

1                                    Andrews Community Forest Committee  
2                                    Transcript of “Public Engagement Session”  
3                                    March 29, 2023  
4

5 **Note: This transcript has been edited for clarity. Time references are those shown on the**  
6 **video recorded by MMCTV and on view at its website and at:**  
7 <https://archive.org/details/andrews-comm-forest-hrg-03292023>  
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10

11 **Melissa L.:** Thank you so much I want to welcome everybody uh this is a great crowd I'm pretty  
12 impressed. I'm Melissa Levy. I actually don't live in Richmond, I live in Hinesburg and I do a  
13 natural resource-based economic development consulting. The Andrews Community Forest  
14 Committee brought me on board to help them plan, design and facilitate this meeting and then  
15 summarize what comes out of it. We've designed it to allow people different ways of interacting  
16 with the information. You'll see that you've had a chance to walk around and see the maps  
17 around the room and talk with folks. There's also going to be an opportunity to learn through a  
18 presentation and a question and answer session and then finally there'll be an opportunity to  
19 connect through small groups. Though I don't know how small they'll be but we're going to try  
20 our best. I know we're all adults here but I just want to introduce some kind of basic ground  
21 rules. We want to allow as many people to speak as is possible so just hoping people will let  
22 others have an opportunity. When you speak be brief and to the point. One person at a time but  
23 please refrain from side conversations as much as possible. Be curious, listen to and respect  
24 what people are saying. Ask questions to understand. We don't want to get into arguments or  
25 debates. We want to just understand what people are saying. I appreciate you all being here. The  
26 agenda is up here so you can see it. Does anybody have any questions before I turn it over to  
27 Nick? Okay, great. Nick, are you ready?

28 **Nick:** Hi everybody, I'm Nick Neveriski, a member of the ACF committee. I've been on the  
29 committee since 2020. We've got a bunch of other committee members in the room if y'all could  
30 ave your hands or say hi or something just so people know who you are.  
31

32 I'm sure they'll all be willing to chat with you and excited to chat with you today, tomorrow or  
33 pretty much anytime maybe (unless they're in a hurry) about stuff going on with the forest. We  
34 are on a tight schedule so I'm going to jump right in here and give us a little bit of a background  
35 so we all have a grounding in what's going on and what's happened so far. That will be on a  
36 similar page.  
37

38 As we have our discussion this evening some folks are more informed than others. We just want  
39 to make sure we all have the same level of understanding here. We're going to break this  
40 presentation into three sections, One, what's happened so far. Two, what's happening now, Three,  
41 what will happen in the future.

42  
43 First, jumping right into that, what's happened so far, we're going to look at a little history, some  
44 key objectives the committee has been tasked with managing the forest, and some steps taken to  
45 implement requirements so far. First, here's a lengthy, admittedly text-heavy slide talking about  
46 the history of the ACF purchase and initial public engagement.

47 ..

48 We can see this went way back to 2018 when Richmond purchased the parcel with support from  
49 VLT, the Conservation Reserve Fund, U.S Forest Service Forest Community Forest program.  
50 Around the time of that purchase there was a lot of public engagement that happened, including  
51 some public visioning at a meeting with about 80 attendees. January through March that year  
52 there was an online survey. We got 317 responses. So a lot of feedback that went on. There were  
53 also stakeholder interviews with certain, particular interest groups about how to manage the  
54 forest. All of that stuff went into here in July 2018 and in September 2018 drafting a strategy  
55 workshop Then a public meeting to develop the management plan. So all that stuff went into the  
56 management plan that was approved by the Selectboard in 2018, and that the committee has been  
57 tasked with using to manage the Forest to meet the requirements of that plan.

58  
59 So fast forward: The committee's doing work -- we're now in 2020 -- where one of the  
60 management plan requirements was implementing some trails. And particularly not just  
61 implementing them in any old way but implementing them with support from professional trail  
62 designers and professional ecologists.

63  
64 **4:45** So in December 2020 we put out an RFP a request for proposals. That RFP was reviewed  
65 by key members of the public

66  
67 It was approved, we put it out. The folks we hired were Arrowwood Environmental and  
68 Sinuosity. We have an Arrowwood representative over here. Thank you very much. Then those  
69 folks, the ecologists and Trail designers, held a public walk in May 2021 walking people  
70 through. They gave a great presentation about the proposed design. Throughout all that there  
71 have been public meetings and public comments are always welcome.

72  
73 We then had a series of public engagements for folks where could submit structured comments  
74 on the trails. The committee received those, thought about it and had a series of engagements  
75 one-on-one with some folks. And every month there is a committee meeting that public members

76 of the public are always welcome to attend. And we do get plenty of attendees and (5:20) we  
77 have plenty of conversation there.  
78  
79 So I wanted to ground us in this. The committee has heard from some people that we've done too  
80 much engagement, that we need to build the trails, that it's been too long. We've heard from other  
81 folks that we haven't done enough engagement, where is our chance to speak.  
82  
83 So here are some things that the committee has done.  
84  
85 Right this just grounds us in that as we all think about what public engagement has happened  
86 and maybe what we would prefer it to be looking at just one of the outputs from that initial  
87 public engagement and this is just one small output right it was a giant report that we don't have  
88 time to go into right now but is available on the website  
89  
90 this is one of the charts that one of the consultants who support the town with that effort put  
91 together. Members of the community who attended those public engagement meetings rated the  
92 importance of different factors for the forest and you can see Recreation and natural resources  
93 and habitat are both really important. So as we're doing this work to manage the forest we see  
94 there's a lot of community members who really want Recreation. It's really important! And a lot  
95 of community members who really want natural resources and habitat to really be considered and  
96 treat it as well.  
97  
98 So these are the things we're managing for. We're going to look quickly at just some of the key  
99 objectives of the management plan related to the updates. Now we are not going to look at every  
100 key objective in the whole management plan. There's simply too much, and this meeting is about  
101 the updates we're proposing to the management plan.  
102  
103 So we're really going to zone in on the management objectives related to the sections that we are  
104 proposing updating, not the whole plan, just those things. There are some page numbers here --  
105 notice there's two: the one before the slash is in the original, 2018 version of the plan available  
106 on the website, the one after the slash is the one available on the proposed revised plan also  
107 available on the website.  
108  
109 You can see this kind of cluster up top we've got a bunch that relate to in various ways -- natural  
110 resources, wildlife, water, etc.; and then on the bottom we've got some that relate to recreation.  
111 We're going to click through these quickly again. I'm not going to read them verbatim but these  
112 are all available in the management plan.  
113

114 We can see overall we've got a lot of goals to protect different things. We want to protect dry oak  
115 forest; we want to maintain and preserve surface and groundwater quality; we want to preserve  
116 wildlife corridors; we want to protect significant wetland resources. So you want to be careful of  
117 all these natural and valuable and valued elements of the forest: vernal pools, wildlife habitat...

118  
119 When it comes to the recreation we've got some pretty specific things in here we want to have.  
120 I'll call out just a few specifically. We want to have recreational opportunities for different user  
121 types. We've got some specifically called out but it's a multi-use forest. We want to preserve  
122 sensitive areas of the forest by being careful about where we route those trails.

123  
124 **8:02** We're required to establish connectivity between adjacent parcels. Particularly, it says  
125 elsewhere, Sip of Sunshine and VYCC. There's also a connection to Valley View extension in  
126 the West. We are required to establish one long loop from the parking area and many shorter  
127 loops.

128  
129 We're also required to protect the forest interior while still inviting and encouraging public  
130 visitation, so that's a balance, right? It's saying protect it but don't keep people out, encourage  
131 invite I visitation.

132  
133 **8:30**

134 We're required to avoid sensitive natural features whenever possible and there's some specifics  
135 here about striving to achieve a 200-foot buffer around sensitive areas but also acknowledging  
136 the 200-foot buffers aspirational and may not always be possible.

137  
138 So all of these things that we just looked at, all these different pages these two or three pages  
139 how to slip through these are the things the committee was handed in the management plan,  
140 saying the Town has approved this, please make this happen for the forest. And that is what  
141 we're trying to do. **(8:50)** We're trying to thread a difficult needle with a lot of different factors  
142 required.

143  
144 So what have we done so far. right this is what still what's happened so far we've implemented  
145 some things in the management plan already one we did a parking lot expansion that was  
146 required there's more parking which is great more access is wonderful we did a Timber Harvest  
147 as per the forestry management plan and that Timber Harvest was done with support from  
148 Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper and that was a cool thing. It was ecologically  
149 beneficial, and helped to create some diversity which is good for wildlife ... helped improve  
150 habitat quality... make the forest more resilient under climate change... also did some cool stuff  
151 with providing wood to members of the community local wood just like local agriculture cool  
152 thing right ongoing invasive control volunteers of school groups and some opportunistic removal

153 the trail design uh in construction right we've done the 16:56 trail the design part or part of it  
154 we're talking about that today but we hired our professional experts to advise us on that and we'd  
155 Implement a small Trail down low another parking lot and then ongoing wetland delineation so  
156 that's what's happened so far

157  
158 Moving into What's Happening Now. Why are we proposing to update the management plan? A  
159 few reasons. One: Trails not appearing on the trail concept map (which we will look at shortly)  
160 shall not be approved for construction until dot dot dot there's a full review of the original  
161 management plan. So if we want to implement any trails that are not exactly as they are on the  
162 concept map, which we'll look at in a few minutes, we need to right. It can't be done without a  
163 revision, which is what we're doing.

