

## Town Forest Background Information

In the early 2000s, perhaps earlier, mountain bike enthusiasts started making mountain bike trails on property owned by Rock of Ages and other nearby private property. As interest and activity grew it was determined an organization was needed. Millstone Trails Association (MTA) was formed in the mid-2000s. After several years Rock of Ages (ROA) informed MTA it wanted to sell its unproductive land. MTA contacted the Trust for Public Land (TPL) which decided to help MTA secure ROA's land and several smaller parcels. MTA and TPL came to the Selectboard on June 22, 2010. On July 13, 2010 at the Selectboard meeting it was noted revenues sources for maintaining, improving forest conditions are through logging and volunteer efforts. On August 10, 2010 the Selectboard formed a study committee to research questions including forestry. On September 28, 2010 the Committee's report was presented to the Selectboard. The timber resources as a possible revenue source was noted in the presentation. At that time there was a concern about Town expenses and loss of property tax revenue, which was estimated to be approximately \$8,000 per year.

In November, 2010 Town voters authorized borrowing \$100,000 to contribute to the purchase of the land. On January 18, 2011 as a precursor to the Town Forest Management Plan Committee (TFMPC) work, the Selectboard held a hearing to gather input on use of the property. Forestry work again was mentioned. At that time the Town was told the Forest Management Plan must have a forest (timber) management chapter. On the February 25, 2011 while discussing forming the TFMPC the Selectboard asked that the county forester be involved.

The county forester was involved with the TFMPC. He attended several Committee meetings and wrote the forest management plan. The Plan was adopted with the chapter the county forester wrote.

Meanwhile MTA continued to operate and maintain the trails. The Plan called for the Town to enter into Corridor Management Agreements (CMA) with organizations, namely MTA and Barre Town Thunder Chickens Snowmobile Club, that use the property. When the property was acquired in 2013 the Town and MTA signed a CMA. MTA agreed to continue being responsible for its trails.

The November 2014 Town newsletter reported the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation held its annual Town Forest Summit in Barre Town and utilized the town forest to highlight uses and benefits of the town forest. The article stated, "In addition to recreation activities the forest is managed for timber and provides opportunity for education."

In 2015 after a request for proposals was issued, Jeff Smith, a Vermont certified forester, was selected from eight applicants to be the Town's consulting forester.

The first logging contract was for 55 acres along Littlejohn Road. The logger was selected after competitive bidding. The logging was performed during the winters of 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. There has been no other logging until the winter of 2020-2021.

The latest logging contract was released for competitive bidding. It was advertised in 5 newspapers. In addition, Jeff Smith mailed the notice to loggers on his mailing list. The Town provided one name for direct mailing. Three bids were received. During its public meeting on November 17, 2020 the Selectboard awarded the contract to the high bidder, Limlaw Pulpwood. The contract has two areas: Area 1 was logged during '20-'21 and is 72 acres; Area 2 has not yet been logged and is 21 acres.

The forest property was acquired with substantial grants from federal and state agencies. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board was one grantor. A condition of its grant was the Town agree to a conservation easement (C.E.). The Town signed the C.E. in 2012. The VLT is the steward or overseer of the

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C.E., which requires a forest management plan. It protects streams and 3 mapped vernal pools. Caitlin Cusack is the VLT steward, and she is a Vermont certified forester. She is a frequent visitor to the forest before, during, and after the logging.

Over 11 years there have been different concerns and assertions about money. In the formative years the concern was about how much the town forest would cost the Town in lost tax revenues, acquisition cost, and operational expenses. The Town contributed \$100,000 towards the purchase. With Town labor, equipment and materials, the Town has developed 2 parking area. Recently the Town paid \$1,115 to install an electrical service in the Brook Street garage (at MTA's request). The Town now pays \$4,500 - \$5,000 per year for year-round port-a-let service and about \$360 per year for electricity at the Brook Street garage. In the new fiscal year '21-'22, \$4,600 was budgeted to extend a water service into the Brook Street lot. The Town plows the parking lots. MTA, the Thunder Chickens and the Town split grass cutting duties at 44 Brook Street. The department of public works has delivered mulch and gravel to the site for the disc golf organization. The trash and recycling barrels are emptied once per week, spring through fall.

Revenue from logging is the Town's only revenue source from the town forest. The Town does not receive any revenue from forest users directly or indirectly. Since 2013, when the forest was acquired, the Town has received \$27,398 in logging revenues. That includes the payment (\$23,022) for the 2020-2021 work. Area 2 of the current contract is much smaller and will yield less than the work in Area 1. The forest management plan recommends 20-25 years between logging in each stand. The area that was logged this past winter will not be logged for another 20-25 years.

An existing road off of Capital Quarry Road and an existing clearing made by the previous landowner, were used for the log landing of Area 1. The logger did not clear a lot for the log landing. One clear cut of approximately a half an acre was prescribed. Other areas had heavier (more concentrated) cutting than other areas, but are not clear cuts.

Equipment crossing trails and tree tops or branches left on trails is inevitable, especially in an area with trail density like Area 1. The forester referred to trail maps when laying out main skid trails. Crossing trails was necessary. Although the loggers had a map showing trails, with snow cover it is difficult to tell where a winding trail is. Tree tops and branches could be left over a trail. The logger is responsible for repairing ruts in the forest, particularly around water. MTA is responsible for clearing trails of slash (tree tops and branches). The loggers' restoration is supposed to be completed by June 30 and may be done now.

From the beginning, in 2010, it was known there would be logging in the town forest. The forest management plan was written by the county forester in 2011-2012. The TFMPC of 7 Town residents reviewed it and incorporated it into the Forest Management Plan. The Plan was adopted by the Selectboard and approved by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the VLT. The consulting foresters' job is to implement the Plan. A critic of the logging contacted the present Washington County forester about the logging and asked his opinion of the forestry practices implemented this past winter and how well those practices lined up with the 2013 Community Forest Plan. Mr. Nelson replied, "To that end, it is my sincere opinion that the forestry practices implement(ed) this past winter were within the bounds both of the 2013 plan and acceptable forestry practices."

If you are interested in logging, thinking about having your woodland timbered, or you like to use the town forest, come to the workshop. Learn about wildlife habitat, protecting recreation trails and enhancing tree species and age diversity.

