

Management Plan for Tucker Mountain Town Forest

Town of Newbury, Vermont

2023



Photo by Hollis Munson

Approval Signatures

Select Board Chair

Date

Vermont Land Trust

Date

Property Map with Class 4 Road, Town Trails, Trails, and Parking Areas

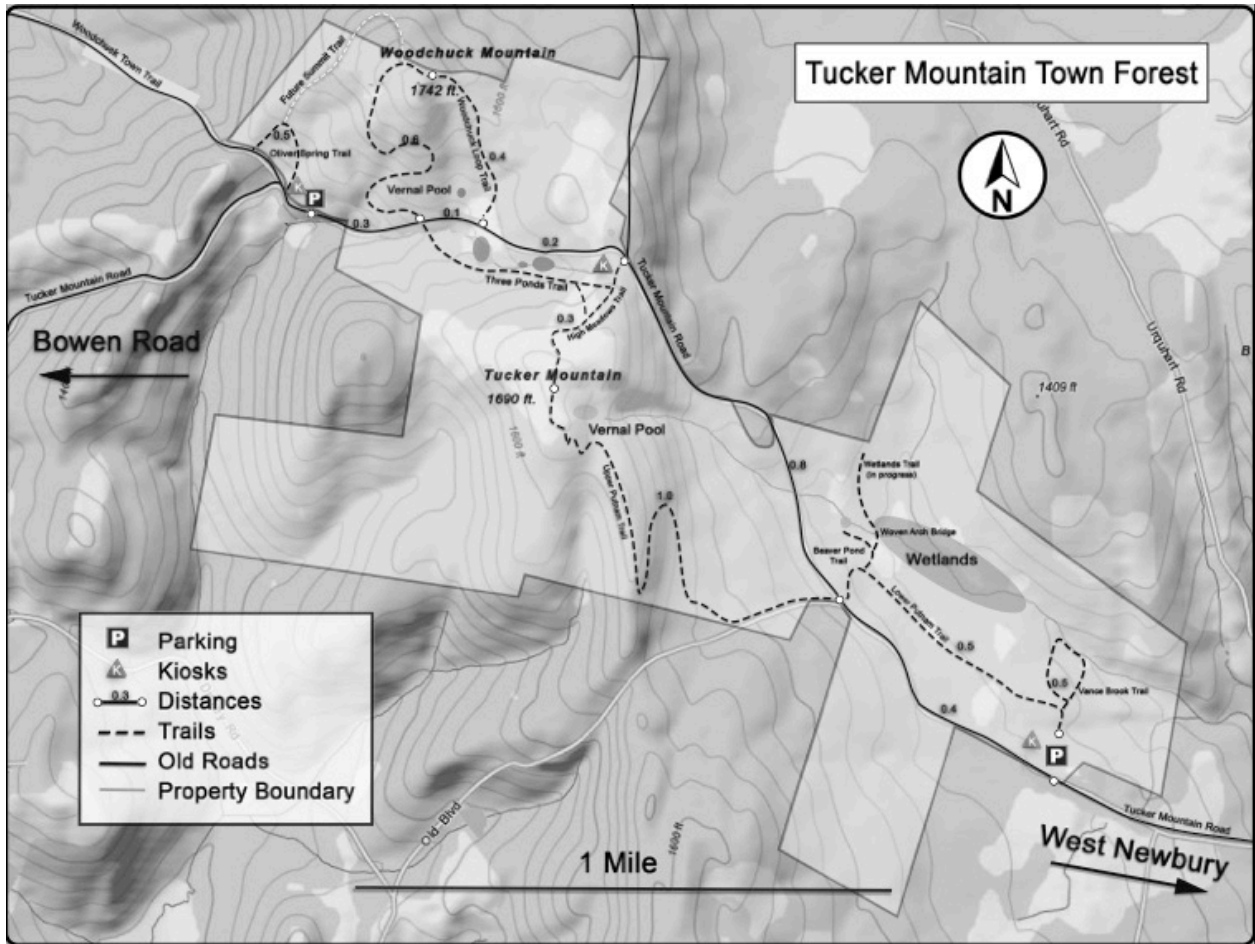


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1. Overview and History

In December of 2018, the Town of Newbury closed on the purchase of The Tucker Mountain Town Forest, 636 acres of land that includes Newbury's beloved Tucker Mountain and the southern half of Woodchuck Mountain.

The Tucker Mountain Town Forest Management Committee has been given the opportunity to lead in the stewardship of this property and to help sustain and improve it as a treasured natural preserve for our community.

The land is an important part of Newbury's history. The top of the mountain was cleared for agriculture by 1808, creating its famous 360-degree view. In his *History of Newbury*, Frederick Wells describes it:

“The highest cultivated land in town, long called the ‘Mountain Carter place,’ from which is a *prospect* of vast extent and variety, lies a mile or two northwest of the hamlet of West Newbury.”