164  
165 We also want to make minor language adjustments to streamline and clarify the document.  
166 Those are things that have no real content bearing. It's just a big document and we can condense  
167 it a little bit.

168  
169 We want to add an indigenous land use acknowledgment, traditional use rights we'll talk about  
170 that.

171  
172 And we want to reflect plain implementation to date. In other words the plan says in some cases  
173 the committee shall do this in the future. Well we've already done it right We should update that  
174 language so it's no longer future tense and the management plan itself says it's okay to make  
175 these changes, right? It says the management plan is intended to be a living and involving  
176 document. More frequent revisions may be necessary especially in the early years of municipal  
177 ownership. So that's why we're proposing to update the management plan

178  
179 Now what parts will stay the same? Honestly, most of it is not being touched in any meaningful  
180 way. Again, minus those changes I talked about, like grammar changes or streamlining a little  
181 bit, in terms of content most of it's really not going to change.

182  
183 The parts that are going to change in terms of content are section 5.1, the indigenous history, and  
184 section 10, recreation. Anything outside of those changes are really just about cleaning things up  
185 and making it a more accessible document.

186  
187 What parts would change? What parts are we proposing changing? That's what we're going to  
188 zoom in on today. First, Cecilia is going to talk a bit about the indigenous land acknowledgment  
189 and related additions. Then we're going to talk about recreation and trails. So, here's Cecilia with  
190 the indigenous land acknowledgment.

191

192 **Cecilia:** Great. Thank you, Nick. So I'm Cecilia Danks. I've been fortunate enough to be on the  
193 committee since the beginning I think or slightly before the beginning. About a year and a half  
194 ago Scott 19:16 Silverstein here from Richmond racial equity which is an organization here in  
195 town um and some others from that group approached the committee and asked about doing a  
196 land acknowledgment for the Town Forest we thought that was a great idea and we were all very  
197 lucky to have Richmond racial Equity lead this effort to develop a land acknowledgment in a  
198 way that was consultative with local Abenaki people as well as other resources and people in  
199 town so as you can see there we consulted Abenaki language and culture Keepers indigenous  
200 authors who provided resources on this looked at many local examples we had Chiefs from two  
201 different tribes attend AFC meetings Vermont Land Trust who has also been working with  
202 indigenous folks gave comments on our work as well as other Richmond residents and acfc  
203 members and in January of 2022 we had a unanimous vote to support the following components  
204 that we're adding to the management plan so we have a full land acknowledgment that's around  
205 page five or six of the revised plan and it begins with what we're calling the shortland Land  
206 Management short land acknowledgment that we could use on the kiosk and other things and it  
207 says the anders Community Forest is located within andakana the unseated homeland of the  
208 western Abenaki people who have a unique connection to this land and who have been its  
209 traditional stewards for millennia now to truly acknowledge indigenous presence on the  
210 landscape we really have to back that up with actions or it's meaningless and so the pieces that  
211 we added we basically had four pieces that we assembled together into an appendix not for it to  
212 be added on but to have all those pieces together so people could see how they were related so it  
213 includes um affirmation of indigenous use rights to hunt and fish and collect products and hold  
214 ceremonies on the land in sustainable ways um it seeks uh engagement of Abanaki people in  
215 stewardship of its Forest by offering if possible a seat on our our committee in the future if um  
216 people are willing and able to do that and to consult with and compensate fairly Abenaki experts  
217 as we revise this plan in the future and undertake major management activities and we also  
218 proposed Trail names and educational signage that reflected the Abenaki presence on the  
219 landscape and this last piece is very important because the Abenaki language is noted by the UN  
220 to be one of the most critically endangered in the world and doing this helps sort of reverse the  
221 erasure of indigenous presence on the landscape and so on the sections in the appendix were  
222 carefully crafted with experts in Abenaki language and culture Keepers to come up with phrasing  
223 that with not only using the Abenaki language but using it in a way that they would have  
224 themselves in naming different features and places sort of the example of calling Mount  
225 Mansfield the Moosehead Mountain we decided that using the Abenaki names for animals would  
226 be a really good way to name the trails that could appeal to children and educate all of us we also  
227 updated the cultural History Section to include some of the indigenous history the species that  
228 were important that we should be considering as we manage the resource and um and then we  
229 took we went throughout the entire plan and it wasn't really reflected in everything Nick said but  
230 if you look carefully through it we've inserted the management objectives throughout the plan

231 and the wording from the appendix that are that relate to the land acknowledgment and that's um  
232 that component and if you have questions later I have copies of the appendix I'm happy to  
233 discuss it.

234

235 **16:30**

236 **Nick:** Other main sections that would change would be about recreation and trails. And to go  
237 through quickly what those would be:

- 238 • One, language would change from aspirational to reflect the present state. Right? We  
239 can't have trails on the ground while the plan says there are no trails on the ground
- 240 • Two, trails to be built matching management plan objective, and as advised by  
241 Arrowwood Environmental, Sinuosity, and community member input. And those are just  
242 referencing back to some of those management plan requirements we were handed from  
243 the Selectboard-approved management plan in 2018 related to what the trail should do.
- 244 • Three, management of built trails. Core elements in the management plan would not  
245 change. For example, multi-use would stay. Prohibition on motor vehicles would stay.  
246 Some details of ongoing trail management, like closure during mud season that's not  
247 specified in the management plan. But it's something that's very much on the committee's  
248 mind. It's something the committee would manage as part of our adaptive management of  
249 trails over time -- seeing how they're used, seeing what needs to be done based on the use  
250 and the conditions that we find.

251

252 **(17:29)**

253 Zooming in a little bit on those trails we're going to look at the Concept Map from the 2018  
254 Selectboard-approved management plan, then we're going to look at the proposed Trail route we  
255 have today.

256

257 So this was in the 2018 management plan. Remember the management plan was the product of  
258 all that public engagement we saw in one of those early slides and voted on and approved by the  
259 Selectboard.

260

261 I want to highlight just a few things. We can see the parcel outlined in red. We've got the power  
262 line cut right there. This brown thing is the VAST trail. It goes over here over to VYCC. We can  
263 see a bunch of smaller loops below the power line as called for. Also, the management plan calls  
264 for one large loop right here. We've got one large loop and then **(18:06)** connecting to Sip of  
265 Sunshine as required the management plan.

266

267 Right up top right there you can see some sensitive areas marked. These are different wetlands or  
268 vernal pools, there's a Dry Oak Forest marked there in pink. Now, I'll mention this was  
269 developed by a great group of volunteers. It was also never ground-truthed yard by yard by

270 ecologists and trail designers. So this is listed as a concept. It conveys the idea but it was never  
271 actually ground-truthed. In fact, what we found when our professionals went out there was that  
272 there are some rooms to improve it ecologically and also there are some facets of this that  
273 actually probably wouldn't physically work, due to cliffs and terrain that were not considered  
274 when this was put together.

275

276 **18:48** So here's our proposal. To orient you again, here's that VAST trail connecting through.  
277 There's VYCC over here, here's our parking area. You can see loops very similar below the  
278 parking line, very similar. Also very similar you can see one trail going up here connecting to  
279 Sip of Sunshine. This is a primary wildlife corridor which you can see marked as a riparian  
280 buffer zone -- that drainage right there.

281

282 The biggest difference that I'll point out is you can see in the concept map from the original  
283 management plan there was this trail proposed for the Northwest Quadrant. Our trail designers  
284 and environmental consultants, once they got out there they were, like, you know, having that up  
285 there has a couple downsides. One, it crosses this wildlife corridor up high and they advised us  
286 against that. They said it would be less disruptive to wildlife to cross only down low. They also  
287 talked about that vernal pool up here. If you get rid of that trail it would move traffic away from  
288 the vernal pool. It would also end up condensing travel. So instead of having all the trails  
289 affecting basically all the forest here you've got trails mostly just in the Northeast quadrant. So  
290 that trail effectively swung around in the original proposal. We had a third trail here but based on  
291 significant community impact and some thoughts about how close that was to that primary  
292 wildlife corridor the community decided to drop that. So that red one is out and the proposal  
293 includes only those purple ones.

294

295 **20:08** So what's going to happen next? Outcomes for this evening? We're going to continue our  
296 conversation here. Right. We know we have some q&a with some panelists here with some great  
297 things to chat about. That's going to start with some questions already submitted. We're going to  
298 have some small group discussions. We'd love to hear from you as well. And then we're going to  
299 work with Melissa to analyze what we hear and consider further revisions if appropriate. And  
300 then once we sort of consider that and what that means we're going to finalize the proposed plan,  
301 and confirm it with VLT. It would ultimately go to the Selectboard and the Selectboard would  
302 have the final approval or not. And they would do that with a public meeting. It would be  
303 publicly warned and so of course everyone would be welcome to go to that as they would any  
304 Selectboard meeting and share their thoughts.

305

306 So that's our background. I'm going to stop right there and we'll go to the next section of our  
307 evening.

308



309 **Melissa L.:** Thanks Nick. So we have questions that were asked. There was an opportunity for  
310 folks to ask questions ahead of time. We have some of those -- we've kind of narrowed those  
311 down to about a dozen questions that we're going to start with. And then after that we'll open it  
312 up. And then we'll take a little break and we'll move into those small groups. Because we have so  
313 many questions, and I do want to allow you guys to have an opportunity to ask questions, too,  
314 we're going to try to limit answers to two to three minutes. Panelists if you can work with me  
315 there. We have a time-keeper who's going to maybe give you a signal if it's getting too long.

