

BOYCE HILL TOWN FOREST
Fayston, Vermont

Interim Management Plan



Photo: Corrie Miller

Prepared by the Fayston Conservation Commission
With assistance from the Vermont Land Trust
November 2019

BOYCE HILL TOWN FOREST
Fayston, Vermont

Interim Management Plan

This plan has been approved by:



Jared Cadwell
Select Board Chair

Date: 11/18/19




Chuck Martel
Select Board Member

Date: 11/18/2019

Mike Jordan
Select Board Member

Date: _____



~~Caitlin Cusack~~ Liza Walker
Vermont Land Trust

Date: 11/25/19

INTERIM MANAGEMENT PLAN

**Boyce Hill Town Forest
Fayston, Vermont
November 2019**

Goal of the Interim Management Plan

The Town of Fayston's Conservation Commission (FCC) has prepared this Interim Management Plan for the Boyce Hill Town Forest, which is the subject of a generous gift to the Town, as a requirement in the land transfer process. This plan is intended to describe the management of the property and address anticipated management issues for approximately 12-24 months following the transfer of the property, or until a more complete and thorough long-term management plan is developed with input from the community and adopted by the Town. The adopted Long-Term Management Plan will be reviewed and revised on a regular basis every ten years, or as needed.

Vermont Land Trust (VLT) holds a Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions and Public Access, or "conservation easement," which permanently protects the 93-acre parcel from further subdivision and development and ensures for its long-term public ownership and community use. As such, VLT will partner with the Town to ensure the land is used and stewarded in accordance with the easement's purposes and conditions.

Only the Town of Fayston – through the Select Board, in consultation with the Conservation Commission – may conduct or authorize changes in management activities, approve or restrict public uses, or permit other changes to the Town Forest Interim Management Plan. The Town will consult and collaborate with Vermont Land Trust when appropriate and/or required by the Conservation Easement.

Property Description and History

The land is comprised of 93 acres of primarily open land with a one-acre pond. Located at the top of Boyce Road, it is dominated by an open hilltop that offers expansive views of Burnt Rock and the Green Mountains, the rolling hills of Fayston and the Northfield Mountain Range. The hillside property was cleared of timber in the 1970s and kept open since then by intensive brush hogging. For decades, landowners welcomed the Fayston community to passively enjoy the property and many Fayston residents have enjoyed the walks and vistas of the Mad River Valley it offers. A privately held parcel separates this Town Forest from the Dowsville Headwaters block of public land in Duxbury that is a relatively new addition to the State of Vermont's Camel's Hump State Park.

The land was generously gifted to the Town of Fayston by Ermione, LLC, to protect its natural resources and public access in perpetuity. The Town of Fayston accepted this donation as it provides a unique opportunity to establish public land in North Fayston, as a complement to the Chase Brook Town Forest off German Flats Rd. Furthermore, the economic benefits

associated with protecting public land are increasingly documented and include the attraction of residents and visitors seeking recreational opportunities, natural beauty, and a healthy environment.

The primary objectives identified in the VLT easement of this land are:

- a. To conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality and native flora and fauna on the Protected Property and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resources as they exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future;
- b. To provide for non-motorized, non-commercial recreational, educational and other appropriate community uses on the Protected Property;
- c. To conserve open space values and scenic resources associated with the Protected Property for present and future generations and
- d. To require that management of the Protected Property be guided by a public management planning process.

The Boyce Hill Town Forest offers opportunities for community recreation and connection to nature. The conservation of the Town Forest also presents an opportunity to expand a large unfragmented forest habitat block that supports critical ecological functions at a regional and statewide level.

Property History

Ermione, LLC bought the land in 2011 from Robert Newis. The Newis family had purchased the land in the 1970s and received a permit for an eight-lot subdivision. The family built the pond and cleared most of the trees to create an open, park-like landscape, which dramatically changed the character of the land.

Local Fayston residents refer to the property as “Boyce Hill,” “Newis Field,” and “Risley Pasture,” among others.

