

SUMMARY REPORT

Envisioning the Future of the Dundee Community Forest

How do we balance and plan for the many competing uses and opportunities for the future Dundee Community Forest?

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A Community Gathering



September 30, 2021
Program from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Doors open at 5:30 PM

Whitney Community Center
18 Black Mountain Road
Jackson, NH

Facilitation and Summary

CJW Consulting LLC

Courtney J. Wrigley

www.cjwconsultingllc.com

AT A GLANCE

Envisioning the Future Dundee Community Forest:

“How do we balance and plan for the many competing uses and opportunities for the future Dundee Community Forest?”

On September 29, 2021, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust hosted a community gathering to hear hopes, concerns, and priorities for the development of the future Dundee Community Forest located in Bartlett and Jackson, NH. The event, attended by over 60 community members, was designed as a community conversation with facilitated small group discussions. The following themes organized in three forest use categories were heard in small group discussions and shared at report out. A full event summary begins on the following page.

FOREST ECOLOGY

- Protecting wildlife and forest ecology through species inventory and special management areas
- Balancing impacts of forestry and recreation to prioritize forest ecology
- Planning and managing for forest ecology with connection and coordination to build legacy

FOREST ECONOMY

- Transparent decision making, best practices, and balancing forest revenue to support other forest goals
- Managing timber harvesting with care and concern
- Considering other uses – agriculture, carbon markets, and the Ham House

RECREATION

- Prioritizing dispersed, lower-impact recreation capacities
- Considering and cautioning higher-impact recreation of mountain biking, motorized use, and camping
- Balancing recreation with impacts of overuse, overdevelopment, and parking infrastructure
- Planning carefully and slowly with collaboration and partnerships to maintain local access

FUTURE DUNDEE COMMUNITY FOREST ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Maintaining the spirit and character of the area
- Suggested representation or members of the Advisory Committee

“We are thankful this is happening – to the organizational partners, funders, and to the Beal Family. Of all that could happen to the property, this is the greatest outcome we could have imagined.” - Participant

BACKGROUND

Upper Saco Valley Land Trust (USVLT) is partnering with the Trust for Public Land to conserve 1,200 acres spanning the Barlett and Jackson town line. The future Dundee Community Forest is comprised of 16 different land parcels that were assembled by a local family over 60 years. The creation of the community forest will provide the opportunity to protect land buffering the White Mountain National Forest, wildlife habitat, old-growth forest, and high-quality riparian areas. The future community forest will be managed as a working forest, with the possibility for different recreational uses. With a \$2.3M Forest Legacy Grant, USVLT will eventually be the owner of the future Dundee Community Forest and the property will be subject to a Conservation Easement held in perpetuity by the State of NH. There are easement requirements and allowances informing the development of the Multi-Resource Management Plan. USVLT welcomes the opportunity for community engagement in the process and in participation of the future Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee.

To support community engagement in this project, USVLT hosted an outdoor community gathering on Thursday evening, September 29, 2021. Event information was shared with residents through community flyers, online mailings, and direct outreach. Approximately 50 participants pre-registered and more than 60 attended. Participants spent the duration of the gathering in facilitated small group discussion to share their priorities, hopes, concerns, and questions about the future Dundee Community Forest. The full group gathered to hear a report out of final priorities from each of the seven small groups.

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

A discussion guide was developed to structure participant dialogue and provide input on the focus question “How do we balance and plan for the many competing uses and opportunities for the future Dundee Community Forest?” Questions on forest ecology, forest economy, and recreation uses guided the community conversation. The full discussion guide is included in Appendix A.

What follows are themes and priorities that came forth in the small group facilitator notes and report out. A full transcript of small group notes is included in Appendix A. These results will help inform USVLT, the future Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee, and partners in planning and management decisions. This summary is prepared for USVLT and may be shared with event participants, project partners, and interested individuals. Please contact USVLT for appendices and more information.

PARTICIPANTS

The majority of participants identified as Jackson or Barlett residents, along with several Conway and regional attendees. Many direct abutters and neighbors of Dundee Road and Thorn Hill Road attended. Participants shared some of the many community ‘hats’ they wear, including members of municipal boards (conservation commission, planning board) and supporters of local outdoor recreation, education, and land organizations. Familiarity with the project and forest ranged from knowledgeable Board members and abutters to curious new residents, “I wanted to come out tonight to learn more about what’s happening in the area.”

Overall, many vocalized their support, interest, and curiosity in the community forest project and their desire to be involved. Many felt connected to the forest, land, and history of the area and honoring the legacy of the Beal Family. Abutters and neighbors shared appreciation and support for the project along with concerns over potential impacts on their property and neighborhood from increased forest uses. As one Dundee Road resident

explained, “I’m glad for conservation and happy for this project, but I’m concerned about recreation overuse, parking impacts, and people wandering into my backyard.” This sentiment was shared beyond abutters. Many added that their attendance was in support for protecting the land and contributing to a major conservation opportunity. Participants also shared an interest in developing low-impact, balanced recreation opportunities for enjoyment of the community forest.

