

ACF Draft Management Plan (MP2)

Synthesis of Public Feedback for Committee Discussion

Sources: June 29, 2026 Special Selectboard meeting (oral public comment, official minutes and companion notes); Zoom chat comments from that meeting; written/emailed comments received through July 16, 2026.

This synthesis groups roughly 30 individual commenters (oral and written, across both meeting records and the emailed comments) into recurring themes, following the two-stage approach the committee has already discussed: (1) organize by theme and note frequency, then (2) evaluate each theme against a consistent set of criteria rather than responding to each comment in isolation. A full comment-by-comment response is neither necessary nor especially useful to the public; a transparent framework showing how each theme was considered is more credible and more manageable for a volunteer committee. Frequency counts unique individuals who raised a theme, not the number of times it was mentioned, and is approximate. Frequency indicates how widely a concern is shared — it does not by itself determine whether the concern is correct.

1. Theme Frequency & Assessment

Theme	# Raising It*	Predominant Stance	Ecological Significance	Recreation Significance	Ease of Addressing	Suggested Committee Action
Sunshine/"Sip" connector & north-south connectivity generally	~15	Split — many favor a connector; committee/some residents urge caution	Very High	Very High	Low	Highest-priority policy question — requires explicit findings, not a quick edit
Mountain-biking access north of the powerline/VAST trail (the moratorium)	~10	Split — roughly even between "lift it" and "defend it"	High	High	Low	Core policy decision requiring explicit findings
Confidence in the science / two-zone approach	~10	Support current approach	High	Medium	Low	Retain; strengthen the explanation of the evidence base
Process & governance trust (turnover, perceived conflict of interest, "bait and switch")	~6	Critical of process	Low	Low	Medium	Clarify governance; consider documenting committee history/turnover (Selectboard)
Accessibility & recreation for families/casual users	~4	Want more explicit provision	Low	High	Medium	Clarify vision for southern-zone access
Adaptive management, monitoring criteria & triggers	~4	Support, want more specificity	High	Low	High	Strengthen plan language with concrete triggers/schedule
Document usability (map, executive summary, organization)	~3	Constructive, not critical of substance	None	Low	Very High	Accept — low-cost, high-value edit

Theme	# Raising It*	Predominant Stance	Ecological Significance	Recreation Significance	Ease of Addressing	Suggested Committee Action
Call for a Town-wide vote on the plan	~2–3	Critical of committee authority	None	Low	Medium	Governance question for the Selectboard, not a plan edit
Timeline / urgency (“nine and a half years”)	~3	Frustrated with pace	None	Medium	High	Commit to and communicate a decision timeline
Seasonal closures for sensitive periods	~2	Supportive suggestion	Medium	Medium	Medium	Consider additional language
Wetland trail feasibility (technical)	~2	Informational, not adversarial	Medium	Low	Medium	Already largely addressed; clarify in text

2. Suggested Responses by Theme

For each theme, two draft response directions are offered for discussion: one that takes the comment under advisement with an intent to revise the plan, and one that defends the current draft. These are starting points for committee discussion, not final language — in several cases (noted below) the committee may want to land somewhere between the two, or combine elements of both.

1. Sunshine (“Sip”) Connector & Regional Connectivity

The single most-discussed issue: whether MP2 should commit to, or at least clear a path toward, a trail connection north to the Sip of Sunshine trail network.

Option A — Open to revision: “The committee heard clearly that regional trail connectivity is one of the community’s top priorities. We are evaluating a defined, monitored path forward for a single connector trail — including conditions such as phased pedestrian-first opening, use monitoring, and a formal agreement among the Town, Vermont Land Trust, and the ACFC — and will bring a specific proposal back to the Selectboard rather than leaving the door closed in MP2.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “MP2 does not foreclose a connector; it declines to commit to one before the ecological and legal groundwork is done. The northern corridor contains the ACF’s highest-value habitat and the connection point is subject to state Forest Legacy easement terms the Town does not control. Committing to a specific alignment now, without that analysis, would be the kind of decision this plan is specifically designed to avoid.”

2. Mountain-Biking North of the Powerline/VAST Trail

Frequently framed as “no science shows bikers do more harm than hikers,” contested from both sides.

Option A — Open to revision: “The committee will revisit whether a narrow, carefully sited exception — limited to a single, monitored route rather than open biking access — can meet the plan’s ecological standards, and will document the specific evidence considered either way.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The restriction is not a judgment that biking is inherently more harmful than hiking; it reflects that the northern zone has documented sensitive habitat, steep and erosion-prone terrain, and species that rely on low, quiet disturbance. Because dispersed pedestrian access is already guaranteed by the conservation easement, adding a maintained bike corridor would add cumulative use to already-sensitive ground rather than simply substitute one user for another.”

3. Confidence in the Science and the Two-Zone Approach

This is the counterweight to themes 1 and 2 and should be presented alongside them, not separately, so the record reflects both sides fairly.

