

Environmental Education in the Andrews Community Forest

The Andrews Community Forest has the potential to provide the community with formal and informal educational experiences that interpret Richmond's natural and cultural history, creating an exciting opportunity to enrich community life. Throughout the ACF land-use planning process, residents expressed a strong interest in a dedicated wild space to learn about the natural world, especially within their town forest.

The ACF is positioned to become Richmond's only site for environmental and cultural education. The committee is poised to support the development of safe, enriching, and inclusive learning adventures through thoughtfully crafted educational materials, signage, programs, partnerships, and infrastructure.

Richmond's three public schools, numerous preschools, day care centers, homeschool programs, senior center, nearby colleges, the VYCC, and the general public will all benefit from a community environmental education hub based in the ACF.

Regional Models for Success

The Green Mountain Audubon Center, Shelburne Farms, Birds of Vermont Museum, North Branch Nature Center, and Krusch Nature Preserve serve as regional models of how natural areas can support both professional and self-guided learning about natural and cultural history. These sites offer valuable examples for creating similar impactful educational infrastructure in Richmond.

Challenges and Opportunities

The ACF offers many advantages for educational programming, including location, available parking, and overall accessibility. These elements make the ACF an ideal site for guided programs, habitat stewardship projects, outdoor recreation lessons, and working lands management workshops. Challenges to address:

- Steep terrain in parts of the forest
- Limited accessible trails
- Minimal parking capacity
- Lack of pedestrian access (most visitors will need to drive)
- Minimal mapping
- Lack of a Risk Management Plan to maximize safety for users ie, evacuation routes, emergency protocols, appropriate trail design for multiple users to share trails safely, alerts for when all hunting seasons are allowed

These considerations should inform the planning and implementation of education infrastructure and programming.

Below is a list of objectives and tasks. Objectives 1-3 should be considered high priority, while Objectives 4-5 are of moderate priority.

9.1 Educational Objectives and Actions

The following objectives guide the development of educational initiatives in the ACF. Objectives 1–3 are high priority. Objectives 4–5 are of moderate priority.

Objective 1: Provide education opportunities to local schools and community groups.

Actions:

- Develop a self-guided tour with interpretive materials for teachers to use on field trips.
- Improve kiosk content and digital resources (maps, audio, data collection tools, photographs) to support educational programming.
- Facilitate educational programs about the natural and cultural history of the ACF, including habitat stewardship projects.
- Partner with educators to design field trips that align with school curricula.
- Provide safety information, procedures, and emergency access.

Objective 2: Recognize and honor Indigenous connections to the land.

Actions:

- Dedicate a portion of the kiosk to sharing the history of Abenaki use and care of the land.
- Host programs and events that include speakers knowledgeable about Indigenous perspectives (e.g., book clubs with authors, partnerships with UVM, VYCC, and the Richmond Free Library).
- Continue to seek guidance from Indigenous leaders, cultural organizations, and community members to inform the naming of trails and places that reflect Abenaki heritage.

Objective 3: Increase access to nature-based programming for the general public.

Actions:

- Host events such as bird walks, guided hikes, nature programs, mountain bike and snowshoe clinics.
- Lead seasonal guided walks that highlight the natural history during that time of

year.

- Support a music and art festival that celebrates the natural and cultural history of the ACF.

Objective 4: Engage the community in citizen science efforts.

Actions:

- Partner with a high school or university class to develop an ecological and recreational monitoring program.
- Involve community members in using platforms like iNaturalist.
- Identify key research questions and, with partners, design a data collection program.

Objective 5: Support environmental literacy through infrastructure and interpretation.

Actions:

- Design signage, maps, and displays to help visitors understand the forest's ecological systems and human history.
- Explore developing an interpretive center or trailhead learning hub in partnership with other town initiatives.
- Ensure accessibility and inclusivity are prioritized in all infrastructure development.

9.2 Potential Education Partnerships

- Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi
- Birds of Vermont Museum
- Camels Hump Middle School
- Essex Technical School
- Girl and Boy Scout Troops
- Green Mountain Audubon Center
- Mount Mansfield Union High School
- Radiate Art
- Richmond Conservation Commission
- Richmond Elementary School
- Richmond Land Trust
- Richmond Racial Equity Group
- Richmond Recreation Committee
- Richmond Senior Center

- Summer Camps (MMMUSD, MMMUSD Part 2, Our Community Cares Camp) • Green Mountain Orienteering Club
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation
- University of Vermont Field Naturalist Program
- UVM Ecological Planning Lab Extension Program
- UVM Environmental Studies Program
- UVM Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
- Vermont Coverts
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation
- Vermont Land Trust
- Vermont Master Naturalist Program
- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC)