and it seems like this is aligned with the initial ACF management plan, but that's about it.

The main disagreement is really starting to feel like it is mostly between people in town who would like to have mountain biking in the ACF and people who do not want mountain biking in the ACF (or more mountain biking in town), though the latter are not explicit about such. I think it's ok to feel that way and to express those concerns. I've done plenty of walking and hiking and trail running over the years in special places that would have just felt different if there was concurrent mountain biking. Such concerns are valid and should be discussed. On the other hand, these are not ecological concerns. With some of the comments, it's difficult for me to untangle ecological concerns from mountain biking concerns (e.g. Sue Morse explicitly references "the mountain bike" community, a web site designed by a community member to help people understand the ACF and the trail proposal highlights a video of someone biking down Chamberlain Hill and their speed). The two issues are certainly not mutually exclusive – presumably mountain biking causes ecological issues. But given the overriding lens on mountain biking, it's not clear to me if there would still be as many concerns from as many people about the current trail

proposal if they were simply for walking/hiking/running. Is the concern the trails or the mountain biking (or both)?

This seems like an ecologically valuable parcel. What's still hard for me to appreciate, given its proximity to route 2, a major busy highway (how is this a wildlife corridor to Camel's Hump with 89 in the middle?), several neighborhoods, and near-constant logging on at least 4 properties directly adjacent to the ACF boundary for the last 8 years that I've lived here, is how much of an impact on wildlife the proposed trails (with mileage close to that specified in the ACF management plan) would really have, especially with most of the parcel remaining trail-free. I would like to understand those concerns better, and not feel like this is mostly about people not wanting mountain biking. I will continue to read the comments.

Regarding the FPF back and forth over logging – many of us recognize that there can be potential environmental benefits of logging. However, there is also increasing recognition that there is value in old growth, and that these current use programs were to some degree designed for timber production (\$), and not necessary with ecological concerns in mind. There are efforts to change this, see this current bill discussed in VT Digger (link below). Maybe more people will conserve their land now that they do not need to log. Maybe some people can now reassess their logging.

<https://vtdigger.org/2022/01/25/bill-proposes-expanding-current-use-program-to-include-some-wild-forests/>

Listening to discussion at the meetings over the last year, it seems like there are many people in town who would have liked many more trails in ACF for recreation than proposed (and have highlighted the trail/acreage ratio compared to Hinesburg Town Forest and that no such ecological trail design has been performed in many Town Forests in the state and so on), and there are people who think there should be no trails at all (i.e. Sue Morse letter). Thus far the unbiased attempt to navigate a compromise for such has been the proposal by consultants the ACFC hired. It's for this reason I support the initial plan as proposed. There have been numerous public meetings (posted on FPF) about these trails which were attended by many members of the community who gave feedback the ACFC. The consultants presented the trails and took comments at one of these meetings and made clear the current design attempts to avoid ecologically sensitive areas completely or as best as possible (a large vernal pool, passing through a ravine more than once and so on), departs from an ACF management plan trail proposal that was tentative and perhaps made without walking the property, and in recent responses made clear that one recreational trail may not be necessarily better ecologically than more than one (or could be worse). The ACF committee is comprised of volunteers in our community doing their best. I agree more feedback now can't hurt, especially at more venues. Personally I am not in favor of disassembling the complete proposed plan as I believe it would fail if partially implemented for the reasons these consultants have put forth. If the current trail plan is not adequately sensitive to specific ecological concerns in the ACF that should've received a higher value or priority in the trail design, which I remain open to being convinced of, it seems to me that the next step would be go back to the consultants for a re-design with revised aims.

Statement that there is not a scarcity of trails in the Richmond area (implication that ACF should therefor be managed more conservatively re: trail miles)

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I would welcome any opportunity to explain and elaborate on these points to the ACF Committee, and thank them for the huge amount of work already done.

I think it is fine the way it was. We have enough trails in richmond

As a nature educator and outdoor enthusiast, I am excited to hike, run, ski, bike and guide educational programs in the ACF on trails that reflect the principles and spirit of the conservation easement that the Andrews Family entrusted our community to honor. The Andrews Family sacrificed millions to primarily ensure that their land be forever wild and shared in a manner that respects the ecological integrity of the forest for generations to follow. The original management plan, reflecting the guiding principles of the easement, is the bedrock for this planning process and should not be compromised to fulfill a vision different from the original one. I urge the ACF committee, our Richmond Selectboard and the VLT to hold us to the promises we made.

I chose to live in Richmond 25 years ago because of the abundant trails and natural areas not just here, but in surrounding towns. While it has been inspiring to see an explosive interest in seeking solace and adventure in

nature during the pandemic, new threats to healthy, thriving forest habitats have emerged due to over-use in the backcountry. Spreading out our robust interest for woodland exercise and adventure with new trails will not solve the problems of congestion, severe erosion, sprawl and impact in a forest that the conservation easement specifies we agreed to manage with minimal impact.