316

317 So we're going to start with the indigenous acknowledgment and land use rights questions. This  
318 one's for Cecilia: Can you explain wheeled vehicle use as it relates to indigenous people's ability  
319 to harvest plants and animals? (Or whoever wants to answer it.) **22.20**

320

321 I'm Scott Silverstein representing Richmond Racial Equity um the group that spearheaded um  
322 putting land acknowledgment language into the um into the forest management plan and um the  
323 the language we have in there for wheeled use is um the uh indigenous people have have the  
324 right to harvest um Forest Products um hunting Gathering foraging um we we ask [Music] that  
325 the the products are harvested in quantities that can be taken out of the forest um by hand and we  
326 specifically said not to use wheeled vehicles um copying some language from an agreement at  
327 the Audubon Center um and um there is an exception to that if um because we we want to be  
328 accessible to to all people and so um for um for those who are um Mobility limited um if they if  
329 they wish to um to to use a wheeled vehicle they can get prior permission from from the board  
330 for hat um I think that covers that question great the next one is the ACF management Plan  
331 update focuses on the Abenaki heritage and today's inclusive awareness are there reasons why  
332 we should not instead allow acknowledgment of all indigenous tribes who had use of Vermont in  
333 some point in history can we change the verbiage to reflect all indigenous peoples instead of just  
334 Abenaki sure yeah Richmond is at a Crossroads for everybody forever people Wildlife plants and  
335 we do acknowledge the presence of indigenous people other than Abenaki is both in the full land  
336 acknowledgment and in the um in the Indigenous History Section Richmond racial Equity  
337 sponsored a webinar recently where Judy Dao who is an Abenaki culture keeper explained how  
338 the current practice of land acknowledgments was derived from an indigenous practice of  
339 acknowledging when you were entering the territory of another tribe and so we think it's  
340 appropriate that this both the language and the tribe that spoke the focus of the acknowledgment  
341 are the Abenaki who were the traditional stewards in this area great.

342

343 **25:15**

344 **Melissa L.** We're going to move into recreation and conservation questions that were submitted.  
345 What kinds of adaptive management practices can be used to assess the impact that people using  
346 the Forester are having on the flora and fauna? Is there a certain threshold that might trigger

347 additional actions, and is it possible to limit public access and use once that threshold has been  
348 reached?

349

350 **Dori:** So when we were thinking about answers to this question we were focusing in on the  
351 monitoring probably being for trail conditions. So probably, committee members, assuming that  
352 you're not going to hire stewards (maybe you are but you'd be looking for erosion, you know,  
353 cut-offs, people not walking on the designated trail and incision, which kind of falls in with  
354 erosion as well. In our mind this is probably going to be committee members. In terms of a  
355 threshold that might trigger action I think that that's that's somewhat subjective. I think. There's  
356 always a scale but if you're seeing impacts then best to either address them yourselves or to  
357 consult with folks that can can advise you. Remedies could include rerouting seasonal closures  
358 and stabilization measures.

359

360 **26.52**

361 **Aaron:** I think typically you see this type trail condition monitoring happening by committee  
362 members. In addition to working with Arrowwood Environmental I'm also the chair of the  
363 Community Forest Stewardship Committee in Huntington, so I have some experience kind of  
364 with the management concept here. Frankly that's what we do there -- it's considered a  
365 responsibility of the stewardship committee members to be on the ground in the forest and be  
366 familiar with the conditions of things and to keep track of those trail conditions and what might  
367 need to be improved or updated over time. And so I think the best we can hope for is that  
368 educated people on the ground who care and keeping an eye on things, knowing what to look for.  
369 Maybe some training is in order, maybe some professional assistance when you don't have ready  
370 answers.

371

372 **28:15**

373 **Caitlin:** I think we should maybe we could go through and give introductions. I also just just  
374 want to say too that in addition to the sort of monitoring that Dori and Aaron are speaking of, one  
375 inherent to our management here is it is adaptive management.

376

377 Adaptive management involves accounting for new information as you have it and folding that  
378 into your management plan. So that's exactly the process that we're going through right here.

379

380 Can we do as a volunteer committee, can we carry out the type of super rigorous, quantitative  
381 analysis to track population levels for every animal in the Andrews Forest, and every single  
382 plant? No, that's just beyond the scope of a volunteer committee. So we will follow what is  
383 exactly as Dory and Aaron describe -- the kind of monitoring and that will potentially involve  
384 engaging experts as needed into the future as well. But we're just we're a volunteer committee.  
385 My professional hat is doing the kind of rigorous monitoring and statistical analyses that would

386 be required for this kind of a threshold establishment, and that's just beyond the scope of a  
387 volunteer committee.

388  
389 **Melissa L and others:** Let's do quick introductions before we go move on to the other questions.  
390 Some of you have already spoken but let's just go across and introduce ourselves.

391 oh you can't hear us sorry Dory Barton with Arrowood Environmental 36:51 and I'm Aaron  
392 worthley ecologist and GIS analyst with Aero Environmental (29:46) I'm Rebecca Roman my  
393 pronouns are she her and I am the Chittenden County Project Director for Vermont Land Trust  
394 so I'm the person that will be reviewing the plan. I'm Caitlin Littlefield pronoun she her and I sit  
395 on the the committee here and I'm also a scientist with conservation science partners 37:16 I'm  
396 Cecilia danks she her and I'm on the Andrews committee Scott Silverstein he him um Richmond  
397 racial equity Pat Maynor she her and I have no qualifications like all these people do 37:34 other  
398 than I've been on the Hinesburg Town Forest committee since Moses was a baby and I I heard  
399 that Andrew watched the recording Andrea short sleeve from Vermont fish and wildlife said nice  
400 things about how we balance Recreation and sustainability in our town forest and I can't say we  
401 have it right but we keep trying. Great thanks all to all of you uh

402  
403 **Melissa:** The next question is, how does the committee go about allowing other forms of  
404 recreation, and would allowing other forms of recreation -- no machines ATVs wild harvesting --  
405 require another amendment to the management plan?

406  
407 **31:04**  
408 **Rebecca:** I can just speak briefly to how that intersects with the conservation easement. The  
409 conservation easement restricts motorized and mechanized access on the property. There is a pre-  
410 approved access for snowmobiles along the VAST Trail and that's embedded in the easement  
411 language. But it's specific to along the VAST Trail only. If there were to be a proposal for  
412 motorized or mechanized access or trail development on the property that would require my  
413 review and approval of that.

414  
415 **Caitlin:** So that's speaking to the conservation easement. What's specifically restricted in the  
416 management plan -- I can read the language here: motorized vehicles are not allowed on the  
417 property except for use by those with physical disabilities, snowmobiles using the VAST Trail,  
418 vehicles required for property management or in the case of emergency. So that is codified in the  
419 management plan. To get to the direct question, which says would any sort of amendment be  
420 required -- yes, an amendment would be required if we were to allow for snow machines or  
421 ATVs. But other than on the VAST Trail those are currently not allowed.

422

423 With regards to wild harvesting, the management plan does not specify on that front and so  
424 therefore it's not prohibited. Commercial harvest is restricted to the indigenous uses as well but  
425 that is for Scott's response following sustainable practices laid out in Appendix D.

426

427 **Melissa L.:** The next question is about e-bikes. Are they allowed in the forest? If they are not  
428 allowed what can be done to ensure that e-bikes do not travel in the in the forest?

429

430 **Caitlin:** I can speak to that one as well. It's a really important question that we've only started to  
431 begin discuss as a committee. I don't want to speak on behalf of the committee in terms of  
432 making a statement on what we're doing or will do. That's not established yet. Rebecca can speak  
433 to what is in the conservation easement, but one thing that I'll say is that the we may well be  
434 looking to what other multi-use trail networks do in terms of addressing e-bike use.

435

436 For example the Kingdom Trails do not allow e-bike use except for those those users who have  
437 disabilities and are protected by law. That's a possible route that we might go down because part  
438 of this is really thinking about equity and access as well, and not excluding users participating.  
439 So that's the committee perspective right now, but what's codified in the conservation easement  
440 Rebecca can speak to.

441

442 **33:45**

443 **Rebecca:** In the conservation easement we perceive Class One e-bikes, which are e-bikes with  
444 pedal assist, to fall under the category of non-motorized, non-mechanized vehicles. We believe  
445 that that can allow for accessible access to properties and it does not require approval by the  
446 easement to incorporate that in your management plan. And from our perspective it's up to the  
447 community or the committee to determine whether or not that is something that they would want  
448 to include.

449

450 **Melissa L.:** What can we do to address the impact of dogs, especially those off leash on wildlife  
451 in the ACF?

452

453 **34:36**

454 **Caitlin:** This is public land, a public forest, and dogs are allowed in the Andrews Community  
455 Forest. The management plan says that that is subject to the Town of Richmond Animal Control  
456 Ordinance, which indicates a dog should be on a leash or under voice control. So dogs are  
457 expected to be on a leash when in the Andrews. I've seen wonderful dog owners all over the  
458 place keeping their dogs on leash. I've seen not so wonderful dog owners not keeping their dogs  
459 on leash. We simply cannot police the behavior of everybody. So we would ask that folks model  
460 good behavior and encourage others to do so. I think that there's a role for education on this front

461 as well. Perhaps our trail kiosks, for example, and the sort of panels that the RCC hosted about  
462 some of these impacts. So that's all I have on that front.

