

ALLIANCE *for* VERMONT COMMUNITIES

INTERIM MANAGEMENT PLAN

Ashley Community Forest



Sharon and Strafford, Vermont

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Goal of the Management Plan.

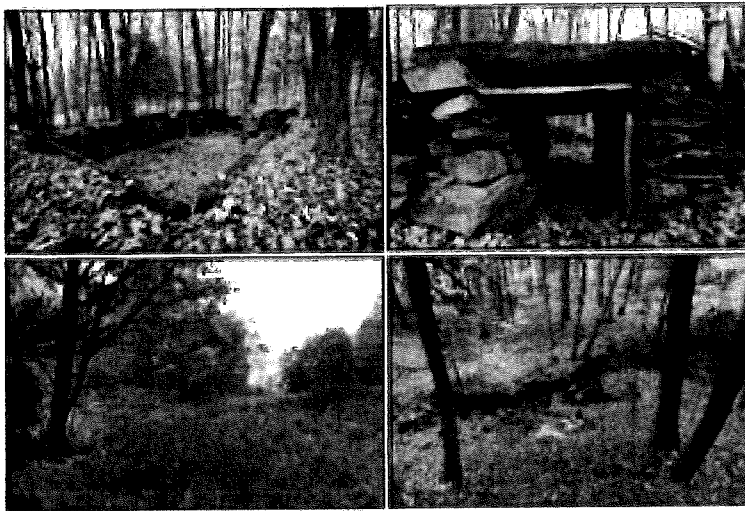
The Vermont Land Trust and the Alliance for Vermont Communities have prepared this Interim Management Plan for the Ashley property in consultation with the towns of SHARON and STRAFFORD. The Ashley property is currently owned by the Alliance for Vermont Communities with the intent of conveying the lands to both towns for the creation of a Town Forest (property map Appendix 1).

This plan is intended to inform the management of the property for the year (or so) following the purchase of the property, pending the towns' discussion of conveyance and the development of a more complete and thorough plan with extensive community involvement. This plan is also intended to inform partner organizations, including the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, who will co-hold a conservation easement on the property. This plan will outline the preliminary plans for the property based on initial discussions with the towns and community and intentions to address any anticipated management issues.

This and subsequent Plans are also intended to provide guidance to contractors and volunteers (if any) who will conduct on-the-ground management activities within the Ashley Forest, in accordance with the restrictions in the conservation easement. The final conservation easement will be presented as Appendix 2 to this document at the time of closing.

The first Full Management Plan will be adopted as soon as possible upon conveyance of the property to the Towns, and thereafter replace this document as an overall guide to use and management of the Ashley Forest. The adopted Full Management Plan will be reviewed, and revised if appropriate, at least once every five years after its initial adoption.

History.



The land was last farmed between 75-100 years ago and logged lightly for a log cabin around 1969. It was originally known as the Preston Farm. Rosamond Ashley lived with Doug Savage on the land until 1971. An offer was made on the property by David Hall of the NewVistas Foundation, a 20,000 person proposed development, in the spring of 2018. Knowing the land had the potential to be a valuable

educational resource and public recreation area, with its connectedness to other conserved parcels, the Alliance for Vermont Communities (AVC) rekindled conversations with Rosamond Ashley's niece, Holly Kicklighter. Holly expressed her disinterest in selling to David Hall and the NewVistas development, with the hope that the land would be conserved. Holly needed to sell the property quickly to help pay for her aunt's medical care, so AVC swiftly entered into an agreement and began raising the necessary funds. During this time AVC had begun conversations with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT). AVC raised \$293,000 from the surrounding communities and VLT assisted with a bridge loan to secure the final funding before the closing.

AVC conducted a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment thru Wheeler Environmental Services in 2018, and a full perimeter survey was completed by Holy Gilmour Survey Associates in 2020 (Appendices 3&4).

AVC and VLT have worked cooperatively as partners to secure additional funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in the amount of \$150,000 under the assumption that the towns would eventually take ownership of the property as a town forest open to the public. AVC, VLT and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board believe that this property will be a great educational, recreational, and natural resource for the residents of Strafford and Sharon, and the entire region. The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and VHCB will hold the conservation easement. VLT will be the main contact responsible for easement stewardship in perpetuity. The primary objective of the purchase and conservation of this land is to protect the property's natural areas, natural communities, forest connectivity, undeveloped character, historic artifacts and scenic open space; and to provide opportunities for low-impact, pedestrian public outdoor recreation.

Property Description and Landscape Context.

The Ashley Community Forest property in Strafford and Sharon is mostly forested, with a small area of wetland and open meadows near its eastern side along Nutting Road. The property's 256.4-acres include a ridge running north-south, with the western slope dropping steeply down to a south-flowing tributary of Fay Brook. An arm of the ridge extends east and is partially open with expansive views of the surrounding area. Nutting Road's terminus soon reaches a cellar hole of a historic farmhouse, as well as stone walls and rows of large old trees that once lined farm roads. Elevations



range from a high point of about 1600' on a hilltop in the center of the property, down to a low point of about 1180' where the stream flows off the southern boundary. The forest is largely hardwood, with mixed-hemlock-hardwood forest on the shadier, steeper slopes surrounding the stream. Sugar maple, black cherry, eastern hophornbeam, American basswood, white ash, and American beech are all common on the higher slopes.

