

Appendix D: Recreation

Community Interests and Benefits

The Andrews Community Forest has long offered many recreational opportunities to town residents and visitors. That tradition continues, along with the many benefits to health and well-being that outdoor recreation and nature experiences provide.

When the Town acquired the forest, it surveyed town residents to determine their preferences for allowed activities in the ACF. The ten most favored, in order of preference, were hiking, running, hunting, snowshoeing, skiing, bird- and wildlife-watching, picnicking, biking and dog-walking. (IS: See Visioning Process Results (2017) in 2018 ACF Management Plan, page 279). Subsequent input from Town residents identified expanded mountain biking opportunities, including connections to abutting trail systems, as important. Others were concerned how new types and intensities of trail traffic would affect existing users, human and animal alike.

Legal and Policy Guidance

Reflecting science, Town legal and policy documents strongly support sustainable recreation. The ACF Conservation Easement establishes recreation as one of its central Purposes, requiring the Town to “provide for non-motorized, non-commercial recreational, educational and other appropriate community uses.”

The Easement also requires the Town to “conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitat, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality and native flora and fauna...and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values....” This echoes the Richmond Town Plan, which calls for protecting “priority natural areas” and ensuring “best stewardship” of Town-owned land such as the ACF. As noted elsewhere in this plan, the ecological importance and sensitivity of the ACF’s natural features and contributions are well-documented in assessments by the Vermont Land Trust, Audubon Vermont, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, UVM Field Naturalist Program, UVM Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative, Arrowwood Environmental, and others.

Examining Options

As part of its due diligence, the ACF Committee reviewed proposals for building several miles of new trails and associated bridges and boardwalks, some to connect the forest to trail systems on adjoining private land and to networks beyond. The Committee considered factors that had changed or come to light since the original, 2018 Management Plan was written, among them:

- *The ACF’s ecological role and importance.* Assessments by UVM, Arrowwood and others since the original plan was written confirm the ACF’s value for black bear, bobcat, whitetail deer, fisher and other wildlife, especially in the northern, least developed and visited areas of the forest.
- *Advances in recreation.* New equipment and technologies are increasing recreational demands, allowing more people to penetrate farther, faster and deeper into forests more often and with less effort. Social media and trail recreation maps direct people places only few knew about a decade ago, including rich, remote natural areas and habitats.
- *Continuing research showing wildlife’s sensitivity to trail traffic.* Recently published scientific

studies and literature reviews further explain how trail traffic can fragment, degrade and destroy productive wildlife habitats within “zones of influence” extending hundreds of meters from the trails themselves.

- *Limited space for sustainable trail development.* Even buffers of a modest 100 meters around sensitive areas would preclude trail development nearly all of the ACF [IS: show a map?]. The steepness and wetness of the surrounding terrain is another concern [IS: refer to map below], and could subject development projects to state and local permitting requirements.
- *The Indigenous Land Acknowledgement.* The Town of Richmond has pledged [IS: where?] to foster a healthy forest community by incorporating into our management practices the Traditional Ecological Knowledge that sustained our area’s forests for thousands of years.
- *Assessments of needs.* There are a number of trails available to the public within Richmond and its neighboring towns, most on private lands.

Achieving Balance

[CR: I do not agree with this.....needs discussion and vote..this is Chase]

The Management Plan’s approach to meaningfully protecting the forest and accommodating diverse recreational and other community wishes centers on balancing ecological and recreational needs. The plan [IS: Cite sections A6 and B6] creates two recreational management zones based on the particular topography, sensitivity and accessibility of each. It puts equal emphasis on conserving the integrity of ACF’s interior forest, and facilitating public access to the entire property :

- North of the former VAST trail, the forest remains open to hiking, hunting and other activities on footpaths, with access improved through light maintenance of select forest roads and skid trails. The remote, rugged terrain helps prevent overuse of this recognized sensitive area..
- South of and including the former VAST trail, the Management Plan encourages development of new trails for casual hiking, mountain biking and other activities. Route 2, the ACF parking lot and existing trail and utility road connections provide convenient access to this area (and also simplify trail construction and maintenance for the Town).

