

**HARTFORD TOWN FOREST
DRAFT RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
FEBRUARY, OCTOBER 8, 2021**

PART I. HISTORY, RULES AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING RECREATION

I. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Recreational activity in the Hartford Town Forest has occurred for many decades. Yet, the Town Forest wasn't actively managed until the late 1990s when the Hartford Conservation Commission began managing the property and it became evident that rules regarding recreational use were needed. The first Recreation Management Plan was adopted in 2002 following a year-long effort initiated by Town staff and the Conservation Commission that included an extensive public process, a Steering Committee made up of different user groups and several community meetings. The Plan resulted in the first set of rules governing recreational use in the Town Forest.

Since 2002, recreational use in the Town Forest has increased and evolved and it was clear that the Plan needed to be updated. In 2018, the Town was selected as part of a 10-town pilot program to look at recreational use in Vermont's town forests. The Plan was developed by consultant SE Group and an initial draft was presented to the Hartford Selectboard in October, 2018 and then subsequently incorporated as Part II of this Recreational Plan update.

A. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to implement the recreational goals, strategies and actions outlined in the Natural Resources Chapter of the 2019 Hartford Town Plan and to present a plan for recreational use of the Town Forest consistent with the other management plans and reports developed for the Town Forest as outlined in previous sections of the Integrated Town Forest Plan.

B. Public Process and Plan Updates

The development of the 2002 Town Forest Recreation Management Plan and the 2018 Town Forest Recreation Plan included extensive public input.

In the future, the Conservation Commission will review the Town Forest Recreation Management Plan on a regular basis. Every ten years, or in the event of substantial changes in management strategies, the Conservation Commission will undertake an update sooner and solicit public input.

C. Guidelines/Principles

The following principles are the basis for the management of recreation in the Town Forest:

1. The Town Forest is open for appropriate use and enjoyment in a variety of ways that do not create forest fragmentation, diminish the quality of wildlife habitat, impede wildlife migration, or negatively impact forest resources including wetlands, vernal pools, and timber.
2. Provision will be made for seasonably appropriate and multi-purpose uses of a sustainably maintained trail system.

3. The Town Forest is a local resource for Hartford residents and our Upper Valley neighbors . It is appropriate for individuals and small group uses that do not interrupt or diminish the peaceful and quiet atmosphere and experience of a forest. It is not an appropriate venue to be advertised beyond the Upper Valley.
4. Access to the Town Forest and activities that include a variety of community perspectives and uses will be provided.
5. Education and learning activities are strongly encouraged.

II. MANAGEMENT AND RULES OF USE

- A. The Town Forest shall be open for public use from sunrise to 10:00 p.m.
- B. No motorized traffic is permitted in the Town Forest except on the Class 4 Section of Reservoir Road and for all terrain vehicles and snowmobiles on Reservoir Road and other designated trails noted in B.1.b and B.1.c. below. The Class 4 section of Reservoir Road begins at the trailhead parking lot and extends to Neal Road.
- C. The Hartford Conservation Commission will:
 1. Maintain clearly posted/blazed boundaries around the perimeter of the Town Forest.
 2. Post signs where any trail leaves the Town Forest and goes onto private land.
 3. Communicate with adjacent landowners on a biennial basis.
 4. Work with the Hartford Police Department to ensure enforcement of local and state laws.
 5. Work with the Town of Hartford Department of Public Works to maintain the trailhead parking area including snow removal.
 6. Maintain an information kiosk at the trailhead parking area with appropriate and current maps, rules of use, and other seasonally appropriate information. Information will also be posted on the Town website.
 7. Promote “Leave No Trace/Pack It In – Pack It Out” practices.

III RECREATIONAL USES

A. Reservoir Road

Reservoir Road runs through the Town Forest. From Kings Highway to the trailhead parking area, it is a Class 3 Road. As a Class 3 Road, it is regularly maintained and plowed by the Town. Entering from Neal Road, Reservoir Road immediately becomes a Class 4 road. According to Section 75-24 of the Hartford Transportation Ordinance, “in accordance with 19 V.S.A. § 310(b), the Town does not provide any regular maintenance on class 4 Town highways. The Town is not obligated to perform winter maintenance on any class 4 Town highway. As a result, the Class 4 section of the Reservoir Road is not maintained by the Town. In addition, the Class 4 portion of Reservoir Road is posted prohibiting travel from March 1st through June 1st except that Reservoir Road may remain open to snowmobile traffic so long as snow conditions permit. The use of the Class 4 road is governed by Vermont State Statutes. All traffic must comply with State Statutes including licensing and registration. During the winter months when there is snow, the Hurricane Riders, the local Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) Club grooms the Class 4 section of Reservoir Road for snowmobiles