The ACF Committee has done an admirable job identifying some of the critical wildlife habitat features to help us carefully select appropriate places to explore and play. The ecological assessment that Arrowwood conducted shows boundaries or buffers between 200 and 400 feet for high value ecological zones we should not intrude. They mapped the following parts of the forest:

- 1) Significant wildlife movement corridors, assessed as among the top 3% most important to protect in the state of Vermont.
- 2) High value Southwest facing deer yards critical for winter refuge.
- 3) Several riparian zones bordering streams that are super important for water quality and rich in biodiversity.
- 4) Interior and remote core forest many species need to feed, breed, and protect their young.
- 5) Mast trees for Black Bears, Vernal Pools for frogs and salamanders and high value uncommon natural communities such as Dry Oak Forest patches that many animals need to thrive.

While I share the desire to access the wilds close to home, many of us are thinking more critically about where, when and how we visit them because of the intense development and global warming assaults the wild ones face. The Andrews Family and the forest inhabitants would want us to take the necessary time we need to plan with care while bearing in mind multiple other developed trail networks in the area. We already have 100 miles of mountain biking trails and turning the ACF into a popular mecca similar to Cochran's and Chamberlin Hill is not the right fit for this integral habitat link within the 10,000 acres Chittenden County Uplands Forest we have already committed to protecting.

Responsible recreational expansion according to the original minimum impact plan means concentrating trails in higher density zones and allowing nature to restore old roads and timber damage to recover a healthy ecosystem we and wildlife need more than ever. Trail options for hops, pops, drops and advanced riding exist below the power lines and out of the wildlife hot spots. By keeping high intensity use out of critical wildlife habitat, we would satisfy our quest for a multi-use trail system while achieving the balance the Andrews Family had in mind.

I hope the ACF Committee will do the following: 1. Complete our planning process by inviting comprehensive public engagement representing the diverse range of interests including wildlife who do not have seat at the table. 2. Follow Arrowwood's recommendation to finish the full habitat assessment including an inventory for rare and endangered species during the appropriate season which they admittedly ran out of time and money to thoroughly complete. 3. Ground-truth alternative trail options away from habitat hot spots. 4. Exhaust all the existing trails and impacted areas before breaking ground, cutting trees and displacing wildlife in new ones. 5. Promote a culture of responsible recreation including seasonal trail closures near vernal pools and safeguarding this forest from severe erosion and unauthorized rogue side trails seen on many other trail networks in Richmond.

Thank you ACFC for taking time to make sure the final outcome is something we can all feel good about long into the future.

Recommendation for monitoring of trail use impact over time and adaptive management

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:
 - o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.
 - o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic?

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible..."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?
- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?
- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.
- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?
- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?
- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in

various seasons, most notably spring and fall." The RFP specifies 50' checks on the trailsides "after the ephemeral flush." Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP's calsl for "multi-use trails" and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

Hello Andrews Community Forest Management Committee,

I saw the solicitation for participation in a process around the latest trail proposal on the Andrews forest. I don't know if as a resident of Jericho I have any standing in the process, but wanted to pass along some new research that I thought is relevant and you may not have seen. I have been visiting the area where the Andrews forest is now as well as adjacent properties for many years, so it's an area I have a significant connection to and I'm very interested in helping to ensure that the development of the property is done in a way that minimizes the inevitable impact this will have on the ecology of the property as well as on other users.

I am concerned about the new trail proposal, which appears to put a relatively significant new trail system in the upper Andrews forest, occupying a significant percentage of the upper property, especially along the eastern edge of the central drainage where the identified wildlife travel corridor, some evergreen winter habitat and oak feeding areas are located. It appears from the map that much of this new trail network is well-within the "flight distance" of many wildlife species from the important south-facing hillside for wintering habitat, fall food-sources in preparation for Winter, or for the vernal pools or water sources. I see the comments in the "Follow Up Report" document from the trail designer essentially said they proposed this trail configuration knowing there would be a greater negative impact and footprint than intended, (the report noted the hemlock trail is routed directly through deer wintering habitat and the trail locations diverged from the intent of the original request and were more numerous than originally intended) but that it was required in order to connect to the other trail system North of there (sip of sunshine), which was a stipulation of the project. My understanding of their response is that the necessity of accomplishing a connection to the Sip of Sunshine trail, combined with the difficulties in trail routing due to the terrain, caused them to alter the originally-intended balance between recreational infrastructure development and maintaining ecological integrity, in favor of the new development.

I know you have been sensitive to these concerns during the planning process, so I also wanted to pass along some new research I ran across on this topic. There is an unpublished UVM thesis from this past Fall cataloging New England-specific negative impacts to various wildlife and habitat from trail-based recreation. I don't have the final thesis to pass on, but the author did a presentation at the last Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative meeting, which I've linked-to here.

https://www.uvm.edu/femc/attachments/project/999/annualMeeting/2021/presentations/Meredith_Naughton.pdf

My worry is that with a significant connector trail to another trail system, within a few years usage of these trails will inevitably wind up being much, much heavier than today. I also worry that with bc skiing being so popular, or if the trails were ever to be groomed for fatbike use as other local trail systems have begun doing, that it's inevitable the trails will see a similar increase in use during the winter when any impact is potentially more harmful to wildlife. It seems clear from the available research this impact is real and significant, and would degrade the value of that wintering habitat as well as negatively impact wildlife's ability to access some of those important habitat features and the movement corridor along the central drainage. I think it would be highly worth considering a more difficult to construct trail location if that means it is less-impactful on the highest-value habitat features and the areas connecting them and allowing wildlife to move through the area un-hindered.

Personally, given the terrain constraints mentioned by the trail builders, if a suitable alternative that is less

impactful can't be found I think the goal of linking to sip of sunshine should be reconsidered altogether in order to maintain a balance between ecological integrity and new development of recreational infrastructure. In this event, further development of trails on the lower portion of the property below the power line would not significantly increase the impact to wildlife since that area already sees relatively heavier use. In my experience trail development projects become a matter of incremental degradation, as the initial development is usually reasonable, but then every few years another "limited, reasonable addition" gets added, whether officially or not. No one addition is ever unreasonable, but collectively over time the result is far more impactful than anyone intended from the beginning. Regardless of the eventual decision the committee and the community makes now, in order to maintain the intended balance between ecology and development in the long-term I believe some trail-less areas should be officially designated now to maintain ecological integrity and maintain the opportunity for dispersed users, so the extent of development doesn't become a moving target over time. This would give both trail advocates and trail-based recreationists a clearer understanding of what is on and what is off the table not only now, but in the future.

Thanks very much, I hope this is helpful feedback.

Dave Furman
Jericho, VT

I am a citizen of Richmond. I m very concerned that there are too many trails being proposed . Much of the proposed trail routes will negatively impact wildlife. I would like to see the addition of new trails done over a long time period so we will know when there is visible negative impact without effecting the whole parcel.

I would like to return to the original plan where all wheeled vehicles would be prohibited.

You can't fully appreciate nature traveling 20mph through the woods.

I do want limited hikers and hopefully school groups to learn about the forest.

I fully support selective logging. We need differing habitat and logging is essential to protect various species.

I would support haying some of the meadow but even then it should be cut late in the traditional first cut so meadow larks may once again nest.

I would like to see the majority of the traffic limited to the area below the power line.

I strongly believe that there should be no bridges or jumps that litter the woods on the south side of town.

I would also like to see the deer yards off limits for all users from Jan 1 to March 1.

I want people to walk on and enjoy the land. Some trails are essential to that goal.

I want to return to the upper section to hunt again as I did years ago. It may sound selfish but I would like to see sections off limits to hikers and bikers if we must have them during the traditional rifle deer season. Many places do this. It does increase safety in the woods.

I am in favor of approving the current proposed trail routes for both pedestrian and bicycle use . I am also in favor of approving the VAST trail thru the property, but for winter only motorized snowmobile use. I am not in favor of other motorized use trails or additional snowmobile trails.

The ATF property was purchased by the town with the idea that it would be managed for conservation, recreation and wildlife habitat. I believe with proper oversight and stewardship by the ATF Committee that all users of this property (plants, animals and humans) can thrive with respect to one another. Proper management of the ATF will require periodic monitoring of the land to be sure that the human users (walkers, bikers and snowmobilers) are staying on designated trails. If permitted human uses cause unforeseen habitat destruction, trails may need to be closed or uses may need to be restricted as deemed appropriate by the ATF Committee. I encourage the ATF Committee to approve of the current trail plan. I also encourage the ATF Committee to determine a process for monitoring the impact of the trail use on the land. My hope is that this place feels friendly to visit and enjoy by all users. Positive reinforcement of what we want vs. what we don't want will do that. Thank you for all your work on this project. I look forward to exploring this beautiful piece of land with my neighbors and with visitors from out of town.

