

# TOWN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

## FOR THE CROSS & GLEBE LOTS

Town of West Windsor, Vermont



Prepared by the Town Forest Committee  
for the West Windsor Select Board  
with assistance from the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission &  
Elisabeth Tii McLane, Forest Ecosystem Consulting

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
  - 1.1 PURPOSE
  - 1.2 PREPARATION OF THE PLAN
  - 1.3 PLAN EVALUATION AND UPDATES
2. LOCATION
  - 2.1 TOPOGRAPHY & SOILS
  - 2.2 SURFACE WATERS
3. HISTORY
4. EXISTING CONDITIONS
  - 4.1 FOREST TYPES
  - 4.2 WILDLIFE HABITAT
  - 4.3 RECREATION
5. POTENTIAL WIND ENERGY
6. COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

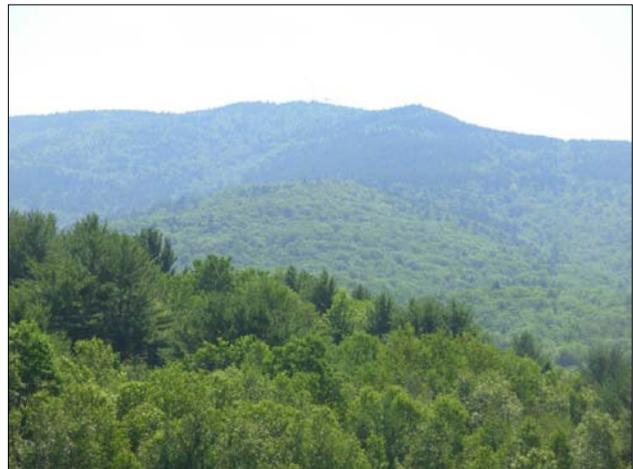
### APPENDICES

- A. MAPS & TABLES
- B. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SURVEY
- C. RELEVANT STATE STATUTES
- D. VERMONT HANG GLIDING ASSOCIATION
- E. ASCUTNEY TRAILS ASSOCIATION

### COMPANION DOCUMENTS:

*West Windsor Town Forest: Ecological Assessment and Natural Community Mapping Project* by Elisabeth Tii McLane, Consulting Ecologist; Strafford, VT; 2011

*Forest Management Plan for the West Windsor Town Forest* by Elisabeth Tii McLane, Consulting Ecologist; Strafford, VT; 2011



# 1. INTRODUCTION

The West Windsor Town Forest consists of both the Cross and Glebe lots adjacent to Mount Ascutney Resort in the southeast portion of the community. The Cross lot is 1,042 acres and the Glebe lot is 300 acres, combining to make the Town Forest 1,342 acres in total land area (see the Vicinity Map). It is a tract of municipally-owned and managed forestland, but it is not officially designated as a municipal forest under 10 V.S.A. §2653 (see Appendix C). The West Windsor Select Board established the Town Forest Committee to make recommendations for managing this area.

The Town has decided to manage this property for multiple uses, primarily for its scenic value, recreational uses, and to protect ecological functions.

## 1.1 PURPOSE

This management plan is intended to update and replace the 1986 *Forest Management Plan* prepared by Daniel Batchelder. The purpose of this plan is to document existing conditions, assess the community's desires for management practices of this property, and establish guidelines for the future management of the West Windsor Town Forest.



To inform management decisions, this plan relies heavily upon companion documents completed by Elisabeth Tii McLane in 2011: *West Windsor Town Forest: Ecological Assessment and Natural Community Mapping Project* and *Forest Management Plan for the West Windsor Town Forest*.

## 1.2 PREPARATION OF THE PLAN

Town Forest Committee members developed this *Town Forest Management Plan* for the Select Board. As part of this process, the Town of West Windsor hired a forest ecosystem consultant to identify forest types and natural communities, evaluate recreational impacts on natural systems, and recommend management opportunities for the Town Forest. The Town also hired the Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission to assist with public meeting facilitation, mapping and preparing this management plan.



