

Management Plan Irish Hill Berlin, Vermont

I. PROPERTY BACKGROUND

Irish Hill is located in close proximity to and west of Berlin Pond in the Town of Berlin, Vermont. The property - 406 acre ridgeline lot and the 110 acre former Lawson lot - is located adjacent to conserved land owned by the City of Montpelier and the Boyer State Forest. The property abuts approximately 347 acres of land owned by the Town of Berlin and the Village of Northfield. The property is used extensively for public recreation both on existing trails and through dispersed, non-trail recreation. Conservation organizations and the Town of Berlin have identified Irish Hill as a priority for conservation for protecting wildlife habitat, the watershed surrounding Berlin Pond – which serves as the drinking water source for the City of Montpelier – and creating recreational and educational public uses. The property also provides spectacular views of the Worcester Range and the surrounding area.

In December 2000, the owners of approximately 404.9 acres on Irish Hill conveyed their interest in the property to the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC). VRC conveyed a conservation easement to the Vermont Land Trust (VLT). The terms of the conservation easement are contained in the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement (December 28, 2000) (Easement), attached as Attachment A. The VRC then conveyed the conserved land to the Town of Berlin. The Easement requires that the Town of Berlin develop a comprehensive management plan (the Plan) governing the use and management of Irish Hill.

II. PLAN OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Plan is to promote the following conservation objectives: to conserve forestry values, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, aquatic habitats, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality and natural flora and fauna, and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resources values. This Plan also provides for

recreational and educational uses of the Property in a manner that is consistent with the resource and scenic values of the Property. Finally, this Plan authorizes other certain limited commercial activities that are authorized by the Easement.

A. RESTRICTED USES OF THE PROPERTY

To ensure the protection of the conservation values on Irish Hill, and pursuant to the terms of the Easement, the following restrictions are placed on the use of the property:

1. **General:** The Property may be used for forestry, educational, non-commercial recreation, natural area and open space purposes only. Unless specified in the Easement, no residential, commercial, industrial, or mining activities are permitted. No buildings or structures may be constructed or moved onto the property, including but not limited to telecommunication towers specifically permitted by the Easement or management plan.
2. **Rights of Way and Easements:** The Easement prohibits rights of way and access easements including driveways, roads and utility lines unless specifically permitted in the Easement or unless **written permission** for new easements is obtained from VLT. Existing rights of way and easements are unaffected.
3. **Signs:** Signs are generally prohibited, except as described in section IV (H) Property identification signs, boundary markers, directional signs, signs limiting access, information and interpretive signs, and memorial plaques may be used with the permission of the Berlin Conservation Commission.
4. **Trash:** The storage of trash, human waste or unsightly material on the property is prohibited unless VLT approves such storage in advance. No permission is required for temporary trash storage in receptacles.
5. **Excavation:** Filling, excavation, removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rocks, or minerals, or any change to topography is prohibited unless the change is necessary to carry out the uses otherwise permitted by the Easement. Surface mining of subsurface oil, gas, or minerals is prohibited.
6. **Motor Vehicle Use:** The operation of pick-up trucks and SUVs are not permitted on the property except to carry out the permitted uses of the property or pursuant to a Permitted Use described in section II (B). ATVs and snowmobiles may be permitted in certain areas on designated trails. ATVs are not allowed on the Lawson parcel. The use of motorized vehicles to maintain trails, assist handicap access, and for safety or emergency purposes is permitted. Motor vehicle use of the property is only allowed as long as it is compatible with both non-motorized and non-mechanized recreational use and the purposes of the Easement.

7. **Watercourses:** Natural watercourses, marshes, wetlands, or other water bodies on the property may not be altered. No activities are permitted that would have a detrimental effect on water purity or water flow of the property. The construction of ponds is permitted with the prior written approval of VLT.