Mountain Carter was a nickname for James Carter who, with his wife, built a homestead near the summit. The name changed to Tucker Mountain after John Tucker bought part of Carter's farm. For close to 150 years, farmers grazed cattle and sheep on the top meadows and lower down along its slopes. As reminders of the land's agricultural history, there are many stone walls and two cellar holes on the property and more along the boundary. A private cemetery lies just beyond the eastern border, the graves bearing names of Putnams and Tuckers, two of the families who farmed on the mountain.

Visitors are drawn by Tucker Mountain's forests, wildflowers, grassy meadows, and magnificent views. Families have driven, hiked, biked, skied, snowshoed, and ridden horses to the summit from the time the surrounding forests were cleared and it's always been a popular picnic spot. Local schools lead children up the mountain every fall to learn about their natural environment, deepen their attachment to nature, and to perform community service projects by building trails or clearing brush.

The property is home for deer, moose, bear, beaver and numerous smaller animals. A vernal pool lies near the Tucker summit and another at the base of Woodchuck Mountain. Vance Brook flows east through an expansive wetland of beaver ponds and swamps, and Meadow Brook flows west from a spring near the top.

The previous owners of the property placed most of it into a conservation easement with the Vermont

Land Trust in 1992. In 2015 the family began discussions with the Vermont Land Trust and the Town of Newbury, offering to sell the land to the town at a reduced price if the town would agree to continue to protect it in accordance with a conservation easement with VLT.

The Newbury Conservation Commission was on board from the time the land sale discussion became public, organizing open forums with VLT and encouraging the purchase, informing Newbury citizens about the potential Town Forest, displaying maps and distributing information. Other interested citizens joined the effort. Many saw stewardship of the forest as an opportunity to support the ecological well-being of the forest property and a chance to reverse destructive abuse by any irresponsible motor vehicle drivers and to heal erosional damage. Opportunities for recreation and outdoor education were also seen as benefits.

When the decision to purchase came to a vote, it was clear that most Newbury voters wanted to move forward with the Town Forest. This was confirmed in a petitioned re-vote. The Town contributed \$25,000 of tax dollars toward the purchase. The project was also funded with competitive grants from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Open Space Institute's Community Forest Fund, the Upper Connecticut River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) Forest Fund, Davis Conservation Foundation, Fields Pond Foundation, and over \$100,000 in charitable donations from members of community.

The Town of Newbury manages the Town Forest with the guidance of a seven-member Management Committee. It is the goal of the Selectboard and the Committee that Committee members represent a cross-section of our community with a diversity of age, gender and interests. Over 80 dedicated volunteers pitch in annually to build trails, make signs, work on road improvements, and plan activities. A group of local citizens came together to form the Friends of Tucker Mountain, a 501 (c)(3) organization that raises funds for the town forest, helps with projects, and helps organize volunteers.

The Vermont Land Trust (VLT), instrumental in managing the acquisition of the property, holds a conservation easement titled "Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement" [Addendum 1]. It provides guidelines and standards for protecting the ecological health of the Town Forest. The committee works closely with the VLT forester in planning trails and other projects.

The Town Forest provides opportunities for recreation and education—involving local schools and other conservation minded groups. The project offers a way for Newbury citizens to unify and bond for a common goal as we dream and plan for what the Town Forest can be.

2. Property Description

Tucker Mountain Town Forest is a 636-acre property that contains Tucker Mountain (el. 1690 ft.) and its environs, including the southern half of Woodchuck Mountain (el. 1742 ft.), Newbury's highest point. The lowest elevation of the property is around 1100 ft. Most of the land is forested with a mix of hardwoods and softwoods with patches left open for successional wildlife habitat. The predominant tree species are white pine, hemlock, balsam fir, red maple, sugar maple, yellow birch, beech, white ash and red oak.

The top of Tucker Mountain is well known for its open meadows lush with various grasses, wildflowers, wild strawberries, blueberries and blackberries. These open grasslands are ideal habitat for grassland birds such as bobolink and eastern meadowlark that have suffered severe decline in the last 50 years, due in large part to loss of habitat. The meadows offer a 360-degree view. To the east one sees New Hampshire's White Mountains from the Presidential Range to Mount Moosilauke. The Benton Range with Black Mountain, Sugarloaf, and the Hogsback are also clearly visible. The Waits River Valley and the mountains of Groton State Forest spread to the west. To the south is Wrights Mountain and a longer view to Mt. Ascutney, and Woodchuck Mountain rises to the north. The meadows are kept clear and open by a yearly or bi-yearly brush hog cutting.

To the east of the Tucker Mountain-Woodchuck Mountain ridgeline, the land is gentle with some level to moderately sloping ground. The western part of the property is more rolling with some steep to very steep ground. Ledge outcrops and surface stones are common, especially near heights of land.

The ridge divides the headwaters of two sub-watersheds to the Connecticut River. East of the two summits, the Vance Brook headwaters drain into the Connecticut. This brook supplies a wetland of several inactive beaver ponds, dams and lodges. West of the summits, Meadow Brook begins at a small spring and drains to the Waits River before flowing on to the Connecticut. Along the course of Meadow Brook on the west side of the ridge are two man-made ponds with beaver activity and a beaver pond. An intermittent brook originates on the southern boundary and joins Meadow Brook. Both Meadow Brook and Vance Brook flow clean and clear with no signs of pollution.