PRIORITIES FOR DISCUSSION

When participants considered the focus question, “How do we balance and plan for the many competing uses and opportunities for the future Dundee Community Forest?”, the following four themes emerged as important to the discussion:

- Planning and developing forest management plans that inform decision makers, build on collaboration, and are adaptable to incorporate lessons learned
- Protecting and conserving forest ecology, wildlife, and natural resources
- Balancing forest uses, specifically forest economy, recreation and their impacts on the forest and neighborhoods
- Creating responsible recreation opportunities, access points, and infrastructure (e.g. parking lots)

KEY FINDINGS

During the community conversation, seven groups discussed topics important to them and reported out the final priorities for USVLT and the future Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee to consider. Participants expressed a range of perspectives and ideas. The summary below is organized into overall themes reflecting group notes and report out: forest ecology, forest economy, recreation, and the future Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee.

FOREST ECOLOGY

Protecting wildlife and forest ecology through species inventory and special management areas:

Participants spoke of the value and interest in protecting wildlife, wildlife habitats and connected corridors, rare species and biodiversity, guarding against invasive species, and special management areas for water, ridgelines, old timber stands, and unique or sensitive ecological areas. Inventory to document what exists, including invasive species, was frequently mentioned. In report out, groups shared priorities to “protect species, preserve old growth forest, watersheds, and not just preserve, but encourage wildlife habitat.”

Balancing impacts of forestry and recreation to prioritize forest ecology:

Balancing uses was a central theme to participants. Maintaining and prioritizing forest biodiversity and natural resources while allowing other major forest uses and recreation users was mentioned repeatedly. While responsible timber management was recognized in many groups as essential for forest and habitat health, several groups shared concern about logging creating negative ecological and visual impacts. Report outs included phrases such as, “don’t compromise the use of land by humans for what wildlife and forest habitats need” and “forest ecology should be considered first, recreation second, then economy.”

Planning and managing for forest ecology with connection and coordination to build legacy:

Careful planning, processes, and management to prioritize healthy, sustainable forest ecology was discussed in many small groups. Maintaining a big picture of how these lands fit into larger scale ecosystem management, consistency with other public landowners, and collaborating and learning with others were shared principles. Participants noted potential for different ecological management on the three parcels and the opportunity to continue building connectivity. Hopes for connecting with local knowledge and partner organizations for ecology education were mentioned to build resiliency and legacy for future generations and stewards. “Think about our legacy – it’s awesome land, let’s keep that in mind.”

FOREST ECONOMY

Transparent decision making, best practices, and balancing forest revenue to support other forest goals:

Planning, process, and how management decisions would be made regarding forest economy were shared issues among participants. Following best management practices and going slow were mentioned as tenants for decision making. Participants expressed faith in USVLT to make good forest economy decisions and there was interest in knowing the plan for forest revenue. There was curiosity whether or not the community forest would consider fee-based recreation use. Again, balance rose as a central theme with participants sharing the desire to balance forest health and commercial gain. In report out, groups shared that forest economy should be actively managed to support other goals, not fiscally incentivized, “We see economy as a way to manage a forest in service of the other goals of ecology and recreation.”

Managing timber harvesting with care and concern:

As the major forest economy use, timber management and logging were significant discussion topics. Participants shared support for limited, responsible timber harvesting as part of sustainable forest management plans. Concerns were also expressed. There were questions about the motivation for timber harvesting, particularly in old growth areas, and how revenue would be reinvested in the forest. Process for selecting qualified loggers and infrastructure around logging, including log landing areas, heavy equipment, and increased traffic on Dundee Road were concerns for some participants. Participants expressed concern about the ecological and visual impacts and interest in knowing timber harvesting criteria and plans. Abutter and neighborhood education around timber harvesting was mentioned.

Considering other uses – agriculture, carbon markets, and the Ham House:

Groups discussed the opportunity for traditional agricultural forest uses such as sugaring, mushrooming, or other small-scale uses. Discussion of carbon markets sparked curiosity and enthusiasm among participants who wanted to learn more. Some challenges revolving around scale and experiences by other organizations were mentioned as hurdles. Participants expressed interest in future carbon market opportunities but did not consider this a primary strategy for decision makers right now. Finally, participants shared varying perspectives on the preservation of the historical Ham House. A small group report out questioned the appropriateness and capacity of USVLT, a conservation organization, in taking the lead on the Ham House and offered that there may be another group to prioritize this effort.