Public meetings were held throughout 2011 and in early 2012 in order to gather input on how best to manage this property. A survey was also conducted in March 2011 to determine community priorities for future management activities. The results of this input are incorporated throughout this document and summarized in Appendix B. The top five priority uses of the Town Forest, as identified through this outreach, include the following listed in priority order:

1. Hiking, jogging, snow shoeing, skiing;
2. Wildlife habitat resource protection;
3. Mountain bicycling;
4. Bird watching, animal tracking;
5. Horseback riding.

This plan incorporates the trails map produced by the Sport Trails of the Ascutney Basin (STAB).

This plan is also informed by the *Ascutney Management Unit Long Range Management Plan* being developed for the adjacent 3,992 acres of state park and wildlife management area by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. State forestry and wildlife officials were contacted to inform this *Town Forest Management Plan*.



### **1.3 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND UPDATES**

This plan is intended to guide future management of the Town Forest over the next five years. It is recommended that it is updated at least every five years. However, active management of the recreational trails should be evaluated at least annually in order to determine if management of those resources should be altered due to erosion, enforcement, trail maintenance agreements or for other reasons.

The Town Forest Committee, in consultation with the Select Board, has the authority to control the use and time of use of the Town Forest, including but not limited to the trail network. The Committee and Board are also responsible for the implementation of this plan.

## **2. LOCATION OF THE TOWN FOREST**

West Windsor's Town Forest lies on the northwestern facing slope of Mount Ascutney (see the Vicinity Map). The forest is located in the southeast corner of the Town, with the Windsor town boundary to the east and Weathersfield town boundary to the south.

Adjacent land uses are primarily comprised of conservation, commercial ski area and residential. The Mount Ascutney Resort and Mile Long Field are located to the north of the property, and private properties abut to the west. The Town Forest, combined with the Mount Ascutney State Park to the east and Little Ascutney Wildlife Management Area to the southwest, forms an important block of core forested wildlife habitat.

The primary vehicular access to this property is from Coaching Lane, off VT Route 44. A parking area (see photo to the right) is located approximately 1,500 feet south of the intersection with Coaching Lane Extension. Secondary vehicular access is from Kimball Farm Road, but no parking area is available.



Alternative access to the property via non-motorized trails is available from the Resort, Mount Ascutney State Park toll road, as well as from the Weathersfield Trail with connections to the Bicentennial Trail. From the resort parking area off Hotel Road, several trails established by STAB connect to the Town Forest. The toll road is off Back Mountain Road (VT Route 44A) in Windsor. The toll road terminates at a parking lot that is approximately half a mile from the summit of Mount Ascutney. The Town Forest can be accessed by foot along the Hang Glider Trail. The Weathersfield Trail starts at the parking lot off High Meadow Road via VT Route 131 and Cascade Falls Road in Weathersfield. Roughly the top half of the Weathersfield Trail is located within the West Windsor Town Forest.

Many of the Town Forest boundary lines are poorly defined or marked. As a result, the acreage figures are approximate and some of the boundaries are hard to distinguish in the field. The Town hired a surveyor to find and mark a portion of the northerly boundary. Due to the expense, surveying the entire boundary will take years to accomplish.

## **2.1 TOPOGRAPHY & SOILS**

Mount Ascutney, at 3,144 feet in elevation at the summit, dominates the surrounding landscape and the topography of this property. The summit is located within the Town of Windsor less than 100 feet east of the Town Forest. The property ranges from about 900 feet in elevation at the brook just west of the gravel pit, to about 3,100 feet in elevation near the summit (see the Vicinity Map). Slopes vary throughout the property, but the prevalence of steep slopes in many areas limit timber and recreational opportunities. Ledge outcroppings and talus areas found in a number of areas provide potential bobcat habitat while also limiting timber and recreational opportunities.

