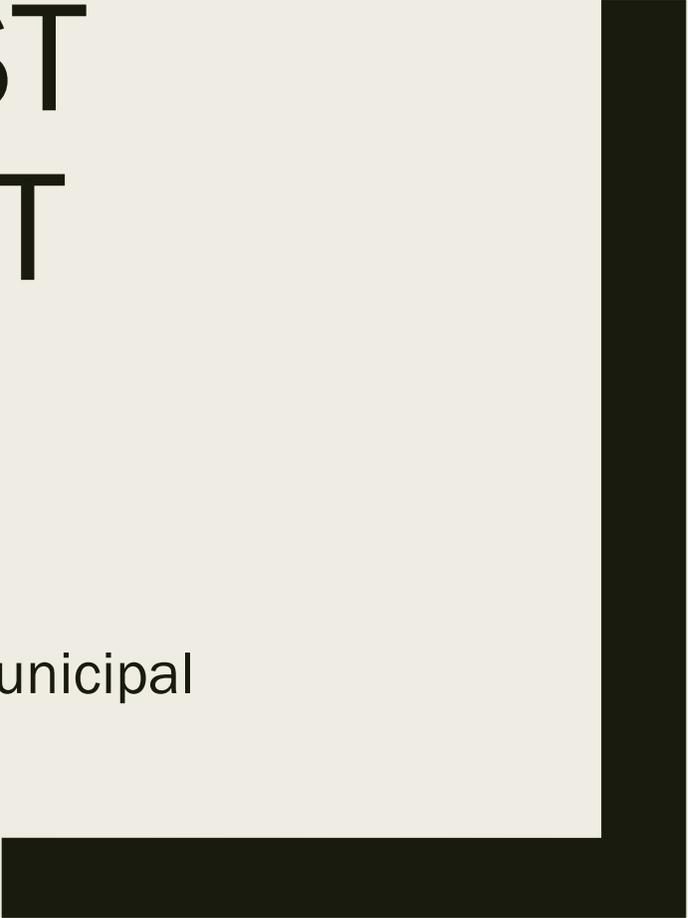


# ACTIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT

## IN TOWN FORESTS

An Introduction to the Management of Municipal  
Forested Lands in Vermont



# OVERVIEW

- History of Town Forests in VT
- Why Manage?
- Making a Plan.
- Implementation
- Follow-up/Follow Through





# George Perkins Marsh

(1801 - 1882)

Vermont Author, Congressman, Ambassador, Philosopher,  
Conservationist...

- Then-US Congressman from Vermont, addressing the Agricultural Society of Rutland County --- 1847:

*“We have undoubtedly already a larger proportion of cleared land in Vermont than would be required...for the support of a much greater population than we now possess...”*

*“...the changes, which these causes have wrought in the physical geography of Vermont, within a single generation, are too striking to have escaped the attention of any observing person...”*

- The cleared landscape of Vermont inspired Marsh to publish Man and Nature an important early conservation book in 1864.

*“We have now felled forest enough everywhere, in many districts far too much...”*

--- From Man and Nature



# Early Town Forests

- Following the landscape-level effects of extractive land uses of 1800's, movement towards public lands began in late 1800's, early 1900's.
- In 1915 Vermont passed legislation enabling municipalities to acquire properties for the purpose of forest management.
  - *The statute describes municipal forests as being:*  
**“a tract of land primarily devoted to producing wood products, maintaining wildlife habitat, protecting water supplies, providing forest recreation and conservation education.”**
- Towns were supported by laws guaranteeing that the state would pay for a portion of the reforestation or acquisition costs for new Town Forests.
- Early statutes give the Commissioner of FPR some advisory and management authority over Town Forests. Ability to access FPR foresters (County Foresters, Municipal Foresters), at no charge influenced active management on these lands.
- In 1951 Vermont passed a law requiring each town without a Town Forest to put an article concerning Town Forests in the warning for their town meeting.