There is one significant vernal pool near the top of Tucker and a second, smaller pool near the south base of Woodchuck Mountain. The land also contains several swamps.

The land reveals outcroppings of the sedimentary bedrock that form the base of these mountains. There are deposits of glacial till and rocky soils and glacial erratics of varying sizes are strewn about. These and fragments of bedrock were used to build the abundant stone walls that border reforested fields.

The history of the land is part of its fascination and attraction; as mentioned above, much of the forest was cleared for agriculture in the early 19th century. Many historical artifacts, such as stone walls and cellar holes, still remain. There were at least two homesteads on the property and three that closely border it.

Two properties were combined when the land was transferred to the Vermont Land Trust and then to the Town of Newbury: the 494-acre Philip and Virginia Leach property, owned by their five children, and a 142-acre parcel owned by Edward and Deborah Leach, Philip and Virginia's son and daughter-in-law. Through Vermont Land Trust, the senior Leaches had previously protected the 494 acres through the VLT, but that agreement was redrafted at the time of the sale to the town. The 142 acres had not been protected until the sale to the Town of Newbury.

The forests of the 142-acre parcel which includes the south side of Woodchuck Mountain is of special note in that most of it has not been logged for 20-30 years and contains healthy stands of red oak, white pine and sugar maple.

The land has been managed with forest management plans drafted and overseen by qualified foresters. Most if not all of the original climax forest was cleared for crop land or pasture when the land was originally settled. Since reforestation, trees have been cut in many different areas over the years, with some stands cut several times. The first logging based on forestry principals was conducted in 1993. Several timber stands were logged prior to the sale in keeping with the owner's forest management plan, the goals of which, aside from timber harvest, were to nurture a forest of mixed species and stages of maturity and create small patches of early successional forest for wildlife habitat.

Logging was somewhat aggressive on the Philip Leach portion of the property with five harvests in various stands since the last forest management plan in 2010. The Edwin and Deborah Leach portion

has not been logged for over twelve years and most stands in this part of the forest have not been logged for 25-35 years.

In the forest southwest of the man-made ponds, there is a stand of enormous old legacy trees. Most of these are sugar maple and ash, but there are a few large basswood and red oak. This is one of many destinations for all to enjoy these magnificent trees.

There are no habitable structures on the property. At the old Carter homestead, there is a small generator shed that the committee is maintaining for future use.

The Vermont Land Trust had two Rapid Ecological Assessments done for the property in 2016. This two-part overview of the property identifies many of the land features mentioned above, makes recommendations for further investigation, and goes into some depth regarding geological features and soil types [Addenda 5 and 6].

3. Natural Resources

Tucker Mountain Town Forest is part of a large and important wildlife corridor extending from the 1500+ acre Fairlee Town Forest to the south, the Groton State Forest to the north, and the White Mountain National Forest to the east and beyond into Maine.

The Tucker Mountain forests provides habitat for a wide range of wildlife, providing opportunities for wildlife viewing, tracking, hunting, and education. Bears find an abundance of oak, beech, and berries on the slopes of Tucker and the adjoining Woodchuck mountains, while white-tailed deer find shelter from snow under conifer stands on the property's lower slopes. Food sources for wildlife are plentiful. Healthy red oaks in addition to moderately healthy beech stands provide a hard mast food source for rodents, deer, turkey, skunks, and bear. Past logging activity has created ideal conditions for berries. There are also a number of apple trees on the property. Striped maple, hemlock, and seeps provide browse and vegetation for herbivores during leaner times of year. Signs of moose are common and the land provides habitat for bobcats, weasels, barred owls, and many other species.

Deer and other animals graze on the grasses of the upper meadows. Grassland bird species may find suitable habitat here, and a breeding bird survey might confirm this. An objective of the most recent forest management plan is to provide and maintain a variety of habitats for wildlife.

The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture ranks the town forest streams as having the highest possible

scores for intact brook trout habitat. There is some beaver activity at one of the man-made ponds on the west side and many inactive beaver ponds on the east side, providing outdoor education and wildlife viewing opportunities. Vernal pools on the property offer amphibian breeding habitat.

An ecological protection zone (EPZ) has been established surrounding the large vernal pool southeast of the summit of Tucker Mountain. The pool is surrounded by forest including an old giant yellow birch that abuts an old stone wall. It is an active amphibian breeding site and a chorus of wood frogs creates quite a cacophony on a spring day. The secondary EPZ—a circular zone 500 feet out from the 100-foot primary zone around the pool itself—includes some of the high meadows at the top of the mountain. Protection of this EPZ is required by the Vermont Land Trust conservation easement as habitat for amphibians. The VLT has approved maintenance of pre-existing meadows within this EPZ.

Working under the direction of The Vermont Center for Ecostudies, five local families have assumed roles as citizen scientists and monitor both vernal pools for amphibian egg masses and other signs of amphibian activity as well as invertebrate populations such as caddis fly larvae.