Mount Ascutney is a “monadnock”: an isolated mountain of erosion-resistant rock rising above a surrounding area worn flat by water and ice. The top of the mountain is comprised of syenite rock, while a mix of rock types can be found below 1,600 feet in elevation. Many of the soils found on this property are poor, shallow and excessively drained. However, a few areas of enriched soil can be found. (See the *Ecological Assessment and Natural Community Mapping Project* for more detail on the geologic composition of this property.) Some areas of statewide agricultural soils are found in the lower elevation areas near Coaching Lane.

Steep slopes are found throughout the property. As a headwaters area, the forested land cover functions to benefit water quality by collecting and filtering rainfall, slowing the release of

stormwater into streams, and protecting against erosion of steep slopes and erodible soils. Erosion control measures should be used for any timber or recreational activities in these areas.

The Town Forest Committee is generally limiting timber harvesting and additional recreational trails to below 1,700 feet in elevation; thereby, maintaining the higher elevations relatively undisturbed due to steep slopes, poor access and wildlife habitat.

## 2.2 SURFACE WATERS

Portions of the tract fall within three watersheds. The majority of this property drains northwest into the Mill Brook. A small portion in the southeast corner of the Town Forest near the summit drains southeast into the Town of Weathersfield along sections of the Weathersfield Trail. An even smaller portion along the southern boundary drains southwest into the North Branch of the Black River.

There are six brooks and a few wetlands and vernal pools on this property. The Town Forest is in a headwaters area. With steep sections along some of the brooks, there are a number of cascades that are very scenic. Since there is a general lack of water on Mount Ascutney, future activities should minimize impacts in order to protect the limited surface water features for their ecological functions.

## 3. HISTORY

The Glebe lot has always been publicly owned and managed. It was set aside for church and town maintenance in the original lotting plan for the West Parish of Windsor. The Town of West Windsor was established in 1848, after the West Parish split off from the East Parish (i.e. Town of Windsor).

In 1883, a major fire burned the top of the mountain above 2,200 feet in elevation.

The presence of stone walls suggests historic farming activity. The lower part of this property was cleared in the 1800s to establish fields for sheep farming.

A historic quarry site is located off the Bicentennial Trail. The Mower granite quarry was established in the 1890s. Stone from this quarry was used in President McKinley's sarcophogus as well as in local monuments at the Story Memorial Hall, Brownsville and Sheddsville cemeteries, and the Sheddsville monument. In addition, a monument in Veteran's Park along Main Street in Windsor



was made with rock from this quarry. There was however too much iron in the stone, and the quarry went bankrupt and closed in 1913.

In 1903 a road to the summit was established.

Tree cover was re-established after the sheep farming ceased operations. Timber harvesting took place on the northwest side of the mountain in the 1940s-50s, which included establishing a logging camp. The last timber harvest on this property occurred on the Cross lot in 1979.

The Cross lot was deeded to the Town from the Cross brothers in 1979. The Crosses had owned the property for about 10 years before giving it to the Town. During that time, trees were cut from almost all accessible areas. Some areas were high-graded, resulting in undesirable regeneration and residual stands of poor quality trees.

Hang gliding from the West Peak area has been popular since the 1980s.

In 1991, the Town established the Bicentennial Trail along the historic roadway to the summit in honor of the State of Vermont's bicentennial year celebration. Governor Richard Snelling was scheduled to preside over the opening ceremony for the Trail, but passed away just before the ceremony. His wife Barbara Snelling opened the trail in his place.

In 2006, STAB began to create a recreational trail network within the Town Forest.



## 4. EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section summarizes the existing conditions of the Town Forest, including forest stand types, wildlife habitat and recreational facilities.

### 4.1 FOREST STAND TYPE

In general, this is not a high-value timber lot at this time. Timber values vary due to differing conditions in topography, soils and past timber harvesting activity throughout this tract of land. The *Forest Management Plan* identifies Stands 3, 4 and 5 as providing the best opportunities for timber harvesting, if the Town so chose to pursue that management activity (see the Forest Stand Type Map). The following summarizes the forest stands as evaluated by the forest ecosystem consultant.

