

Draft Minutes
Andrews Community Forest Committee
Regular Meeting, 6 p.m., February 23, 2026
Richmond Town Center

Present: Sam Pratt (co-chair), Brad Elliott (co-chair), Ian Stokes, Wright Preston, Dan Wolfson (via Zoom)

Review of January 26 Minutes

- Approved: Wright made the motion, Brad seconded

Review of February 9 Minutes

- Approved: Wright made the motion, Ian seconded

ACF Management Plan Update – Ecology Section

- Sam explained that he and Brad had met to find the latest draft of this section, as it had not been worked on since at least last summer, before the focus shifted to the Recreation section. They also began work on an outline for the whole document, reflecting the streamlined approach being used in the sections updated so far.
- Ian noted the absence of the section numbers used in previous drafts of this and other parts of the update. Sam explained that they were proving cumbersome to manage and would most easily be added once the whole MP2 draft was organized.
- The committee went through the section line by line, discussing many items and looking for opportunities to consolidate duplicative text and clarify meaning. Sam made revisions directly to the document (attached).
- Wright moved and Dan seconded a motion to approve the section as revised. The motion passed unanimously.
- Sam noted that there may be disagreement among the full committee but that there will be opportunities for anyone to register and discuss contrary opinions at the upcoming Town committee and public reviews of the finished draft.

Next Meetings

The ACFC will next meet on March 9 to review additions made to the combined appendix for the Ecology and Recreation sections.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m., with the motion made by Brad and seconded by Wright.

Ecology

These objectives and actions address the ACF from three ecological perspectives — landscape, community and species — following the organization of the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources publication *Conserving Vermont's Natural Heritage*. See Appendix ___ for background information about this section.

Landscape-Level

Objectives

- Maintain the ACF's ecological integrity, biodiversity and functionality, including its status as “High Priority” and “Priority” interior forest and connectivity components of Vermont Conservation Design.
- Preserve interior forest health and connectivity to support black bears, bobcats, moose, fishers, ovenbirds, hermit thrushes and other deep-forest species.
- Protect neighboring properties' landscape-scale ecological integrity and pursue opportunities to conserve and connect wildlife habitats.
- Protect soils, natural vegetation, water quality and natural climate change resilience through measures shown to control erosion and prevent washouts from soil disturbances on all slopes. Restrict the disturbance of any soil or duff layers on slopes over 35 percent. Monitor existing trails on those slopes for damage and erosion, and take restorative measures that could include closures.

Action Items

- 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 former VAST trail and the powerline corridor. Specifically, the dividing line should follow the northernmost edge of either the former VAST trail or the powerline corridor.
- Maintain hiking, hunting, skiing, snowshoeing, birding, wildlife observation and other types of low-impact recreation north of the former VAST trail, utilizing suitable existing forest roads where possible. Expand recreational opportunities south of the former VAST trail to include new and improved trails for mountain bikers, casual walkers, runners, elderly residents and school groups. (**see Section __ Recreation Management**).
- Work with the County Forester to implement the ACF Forestry Management Plan and enhance the ACF's interior forest and wildlife connectivity values.
- Control the spread of invasive species through their removal and replacement with native vegetation.
- Develop a plan to reduce wildlife mortality along Route 2 crossings.
- Use public signage and events to educate visitors about ACF's ecological role.

Community Level

Objectives

- Maintain the relative isolation and integrity of rare upland natural communities (e.g., Dry Oak Forest) to support the conservation needs of bears, bobcats, wild turkeys, hermit thrushes and other deep-forest, far-ranging species.
- Protect wetland and aquatic habitats, including vernal pools, for diverse species such as salamanders and wood frogs.



- Facilitate connectivity between upland and wetland habitats.

Action Items

- Promote food, cover and structural diversity for terrestrial and aquatic species in upland and wetland natural communities.
- Work with County Forester, UVM resources and professionals to ensure adequate amounts of shade and coarse, woody debris in streams and wetlands.
- Assess and develop plans addressing these major challenges to the ACF's natural communities:
 - Invasive species
 - Tree and plant diseases
 - Climate change
 - Human impacts
- Use signs and outreach tools to inform and involve the public in conserving the ACF's natural communities and the ecological processes and benefits they support.
- Monitor the health of the ACF's natural communities and habitats.
 - Involve ACFC and public volunteers in a program combining field visits, camera and audio traps, and consultations with experts.
 - Utilize black bear, bobcat, and wild turkey as indicators of the overall biodiversity and health of the ACF.
 - Monitor wildlife activity utilizing cameras, microphones, etc. Seek advice on the monitoring plan from resources such as the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.
- Maintain or enhance conditions for wildlife in and among the ACF's natural communities:
 - Utilize best management practices, including hunting, to manage the deer population.
 - Protect mast-producing areas from disturbances during fruiting and wildlife foraging seasons.
 - Monitor forest health and quantitative/qualitative changes to its habitats (**see Appendix C**).
 - **Post to *Times Ink!*, *Front Porch Forum*, the ACFC webpage and social media information about the ACF's natural and cultural history, and efforts to protect and enhance its natural communities and other habitat features **move to education****

Species Level

Objectives

- Conserve rare, threatened, and endangered species by integrating updated information into management plans.
- Maintain the functionality of mature softwood cover for wildlife wintering and ensure nearby food sources.
- Promote the health and viability of mast-producing trees and shrubs.
- Enhance early successional habitats to diversify species and age structures.



Figure_ : Hemlock stands shield deer and other wildlife from winter snows and winds, and also provide nesting spaces for interior forest birds such as the hermit thrush.

Action Items

- Engage ecologists to survey proposed trail routes and infrastructure areas for rare species within 50 feet of their sides and adapt conservation plans accordingly.
- Maintain at least a 70 percent canopy within hemlock stands to preserve their utility as wildlife wintering areas by blocking enough wind and snow.
- Maintain oak and other mast requirements of black bears, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer and other species. Avoid disturbing soft- and hard-mast stands areas during fruiting and foraging seasons.
- **Provide education and updates about ACFC's efforts to preserve its species and habitats. Move to education**