4. Access

Tucker Mountain Road and the High Meadows Trail

The Class 4 Tucker Mountain Road runs east to west through the Town Forest. This is the primary diverse-use trail in the Town Forest—hikers, snowmobiles, motor vehicles and others all share this road. The road approaches the property on Tucker Mountain Road from West Newbury on the east side and from Bowen Road on the west side. It is maintained to the boundaries of the town forest.

Much of the rest of the road in the town forest itself is in poor condition with washouts, exposed boulders, and bare ledge. The degradation in the last ten years or so has restricted vehicle access to the top of Tucker Mountain. The Newbury road crew made significant repairs to the first mile of road entering the Town Forest from the east prior to the sale, establishing a series of stone gravel bars to abate erosion. This recent maintenance ends at the upper log landing about 1/3-mile east of the road's height of land. Along an approximately 300-yard section of this road west of that landing the road is nearly impassable due to erosion. Tucker Mountain Road on the west side of the mountain is in slightly better condition, but nearly impassable for most vehicles once it enters the Town Forest.

There is a 20-car parking lot just off of Tucker Mountain Town Road by the eastern boundary and a six-car parking lot off of Tucker Mountain Road near the western boundary. Each lot has an informational kiosk with trail maps, hunting information, and other notices.

Any motor vehicles other than snowmobiles are prohibited from December 1 to May 31 between two gates, one near the east side of the property and one near the west boundary as set forth in a travel restriction ordinance by the Newbury Selectboard. These gates were installed to protect the road during the muddiest time of year. When the ground is frozen and covered with snow, the gates are left open for snowmobiles. Whether the gate is open or closed, the road is used regularly by hikers, mountain bikers, occasional horseback riders, and cross-country skiers.

The High Meadows Trail is a multi-use trail leading from the Tucker Mountain Road height of land to the top of Tucker Mountain. Other than the Class 4 Tucker Mountain Road, this is the only trail shared by motor vehicles. It has been a major concern because its use has caused severe erosion in the grassy meadows, especially over the past three decades. Where one section of road has washed out, vehicles have created a new road next to it. When that new road washes out, a third road is created. Using signs and hay bales, the management committee has successfully directed traffic onto just one of these roads and seeded and mulched the unused roads. However, the designated roadway is unstable and erosion continues such that the road is not holding up. An important goal of the management committee is to reverse erosion and improve access by building a new road (See page 15 under Specific Activities in Support of Objectives).

Tucker Mountain Road on the west side will need some improvement in order for trucks and equipment to access the summit area for re-construction of a High Meadows Trail. Aside from this, the committee is not considering making any major improvements to Tucker Mountain Road other than maintaining water bars to reduce erosion. Any help from the town highway department in maintaining Tucker Mountain Road, especially in controlling erosion, is welcomed.

The upper log landing on the east side serves well in its present condition as a parking area for five or six vehicles. This lot could be easily expanded if there is a need for more parking.

Hiking Trails

Present trails in The Tucker Mountain Town Forest include the following

- 1) The Putnam Trail: A trail from the east parking lot to the summit of Tucker Mountain that avoids Tucker Mountain Road except to cross it at its junction with the Old Boulevard.
- 2) Woodchuck Loop Trail: A trail that ascends from Tucker Mountain Road to the summit of Woodchuck Mountain and loops back to the road.
- 3) Three Ponds Trail: A trail west of the Tucker Mountain summit that passes south of the two man-made ponds and a beaver pond.
- 4) Beaver Pond Trail: A trail build by Newbury Elementary and Oxbow Students that leads to an old beaver pond, dam and lodge.
- 5) Vance Brook Trail: A short loop trail just north of the east parking lot that leads to Vance Brook. The management committee plans to make this into an all-persons (accessible) trail in the next few years.
- 6) Woven Arch Bridge: This bridge is on our Wetlands Trail, which is still under development. The beautiful cedar bridge across Vance Brook is in itself a destination for hikers.
- 7) Oliver Spring Trail: A short loop trail from the west side kiosk at the base of Woodchuck Mountain. Eventually we plan to work with Upper Valley Land Trust to extend this trail onto their land and to the summit of Woodchuck Mountain.

Tucker Mountain Road and the High Meadows Trail are shared by all means of foot travel as well as motorized and non-motorized transport and there are rarely conflicts between these groups.

5. Overall Vision for the Town Forest

The Tucker Mountain Town Forest Management Committee envisions a Town Forest that is a forever natural refuge owned and cared for by the citizens of Newbury and shared with others through respectful outdoor recreation for the enjoyment of everyone. It is a catalyst for rallying our community as we engage in the stewardship of this land, coming together in planning and volunteering for work projects that improve and preserve the ecological health of the forest as we encourage and protect wildlife, and enhance the forests recreational value. We envision a landscape that does the best possible job of modeling the most current scientific thinking of a diverse and sustainable carbon sequestering forest environment. We see protected vernal pools, streams, beaver ponds and wetlands along with open meadows of native grasses and wildflowers and a 360-degree view as integral to this vision. The Town Forest is a source of pride for Newbury and an attraction for visitors throughout the region.

The Town Forest will continue to be used for activities like hiking, skiing, snowmobile riding, hunting, bird watching and other wildlife observation, mountain biking, horseback riding and responsible motor vehicle travel where permitted. The Committee promotes cooperation between all user groups and leads in managing any conflicts that arise.