#### Stand 1 – Mixed Wood

- Hemlock (37%), white pine (18%), red oak (13%), red maple (13%), paper birch (10%), other hardwoods
- Shallow to bedrock soils, frequent exposed ledge

- Recreational trails are common
- Invasive multiflora rose along the stand's northwest boundary
- Not critical wildlife habitat, but hemlock provides cover for deer, and red oak is a valuable food source for deer, bear, grouse, turkey, other animal species
- Wildlife habitat and recreational uses are priorities for this stand

### **Stand 2 – Red Oak-Northern Hardwood**

- Hophornbeam (38%), red oak (23%), sugar maple (19%), bitternut hickory (13%), other hardwoods
- Hilltops and west-sloping shoulders, shallow to bedrock and well- to extremely well-drained soils
- Recreational trails are common
- Very good wildlife habitat
- Some patches of invasive honeysuckle in small openings
- Wildlife habitat and recreational uses are priorities for this stand



### **Stand 3 – Northern Hardwood**

- Sugar maple (62%), basswood (7%), yellow birch (7%), hophornbeam (7%), other hard and soft woods
- Moderate to steep slopes, rocky and moderately deep to shallow to bedrock soils, high soil moisture
- Not critical habitat, but provides thermal cover for wildlife during the winter
- If desired, manage this area for hardwood sawtimber

### **Stand 4 – Hemlock-Northern Hardwood**

- Hemlock (30%), red maple (24%), sugar maple (14%), hophornbeam (10%), paper birch (9%), other hard and soft woods
- Moderate to steep slopes with gentle slopes in valleys, moderate to somewhat shallow soils, enriched soils are not uncommon
- Southern area is mapped as critical deer wintering area, hemlock serves as winter cover for deer, mast species provides for an important wildlife food source, two streams and one vernal pool serve as important water sources
- If desired, harvesting would produce a mix of pulp, fuelwood and some sawlogs

### **Stand 5 – Red Oak-Bitternut Hickory-Northern Hardwood**

- Sugar maple (31%), bitternut hickory (15%), red oak (13%), paper birch (10%), hophornbeam (10%), red maple (5%), other hard and soft woods
- Moderate to very steep slopes, moderately deep to shallow soils, well drained soils
- Talus areas support denning porcupines, oak and hickory mast food source, structural diversity for nesting forest birds

- If desired, harvesting would produce a mix of pulp, fuelwood and some sawlogs

### Stand 6 – Hemlock-Hardwood

- Hemlock(53%), red oak (27%), sugar maple (6%), hophornbeam (6%), other hard and soft woods
- Sites are somewhat fragile (shallow/ledgy soils or extremely steep slopes)
- High wildlife values, southern portion within mapped critical deer wintering areas, red oak serves as a wildlife food source, one vernal pool supports salamanders and wood frogs
- Any uses should avoid damage to the ecology of fragile areas
- Wildlife habitat is a priority in this area, with recreation as a secondary priority

### Stand 7 – Hemlock-Red Spruce

- Hemlock (64%), red spruce (27%), and white pine (9%)
- Steep to very steep slopes
- Mapped critical deer wintering area, extensive hemlock cover, some mast for a wildlife food source, two streams and one vernal pool
- Timber values are good, but the area is small and steep
- Wildlife habitat and recreational uses are priorities for this stand

The accompanying *Forest Management Plan* includes recommendations to improve wildlife habitat and promote the growth of good quality timber for possible future harvesting, if desirable. Primary access for timber harvesting is via Coaching Lane and Kimball Farm Road with old forest roads providing secondary access within the Town Forest.