Statement related to importance of increasing Richmond trails on public (rather than private) land for access security

The Richmond Trail Committee would like to lend our support to either the original trail plan or the amended trail plan for the Andrews Community Forest. The trail committee has been involved over the last 5 years in helping shape the future of the Andrews Community Forest. The process that the Andrews Community Forest Committee has been through to get to this trail design has been long, extensive, precedent setting, and public. Trails are how the majority of townsfolk, students, and visitors are going to use and enjoy our new Town Forest. It has been a long, deliberative process to get to this point. By working with a professional ecological firm and a professional trail design firm, we feel the plan put forth finds the optimal balance for recreation and conservation. Some of the Trail Committee's key goals are interconnecting neighborhoods and interconnecting towns via trails to avoid roads. This plan helps to accomplish this. Moreover, we strongly believe having a loop option in the upper forest for exploration is a key design feature for forest visitors, so even with losing one of the upper trails, a loop option still remains. Compared to our neighboring towns with Town Forests, the proposed trail density in this design is extremely low. Currently, the majority of trails we enjoy in Richmond are on private land, and access is provided by landowner generosity, but is not guaranteed in the future. The ACF was bought by the town with recreation as a key component, and ensuring well crafted, thoughtful, and sustainable trails is key to having a town resource for the future. For these reasons and more, we are excited for and support either plan.

I trust the ecologist and trail builder and the original plan they proposed. It feels important to honor the work of the experts that the town hired. We need town recreation trails for those of us that don't own land. I don't see a need to amend the original trail plan because of an extremely vocal minority.

I am in favor of the proposed trail route. As primarily a trail runner and hiker, I am grateful to all the generous landowners in Richmond that have allowed trails on their properties. I do not take that for granted and know that those opportunities can change. I am excited to see movement towards sustainable town trails that will be a legacy to the town of Richmond. I appreciate all the energy and thought that has been put into this project.

Statement that trail proposal is consistent with management plan

I support both of the proposed trail plans from Sinuosity/Arrowhead. The ACF Committee have done an excellent job coming up with a trail plan that balances public recreational access as well as ecological preservation that is aligned with the Management Plan. The Community Forest is a valuable resource that can provide members of our community access to the outdoors, which leads to strong bonds and a drive to protect these natural areas. Arrowwood and Sinuosity are experts in their fields, and carefully created a solution that allows public access with minimal intrusion on the environment.

I am writing to express my support for the new trail network that has been proposed by the ACF committee. I am supportive of the trail network compromise as as proposed in the February 28th meeting minutes.

I realize there is significant public interest in this trail network and there hasn't been a shortage of opinions expressed publicly through Front Porch Forum during the current open comment period. At the end of the day, the committee is abiding by the spirit of the ACF management plan. The committee is obligated to build a network of multi-use trails in the forest. It's written very clearly in the plan. It was the voice and will of the people through extensive outreach and public involvement. There are several people in our community who have expressed great concern that the new trail system would require an amendment to the management plan. I'm writing to assure you that this is not a big deal. Management plans change! When the original management plan was written, it was written with great specificity, arguably too much specificity for the level of ground assessments that had actually been done. Conditions on the ground were not fully understood or vetted when the management plan was written. What I love about the current proposal is that it involved the review of ecologists who actually evaluated the ground conditions in great detail. The fact that the committee has been responsive to public concern and eliminated the ridge trail shows that the committee is willing and able to make hard decisions and make compromises when necessary. Managing public lands requires a strategy that balances conflicting values. I feel that balance has been achieved here, and I'm really grateful to the committee for working so hard to develop a trail network with the resources of trained professionals. I attended the very first public involvement meeting with the SE Group up at CHMS many years ago now. From day one, there has been strong public support behind multi-use trails and recreation. Now, years later, the time to act is now. Please move forward with this recommendation to the selectboard.

I would also like to thank the members of the ACFC who are public servants not being paid a penny to work behalf of the residents of our town. The committee deserves recognition and praise for their hard work in moving this town forward. I'm incredibly grateful for all of your hard work and thoughtful compromise. Keep your heads up! You are doing great!

Sincerely,

Rob Peterson
Stage Road

I support the trail plan for ACF. They help achieve the management plan's objectives.

Ambiguous statement

Thanks for providing this opportunity to comment. Vermont's wildlife deserve space and respect, and I support trail construction that avoids sensitive areas. There are many unique ecological assets in Andrews Town Forest that are at risk from recreational impacts. To protect the public's investment in this forest and the biodiversity it supports, trail development should be kept to a minimum to protect existing, intact values. Thanks again for the opportunity to comment.

Hello ACF Committee Members, attached [see link below] is a report titled Wildlife & Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife. It was researched and written by Meredith Naughton, a UVM grad student for the Vermont Departments of Forest, Park & Recreation and Fish & Wildlife.

Meredith is one of the students that conducted the natural communities mapping project for the ACF. She is now the Conservation Director for the Stowe Land Trust.

The report includes the most up-to-date and Vermont-specific literature review on the effects of trails on wildlife, as well as management recommendations. Both FPR and F&W advised Meredith throughout the course of her research. I think you'll find it highly relevant to the work of your committee.

