

MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE TOWN-OWNED LAND
("PROTECTED PROPERTY"), Norwich, Vermont (Updated April 2008)

I. INTRODUCTION

This document is the Management Plan for the "Protected Property" defined herein, as contemplated by the Conservation Easement held by the Upper Valley Land Trust. It has been prepared under the supervision of the Upper Valley Land Trust, Norwich Special Places, the Norwich Conservation Commission and the Town of Norwich Board of Selectmen.

It is a requirement of the Conservation Easement that a copy of the current Management Plan be available for examination by the public at the offices of the Norwich Town Clerk and UVLT.

2. VISION STATEMENT

This land, purchased from the Peisch and Lewis families in the 1960-70s, will remain an undeveloped 35.3 acre parcel of land that separates the public and commercial center of Norwich from Interstate 91 and its entrance and exit ramps. It is part of a buffer that helps define the transition from the automobile-dominated highways to the slower, more pedestrian-oriented village streets.

The land will be far more than a static buffer. Norwich will treasure and use it as a convenient community resource, as a place to go to enjoy and learn about Vermont's forests and fields. It will also provide a scenic entry to our village.

We recognize that previous stewards of this land cleared and used it as pasture, for maple sugaring and as an orchard. Norwich will use this land to benefit the community while conserving the biological productivity of the site.

Its undeveloped character and proximity to the Marion Cross School makes this land an ideal site for an outdoor classroom. Faculty, staff and volunteers will use it as a real-life laboratory to help students explore a wide variety of topics. For example, students gain a better appreciation of ecology, creative writing, environmental ethics, stewardship and management of forest, wetlands and open habitats when they are outdoors. We mean for this close-to-the-land learning to extend to all members of the community.

The land will also be used as a park where residents and guests can enjoy walks in the woods, picnics, and other low-impact recreation. Sponsors may use the area as an outdoor site for community and social events such as the annual May Day celebration, Revels, outdoor performances, and other summer and cultural events. It is permissible to erect temporary structures such as theater sets and maypoles, as directed herein.

Past and present uses of the land include: farming (forestry, grazing, maple sugaring, orchard, agriculture, haying, etc), recreation (walking, jogging, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing), education (outdoor classrooms for nature, science, art, literature, social studies), guided nature walks, birding, tracking, wildlife inventory, orienteering, playing, picnics, stewardships studies, cultural events (Marion Cross School's May Festival, Revels, assorted theatrical performances, occasional fire department-authorized launch of fireworks, etc). Similar uses of the land should be supported and encouraged in the future, when conducted in a manner that protects the natural attributes of the property.

3. MANAGEMENT GOALS

The management of the Protected Property must always be consistent with the mandates of the Conservation Easement. While the provisions of the Conservation Easement are far too detailed and specific to be covered here in full, the covenants and restrictions which provide the primary direction for the stewardship of the Protected Property and the scope of this Management Plan can be summarized as follows:

1. UVLT retains all development rights. No residential, industrial or commercial activities shall be permitted. This reservation is a standard land protection technique designed to preserve the property as open space.
2. No buildings, structures or improvements are permitted, except as expressly authorized in the Deed and outlined below (see Section 5., 5.1.d). The only other structures or improvements authorized are trails, related improvements such as timber steps and waterbars, and stream crossings of de minimus design and impact.

The overall management goals for the Protected Property are to protect the natural features and functions of the area for the purpose of residents' enjoyment through low-impact recreation, educational and cultural use. These goals are derived from the purposes of the Conservation Easement, and all management objectives and policies must be consistent with the priorities set forth in the Conservation Easement. The purposes of the Conservation Easement include three priorities and a general statement:

1. To permanently protect and conserve the scenic and open space values of a rural landscape near the entry to the Village of Norwich from development and other high-impact uses for present and future generations;
2. To protect natural communities, wildlife habitat, and the integrity of the environments and ecological processes that support them, on the Protected Property, as those values exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future;
3. To provide continued public access to the Protected Property and use of existing nature trails for educational, cultural, and low-impact recreational enjoyment without compromising water quality, scenic benefits, wildlife habitat, and other conservation values;
4. To conserve land adjacent to the Town's elementary school, the Marion Cross School, for safe use and enjoyment by school children for education, low-impact recreation, and quiet reflection;
5. Overall, to assure the Protected Property will be retained forever in its undeveloped and scenic condition, and to prevent any use of the Protected Property that will significantly impair or interfere with the unique and significant qualities of public benefit and conservation values of the Protected Property.

