

**Regular Meeting of the Hogback Management Plan Update Committee**  
**7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 17, 2024**  
**Town Office, Marlboro, Vermont and via Zoom**

**D R A F T**  
**Minutes**

Meeting called to order at 7:32 pm.

Present: in person, Diana Todd; via Zoom, Mike Purcell, Pieter Van Loon

abbreviations used:

MP = Management Plan

SB = Selectboard

1. Preliminaries
  - a. choose a secretary to take minutes - Diana
  - b. choose a Zoom host - Diana
  - c. start Zoom recording
2. Minutes of previous regular meeting (Apr 3, 2024) approved as submitted.
3. Discuss items from master list of topics that still need to be addressed. See attachment for list. The committee reviewed written comments submitted by HMPUC member Eric Slayton, who was unable to attend in person.
  - a. Money-related topics. Diana reported on an informal meeting with Assistant Town Treasurer Rebecca Sevigny and Town Clerk Forrest Holzapfel at which the lack of any existing plan for either short or long term funding for Hogback was discussed. The committee agreed that we need to look into the situation further, to see if it is appropriate to tackle this problem in the MP. This will be the topic of the next HMPUC meeting (May 1, 2024). HPC Commissioners and HMCA Directors will be invited to attend. After that meeting, HMPUC representatives will ask for time at an upcoming Selectboard meeting to seek input from the SB.
  - b. Permitted, restricted, and prohibited activities. Decisions were as follows:
    - i. Nighttime use. No need to restrict or prohibit. No need to overtly address in the MP. Leave status as is – tacitly accepted.
    - ii. Winter use of “fat bikes”, use of mechanical groomer to maintain trails. HPC discussed and approved this use, including mechanical grooming, several years ago, but it has not been implemented. We noted that grooming of trails is allowed for VAST; this is a mini version of that, done using a “snow-dog.” The track that is created is too narrow for use by modern snowmobiles, but is usable by XC skiers and fat bikes. Agreed to include this as a permitted use and an allowed exception to the ban on motorized vehicles.
    - iii. Geocaching. People have been participating in this activity on Hogback for many years. It has not caused any problems. A ban would be impossible to enforce. No need to address this explicitly in the MP. Leave the status as is – tacitly accepted.
    - iv. Foraging. Agreed that foraging for personal use is acceptable. Considered whether there should be an effort to protect any vulnerable species, such as ramps or ginseng; monitoring and enforcement would be extremely

difficult. Discussed difficulty of enforcing any limits on “commercial” use of foraged materials. Foraging has not caused any problems that we know of. Considered leaving the topic unmentioned in the MP and tacitly accepted, but decided the MP should have a statement. Personal use OK, commercial use not allowed.

v. Cutting trees.

1. Agreed that no unauthorized cutting is allowed. Need to make clear that it applies to more than just chainsaw-sized trees, but also applies to cutting side branches and saplings to “improve” trails and ski slopes, unless part of an authorized project. Text should include overall ban, then include list of examples: “including but not limited to . . .”
2. Firewood. Agreed that any program to permit culling of firewood would need to be part of the Forest Management Plan, which will be developed in the next few years.

vi. Maple sugaring. The conservation agreement gives the town authority to contract with a sugaring operation. Agreed that if the topic comes up, the guidance in the easement is sufficient. No need to explicitly address it in the MP.

c. Special Use Permits (Facility Use Agreements)

- i. Non-public, non-educational events. Agreed there is no need to ban or limit private events, as long as they do not impede public use of the site (as required by the conservation easement). The permit process already deals with this. No need to single out private events in the MP.
- ii. Commercial use. Ditto above. Follow guidance in the easement and the permit process. No need for MP to single this out as a special category.
- iii. Maximum group size?
  1. Agreed to not specify a group size limit, but deal with the topic on a case-by-case basis in the permit process.
  2. Should large groups be required to establish a safety plan and/or name a safety officer? No. The permit process should make clear that “use at your own risk” applies.

d. Getting the word out to the public. Agreed the kiosks need to have more administrative info. At a minimum: map, list of restricted and prohibited activities, “use at your own risk” notice, and “remove dog waste from trails.” Also agree that there should be signs or kiosks at all entry points, not just at trailheads on the roads, at a minimum saying “you are now entering Hogback.”

e. Buildings

- i. Agreed MP should include some overall philosophy about buildings AND other infrastructure. More discussion needed.
- ii. Agreed a process for making decisions about buildings should be specified, particularly for actions that will require significant funding. More discussion needed.
- iii. Agreed the First Aid Building and Benedict Cottage are not usable for any purpose in their current states. For the Castle and the Quonset Hut, agreed there is no need to specify allowed and prohibited uses. Deal with it on a case-by-case basis via the permit process.

f. Map policy as included in existing MP. Agreed there is no need for this section. Agreed that the related section of the existing MP that urged caution in publicizing the

existence of the trails was also not needed. Overuse has not been a problem. Public sharing of trail information online can't be controlled, and there's no need to try.