Jon

<http://www.richmondvt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2021-11-Wildlife-Managing-Trail-Use-Effects-Naughton.pdf>

I think you've done amazing job. We are so lucky that you all "stepped up" to this huge task. I appreciate your revisions to the trail design. I attended one of your meetings with Sue Morris. She was very knowledgeable and convincing. I also appreciate the access agreement we will be entering in to with the Abenaki people. A small step toward repairing that relationship.

As a trail runner I am always thrilled to see new places to run, especially in my hometown. I truly appreciate the effort of protecting wildlife, as I find it important to keep a minimal impact on the lands all living beings rely on. As long as this effort to preserve wildlife/the natural land comes to fruition, I am in favor of this new network.

Ambiguous or “other” statement

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Trail concern (other)

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?

- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:

- o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.

- o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic)?

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible..."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?

- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?

- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.

- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, "As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities."

- What "project priorities" are referenced here?

- Which "target user groups" were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?

- In the reference to a "sustainable" recreational experience, how is the word "sustainable" used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer....” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral

flush." Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP's calsl for "multi-use trails" and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

From an ecological perspective, the trail route seems mostly sound. I would be curious to see what could be done to remove and restore the woodland communities around some of the redundant, eroded old logging roads, as they would be less necessary for recreation given the new planned trail infrastructure. Also perhaps the pink proposed trail near marker #13 could be routed closer to the logging road corridor and away from the wildlife corridor if it is intended as a climbing trail. A lot of mountain bikers, myself included, don't mind the occasional "haul road" for climbing if it lessens the impact of our recreation.

I have walked the trails off Cochran Road for many years. I have observed that as more trails are developed, wildlife has had to move to other habitats. So I would like to make sure we minimize the disruption of habitats in the ACF. I am not an expert in the ACF land so cannot specifically comment about that. My comment is to keep this principle in mind.

Question: What are the tradeoffs associated with two vs. three trails in the NE?

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- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
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- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
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- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

I have been following development of a Trails Plan for the Andrews Forest (<https://arrowwoodvt.com/acf/>). I have not found it possible to come to an opinion regarding that Plan without knowledge of proposed changes to the ACF’s governing Management Plan, which states that “The Trail Concept Map shall not be revised independent of the Management Plan” (verbatim including underlining). I feel the two must come forward together.

For example, it no doubt was essential to somewhat relocate the proposed trail in the North-East quadrant, as described in the Management Plan Concept Map, based on a feet-on-the-ground examination as carried out by Consultants.

However, a single trail was specified in the Management Plan for that area. The initial Forest Committee Trails Plan called for three. One, I think wisely, was removed, but still leaving two trails, not the single trail specified.

I need to understand how two remaining trails can be justified in what is considered the ecologically most sensitive area in the Forest - how the Trails and Management Plans can be reconciled. How can two trails provide the appropriate balance of ecological / wildlife protection with recreational opportunity? I need to hear the reasoning.

Concern that mountain biking is more harmful than walking (e.g., via higher rate of erosion)

I am very concerned that the proposed trails would be harming local wildlife and plants. No trail should infringe on wildlife corridors, or areas with sensitive plants. While mountain biking is popular, it specifically creates more erosion than foot traffic does on trails. I am a regular trail user and have been shocked at the damage to the Preston Legacy Trails since more mountain bikers have been using it. We cannot have that happen to the Andrews Forest, as well. We as a town are the new land stewards of this parcel and are responsible for preserving sensitive wildlife areas within it. For that reason it is essential that trails are carefully planned to avoid damage to the land and current inhabitants.

The process of planning should continue, with another look at how trails could be better placed. Thank you.

Page 7 of the Andrews Community Forest Management plan states that the land in question is a "critical wildlife corridor and is ranked top 3% of the states wildlife habitat blocks." Additionally page 8 states that the different water sources found on ACF is also critical - as it directly correlates to the health of the surrounding forest.

Therefore,

as a critical block, linking Mt.Mansfield and Camels hump blocks, this land should have minimal impacts, which includes minimal to no biking. Hikers can more easily tread lightly- able to step aside and avoid harmful and long term negative impacts to the ACF.

The proposed plan ignores the corridor buffer zones (200') and puts trails on over and adjacent to the corridor.

The surveys mention deer- what about studies for all the other environmentally sensitive species/habitats/ insects/amphibians etc. The May 23 survey ignores the environment at different times of the year (breeding times, migrating times for other species) and ignores specifics to other habitats and creatures.