Tucker Mountain Town Forest serves as an outdoor classroom for students from Newbury Elementary, Bradford Elementary, Oxbow, and all neighboring schools as a destination for school field trips, outdoor learning and research projects, and community service. The property offers specific opportunities for high school students from River Bend Career and Technical Center to learn and practice forest management skills, trail and road construction and maintenance, restoration of eroded landscapes and basic carpentry skills like making sign, benches and picnic tables. Aside from skills and knowledge gained, educational endeavors will engender appreciation and respect for natural environments and the role humans play in preserving and nurturing them. Adults and families, too, can enjoy educational walks, talks and studies associated with the Town Forest and benefit from the ten interpretive signs placed throughout the forest.

5. Management Objectives

First and foremost, preserve a healthy ecosystem.

- All aspects of managing the town forest are planned and executed with the overall goal of preservation and improvement of the ecosystem. Forest management, road repair, education, signage, wildlife monitoring, and any other activities are guided by what is best for the Town Forest ecology. The Committee will act in respect to the conservation easement agreed upon and signed by the Town of Newbury and the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) [Addendum 1, Map Addendum 2]. We will seek help, advice and approval from VLT and their forester as needed.
- Invasive bush honeysuckle is present on the property and steps are being taken to identify and remove it. Volunteers have made some progress in uprooting the bushes and this work will continue. Invasive knotweed has been discovered along Tucker Mountain Road and volunteers have eradicated it for now. Our forester also reports invasive barberry. We will be vigilant in monitoring for Invasive species both plant and animal, and will establish a reporting process that will allow the public to help

Develop, improve and preserve the features of the property that users' value.

- Preserve the 360-degree view from the top of Tucker Mountain by brush-hogging the meadows as needed (after September 15 to protect nesting birds and their fledglings and pollinators) and clearing saplings where they are encroaching on the meadows.

A small patch of meadow may be mowed for events such as weddings and for an area for viewing and picnicking.

Maintain recreational trails for hikers, skiers, bikers and equestrians and establish new trails.

Existing and potential trails are described earlier in this plan under “Hiking Trails” (Page 11).

Volunteers will flag and map new trails and consultants as well as our forester will make recommendations for fine-tuning these routes in consideration of ecological factors. Trails are built with the help of volunteers, including organized groups of school children.

- Create an all persons’ accessible trail designed to achieve stable ground and gradual inclines for people who need a gentler path or who use walkers, wheelchairs, push children in strollers, or use other devices that assist walking.
- Repair erosional damage and improve access to motor vehicles on the summit road by reconstruction of the road from the height of land of Tucker Mountain Road to the summit of Tucker Mountain, improving drainage and managing traffic.
- Provide directional signage and trail maps.
- Avoid potential user conflicts by promoting respect and cooperation in kiosk messaging, “share the trail” signage, on the website and in other communications.

Improve and protect wildlife habitat

- Any human activity in the Town Forest will be managed with an eye to preserving or improving wildlife habitat and water quality.
- As a general guide, and in keeping with a multiple-use strategy, the Forest will be managed to optimize wildlife carrying capacity, and therefore its value to the user public. In particular, emphasizing an uneven-aged forest composition will maximize the value of the forest to the greatest number of wildlife species.
- There are numerous abandoned beaver dams, lodges and ponds throughout the largest wetland section of Vance Brook, and the man-made ponds and one beaver-made pond show signs of beaver activity. Our objective is to protect beaver habitat. Based on what we know of beaver behavior, when food sources recover from past beaver activity, they will return to sites that are currently inactive. Beaver ponds and dams improve habitat for many other species, aid in flood control, help filter water, and add volume to the aquifer. People, especially children, enjoy watching beavers, observing their work, and learning about them.

Do all we can to get people into the woods: families, children, the elderly, and the disabled.

- Be sure planned facilities are accessible to all.
- Promote the Town Forest as providing inexpensive activity for anyone regardless of income level.
- Provide a trail attractions and activities for families with children.
- Promote the town forest using social media, press releases, and newsletters.

Promote the Town Forest as an outdoor classroom

- Education creates an understanding of the Tucker Mountain ecosystem, and it is a fundamental tool leading people to respect and love the town forest property so they become better stewards. This stewardship expands to engender conservation ethics for all natural environments. Education can help generate a cultural shift where disrespectful degradation of terrain and any other acts of vandalism are diminished.
- Increase school participation through field trips, field study projects, and community service.
- Newbury Elementary School and Bradford Elementary lead field trip hikes to the top of Tucker Mountain. Committee members and other friends of the Town Forest can arrange to help plan curriculum for the day and offer to join the students and help point out ecological and historical features of the Town Forest. Blue Mountain School, Waits River Valley School, and Oxbow are also encouraged to make use of Tucker Mountain as a field trip destination.
- Committee members and friends have visited schools to present programs on Tucker Mountain history, geology, forestry, the ecology of the mountain, and other town forest related topics.
- The committee created and installed 10 interpretive signs though out the town forest with information on forestry, history, wildlife and geology. These are to be promoted and maintained.
- We encourage middle and high school teachers to make use of the town forest as an educational resource.

