

Ashley Community Forest Board – Special Meeting DRAFT Minutes

Friday 7-25-25, 8:00 a.m.

Ashley Community Forest parking area, Nutting Road, Strafford

In Person Participants:

ACF Board: Erik Skarsten (ES), David Paganelli (DP), Michael Sacca (MS), Kevin Gish (KG)

Public: Judith Falk

1. Call to Order: DP called the meeting to order at 8:03 am, in the ACF parking area. Items 2-4, below, were discussed in the parking area.
2. Review Treatment Prescription for Stand 3 (black locust area) in the approved Forest Management Plan:
 - DP provided background and history, including the development of the ACF Stewardship Plan with expert input as well as multiple opportunities for public input. The creation of the Stewardship Plan took approximately 1 year. Once finalized, the plan was approved by the ACF Board and then ultimately by Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). MS asked if VLT questioned the prescribed forestry practices in the plan; DP responded “no”.
 - DP described Stand 3 and the prescription for this stand, as specified in the Stewardship Plan. Stand 3 is 19.0 acres and classified as Northern Hardwood. A significant portion of the stand is black locust, some of which was recently harvested. The recommended treatment for Stand 3 in the Stewardship Plan includes hand pulling invasives during summer of 2023, harvest black locust but retain legacy trees near foundation and some forest stand improvement (FSI) work. The plan also includes extending trails into the stand and then follow up invasive pulling in summer 2026.
 - DP also mentioned that the easement with VLT/VHCB requires us to follow the Stewardship Plan.
3. Explanation of the silvicultural practice known as Forest Stand Improvement (FSI) that includes practices known as “girdling” and “crop tree release”.
 - DP explained the two FSI practices: reasons for doing them and the specifics of each.
 - For Stand 3, the Stewardship Plan includes girdling 3-5 trees/acre. DP explained that these were primarily pasture pines.
 - For Stand 3, the Stewardship Plan includes crop tree release (CTR) of 50-100 trees/acre on 2-3 sides. DP explained that this results in spacing between CTR trees of appx 21 ft on average.

- DP also explained that there is a CTR Manual that specifies 3-4 side release for CTR. DP said that the CTR work done recently at Ashley followed the CTR Manual, however the number of sides released is different in our plan.
 - DP stated that CTR and girdling work in Stand 3 was done recently on June 27, 2025 by four foresters, including DP.
4. Review Posted Agendas: February, April, May, June and July 2025 with respect to proper notice to the ACF Board of planned activity and opportunity for discussion by the ACF Board.
- DP pointed out that FSI work was on the agendas for the Feb, Apr, May, Jun and Jul meeting, and that the May agenda specifically mentioned “post harvest and CTR on June 24 and 27”. KG mentioned that being on the agenda does not necessarily mean that an item was actually discussed, as we frequently don’t cover all items on our agenda.
 - MS had several comments/questions directed personally at DP. These comments/questions primarily focused on his dissatisfaction with the recent cutting performed (CTR) by DP and the other 3 foresters. MS stated that he feels it is a conflict to have the chair of the ACF Board also serving as our forester.
 - ES commented that the Board is not communicating/coordinating well. He believes that the all-volunteer board (hopefully) has good intentions in what we do regarding the forest. ES encouraged each board member to own what you can.
 - Judith Falk suggested that agenda items that are a priority should be dealt with in the moment.
 - DP stated that he is “trying to be a conscientious forester, serving the public and also the forest.”
5. Tour Stand 3 and view the area of 4-sided release (approx. ½ acre) and the area of 1,2, 3-sided release (approx. 15 acres). Discuss this activity with respect to full compliance with:
- the approved ACF Stewardship Plan,
 - the approved ACF Forest Management Plan, and
 - the Conservation Easement with Vermont Land Trust and VHCB.
- The group entered the area of Stand 3, just uphill from the landing, where recent cutting occurred on June 27, 2025.
 - DP stated that 4 foresters were all doing CTR work in this area, but were somewhat spread out and working independently for safety reasons.
 - 1 of the 4 foresters was releasing crop trees on 3-4 sides, more extensively the other foresters who were releasing on 2-3 sides as specified in the Stewardship Plan. DP stated that he was unaware that this was happening until after significant cutting had occurred, at which point he corrected the forester who had been releasing on 3-4 sides.
 - MS questioned cutting small diameter black locust. DP responded that this cutting was included in the recent logging contract and such trees could also be cut as part of CTR.
 - DP explained that Stand 3 is essentially an even-aged stand. The goal is to work towards a diverse stand with some big trees. More openness, created by CTR and

girdling will invite regrowth. KG mentioned that this includes the potential for inviting invasives also.

- DP stated that the crop trees were flagged, but have since been removed. He is not aware who removed this flagging.
- DP stated that he will be on site when the logger comes to do closeout work and will cut slash lower at this time.
- DP explained that closeout work includes waterbars, removing stumps in trails, cutting damaged trees along the trails and pushing slash off the trails.
- The group walked through a significant portion of Stand 3 where the black locust harvest and recent CTR/girdling work was done.
- The group stopped in the forest several times for further discussion with the following comments noted:
 - KG: CTR work is too extensive.
 - ES: This is a good educational opportunity. Progress could/should be recorded and charted over time. We could incorporate interpretive signs.
 - DP: We have samples from the initial survey that was done as part of developing the Stewardship Plan, but there is no control stand.
 - DP: All future work in the forest will get ACF Board approval.
 - MS: Suggested using the recently cut wood that is close to the landing to create a firewood bank. Some discussion among board members about this idea included liability, coordination and labor.
 - MS: What happened during the recent cutting was not what the Alliance for Vermont Communities (AVC) had in mind when they donated the land. His idea of sustainable would not look like this. MS questioned whether the motivation is just to sell timber. DP responded that the goal is to create options: carbon storage, timber sale, habitat improvement, etc.
 - DP: The key is balance; the forest is not all a woodlot. Some areas that call for FSI in the Stewardship Plan were not treated. Forest management is not one dimensional.
 - KG: Suggestion to possibly involve the Windsor County Forester more since more than half of the forest is under his jurisdiction. DP responded that the previous Windsor County Forester, AJ Follensbee had been significantly involved, but there has since been turnover in that position. The new Windsor County Forester is Dan Healy.

6. Public Comments. None

7. Discussion of unresolved issues that should be on the agenda of our next meeting. There was very brief discussion, but nothing concrete noted.

9:49 am Adjourn: **KG motioned to adjourn; MS seconded; approved unanimously.**

Next meeting. 8-21-25 at the Morrill Library, Strafford, VT