B. TRAILS

1. Permitted Uses

- a. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including Class 1 e-bikes - are allowed on all trails.
- ~~a.~~b. Class 1 e-bikes will be allowed in the Town Forest for a one-year trial basis beginning with the adoption of this Plan. Following the end of that year, the HCC will evaluate the impact of e-bikes and determine whether they should continue to be allowed on Town Forest trails.
- ~~b.~~c. In the spirit of the 2002 Town Forest Recreation Management Plan, snowmobile pass-thru traffic is allowed. In addition to the Class 4 section of Reservoir Road, snowmobiles are allowed on WB Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, Wright Farm Trail and the connector between the ~~two~~Wright Farm Trail and Reservoir Road. Snowmobiles are also allowed on the Snowmobile Cut-off, the connector between Reservoir Road and the VAST Trail on private land on the northwest section of the Forest. The Snowmobile trails are clearly marked for snowmobile traffic by the Hurricane Riders.
- d. In the spirit of the 2002 Recreation Management Plan, pass-thru all-terrain vehicles (ATV) access is allowed in the Town Forest. ATV's are allowed on WB Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, West Side Loop, South Side Trail, Simonds Way and Reservoir Road except during the late winter and spring wet season between – March 1st - June 1st.
- e. ATV use for trail maintenance purposes is allowed throughout the Town Forest by permission of the Hartford Conservation Commission.
- ~~e.~~f. All-terrain vehicles, Ddirt bikes and, motorcycles, and e-bikes are not permitted on Town Forest trails.
- ~~d.~~g. Horseback riding is permitted on the W.B. Brown Trail, Moose Brook Trail, Reservoir Road, Wright Farm Trail , West Side Trail and Southside Trail.
- ~~e.~~h. The Town Forest can be enjoyed by a wide variety of activities such as hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, dog walking, etc.
- ~~f.~~i. Dogs are not required to be on a leash IF the dog is responsive to voice commands. For the enjoyment of others, please clean up after your dog and carry the waste home.
- ~~g.~~j. Hunting is permitted throughout the Town Forest during hunting season as prescribed by law. The Conservation Commission will post hunting notices annually of the Vermont Hunting Schedule for the safety of the general public. Hunting licenses are required to hunt in the Town Forest.

2. Activities Requiring the Express Permission of the Town of Hartford.

- a. **Orienteering-** groups desiring to set up an orienteering activity may apply for a permit to the Conservation Commission to use the Town Forest.
- b. **School based or Other Educational Activity.** Groups that intend to conduct projects or educational activities in the Town Forest must apply for a permit from the Hartford Conservation Commission and specify the details of their proposed project. Educational activities that involve the killing of animals or the permanent removal of nests or plants, including wildflowers are prohibited. Activities such as the limited collection of tree leaves, fern fronds, fungi fruits, algae and lichen specimens are permitted. Any educational activity that involves the placement of stakes, ropes, wires, fencing, netting, flagging, signs, paint, branches, brush, vines or other such materials must be done so as not to endanger humans, pets or

wildlife. All such materials must be considered temporary, must be clearly marked with the name and address of a contact person for the school group, and must be removed by members of the school group in a timely manner. Structures that significantly impound water or impede the flow of water in the Town Forest are prohibited. Any holes dug in the soil by school groups must be filled in with the original soil in a timely manner and directed away from trails or roads.

- c. **Special Events to which the General Public is Invited.** For those interested in using the Town Forest for a special event, an application for a Special Events Permit is required to be submitted to the Hartford Selectboard with notice provided to the Conservation Commission. For example, for several years, the Parks and Recreation Department has held an annual running race in the Town Forest and has worked closely with the Conservation Commission. Care must be taken so that if events do occur, their use does not negatively impact the character of the Town Forest.
- d. **Camping** Use of the Town Forest for camping is permitted for educational purposes and for work crews only. Camping for these organizations will be limited to areas designated by the Conservation Commission. A permit from the Conservation Commission is required.

3. Prohibited activities

- a. Trapping.
- b. Campfires unless they are part of an approved educational activity and are permitted by the Hartford Fire Department and any remains of the campfire are promptly removed following their use.
- c. Commercial recreational use.
- d. Target shooting.
- e. Alcohol consumption.
- f. Establishing new trails without the authorization of the Conservation Commission.
- g. Cutting or damaging trees or vegetation without the authorization of the Conservation Commission.

PART II: RECREATIONAL PLANNING IN THE TOWN FOREST.

The following report has been adopted by the Conservation Commission to guide future recreational planning in the Town Forest <https://www.hartford-vt.org/2226/Conservation-Commission>

PART III: 2020-2022 WORK PLAN

As part of the 2018 recreation planning process, the Town of Hartford retained the services of the Upper Valley Trails Alliance to assess the condition and sustainability of all trails in the Town Forest and to make recommendations for future trail work. That report is included here and will continue to be basis for the ongoing work to improve and maintain trails.

In addition, to the work proposed by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, the Conservation Commission has adopted the following goals for 2020-2022:

1. ~~Wayfinding S~~ignage on Route 4 ~~for the~~ Town Forest with directional signage ~~and~~ at Center of Town Road, King's Highway and Reservoir Road.
2. ~~Establish a~~The Trails Working Group will continue to make recommendations to the Conservation Commission ~~for~~ regarding trail maintenance. The Group shall be comprised of representatives of various user groups.

3. Create pause places (two-person benches) in appropriate wildlife viewing areas.
4. Create educational and access restriction signs for vernal pool areas, tree identification signs, wildlife viewing areas, etc.
5. Post a trails map in the kiosk, on-line and at major intersections throughout the Town Forest.
6. The Conservation Commission will review 2020 Town Forest Recreational Management Plan annually.
7. The Conservation Commission will continue to work closely with the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department.