RECREATION

Prioritizing dispersed, lower-impact recreation capacities:

Participants shared priorities for lower-impact, dispersed recreation uses, including year-round trails for hiking, walking, and skiing. With many small parcels and abutting lands and ownership, participants emphasized coordination in creating trail connections, loops, and expanding current trail infrastructure. Potential connections with cross-country ski trails, backcountry glades, and other winter uses were brought forth with interest and caution due to overuse and parking concerns. Appropriate trailhead locations, viewpoints, and protection of sensitive areas, like ridgelines, were noted for special consideration. Role and importance of signage, search and rescue capacity, and compatibility with hunting and trapping were mentioned. Warnings to “not create the next Diana’s Baths with over-manicured trails,” high visitor counts, and parking impacts were heard in small groups and during report out. Some groups had questions about easement requirements and ADA accessible trails. Careful recreation management, even of seemingly low-impact uses, is of highest priority to participants due to overuse concerns and infrastructure needs.

Considering and cautioning higher-impact recreation of mountain biking, motorized use, and camping:

Participants discussed priorities and concerns about higher-impact recreation uses, such as mountain biking, motorized uses, and camping. There were many perspectives on mountain biking, including interest in the increasingly popular sport with opportunities for those with less mobility. Caution about management and trail design were emphasized, as erosion and hiking compatibility on multi-use trails was a concern. Except for use of a motorized cross-country ski groomer, participants were not interested in motorized uses being developed and were reassured by easement guidelines. Camping raised mixed response with some participants expressing interest in primitive, highly dispersed camping. Camping concerns included management and capacity in relation to trash and human waste. Town Hall Road and Mountain Pond were shared as examples of such concerns and many participants, particularly abutters, expressed preference for no camping, especially near the road.

Balancing recreation with impacts of overuse, overdevelopment, and parking infrastructure:

Participants have a love for the land and value opportunities for outdoor recreation, however balance and concern about overdevelopment and overuse remained a priority in all small groups. Groups reported out that “land should be used, but not overused.” Specific concerns were raised including guided commercial trips and promotion by gear rental companies; Bartlett tract viewpoints with path of least resistance through private property; and access points along Dundee Road and Thorn Hill Road impacting neighbors. It was noted that more trails equal more infrastructure to manage, including parking lots, restrooms, signage, and more. Parking was of particular concern with acknowledgement that the issue is complicated. There was interest in distributed, small parking lots with enforced capacities. Parking overflow was discussed, especially in the winter, and that there be a plan to avoid the problems experienced elsewhere without being exclusionary. Participants, particularly abutters, noted that parking lot impacts are significant and can change neighborhoods and roads regardless of use.

Planning carefully and slowly with collaboration and partnerships to maintain local access:

When it comes to recreation, participants prioritize a careful planning process that moves slowly, balances access and restraint, and works collaboratively with recreation groups to incorporate lessons learned. With the speed of social media and advertising, and witnessing the impacts of the last 18 months, participants expressed cautious support for balanced recreation development in the future Dundee Community Forest. One group noted “the reality of protecting for local access is important – at what cost do we expand infrastructure and lose local access?” Participants expressed preference to go slowly with decision making especially around impactful recreation development. Some participants expressed ambivalence over encouraging public use of the land, preferring more private enjoyment of the forest. Participants suggested an overall, well-designed recreation or trails plan that coordinates with abutting lands and trail networks. The opportunity to work collaboratively with recreation groups and similar areas, like Randolph Community Forest, to incorporate lessons learned was mentioned in report out.

FUTURE DUNDEE COMMUNITY FOREST ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Maintaining the spirit and character of the area:

While participants shared specific priorities in each of the major forest uses - forest ecology, forest economy, and recreation - overarching themes for planning, process, and management decisions were repeated. Groups encouraged USVLT and the future Advisory Committee to move forward with caution and clarity while developing “plans for everything” before acting. Many participants are interested in developing recreation opportunities and access points, however balance and maintaining what is loved about the area were consistent themes. One group encouraged, “Maintain the spirit and character of what we love about this land and area – there will be more people, so go thoughtfully and slowly.” Respect and awareness of impacts and changes to Dundee and Thorn Hill Roads and abutters’ private property and privacy was acknowledged as important by participants. Finally, learning from mistakes and lessons learned from other similar properties and projects in collaboration with partners, abutters, and knowledgeable individuals was emphasized in report out.

Suggested representation or members of the Advisory Committee:

Participants shared suggestions for members of the future Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee (see below). Some small groups discussed concerns that official representation of stakeholders and recreation groups on the Advisory Committee may lead to overstepping or unbalanced advocacy. There was suggestion for a group of more independent individuals who could consider interests and requests by organizations with a particular agenda or purpose. However the Advisory Committee is developed, there is likely to be needed transparency in process, governance, and clarity on who or what organization holds final decisions.

- USVLT
- Towns of Bartlett and Jackson
- Conservation Commissions of Jackson and Bartlett
- Bartlett Water Precinct
- Abutters
- Recreation groups (local and regional)
- Jackson Ski Touring Foundation
- Jackson Chamber (not desired by some)
- Forest Service
- Representation for forest ecology expert
- *Several participants indicated interest*

Links to Appendices:

[Appendix A:](#) Discussion guide, event flyer, small group transcripts

[Appendix B:](#) Event evaluation summary

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