As much as possible use preexisting trails and logging roads IN COLLABORATION with VAST and VYCC - so as to preserve as much ACF as possible. I support eliminating the ridge trail, and as cited in the minutes from 2/28/22 from Amy's comments - eliminate the RAvine trail too - as it goes against the management objective as noted by CL, minimize impact to wildlife and natural resources. Thus again, supporting low to no biking. Moreover, Are there studies presented about the impacts of biking, vs. hiking? This seems highly relevant.

Statement that ACF process has been adequate because other trails were built with less ecological evaluation and/or community review

Yes please! More trails. I cant think of any trails in Richmond that have done as much homework and had as much scrutiny as these proposed trails. Yet the others were built. Look at the positive impact to our community of the existing trails. Fully support these new trails.

I believe that with the extensive collaboration that was built into the original design, with a professional ecological firm, AND a trailbuilder, that it already was designed with a considerable compromise, when comparing the proposed trail density with other local town-forests (and recognizing the amount of additional non-interrupted land nearby).

But since that has been deemed potentially too intrusive, I support the current compromise as a means to allow both wildlife to thrive, and people to enjoy the land.

It is generally through the use of land that most people gain an appreciation for it, and will continue to drive towards further preservation and conservation efforts. If conservation is seen as only taking away, or limiting people, it will inhibit further conservation efforts.

Question: What parameters (i.e., priorities) were the consultants given for trail design?

Many thanks to the consultants for their work in preparing their responses to the ACF Committee's three questions. Some additional information from them and/or the Committee would help clarify the responses and perhaps lead to some new and better alternatives to what is being proposed:

Question 1 (Reducing trail mileage/number in the NE quadrant)

The consultants state, "In order to reduce mileage in the northeast quadrant of the property, there must be a shift to a more defined ranking of priorities, with a de-valuation of some current priorities." The reference to "current priorities" is unclear.

- What "current priorities" are referenced as needing to change – those in the Management Plan, or those in the bullet points that follow ("Sustainable connectivity..." and "Ecological considerations...")? If the reference is to the bullet points, where did that language come from, and how does it reflect the MP and RFP?

- Trail Use Perspective

The MP's Concept Map and the RFP both call for a Sip of Sunshine connection and multi-use trails. The consultants argue that safety and terrain issues make this impossible. The only solution they present is to build multiple single-use trails in the northeast quadrant and accept the greater ecological impacts traffic will have on the many sensitive ecological features the consultants and others have cataloged in that part of the Forest. That would seem to have us not balancing but subordinating ecological needs to recreational preferences.

- How does that reconcile with the Easement's, MP's and RFP's parallel calls for balancing ecological and recreational considerations?
- Were alternatives considered, and, if so, why were they ruled out? For example:
 - o Could we address safety, terrain and ecological issues by constructing just one, single-use connection to Sunshine, avoiding sensitive areas by the MP's very conservative 200 feet. East Climb now comes closest to filling this bill. Also, its suitability for hiking tracks with the leading recreational interests derived from the Visioning process' public survey.
 - o Could the consultants provide a single route to accommodate all users (who might have to make some compromises, such as dismounting on steep sections, reducing speeds, or stepping aside for bike traffic?)

The second bullet states that ecological impacts will be "mitigated to the greatest degree possible...."

- What references and standards were used to gauge ecological impacts of introducing more people and dogs into these areas, and do they track with recent research?
- Since traffic volume and density are important causes of both trail and ecological degradations, as well as management challenges, what are the forecasted traffic volumes for the trails over time?
- Did the consultants consider the effects of mountain biking's ongoing technological advances, i.e., lighter materials, electric assists, LED headlights, fat tires, etc.
- At what point might the trails' carrying capacities be reached on safety, terrain and ecological considerations? How might we monitor and manage for that?

On page 2, the consultants state, “As a whole these trails provide for the most sustainable and safest recreational experience for the target user groups, while maintaining the smallest ecological footprint possible to meet these project priorities.”

- What “project priorities” are referenced here?
- Which “target user groups” were focused upon, and how do they reflect the ranking of user group preferences compiled during the Visioning process? If not, would a plan reflecting those preferences remove the issues we are struggling to confront?
- In the reference to a “sustainable” recreational experience, how is the word “sustainable” used – from an ecological or trail maintenance perspective, or both?

The consultants describe the north-south stream corridor as “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant,” echoing prior and detailed evaluations by them and other ecologists. Even so, they say that designation was “impossible to quantify with the limitations of seasonality and duration inherent in the original project scope.” They also note that ““traffic, noise, and activity” on trails “a short distance” from other habitats have similar effects.

- Given the duly noted sensitivity of the corridor area, why is the portion of Stream View that encroaches on the southern part of the corridor still on the table? Could/should it be routed further to the west?
- Given the limitations the consultants describe, what other ecologically sensitive landscape and habitat features might we be missing?

- Ecological Perspective

The importance of the north-south stream corridor is widely noted, and highlighted again here as likely “the most sensitive ecological feature in the northeast quadrant.” Accordingly, the Ridge Top trail and its multiple encroachments on that feature have been dropped, though, as noted above, a section of Stream View is still routed within the corridor’s 200-foot buffer.

The consultants suggest that closing the Hemlock Valley trail during the winter to protect the large, likely wintertime refuge for deer and other wildlife through which the route runs.

- Would the sights and sounds of hikers, bikers, skiers and other wintertime traffic on trails near that and similar refuge areas alarm sheltered deer and other wildlife, driving them to flight and consumption of energy reserves during a lean season?

The ecological features map does not show a large hemlock stand surrounding the close loops of the Ridge Top trail. It does appear as a “Reserve Area” on Forestry Plan maps. A tight system of loops is shown on the proposed trail map, seemingly in conflict with the MP’s concept of minimizing trail density and parallel routes above the power lines.

- Has that area been ruled out as a possible wildlife wintering area?
- The tight trail network there does not appear on the Concept Map. What is the reasoning for introducing such traffic density there, above the power lines?

Question 2 (Departure of the trail design from the Concept Map)

The response notes that a route to Sip of Sunshine through the northwestern quadrant “was abandoned in order to provide a larger buffer around the vernal pool and to avoid crossing the large ravine near the top of the property.” Though the Easement imposes an ecological protective zone of 200 feet around the pool, it would permit a trail in the outer part of that zone with VLT’s approval.

Furthermore, and contrary to the response, the ravine begins a short distance below the “top of the property.” The proposed route for the Sip of Sunshine connector uses that same area, coming close to a relatively flat area between the head of the ravine and the property boundary.

- Why are we seeking more protection for this one feature (the pool) than VLT’s ecologists established, abandoning a potential trail route in exchange for building more trails in the more sensitive northeast quadrant?

Question 3 (Limits caused by the short timeframe allowed for ecological assessments)

The question acknowledges that the project timeframe didn’t allow for the fine-scale ecological assessments required by the MP and RFP. But reference is made to an intent to “build trails this upcoming summer...” Both the MP and RFP articulate the need for multi-seasonal checks along the sides of each route for rare, threatened and endangered species and other fine-scale features. The ecologists note in their response that “...avoidable small, localized elements are likely present” and that it is “additionally best practice to see trail design regions in various seasons, most notably spring and fall.” The RFP specifies 50’ checks on the trailsides “after the ephemeral flush.” Construction will further require adequate public notification of input about the proposal, and reviews and approvals by the Selectboard and Vermont Land Trust.

- When and how did that target of summertime construction emerge, and how was its feasibility determined?
- When will the necessary multi-season checks be made and a final trail map and construction schedule prepared?
- Who will conduct the assessment, and will another RFP be necessary?
- If the plan is to abandon the MP’s calsl for “multi-use trails” and balancing recreational development with minimal ecological impacts, what will be the process and schedule for revising the MP with the required public input and review and approvals from the Selectboard and VLT?

Recommendation to reengage consultants to manage tradeoffs in light of concerns raised by community

Since people have posted more than once here I decided to post again, as I’m thinking I may be speaking for many who have not posted. I’ve been reading all the comments with interest, while trying to be open-minded and as agnostic as possible. I will state outright my bias is that the ACF should have some trails, and it seems like this is aligned with the initial ACF management plan, but that’s about it.

The main disagreement is really starting to feel like it is mostly between people in town who would like to have mountain biking in the ACF and people who do not want mountain biking in the ACF (or more

mountain biking in town), though the latter are not explicit about such. I think it's ok to feel that way and to express those concerns. I've done plenty of walking and hiking and trail running over the years in special places that would have just felt different if there was concurrent mountain biking. Such concerns are valid and should be discussed. On the other hand, these are not ecological concerns. With some of the comments, it's difficult for me to untangle ecological concerns from mountain biking concerns (e.g. Sue Morse explicitly references "the mountain bike" community, a web site designed by a community member to help people understand the ACF and the trail proposal highlights a video of someone biking down Chamberlain Hill and their speed). The two issues are certainly not mutually exclusive – presumably mountain biking causes ecological issues. But given the overriding lens on mountain biking, it's not clear to me if there would still be as many concerns from as many people about the current trail proposal if they were simply for walking/hiking/running. Is the concern the trails or the mountain biking (or both)?

This seems like an ecologically valuable parcel. What's still hard for me to appreciate, given its proximity to route 2, a major busy highway (how is this a wildlife corridor to Camel's Hump with 89 in the middle?), several neighborhoods, and near-constant logging on at least 4 properties directly adjacent to the ACF boundary for the last 8 years that I've lived here, is how much of an impact on wildlife the proposed trails (with mileage close to that specified in the ACF management plan) would really have, especially with most of the parcel remaining trail-free. I would like to understand those concerns better, and not feel like this is mostly about people not wanting mountain biking. I will continue to read the comments.