4. GOVERNANCE

The Town of Norwich will manage the Property (i) in accordance with the requirements and

priorities of the Conservation Easement; (ii) utilizing conservation “best practices” as they are understood over time; and (iii) for the benefit of the Norwich community. UVLT is responsible for annual monitoring of the property for transgressions of restrictions in the Conservation Easement. The stewardship process must involve the Upper Valley Land Trust, as holder of the Conservation Easement, whenever interpretation of material elements of the Conservation Easement is necessary and draw upon its support and expertise whenever appropriate.

The Norwich Selectboard, the governing body of the town, is ultimately responsible for the care of the land. As the governing body representing the town, the Selectboard will hereinafter be referred to in this document as the "Town." It will delegate much of the oversight of the uses and care of this land to the Norwich Conservation Commission's Milton Frye Nature Area Committee (MFNAC), made up of teachers and interested community members, and funded by donations. This sub-committee will oversee educational, cultural and recreational uses by nonprofit organizations and will coordinate other uses. The MFNAC will keep the Town and NCC informed through reports and a liaison.

4.1 The Town will work with the Milton Frye Nature Area Committee to assist with ongoing stewardship and upkeep.

4.2 The MFNAC, in cooperation with the Marion Cross School, will maintain the trails and oversee educational programs on the property. Permission for special events will be obtained from the committee.

4.3 The Town will mow the field every 1-2 years to keep it open and useful to the public, and maintain the meadow's scenic qualities. It shall maintain the orchard to retain the scenic beauty of the area.

4.4 The MFNAC will inform users and abutters of rules and policy objectives and encourage them to be stewards.

4.5 The MFNAC will make periodic inspections (at least yearly) of the property to insure that there has not been any unauthorized work done on the property, to observe and remove hazards, and to make sure that the property boundary markers are in place. Discovery of any adverse conditions to the property will be reported promptly to UVLT and the Town.

5. MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF THE NATURAL COMMUNITY

The following management policies will apply to the Protected Property. These policies will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised on a regular basis. In addition, the management of the protected property will be consistent with that of the Milton Frye Nature Area Committee (by-laws are attached).

5.1 Preservation of Natural State

Our principal goals are to maintain and protect the Protected Property as open space for public enjoyment, the observation and education of wildlife and wildlife habitat, and for solitude. It is acknowledged that little of this land is in the natural state that greeted the settlers of Norwich when they first came to this area, and the purpose of preserving this property is not to return it to such a

state.

5.1.a The land will be managed as a diverse natural environment that can serve as viable wildlife habitat. Some modifications to the area, such as marking and maintaining pedestrian trails, creating stream crossings, maintaining current clearings or restoring past clearings in order to accomplish wildlife management objectives, and removing invasive species, may be used to meet management objectives.

5.1.b The forest lands will be managed primarily for wildlife habitat. Dead and dying trees will be left to serve their ecological functions unless they pose a danger to pedestrians on the trails. Timber and other wood products will not be taken from the area except as permitted in section 5.3.

5.1.c The field will be mowed every 1-2 years in early summer by the Town to avoid encroachment of scrub growth and trees, both for aesthetic reasons and to maintain a meadow habitat for study by school children.

5.1.d The Town of Norwich, NCC and MFNAC reserve the right to construct, if deemed necessary, a small structure on the Protected Property that is associated with educational uses, such as an outdoor classroom, storage shed for educational materials, or storage of equipment necessary for conservation and educational goals as outlined in this document. Such structure shall not be residential or commercial in nature, and shall not exceed a total of 200 square feet. If such a structure is deemed necessary to support said uses, then the NCC/MFNAC will develop and submit plans for approval by UVLT and the Town.

5.2 Management of Forest Resources

Forest management is the practical application of biological, physical, quantitative, managerial, economic, social, and policy principals to the regeneration, management, utilization and conservation of forests to meet specified goals and objectives while maintaining the productivity of the forest. Forest management includes management for aesthetics, fish, recreation, urban values, water, wilderness, wildlife, wood products and other forest resource values. (from Helms, John A., editor, 1998, *The Dictionary of Forestry*, The Society of American Foresters)

In the conservation easement, the Town retains the right to manage the forest on the protected property. Forest management activities must follow a forest management plan that the Upper Valley Land Trust has approved. This document will serve as the forest management plan. It may be amended to include more extensive manipulation of the natural resources on this property including changes in trail location or cutting of more than a few plants for educational purposes with permissions as outlined below.

With the permission of the NCC and MFNAC:

- Interpretive signs, benches and other structures related to non-motorized recreation may be placed or moved.
- Trees may be cut if they are hazards because of rot, broken branches or weak form.
- Branches may be trimmed to keep trails clear.
- Trees may be cut and used for bridges, waterbars or other trail structures on the protected property.