# Town Forests in Vermont Today

- “Town Forest” is any forested land that a town owns – the designation no longer entitles a town to additional benefits.
- Community Forests, Municipal Forests, Town Forests, Natural Areas, Conservation Areas, Country Parks in 168+ Towns of Vermont.
- Many newer Town Forests have **conservation easements** — acquired in partnership with conservation organizations and grants from a variety of sources.
- Managed for a **variety of uses**, usually based on the specific features of the property and the desires of the community.
- The management of a town forest can be guided by primarily one use, several uses, or ‘no use’.
- The **allowed uses**, and the interaction between them, may be intentional or have developed over time independent of formal review.





# THE ROAD TO ACTIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT

PART I:

**WHY MANAGE?**

# Why Manage?



To improve the health and function of the forest in some way;



To improve the usage of the forest for recreation or some other use;



To provide wildlife habitat conditions underrepresented across the landscape;



To address a threat (invasive plants, climate change, EAB);



To generate income to be used for a conservation purpose (road/trail building or stabilization, invasive species management, timber stand improvement, access or educational infrastructure) or resources for a town project;



To demonstrate how to do all the above things in a responsible way.

# Habitat, Forest Health and Threats

- Modern forest management can actively create forests which are more diverse, more closely resemble “old growth” and feature habitat conditions which are uncommon across the landscape;
- Active management can also provide a proactive response to issues that threaten forest health, like EAB (and other pests and pathogens) and climate change;



# Resources and Income

- Forest management can also provide a local, renewable, charismatic source of resources for a town project;
  - *Hinesburg Town Hall project;*
- Forest management can provide income that can fund non-commercial work like invasive species removal, timber stand improvement, habitat restoration, trail building and maintenance and infrastructure development;
  - *Hinesburg Town Forest/LaPlatte Headwater Town Forest invasive treatment.*
- Forest management can demonstrate the responsible harvesting of local, renewable resources, and empower people to consider where the resources they consume come from.

There's an easy way to install a floor, and then there's Hinesburg's way.

The town of Hinesburg returned to its roots by replacing its 106-year-old Town Hall floor with ash trees sustainably harvested from its own Town Forest. It took several months and the help of several Vermont companies, but the wood was laid to rest in its new home in early April.

Follow the trees as they journey...

from the  
**FOREST**  
to the  
**FLOOR**

PART 1:  
MARKING

PART 2:  
CUTTING

PART 3:  
MILLING

PART 4:  
REMOVAL

PART 5:  
INSTALLATION



# Education and Demonstration

- Forest management, done well, has massive benefits to our ecosystems, our communities, our local economies and more but understanding it is nuanced – Town Forests can provide on-the-ground examples of good management;
- The positive impact of all the work we do can be greatly compounded by doing it in an open, transparent and inclusive way.

# Resources for More Info on Management

- County Foresters;
- Consulting Foresters;
- Natural resource professionals in your community;
- Land Trust/Conservation professionals (if your property is conserved);
- Organizations with common goals (Vermont Woodlands Association, Vermont Coverts, Audubon Vermont, Vermont Land Trust);
- [VTCutWithConfidence.com](http://VTCutWithConfidence.com)
- [OurVermontWoods.org](http://OurVermontWoods.org)
- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Atlas.

THE ROAD TO  
ACTIVE FOREST  
MANAGEMENT

PART II:

**PLANNING**





# The Point...

- How can this Town Forest serve as the greatest potential **community resource**, both **culturally** and **ecologically**?
- The planning process can help us **engage** people with a Town Forest, **understand** it in relation to our communities and form a more articulate **vision** for how to manage it for maximum good.
- Beyond planning and information collecting, the planning process itself is an opportunity for **demonstration**, **engagement**, and laying the groundwork for future management.

# MAKE A (MANAGEMENT) PLAN

- Create a **Management Plan (MP)**, a vision document that describes broad goals and objectives, using a public process.
- Create a **steering committee** or designate existing town committee to facilitate the process.
- **Engage your community:**
  - *Public meetings* where people can provide input in different ways;
  - *Online/paper survey*;
  - *Free Public Walks* of the Town Forest;
  - *Direct engagement with stakeholders.*
- ❖ *Use the **Town Forest Recreation Planning Toolkit**, created by Vermont Urban and Community Forest (UCF) Program for a roadmap.*
- ❖ *If you are able, you can also hire a consulting firm to facilitate this process.*