Regarding the FPF back and forth over logging – many of us recognize that there can be potential environmental benefits of logging. However, there is also increasing recognition that there is value in old growth, and that these current use programs were to some degree designed for timber production (\$), and not necessary with ecological concerns in mind. There are efforts to change this, see this current bill discussed in VT Digger (link below). Maybe more people will conserve their land now that they do not need to log. Maybe some people can now reassess their logging.

<https://vtdigger.org/2022/01/25/bill-proposes-expanding-current-use-program-to-include-some-wild-forests/>

Listening to discussion at the meetings over the last year, it seems like there are many people in town who would have liked many more trails in ACF for recreation than proposed (and have highlighted the trail/acreage ratio compared to Hinesburg Town Forest and that no such ecological trail design has been performed in many Town Forests in the state and so on), and there are people who think there should be no trails at all (i.e. Sue Morse letter). Thus far the unbiased attempt to navigate a compromise for such has been the proposal by consultants the ACFC hired. It's for this reason I support the initial plan as proposed. There have been numerous public meetings (posted on FPF) about these trails which were attended by many members of the community who gave feedback the ACFC. The consultants presented the trails and took comments at one of these meetings and made clear the current design attempts to avoid ecologically sensitive areas completely or as best as possible (a large vernal pool, passing through a ravine more than once and so on), departs from an ACF management plan trail proposal that was tentative and perhaps made without walking the property, and in recent responses made clear that one

recreational trail may not be necessarily better ecologically than more than one (or could be worse). The ACF committee is comprised of volunteers in our community doing their best. I agree more feedback now can't hurt, especially at more venues. Personally I am not in favor of disassembling the complete proposed plan as I believe it would fail if partially implemented for the reasons these consultants have put forth. If the current trail plan is not adequately sensitive to specific ecological concerns in the ACF that should've received a higher value or priority in the trail design, which I remain open to being convinced of, it seems to me that the next step would be go back to the consultants for a re-design with revised aims.

Concern about biker vs. walker conflict if two (rather than three) trails in the NE

The original trail design plan would be AMAZING if it came to fruition. It would connect to town via Sip trail without having to ride on the treacherous twisty section of Rt 2. Love that I can park or ride to town and connect Chamberlain, Preston, & Cochran's without spending too much time on the road. At Andrews to that---sweet!!! But if the Sip connector can't be...it's a blow....not a critical blow for me, but I assume it could be for residents in the proximity close to Sip.

I am concerned that not having enough trails to spread users out on the descents (specifically gravity oriented riders) could potentially cause significant conflict or at least some potential disharmony with different users' flow types. As one commenter anecdotally stated in the meeting, the users at Preston are generally always polite and smiling when they cross each other, no matter what their mode of transportation. I 100% agree with this statement. BUT 2 notable differences between Preston and this revised Andrews design are: (1) Preston has 3-4 descending options (LungTa, Preston Loop, Visceral, and Graveyard). (2) Aside from descending, users also are able to exit the Preston trail network in 4 separate exit points which significantly spreads users out (A-Day, Connector, Lower Connector, and out Merritt). I spend an unhealthy amount of time scouring Trailforks and Strava routes, and I find users travel Preston (often paired with Cochran's) in so many different ways and in all directions. There really isn't 1 standard top-to-bottom loop or route that everyone takes. How many hikers do you see on Graveyard or Visceral? None right!? They obviously opt for more hiking-friendly routes/exists (Preston and Merritt). So to wrap up my point--yes--most trail users jive in harmony at Preston, but they are not all forced/funneled onto 1 trail ascent or descent and their typical routes vary significantly even among the same type of user groups.

I've spent a lot of time this winter grooming the fat bike trails at Andrews and I see how much potential that land has. Descending Urbanik trail I envision the future of Andrew's downhill being 3x longer--wow that will be fun!! And having fun climbing trails too--yes please! A full top-to-bottom loop is sure to be a real fun addition to the Richmond Trail network for any trail user. Even the most basic top to bottom loop is sure to be AMAZING and I can't wait.

If I can add my two cents as fat bike trail groomer...Having 'boot friendly' trails at Andrews could make the winter grooming last much longer and better. I know PRKR mountain in Little NH does this. There is sooo much boot traffic at Andrews, which is great that people like to hike there, but it's almost

impossible to maintain a fat bike friendly route. Boot friendly routes could help make the trails better for bikers, and could continue to make the trails more equitable without requiring users to use snowshoes on all groomed trails (which they don't at Andrews anyway as you know). The boot trails can even be groomed. Options and signage could go a long way.

Thanks!