Encourage public education through organized walks, signage, presentations, and publications.

- Organized walks led by geologists, naturalists, and historians.
- Provide trail signs with information on history and ecological features.
- Publish information on social media, the web page, and in print.

Continue to build community support and encourage a sense of ownership for the Town Forest through publicity, social media, public meetings and events, and volunteerism.

- The Committee has established relationships with local newspapers which publish stories and photographs showing volunteer activities, progress and improvements to the town forest, and report on other newsworthy events.
- Public meetings are conducted to include citizens in the development of planning initiatives, to discuss progress, and to gather feedback.
- The Committee has launched a Tucker Mountain Town Forest celebration day, inviting the public to celebrate the town forest and see the work that has been done.
- The Committee photographs events such as volunteer days and publishes these photos along with a text story on their Facebook Page and sends the same material out to over 280 readers on an email list.
- Each year the Management Committee writes a report for the Town's annual report. This summarizes work done and the status of the town forest, presents the year's progress, and describes future plans. Town Meeting is also be an opportunity to speak about the report, answer questions, and thank the town for their support.

Establish good relationships with neighboring landowners.

- Communicate openly and transparently with our neighbors.
- Respect and help promote the ecological health of bordering land.
- Use signs and other tools to ask users to cooperate in showing respect for surrounding private land and especially posted land.

6. Specific Activities in Support of Objectives

- **High Meadows Trail Construction.**

With donations from the community and a grant from Vermont's Recreational Trails Program, a substantial new gravel roadbed for the High Meadows Trail with proper ditching and drainage will be completed by December of 2024. The project includes compacted earth parking areas near the summit and a short all-persons accessible trail to a viewpoint. The improved road will mitigate the severe erosion caused by washouts of the multiple roads currently existing and create better access to the top.

- **View clearing**

Two patches of saplings near the Tucker Mountain summit need to be cleared to preserve the view. Left to grow, they will soon block the views to the west and north. The committee will seek funding to have the saplings cut and mulched.

- **Controlling invasive species**

Honeysuckle and barberry are two invasive plants that threaten the town forest. Volunteers have removed a fair amount of honeysuckle but the total project is more than our volunteers can manage. The committee will seek funding to hire a forestry company to help us get ahead of these invasive species.

- **Firepit reconstruction**

The firepit on the summit of Tucker Mountain is large and messy. The committee's goal is to remove the current pit, redesign and construct a fire ring of steel and stone with a smaller inside diameter.

- **Pavilion**

Plans are under consideration for a log frame picnic pavilion either at the old homestead site across the road from the upper pond on the west side of the town forest or in the lawn next to the east parking lot.

- **Trail bridge**

Plans are under consideration for a bridge that crosses Vance Brook north of the east parking lot as part of our wetlands trail, linking two logging road that will become part of the trail. There have been logging bridges at this site in the past.

- **StoryWalk: an educational project**

Friends of Tucker Mountain secured a grant to install a StoryWalk along the Vance Brook Trail. 20 presentation signs will display pages of children's books such that kids and their families can move from sign to sign as they hike, reading a story as they go. Books will be rotated throughout the year. Newbury's after school program includes a woodworking club made up of students who, under close supervision, built and installed the display signs.

- **All Persons' Trail**

The committee is laying out plans for an all persons (handicapped accessible) trail, beginning with an engineering plan with construction to follow. At this point, we have created a 0.5 loop trail on relatively flat ground as a preliminary trail layout and secured an assistance grant from the National Park Service for guidance and advice. The NPS has also offered to pay for the design.

- **Monitor wildlife**

With the help of wildlife experts, the Management Committee will establish a wildlife monitoring program. Game cameras will likely be placed at recommended sites to gather images for demonstration and educational purposes. A data bank may be established at kiosks and on the website whereby visitors to the mountain report sightings, tracks, scat, and other signs of wildlife. Biologists from the he VTFW and the Vermont Audubon Society forester have agreed to visit the forest and provide technical assistance on how to intentionally incorporate wildlife habitat considerations into our land management. Members of the community will be invited to join such activities.

- **Ongoing and Future trail work**

1. Construction of an all persons (accessible) trail near the east parking lot called the Vance Brook Trail.
2. The completion of the Wetlands Trail that extends around a large wetland supported by past and future beaver activity in the northeast part of the town forest.
3. Continuation of the Oliver Spring Trail to the summit of Woodchuck Mountain.
4. A spur trail is flagged and scheduled to be cut that leaves the pond near the west end of the Three Pond Trail and accesses the height of land near the west boundary of the forest. Eventually this trail will loop around to reach the summit of Tucker Mountain from the south.
5. Working with members of the Bradford Conservation Commission, construct a trail from the Tucker Mountain Town Forest to Bradford's Wright's Mountain and Devils Den Town Forest

Other trails may be considered for planning and construction. All trail building and maintenance will be consistent with our goal of managing the property for wildlife, environmental impact and respect for private property.