In addition to the forest stands noted above, the *Ecological Assessment and Natural Community Mapping Project* also identified rare and uncommon plants within the Town Forest. One rare plant was found at this site: bronze sedge (*Carex foenea*). Three uncommon plants were also found onsite including back's sedge (*Carex backii*), Minnesota sedge (*Carex albursina*), and wood millet (*Millium effusum*). These plants are generally located in isolated areas.

## 4.2 WILDLIFE HABITAT

The Town Forest is located within a network of large blocks of undeveloped lands that provide likely habitat and travel corridors for wildlife. The larger the habitat blocks, the more likely they are to support biodiversity and provide habitat for a wide-range of animal species. The wildlife habitat suitability map shows how the Town Forest is located in the middle of a network of areas that facilitate habitat and travel corridors for larger mammals (i.e. bear, moose, bobcat, fisher) that have extensive home ranges. Connections between these habitat blocks are critically



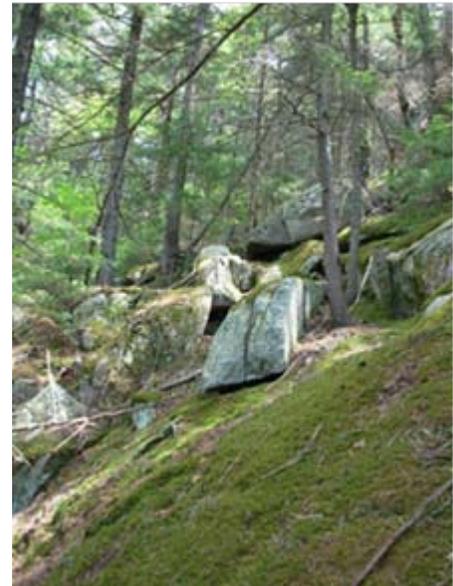
important to support these larger mammals. This network includes connections from northwest Reading, through Little Ascutney and Mount Ascutney areas, to both New Hampshire as well as the Hawks Mountain area. Forestry activities and recreational facilities should locate carefully in order to maintain this important functionality noted above.

There are considerable wildlife values on this property as described in the *Ecological Assessment and Natural Community Mapping Project*. Important habitat features that are important for wildlife were recorded in this Town Forest Management Plan or in the above companion document, including the following (see both the Wildlife Habitat and Natural Communities Map and the table entitled Natural Communities – Summary of Notable Habitat Features):

**Deer wintering areas:** these areas provide cover for deer that is critical for winter survival. Deer wintering areas were mapped by the State a number of years ago, and should be further informed by site evaluations conducted by the Town’s ecological consultant and input from the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

**Thermal cover:** softwood species (i.e. hemlock, spruce, fir) provide important thermal cover during winter months for a variety of species. Due to the age and accuracy of the deer wintering area mapping data, this thermal cover evaluation is important to verify where these locations exist onsite.

**Talus areas:** these areas are important as porcupine habitat (see photo to the right). The *Ecological Assessment* did not definitively find any bobcat sign, however, these areas would provide good habitat. Bobcat frequently den in rock piles and use the cliffs as hunting perches or to rest in sunny locations during the day. The Fish and Wildlife Department suggest that a buffer surrounding these areas would help to minimize negative impacts on these species.



**Mast:** tree species that provide nuts and acorns (i.e. “mast”) are a very important food source for wildlife, such as bear, turkey, deer, grouse and squirrels. Beech and red oak are important mast producing species on this property. Currently the Town Forest is not known as important bear habitat. However, preserving beech mast is an important consideration to maintain an adequate local bear food source as diseased beech trees are dying in many parts of the northeast.

**Water and wet soils:** Brooks, wetlands, vernal pools and other wet soils are uncommon in the Town Forest and on Mount Ascutney in general. These areas are important to many wildlife species for water and foraging opportunities. Wet soils areas provide the first green shoots in the spring, benefiting bears as they emerge from hibernation.

**Soil enrichment:** herbaceous plant diversity increases in enriched soils, which provides greater wildlife food variety. Bears in particular eat Jack-in-the-Pulpit root, a plant which is more abundant in soil enrichment areas.