B. PERMITTED USES OF THE PROPERTY

The following are permitted activities on and uses of the Property:

1. **Recreational Uses:** The property may be used for non-motorized, non-commercial recreational purposes as provided for in this Plan and the Easement.
2. **Forest Management:** The Town of Berlin may harvest timber and conduct maple sugaring operations, and may construct and maintain a sugarhouse and logging roads. The Town of Berlin must obtain written approval from VLT prior to constructing a sugarhouse. The harvesting of timber must be in accordance with a Forest Management Plan which has been approved by VLT. The Washington County forester has supplied the Town of Berlin with a Forest Stewardship Plan which is included with this plan as an Attachment B.
3. **Trails:** The construction and maintenance of trails is provided for in section IV below.
4. **Special Use Permits:** The Town of Berlin may issue temporary special use permits or licenses authorizing the commercial or non-commercial use of the property for recreational, forestry, or research purposes. Such permits or licenses may not interfere with the public's access to the property and must be consistent with the Easement.
5. **Temporary structures:** The Town of Berlin may construct, maintain, repair, and replace and use permanent or temporary structures that have a rustic design, necessary to support the public outdoor uses permitted by the Easement. **[The Easement requires that the management plan designate the number, use, location, and construction of approved structures.]**

III. RECREATIONAL USES

The area including and surrounding Irish Hill has a long history of recreational use. The purpose of this plan is to identify those uses that are consistent with the conservation objectives of the Easement and to provide for the management of the recreational use of Irish Hill in a manner that protects these conservation values.

Irish Hill shall be available to the general public for all types of non-commercial, non-motorized, dispersed recreational and educational purposes (including, but not limited to, bird-watching, cross-country skiing, hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, trapping, walking and wildlife

observation) consistent with the purposes of the Easement and this Plan. Use of the Protected Property for motorized recreation (including, but not limited to, snowmobiling) and for non-motorized, mechanized recreation (including, but not limited to, mountain biking) and by animals capable of transporting humans (including, but not limited to, Horses) may be permitted at the discretion of Grantor if such uses are not incompatible with non-motorized and non-mechanized recreational uses.

The following conditions apply:

- ATV use shall only be permitted from May 15 through the first Sunday in November except if wet and may not occur on the former Lawson parcel.
- All motorized bikes shall display an identifying registration plate and shall only be permitted from May 15 through the second Sunday in October, except if wet and may not be operated on the former Lawson parcel.
- the -All snowmachine riders shall be members of a local snowmachine club affiliated with Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) and shall only be permitted during the period which the VAST trails are open and only on designated trails. Riders should all wear protective safety equipment.
- Mountain bikes shall only be permitted from May 15 through the second Sunday in November, except if wet.
- Off season special use permits may be issued by the Town Conservation Commission for disabled riders or for other reasonable uses such as research and must be consistent with the purposes of the conservation easement.
- All motorized uses and mountain bikes shall only use trails specifically designated for that activity.
- special -All automobiles, trucks, sport utility vehicles are prohibited unless authorized by a use permit issued by the Berlin Conservation Commission and based on the appropriateness of site and use.
- All camping is prohibited except by special use permit issued by the Berlin Conservation Commission and based on the appropriateness of the site and use. .
- All fires are prohibited except as authorized by a special use permit issued by the Berlin Conservation Commission and the Town Fire Warden if necessary.
- All discharge of firearms is prohibited except for hunting of game in season.

IV. TRAIL PLAN

The objective of the proposed trail system is to allow individuals to access the property in a manner that avoids ecologically sensitive areas, minimizes erosion and maximizes the

aesthetically pleasing areas of the property for a variety of users. Trails will be designed for a variety of uses, including hiking, horseback riding, off-road recreational vehicles and mountain biking. Trails shall be well marked, safe, and designed to provide access and enjoyment while preserving the natural resources of the area.

The Town will work to develop a trail corridor manager program with the various user groups involved. Each trail use (hiking, mountain biking, ATVs, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, and snowmobiling) will have an organization or volunteer group that is responsible for the establishment, maintenance, repair, and monitoring of trails and enforcement of trail use rules. Possible corridor managers include the local ATV and VAST clubs, the Vermont Mountain Bike Advocates (VMBA), and local or regional hiking and cross-country skiing groups.

The existing trail network is extensive and in need of some immediate repair work to control erosion problems. The Town will work with corridor managers to remedy as much of this as possible and will meet Acceptable Management Practice (AMP) standards. Trails are currently undefined in terms of their allowed use or uses. Some trails will continue to be used, but many others will have to be abandoned. The Town and corridor managers will locate and map all existing trails and develop a trail network and a protocol for closing off trails that will not be utilized in the network.

