

Draft Meeting Minutes
Town Forest Recreation Management Plan & Proposed Rules
Community Meeting
10/21/20

Attendance:

Members of the Public: Jill Cutting, Jeremy Delisle, Sheila Hastie, Andy Jones, Anna Schaal, Tim Schaal and Chuck Wooster.

Conservation Commission Members: Jon Bouton, Angie Emerson, Mary Hutchins, Tom Kahl, Katie Mann and Lee Michaelides.

Staff: Town Planner Matt Osborn.

A remote meeting on the draft Recreation Management Plan (RMP) for the Hartford Town Forest (HTF) hosted by the Hartford Conservation Commission (HCC) was held on Wednesday, October 21, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. HCC chair Tom Kahl opened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. and read the Act 92 meeting script. He welcomed everyone and provided an overview of the meeting. Tom noted that the meeting will be recorded.

Matt Osborn and Angie Emerson presented a powerpoint presentation about the background information on Town Forest management, the 2002 RMP, the 2018 RMP and the current proposed four-page list of proposed rules to be incorporated with the 2018 RMP into a comprehensive RMP. Angie explained that the Comprehensive would include the three parts of the

1. Rules and Regulations:
2. The 2018 Planning Document, and
3. The Immediate Work Plans.

It was noted that there is a delicate balance between managing the property for natural resource stewardship and recreation. A theme that came out of the 2018 RMP was that the HTF should be managed as a forest and not a park.

Public Comments:

Jill Cutting objected to the proposed exclusion of e-bikes. She noted that Class 1 e-bikes do not have any more impact than a standard bike. They have a battery that is only activated when the bike is manually pedaled and do not have a throttle. She noted that the Green Woodlands, Woodstock community trails and the Boston Lot in Lebanon currently allow Class 1 e-bikes as well as many other trail networks.

Anna Schaal, a board member of the Upper Valley Mountain Bike Association (UVMBA) agreed that Class 1 e-bikes should be allowed. She stated that they increase access to biking for many folks. She noted that UVMBA researched the issue and had many discussions over six months about it and eventually supported their use. She stated that the Class 1 e-bikes do not cause damage to trails. She added that the State of New Hampshire recently passed a law treating Class 1 e-bikes the same as a standard bicycle.

Tom Kahl reported that he received an e-mail from a resident noting that electric skateboards should not be allowed in the Town Forest. He agreed.

Andy Jones noted that a friend of his who helps manage the Brownsville community trails will likely allow e-bikes as well.

Jon Bouton expressed concern about the uncertainty of where e-bike technology is going. He also expressed concern about the impact of recreation on wildlife habitat and connectivity to other forest blocks. He supports mountain biking in the Town Forest, but does not want to see major increases in use.

Katie Mann noted that the Woodlands Trails website notes that e-bikes are allowed on a trial basis. Jill Cutting responded that e-bikes are past the trial phase.

Katie Mann noted that the Town Forest is multi-use area and the Conservation Commission manages for property for conservation as well as recreation.

Jill Cutting suggested allowing ATV's for trails work, noting their practical use with repair and construction.

Tim Schaal stated that he opposes the prohibition on ATV's on Town Forest trails unless there is a compelling reason to do so. Currently, there is very little ATV use in the Town Forest and there hasn't been damage to trails. He thinks residents in the area should be able to access the Town Forest trails.

Andy Jones said he has used an ATV in the Town Forest to remove downed trees.

Tom Kahl asked about the restriction on snow machines.

Andy Jones recommends allowing snow machine access on trails to allow residents access to connect to the VAST trail.

Anna Schaal asked why the HCC is proposing restrictions on snow machines. Katie Mann responded that it has been 18 years since we reviewed recreational uses in the Town Forest and it was time to revisit uses. She noted that we haven't seen much use in recent years. She said it is helpful to get insight from Town Forest users on trail use and that the HCC will take the comments and consider changes to the draft rules.

Chuck Wooster noted that he served on the Steering Committee on the Recreation Management Plan in 2002. At that time, the HCC compromised to allow snow machines use and ATV's on Town Forest trails as a way to allow local residents pass-thru access to other area trails. He encourages the HCC to reconsider the proposed restrictions on ATV's and snow machines. He suggested closing Simonds Way to ATV's since they can't access private land to the east.

Mary Hutchins, who is involved with the local snowmobile club (Hurricane Riders), noted that she suggested closing snow machine access to the South Side and West Side Loop since the VAST Trail was relocated and there is no need to have two trails paralleling each other. Andy Jones agreed.

Anna Schaal noted the 2018 Recreation Management Plan encouraged improvements to signage and wayfinding. She stated that she has run into many mountain bikers who couldn't figure out where they were due to unclear signage. She encouraged the HCC to improve wayfinding signs to direct people to the Town Forest, and to update trail signs in Town Forest to assist trail users. Tim Schaal

agreed stating that he thinks the HCC needs to take signage to the next level. He also recommends improvements to the trail map and offered his assistance.

Jon Bouton expressed concern about too much signage and bringing too many people to the Town Forest.

Regarding the Forest Management Plan, Sheila Hastie requested a map of the forest stands and planned timber harvest that shows the recreational trails that will be impacted. Tom Kahl responded that such a map is available and that we will get it posted on the website.

Jeremy Delisle noted that his parents live near the Town Forest and they use ATV's and snow machines in the Town Forest. He hopes that they will be able to continue to do that in the future.

Chuck Wooster noted that there has been tension about recreational use and conservation in the Town Forest for a long time. He noted that the Town Forest is a public resource and there is a large user group. The HCC tends to want to limit recreational use. He encouraged the HCC to cease the moment and get the Plan adopted since we are a good spot today as to the balance between recreation and conservation.

Tom Kahl summarized the main issues discussed tonight:

- Allow Class 1 e-bikes.
- Continue to allow pass through ATV's and snow machines.
- Create wayfinding signs off-site, and new trail maps and signage in the Town Forest.

Next Steps: Matt Osborn noted that public comments on the Draft Rules will be accepted until Monday, November 30th. The Conservation Commission will review the public comments and make changes to the Draft Rules based on the public comments. Tom Kahl estimated that the revised Draft Plan and Rules will likely be presented to the Selectboard sometime in January or February. Matt noted that like this meeting, the Selectboard meeting will be promoted via the town website, Hartford List Serve, e-mails, Constant Contact, and flyers. Tim Schaal asked if the public will have a chance to review the revised draft. Matt responded yes.

Adjournment: Tom Kahl thanked everyone for participating in the meeting. Several attendees thanked the HCC for sponsoring the meeting. Tom noted that minutes of the meeting will be posted in a few days. He encouraged attendees to review the minutes and let the HCC know if you have any requested changes.

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.