**Structural diversity:** areas of structural diversity benefit nesting forest birds particularly. Hardwood, hemlock and fir seedlings and saplings provide browse material for deer, moose and snowshoe hare. Low softwood cover provides excellent cover for both predators and prey.

### 4.3 RECREATION

Recreation is one of the primary current uses of the Town Forest. An extensive trail network exists at lower elevations of the property (see the Recreation Map). They are currently used for hiking, jogging, mountain bicycling, snow shoeing and skiing. The trails are categorized based on the difficulty of use and width (i.e. single track or double track). Mountain cyclists are cautioned that single track trails are for advanced off-road riders only due to hazards, such as stumps, roots, rocks and other obstacles. The Bicentennial Trail, as discussed earlier in this plan, is used by hikers to reach the summit of Mount Ascutney.

The forest ecosystem consultant assessed ecological issues with the existing trail network and made recommendations for improvements. This assessment determined that the existing trails are generally very well made. With certain improvements (listed in the forest ecosystem consultant's trail evaluation summary), this trail network can minimize ecological impacts even more than they currently do. Any new trails should avoid the sensitive ecological areas identified in the companion documents and summarized in this plan.

The Select Board has had an agreement with STAB to maintain the official trail network, but is considering other long-term maintenance options. Erosion has not been a significant problem in past years, but typical trail maintenance activities are required. The trails held up remarkably well during the Tropical Storm Irene flooding event; however, some erosion occurred exposing roots and causing other minor damage.



Due to the temporary closure of Mount Ascutney Resort, the Town is considering this trail network as part of an economic development strategy to diversify tourism-related business in West Windsor. As use of these trails expands, the required routine maintenance efforts and costs will increase.

Mount Ascutney is known as a favorite launch site for hang gliders in Vermont. Under agreements with the Town and State, the Vermont Hang Gliding Association (VHGA) uses the platforms on the West Peak for hang gliding. VHGA insures and regulates the use of the hang gliding. (See the Recreation Map and Appendix D for more information.)

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation has a 100-foot wide easement over the southeastern portion of the Town Forest for the Weathersfield Trail. The Ascutney Trails Association (ATA) publishes a guidebook and maintains many of the trails on Mount Ascutney,

including the Weathersfield, Brownsville, Windsor and Futures Trails. (The ATA does not maintain the Bicentennial Trail.)

## 5.0 POTENTIAL WIND ENERGY ANALYSIS

A basic analysis of the wind energy potential of this site was included as part of this planning effort. The Vermont Renewable Energy Atlas was used to conduct this analysis. This information is helpful for planning purposes, but additional information, such as utilization of an anemometer, is helpful to further evaluate wind potential. (Visit the Renewable Energy Atlas [website](#) for more information about this online tool. Click [here](#) to read the methodology for the energy analysis.)

This tool involves analysis at three different scales:

1. **Residential** (30 meter wind turbine hub height);
2. **Small-Scale Commercial** (50 meter wind turbine hub height); and,
3. **Large-Scale Commercial** (70 meter wind turbine hub height).

According to this analysis, there is very limited potential for commercial scale wind energy production within the Town Forest. There is the potential for residential-scale wind power within most of the Town Forest (see the Potential Wind Energy Map). The table below summarizes the findings of this analysis for the Town of West Windsor. The Town Energy Committee may wish to further evaluate wind energy potential for this site.

**Potential Wind Energy Sites**

Scale	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7
	(10-11 mph)	(12-13 mph)	(13-14 mph)	(15-16 mph)	16-17 mph)	(17-18 mph)	(19-25 mph)
Residential (30 meters)	4,856	188	112	62	48	16	
Small Commercial (50 meters)		462	76	8	4		
Large Commercial (70 meters)				17	11		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,856</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>

Source: Renewable Energy Atlas of Vermont, analysis for the Town of West Windsor, January 2012

Wind energy projects were not considered to be a priority use for the Town Forest during the public outreach conducted as part of this planning effort.