Corridor managers may be authorized to construct multi-use recreational trails at the discretion of the landowner. Trails shall be designed and constructed in a manner that protects the natural resources, as described below and are consistent with the purposes of the conservation easement. Construction of new trails or repair, maintenance, improvement, or replacement of existing trails must be approved and have prior approval of the Town. VMBA, local ATV clubs, and VAST shall be responsible for maintaining any multi-use trails that it is authorized to construct. VMBA, local ATV clubs and VAST shall monitor trail use and provide periodic reports to the town of Berlin and VLT. These reports will be due on May 30 and November 30 and will describe the condition of the trails, and maintenance, repair, or construction planned for the trails, any educational programs planned for the season, any actions required to control unauthorized or inappropriate use of the trails. All corridor managers shall work to discourage any unauthorized trail use or construction on the property. Use of the trails is a privilege that may be revoked if there is inappropriate or unauthorized use resulting in damage to the property or non-compliance with the terms or purposes of the Easement.

A. General Trail Construction Principals

All participating parties agree to abide by the following principles in any trail construction:

- Trails will be maintained and/or designed, located, and constructed according to the standards set forth in *Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance, 1st edition* by Demrow and Salisbury;
- Trail design shall minimize the impact of all uses to prevent the degradation of

the areas through which trails pass;

- Seasonal trips should be made to clear blow-downs, cut spring growth and to control litter;
- Trails will be built to the minimum size required for the particular use or uses;
- Trailwork should be completed with as little disturbance to the natural environment as possible;
- Trails should be designed to link with other authorized trails or roads in the Irish Hill area such as the Darling Road trail;
- Trails shall be inspected twice annually at a minimum.

B. CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE

Trail construction and maintenance will rely on native materials and simple tools and techniques to retain the simple, primitive character of any trails, while allowing for local discretion, resourcefulness, and artistry. To the extent feasible trail construction methods will follow the general trail standards outlined in the Appalachian Mountain Club book *Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance 1st edition* by Demrow and Salisbury. No trail relocations will take place without notification of and approval by the Berlin Conservation Commission. All relocations will provide a trail environment equal or better than existing location and must be in compliance with the purposes of the Easement. Criteria for making this determination will include impact on natural resources, aesthetics and the recreational experience.

C. STREAM CROSSINGS AND BRIDGES

Trails shall be located to minimize stream crossings and areas susceptible to water problems. Alternative crossing options should be considered before an artificial structure is added to the forest. Bridges will be used when necessary to protect sensitive soils along a stream bank. Approval for bridges will be managed by the Berlin Conservation Commission subject to the conservation easement.

If inspections of the streams determine a problem with erosion or sedimentation, the source will be determined and action will be taken meeting AMP standards to resolve the problem. If the problem cannot be resolved immediately, the area will be closed off to all but dispersed, pedestrian use until such time as the situation has been remediated.

D. TRAILHEADS AND PARKING

The Town of Berlin will work with the City of Montpelier to provide appropriate trailhead parking at the intersection of Darling Road and Brookfield Road. Local volunteers, will monitor trailheads for litter and illegal or improper parking. The Town of Berlin may place signs at a trailhead which describe the permitted and prohibited uses of the Property, the condition of trails, and any other information pertinent to the use and management of the Property.

E. TRAIL MONITORING

The use of Irish Hill for recreational purposes must be monitored to ensure that misuse

does not occur. Volunteer corridor managers will develop a monitoring program protocol and will provide monitoring of trails. This monitoring program may include the use of the trail counter and other methods to collect actual trail use data.

Corridor managers will work to educate their members and the public on appropriate trail usage. They will also develop strategies for shutting down unauthorized or inappropriate use and for informing the public and their membership as to loss of privileges due to such use. The Berlin CC will oversee corridor management to assure compliance with the plan.

F. UNAPPROVED TRAILS

Unapproved trails will be brushed in or otherwise effectively blocked using accepted practices, and the Berlin Conservation Commission will work to educate users who are unaware of the Irish Hill policies.