The State of Vermont is transferring land north of Woodchuck Mountain to Upper Valley Land Trust. In conversations, UVLT is enthusiastic about sharing trails between our property and theirs.

- **Reach out to Blue Mountain School, Waits River School, and Others**

Newbury and Bradford elementary schools make good use of the town forest for field trips and Newbury Elementary and Oxbow staff and students have done trail work as community service. The committee needs to make a concerted effort to involve Blue Mountain School as well.

Invitations should also go out to Waits River School and schools in Haverhill, Woodsville, and Piermont.

7. Signage

Signage includes:

- Three kiosks, each with a map of the Town Forest, educational information, regulations, and other notices. One is placed at the east gate, one at a west entrance parking area, and one where the High Meadows Trail to the summit leaves Tucker Mountain Road.
- Signs marking trails and directional signs, boundary signs, and signs that warn users to respect private property and, where necessary, signs that prohibit entry.
- Signs on the meadows that discourage activities that cause erosion to the land and that remind people to remove their trash.
- Signs designating trails as multiuse, pedestrian, and multi-use non-motorized.
- Speed limits for motorized vehicles and signs warning vehicles to watch out for non-motorized users.
- “Share the Trail” signs that encourage cooperation between various user groups
- Summit elevation signs for the tops of Tucker Mountain and Woodchuck Mountain
- Profile signs at the summit of Tucker identifying peaks within view.
- Educational signs that identify and present information on historical homestead sites, explain geologic and botanical features, vernal pools, wildlife, etc.

8. Restrictions

Allowed activities

- The Town Forest allows hiking, cross country skiing, and snowshoeing in any part of the property.
- Mountain bikes and horses are allowed on established trails as long as they are not causing significant erosion.
- Hunting is allowed in the town forest. During hunting season, signs are posted warning non-hunters to wear bright colors and to keep dogs on leashes. Signs also warn hunters to be alert for hikers and other users.
- Wheeled motorized vehicles are permitted on Tucker Mountain Road and the High Meadows Trail to the top. When there is sufficient snow cover, snowmobiles are allowed on the meadows as long as there is no damage to the soil.
- Fires are allowed in the established fire ring only. If fire danger is high, fires are prohibited.

- Leave No Trace overnight camping is permitted (no digging, no wood cutting, no fire).

Restricted activities

- All vehicles require a valid registration from Vermont or any other state.
- Dogs are the responsibility of their owners and are to be kept on a leash or under the owner's control.
- Dog owners are responsible for picking up and removing their dog's excrement.
- Temporary tree stands or ground blinds for hunting are permitted two weeks before until two weeks after the specified hunting season with permission from the Management Committee. Tucker Mountain Management Committee holds the right to establish ground blinds for wildlife viewing.
- Temporary stands or blinds for photography are permitted with permission from the Management Committee.

Prohibited activities

- Any activities that are harmful to wildlife habitat, geological features, meadows, and the town forest environment are prohibited as established in the Conservation Easement held by the Vermont Land Trust.
- Except for maintenance and emergency vehicles, all motorized vehicles are required to stay on Tucker Mountain Road and the High Meadows Trail. Driving wheeled vehicles off-road on the upper meadow is strictly prohibited and will be treated as vandalism.
- No fires outside of the fire ring and no fires when fire danger is high, even if warnings are not posted. Fires must be completely extinguished before leaving them unattended.
- No trash is to be left in the Town Forest. It is the users' responsibility to remove all trash they bring in. Pack it in, pack it out.
- Illegal dumping will be prosecuted.
- No commercial harvesting of plants such as mushrooms, ginseng, birchbark, etc. The selectboard has adopted a Community Resource Use Policy with guidelines for community harvest of forest products, edible plants, etc. Request a copy from the town clerk or email tuckertownforest@gmail.com
- Unapproved installation of any memorials is prohibited. Contact the Tucker Mountain Town Forest Committee if you wish to memorialize a friend or family member through some means. Decisions will be governed by our Memorial and Gift policy, available by request by contacting

tuckertownforest@gmail.com. At the time of the property transfer to the town, the previous owners (the Leach family) reserved a section of land near the top for a family memorial which does not fall under this rule.

9. Development Process for the Management Plan

This management plan will be reviewed and updated in five years.

In developing an updated management plan, the Management Committee will conduct public meetings seeking input from the community about their vision for the Town Forest and the concerns they want the management plan to address. An on-line survey is also advised. Citizens will be asked what they value about Tucker Mountain, what improvements they would like to see, what activities should be allowed and what restrictions should be put in place, and what opportunities exist for education and other benefits. The opinions gathered in those meetings will inform the updated report.

From the management committee, the plan will go to the Newbury Selectboard and the Vermont Land Trust for review and approval.

10. Responsibilities of the Committee

The seven-member Tucker Mountain Town Forest Management Committee, supported and overseen by the Newbury Selectboard, is responsible for ensuring management goals are met.

Orange County Forester David Paganelli serves as forester for the town forest. He advises the Committee on management activities and has written our current forest management plan (Addendum 4).

The Committee will work closely with the Newbury Conservation Commission and look to them for resources, help and advice.

