INTERIM MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE WOODY ADAMS CONSERVATION FOREST
Norwich, Vermont (dated March 2021)

INTRODUCTION

The Woody Adams Conservation Forest is comprised of three contiguous town-owned parcels: the 186-acre Adams parcel, the 52-acre Norwich Town Forest, and the 52-acre Gile parcel. The central Adams parcel was purchased to connect the other two previously town-owned parcels and thereby protect a larger central section of a high-conservation priority contiguous forest block, important for wildlife habitats and movements among habitats, as designated by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. That forest block is the largest forested area that involves Norwich and it contains the highest peak in Norwich, making it an area important to the resilience of flora and fauna populations experiencing climate change.

The forest is also highly valuable for other roles it can play in “Natural Climate Solutions”. It contains some older trees and well-established forest ecosystem soils that are important sites of carbon storage. It has the potential to contain much more older growth forest that would store even more carbon, given proper management. The forest lies within the headwaters of two drainages, Mitchell and Blood Brooks; therefore, it is important to flood prevention in the upper reaches of both watersheds that have experienced previous significant downstream flooding. The headwaters location also adds to the forest’s importance to water quality protections. The surface water features in the forest include vernal pools, a wetland, seeps, ephemeral streams, and a couple year-round streams.

The Woody Adams Conservation Forest name is in honor of the father of Tony Adams, who pursued a conservation sale of the 186-acre parcel to the Town of Norwich. Woody was an advocate of land stewardship and conservation. He also enjoyed backcountry Nordic skiing. The Adams family has deep roots in the area, the family farms, dating to the mid-nineteenth century lie just to the west of the parcel. Tony wanted to honor his father with the conservation of forestland, and therefore made a very generous donation to the project by selling the parcel significantly below the conservation appraisal valuation. The naming of the conserved forestland was one stipulation of the sale. There were two other management plan-relevant stipulations of the sale. One was that a kiosk, containing description of the conservation project, conservation values, and Woody Adams, be erected along the old logging road that crosses the property. The other was that a suggested backcountry Nordic ski route be marked in a loop containing the kiosk. All of the stipulations will be happily honored.

This document is the general Management Plan for the Woody Adams Conservation Forest subject to the Conservation Easement held by the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT) and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) until a more permanent Comprehensive Management Plan and a more specific Forest Management Plan are compiled. It has been prepared under the supervision of the UVLT, the VHCB, the Norwich Conservation Commission (NCC), and the Town of Norwich Select Board (NSB). The more-detailed Forest Management Plan is mentioned in the Forest Resources section and it will cover the specific forestry objectives and actions, also complying with the stipulations of the Conservation Easement. It is a requirement of the Conservation Easement that a copy of the current Management Plans be available for examination by the public at the offices of the Norwich Town Clerk and UVLT.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The management objectives in the Woody Adams Conservation Forest are to protect:

1. Climate change natural mitigation via forest carbon sequestration and storage
2. Climate change resiliency via higher elevation opportunities for shifting species distributions
3. Water quality of streams, seeps, vernal pools, other wetlands, and groundwater
4. Flood prevention capacity in the upper reaches of both watersheds
5. Forest contiguity, natural communities, and ecosystem integrity
6. Wildlife habitats and corridor connectivity
7. Public access on the existing Ridge (Blue Ribbon), Old logging road, and Gile trails
8. Public access to backcountry Nordic skiing and snowshoeing

CONSERVATION EASEMENT MANAGEMENT ATTRIBUTES AND CONSTRAINTS

The management of the Woody Adams Conservation Forest 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 three parcels and the scope of this Management Plan can be summarized as follows:

1. UVLT and VHCB retain 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 or structures or built improvements are permitted, except as expressly authorized in the Deed and outlined herein. The only other structures or improvements authorized are kiosks, suggested backcountry Nordic route posts, and trail maintenance, such as steps, water bars, and stream crossings of *de minimus* design and impact.

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

1. To permanently protect and conserve the open space values of a natural landscape 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, as those values exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future;
3. To provide continued public access 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. Overall, to assure the three parcels will be retained forever in their undeveloped and scenic condition, and to prevent any use of the Woody Adams Conservation Forest that will significantly impair or interfere with the unique and significant qualities of public benefit and conservation values.