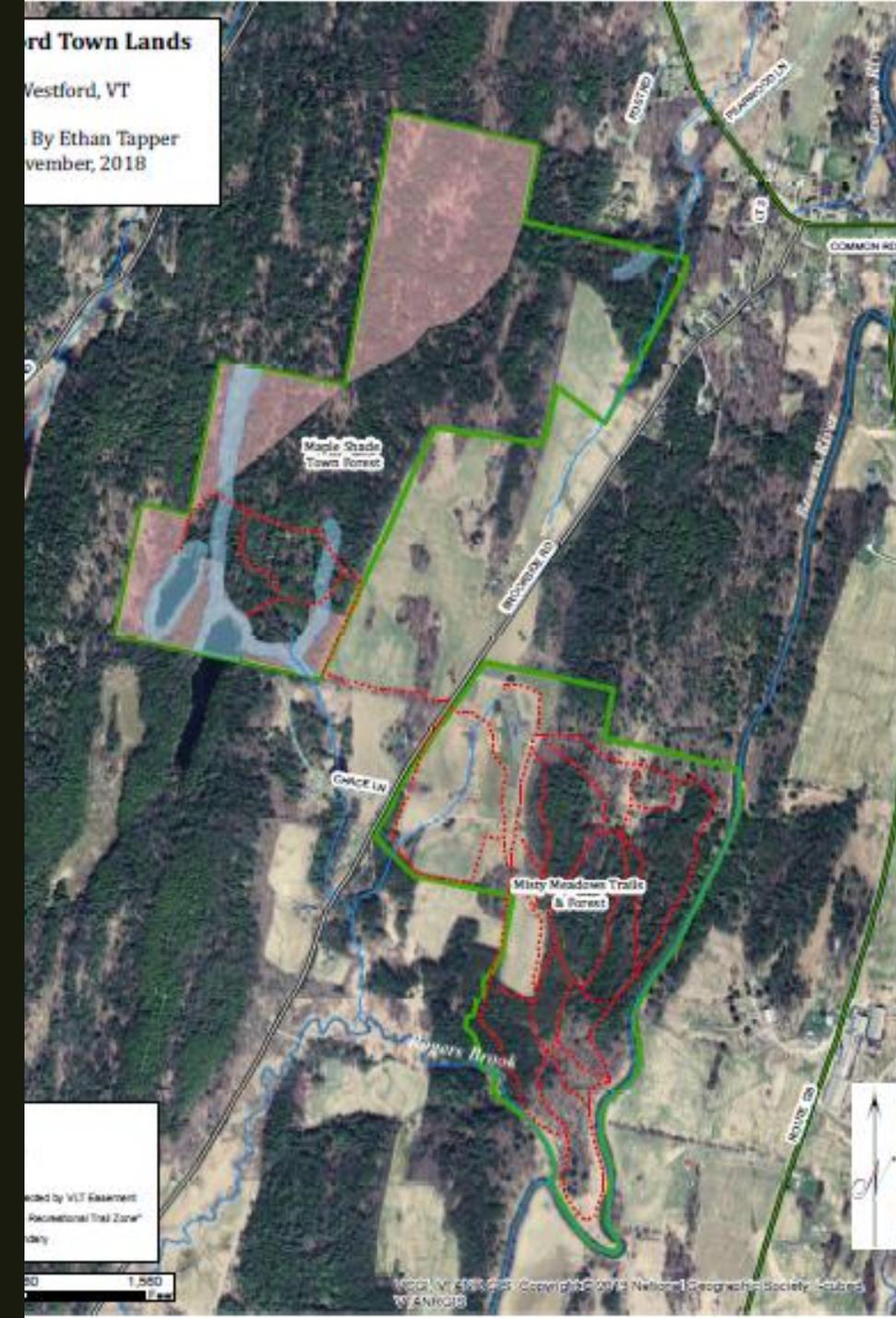


# MAKE A (FOREST MANAGEMENT) PLAN

- Create a **Forest Management Plan (FMP)**
  - *Ask your **County Forester**, or hire a licensed **consulting forester**.*
  - *FMP is a document with detailed descriptions and data on the forest, and specific management recommendations.*
  - *Included as attachment or appendix to **Management Plan**.*
- Both MP and FMP should be rolled out publicly and approved by governing committee, town Selectboard, and easement holder (if property is conserved).
  - *If you can't get a Management Plan together, write a very detailed Forest Management Plan and do a lot of outreach around it.*