Trails in the south include shorter loops from the parking area to ensure the property is accessible and inviting to people of all ages and abilities, including families with young children and older people. They can also accommodate visits by school groups.

This dual-zone strategy helps the Town meet its legal [IS: specify which legal and policy obligations] and policy obligations. It also provides the community with an expanded range of recreational opportunities balanced with minimal impacts on its most secluded, sensitive and ecologically sensitive areas.

Dogs are to be kept on leash at all times, following the model of the Audubon Society (Huntington), in order to protect the forest wildlife. This is more stringent than the town dog ordinance, and is intended to protect wildlife and vegetation as well as other forest users. Hence no hunting with dogs. Voice control may not always be effective, and may disturb wildlife anyway because of the (loud) vocalization required. All pet waste must be carried out. While we love hiking with our dogs too, birds and other wildlife think of dogs, even friendly ones, as predators and can be very sensitive to their presence. Research has shown this can lead to abandoned nests, unnecessary stress and exhaustion, and decreased available habitat. We

also know that people see more wildlife in places where dogs are not allowed.

Special considerations

- *Hunting*. Benefits include control of the ACF's deer population, important to restoring healthier diversities of age and species to the forest's trees and understory. Hunters and non-hunters can share the landscape at any time of year. The ACFC urges each to take safety precautions such as wearing highly visible clothing and keeping dogs leashed. Citizens of recognized Abenaki tribes may obtain free hunting licenses from the state of Vermont. See the posted guidelines for the latest requirements and advice.
- *Trapping*. Because of safety hazards to visitors, pets and bycaught animals, trapping is not permitted in the ACF.
- *Snowmobiling*. Previously the ACF contained a snowmobile trail that was part of the VAST trail network. Snowmobiling may be permitted to resume on the former VAST trail subject to a use contract ensuring compatibility with the ACF Conservation Easement and Management Plan. Motorized recreation is otherwise prohibited in the ACF.

Process for Considering Future Trails [IS: Check for duplication/ consistency with Section B6]

Proposals to the Selectboard and easement holder for new trails must conform with this or subsequent ACF Management Plans and:

- Document the needs and benefits of the new trail for specified users (hikers, runners, mountain bikers, skiers, etc.)
- Map the proposed trail route in relation to nearby sensitive features, 100-meter envelopes around them and slope and soil suitability for the types of anticipated usage.
- Obtain cost estimates for trail and infrastructure assessments, design, permitting and management, including compliance with the ACF Trail Stewardship Plan.
- Engage with the Conservation Commission, Trails Committee and the public to address the proposals compatibility with the Conservation Easement, Town Plan and Management Plan.
- Conform with the Trail Stewardship Plan.
- Obtain Selectboard and easement holder approvals along with any required State or Town permits.