463

464 **35:24**

465 **Melissa L:** What unique challenges are ...

466

467 *[Inaudible audience member asks question about dog control]*

468

469 **Melissa L.:** Most dog ordinances do allow for voice control. I'm not sure if Richmond's does.

470

471 **Caitlin:** That's what I just said 43:09 well this is the language from the management plan so we  
472 should confirm that.

473

474 **Cecilia:** It just follows the Richmond ordinance that dogs should be either on a leash or under  
475 voice control.

476

477 **Caitlin:** The management plan does not say either. It should be on a leash yes so we specify in  
478 the management plan the dog should be on a leash.

479

480 **Melissa:** We are going to hold other questions until after we get through this list, so just please  
481 we do want you to ask questions but just hold on.

482

483 So, what unique challenges are presented by the fact that the Andrews Forest property is  
484 considered a high priority forest for connectivity and ecological integrity? How did the status  
485 inform trail planning and what are the best practices for recreation design that affects the forest's  
486 ecological function as little as possible?

487

488 **37:01**

489 **Caitlin:** I'll kick this off to say that recognizing where this property is this parcel is situated in  
490 that larger forest block and the importance of that connectivity is one of the primary motivations  
491 for us engaging in what is a pretty unique process of calling for a trail network design to involve  
492 ecologists and trail designers on equal footing from the from the ground up rather than trails  
493 going in and damages being mitigated after. The siting of this parcel -- where it exists in the  
494 landscape -- was a major motivation for engaging folks like Dori and Aaron.

495

496 **37:39**

497 **Aaron:** So a little very brief background on sort of what High Priority Forest blocks mean and  
498 where that comes from. This is a statewide planning initiative that was undertaken by Fish and  
499 Wildlife I think back around 2010 or 2011. They first started the process of identifying forest

500 blocks and it was really in response to you residential and commercial fragmentation of large  
501 forested areas. The textbook case is the is the residential sprawl in Stowe where private roads  
502 wind up mountainsides with lots of scattered, relatively large home development 45:37 that's just  
503 taking up vast areas of previously undisturbed Forest or mostly undisturbed Forest.

504  
505 This mapping project of forest blocks which later came under this umbrella of Vermont  
506 Conservation Design was done at a statewide scale using what I would say are relatively coarse  
507 inputs and somewhat inaccurate mapping. But that's not to say it's meaningless certainly at the  
508 scale for which it was developed. It's a really important tool to help us understand where these  
509 important large areas of intact forest are and where it's important to maintain connectivity  
510 between them in order to continue to have wide-ranging wildlife across the state.

511  
512 It's also important to note that trails and, in fact, many roads including trails that are used by  
513 motorized vehicles are not considered fragmenting features in the development of forest blocks  
514 that the state has conducted. So there are certainly high priority Forest blocks with far greater  
515 trail impact currently than what this parcel would have.

516  
517 For example, the Mount Mansfield toll road is not a fragmenting feature in the huge Mount  
518 Mansfield Forest Block. Things like the Camels Hump trails are not fragmenting feature, nor is  
519 the Perry Hill trails in Waterbury, which is kind of an extensive bike network. These are just  
520 kind of some examples of some of those. When you think about the statewide mapping of these  
521 forest blocks it doesn't consider these trails to be things that would break. It's really the large  
522 canopy openings and heavy disturbances like lights, sounds, vehicles, residential development --  
523 that sort of thing.

524  
525 I would say that in many ways the goals of the Vermont Conservation Design and what these  
526 habitat blocks were were developed for has been met through the conservation of this parcel in  
527 that it won't be developed for residential use. That being said [Laughter] yeah yeah, so you know  
528 I think it's also important that we evaluate habitat in terms of its larger context, it's larger  
529 connectivity. So that's certainly something that gets considered when we as ecologists look at  
530 what's happening on the ground in a particular parcel okay

531  
532 **Melissa:** Moving along -- are ecological reviews required for logging in the ACF and how is it  
533 similar or different from the ecological reviews required for implementing a trail plan?

534  
535 **Caitlin:** I'll speak to that only because, unfortunately, Ethan Tapper, our Chittenden County  
536 Forester who wrote the Forestry Management Plan couldn't be here this evening. But he is an  
537 outstanding steward of this land and many other town forests around here. He's also the person  
538 responsible for ensuring that all forestry activities throughout Chittenden County follow the

539 acceptable management practices established by the State of Vermont designed to protect water  
540 quality and other features. So we really have an outstanding person developing and stewarding  
541 the forestry management activities on this parcel. His forestry management plan was signed off  
542 on and, as is required by the conservation easement, signed off on by Caitlin Cusack, who is  
543 another licensed forester with VLT. She just so happens to have won one of the first ever  
544 Audubon endorsements for her approach to forestry management so I can assure everybody here  
545 that the logging that was carried out and the forestry management plan in general is in really  
546 good hands.

547  
548 I'll just mention briefly that some of the management objectives associated with the forest  
549 management are to improve habitat, to mitigate invasives and disease on the parcel, to enhance  
550 the resilience of the forest under climate change. So, for example, promoting species that are  
551 better adapted to the warmer temperatures and precipitation variability coming down the pike.  
552 Like white oak, which are great for wildlife. And creating some more openings for, especially,  
553 nesting birds. I will also say that the harvest looks messy initially to humans. But that is part of  
554 the regeneration process of the forest. It means that we are seeing other species emerge that were  
555 otherwise shaded out. For example, a lot of species like berries that are important for wildlife.  
556 That's one example of how it doesn't look great to us initially necessarily but it's really quite  
557 important for a lot of wildlife.

558  
559 Also, the modest volume of wood products that have come off of the forest so far have, as Nick  
560 already alluded to, gone to some bridge construction in the forest. Firewood went to Wood for  
561 Good, a local organization that helps get firewood into the hands of folks that that need fuel  
562 assistance. I'll wrap up simply by saying that I think there's there's an important role for us  
563 recognizing that the use of local wood resources, rather than importing wood from plantations in  
564 the South or the Pacific Northwest or tropical forests, is something we should take a hard look at  
565 and that we should start taking responsibility for some of our wood use. It's what our homes are  
566 made out of, what the cardboard Amazon box that many of you probably all received in the past  
567 week is made out of, and then your wood stove as well. So I think taking some responsibility for  
568 our wood consumption is pretty important and this forest can serve an important role in that.

569  
570 **45:15**  
571 **Aaron:** We definitely encourage ecological review or consideration in forest management for  
572 sure I think this property has some particular challenges that present an opportunity for the town  
573 to kind of rise above and beyond even just the acceptable management practices, and to try to be  
574 a real demonstration for how things can be done to the highest possible standardsj.

575  
576 **Melissa L:** What ongoing practices would be most effective to monitor and evaluate potential  
577 impacts of recreation on wildlife?

578

579 **46:02**

580 **Aaron:** This is a challenging one. We talked a little bit about monitoring trail use and impact  
581 previously, and so when you're talking really specifically about monitoring the impacts of  
582 recreation on wildlife I think you kind of fall back to a little bit of what Caitlyn mentioned  
583 before, which is the challenge and the cost and the kind of extensive nature of doing something  
584 actually meaningful in that realm.

585

586 The UVM field naturalist team who studied this property, I don't know, in 2019, maybe  
587 somewhere in that range, prepared a kind of a conceptual monitoring methodology which would  
588 be carried out by volunteers -- so that could be community members or stewardship committee  
589 members or another group of volunteers. I think these kinds of approaches to volunteer  
590 monitoring are good for trail condition monitoring as we mentioned before. And they're really  
591 good for building enthusiasm and excitement about what's out there on the property, because it  
592 gets people engaged and on the land looking for things, and really seeing what's going on.

593

594 But I'm not sure that it really gives you any actionable information about how things are  
595 changing or being affected by the activity on the property. I think it's unlikely you could  
596 probably get a lot of actionable information out of any kind of a study out there given the long  
597 history of human interactive interaction on the land.

598

599 I think there's been a fair amount of wildlife adaptive adaptability already, so it's a matter of  
600 degrees and how much you would see in changes. Of course that depends on the levels of uses.  
601 But really, a comprehensive monitoring effort that would get actionable and statistically  
602 significant information would require a really rigorous study design, with really long-term,  
603 heavily engaged monitoring and, probably, professional support with probably expensive  
604 equipment and would probably be very costly.

605

606 **48:52**

607 **Pat:** This is one point where I feel I actually have something to add. Hinesburg's been through  
608 this kind of process that you're going through except over a longer period of time. One of our  
609 questions was what about the effect of our trails on wildlife. I think what we learned is exactly  
610 what Aaron said. There's thousands of species from microorganisms to Black Bear and moose in  
611 our forest, and we certainly can't go out and count them or count the plants. But we can try to  
612 make sure that we're providing them what they need in terms of habitat enough diversity of  
613 plants so that they can eat that they have nesting areas, various structure -- the forest structure,  
614 the brush and the mid-level branches in the canopy -- and clean water. **[Peace & quiet?]** We're  
615 doing the things that we can to provide all those species what they need and that my takeaway  
616 learning from that. That's what we're trying to do.



