

Memo to the Richmond Selectboard

Re: Andrews Community Forest – Forest Management Project

August 3, 2020

In 2019 the Richmond Select Board adopted a Forest Management Plan for the Andrews Community Forest (ACF) written by the Chittenden County Forester at the recommendation of the Richmond Town Forest Committee. This “FMP” served as an addendum to the “Management Plan (MP),” adopted by the Richmond Selectboard in 2018. The 2018 MP detailed broad goals and objectives for the ACF, whereas the 2019 FMP recommended specific forest management actions. As part of the recommendations in this FMP, forest management at the ACF will be beginning this summer.

The joint goals of the project are to increase diversity, resilience and overall health of the ACF’s forests and to demonstrate responsible forest management. This project will showcase “ecological forestry,” which uses the harvesting of trees to mimic natural disturbances and encourage the development of complex, diverse forests. This holistic approach to forest management seeks to create great habitat for all of Vermont’s native flora and fauna, help forests be more resilient and adaptive in a changing climate, and help our relatively young forests become more like old growth forests.

A major objective of the project is to provide opportunities for residents of Richmond (and beyond) to learn about forest management in an open, transparent and inclusive way. While COVID-19 means that our events this year will be largely virtual, numerous opportunities are being provided for the public to learn about this project, and we will resume in-person events as soon as it is safe to do so. Our approach to outreach and education will be modeled after a similar project at the Hinesburg Town Forest over the last two years, focusing on a wide range of topics, engaging many other natural resource experts and partnering with numerous other organizations, from Vermont Woodlands Association and Audubon Vermont to Pride Center of Vermont and City Market Co-op. We will be working both with local partners like the Richmond Free Library and statewide partners like the Vermont Land Trust.

This project will also showcase Vermont’s working landscape and the sustainable production of local, renewable resources (wood). Income from the project will be used to improve the ACF’s recreational and educational offerings and pay for important stewardship activities like controlling invasive exotic plants. The Richmond Town Forest Committee is also considering how to use some of the wood to directly benefit the local community. This could take several forms – some towns have established “firewood banks,” which provide firewood to community members in need. Other towns – like Hinesburg – have used wood harvested from their Town Forest in municipal building projects. While generating income and resources is not the main goal of the project, producing income and local, renewable resources in the course of high-quality forest management is something that we can be proud of, and that can be positive for our forest, our communities and our world.

Finally, we are working with other adjacent, conserved properties, in particular those owned by Prelco Inc. and VYCC, to demonstrate partnership and collaboration. This partnership may include outreach, education, extending the harvest area to portions of these landowners’ properties and providing learning opportunities for VYCC’s new forestry program and area Tech Centers.

This project will affect about 80 acres in the eastern portion of the ACF. This portion of the ACF will need to be closed for public safety during this time, but the remainder of the ACF will remain open to the public. The Richmond Town Forest Committee is working on ways to allow the public to safely access these other areas during this time. The work will begin in late August or early September, 2020, and likely continue through March 2021. If necessary, work will begin again in August 2021 and finish in

November 2021. The schedule is dependent of weather – wet soil conditions will necessitate work stoppages to avoid excessive soil disturbance by logging equipment.

Per Richmond’s procurement policy, the Chittenden County Forester has showed the project to 4 local, reputable logging contractors and procured 3 “bids” from them. These “bids” indicate rates that the logger will pay the Town per unit and type of wood harvested from the ACF. This process has been followed on forest management projects over the last 3 years on Town Forests in Hinesburg and Bolton, supervised by the Chittenden County Forester. The Chittenden County Forester will mark all trees to be cut, make sure the logger is operating within best practices and the restrictions of the Town’s MP, FMP, conservation easement and their timber sale contract, including paying for wood correctly. The logger will supply a “security deposit” to the Town, to be held in assurance of successful completion of the contract, and liability insurance, with the Town held as “additionally insured.”

The bids will be vetted by the Richmond Town Forest Committee and one will be recommended to the Richmond Select Board. At their August 17, 2020 meeting, a draft of a contract with that logging contractor will be brought before the Select Board for their approval. For the timing of this work, it is very important that this contract is able to be approved at this time, so that forest management may proceed soon afterward. The goal of this memo and appearance before the Select Board is to answer any questions and provide information necessary to allow for the approval of this contract on 8/17/20 if possible. A draft of the “timber sale contract” is included with this memo. This contract is intended to contain virtually all the final contract language, but will be updated with the name and information of the recommended logger and their “stumpage” rates.