# Case Study: The Westford Town Lands

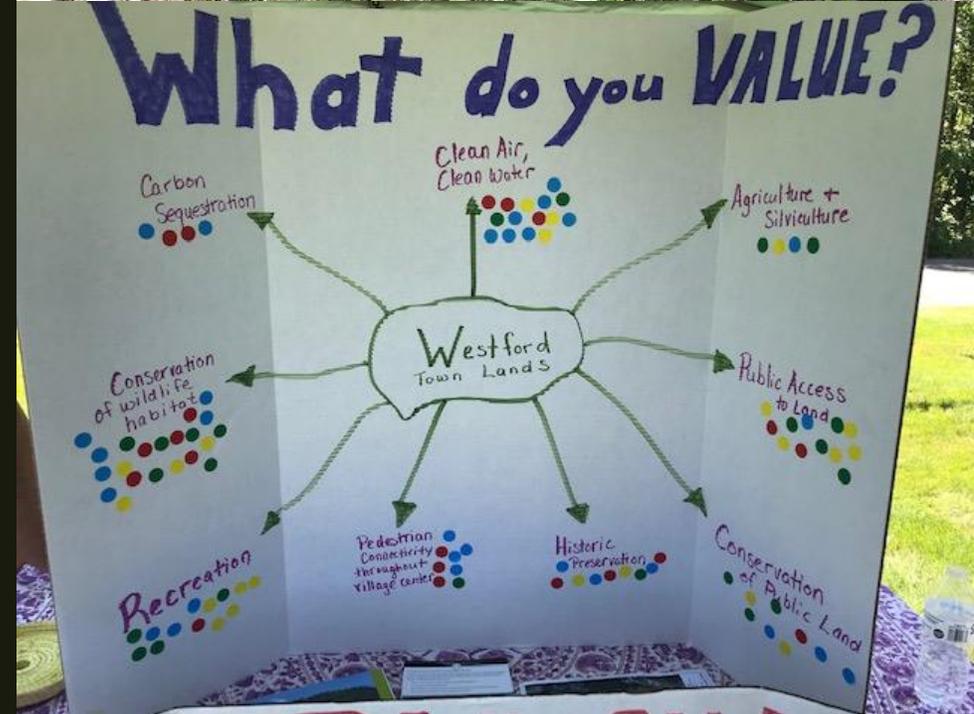
- The Town of Westford acquired the Maple Shade Town Forest (MSTF) through conservation partnerships (VLT, VHCB) and private funding in 2018.
- Planning for the MSTF commenced immediately, combined with a separate town-owned property across the road, Misty Meadows Trails and Forest (MMTF) to form the Westford Town Lands (WTL) project.
- ~210 Total acres, with frontage on Browns River and established recreational trail network on MMTF, and protected streams and wetlands and no established trails on MSTF. Westford Elementary School located between the parcels.



# WTL Case Study

## (Continued)

- Westford formed an ad hoc **steering committee** --  
- members of conservation commission, planning commission, school community, local hunting community and others --- met monthly for 1 year.
- Identified key advisors: County Forester, Vermont Land Trust, local wildlife biologists, Audubon Vermont and DEC Wetlands ecologists.
- Held numerous public walks with experts, community celebration and community meetings.
- “Dot Democracy” booth at 4<sup>th</sup> of July.
- Conducted survey online, with paper copies at Town Offices.
- Asked County Forester to prepare Forest Management Plan, which was attached to MP as addendum.