## 6.0 COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The primary management objective for this property is to provide for lower-impact recreational activities while also maintaining it as a natural area that supports the important identified ecological functions (e.g. wildlife habitat protection, healthy and sustainable forest ecosystem, stormwater retention and filtration, and erosion control). Timber management should be primarily limited to

improvements for wildlife habitat or small cuts to enhance recreational uses (e.g. clearing picnic areas or vistas along certain trails).

The following section lists specific recommendations in order to meet the above objectives.

### **General**

- A. Establish guidelines for the use of the Town Forest and trail network
- B. Manage for sustainable forest ecology
- C. Preserve the southern end of the Glebe lot as a natural area
- D. Coordinate with hospitality and recreation businesses
- E. Develop a multi-year, phased program to survey the entire property boundary
- F. Budget to update this plan at least every five years
- G. Any revenues generated from the use of the Town Forest will be placed in a fund for stewardship (management) of the Town Forest. This includes, but is not limited to, such values as recreation and timber harvests.
- H. Improve the conditions of Coaching Lane as the primary access to the Town Forest
- I. Consider moving the existing Coaching Lane parking lot in order to reduce access road maintenance costs and to provide additional parking spaces
- J. Install an informational kiosk at the trailhead near the Coaching Lane Parking area; provide educational materials, trail maps and guidelines at the kiosk
- K. Incorporate this forest management plan into the West Windsor Town Plan
- L. Coordinate with the State on cross-boundary management issues with the Ascutney State Park and Little Ascutney Wildlife Management Area



### **Wildlife Habitat**

- A. All new trail construction will avoid wet areas (i.e. Vermont Significant Wetlands/vernal pools and identified wet soils), and natural vegetation will be maintained surrounding these wet areas
- B. Limit disturbance of soil enrichment areas; keep crossings at a minimum
- C. Special consideration shall be given to any new development (i.e. trails, amenities or other disturbances) within or surrounding the talus areas.
- D. Maintain existing beech mast areas as a food source for bear and other animal species
- E. Special consideration should be given to trails in mast producing areas in order to minimize impacts on wildlife species feeding in these areas during the autumn
- F. Manage areas over 1,700 feet in elevation as a natural area primarily to serve as wildlife habitat and travel corridor
- G. Avoid building trails on both sides of streams in order to avoid disturbing wildlife using wildlife travel zones; concentrate trails on only one valley side at a time

- H. Improve integrity of banks at all stream crossings to reduce erosion, and consider up- and down-stream impacts when armoring streams
- I. Do not construct trails near areas where rare or uncommon plants are identified

### **Timber Management**

- A. Timber harvesting will not be a priority for the town forest
- B. Cutting and harvesting trees may be allowed in order to improve wildlife habitat or improve recreational facilities
- C. Mark all trees that are to be cut (under the supervision of the Town Forest Committee)
- D. Winter harvesting is preferred
- E. No whole-tree harvesting, keep the tops, etc., for wildlife/decomposition
- F. Remove invasive plants as identified in the companion documents before any tree cutting that could allow invasive plants to thrive

### **Recreational Trails & Amenities**

- A. Install/replace trail signs
- B. Develop a few picnic areas in remote areas along the existing trails
- C. Cut trees to establish vistas at picnic areas and other identified locations
- D. Consider equestrian use on appropriate double track trails
- E. Consideration of future ATV trail use on appropriate designated trails
- F. Rebuild or relocate sections of the Bicentennial Trail to accommodate more traffic
- G. Consider implementing trail improvements recommended by Elisabeth Tii McLane
- H. Trail construction and maintenance will follow the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) standards
- I. Maintain a current agreement with the Vermont Hang Gliding Association for use of the hang gliding platform located within the Town Forest
- J. Coordinate Weathersfield Trail maintenance activities within the Town Forest with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and the Ascutney Trails Association