617

618 **Melissa L:** How do you suggest that current and future science on impacts of outdoor pursuits be  
619 shared with the public? What are some best practices in this area?

620

621 **50:10**

622 **Caitlin:** I can jump on that one. First off, and I say this as a scientist myself, it's not our charge  
623 as a committee to be a public science engagement committee. That's not that's not part our  
624 responsibility. But it is our responsibility to be incorporating the best available science into our  
625 management decisions And as a public engaging group like we're doing right now and along  
626 with the Richmond Conservation Commission look for those opportunities to help make sure that  
627 everybody understands what the best available science does say. So I really do applaud the  
628 Richmond Conservation Commission for hosting that panel a few weeks ago in which there were  
629 four experts that spoke specifically to some of these trade-offs of balancing recreation and  
630 natural resource management.

631

632 One of the major lessons that came out of that is that the science is still emerging [??] in terms of  
633 the impacts of human recreational use on plants and animals. That's still a growing field and we  
634 don't have clear a clear understanding of how **every single activity** at different times of day at  
635 different seasons affects every individual of a given species or the entire population of species.  
636 What happens when you're looking beyond the trails, looking at the entire landscape, so, again,  
637 it's still a growing science and it it is our responsibility to make sure we're keeping track of that.

638

639 I think in that vein though one of the challenges when you still have an emerging body of science  
640 is that it's kind of easy to conflate the idea that ....no evidence of impact does not equal evidence  
641 of no impact. Does that make sense if we don't yet have the evidence yet in some of these cases?  
642 And so we're being as precautionary as we can in designing this trail network to make sure that we  
643 are incorporating the science thanks to Dory and Aaron for doing so um and but also  
644 acknowledging that we are designing a trail network reflecting the desires of the community.

645

646 **Melissa:** We're in the last few, so then you'll have an opportunity and we'll have to see what time  
647 it is.

648

649 There may be instances where the trail is located next to sensitive areas and we know that trail  
650 users don't always stay on the trail. How can we design the trail so that trail users stay on the trail  
651 and don't impact areas outside of the trail corridor?

652

653 **Dori:** I'll keep this brief I think that the best strategies are to clearly demarcate the trail so people  
654 understand where the trail is, and to be, as the stewards of the trail network, to be on top of the  
655 trail condition so that it's clear where folks need to go, and signage. I think those are effective

656 ways to keep people where they're supposed to be and I don't know if Pat has other thoughts  
657 about that from your personal experience

658

659 **Pat:**

660 We have a local Trails Committee in Hinesburg that maintains some of the trails in the  
661 Hinesburg Town Forest and Laplatte Headwaters Town Forest. Fellowship the of the Wheel, the  
662 local Vt. Mountain Bike Association chapter does an amazing job of maintaining the trails. You  
663 know, I think people go off trail when they're trying to avoid wet spots or mud. I don't think we  
664 can say there's no wet spots or mud ever on our trails. This is Vermont but they really minimize  
665 it and people tend to stay on the trail. We have some Dry Oak Forest but that's not really inviting  
666 because the leaves are so slippery, the oak leaves are slippery. And we have a trail that goes  
667 probably 150 feet from a sometimes vernal pool. It doesn't fill up every year but who's going to  
668 step off the trail into mud? That's not what people do.

669

670 **Aaron:** I think the most important thing is having somebody designated to keep an eye on  
671 things.

672

673 **Daniel:** I'm just going to put on my VYCC hat for a second and add to that those are all really  
674 great comments. And then, just from our trail-building perspective a lot of what we do when we  
675 start to build a trail system is actually to brush in all the social trails. So as stewards both as the  
676 committee of the forest, one of the things that we look to do is constantly adaptively manage all  
677 those trails. And just because a ;trails there whether it's a social trail or it's one that was  
678 constructed a long time ago doesn't mean it has to stay there so that's always a possibility.

679

680 **Melissa L:** How do the proposed trails meet the easement's requirements for protecting sensitive  
681 natural areas and communities in the ACF? How do we reconcile building trails above 900 feet  
682 elevation when the Richmond Town Plan contains guidelines of no development over 900 feet  
683 elevation? And why do the proposed trails intersect with several rare natural communities when  
684 the Richmond Town Plan calls for avoiding these specific communities? That's a lot, but you  
685 guys have it written down.

686

687 **55:23**

688 **Rebecca:** I will just repeat the question that I will be responding to: "How do the proposed trails  
689 meet the easements requirements for protecting sensitive natural areas and communities in the  
690 Andrews Community Forest."

691

692 The proposed trail map is fine in our eyes. It balances the resources, it does not significantly  
693 impact any of the areas that we would be concerned with.

694

695 I can touch on why do the proposed trails intersect with several rare natural communities. Well, I  
696 can't say why. But I can say from the perspective of the easement when we're looking at the  
697 secondary zone of the vernal pool, that area is most sensitive. Vernal pools are pools that exist in  
698 the springtime, mostly when it's really wet. And little amphibians like to go there and reproduce  
699 and mate and that's where their little babies stay. So ideally those trails would not be accessible  
700 during mud season when the wildlife are using those areas. And one trail going through there is  
701 not going to have a significant enough impact on those wildlife activities and so we can approve  
702 that.

703

704 Additionally, it goes near the riparian buffer zone. That area is actually pretty well protected up  
705 where that trail goes because it's within the ravine. I was out there in person field-visiting it and  
706 the Ravine does a good enough job of that buffer and it's pretty well vegetated up on that ridge  
707 line and everything as well. I will now pass it to you for the Richmond stuff.

708

709 **57:22**

710 **Caitlin:** Thank you Rebecca. Just to recap the other questions there regarding what's in the Town  
711 Plan. So how do we reconcile building trails above 900 feet elevation when the Town Plan  
712 contains guidelines of no development over 900 feet, and then we can get to the Natural  
713 communities again perhaps.

714

715 I'll quickly read what is in the Town Plan regarding that 900 feet: "Restrict development on steep  
716 slopes dot dot and cliffs and ridgelines over 900 feet in elevation, and prohibit all structural  
717 development on slopes greater than 35 percent." So in a nutshell what it says is, restrict  
718 development. What do we mean by development? It doesn't say trail development in there. Do  
719 we include trails in development or are we talking only about the other items that are addressed  
720 in the Town Plan -- renewable energy generation facilities, transmission infrastructure, etc.

721

722 So what is in the Town Plan says restrict development and prohibit structural development.  
723 We're not talking about any structural development so we're not in violation there of the Town  
724 Plan. The Town Plan also calls for trail connectivity and calls for protecting natural  
725 communities. So again, I think this is just this really typifies some of the trade-offs that we're  
726 trying to manage on this parcel.

727

728 The fact that we have competing objectives and I think we've done, with the help of Dori and  
729 Aaron, and Brooke and Mariah of Sinuosity a pretty admirable job at threading those needles.

730

731 **58:46**

732 **Aaron:** The trails don't actually intersect any of the, at least in the original question, any of the  
733 specific natural communities that were called out. There are DOak forests on the property but

734 those were areas that we specifically looked at and encouraged trails to stay away from. The  
735 original Trail proposal had one that intersected a Dry Oak variant community and we had some  
736 lengthy discussions with the trail designers about how that could be accomplished in a sensitive  
737 manner both both we and them felt that given the nature of the community and the conditions on  
738 the ground there that was a realistic possibility.

739  
740 **Melissa:** That kind of leads into the next one, sort of. What are Arrowwood and Sinuosity areas  
741 of expertise as they relate to creating a trail plan within the context of a conservation easement?  
742 And there's some specific concerns around, could Rocky View, Cascade and Stream View above  
743 the power lines be consolidated to minimize environmental impact? Could Roadside Trail be  
744 removed because it parallels the access road and is within 20 feet of a wetland? And what  
745 alternatives to a trail connecting the ACF to Sip of Sunshine might be considered to reduce  
746 impact on sensitive upland habitat?

747

748 **1:00:25**

749 **Dori:** We could have started here. So Arrowwood Environmental is a Vermont-based consulting  
750 firm. There are four of us and we have been in business for over 20 years. We pretty much work  
751 extensively in Vermont. We work with public and private entities, and we do natural resource  
752 assessments on parcels, on private and public property, town-wide assessments. I guess what was  
753 tagged in here is, how does our experience relate to properties with conservation easements.  
754 We've done a lot of work on other VLT properties with conservation easements. Working with  
755 the conservation easement is understanding the restrictions that are laid out in terms of what  
756 natural resources need to be identified and then what sort of prohibitions or recommendations  
757 would be appropriate to protect those. So that's us, we're the ecological consulting firm. We  
758 don't have anyone here from Sinuosity tonight but they are the trail builders and they have a lot  
759 of experience working around in Vermont as well. I'm not sure they have 20 years behind them -  
760 - they look younger than that. But they do seem quite experienced at the job that they do.

761

762 **1:01:50**

763 **Caitlin:** I do regret we don't have somebody from Sinuosity here tonight, but I will just say that  
764 there's a perception by some in the community that Sinuosity exclusively builds thrill-seeking  
765 mountain biking trails and mountain biking parks. But no. They really do address the trail design  
766 objectives for a range of users. They're not simply mountain bike park trail designers.