GOVERNANCE

The Town of Norwich will manage the Woody Adams Conservation Forest (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 and VHCB are responsible for annual monitoring of the property for transgressions of restrictions in the Conservation Easement. The stewardship process must involve the UVLT and VCHB, as holders 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 Select Board, the governing body of the town, is ultimately responsible for the care of the land. It will delegate much of the oversight of the uses and care of this land to the Norwich Conservation Commission as follows:

1. The NCC will keep the Select Board, UVLT, and VCHB informed of issues and/or proposed changes as required by the Conservation Easement.
2. The NCC will work with the NSB to assist with ongoing stewardship and upkeep.
3. The NCC will inform users and abutters of rules and policy objectives and encourage them to be stewards.
4. The NCC will oversee educational, cultural, and recreational uses by non-profit organizations and will coordinate other uses.
5. The NCC Trails Subcommittee, in cooperation with the Trails Volunteers, will maintain the trails and oversee educational programs on the property.
6. The NCC will make frequent inspections of the parcels to ensure no unauthorized work has been done on the property, to observe and remove hazards, and to make sure that the property boundary markers are in place. Any discovery of adverse conditions or inappropriate uses on the property should be reported promptly to the NCC. The NSB, UVLT, and VHCB will be advised as necessary.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF THE NATURAL COMMUNITIES

The following management policies apply to the three conserved parcels. These policies will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised on a regular basis. The principal goals are to protect the natural features and functions of the area while allowing for public enjoyment through low-impact recreation, educational, and cultural use.

1. The land will be managed with a light footprint as a collection of natural communities, plant assemblages, ecotones, and successional stages that serve as viable wildlife habitats and travel corridors.
2. The Management of Forest Resources section and the separate, more-detailed Forest Management Plan shall be consulted for specific guidelines to maintaining the integrity of the forest ecosystem with additional considerations for water quality protection, fluvial erosion control, forest contiguity and resiliency, forest block connectivity, and carbon sequestration.
3. Some modifications to the area such as maintaining the “Blue Ribbon” and “Gile” loop trails, marking of the suggested “Woody Adams” backcountry Nordic ski and snowshoe route, improving stream crossings, gating of unauthorized motorized vehicle routes, rerouting the Vermont Electric Company (VELCO) access easement to their powerlines via a lower-impact permanent location, maintaining current clearings or restoring past clearings in order to accomplish wildlife management objectives via small-scale forest harvests, and removing invasive species may be used to meet management objectives.

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 easements, 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. It may be amended or revised by forest professionals as the forest ages.

With the permission of the NCC, the following activities may take place:

1. Interpretive signs and other structures related to management objectives may be placed or moved.
2. Dead and dying trees which pose a danger to users of the area may be removed but will otherwise be allowed to stand as shelter for wildlife. Trees may be cut if they are hazards because of rot, broken branches or weak form.
3. Branches and saplings may be trimmed to keep trails clear and a tree may be dropped to block an unauthorized trail.
4. Trees may be cut and used for bridges, water bars or other trail structures on the protected property. Suitable trees for these purposes will be identified with the assistance of a professional forester and reported to NCC.

More substantial changes or activities must also be communicated to the UVLT and the VHCB. Activities that would be considered substantial include:

1. Relocating an existing trail.
2. Cutting trees larger than 10" in diameter to change forest structure such as to retard or advance natural succession or to change wildlife habitats.
3. Creating a pond, vernal pool, or wetland.

In accordance with the purposes of the Conservation Easement, the Properties have been protected as natural areas that allow for public use and enjoyment. As such, particular attention should be given to Protection of Plant and Animal Diversity:

1. 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.
2. The Property will be managed to maintain or even to increase habitat diversity. To this end, some areas may be thinned or opened up, others may be maintained as shrub and scrub layers, and others allowed to advance fully in ecological successional. Alterations of habitat for particular species, plant or animal, may be undertaken as recommended by the Forest Management Plan. Any such change to the landscape to alter habitat for particular species will be carefully evaluated, taking advantage of established wildlife management criteria to ensure that habitat integrity and connectivity can be maintained.
3. In the interest of maintaining native plant diversity, efforts to control invasive alien plant species that tend to dominate natural habitats may be undertaken as deemed appropriate and necessary by the NCC and UVLT.
4. 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. 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.

MANAGEMENT OF 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 as well as to encourage respectful interactions of visitors with the natural environment.