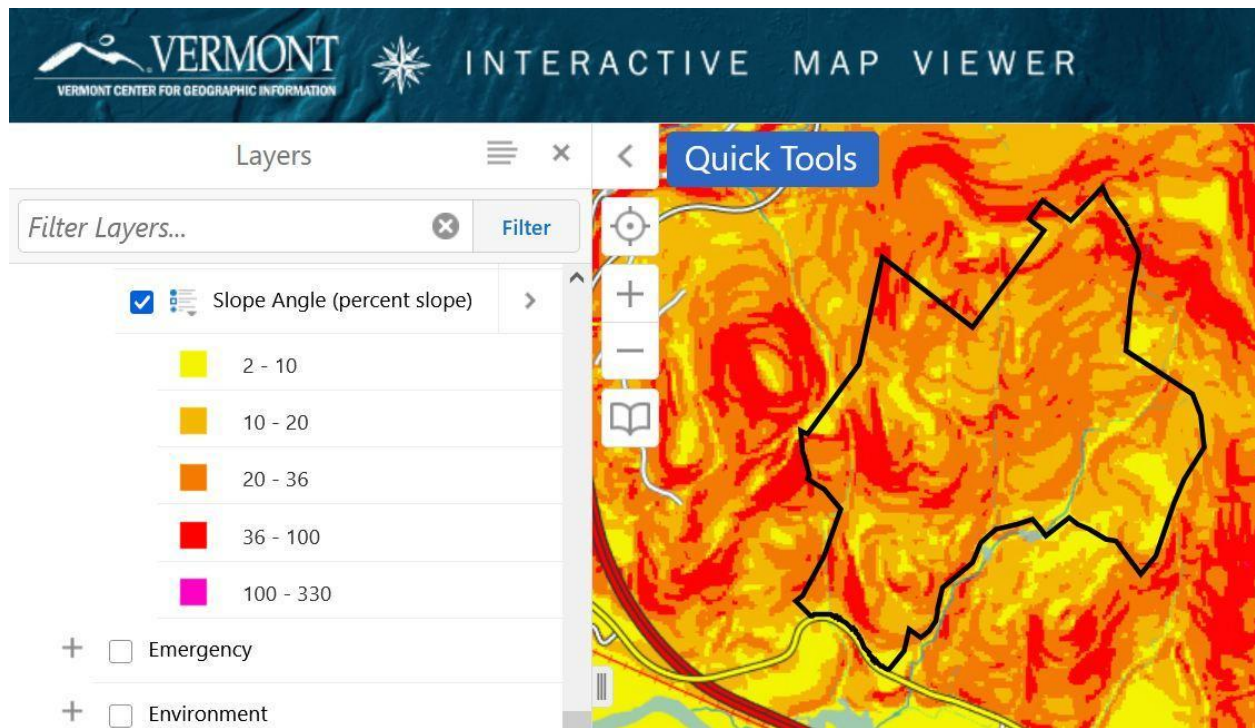


Figure __: Slopes of terrain in the ACF. Richmond's Zoning Regulations identify special provisions for development on slopes greater than 20%, and greater than 35%.
Source: Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

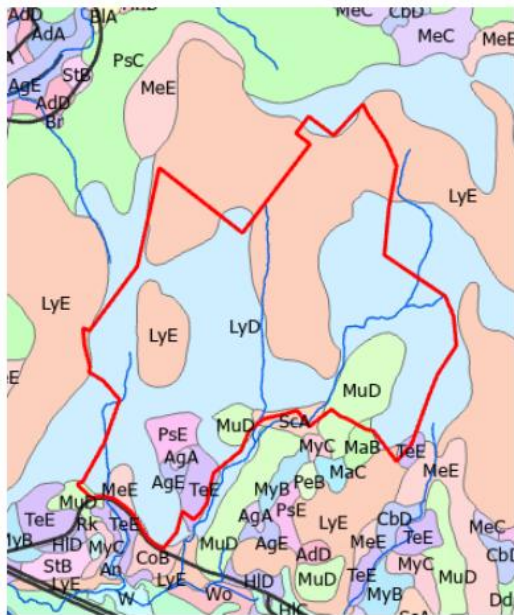


Figure __: Soil distribution in the ACF [IS: Source: UVM Forest Ecological Management Cooperative)]

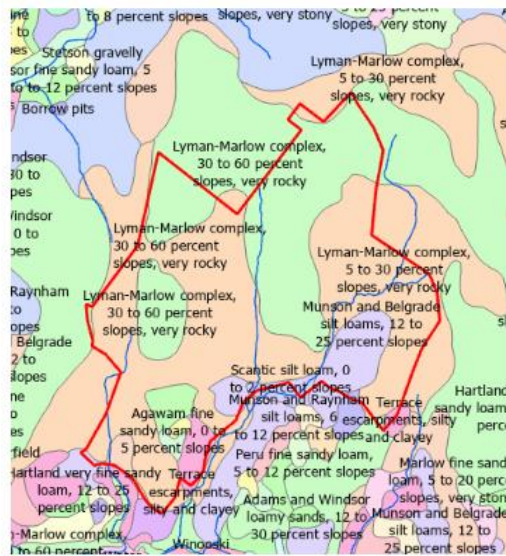


Figure __: Soil types in the ACF [IS: Source: UVM Forest Ecological Management Cooperative)]