767

768 **1:02:26**

769 **Dori:** From an ecological perspective I think it's easier for us as the ecologist to look and say,  
770 yeah take that out, take that out. That'd be great. But we're not that we're not the actual trail  
771 designers on this team. We came to know through our process with Sinuosity that there's  
772 actually a lot that goes into figuring out where a trail should be located. So I don't think that even

773 if they were here they would say, yeah we can get rid of that trail if you don't like it. Because I  
774 think there's kind of a web, and if you pull out a piece of the web how's that affect the user  
775 experience. Does that render the network not an enjoyable experience, which is part of  
776 recreation. So I don't think there's an easy answer to that question  
777

778 **1:03:20**

779 **Rebecca:** Building off of what Dori just shared there, that one center thing to consider as part of  
780 this that the easement calls out is a balance of both recreation and natural area protection. And  
781 public access is center to the easement in addition to the other conservation values that are  
782 highlighted. Since Sinuosity isn't here I want to give voice to the fact that both of those are  
783 prioritized within the conservation easement itself, not only the management plan that you all  
784 listed earlier with the priorities but in the conservation easement.  
785

786 **Melissa L.:**

787 Last question then we'll open it up. How does this trail plan or amendments to this trail plan  
788 minimize the environmental impact specifically in the Northeast quadrant of the forest? Would it  
789 be possible and desirable to concentrate trails below the power lines which would minimize  
790 impacts and potentially make trail construction easier? Does the ACF management plan  
791 designate permanent trail-free areas?  
792

793 **1:04:40**

794 **Aaron:** I can just speak briefly to "How does how does the trail plan minimize impact  
795 specifically in the Northeast quadrant of the forest?" The goal of the project we embarked on  
796 wasn't specifically to minimize impact in any one particular part of the forest. But it was to  
797 understand what's going on holistically at a large scale, what's going on at a micro scale at  
798 specific places where trails might be located, and to make sure that we're avoiding significant  
799 impacts to any of those things.  
800

801 In that light we strongly discouraged trail presence on both sides of that central ravine in the  
802 northern portion. I don't really know where you draw the line between what's the Northeast and  
803 what's the Northwest quadrants. But the original plan that that was shown on the screen in the  
804 beginning had Trails on that loop. And the original drafts that Sinuosity developed had some  
805 similar and, in fact, perhaps even more concentration of trails on that side of the ravine. As we  
806 dove into the ecological significance of that area we felt like getting the trails on one side and not  
807 straddling it and not Crossing it multiple times was going to be a really important endeavor. In  
808 fact we felt getting it to the Eastern side was the better option. There's some more significant,  
809 more sensitive features on the western side that we felt were more susceptible to disturbance and  
810 impact. It would be a more sensitive trail network to keep it to the east.  
811

812 **1:06:46**

813 **Dori:** Everyone needs to remember that part of what we were charged to do was to connect to  
814 Sip of Sunshine. So there was no discussion about not having trails above the power line. There  
815 was no discussion because one of the parameters we were given was to connect. And so that  
816 played a pretty large role in the discussions with Sinuosity. It just wasn't an option to eliminate  
817 that.

818

819 **1:07:19**

820 **Caitlin:** Yeah, thanks, Dori. That was an option for the parameters of the agreement we have  
821 with them all, and it's also something that's stipulated in the management plan and indeed the  
822 Town Plan also does call for trail network connectivity. And so that was pretty key to this.

823

824 I'll speak to the final part of this question which is, does the ACF management plan designate  
825 permanent trail-free areas? This is a great thing for us to discuss. We were really intentional in  
826 the language that we included in the revision to the management plan because we want to honor  
827 the decisions made in the past and we want to honor the decisions made in the future. We're just  
828 we are a transient committee, so we don't want to hamstring anybody in the future. So the  
829 language that we included is the following. It is the ACFC's intention that the trail design map --  
830 so what we're presenting here today -- represents an enduring, sustainable trail network that will  
831 not be expanded, to protect not only the natural resources within the ACF but also to honor the  
832 desires of the Andrews family and community intent captured in the original management plan.  
833 So in that way we are basically enshrining this idea that is it. This is what we we hope and intend  
834 for the trail network to be limited.

835

836 I recognize that's not the same as saying this area is off limits, so that's something that we could  
837 continue to talk about as as a committee. But I do just want to highlight that in our revisions right  
838 now we are we are effectively saying other areas ought not see any 1:15:51 trail development in  
839 the future.

840

841 **Melissa L.:** Great that's it for the pre-recorded questions. I'm going to open it up. We have about  
842 five or ten minutes and then we're going to move into our small groups. So this is your chance to  
843 ask questions. I'm just going to remind us about the ground rules we set at the beginning to be  
844 respectful, ask questions, be curious. We only have five or ten minutes so let's try to keep it  
845 short. If you want to ask a question come on up. It would be helpful to come to the mic just  
846 because it is being recorded.

847

848 **Jon Kart:** I'm Jon Kart. I'm a Richmond resident, avid hiker, user of richmond trails on an  
849 almost daily basis except in mud season. I've done a lot of work on in and around Richmond  
850 trails in my day job. I'm a wildlife biologist for the state.

851  
852 I want to just talk on two things and and come to the question of which additional experts need to  
853 be consulted. In general, I'd say looking at the draft management plan the section titled "History  
854 of expert guidance sought by The Andrews Forest Committee," Section 1.5.2, is really short on  
855 seeking guidance except for talking amongst yourselves. There are virtually no independent  
856 voices included in that. It was just repeated talking to the consultants talking to you guys, talking  
857 to Sinuosity, talking to VLT and maybe talking to the town manager and a couple other people.  
858 No other Wildlife experts, no other ecology experts were brought in.

859  
860 Caitlin congratulated the Conservation Commission on its meeting or discussion a couple weeks  
861 ago. In one meeting they brought together four other experts, outside independent experts to talk  
862 about recreation and trails. In two years of working on this you guys didn't bring in anyone to the  
863 table that the public could hear.

864  
865 At the Fish and Wildlife Department I'm on the committee working on updating the Vermont  
866 Conservation Design. While the the original version was kind of coarse, Aaron, the new version  
867 we're using LIDAR sub-meter accuracy. The importance of the Andrews Forest and the  
868 Chittenden Uplands is anything but diminished. At the same time the Fish & Wildlife  
869 Department, and Parks and Recreation Department put out a report, a survey of impacts on  
870 wildlife from trails. And the research is showing it's significant. So my question is, which other  
871 experts could be brought to the table, ideally some with wildlife expertise, to help inform this  
872 and provide a deeper, richer either substantiation for the current plan, or to help you improve the  
873 plan?

874  
875 **1:12:14**

876 **Caitlin:** Thanks, Jon. I need to look back at that language to make sure that Nick Fortin, the deer  
877 biologist with Fish and Wildlife is included.

878  
879 **Jon Kart:** *[Inaudible]*

880  
881 **Caitlin:** Okay, thank you Jon. We also we were lucky to have Sue Morse join us for a meeting  
882 and she submitted a letter regarding her thoughts on the trails and trail development. She knows  
883 that land very, very well. We had already engaged at that point our professional colleges here so  
884 we passed on that letter to Aaron and Dori so we incorporated that information as it came.

885  
886 Also, in the leading up to what we learned of as being the RCC's panel, we had been talking  
887 about what it looks like to bring experts into this kind of public forum to speak to the impacts of  
888 recreation on the ACF. We decided to rely on the RCC's panel for carrying out that kind of  
889 public education.

890

891 I know that you're still shaking your head and you continue to be disappointed in the degree to  
892 which we've engaged others. We're a volunteer committee and trying our darndest.

893

894 **Rebecca:** I can just add to that for the county perspective, since I review a lot of town forest  
895 management plans, you all have done an extensive consultation with outside resources. Most  
896 towns don't have the financial resources to employ the level of expertise and consultation that  
897 you all have. That's not to say that John's opinion is invalid. Just from the context of the  
898 Chittenden County and the many management plans that I review, most folks don't have the  
899 privilege and opportunity to get the many voices of input that you all did. So I wouldn't negate  
900 all of the really incredible resources that you received.

901

902 **Melissa:** Okay other questions?

903

904 **Betsy Hardy:** I would support what John said about bringing in others with wildlife expertise  
905 and specifically Sue Morse, who has been mentioned. She did write a letter that I believe was in  
906 the Times Ink! some months ago. And she followed up with a second letter that was in the most  
907 recent one that just came out earlier this week. If you haven't read it yet I hope you'll read Sue  
908 Morris's letter. She did offer, I think in her first letter and again in her second letter, to participate  
909 and help. But she didn't get replies from the committee and she was not invited. So I would hope  
910 there'd be another meeting like this sometime hopefully in the not too distant future that would  
911 include more experts and, hopefully, Sue Morse. She's known across the country and even  
912 internationally for her wildlife expertise. Yes, she's not a resident of Richmond but she lives in  
913 Jericho just up the road. I hope her voice will be considered more fully and that she might get to  
914 participate at some point.

915

916 Looking at the map, the trail that kind of goes all the way around a wetland, which I believe is a  
917 critical habitat, and, I think, by other critical habitats in the Northeast quadrant is problematic for  
918 me. I could envision a way where it could be redesigned a little to move it further east away from  
919 that Wetland and could still connect to the Sip of Sunshine trail. My question is, would the  
920 committee consider another meeting that brings in more wildlife experts such as Sue Morse?

