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B6. Recreation Management

B6.1 Recreation Objectives and Actions

Outdoor recreation has long been and remains a highly valued tradition throughout the Andrews Community Forest. With careful planning, we can offer meaningful access to nature while protecting the forest's most sensitive ecological features. Recognize that trails can fragment habitat and connectivity at certain scales, types, and volumes of use.

Objectives:

- Provide inclusive, accessible recreational opportunities for hikers, walkers, bikers, hunters, runners, nature observers, skiers, snowshoers, and others of all ages and abilities.
- Accommodate potentially conflicting recreational activities through strategies such as spatial zoning, seasonal scheduling, and tailoring approaches to the specific nature of each activity.
- Promote trail connectivity to neighboring properties where ecologically appropriate.
- Seek input from relevant community groups, town committees and the general public about decisions related to recreation to promote a culture of shared stewardship and education.
- Design trails to highlight the forest's beauty while protecting wildlife corridors, riparian zones, steep slopes, vernal pools, and other ecologically sensitive features.

Actions:

- Promote recreational use on existing trails/skid roads and limit the creation of new trails except as needed to 1) bypass wet, steep, ecologically sensitive or otherwise unsuitable stretches of existing trails, 2) connect trail segments interrupted by acts of nature or forest management activities, 3) connect to trails on adjacent land where ecologically appropriate.
- Site, build and maintain trails in keeping with this document's trail approval process and development parameters, and utilize the best practices from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. Trail work will only be performed at the direction of the ACF committee.
- Develop and implement a plan for monitoring and responding to major changes in natural resources, trail conditions and human usage.
- Restrict motorized traffic to comply with the easement.
- Avoid constructing and maintaining trails in or near ecologically sensitive areas, buffering those locations from human disturbances as specified in the Trail Development Parameters.
- Designate two distinct management zones within the forest: a southern zone and a northern zone. These zones are separated by a boundary that follows an east-west corridor composed of the

VAST trail and the powerline corridor. Specifically, the dividing line should follow the northernmost edge of either the VAST trail or the powerline corridor.

- Designate trails in the northern zone as pedestrian only. Limit dogs and mountain bikers to the southern zone. Re-evaluate designations as usage data are collected and organized regarding mountain bikes, and amend the management plan accordingly.
- Minimize trail stream crossings and avoid encroachment on riparian buffers. Site, build, and maintain bridges, culverts and boardwalks in accordance with best practices to maintain water quality and prevent erosion.
- Monitor trail use and wildlife activity utilizing cameras, microphones, trail counters, sign-in sheets, etc. Seek advice on the monitoring plan from resources such as the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.
- Adapt management of recreational trails as dictated by user volumes and their ecological impacts and using closures or reroutes where appropriate.
- Create and maintain a positive working relationship with adjoining property owners in efforts to coordinate ACF's management goals with theirs.
- Implement additional seasonal and weather related closures in designated areas to protect wildlife wintering areas, nesting/breeding sites, mast stands, wildlife connectivity routes, and fragile soils.
- Create and maintain up-to-date kiosks with trail maps, safety guidance, regulations, and seasonal advisories (e.g., trail closures, wearing blaze orange, etc). Install signs at all trailheads and property access points. Include Indigenous land acknowledgments and use Abenaki names where appropriate.
- Keep the public informed about trail conditions through the town website, Front Porch Forum, *Times Ink!* and other outlets.
- Inspect trails and infrastructure on a yearly schedule and after major storm events. Track and respond to changes caused by human use and natural events.
- Collaborate with the Richmond Trails Committee and other volunteers to help steward the trails by scheduling volunteer work days.
- Establish an ACF contact email for the public to report trail maintenance needs, user conflicts, or wildlife concerns.
- Maintain an up to date ecological resource map to guide decision-making and educate trail users.
- Maintain a record of trail approvals, construction information, and any special stipulations or stewardship needs.

6.1.2 Trail Development Parameters

The following parameters ensure protection of sensitive areas and wildlife, and promote responsible trail building. Trail development must follow the Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Natural Resources Guide.

Wildlife Habitat Connectors

- Identify, map and maintain major wildlife linkages to support habitat connectivity.
- Prohibit any new trail construction within a 300 foot strict buffer zone around these habitat connectors. Exceptions may be allowed if in compliance with the Trail Deviation Review Process.

Riparian Areas

- Avoid trail development within riparian zones (of perennial and intermittent streams) to protect water quality and aquatic ecosystems.
- Where stream crossings are unavoidable, they must be minimal and perpendicular to the watercourse, and:
 - Use bridges and boardwalks to cross streams.
 - Ensure proper crossing height to cover full bank width and provide adequate debris clearance beneath.
- Buffer requirements from top of bank:
 - Perennial - 100 feet
 - Intermittent - 50 feet

Wetlands

- **Avoid trail development within 50 feet of wetlands to protect water quality. Avoid trail development within 300 feet of identified Wetland Natural Communities in the Northern Zone (see map on _____), to protect habitat integrity and ecological functions.**
- **Trails proposed within a Class II wetland or its 50-foot buffer zone require a state permit and must go through a review process with the state of Vermont Wetlands Program. Impacts must be avoided and minimized, and use of boardwalks or puncheons through wetland and buffer crossings are required if the trail cannot avoid wetlands or their buffers. Boardwalks are considered an allowed use if they meet the state's eligibility criteria.**

Vernal Pools

- Protect vernal pools and associated species by avoiding trail and path development within a 300 foot buffer.