1. Access to the Property will be made available from several established entries at the edge of the property: The Gile Mountain Trailhead on Turnpike Rd, the old logging road entrance off Turnpike Rd opposite Birch Hill Rd, and the Blue Ribbon Trail that traverses northward along the Gile ridgeline to the conservation forest from a trailhead on Beaver Meadow Rd. Establishment of new trail entrances from abutting properties must have Town approval. The Town reserves the right to maintain the roadside rights-of-way with permeable surface type materials (such as gravel) and to regrade to maintain integrity of the ROW.
2. All entrances to the Protected Property will be marked to inform users that they are entering the Protected Property and of the regulations for use.
3. Stone walls or fences may be built, or boulders used, at some entrances to control the entry point and to prevent unauthorized access by wheeled vehicles.
4. 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 NCC will propose a plan and seek approval from UVLT.
5. Parking shall be on-site, either at the Gile Mountain trailhead or at the logging road entrance off Turnpike Rd. Parking is only permitted on the Protected Property in the two designated locations, except in the instance of public events, when access is permitted for service vehicles and handicapped access only.
6. The Town maintains the right to restrict vehicular (motorized and mechanical) access as necessary. Should gated access be necessary, fences and gating must conform to any town regulations, and plans for gates must be approved by the NSB. Gates are to be maintained by the town. Additionally, stone walls or fences may be built, or boulders used, at some entrances to control the entry point and to prevent unauthorized access by motorized vehicles. Fences should be built primarily of natural materials, and not higher than four feet.
7. 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). There will be a dog waste can at the Gile Trailhead.
8. Temporary closure may be necessary after a significant natural event, or forest management or rehabilitation activities. 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 NCC will propose a plan and seek approval from UVLT. The NCC will propose a plan and seek approval from the NSB.

MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

We aim to inform the public about the environmental assets of the forest 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.

1. Trail maps are available to the public in the Town Clerk office and on the Town website. Information about the plants, animals, birds, geological features, and diverse habitats found within the Protected Property may be made available by NCC to the public at appropriate locations in Town, and at the Upper Valley Land Trust.
2. Organized nature walks, bird trips, orienteering events, and the like may be led by NCC or other organizations.
3. 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.
4. Stations along the self-guided nature trails may be installed to identify either their particular environmental assets or pose relevant questions to ponder.
5. Trail kiosks will contain materials to educate visitors about the value of large forest blocks and of animal and plant populations in the area.
6. Educational work sessions may be undertaken by students or the public with supervision of knowledgeable leadership and communication with the NCC - for example invasive plant management and trail management.

MANAGEMENT OF TRAILS AND RECREATION

The Town maintains 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. 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 properties. Foot travel will be allowed throughout the properties. Bicycle travel will be allowed on designated trails, mapped, described at the Gile trailhead kiosk, and marked on the Gile parcel an on the Ridge trails across the Adams parcel. Ski and snowshoe travel will be allowed throughout the properties with a suggested route mapped, described at kiosks, and minimally marked on trees or posts.

1. Trail maintenance on the properties will be performed by Trails Volunteers in consultation with the NCC Trails Committee and following advice from the UVLT and Recreation Department when necessary. Trail rerouting options shall be evaluated for ecological appropriateness, taking into consideration such aspects as soil erosion, wetlands, water quality, drainage patterns, habitat needs, etc. All proposed reroutes must be discussed with the NCC Trails Committee and UVLT.
2. The properties are used by residents to walk dogs. Dogs must not be allowed to disturb or endanger wildlife or run up to area users. Therefore, dogs must be kept on a leash, with the exception of those service dogs which are required to be off leash in order to do their work. Dog owners are required to pick up any deposits their dogs leave on the trails.
3. There shall not be any unauthorized camping, fire building, horseback riding, trapping or collection of mineral, soil, plant or wildlife specimens, nor use of motorized or mechanical vehicles on the protected properties, except for wheelchairs or other aids for handicapped persons.
4. The Town shall not allow the trails to be used for motorized vehicles, except for maintenance and emergency service purposes.
5. The vehicular Old logging road ROW access is limited to maintenance, emergency and event service vehicles, and for access by handicapped persons.

MANAGEMENT OF 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 entrance indicating that the property is a nature preserve, giving the appropriate uses; signage must receive approval of the NCC. Signage within the preserve nature area should be minimal and unobtrusive, consistent with the natural setting.

1. Entryway signs/kiosks may be placed near logging road and trail entrances. Trails may be marked as necessary. Boundary marking should be more frequent where existing boundary definitions are not evident.
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.

MANAGEMENT OF 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.

1. The Town will work with prior owners, the Norwich Historical Society, and others to preserve and expand historical records and understanding concerning various historical sites on the Property (stone walls, foundations, wells, cellar holes, etc.). These historical artifacts shall not be disturbed.
2. Use of the Protected Property for cultural, historic, educational, 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 Vision and Objectives sections.