921

922 **Cecilia:** Thank you for those comment. We'll definitely take that into consideration – the idea of  
923 an additional meeting when we hear what's going on here today. I'm just wondering Melissa  
924 because it took us so long to get to the point where people can give us input can we extend the  
925 public comment period a little bit or even a little more than that? You should know that the small  
926 group is to be able to collect even more input and comments and questions and get them written  
927 down. So this is not the only time to contribute, but it would be great if we could take this a little  
928 bit longer.



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**1:18:23**

**Melissa L.:** I think that's fine. I wonder if we should hand those out just so people can start in case we don't get to the small groups. Because there'll be the opportunity to talk in the small groups and to write down some comments. We want to make sure everybody gets a chance and of course we'll evaluate if we need an additional meeting.

What's being handed out are what we will use in the small groups. But if you want to get a head start it's just some questions about your thoughts about the management plan revisions and anything that you're suggesting be changed. I encourage you to think about filling that out whether or not you stay for the small groups. I hope you will. We're going to have a little less time for the small groups but I think that's okay. I'm asking them to hand them out just so you have a little bit of a head start.

Okay. the gentleman from Williston. Go ahead.

**Caitlin:** Melissa, can we just wait? I feel like Betsy's question wasn't fully ... I'm sorry [Laughter] Betsy, thank you for your thoughts. I do just want to address one of the suggestions you had about potentially shifting the trail in the Northeast around, given that there are some mapped wetland are. There's also some really steep terrain there, too. This is just one of those instances of having to manage some of the trade-offs of what the terrain presents us with and also looking to areas where there are already existing impacts, for example, existing skid trails. I can't speak exactly where some of those were but I know that did go into some of the decision-making, especially in that Northeast quadrant.

And thank you again for bringing up Sue Morse. I know I saw her letter as well and you said she didn't get an invitation. An invitation is open to everybody absolutely and I understand that some folks would have preferred that we engaged her more deeply. Having already engaged several professional ecologists we are honoring that relationship. Like I said we passed on input from Sue to them as well. But understood that folks feel that way, that we should have more directly involved a wildlife biologist from the get-go.

**Aaron:** I'm not sure of which wetland was being pointed out specifically, but there is a wetland there, a small seepage wetland in the Northeast quadrant area there, relatively high elevation, that was not fully mapped when we did the original evaluation, which took place primarily over the course of the winter. We did go back out last year during the growing season to specifically to look at potential populations of rare plants and also to fine-tune wetland boundaries. We found that wetland was larger than we had previously expected it to be. That is 1:28:36 one of the

967 recommendations that was made -- relocation of a portion of that trail at least to be further  
968 away from that wetland that's present there.

969  
970 **Hans Mueller:** Hans Mueller from Williston Catamount Community Forest Committee. I really  
971 appreciate this committee and I participated in a bunch of the other sessions over the years for  
972 the Town Forest here as well. I really appreciate the cautious nature of approaching the property  
973 to not affect it negatively and for any habitat or ecological reasons. I also appreciate the  
974 comment about there being both mandates or goals of recreation and conservation. I feel like  
975 we've talked the entire night about conservation. Has the recreation part been diminished at all  
976 with the change? I don't know you know experts that you've engaged in. Is the trail network 50%  
977 the length that it was originally? Has that goal still been met? We haven't heard anything about  
978 that tonight and that's a significant change in terms of the original trail network to what we have  
979 now. I don't know if you can speak to that or, again, how many external experts you want to  
980 bring in. If Richmond Mountain Trails who have volunteered for it quite a bit still thinks this is  
981 going to be an awesome recreational experience I would say wonderful. What would you say on  
982 the recreation side of things?

983  
984 **Caitlin:** That it will still be an excellent experience. I don't think it's diminished at all. We did  
985 remove that one trail that was particularly was one step closer to the primary wildlife corridor.  
986 But part of the reason why we are putting forth the trail design that was designed by these  
987 experts is to balance and ensure both the enjoyment and safety of multiple users. So the answer is  
988 no, it's not diminished.

989  
990 **1:23:33**

991 **Rebecca:** I just want to add just one thing because this happens frequently. Conservation is an  
992 umbrella for recreation and ecological protections. Conservation is not exclusive to ecological  
993 protections, wildlife protections or natural area protections. It includes access for humans to be  
994 able to partake in it. It includes human activities like timber harvesting or sugaring. I just feel  
995 that that's a really important distinction to make while we're having this conversation, because it  
996 is all inclusive to all of those experiences. I'm not like saying that you said something  
997 incorrectly, I just feel it's an important distinction.

998  
999 **Judy Rosovsky:** I'm Judy Rosovsky. I'm the chair of the Conservation Commission but I'm not  
1000 speaking for the Conservation Commission tonight. I'm just here as a private citizen. Because of  
1001 my experience in town governance I have three quick questions:

- 1002 • One is I noticed in the management plan, the old one and the new one, I didn't see a  
1003 reference to the Town Plan. Is the ACF governed by the Town Plan?
- 1004 • One of the reasons to acquire that parcel was because the Chittenden County Uplands is a  
1005 large contiguous intact forest which is a really important piece of habitat to have. The

1006 ACF can connect it to the river which is an east-west corridor. Is there an area where  
1007 wildlife can move from the Uplands to the river through the forest unimpeded by trails or  
1008 human activity?

- 1009 • The third question is a little radical, but has the committee considered taking all  
1010 stipulations off of trail location and trying to find the best place to put a trail that would  
1011 give a good ride and minimize impact on wildlife, particularly with respect to  
1012 connectivity from the uplands to the river.

1013 And just as a comment, I know some really quick and dirty ways to monitor wildlife if you want  
1014 to talk to me about that. Thank you.

1015

1016 **1:25:55**

1017 **Caitlin:** I can speak to a couple of those.

- 1018 • We see the management plan as being governed by the Town Plan, which, again, does  
1019 include several different objectives like trail connectivity and protection of of key habitat  
1020 as well. So yes, but good point. That might be an oversight that we should revisit if it's  
1021 not expressly included in the revised plan.
- 1022 • In terms of larger connectivity, as to whether or not, say, a critter could go from the very  
1023 northern that very tip all the way down to the Winooski River without hitting a trail. Well  
1024 right now, there's the VAST trail, so yes. In terms of the trails that we are talking about  
1025 here today they could. I mean there's Route 2, I-89 that kind of stuff that we got to deal  
1026 with. But a critter could [*background comments*] yes okay yeah yeah um, but the only  
1027 one right now is the VAST trail. Now the management plan does call for connectivity  
1028 ultimately to VYCC. And even though the VAST Trail is not something that we are  
1029 currently thinking about in this trail design process presently we feel as a committee that  
1030 it's our responsibility to steward that as well if we are ultimately going to connect to  
1031 VYCC. So pardon me, that was a little convoluted so, right now, yes except for the  
1032 VAST trail.
- 1033 • I didn't fully understand when you said consider taking off all stipulations to the trails.  
1034 Do you mean like large loop, that kind of thing?

1035

1036 **Judy:** [*In background, difficult to hear but sounds like she repeated the "no stipulations"*  
1037 *question*] [*Audible*] If you just looked at the property for the best place to put a trail with  
1038 minimal wildlife impact where would that be?

1039

1040 [*Inaudible comment from another member of audience*]

1041 **1:28:14**

1042 **Caitlin:** Thanks, Jimmy, I was just going to say that. But it's only two. Beyond there just being  
1043 two there, the connection to Sip of Sunshine is part of the crux of this whole challenge here. That  
1044 was one thing that guided the design in a major way, as does having one larger loop for example.

1045 It's not something that we from the get-go have been talking about entertaining, a trail network  
1046 that doesn't connect to those areas. It would be a conversation with the committee if we would  
1047 would open this back up and to start this two and a half year long process all over again. I don't  
1048 think anybody wants that. I'm really pretty excited about, given the mandates in the management  
1049 plan, the ways in which we have threaded this needle.

1050

1051 **1:29:09**

1052 **Dori:** I was gonna say there have been a few questions about inviting wildlife biologists, almost  
1053 suggesting that you didn't have some with you, but you do. I think that what you'll find is if you  
1054 invite others and you give them the same parameters that we were given, which is the connection  
1055 to Sip of Sunshine and the loop, you're going to get the same interaction that we had in our  
1056 process with Sinuosity. Which is, yes, if there are people up there there will be impacts to  
1057 wildlife. That is going to happen. We didn't, as the wildlife biologists on this team, suggest that  
1058 there wouldn't be. But if you give folks the same parameters that we worked with you're going to  
1059 end up with a very similar product. If you change those parameters as was just suggested you  
1060 would get a different product from us as well.

1061

1062 **1:30:05**

1063 **Aaron:** That kind of goes back to the question about what was given up in the trail network.  
1064 We've said this in presentations on the results of this project before. This was a frustrating  
1065 interaction between ecologists and trail designers. The trail designers definitely didn't get what  
1066 they wanted from an ideal, only-trail perspective. Similarly, if the objective was strictly habitat  
1067 preservation-hands-off-no people you can't say we're getting that either. It was designed to have  
1068 friction. That's kind of what drove the decision-making and it wasn't easy. As reflected in the  
1069 larger community discussion, it's not an easy thing.

1070

1071 **Melissa:** I don't think we're gonna get to our small groups and I think that's okay. I think this is  
1072 good to have this discussion as a whole. But I would really would encourage you to fill out those  
1073 forms because those forms are what's going to come back and I'm gonna try to make sense of  
1074 them and deliver them to the committee. It's really important for you to fill those out.