Ledges and Talus Slopes

- Prohibit trail development within 100 feet of broken ledge and talus formations due to ecological sensitivity and erosion concerns.
- Protect likely bobcat denning sites with 300 foot buffers.

Slope Guidelines

- Prioritize soil integrity and erosion control.
- Expedite and simplify new trail development by prioritizing new trails on terrain with slopes less than 20%.
- Avoid trail development on slopes greater than 20%.

Sensitive Natural Communities

Protect sensitive natural communities* (see easement EPZs) identified in ecological surveys by enforcing a 300 foot buffer for:

- Dry Oak
 - Dry Red Oak–White Pine
 - Dry Oak–Hickory–Hophornbeam
 - Red Pine
-

Hemlock Stands

- Focus on protection of Hemlock stands, which serve as critical wintering habitat for deer, turkey, and other species [DW: and provide a naturally cooler microclimate in summer months, offering shade and maintaining lower ground temperatures that benefit both wildlife and nearby water sources.].
- [IS: ‘during winter months’ is ill-defined. I suggest specifying ‘when there is snow on the ground’] Close trails in and within 300 feet of Hemlock stands during winter months to maintain the critical roles these areas play in sheltering deer and other species from harsh weather.

6.2.2 Trail Approval Process

All new trail development in ACF must adhere to the trail approval process. This ensures compliance, transparency, ecological responsibility, and community engagement.

Document the Need, Purpose, and Identify Proposed Route

- Clearly define the intended use, users, purposes, and estimated costs of the proposed trail.
- Explain how the trail supports goals in the ACF Management Plan and aligns with the easement's permitted uses.
- Justify the trail based on community interest, accessibility improvements, estimated cost, and/or connectivity needs.
- Identify the proposed route using existing forest roads or skid trails where possible.
- Adhere to the trail development parameters to ensure compliance with protecting forest integrity and wildlife habitat.
- Is the proposed trail accessible to a range of user types? Consider ages, abilities, and user types.

Committee Review

- The proposed trail should then be brought to the ACF committee for consideration

Expert Review and Flagging

- Engage a professional trail designer to flag the preliminary route.
- Hire a qualified ecologist to walk the flagged route and 50 feet on either side to identify fine-scale ecological features.
- Adjust the route as needed to avoid:
 - Rare, threatened, or endangered species
 - Fragile soils and erosion-prone terrain
 - Conflicts with known wildlife usage
 - Any sensitive areas as outlined in the trail development parameters

Overlay Mapping and Zones of Influence

- Map the proposed trail using the respective buffers from ecologically sensitive areas

Committee Review and Public Input

- Present the proposal to the ACF Committee for preliminary review.
- Solicit input from:
 - Richmond Trails Committee
 - Richmond Conservation Commission
 - Neighboring landowners
 - The general public (e.g., through meetings, notices, and comment periods)

Regulatory and Legal Compliance

- Ensure compliance with Richmond Zoning, State, and Federal regulations
- Prepare supporting documents as needed:
 - Site plans
 - Erosion and sediment control plans

Approval and Permitting

- Submit finalized proposal for **formal approval** by:
 - The ACF Committee
 - The Richmond Selectboard
 - Vermont Land Trust

Construction and Stewardship

- Construct the trail using best practices outlined in the *Vermont Town Forest Stewardship Guide* and *Vermont Town Forest Trail Design Guide*.
- Coordinate with volunteers, professional builders, and the Trails Committee.
- Establish a monitoring and maintenance plan with reporting and adaptive management based on use and impact..
- Maintain a record of any trail project, including proposal, design, construction, and stewardship activities.

6.2.3 Trail Deviation Review Process

This process provides a structured way to evaluate minor deviations from the Trail Development Parameters.

Define “Minor Deviation”

Set clear criteria to distinguish minor vs. major deviations. A minor deviation is defined as:

- No more than 5% of a trail may encroach on a buffer zone.
- Trail passes within the edge of a buffer but does not cut through it (e.g., skirting the edge of a 300-ft zone, not crossing through a vernal pool EPZ).

Require a Justification Statement

- Why the deviation is necessary (e.g., terrain constraints, connectivity need, user safety).
- What alternatives were considered and why they were rejected.
- Expected ecological impacts of the deviation.
- How the deviation will be minimized or mitigated.

Trigger an Enhanced Ecological Review

Require a review by a qualified ecologist and/or wildlife expert that includes:

- **Site walk** of the deviation area.
- Assessment of **potential impacts** (wildlife, soil, hydrology).
- Recommendations for:
 - Buffers or reroutes
 - Seasonal restrictions
 - Infrastructure (e.g., boardwalks, signage)
 - Monitoring requirements and impact assessments

Committee Decision and Conditions

The ACF Committee votes to approve with conditions, request modifications, or reject the proposed deviation. If approved, include monitoring requirements, and set a review window to reassess impact.

B6.3 Potential Recreation Partnerships

- Richmond Trails Committee
- Western Abenaki Tribes and Richmond Racial Equity
- Maple Wind Farm
- VYCC

- Richmond Land Trust
- Richmond Mountain Trails/Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA)
- Scouts
- Community Senior Center
- Richmond Conservation Commission
- County Forester
- Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
- UVM Community Forest Program