More intensive changes must be addressed in written plans approved by the Selectboard representing the Town and UVLT. These plans should include information that describes why,

what, who, where and when the activity will take place. Activities that would need a plan include:

- Building a new trail or relocating an existing trail.
- Cutting trees larger than 10" in diameter to change forest structure such as to retard or advance natural succession or to change wildlife habitats or for income.
- Creating a pond.

An overall plan for managing the vegetation on the property so it continues to meet the owners' goals is desirable because as the trees grow, the character of the area will change and may become less useful to the town and school.

5.3 Protection of Plant and Animal Diversity

In accordance with the purposes of the Conservation Easement, the Property has been protected primarily as a natural area for public use and enjoyment. As such, particular attention should be given to protecting sensitive habitats.

5.3.a Human uses should not significantly compromise the viability of wildlife travel corridors and sensitive plant and wildlife habitat. Only those uses that are compatible with the habitat needs of the indigenous wildlife and native flora will be encouraged.

5.3.b The Property will be managed to maintain or even to increase habitat diversity. To this end, some areas may be kept cleared, others may be maintained as shrub and scrub layers, and others allowed to advance further successional. Alterations of habitat for particular species may be undertaken if needs arise. Any such change to the landscape to alter habitat for particular species will be carefully evaluated taking advantage of established wildlife management criteria to insure that habitat integrity and connectivity can be maintained.

5.3.c In the interest of maintaining native plant diversity, efforts to control invasive alien plant species that tend to dominate natural habitats may be undertaken.

5.3.d Areas of human disturbance to the landscape may require restoration efforts to preclude the advance of invasive aliens into disturbed areas. Areas in which invasive species are being controlled may benefit from re-vegetation with habitat-appropriate, locally native plants.

5.3.e Steps shall be taken to protect rare, threatened, or endangered plant species, if any exist. Species that are of local, statewide, or global significance will be reported to the Vermont Natural Heritage Program.

5.3.f There shall be no hunting or trapping of animals on the Protected Property except for the control of diseased, dangerous or nuisance animals. In such cases, the police will be notified regarding disposal of such animals.

6. PUBLIC ACCESS, ENTRANCES, AND PARKING

The Town of Norwich will manage the Protected Property to provide access to its natural, ecological, scenic, and cultural values and to encourage respectful interactions by visitors with the natural environment.

6.1 Access to the Property will be made available from several established and well used entries at the edge of the school property: through the parking lot on the south side of the school property,

and a ROW from Church Street (currently not used). There is also a vehicular access R.O.W. through the former "Peisch" house property (currently Hybels) off Route 5. Establishment of new trail entrances from abutting properties must have Town approval. The Town reserves the right to maintain these rights-of-way with permeable surface type materials (such as gravel) and to re-grade to maintain integrity of the ROW.

6.2 Entrances to the Protected Property will be marked to inform users that they are entering the Protected Property and of the regulations for use. A very brief summary of rules may be posted only at the major entry points.

6.3 Stonewalls and fences may be built at some entrances to control the entry point and to prevent unauthorized access by wheeled vehicles.

6.3 Access to portions of the Protected Property may be temporarily closed to the public for reasons that aid in fulfilling other priorities of the Conservation Easement. If such a need arises, the Town and/or the MFNA will propose a plan and seek approval from UVLT.

6.4 Parking shall be off-site. Parking is currently available along Route 5 along the school property, and during off-hours, at the school's parking areas. Parking is not permitted on the Protected Property except in the instance of public events, when access is permitted for service vehicles and handicapped access only. Vehicles may only access the property through the Hybels ROW from Route 5.

6.5 The Town maintains the right to restrict vehicular (motorized and mechanical) access if necessary on the Hybels ROW, such as gating the entryway, if such gating does not affect the Hybels property. The gate may be locked and the key available to responsible parties through the Town Clerk. Should gated access be necessary, fences and gating must conform to any town regulations, and plans for gates must be approved by the Town. Gates are to be maintained by the MFNAC. Additionally, stonewalls and fences may be built at some entrances to control the entry point and to prevent unauthorized access by wheeled vehicles. Fences should be built primarily of natural materials, and not be higher than four feet. Fences must also be approved by the Town.

6.6 Waste materials: Dumping of any kind, including yard and household wastes, onto the Property is not permitted. Trash generated on the property will be removed by the responsible party ("carry in, carry out" policy). Trash cans will only be available on-site when public events are taking place. Event sponsors are responsible for temporary trash bins during event, and for removal promptly following event.

6.7 Certain areas of the Property may be made handicapped accessible to make the enjoyment of the Property more inclusive. Special provisions for wheelchairs may be made where appropriate. Specifics will need to be addressed in a supplement plan as issues arise and are considered in the future.