1075

1076 **Guy Roberts:** I'm a Richmond resident and I've also I've been a practicing scientist for 30-40  
1077 years. With all due respect to Jon I would really caution us from going on and on looking for  
1078 additional scientists to weigh in on this because at some point we're going to find out that not all  
1079 scientists feel the same way. They all have their own personal viewpoints, and if we're going to  
1080 wait until we find a scientist who agrees with our own personal viewpoint we're going to  
1081 continue down a road of never finding a consensus on this topic. I think what we've done what  
1082 we've set out to do. I was the original chair of the steering committee for the draft forest  
1083 management plan and we thought we were making incredible headway by setting out a precedent

1084 where we had ecologists working with trail designers to actually look at an ideal trail that would  
1085 be great for bikers and a recreational experience, and then match it with a set of ecologists who  
1086 could identify sensitive areas and move that trail away from those sensitive areas so that we  
1087 could reach a compromise. There is no perfect ideal solution here.

1088  
1089 What is the risk of not allowing the public to get into these forests and see what they have to  
1090 offer? We have sensitive areas in abundance but we also have a large population of people who  
1091 don't appreciate what we have out there. And they will never appreciate it if they can't get out  
1092 there and see it. That is a huge risk that we run if we don't have people appreciating what's out  
1093 there and being able to understand what we have the wealth of. I think we have as equal a risk to  
1094 actually impacting the wildlife that we have out there as well.

1095  
1096 One final point: Having read a large amount of the scientific literature what I've seen is a lot of  
1097 discord and a lot of learning that's happening as I read the different articles from different people.  
1098 What I see over and over again is people making substitutions for a trail and saying, well, we  
1099 couldn't find data for that animal so we substitute information for a road or for a motorcycle trail  
1100 and we use that instead. So the scientific literature is riddled with inaccuracies and bloated  
1101 claims about impacts on wildlife.

1102  
1103 The other thing that I've seen in the scientific literature is, over and over again, they compare  
1104 established trails to new trails. They say, "What's the impact? Let's look at how far the wildlife  
1105 runs away and we'll see what that does." And sure enough, you find that in a new trail the  
1106 wildlife runs away further. Not surprising, because they've been surprised. But the premise of  
1107 those studies is that on the established trails, actually, the wildlife is tolerant. Wildlife can adapt  
1108 apparently and that seems to be a pretty common theme in a lot of these scientific articles. But  
1109 what it's used to say instead is, wildlife would be scared away but, in fact, actually, wildlife will  
1110 be scared away if they're surprised by things. But they also seem, as there seems to be consensus,  
1111 that wildlife will also adapt.

1112  
1113 So I'll leave you to that.

1114  
1115 **1:35:40**

1116 **Caitlin:** Thank you, Guy. I think that there's not a huge amount of consensus surrounding some  
1117 of that literature on wildlife impacts, like I alluded to earlier. I think it's still a growing field and  
1118 again, we need to not conflate the absence of evidence for evidence of no impact. So thanks for  
1119 your comments.

1120  
1121 I do just think that its important to acknowledge that this is still a growing field. But I will  
1122 comment on one thing that you said about what do we risk. You ask that question, "What do we

1123 risk if we don't have people out there?" And I think one other risk that I've been thinking about is  
1124 how, when you spoke to how protracted this has been as well, I'm concerned about what we're  
1125 risking in terms of protecting more land. So if we have this kind of ongoing, protracted and  
1126 really important questions, and these kind of conversations, absolutely, but if we keep drawing  
1127 this kind of process out, and we've seen some discord in the community related to it already,  
1128 what happens the next time a potential parcel comes available and there's just a bad taste in  
1129 folks' mouth from some of the divisiveness that has arisen from this. I fear that there will be less  
1130 community acceptance to actually purchase a parcel and bring into being a community forest.  
1131 That is a risk that I'm concerned about. I ask that we all try to be as respectful and moving  
1132 forward, and try to resolve some of these challenges so that we can continue to protect as much  
1133 for us as possible.

1134

1135 **Melissa L.:** We're running up to our ending time so we have about five minutes left. I want to let  
1136 the committee take a couple – oh, one other thing.. There was some concern about handwriting  
1137 and I've been made aware that there'll be a link on the [inaudible] ... yeah, spelling doesn't count  
1138 but if I can't read your handwriting then I can't integrate your comments The committee will  
1139 make a link on the website so you can fill it out digitally.

1140

1141 Yes, okay, go ahead.

1142

1143 **Richard Donovan:** I'm Richard Donovan. I'm a resident of Jericho but I've been in the  
1144 community here for a long time. I'm working and living here as well. First, a comment is that  
1145 when people are suggesting that there are gaps in expertise, be specific about those areas of  
1146 biology or wildlife that you really think where the gaps are. And get that to the committee so that  
1147 they can work with that. Wildlife , and biology is a big field with a lot of specialization. It sounds  
1148 like there's actually been a lot of thinking already, but I think it's really important to be specific  
1149 about the suggestions and where there are gaps perceived.

1150

1151 My question is (maybe I'm being dense but I'm trying to understand where there will be  
1152 pedestrian walking and traffic versus, for example, biking or other types of recreation in the  
1153 forest. Is the trail network basically an open season for anything that's a permitted use on those  
1154 trails?

1155

1156 **Caitlin:** Yes

1157

1158 **Richard Donavon:** So there's no restricted area for where it's just pedestrian only?

1159

1160 **Caitlin:** That's right. There was never any trail that was pedestrian only. They've always been  
1161 designed to be multi-use. I don't know where that is coming from.

1162

1163 **Richard Donovan:** Okay. So what that means is it's all it's open season for both pedestrian and  
1164 and biking, and anything else on those...

1165

1166 **Caitlin:** And they were defined with that intention -- that they'd be multi-use trails.

1167

1168 **Dori:** If you read our report, though, Sinuosity made some comments and suggested that some of  
1169 the trails may be preferred for pedestrian use, and that could be what this discussion is about.

1170 And the trail that was removed was not the pedestrian, maybe preferred trail -- that one was

1171 retained. but at this point in time because there aren't three trails then I think the multi-use is

1172 really what's going to carry the day. But I do think if you were reading our report that you would

1173 have seen some reference to pedestrians are probably going to like this t better.

1174

1175 **Richard Donovan:** Thank you. My concern is that's the kind of monitoring that I would think

1176 would be important. To say, "Wait a minute..." Because I've been on the Hinesburg trails, the

1177 Huntington trails, etc. And the dynamics between biking and pedestrian can be challenging

1178 sometimes. And if you're not monitoring.... I think that may actually be on a day-to-day basis:

1179 the more important kind of monitoring that needs to happen over time. I'm not saying who's

1180 going to do that but trying to figure that out. I'll stop there.

1181

1182 **Pat:** Just for what it's worth, I haven't heard of one pedestrian/horseback riding conflict in the

1183 Hinesburg Town Forest in all the years I've been on the committee since the early 80s. I have

1184 heard of a couple of dog versus people who don't like dogs conflicts. I have not heard of a single

1185 mountain bike pedestrian conflict, and that, frankly, shocks me. But that's a fact.

1186

1187 **Melissa:** I think one more question and then I need to release you we'll go back to next steps, but  
1188 go ahead.

1189

1190 **Chichi Barrett:** I am a Richmond resident and my question is, What happens during hunting

1191 season with those trails? Will you post for people to stay off the trails?

1192

1193 **Cecilia**

1194 That was a big topic of conversation in the first management plan and the decision after

1195 extensive input is definitely to put up signage to make people aware that it's hunting season but

1196 that we would not restrict access during hunting season.

1197

1198 **Caitlin:** Thank you, Chichi, for that question and I do think that one of the crucial next steps the

1199 committee will take is thinking about trail closures. So during mud season, maybe during deer

1200 wintering, maybe during breeding bird seasons --we need to think that's part of the next step that

1201 we'll be addressing. Right now we're just kind of laying out the footprint, so this is not the end of  
1202 it.

1203

1204 **Melissa L:** We do need to vacate this space at some point. But I really want to thank you all for  
1205 being respectful and being productive, and for the productive conversations we've had tonight.  
1206 The next steps, as I understand them, are that we're going to collect all of these thoughts from  
1207 you. There'll be a link for you to put your thoughts digitally and my job is to kind of make sense  
1208 of all of that and provide some recommendations to the committee about any revisions to the  
1209 revisions to the plan before they go to the Selectboard. Is that correct?

1210

1211 **Cecilia:** Yeah I just wanted to add for the people online, I'm sorry we couldn't do an interactive  
1212 Zoom call but it didn't work with having it transmitted on TV. At any rate we really encourage  
1213 people to continue to give us feedback at the link on the website.

1214

1215 and 1:50:20 um it's we have to be out of this area by eight o'clock for the custodian's sake but we  
1216 have a few minutes if you'd like to talk to any of the members as we break things down. Thank  
1217 you very much.

1218

1219 **Caitlin:** I just want to clarify that when that link closes *[aside to Cecilia]* Do we know that?

1220

1221 **Cecilia:** No, we talked about it. *[inaudible]* The link's not up yet but it will be and we're  
1222 expecting it'll be open at least a week. And we want to thank Melissa as well. Thank you,  
1223 Melissa.

1224

1225 **Melissa:** Thank you so much for the panelists.