- g. Recommended Actions – should any of these be implemented?
    - i. Big sign along route 9? No.
    - ii. Active measures to preserve the lift towers? Not at this time.
    - iii. Develop an “accessible” trail (usable by wheelchair or other mobility-assisted device)? Yes. The overall philosophy should be to allow as many people as possible to enjoy the conservation area. Grants for creating accessible trails (although competitive) are available. HMCA, as the party responsible for trails, should be encouraged to explore the feasibility of creating such a trail.
    - iv. Should the service road from Grant Road to the Quonset Hut be maintained at a level that would support maintenance equipment, tractors, or heavy equipment? No. VAST already is responsible for maintaining it to support their mechanical groomers, which is sufficient to support UTV's and maybe light tractors.
  - h. Do we need a wildfire plan? No.
  - i. Should the MP discuss the relationship with Molly Stark State Park? No. There is and has been no significant coordination between the two entities, and no need for greater interaction is anticipated.
4. Review new draft sections and revised sections based on discussions at previous meetings. See attachment. We did not have time to address this scheduled topic.
  5. Plan next few meetings. As mentioned above, invite HPC and HMCA to May 1 meeting to discuss short and long range funding strategies. Follow up by attending SB meeting to bring them into the conversation. (Mike Purcell, who is HPC Chair as well as a HMPUC member, noted that he will be out of the country for the first three weeks in May and unable to attend any meetings in that time period.)
  6. Adjourned at 8:57 pm.

## 2024\_04\_17 Topics still to discuss

items left to discuss, from previous meetings and the running list of topics

- Money
  - Should Plan say anything about the money that National Grid pays to the town to lease access to the Tower Trail for their maintenance vehicles?
  - We are recommending that any excess funds generated by forest management activities be set aside for use at Hogback and not go into the general fund. Is this out of our purview? Talk to the Town Treasurer or the SB.
- Permitted, restricted, and prohibited activities
  - should nighttime activities be allowed
  - winter use of “fat bikes” on snow-covered trails, mechanical snow-packing to make such use possible?
  - geocaching
  - Foraging – yes? no? limits?
    - for personal use vs for commercial use
    - berries, fruit, fungi, flowers, ferns, leaves
    - boughs (balsam for wreaths), poles
    - Any need to discuss firewood? What if forest management activities leave unmerchantable wood on the ground? Can people come and “glean” it?
  - No unauthorized cutting – covers many topics – should it be dealt with in a dedicated section, or in prohibited uses, or in multiple areas, as it arises in context?
    - no cutting to open skiable routes (except as part of authorized volunteer work days)
    - no cutting new trails without permission
    - no cutting to widen or “improve” trails except as part of authorized volunteer work days
    - no cutting to open shooting lanes for hunting
    - no cutting firewood (not even fallen dead?)
    - no cutting trees or poles (young trees) for woodworking or other projects
  - Maple sugaring –Is there any need to address this?
- Special Use Permits (Facility Use Agreements)
  - for non-educational, non-public activities (e.g. weddings are mentioned in existing MP), should they be limited to specific locations?
  - should anything specific be said about use by commercial organizations? Should they be banned? The land is supposed to be open to the public.
    - summer day camps
    - tour groups
  - should there be a maximum group size allowed?
    - should large groups be required to develop a safety plan or have a safety officer, like is required for using some public buildings or public spaces? For examples, ask Bob Milligan, HMCA Director
- Getting the word out to the public about what is and isn’t allowed
  - Should the MP specifically say we need more/better postings at the kiosks, boundaries, and on the website about what is and isn’t allowed?

- Should public postings (kiosks, boundaries, website) have a “use at your own risk” component?
- Buildings
  - establish overall philosophy for all buildings – Repair and preserve them? Tear them down? Let them decay on their own?
  - what uses should be allowed? Current draft describes how the buildings are currently used, but doesn’t discuss how to decide on potential future uses of buildings
  - Should there be specific plans in the Management Plan for some buildings? Benedict Cottage? First Aid building? The Castle?
    - Should Benedict Cottage be demolished? Preserved?
- the “map policy” that was part of the previous MP
  - it said it couldn’t be shared with most online organizations – only governmental orgs
  - HMCA was responsible for producing the map, but HPC approved the content should we just drop this as overly nit-picky? Or is this something worth addressing?
- Recommended management actions/activities
  - Should we recommend an identity sign visible at a drive-by glance on Route 9? Like at entrances to parks and at edges of National Forests?
  - Should active measures be taken to preserve the lift towers, like oiling or painting them?
  - Should we recommend building a wheelchair-accessible hiking trail?
  - Should the woods road from the Grant Road entrance to the Quonset Hut be maintained at a level able to support vehicles like maintenance trucks, tractors, or even heavy equipment?
- Do we need a wildfire plan?
- Do we need to discuss our relationship with Molly Stark State Park?

Hogback Mountain Conservation Area  
Management Plan

**EXCERPTS ONLY**

This document contains only those sections which are newly written or newly revised and have not been reviewed yet by the committee. To see how these fit into the overall plan, see the complete draft.