6.8 Temporary closure may be necessary after a significant wind event or major flooding. An area occupied by wildlife in need of protection, such as a denning bear, may require that a portion of the area be made off-limits for a time. Also, rare species may need special protection from contact with the public. If such a need arises, the Town and/or the MFNA will propose a plan and seek approval from UVLT. The MFNAC will propose a plan and seek approval from the Town.

7. EDUCATION

We aim to inform the public about the environmental assets of the Property and its trails, and about its appropriate uses, and encourage low-impact use and aesthetic enjoyment of the property and its attributes by the public. Education efforts are addressed to all members of the community including schoolchildren.

7.1 Trail maps are available to the public in the Town Clerk office and information about the plants, animals, birds, geological features, and diverse habitats found within the Protected Property may be made available by MFNAC to the public at appropriate locations in Town, and at the Upper Valley Land Trust.

7.2 The MFNAC and the MCS may establish self-guided nature trails walks and produce related brochures.

7.3 Organized nature walks, bird trips, orienteering events, and the like will be encouraged. These may be led by MFNAC or other organizations. Schools may be encouraged to participate. Organizations and schools planning an event or outing on the property will make arrangements through the committee.

7.4 Information about access points, trails, permitted and prohibited activities, as well as the information described in the policy statements above should be available at the Town Office, town library, the Upper Valley Land Trust and other places where such information is appropriate.

7.5 Stations along the self-guided nature trails may be installed to identify either their particular environmental assets or pose relevant questions to ponder.

7.6 Small numbers of live plants and animals may be sampled and / or removed for educational purposes unless prohibited by state or federal law.

8. TRAILS, RECREATION, AND TRAIL LINKAGES

The Town will maintain a trail system for education, cultural and low-impact recreational use, aesthetic enjoyment, observation of wildlife, and nature study that is sensitive to the needs of the land. Foot travel will be allowed through all of the Property. Only those low-impact recreational uses which do not interfere with the protection of biological diversity, the integrity and health of plant and animal habitats, and the functioning of natural processes will be allowed within the Property.

8.1 All trail building and maintenance within the Property will be entirely under the direction of the Town of Norwich and in consultation with the Upper Valley Land Trust.

8.2 All existing trails on the property will be evaluated for ecological appropriateness, taking into consideration such aspects as soil erosion, wetlands, water quality, drainage patterns, habitat needs, etc. Trail locations may be changed if MFNAC determines better routes are possible. Proposed changes must be submitted to the Town and to UVLT for approval.

8.3 It is recognized that the Property has long been used by residents to walk dogs. Dogs must

not be allowed to disturb or endanger wildlife. Dogs must be under control of their owners while in the Property and not allowed to freely roam into the natural areas away from the trails. Dogs that stray from the trails must be kept on a leash. Dog owners are required to pick up any deposits their dogs leave on the trails.

8.4 There shall not be any unauthorized camping, fire building, horseback riding, trapping or collection of mineral, soil, plant or wildlife specimens within the Property, or motorized or mechanical vehicles (including bicycles) on the Protected Property, except for wheelchairs or other aids for handicapped persons.

8.5 The Town shall not allow the trails to be used for motor vehicles, except for maintenance and emergency service purposes.

8.6 The vehicular R.O.W. access is limited to maintenance, emergency and event service vehicles, and for access by handicapped persons.

8.7 The Appalachian Mountain Club's *"The Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance"* should be used as a standard in making trail decisions.

8.8 In general, ecological processes will underlie any alterations to the property.

9. SIGNAGE

Signs are necessary to identify the preserve nature area, conditions of use, trail locations, and destinations. Signs may also be necessary for identifying certain wildlife habitat. Signs may be posted at the primary entrances indicating that the property is a nature preserve, giving the appropriate uses; signage must receive approval of the Town. Signage within the preserve nature area should be minimal and unobtrusive, consistent with the natural setting.

9.1 Entryway signs/kiosks may be placed near trailheads. Trails may be marked as necessary. Boundary marking should be more frequent where existing boundary definitions are not evident.

9.2 Signs directing the public to cultural and educational events held on the property shall be permitted temporarily, and must be removed promptly by the event sponsors when the event is over.

10. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

The Protected Property will endeavor to expand the understanding of historical uses and the chain of ownership of the Property to show how these factors have shaped the natural environment of the Property and the Town of Norwich.

10.1 The Town may work with prior owners, the Norwich Historical Society, and others to preserve and expand historical records concerning the Property.

10.2 Man-made historical artifacts such as stone walls, cellar holes, or foundations shall not be disturbed.

10.3 Use of the Protected Property for cultural, historic and related events by nonprofit organizations is encouraged. The Town may allow the use of the property by non-profit organizations that are consistent with the uses described in Section 2.