

Dan:

Your letter of Feb. 23, 2021 to Sherry Winnie regarding the Forest Board's decision to withhold support for the Recreational Trails Program application has just come to my attention. This is attached for reference. Since it mischaracterizes my views and motives, I want to respond, not by addressing your allegations, but by stating plainly, for the record, what my views actually are because they reflect those expressed by a significant number of participants in the fall public forest meeting. You may disagree with a few of the following but also find some that either align with your own ideas or are worth considering:

1. Completion in 2022 of the Forest Board's good 2021 trail repairs and permanent closure of sections unsuitable for motorized recreation or that cross wetland habitats. This would reduce miles of track requiring maintenance and assist in the restoration and re-wilding of disturbed areas. I, and I think most Fairlee residents, also support the Forest Board's decision to close forest roads and trails to vehicles during mud season.
2. Prioritization of recreational and environmental values in management of the forest, as stipulated in binding contracts approved by voters and signed by Town officers as a condition of accepting the Lange properties and HCRS grant.
3. A multi-use recreational trail system reflecting the community's seeming preference, expressed on Nov. 3, for low-impact recreation in the town forest. This system would include the recreational types specified by the Lange family and a goal of preserving the forest's wild character while also making it safe and accessible for recreational users. To this end many on Nov. 3 seemed to favor:
 - a. a designated ATV trail loop designed and hardened to reduce erosion and maintained by users, much as the VAST trails are, and
 - b. a network of trails for non-motorized recreation that would incorporate a few suitable sections of closed logging tracks and connect them with the two existing hiking trails (Echo Mountain and Cross Rivendell Trails). In cooperation with the Forest Board, this could be designed, mapped, sign-posted, and maintained by trail volunteers with funding from grants and donations, just as the Cross Rivendell Trail is today.
4. Wilderness Response Equipment and training. Nice surprise to see equipment in the 2022 Town Budget!
5. Sustainable, low-impact logging conducted for forest health, recreational access, and stewardship of wildlife habitat (in the broader ecological sense) rather than for income, since the net income potential from forests like ours, logged sustainably, is projected to continue declining.
6. A more diversified business model for the town forest that adheres to established stipulations against using tax dollars or forest trust principal for ongoing forest maintenance and that includes the untapped potential of income from grants, donations, carbon offsets, and volunteer labor to help offset projected declines in net income from logging. There are people in Fairlee willing and able to help raise these funds.

These are my personal views, as I said. However, enough are shared by the "friends" who contributed to the application and by other segments of the community interested in recreational access and environmental stewardship to warrant consideration in forest management decisions--whether through periodic public forums, recreational and environmental committees under the Forest Board, or as future Forest Board members selected to focus specifically on recreational and environmental elements of forest management and planning.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Respectfully,

Lynne Fitzhugh

Attachment: