

Andrews Community Forest Annual Report

The Andrews Community Forest Committee has had another active year, and we owe many thanks to the volunteers on this committee and collaborations with other town entities, committees and volunteers who have worked to get people into our new town forest. The Andrews Community Forest Committee meets on the last Monday of each month at 7pm.

Trails in the Forest

The committee has spent much of its time deliberating how to find a balance between best practices in both recreation and conservation ecology. Working closely with Vermont Land Trust and using various ecological assessments performed on this land, we are establishing a trail network that holds both imperatives in mind-- recreation and progressive stewardship of this incredible property. Surprisingly, this is not common practice in Vermont, and we hope to establish our process for trail building, with the goal of protecting ecology, to become an example for other towns. In the spring of 2020, a bid was awarded to Mountain Trail Works, a Richmond trail building company, and 2 fantastic trails were established that are both easily accessible from the parking lot for those who don't want to walk on skid roads or the decommissioned VAST trail. Throughout the past 2 summers, a volunteer mowed the VAST trail, as well as a meandering path through the large meadow to encourage walking and enjoyment of the Camel's Hump view. Collaborating with the Richmond Trails Committee and the Richmond Conservation Committee, bridges and trail trimming have made all the lower trails easily accessible for foot and bike traffic. A very special trail dedication occurred in November of 2020, to honor and celebrate Geoff Urbanik's contributions to our town. Geoff was our Town Manager for 9 years and was instrumental in helping to acquire and establish the Andrews Community Forest for Richmond the general public. "Urbanik Way" can be accessed near Rte 2, directly from the parking lot. In partnership with Richmond Mountain Trails, the Andrews Town Forest Committee secured grants for trail design and construction: \$2,500 from Ranch Camp in Stowe and \$5,000 from VMBA.



With volunteers from Richmond Trail Committee (RTC) and Richmond Mountain Trails (RMT), we were able to construct new multi purpose trails.



Children from Honeycomb Kids taking a break at the log landing and enjoying the Camel's Hump view.

Forest Management

Working with Chittenden County Forester, Ethan Tapper, the Andrews Community Forest is demonstrating responsible forest management in accordance with its 2018 Comprehensive Management Plan and 2019 Forest Management Plan and Conservation Easement. This demonstration is focused both on showcasing a progressive approach to forest management --through "ecological forestry" which focuses on increasing forest diversity, complexity and creating old growth forest-like conditions. Ethan is committed to demonstrating this work in an open, transparent and inclusive way. Revenue is not the goal of this project, but any revenue generated will be used to benefit the ACF, improving the health of ecosystems, creating opportunities for wildlife as well as recreational opportunities for the community. A portion of the revenue may also be used to donate firewood from the project to community members in need.

In its 2019 Forest Management Plan, the Andrews Community Forest was divided roughly into 3 equal "Management Intensity Zones", each with a different management approach. The spectrum ranges from areas where forest management can be used to create larger openings (Zone 1), to a zone in which no management will occur, and will naturally develop into 'old growth forest' (Zone 3). The forest management currently underway at the ACF is in Zone 2, a zone in which "light-touch" forest management is allowed, but no whole tree harvesting techniques may be used, leaving as much carbon and biomass in the forest as possible to improve soil quality. The different Management Intensity Zones will provide a range

of unique conditions and management opportunities in the ACF, benefiting both the parcel and the greater landscape that it is a part of.

The pandemic has required Ethan and the committee to create new and creative ways of reaching out to people to highlight our work. This has included holding many virtual educational events highlighting the work with different conservation partners, creating a self-guided tour using the app Avenza where people could tour the management area and look at the trees marked to be cut, creating and posting regular short update videos about the project on YouTube, creating a blog on the project, using the ACF Facebook page and the social media pages of partners like Audubon Vermont and the Vermont Land Trust to publicize the work. We hope to have even more interactive signage with links to more information on the project and post it around the property. Ethan has been writing articles and press releases on the project, and posts regular updates to the project on Front Porch Forum. Ethan has been instrumental in show-casing ecological forestry techniques and brings his wealth of knowledge and progressive ideas to actually improve the ecology and health of our town forest for all its flora, fauna and diverse ecosystems.

Other Notable Achievements

- The Committee awarded a joint bid from Sinuosity Flowing Trails and Arrowwood Environmental to design an ecologically minded trail network.
- The parking lot was expanded from 5 cars to now accommodating over 12 cars, and also has a space for a school bus turn around.
- A Kiosk was installed in the main parking area on Rte 2 by Tegan Low as an Eagle Scout Project in 2018 and will continue to welcome people to the forest.
- Game Cameras are maintained and we have pictures of bears, bobcats, coyotes, deer, turkey's, porcupines, racoons, and other local species.
- Hunters turned out in great numbers this year, likely due to increased accessibility from the expanded parking lot.
- Boundary pins were located in the forest (which was not a simple affair)!
- Ethan Tapper is making a concerted effort, despite Covid, to get people interested and involved in the progressive forestry practices happening in Andrews Community Forest, with youTube videos, presentations throughout the state in various capacities i.e. radio interviews, webinars, Front Porch Forum postings, facebook posts, creating site specific printed materials, and other novel approaches to community involvement walks in the forest are discouraged due to Covid.
- Improvement of existing skid roads with donated materials to reduce erosion and protect waterways.
- A grant was secured to provide education, outreach, and funds to work with upcoming Emerald Ash Borer infestations throughout the town and in the ACF and other Richmond Trails.
- We were awarded a grant from Ranch Camp for naming trails and improved signage.
- VMBA awarded us money for trail design and maintenance endeavours.

- A gate was installed in the Valley View community entrance in response to observations of illegal ATV use. The community spoke up about the aesthetics and function of the gate, and plans were swiftly put in progress to find a community consensus.
- Wood For Good- A Jericho based non-profit organization is dedicated to delivering free cord wood to communities members in need, no questions asked. ACF is excited to work with this organization, helping to keep our community warm all winter.

Looking Ahead in 2021~

- Opportunities to collaborate with Audubon and our current forest management activities to intentionally create and preserve habitat for birds, flora, and other fauna.
- Create more signs in parking areas and other points of interest throughout the forest.
- Install photo points throughout the forest for people to take photos throughout the year with Camel's Hump views and other unique features on the property.
- Work with Trail Designers and Ecologists collaboratively to thoughtfully expand the trail network.
- Figure out more winter recreation opportunities in collaboration with Richmond Mountain Trails to potentially groom trails for XC skiing, snowshoeing, and fat biking.
- Work on liability and other insurance concerns with the town for snowmobile use on the VAST trail which is currently inactive.
- Work with CHMS to plant apple trees and possibly do an invasive species unit with the middle school science program.
- Continue to investigate and learn about the history and wonders of this special parcel to direct our resources to both highlight and preserve specific places in the forest.
- Once Covid subsides, we hope to host community gatherings in the forest such as: educational walks and talks, recreation races and fundraising, community cookouts and gatherings.
- Timber and Forest Management Activities will be ongoing throughout 2021.

Please feel free to use (or not use) any of these pictures from the ACF!



Coyote













Bobcat



Porcupine



Mama Bear



Children running up the VELCO road



Children discover mushrooms growing on the logging road



Children explore the forest in the winter