G. PUBLIC INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The Berlin Conservation Commission will work with user groups and corridor managers to educate their constituents in using trails without damaging natural resources or spoiling the experience of others; appreciating the forest experience; understanding the areas cultural and natural history; and having a safe and enjoyable visit to the Property. Education and information efforts may include newsletters, meetings, listserv messages, brochures, maps and field programs.

H. SIGNAGE

The Berlin Conservation Commission will work with local volunteers and organizations to create signs for all approved recreational trails and, if necessary, for alerting users to the closure of trails. Signs shall be used to designate trail locations, to describe authorized trail uses, to alert users to trail closures, and to promote the educational objectives of the Easement. Signs may also be placed at lower elevation entrances to the property (i.e., on Darling Road) to describe permitted and prohibited uses of the Property and to provide any other information necessary to promote the conservation values of the Property.

V. WILDLIFE HABITAT

The condition and variety of wildlife habitat on the Irish Hill parcel was significantly altered by the former owner. Habitat on that portion of the property is now largely limited to nesting areas for neo-tropical migratory birds, food resources (for deer and moose in the form of ample hardwood regeneration and for bear and other mammals in the form of dense raspberry and blackberry thickets), small, dispersed winter yards for deer, and perches for raptors.

The former Lawson property has more varied vegetation and has a wider variety of habitat. The combination of open and forested areas with adjacent water and an old apple orchard makes for especially rich habitat for a variety of animals. This combination of habitat elements should be maintained or enhanced to protect the value of the habitat.

During the field work for the forest management plan on the Lawson property, a number of vernal pools were discovered. These are critical to the success of many amphibians and must be protected from disturbance from recreational or timber harvesting activities. A 75 foot no-cut buffer zone should be delineated around each vernal pool to ensure adequate shade it provided to keep them from drying up prematurely. Care must be taken to lay out skid trails and recreational trails in such a way as to not alter the natural flow of water into or out of the pools.

VI. NATURAL COMMUNITIES

Elizabeth Thompson and Eric Sorenson define natural communities in their book *Wetland, Woodland, Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont* in the following way:

“A natural community is an interacting assemblage of organisms, their physical environment, and the natural processes that affect them.”

Using this definition as a basis, forest types, or the forest that is seen currently on the land, could be describes as:

“A forest type is an interacting assemblage of organisms, their physical environment, and the natural processes and human activities that affect them.”

The Irish Hill parcel is dominated by the northern hardwood natural community. This is the most common natural community in Vermont and has several variants, some of which are also present on Irish Hill. Along the rest of the ridge there is a significant area of rich northern hardwood forest. Understory plants such as Dutchman’s breeches, squirrel corn, maidenhair fern, and hepatica are common in this natural community. The common tree species are sugar maple and white ash, with common associates being basswood, butternut, yellow birch, beech, and black cherry, among others. Trees in this community grow fast, tall, and straight due to the enriched soil conditions.

Also present on this parcel and the former Lawson parcel is the Northern hardwood-Hemlock natural community. The Lawson parcel has an area of open land that is recently abandoned agricultural land. The natural community type for this area has not been determined, but the forest type is primary successional hardwood. Another important natural community found on the Larson property is the vernal pool (see above, Wildlife Habitat).

The Berlin Conservation Commission will work to locate and develop strategies to protect natural communities and other important plant and wildlife habitat and important ecological resources.

VII. STRUCTURES

The Easement allows the town to construct, maintain, repair, replace, and use permanent or temporary rustic structures. These structures may not have utilities and must be built in support of public, outdoor, non-commercial recreational and educational uses that are allowed by the Easement. At this time the Town has no plans to construct any such structures, but in the next ten years it is hoped that (insert # and type of structures) will be built. Their locations will be depicted on the forthcoming Existing Trail Network map.

VIII. FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN

Forest Management Plan written by Washington County forester Russ Barrett included in this plan is found under separate cover in Conservation Commission file cabinet under "Management Plans".

This management plan is adopted on _____ 2007 by the Berlin Select Board.

Patricia McDonald, Chair

Bradley Town

Donald Blanchett

Laura Plude

Kitty Langlois