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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 [the committee is returning to this section after meeting with wetlands experts]

- **Avoid trail development within 50 feet of wetlands to protect water quality. Avoid trail development within 300 feet of identified Wetland Natural Communities to protect habitat integrity and ecological functions.**
- **Set class III wetland buffer (100ft?)**
- **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

- In the northern zone, close trails within 300 feet of Hemlock stands during winter months (December 1st - April 30th) to protect the critical roles these areas play in sheltering deer and other species from harsh weather.

Legend

Red - Brad

Green - Ian

Blue - Sam

Purple - Wright

Orange - Dan

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.

[To keep decisions fair and consistent, the ACFC will review new trail proposals during the regular 5-year management plan updates, when they can be considered alongside conservation priorities, recreation balance, and monitoring data. This avoids piecemeal decision-making and constant pressure from one-off requests. Exceptions may be considered if a proposal is needed for safety reroutes, urgent environmental protection, unique funding opportunities, or clear improvements to trail sustainability—but otherwise, proposals will be held for the full planning cycle so that all voices and data are weighed together]

Document the Need, Purpose, and Identify Proposed Route

- Clearly define the intended use, users, purposes, and estimated **financial costs** and funding sources 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 **trail** 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, wildlife habitat, and **wildlife connectivity**
- Is the proposed trail accessible to a range of user types? Consider ages, abilities, and user types. **[I think this should be rephrased as ‘the user types for which the trail is suitable’. Specifically, mechanized or pedestrian or both?]**

Committee Review

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

Expert Review and Flagging

[Flagging should not occur until trail meets preliminary trail review and is approved by ACFC - Need to be a process in place for this. Initially just a proposal with a map should be submitted until the first level of review approves flagging.]

- Engage a ~~professional~~ **qualified** trail designer to flag the preliminary route. **(remove period)**
- Hire a qualified ecologist to walk the flagged route and 50 feet on ~~either~~ **each** side to identify fine-scale ecological features. **(remove period)**
- Adjust the route as needed to avoid:
 - ~~Rare, threatened, or endangered species~~ **Vermont “Species of Conservation Concern”**
 - Fragile soils and erosion-prone terrain
 - Conflicts with known wildlife usage

- Any sensitive areas as outlined in the trail development parameters
- Slopes greater than 20%

Overlay Mapping and ~~Zones of Influence~~ Buffers

- Map the proposed trail using ~~respecting~~ the ~~respective~~ ~~protective~~ buffers ~~from~~ around 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
 - Independent experts
 - The general public (e.g., through meetings, notices, and comment periods)

Regulatory and Legal Compliance

- Ensure compliance with the ~~Conservation Easement and~~ 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 Trails Committee and the Conservation Commission
 - 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*. [added hyperlinks]
- 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~~ the trail project, including proposal, design, construction, and stewardship activities.

6.2.3 Trail Deviation Review Process

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

Define Definition of “Minor Deviation”

A minor deviation is defined as:

~~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. [This seems arbitrary. I suggest instead to identify how much or the protected zone’s buffer area is impacted, but not sure how.]~~
- ~~• 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).~~

A buffer zone encroachment whose area is no more than 5% of the buffer zone’s area, and avoids cutting into the core protected feature.

Require a Justification Statement

- Why the deviation is necessary (e.g., terrain constraints, **trail** 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.

6.3 Potential Recreation Partnerships

[Note newly alphabetized list, and suggested additions]

[another option: list in order of importance?]

[combine two bullets into one: ACF neighbors, including VYCC and Maple Wind Farm]

- Audubon Vermont
- Community Senior Center
- County Forester
- Maple Wind Farm
- Richmond Conservation Commission
- Richmond Land Trust
- Richmond Mountain Trails/Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA)
- Richmond Trails Committee
- Scouts
- UVM Community Forest Program
- UVM Field Naturalist Program
- Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
- VYCC
- Western Abenaki Tribes and Richmond Racial Equity

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