



NON-REGULATORY

9. Conservation Funds and Town Forests

Municipalities have many opportunities to promote forest and habitat conservation through public policies and programs. Creating conservation funds and town forests are two options to that are available to help municipalities.

Conservation Funds

In the past decade, nearly 50 Vermont communities have helped fund the permanent conservation of one or more parcels of land. Most of these towns did so by creating a conservation fund: a dedicated pot of money that can be used for conservation projects.

Funds for conservation can be raised in response to an immediate opportunity — buying development rights on a prominent local mountain, for example — or they can be put into a reserve fund so that money is available when opportunities arise in the future. A reserve fund, adopted in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2804, serves as a “savings account” that can be carried forward into future fiscal years. Reserve funds are a useful companion to a capital budget and program (24 V.S.A. §4443) for implementing the town’s vision. Through the capital budget and program, a municipality can integrate land conservation into the annual budgeting process and coordinate expenditures for land conservation with other capital expenses, such as road improvements and equipment purchases.

The most common method of raising money for a conservation fund is through a direct appropriation at Town Meeting (e.g., \$25,000), although some communities have successfully tied their annual appropriation for land conservation to a specific increase in the tax rate (e.g., \$0.02 on the tax rate, with the proceeds going to conservation).

Municipal land conservation dollars are often multiplied, since local funds typically leverage additional funds from state or federal sources, such as the Vermont Housing & Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Program. (See *Chapter 10, Federal and State Assistance Programs.*)

Most local conservation projects are undertaken in partnership with a land trust or other conservation organization, which enables the land trust to take on stewardship responsibilities for the life of the easement. Most conservation easements in Vermont are perpetual, so stewardship is an important consideration — as well as a



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common requirement of state and federal funders.

While municipalities can purchase lands for conservation — which is common, especially for larger forested parcels — they can also work with a private landowner and land trust to develop a conservation easement. In this instance, the landowner would retain ownership of the parcel, while managing the lands according to the terms of the easement.

Town Forests

“Town forests” have been a part of Vermont’s landscape for much of the last century. In the early 1900s, municipalities created town forests to protect water supplies and grow timber.

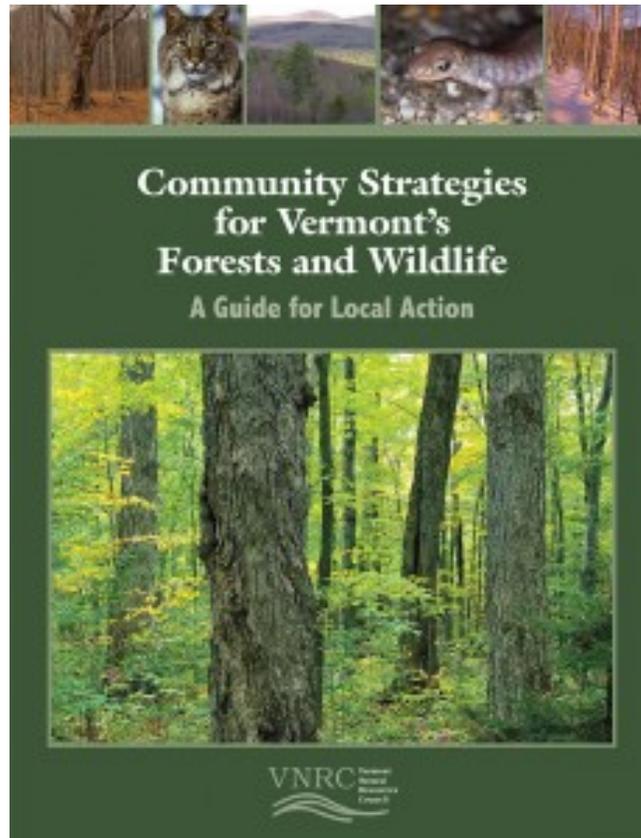
Since their establishment, town forests have grown to provide diverse services including recreation opportunities, affordable firewood for town residents, a source of timber for municipal construction projects, municipal revenues through logging operations (that can be reinvested in land conservation). They can also serve as demonstration sites for local residents to learn about sustainable forest management, and town forests help to maintain blocks of habitat for diverse wildlife species.

Today, there are at least 121 municipal forests in Vermont with approximately 120,000 acres, although this number is potentially greater due to recent acquisitions.¹ To learn more about this topic, including how to create a town forest and management plan, go to: <http://www.communitiescommittee.org/pdfs/TownForestStewardshipGuide.pdf>.



This chapter is part of a larger publication called ***Community Strategies for Vermont's Forests and Wildlife: A Guide for Local Action***. You can download the entire publication or individual chapters (including the endnotes, resources, and credits page) for FREE at:

www.vnrc.org/programs/forests-wildlife/guide/



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