Option A — Open to revision: “We will make the underlying ecological basis for the zoning boundary more visible in the plan itself (rather than only in the appendices), including a short, plain-language summary of the Vermont Town Forest Stewardship guidance and the site-specific assessments that informed it.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The two-zone structure follows Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation guidance for town forests and reflects a multi-year ecological assessment, not committee preference. The committee is not persuaded that public comment volume on one side of this question outweighs the ecological record, and will retain the zoning approach while continuing to explain its basis.”

4. Process & Governance Trust

Concerns include committee turnover/attrition, a perceived conflict of interest involving an abutting landowner, and a call to re-engage outside ecological consultants.

Option A — Open to revision: “The committee will document, in an appendix or companion memo, the history of the plan’s development — including the 2023 restart, membership changes, and the rationale for the current approach — and will ask the Selectboard whether an independent review of the ecological basis would be useful before the plan is finalized.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “Committee membership turnover reflects the demands of unpaid volunteer service on a technical, multi-year project, not a coordinated effort to reach a predetermined outcome; a majority of current and recent members, including several with no stake in trail access either way, support the current draft. The plan’s recommendations rest on named, cited ecological sources (Arrowwood’s assessments, VT Fish & Wildlife guidance, the Vermont Town Forest Stewardship guide), which the committee is glad to walk through with any member of the public or the Selectboard.”

5. Accessibility & Recreation for Families and Casual Users

The concern that the plan, as written, doesn’t clearly deliver low-barrier recreation for children, older residents, or people with accessibility needs.

Option A — Open to revision: “We will add explicit language describing the southern-zone trail network’s intended grade, width, and surface standards for shared use by families, older residents, and people with accessibility needs, so this is visible in the plan rather than assumed.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The southern zone was deliberately sited on the ACF’s gentlest terrain, closest to the parking area, for exactly this purpose, and already connects to the Maple Wind and VYCC trail networks that serve a broad range of users; the plan’s vision for that zone doesn’t need to change, but we agree the document could say so more plainly.”

6. Adaptive Management, Monitoring Criteria & Triggers

A request for concrete, scheduled monitoring with defined criteria that would trigger a management response, rather than general language about “monitoring and adaptive management.”

Option A — Open to revision: “We will add a monitoring schedule with a short list of specific indicator sites, an annual or quarterly assessment cadence, and defined criteria that would trigger a management change — addressing the specific gap identified in public comment.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The plan already establishes an adaptive-management framework and a stated commitment to revisit it every 10 years or sooner; we agree the implementation-level detail (specific sites, cadence, triggers) belongs in an annual work plan rather than the management plan itself, and will note that distinction clearly.”

7. Document Usability (Map, Executive Summary, Organization)

Low-cost, high-value, and not contested.

Option A — Open to revision (recommended — no meaningful downside): “We will add a location/orientation map and a one-page executive summary, and reorganize Appendix F along the lines suggested, to make the plan easier for a general reader to navigate. This does not change any substantive policy.”

Option B — Defend current approach: (Not recommended for this theme — there is no ecological or policy reason to decline these edits; a defensive response here would read as unresponsive to a low-stakes, widely-supported suggestion.)

8. Call for a Town-Wide Vote

A process objection to the ACFC/Selectboard adopting the plan rather than putting it to a Town vote.

Option A — Open to revision: “We will ask the Selectboard and Town Manager’s office to confirm and publicly state the plan’s formal adoption process, and will support whatever level of public referendum, if any, Town governance and the ACFC’s charter require.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The ACFC was chartered by the Selectboard to steward the ACF and develop this plan, with the Selectboard retaining final approval authority; that is the process the Town has used for other land-management plans, and the committee does not believe a Town-wide referendum is required or would produce a more informed outcome than the multi-year public process already completed.”

9. Timeline / Urgency

Frustration that meaningful trail decisions have taken nine-plus years.

Option A — Open to revision: “We will publish a specific timeline for finalizing MP2 and, separately, for any subsequent trail-development decisions, so the community has a clear sense of what happens next and when.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The multi-year timeline reflects a deliberate choice to base the plan on updated ecological assessment rather than the earlier, faster process that produced a trail concept several committee members and outside experts found unsupportable; we understand the frustration but stand by the decision to do this carefully.”

10. Seasonal Closures

Option A — Open to revision: “We will evaluate a defined seasonal closure for the identified deer wintering area and any other time-sensitive habitat, and add specific date ranges and affected areas to the plan if the ecological basis supports it.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “The plan’s existing buffer and zone-of-influence framework is designed to address seasonal sensitivity without a blanket calendar closure, which can be difficult to enforce and may simply displace use rather than reduce impact; we’re open to examining this further but are not persuaded a hard seasonal closure is necessary at this time.”

11. Wetland Trail Feasibility

Option A — Open to revision: “We will add a short technical note to the plan citing the applicable state wetland-crossing guidance and clarifying what trail construction standards would be required in or near delineated wetlands.”

Option B — Defend current approach: “This is largely a technical clarification rather than a disagreement about substance; the plan’s standards already anticipate this, and we’ll make that more explicit rather than changing the underlying policy.”