D R A F T

as of Apr17, 2024 (before the HMPUC meeting)  
items edited or added since last review shown in red

## Introduction

*(Note to committee and reviewers – A Vision Statement is a pithy phrase presenting the ideal future for the company. A Mission Statement describes why the company exists, focusing on its reason for being. Which of these types of statements (either? both? none?) should be in the Management Plan?)*

Vision Statement: A healthy forever forest where people can play and wildlife can thrive.

Mission Statement: The Hogback Mountain Conservation Area was created in order to ensure that this forested mountain ridge remains forest and is never subdivided. The mission of the managers should be to provide free public access for appropriate recreational uses while protecting ecologically sensitive areas and promoting the long term health and resilience of the forest.

This Management Plan is intended as a guide for the decision-makers of the Town of Marlboro as they oversee use of the town-owned Hogback Mountain Conservation Area, consisting of about 600 forested acres on the western boundary of the town, on both sides of Route 9. Management of the Conservation Area must be consistent with the conservation easement on the property, which defines multiple purposes for conserving the land. It is conceivable, even likely, that some proposed actions or activities in the Conservation Area will find one intended conservation purpose conflicting with another. For example, would a proposed recreation trail degrade a wildlife habitat? This Management Plan is intended to provide guidance for decision-makers for reconciling potentially conflicting purposes.

## Administration

### Management Structure

- a. The HPC is responsible for writing and submitting a short report for inclusion in the annual Town Report.
2. The Marlboro Town Office
  - a. The Town Clerk's office fields inquiries from the public.
    - i. Most inquiries can be directed to the HMCA-maintained website, hogbackvt.org.

- ii. Facility Use Agreements – Inquiries about use by large groups, researchers, commercial enterprises, and any other organization that may require a Facility Use Agreement should be directed to the HMCA . See Section XXX for more detail.
- iii. For guidance on inquiries related to hunting or trapping, see Section XXX. In short, hunting is allowed, but hunters are encouraged to stay as far from recreation trails as possible. Trapping is not allowed.

## Special Use Permits

1. The Select Board is responsible for the final decision on whether or not to grant the FUA. The SB should notify the applicant, the HPC, and the HMCA about their decision.

## Forest Management

### Recommended Forest Management Activities

- By July 1, 2025, complete a forest inventory.
- By January 1, 2026, with input from the County Forester, create a 10-year or longer Forest Management Plan (FMP).
  - The plan will utilize the most current best practices for sustainable forestry, and include requirements to protect riparian buffers, aquatic habitats, wetlands, soil productivity, and water quality.
  - Existing state-wide goals and priorities, such as those presented in the Wildlife Action Plan, the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, the Wildlife Linkage Habitat Ratings and Wildlife Crossing Values should be reviewed as part of the planning process.
- By July 1, 2026, after soliciting review and input from HMCA, VLT/VHCB and the town, adopt the FMP and begin implementation. HPC is responsible for managing the review and (if necessary) revision processes. The Select Board is responsible for making the final decision on whether to adopt the plan. If adopted, it will become an appendix to this Management Plan.
- The HPC will serve as the representative of the Town (the owner) during the implementation of the FMP, responsible for
  - reviewing the onsite markings of proposed management activities prior to putting the job out to bid
  - with input and advice from the County Forester, selecting a logger or other contractor to undertake the project
  - regular onsite review of the ongoing work
- Hold educational events that introduce the public to the forest management activities and their objectives.
- Manage invasive species as described below.

## Education

Use of the conservation area as an outdoor education and research resource should be supported at all levels, from formal education and research (pre-K to post-doc) to citizen science projects and informational, educational programs for the public. Guidance on management issues that may arise can be found in the following sections of this Plan.

Information on Special Use Permits (aka Facility Use Agreements) is included in the Administration section of this Plan and provides guidance on a variety of issues that may arise relative to educational/research use. The permit process is intended to help plan for issues that arise for large groups or all-day use, such as need for bathrooms, dealing with trash, etc. Permits can grant permission for otherwise prohibited activities, such as use of drones or wildlife cameras, when being used for educational/research purposes. Installation of temporary equipment, collection of samples, and other research needs can be addressed through this process.

The role of the HMCA in providing programs for public education and enjoyment is described under Management Structure in the section on Administration. HMCA is also charged with tracking and coordinating use of the conservation area by groups and researchers to prevent overlaps in time and space.

The Forest Management Plan, to be completed by 2026, is expected to include forestry activities that can serve as demonstration projects. HMCA is encouraged to collaborate with the County Forester, the Windham County Conservation District, VLT and other pertinent groups that provide education to the public about the environment, forests, and wildlife to identify opportunities for bringing groups to the conservation area to learn about the forestry concepts that are being implemented.

The Biodiversity Inventory of 2018-2019 (included as Appendix XXX) included suggestions for several scientific studies. This Plan does not foresee any mechanism whereby the town would be able to fund these studies, but conservation area managers should welcome self-funded researchers who are interested in tackling these projects.