

# **Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund Application**

## **Town of Richmond Stage Road Community Forest**



Submitted by: Richmond Land Trust, December, 2019

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## **Project Summary**

Since 1941, the Town of Richmond has owned a 30.20 +/- acre parcel along Richmond's town line with Bolton, about 700 yards west of Stage Rd. and on the VAST snow machine trail. The Town of Bolton owns the 13.5 +/- acre parcel along its side of the line. Thousands of acres of similar but conserved forest and terrain surround the properties

Recognizing the ecological and recreational values of both parcels and their importance to the overall forest block, the conservation commissions and selectboards of each Town held public discussions on permanently conserving them and voted in favor of it. The Towns will continue to own and manage them as small, municipal forests, with Richmond Land Trust (RLT) agreeing to hold a conservation easement on each parcel. To support the Richmond's and RLT's legal, stewardship and other costs associated with conserving the properties, RLT is seeking a grant from the Richmond Conservation Reserve Fund for an amount not to exceed \$4,500.

## **Funding Request**

RLT requests funds not to exceed \$4,500 for the sole use of conserving the Town of Richmond's parcel off Stage Rd., as follows:

RLT Stewardship Endowment	\$2,500.00	(Actual amount)
Town of Richmond and RLT legal expense	\$1,000.00	(Estimate)
Town of Richmond recording costs	\$ 500.00	(Estimate)
Other related expenses	\$ 500.00	(Estimate)

The project sponsor (RLT, with the Town of Richmond, will only use such funds as needed within the \$4,500.00 limit.

## **Property Description**



One of the old foundations on the site. (Photo by Lou Borie)

In 1941 the Cunningham family donated to our Town a 30.2 +/- acre parcel abutting the Richmond/Bolton town line. The family had carved out a small, upland farmstead on the land in the early- to mid-1800s but abandoned the property later in the century.

At the same time as the donation to Richmond, the Cunnninghams gave to the Town of Bolton the abutting parcel of approximately 13.5 +/- acres they owned in that Town. Though both parcels and surrounding lands are now re-forested,

one can still see abundant evidence of the Cunningham's 19<sup>th</sup>-century homestead,

including an intact stone cellar hole and foundation, stone-lined well, stone-lined spring, and boundary walls.

The property slopes upward from south to north. Its southern, western and northern boundaries match those of the original Lot 144, established in 1795 when Vermont's General Assembly organized and mapped out Richmond from parts of what then comprised Jericho, Bolton, New Huntington and Williston. Today, the town line between Richmond and Bolton divides the parcels and serves as the common boundary. (See copy of the 1984 survey in the Appendix.)

The public can access the two properties most easily from Stage Road in Bolton by walking 10 minutes south on the VAST Trail through neighboring forestlands conserved and owned by the Jericho Underhill Land Trust. (See Site Map.) There is limited parking on Stage Road. The properties can also be accessed by walking about 45 minutes north on the VAST from Snipe Ireland Road in Richmond.



Water still flows into the old stone-lined spring.

## **Project Significance**

### **Key Attributes**

This forestland is important to conserve because it possesses the following attributes:

- a) Cultural features including the 19<sup>th</sup>-century homestead foundation, well and spring of the old Cunningham family farm and related stone walls. These can be seen just west of the old Cunningham barn foundations on the adjacent Jericho Underhill Land Trust conserved parcel;
- b) A diversity of habitats for wildlife species common to the Northern Forest region;
- c) A keystone to maintaining the contiguity and connectivity of habitats among the surrounding conserved parcels and others within the Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project (CCUCP), which also includes the Andrews Community Forest. CCUCP is conserving habitat health diversity and connectivity from the Winooski Valley to the highest peaks of the Green Mountains;
- d) A prime local area for hunting deer and other game;
- e) A location in a predominantly rural and undeveloped part of Richmond;
- f) Adjacency to and accessibility via the VAST Trail;
- g) Surrounded by other properties previously protected with conservation and public access easements held by the State of Vermont and other conservation organizations.

## Qualifications for a CRF Grant

### General Criteria Matched



The parcel's attributes align with numerous criteria used to weigh a proposal's qualifications for CRF funding, and they conflict with none.<sup>1</sup> The CRF criteria appear in italics below:

1. *Contributes toward the acquisition or permanent protection of natural, agricultural or historical resources in and of importance to Richmond.*

[and]

2. *Will yield a clear, sustainable benefit to Richmond residents in the form of permanently preserving or improving water quality, wildlife, recreational, historic, cultural, scenic or environmental values, including the preservation of significant natural, agricultural and historic resources.*

(Lou Borie)

Conserving the forestland will permanently protect its significant natural and historic resources, which include two main forest types: mixed hardwoods on most of the parcel and a 4-5 acre hemlock stand on the steep northwest section.

The land is entirely within the Chittenden County Uplands Conservation Project (CCUCP). CCUCP is a landscape-scale conservation effort with over a dozen partners working to conserve ecologically and culturally important forest blocks and habitat connectors between and alongside Camel's Hump State Park and Mount Mansfield State Forest. The parcel

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<sup>1</sup> Town of Richmond, *Conservation Reserve Fund Policy*

abuts 5,000 acres of conserved land adjacent to Mount Mansfield State Forest. Largely conserved, this forest tract is a critical wildlife corridor. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife ranks it in the top 3% of the state's wildlife habitat blocks. Largely unbroken, it allows wildlife to move between the rich but more developed lowland areas to the west and the higher, more rugged habitats to the east.

Though the parcel is no longer used for agriculture, its robust stone walls and homestead stone foundations have historic value. They illustrate how hard the early settler farm families worked to sustain themselves. The property is pleasing to walk, cross-country ski and snowshoe through, and is also used by hunters during the appropriate seasons.

3. *Will help the Town of Richmond meet natural resources and planning goals identified in the Richmond Town Plan or other representative community forums.*

The project is consistent with 2018 Richmond Town Plan, including these statements of the Town's underlying Vision:

- Enhance our **history and traditions**, celebrating our agricultural heritage, treasured community events, and unique historic sites and architecture
- Wisely steward our **natural and working lands**, ensuring the beauty and health of our landscapes, waterways, open spaces, wildlife, and agricultural resources
- Foster and enhance our **small-town character**, including our quiet pace and rural way of life, friendly and involved community, and scenic beauty
- Support a wide range of **social, cultural and recreational offerings**, including open space and recreation facilities, arts and cultural activities, and community gathering places

The project also tracks with the 2018 Town Plan's "Future Land Use" section, under "Significant Natural Areas":

- **Location:** Portions of High Priority Contiguous Habitat Units, High Priority Forest Blocks, and Habitat Connectors. These areas are found in Richmond's northeast quadrant, eastern and southern borders, southwest border and Bryant Hill. They have been defined by state and regional mapping efforts.
- **Purpose:** To minimize forest and habitat connector fragmentation and protect significant natural resources and the ecological services they provide. These areas will have the lowest density of development in Richmond.
- **Current Uses:** conserved lands, low density residential, or and agricultural and forestry uses, with some accessory uses such as cottage industries and home-based businesses
- **Future Uses:**
  - o further conservation or protection of these areas
  - o uses that minimize forest and habitat connector fragmentation, soil erosion, and water pollution
  - o uses that minimize impacts to scenic views, ridgeline habitat connectors, sensitive ecosystems, and steep slopes
  - o low density residential or agricultural development that is clustered and in the fringes of these areas,
  - o cottage industries and home-based businesses

o other uses that are compatible with Act 171<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the proposal supports the 2018 Town Plan's specific Goals and Actions detailed in the Natural Resources Section:

GOAL 1: Protect priority natural areas in order to maintain the health and function of those areas and their ecosystem services

LAND ACTIONS:

1. Identify opportunities to conserve lands containing or adjoining above listed conservation priorities
4. Continue to support the efforts of the public and private organizations such as the Richmond Conservation Commission, Richmond Trails Committee, and Richmond Land Trust to protect sensitive natural areas
6. Minimize the fragmentation of and intrusion into sensitive wildlife habitats and forests, including Contiguous Habitat Units and Wildlife Travel Corridors, through land use regulation that promotes Vermont's Smart Growth principles such as clustering development, siting development in a manner to preserve contiguous habitat areas, and through coordinating with neighboring towns on border areas.