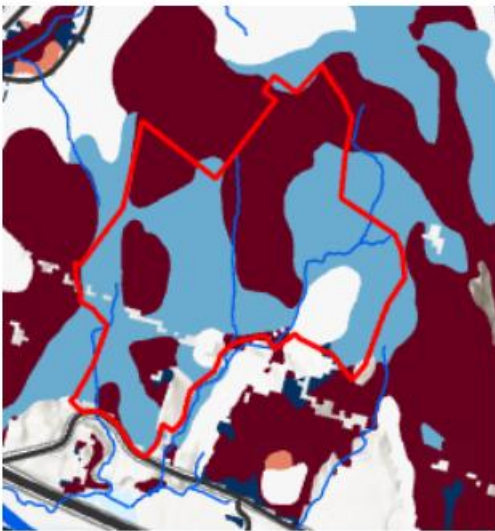


Figure __: Soil suitability for trail construction in the ACF. (Sources: UVM Forest Ecological Management Cooperative)

Process for Constructing Approved Trails [BE: Might we cover this in B6?][IS: Yes, check for duplication in B6]

- A hired professional trail designer will flag a route that, to the best of their ability, follows the route appearing in the approved Trail Design Map.
- A professional ecologist, will walk the flagged route and a 50-foot buffer on either side to determine whether there are any fine-scale features (rare, threatened, or endangered species) that would be adversely impacted by the proposed trail development. If there are, the trail designer will consult with the ecologist to identify a suitable re-route.

- The Committee may make minor adjustments to the Trail Design Map to ensure protections of known sensitive areas, as identified and mapped in existing ecological assessments.
- Following Easement holder and Selectboard approval, the Committee will work with the Richmond Trails Committee, volunteer groups or individuals and/or a hired trail-builder to install trails which meet standards and designs agreed upon by the Committee and approved by the Selectboard and DRB.
- The ACFC will seek grant funding as necessary to support the design, construction, and maintenance of trails approved and included on the Trail Design Map.

Potential Recreation Partnerships [IS: Move to B6, for consistency with other sections in the MP?]

- Richmond Trails Committee
- Richmond Conservation Commission
- Chittenden County Forester
- UVM Community Forest Program
- 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

[BE: The following (drafted by ChatGPT) might be better placed in the B6, where it could be more easily modified as changing situations warrant)]

Trail Maintenance Commitment Agreement

This Trail Maintenance Commitment Agreement ("Agreement") is made and entered into as of the ____ day of _____, 20, by and between:

Town or Richmond, the owner of the Andrews Community Forest located at [Address or Legal Description] (Granting Landowner); and

Landowner 2: [Name] ("Receiving Landowner"), the owner of the property located at [Address or Legal Description].

WHEREAS, the Granting Landowner maintains a trail on their property and wishes to connect it to a trail on the Receiving Landowner's property;

WHEREAS, the Receiving Landowner agrees to maintain the trail on their property to ensure its continued usability and connectivity with the Granting Landowner's trail; NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the mutual promises contained herein, the parties agree as follows:

Trail Maintenance Commitment

a. The Receiving Landowner commits to maintaining the portion of the trail located on their property in a reasonable condition suitable for continued use by pedestrians, cyclists, and other agreed-upon users.

b. Maintenance shall include, but is not limited to, clearing debris, repairing erosion, and ensuring safe passage along the trail.

1. **Access and Use**

a. The trail shall remain open for public or private use as determined by the Receiving Landowner.

b. The Granting Landowner shall not be responsible for any maintenance, liability, or costs associated with the Receiving Landowner's trail portion.

2. **Duration and Modification**

a. This Agreement shall remain in effect unless terminated by mutual written consent of both parties.

b. Any modifications must be in writing and signed by both parties.

3. **Indemnification and Liability**

a. Each party agrees to hold the other harmless from claims arising from their respective trail maintenance obligations.

b. The Receiving Landowner assumes responsibility for injuries or damages occurring on their portion of the trail.

4. **Governing Law** This Agreement shall be governed and interpreted under the laws of the State of Vermont.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed this Agreement as of the date first written above.

Granting Landowner:

[Name]

[Date]

Receiving Landowner:

[Name]

[Date]

Trail Development and Stewardship

[Insert link to Trail Stewardship Plan] **[IS This means Section B6?]**