# WTL Case Study

## (Continued)

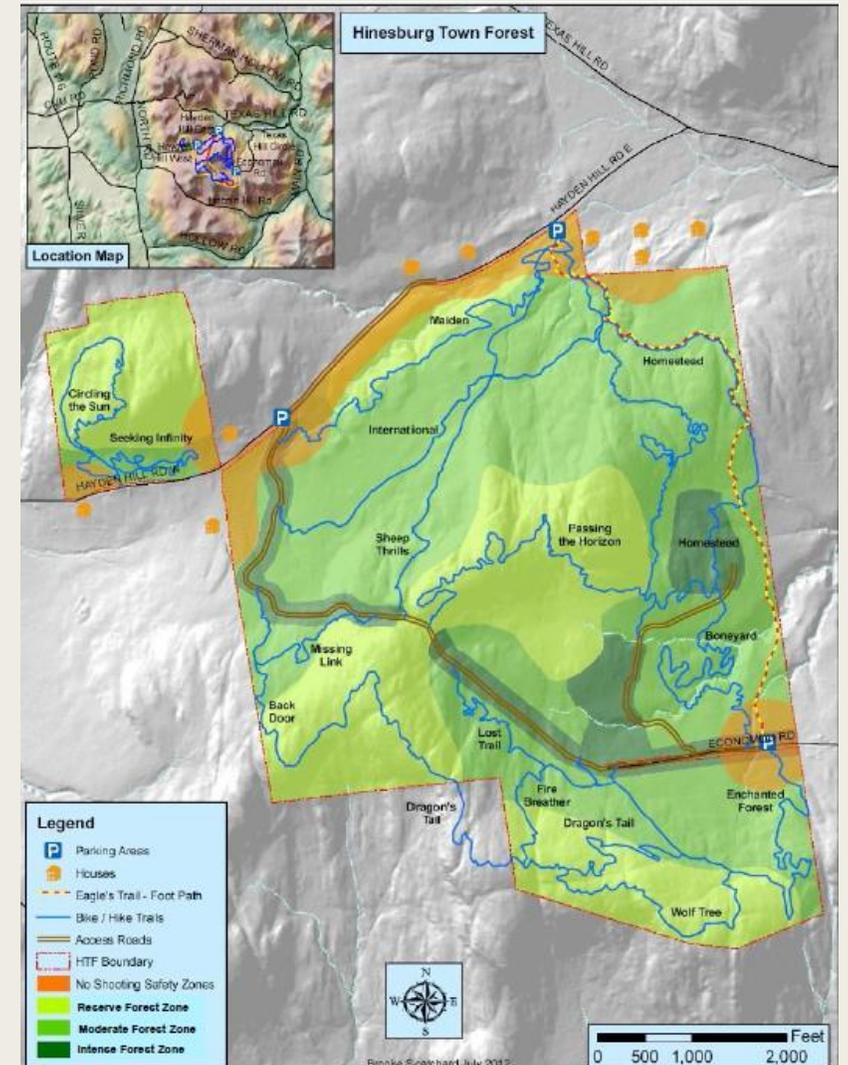
- The result of public planning process was a compromise:
  - *Hunting allowed at MSTF, no hunting at MMTF*
  - *Recreation and education are key uses of MMTF, wildlife habitat and ecosystem function are key uses of MSTF, with only minimal recreation.*
  - *Forest management is allowed at MSTF, only allowed in connection with specific educational objectives at the MMTF.*
- Connections were made between the WTL and other community resources like the Westford School and the Westford Common, and the goal to sustainably develop the Common, as specified in the Town Plan, was incorporated into the WTL MP.



# Case Study : Hinesburg Town Forest

- In 2012, Hinesburg’s Town Forest Committee took on a multi-year management planning process to try to find a balance between different users and user groups.
- The result was a “triad” of different “zones”, with different levels of use allowed:

Zone	Management Goal	Compatible Practices/Uses
Low Intensity Use/Reserves	Protect forest biodiversity and ecologically sensitive sites.	No timber management – unless needed to protect ecological integrity Limit access to wetlands and vernal pools Low-density single-track sustainably-built hike/bike trails where appropriate
Intermediate Use	Protect and enhance biodiversity (primary) through timber management (secondary).	Timber management which mimics small-scale natural disturbance events. Any openings created should be <1acre. Single-track, sustainably-built hike/bike trails.
Intensive Use	Protect and enhance biodiversity through timber management	Timber management which mimics natural disturbance events. Range of recreational opportunities.



# PLANNING RECAP

- Steering Committee -- Town Forest Committee, Conservation Commission or other;
- Public Process --- provide lots of different ways for people to participate and give feedback/comments and ask questions;
- Identify partners;
- Identify/engage stakeholders;
- Define goals and objectives;
- Define interaction between different uses;
- Identify governance structure --- who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Management Plan?
- Identify how Town Forest will be funded, and where revenue will go;
- Management Plan vs. Forest Management Plan;
- Get Selectboard approval.