Physical Description of the Property

The Boyce Hill Town Forest consists of 93 acres situated on a steep, largely south- and west-facing slope rising from 1,400 to 1,800 feet. The land has been largely cleared (~68 of 92 acres) and has been maintained as an open park-like area with scattered trees, including several dozen productive apple trees. A previous owner installed a hard-packed road from the top of Boyce Road to the highest point on this property. The road has begun to grow in with vegetation but there is ample room for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The property offers expansive views of the Shepard Brook valley and beyond. Some of the forest is regenerating on the steeper slopes on either side of the road. A perennial stream enters the property in the northwestern corner and meanders down the western side of the property. It flows into the roughly 1.25-acre man-made pond in its northwestern corner; there is one known outlet of the pond.

The property was surveyed in 2001. Stone walls, barbed wire fence and iron pipes mark the boundary. Part of the southwestern boundary line was painted but the line has not otherwise been marked.

While the Town parcel is largely cleared, it sits within a state-significant block of Northern Hardwood Forest – one of the largest in the state, surrounding the higher elevation portions of the central Green Mountains near Camels Hump. The Town Forest is located near Camel's Hump State Park, which is an important regional asset for public recreation and the protection of unfragmented forested landscape.

Access and Parking

Primary public access to the Boyce Hill Town Forest is at the top of Boyce Road off North Fayston Road in Fayston. Currently, the first 0.2 miles of the road is designated as Class III. The remaining 0.6 miles are currently designated as Class IV.

Proposed Short-Term Improvements to the Property

Access and Parking

Sometime in the construction season of 2020, pending approval of the Town Budget at the annual March Town Meeting, the Town of Fayston will improve the roadbed with grading and gravel, replace culverts, and manage water drainage and runoff. Further, the Town will develop a parking area at the top of Boyce Road and a new snowplow turnaround. The exact location and number of spaces for the parking area, and site for the turnaround, have yet to be determined and will need to be approved by VLT as specified in the conservation easement. The work may entail excavation for a new parking area and plow turnaround and relocation of the existing metal gate. After these initial improvements, the Town will maintain the road and parking area for public access in winter and summer.

During the winter of 2019-20, the Town will continue to plow Boyce Road as it has done in the past, with the snowplow turnaround just above Parcel ID #01-100. The owners of the parcel(s) with residences above this turnaround will be allowed to park off to the side, as they have done in the past, so they do not block the plow. No public parking will be allowed in the snowplow turnaround. Pending removal of logs from a log landing above the snowplow turnaround, there will be room for a couple of cars to park in an area that will be plowed by the Town. If the logs are not removed in time, then there will be no designated parking at this location for the winter of 2019-2020.

Signs

Several signs will be installed once the property transfer takes place at various locations around the Boyce Hill Town Forest.

1. Welcome sign to inform users of permitted Town Forest uses on gate at entrance to property at the top of Boyce Road.
2. Signs for plow turn around in winter that identify parking areas and/or areas where parking is not allowed.

3. Boundary signs on access trails between private land and Boyce Hill Town Forest to encourage Town Forest users to respect private property.
4. Pond signs that discuss swimming and winter use rules.
5. Cellar hole - A sign will be placed next to the foundation notifying people of its presence to ensure user safety and inform them of the historical land use.

Trail Maintenance

It is anticipated that in the short term, the existing “road” to the top of Boyce Hill will be kept mown for ease of access. It is also anticipated that some mowing may occur at one end of the pond. All trail maintenance will be at the discretion of the Town.

Management of the Property

The Boyce Hill Town Forest possesses diverse natural resource values and potential for recreational and educational activities. A summary of anticipated recreational and educational use of the property are presented in this Interim Management Plan, with the knowledge that citizen participation will further identify community goals for the land and help to develop a Long-Term Management Plan after the purchase of the property. All uses of the land need to be permitted by the Conservation Easement held by VLT (see appendix 2) and in accordance with this Plan.