GOAL 3: Maintain Richmond's rural character and scenic beauty

GOAL 4: Utilize best management practices for Richmond-owned, publicly accessible natural and recreational areas

ACTIONS

2. Manage trail development and usage on Town lands to protect neighboring property owner rights and possible sensitive natural areas or conservation priorities such as those listed previously
5. Utilize the conservation reserve fund to protect important natural resources and public access to them where appropriate
4. *Will protect, enhance and provide public access to a natural resource or recreation area.*

The forest will continue to be open to the public. The Town of Richmond will convey a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement (Conservation Easement) to RLT and retain ownership and management of the parcel. This grant guarantees that the property will be available to the public for all type of non-commercial, non-motorized, non-mechanized, non-logging dispersed recreational and educational activities in perpetuity.

5. *Expands an existing, protected resource, including those that benefit not only Richmond but also neighboring communities and those beyond.*

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<sup>2</sup> The goal of Vermont's Act 171 is to maximize the significant benefits that intact blocks of forested land provide by reducing fragmentation of those lands.

As noted above, the project will expand the conserved portion of a largely unbroken landscape of rich habitats and diverse forests.

*7. Attracts and leverages funds from other sources.*

Richmond's commitment to conserving and stewarding a Town-owned parcel, evidenced by the CRF grant, will strengthen the cases the Town can make to foundations and granting agencies for funds needed to complete important conservation projects in the future.

## **CRF Specific Criteria Matched**

In addition to meeting the General Criteria for CRF support, the project aligns with the CRF Policy Document's criteria for conserving specific resources:

### Natural Resources Protection Criteria

- 4. Preserves or restores biodiversity by providing areas for wildlife to live, feed and reproduce.*
- 5. Provides a corridor linking wildlife habitats.*
- 6. Maintains woodlands, meadows, or pastures.*
- 7. Supports low- or no-cost outdoor recreational activities, such as fishing, hiking, skiing, hunting, swimming, canoeing, etc.*
- 8. Preserves outstanding scenic views or is scenic itself.*

### Historical Resources Protection Criteria

- 1. Defines and maintains special landscape setting.*
- 2. Preserves, enhances and/or rehabilitates historical structures, features and character.*
- 4. Very early example of its type, or a rare type that has undergone little change.*
- 5. Represents an important central function in Richmond's past, or is associated with an important person, movement, industry, or function.*

## **Project Schedule**

It is likely that the Selectboards of Richmond and Bolton will hold public hearing votes to conserve these two parcels in late December 2019 or January 2020. The conservation closings could occur soon after that.

## **Project Partners**

The Town of Richmond, Town of Bolton and Richmond Land Trust.

## **Long-Term Plans**

The Town of Richmond will continue to own and manage the property on its side of the town line, and Bolton will do the same on its side. To simplify management and stewardship, the Richmond and Bolton Conservation Commissions have agreed to use the same conservation easement allowances and restrictions. These call for managing the land to become an old-growth forest – a forest type all but extinct in our area and very rare elsewhere in Vermont. The Towns will avoid logging, and keep the properties available for public enjoyment of its ecological, historical and educational resources through non-mechanized access and recreation. Forestry practices will be avoided, other than treatments needed to control invasive species.

## **Easement Holder**

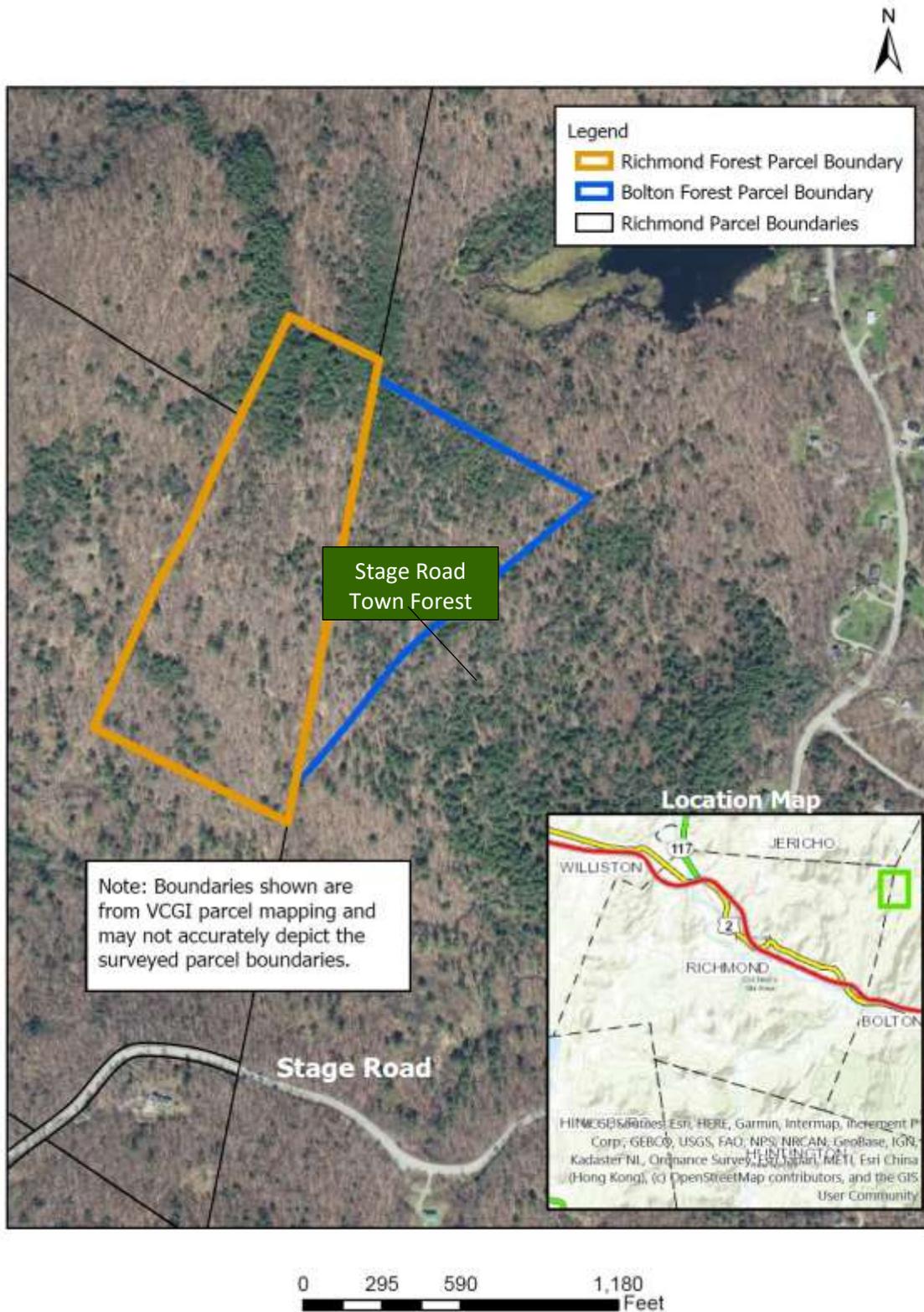
The Richmond Land Trust is a non-profit land conservation organization founded by a group of Richmond residents in 1987. RLT's mission is "to preserve the rural character and quality

of life in Richmond, Vermont, and its surrounding communities through land conservation, historic preservation, land stewardship, and community service and education.”

Since 1987, RLT has protected more than 800 acres of land through direct acquisition or conservation agreements with other landowners. RLT’s recent conservation projects include the conservation of the Upper Huntington River Gorge, Gillett Pond and the Willis Hill sledding hill and wetland, all funded in part through the CRF. RLT also conserved the Owl’s Head Blueberry Farm on Hillview Road. In 2004, RLT completed the reconstruction of the 100-year-old West Monitor Barn and the conservation of 275 acres surrounding the barn, in partnership with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps.

RLT has conserved and manages several additional parcels of land along the Winooski and Huntington Rivers, including the Warren and Ruth Beeken Rivershore Preserve, the Safford-Brown Preserve, the Bombardier Meadow and the Lower Huntington Gorge Preserve. These areas are extensively used by the public for dispersed recreation, education, and riparian access to these rivers.

# Parcel Map



## References

1. 1941 Cunningham family transfer deeds, recorded the Town of Richmond and Town Bolton land records.
2. 1984 Glenn Towne Survey, recorded Town of Bolton Land Records
3. Richmond Town Plan, adopted March 5, 2012.
4. Natural Resources Atlas, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 2017.
5. Vermont Conservation Design, Eric Sorensen, Robert Zaino, Jens Hilke, and Elizabeth Thompson, 2015.

# Appendix

## Parcel Survey

