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B6. Recreation Management

B6.1 Recreation Objectives and Actions

Andrews Community Forest Committee manages recreation with care to balance community interest in recreational opportunities with protection of the forest’s ecological health. Outdoor recreation has long been and remains a highly valued tradition throughout the forest. With careful planning, we can offer meaningful access to nature while protecting the forest’s most sensitive ecological features. 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.
- Minimize trail density by consolidating trail footprints.
- Develop and implement a plan for monitoring and responding to major changes in natural resources, trail conditions, and human traffic.
- Utilize rest periods for monitoring after new trail development.
- 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 & Vernal Pools

- Prohibit trail development in and avoid trail development around wetland natural communities and vernal pools to protect habitat integrity and ecological functions.
 - Class III: 50 foot buffer
 - Class II: 100 foot buffer
 - Vernal pools: 300 foot buffer
- Close trails within 300 feet of Class II Wetlands in the spring (March 1st - May 31th) to protect vital habitat during periods of heightened wildlife vulnerability.

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.

6.1.3 Trail Impact Evaluation Period

New trail proposals are considered carefully and at deliberate intervals during defined planning windows. After any new trail or major reroute, that area of the forest enters a minimum three-year rest period to allow evaluation of impacts to soils, vegetation, and wildlife before additional projects are considered. The focus remains on maintaining and improving the existing trail system, while exploring new trails only when they clearly align with recreational and ecological management goals.

- **Rest period:** No new trail approvals in the affected area for at least three years after construction or reroute.
- **Exceptions:** Safety concerns, environmental protection (e.g., erosion or drainage repairs), or legal/funding requirements.
- **Goal:** Keep the pace of trail development thoughtful and balanced so the forest can rest, heal, and remain ecologically resilient over time.
- **Consistency:** This approach is consistent with how other Vermont community and state forests manage trail planning—using multi-year rest periods and limited review windows to ensure ecological recovery and careful stewardship.

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. This is a sequential list of steps that must be completed in order.

1) Document the Need, Purpose, and Identify Proposed Route

Requests to the committee should include:

- Clearly define the intended use, users, purposes, and estimated financial cost and funding sources of the proposed trail
- Explain how the proposed trail supports goals in the ACF Management Plan and aligns with the easement's permitted uses
- Justify the proposed trail based on community interest, accessibility improvements, estimated cost, and/or trail connectivity needs
- Identify the proposed trail using existing forest roads or skid trails where possible
- Show the proposed trail on the provided **Sensitive Area Map* ACTION ITEM [committee]: we need to agree on a map to use**
- Adhere to the Trail Development Parameters to ensure compliance with protecting forest integrity, wildlife habitat, and wildlife connectivity
- What is the intended audience for the trail?
 - Is the trail intended for pedestrians, bikes, etc
 - What user ages, abilities, and interests would be targeted?

2) Preliminary Committee Review

- The proposed trail should then be brought to the ACF committee for consideration and preliminary approval
- The trail proposal documentation from step 1 must be submitted to the committee prior to committee review
- Committee will evaluate trail proposals and base decisions and recommendations in alignment with B6.1 Recreation Objectives and Actions

3) Expert Review, Flagging, and Final Map

The applicant and committee will coordinate to:

- Engage an experienced trail designer to flag the preliminary route
- Engage a practicing botanist, wildlife biologist or other qualified, practicing ecological professional to walk the flagged route and fifty feet on each side to identify rare, threatened, and endangered native species or wetlands that could be disturbed by trail construction or usage
- Provide opportunities for members of the ACF Committee to walk the proposed trail
- Adjust the route as needed to avoid:

- Rare, threatened, and endangered species
- Fragile soils and erosion-prone terrain
- Conflicts with known wildlife usage
- Sensitive areas as outlined in the Trail Development Parameters
- Map the finalized proposed trail route, respecting the protective buffers around ecologically sensitive areas

4) Committee Review and Public Input

- Present the proposal to the ACF Committee for further review
- ACFC will invite input from the following groups:
 - Richmond Trails Committee
 - Richmond Conservation Commission
 - The general public (e.g., through meetings, notices, and comment periods)
- Consider abutting landowner input when appropriate

5) Regulatory and Legal Compliance

- Ensure compliance with the Conservation Easement and Richmond Zoning, State, and Federal regulations
- Prepare supporting documents:
 - Final trail map
 - Erosion and sediment control plans (if necessary)

6) Approval and Permitting

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

7) 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 the trail project, including proposal, design, construction, and stewardship activities.

6.2.3 Trail Deviation Review Process

This process allows for limited and carefully considered adjustments to recreational trails adjacent to sensitive natural areas. Deviations may be used to address site-specific safety or terrain challenges, and should be minor, purposeful, and protective of core habitats.

Definitions/Limitations

Trail Encroachment: A trail's encroachment distance may not reduce the buffer width by more than **20%**. The buffer width is the distance from the sensitive area to the outer edge of the buffer. **(see diagram 1).**

Fragmentation Area: The combined total area of all trail encroachments on a buffer zone shall not exceed **10%** of that original buffered area. Any buffer separated from the original zone by the encroaching trail is considered to be fragmented from the original buffer. **(see diagram 2).**

Require a Justification Statement

Where ZOI trail deviations are proposed, requester shall include a justification statement indicating:

- Why the deviation is necessary (e.g., terrain constraints, trail connectivity need, user safety)
- What alternatives were considered and why they were rejected
- Ecological impact mitigations. Specifically, note the ways in which the remaining management variables noted in Meredith Naughton's Wildlife & Recreation¹ are taken into account by the proposal. These include: trail consolidation, trail use volume, recreation activity type, species specific management/impacts, education, seasonal closures, and trail construction impacts and timing.

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

¹ Naughton, Meredith (2021). Wildlife & Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife. Vermont Fish & Wildlife and Vermont Forests, Parks, and Recreation. 55-58. Retrieved from <https://infoacf.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2021-11-wildlife-managing-trail-use-effects-naughton.pdf>.

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

Legend

Red - Brad

Green - Ian

Blue - Sam

Purple - Wright

Orange - Dan