THE ROAD TO ACTIVE  
FOREST MANAGEMENT

PART III:

IMPLEMENTATION



# OUTREACH

- Begin **planning** and doing another wave of **outreach** on the forest management prescribed in your Forest Management Plan at least 4-6 months before the harvest.
  - *The goal of this is a process that is **open, transparent and inclusive**, and gives people time to react.*
- Think about how to reach out to people in different ways
  - *Numerous well-advertised **public walks** at every step in the process (before, before but after marking, during, after). Have your consulting forester, County Forester, or experts in different fields lead.*
  - ***Educational events** that highlight different facets of the work --- education, ecosystem services, local renewable resources, natural history.*
  - ***Press releases and stories in local newspapers and town newsletters.***
  - ***Talks and presentations at libraries, local schools, and town events.***

# The Business End of Forest Management

- Have the management work on your Town Forest supervised by your **County Forester**, or a licensed **consulting forester**. They will:
  - Act as the **agent** of the Town;
  - **Mark timber** to be cut in accordance with your Forest Management Plan;
  - Find a **reputable logger** and sign them to a fair **contract** that protects the Town's interests;
  - Supervise the job to make sure the logger is complying with the contract terms and best practices;
  - Ensure the logger is paying for the wood he cuts correctly;
  - Supervise the "**close-out**" of the job, to make sure all infrastructure is stabilized.





## Case Study: Hinesburg Town Forest

- In 2017 the HTF hired a consulting forester to draft a new Forest Management Plan for the property, based on the goals and objectives in the 2012 Management Plan.
- The town had more public meetings, and brought the FMP to the Selectboard for approval as an addendum to their MP.
- Forest Management commenced in 2018.

# Case Study: HTF (continued)

- In 2018-19 I hosted:
  - *A summertime presentation at the Hinesburg Library;*
  - *Pre-harvest walks in September and December;*
  - *Active harvest walks in January and March;*
  - *Post-harvest walk in April;*
  - *HTF “History Night” in April;*
  - *Wildlife walk in June with VTFW biologists;*
- All these educational opportunities were free, open to all and on nights and weekends;
- Co-sponsored events with Vermont Woodlands Assoc., Vermont Coverts, Vermont Fish and Wildlife and Fellowship of the Wheel (mountain biking group);
- Over 200 people have attended these events so far.



## Case Study: HTF (continued)

- Income from the job has funded invasive plant control at LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest, to FOTW for trail restoration, and for future conservation of HTF;
- Educational signage will be put up following the work that highlights it for the long term.





# THE ROAD TO ACTIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT

PART IV:

## FOLLOW-UP/FOLLOW THROUGH

# Opportunities Following the Work:

- Follow-up walks to see how the forest is regenerating;
- Create educational signage/materials highlighting the work that was done;
- Create citizen science opportunities;
  - *Photo-posts, regeneration plots, deer exclosures, etc.*
- Follow-up with stakeholders impacted by the work;
- Have a public presentation celebrating the work and its completion.

# Resources:

- **Vermont Town Forest Stewardship Guide:** Great resource for all things Town Forest-related in Vermont. [vtcommunityforestry.org/resources/vermont-town-forest-stewardship-guide](https://vtcommunityforestry.org/resources/vermont-town-forest-stewardship-guide)
- **Cut With Confidence:** Resources for forest landowners for planning/executing a successful timber harvest, put out by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation(FPR). [VTCutWithConfidence.com](https://VTCutWithConfidence.com)
- **Our Vermont Woods:** A resource hub for all things forest-related in Vermont, and connecting various resources, maintained by FPR and UVM Extension. [OurVermontWoods.org](https://OurVermontWoods.org)
- **VT Invasives:** A hub for information on invasive plants, insects and pathogens, their identification and their treatment, maintained by FPR's Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program. [VTInvasives.org](https://VTInvasives.org)
- **Urban and Community Forestry Website:** Stay tuned on this site for the roll-out of the Vermont Recreation Planning Toolkit. [VTCommunityForestry.org](https://VTCommunityForestry.org)