A headwater tributary of Fay Brook, which is itself a tributary of the White River, begins north of the property and flows south through its western side. The stream has well-developed



channel features including small floodplain terraces, gravel bars, and pools. Scattered black ash, yellow birch and eastern white cedar trees grow in these small floodplain forests over stands of ostrich fern, sensitive fern, and jewelweed.

Moose tracks were noted during a couple of our visits and the property also provides habitat for forest-dwelling songbirds; Black-throated Green Warblers and Chestnut-sided Warblers were heard on a mid-June visit, and numerous bird species have been heard on many outings since. The ledges and riparian areas provide additional habitat diversity.

The property has established trails and logging roads that lead through a variety of forest types. In addition to the existing trails and logging roads, there is significant opportunity for addition trail development for hiking, cross-country skiing, or other uses. The homestead area has old cellar holes that provide historical and cultural educational opportunities.

Access and Parking.

The property is accessible from Nutting Road, a narrow Class IV accessed via Brook Road on the Strafford side of the property.

Future long-term parking solutions will continue to be explored as part of the public scoping and development of the Management Plan. A parking area with space for up to six vehicles has been created along Nutting Road. Parking possibilities will be explored along the Clifford Farm Road, or along Brook road. A main concern is creating a parking area not visible from the main road, as it may be more likely to become a place for vandalism and littering. We will continue to explore these and other possibilities with the towns.

Current Physical Improvements to the Property.

There are only minor physical improvements to the property, including recreation trails, logging roads and old cellar holes. There are no other existing physical improvements to the property.

Proposed Physical Improvements to the Property.

The only anticipated physical improvements to the property at this time are improvements for parking.

**Management of the Property.**

The future Town Forest possesses a diversity of managed and natural communities and species and potential for recreational and educational activities. A summary of anticipated recreational and educational use of the Town Forest are presented in this Interim Management Plan, with the knowledge that citizen participation will involve people in management issues and help to develop a Full Management Plan after the conveyance of the property to the two towns.

Activities the AVC anticipates and would be allowed on the property include:

- Educational outings by schools, Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, and other adult and youth groups.
- Human powered traffic on the trails which includes foot, snowshoe, skis, and bicycle.
- Maintaining pre-existing trails.
- Erecting appropriate signage.
- Boundary marking
- Hunting with specific guidelines set forth by AVC in consultation with the Selectboards.
- Woodland management to address immediate needs (e.g. hazard tree management, salvage) in accordance with the forest management plan recently developed and approved.
- Conducting various inventories.
- Birding and wildlife observation
- Adult education in forestry, woodland and watershed ecology in conjunction with town conservation commissions, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Coverts, and other similar groups.

Additional Guidelines:

- Carry out what you carry in
- Stay on the trail and use only designated trailhead parking areas
- Stay off trails during spring melt, when soils are soft and easily eroded
- Be respectful of other trail users and be courteous to trail neighbors
- Control your dog(s). Do not allow dogs to disturb livestock, wildlife, or sensitive natural areas. Pets are not allowed on some trails.
- Close farm gates behind you
- For your safety during hunting seasons, wear blaze orange
- Follow Leave No Trace guidelines.

Activities that are not allowed during the interim period include:

- Camping
- Fires
- Recreational use of motorized vehicles including all-terrain vehicles and snow machines
- Mountain bikes, until a full discussion and guidelines can be set forth by AVC and the Selectboards
- Unleashed dogs (need to consult towns on this)
- New trail development, until both towns and AVC agree to further develop a trail to a possible new parking area or other functional use.
- No use before dawn or after dusk, except for sanctioned events.
- AVC may close access to the trails at any time to address safety issues.

Uses will be subject to the following legal restrictions and constraints:

- Conservation Easement held by VLT and VHCB

Forest management:



The AVC does not currently have any plans to conduct logging operations on the property. There is currently a Forest Inventory for the property. The inventory was prepared for the Ashley property by Paul Harwood of

Harwood Forestry (attached as Appendix 5). Orange County Forester, Dave Paganelli and Windsor County Forester AJ Follansbee collaboratively developed a forest management plan for the property (Appendix 6). They can provide assistance to towns in the management of Town Forests in and can discuss any plans for future forest management and stewardship.

- Conducting apple tree releases for wildlife habitat
- Woodland management to address immediate needs (e.g. hazard tree management, salvage) in advance of the final Management Plan being developed and approved.

Areas of Special Management Focus during the Interim Period:

Parking and governance structure between the two towns will be the main focus until a final Management Plan has been produced.

Partners and Contact Information

Donna Foster, Regional Project Director at the Vermont Land Trust, 802-371-8611

Michael Sacca, President of the Board of Directors at the Alliance for Vermont Communities, 802-889-3210

Signed:

Alliance for Vermont Communities

By: _____

Its Duly Authorized Agent

Date

Appendices and References:

Appendix 1: Property Map

Appendix 2: VLT and VHCB conservation easement, January 2022

Appendix 3: Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), Wheeler Environmental Services, LLC, 2018

Appendix 4: Boundary Retracement Survey, Holt Gilmour Survey Associates, LLC

Appendix 5: Summary of forest provided in 2016 by Paul Harwood, Consulting Forester and by Allaire Diamond, Ecologist, Vermont Land Trust

Appendix 6: Forest Management Plan prepared for the Alliance for Vermont Communities by David Paganelli, Orange County Forester, and AJ Follansbee, Windsor County Forester, 2019