The committee will rely on the Vermont Land Trust and their forester and our county forester to advise them on any work that impacts the ecology of the property and to approve such work.

The committee will always seek to communicate with the community through public meetings including an annual meeting, email, social media, website and open committee meetings.

11. Financing

The Selectboard may use public funds to help fund any aspect of the development and maintenance of the Town Forest as they choose. The Town is responsible for Tucker Mountain Road, a Class 4 Town Highway according to Vermont Highway Ordinance, Article 6:

6.3 Class 4 Town Highways. Class 4 highways are seasonal highways, which may be graded once during the summer season. Replacement/maintenance of bridges/culverts to a minimum standard is on an “as needed” basis. No winter maintenance is performed unless ordered by the Selectboard for an emergency or unusual circumstance. Abutting landowners/residents may be allowed to perform improvements/maintenance upon presentation of a detailed proposal to, and acceptance by, the Selectboard.

Aside from any funding beyond what the Selectboard may allocate, rebuilding and maintenance of the summit road, maintaining views from the top of Tucker, maintenance of parking areas, any construction on the property, and any similar operations will be scheduled using funds from non-tax sources such as grants and donations as they become available. Proposed maintenance and improvements will happen over time only as funds permit.

The Management Committee believes that the Town Forest can be primarily self-financing. Among the sources of potential revenue that may be tapped are the following:

- Grants from state and local, public and private sources.
- Private donations to Friends of Tucker Mountain, a 501(c)(3) organization.
- Community fundraising campaigns.
- User fees, if any.
- Proceeds as deemed appropriate from sale on the commercial market of other properties owned by the Town.
- Proceeds from timber harvests.

For any timber harvest, an income sharing agreement should be developed by the Town and the Management Committee to determine the distribution of proceeds so that a substantial percentage will be available for the continued maintenance and development of the town forest. Our forest management plan recommends there be no timber harvest for at least ten years.

The town will continue to manage a Town Forest Management Fund as a repository for funds acquired through grants, donations, a percentage of timber harvest, and other non-tax dollars for the improvement and maintenance of the property.

Financial Benefits to Newbury

Although not a direct income flow, the town forest's stimulus to economic development in the area very likely has an impact on increased tax revenue and local businesses. This growth is the result of any increase in tourism and the attraction of a Town Forest recreation area to families who are considering moving to Newbury and buying homes here. That attraction also encourages young people to stay in the area, improving the quality of life here in a way that makes them less likely to move away.

11. Management for Timber and Other Forest Products

Orange County Forester David Paganelli is forester for the Tucker Mountain Town Forest. With his colleague A. J. Follensbee he has completed a ten-year Forest Management Plan (attached). Overall, the plan recommends that the forest be given at least ten years from the time of plan approval to mature before any logging takes place.

The plan includes the following priorities:

1. Maximize tree growth and health emphasizing diversity of tree species and age classes
2. Create and supporting wildlife habitat
3. Forest appearance
4. The impact of recreation
5. Carbon sequestration and storage
6. When logging takes place, the use of sustainable and environmentally sound timber harvesting practices including the consideration of horse logging.

12. Tucker Mountain Town Forest Community Survey 2022

In early spring 2022, the Tucker Mountain Town Forest Management Committee put out a community survey to evaluate the use and value of Tucker Mountain Town Forest to residents, and identify priorities for future recreational resources in the Town Forest. The survey had 135 respondents. The average score (from 0 to 100) of how much the members of the community valued Tucker Mountain Town Forest came in between 80 and 90, indicating that the majority of residents value and appreciate the Town Forest. Approximately 90% of the respondents lived in Newbury or in communities adjacent.

The most common recreational activities that residents participate in were, in order, 1) walking, hiking and/or running; 2) Skiing and/or snowshoeing; 3) walking, hiking and/or running with pets; 4) picnics, and 5) birding or other wildlife viewing. The majority of respondents use Tucker Mountain Town Forest at least twice per year, with some visiting more than ten times per year.

While views were more mixed on supporting vehicle access to the summit, with a small majority supporting a spur road to the summit, many noted that accessibility to the elderly or disabled who cannot hike the distance from the current parking areas to the summit was an important consideration to this issue.

The most common responses about future Tucker Mountain Town Forest recreation improvements or enhancements included:

- Maintaining and expanding the existing hiking trails; with some respondents advocating for mountain bike trails or motorized vehicle trails in addition to hiking trails.
- Increasing the availability of online resources, including trail maps, posts about trail conditions, and other resources about Tucker Mountain on the website or social media.
- Responses were mixed on motorized recreation, with nearly an equal number supporting improving the ability to access Tucker Mountain by vehicle as those who advocated to limit motorized vehicle access.
- Some supported designated sites for overnight camping.
- Others mentioned hosting a “clean-up” day and better controlling litter on Tucker Mountain.
- Many voiced support for keeping the area in as natural a state as possible.

Addenda

[Request Copies from Tom Kidder, Chair tuckertownforest@gmail.com]

1. Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement
2. Conservation Easement Map
3. Forest management plan
4. Newbury Town Forest Rapid Ecological Assessment Part I
5. Newbury Town Forest Rapid Ecological Assessment Part 2