Public activities allowed on the property during the interim period include:

- Use by the general public for low-impact non-motorized activities such as hiking, running, snowshoeing, mountain biking (on main road and existing trails only), and cross-country/back-country skiing;
- Hunting, with adherence to Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department regulations;
- Birding and wildlife observation;
- Community events and gatherings, with special permission from the Town; and
- Educational activities.

All uses of the property require practice of “Leave No Trace” and “Carry It in, Carry it Out.”

Public activities not allowed during the interim period include:

- Motorized vehicles on the property, including but not limited to motor vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, dirt bikes, snow machines, and electric bikes;
- Trapping;
- Fishing;
- Any activities before dawn and after dusk;
- Camping, with or without shelter;
- Fires of any kind;
- Trash dumping;
- Horses;
- Permanent or temporary structures, including but not limited to hunting blinds, tents, and tree stands;

- Cutting or removal of any vegetation, alive or dead, without Town permission; or
- Creation of any new trails.

Pond

Historically, previous landowners have turned a blind eye to members of the public swimming in the pond during the summer and skating on the ice in the winter. The Town has researched its legal obligations and liabilities and notes the following permitted and non-permitted uses for the pond during this interim period:

- Public swimming will be at user's own risk
- No winter use
- No watercraft of any kind

Stocking fish in the pond is prohibited. Vegetation surrounding the pond may not be altered without authorization from the Town.

Dogs

Dogs are allowed on and off trails; however out of respect for others, and to protect the welfare of both wildlife and pets, dog owners are required to keep their pets leashed at all times, to pick up after their pets, and to properly dispose of all waste offsite.

Permitted and restricted activities described above will be given further consideration during the development of the longer-term comprehensive management plan for the property. As a result of the Town's initial experience owning and managing the property, soliciting further community input, and ensuring compliance with the purposes of the conservation easement, the updated management plan may further limit, regulate, or expand uses and activities addressed in this Interim Management Plan.

Management activities the Town may undertake, or approve others to undertake:

- Erecting appropriate signage;
- Boundary marking;
- Wildlife habitat protection;
- Conducting natural resource inventories; and
- Maintaining pre-existing trails or constructing new trails.

Longer-Term Management Plan

A community engagement process will begin in the spring of 2020 to develop a longer-term Management Plan for the Boyce Hill Town Forest.

Prior to the Town's acceptance of the donation of the land, the Fayston Conservation Commission discussed the management of the new Town Forest with the public on several occasions, including Conservation Commission meetings, Select Board meetings, and a special meeting focused solely on the future management of this parcel. Over the course of these meetings, a few topics

consistently arose from community members present. The following issues will receive special attention in the development of a longer-term Management Plan:

Parking

Residents who live near the property expressed concerns about parking, and specifically about issues that could arise if not enough parking was made available. The Town will work through a community engagement process to address these concerns.

Access to Private Land

There are several existing foot trails that access private property from the Town Forest. Due to concerns from abutting landowners and the ethics around recreating on private land in Vermont, the Town encourages the public to respect these boundaries and the wishes of private landowners.

Landowner Outreach

The Town Forest abuts several properties and efforts are being made to contact all landowners to hear their input regarding the longer-term management of this property.

Funding Assistance

Possible anticipated costs include development of the longer-term management plan, community engagement process in longer-term management, property maintenance, a natural resources inventory, and road/parking upgrades and maintenance. It is probable that the Town will solicit private and grant contributions to leverage the Town's investment and support the stewardship of this new town asset.

Partners and Contact Information

Jared Cadwell, **Fayston Select Board** – faystonsb@madriver.com

Lisa Koitzsch, **Fayston Conservation Commission** - faystonconservation@madriver.com

Caitlin Cusack, **Vermont Land Trust** – caitlin@vlt.org

Appendices and References:

Appendix 1: Property Map

Appendix 2: VLT Conservation Easement

Appendix 3: VLT Baseline Documentation Report