

## Updates to the 2025 Monkton Town Forest Management Plan following community feedback on the March 14th draft

Topic	Initial Draft Language 3/14/25	Initial Draft Reasoning	Community Feedback 3/14/25 - 4/4/25	Final Draft Language 4/4/25 (significant changes in <b>bold</b> )	Final Draft Reasoning
<b>Vision statement</b>			Original vision statement was more wildlife-focused and it was recommended that it focus more on the human aspect.	<b>Shifted focus more toward people</b>	It is appropriate to highlight the human benefits, of course. Still has a clear focus on wildlife, climate resilience, etc.
<b>Hours of Operation</b>	Open from dawn to dusk	<b>Primary reason:</b> concern for neighbors regarding noise. <b>Second reason:</b> late night activity, remote parking lots, etc.	Neighbors seem mostly unconcerned about hours. Some concerns about late activity, but this could happen regardless of a rule. It would be nice to walk/ski at night.	<b>Open 24 hours. Quiet hours will be 9pm - 7am.</b>	Few concerns and some benefits from this proposed change. Less administrative, less restriction.
<b>Dogs off-leash</b>	Dogs must be on-leash and attached to their owner.	<b>Primary reason:</b> trail conflicts - human/animal interactions. Significant feedback that some users do not feel safe being approached by off-leash dogs.  <b>Second reason:</b> wildlife impact is higher with off-leash	<b>Pro:</b> off-leash is a highly desired use for a number of users of the Town Forest. Past users of the property were limited in number, but appreciated the opportunity for off-leash there. Lack of places to do this in the area. Better for dogs and dog walkers. Suggestions: 1) fully allow off-leash, 2) allow in designated area(s), 3) allow during certain hours, 4) follow the town dog ordinance.  <b>Con:</b> Continued feedback that some users do not feel safe being approached by off-leash dogs. Less safe for horse interactions and some dog interactions. Wildlife harassment by dogs. Concern that verbal control doesn't usually work (town ordinance). Should specify no bear dogs.	<b>Dogs must be on-leash or wearing an e-collar</b> that effectively allows the dog to be immediately recalled. Dogs must remain within the sight of their owner and under their control. Owners must have a leash with them to further manage trail interactions and protect wildlife. Owners are expected to exercise good trail etiquette and leash or effectively manage their dog if another person, dog, horse, or wildlife is seen.	Ultimately, the MTFC decided that simply following the Town dog ordinance was not a responsible option for all groups, given community feedback (too many dogs are not “clearly under the verbal or non-verbal control of the owner”). The Town dog ordinance applies to MTF, but this plan adds additional requirements and expectations for this Town property. Other proposed options were not adopted. The suggestion of off-leash during certain hours was problematic from several angles (including user groups, wildlife, seasons). Having a designated off-leash area would likely concentrate trail interactions and not be satisfactory for most users. There were concerns about long-lines. <b>The electronic collar off-leash option seems feasible but requires substantial training</b> , for both owner and dog, to be a responsible, positive and effective option that supports additional freedom of movement. Electronic collar cost is not prohibitive if off-leash is an important activity to the user (\$50-250 for most models). The MTFC remains concerned about shifting the burden of off-leash activity onto other user groups and wildlife, but is mindful that exercising with your dog is an important recreational activity for many users.  <b>Huntington Community Forest's language is helpful:</b> "HCFSC may prohibit individual dogs due to behavioral issues on the part of the pet or pet owner. Pet owners are asked to recognize that the ability to bring your pet to the HCF is a privilege and will only be possible through responsible behavior by pet owners. Users are asked to know your pet and make informed and realistic decisions about the appropriateness of bringing your pet to the HCF. The HCFSC will provide signage reminding pet owners of their responsibilities and the HCFSC's expectations."

<b>Bikes</b>	Bikes - are only allowed November 1st to March 1st, out of concern for protecting a rare reptile found on the property in the warmer months. No e-bikes on the property.	<p><b>Primary reason:</b> presence of a RTE reptile during warmer months. Fragile population.</p> <p><b>Second reason(s):</b> erosion, trail conflicts</p>	<p><b>Pro:</b> bikers note never running over rare reptiles (or at least not being aware of doing so). Past users of the property have appreciated the opportunity to bike here and have built trails. Small group, but very dedicated. How will trails be maintained if no maintenance by bikers? Winter biking would be limited without trail grooming.</p> <p><b>Con:</b> Primary concern is about the rare reptile. Loss of a few individuals threatens the long-term health of the population even more. This is a unique concern for this town forest, not faced by others. Biking opportunities continue to grow in nearby communities - not needed here as well with this wildlife concern.</p>	<p>Bikes - are allowed from November 1st to <b>April 1st</b> only, out of concern for protecting a rare reptile population in the warmer months. No e-bikes.</p> <p><b>Trails may be groomed in winter, with permission of MTFC, to improve fat biking conditions.</b></p>	The committee appreciates the polite and constructive engagement with the biking community. Considering the fragile population of a rare reptile we do not see a path to allow biking during the warmer months when sightings of this reptile have been reported. On a closer examination of sightings the winter timeframe for biking was extended to April 1st. The committee also supports the idea of trail grooming, with permission of the MTF committee, (usually done with a snowmobile & drag or similar) to improve snow conditions for fat biking and walking on some trails/forest roads.
<b>Hunting</b>	Hunting - is limited to the VT Fish & Wildlife deer and turkey hunting seasons.	<p><b>Primary reason:</b> Substantial concern about the safety of recreating in a space where hunting is happening. This group is very likely larger than the group of hunters. Deer overpopulation is a concern in the state, so allowing deer seasons seems appropriate. Turkey is a popular season (although no concern about overpopulation).</p> <p><b>Second reason(s):</b> Resource concern - want to promote predator populations to naturally manage rabbit/grouse/etc.</p>	<p><b>Pro:</b> hunters indicated that safety concerns are not statistically valid. We should allow all/most seasons. Concerned users need more education. Suggestion to allow more seasons that overlap deer/turkey.</p> <p><b>Con:</b> concerns expressed that allowing spring turkey hunting impacts other uses in May. Not allowed after Noon in May. Turkey hunting is mostly recreational (unlike deer herd management) so should be evaluated alongside all the other recreational uses that bring value to their user groups. Concerns expressed that the Fall deer and turkey seasons block off October through most of December for users who are not comfortable recreating during hunting. Suggestion/recommendation to reduce that footprint of hunting on the calendar but perhaps restrict other users during those times in exchange.</p>	<p>The final draft remains the same for seasons.</p> <p>We did <b>hear and support the request to encourage more hunter safety and community education</b> to bring user groups together in order to share information, get to know one another's experiences/concerns, and promote safety.</p> <p><b>No hunting between Old Airport Rd. and Hardscrabble Rd.</b> This ~30-acre section is almost entirely within 500' of a residence. It will have a trail loop and offer an option for a half-hour hike during hunting season.</p>	<p>The committee received feedback in March and April advocating both for more hunting and also for less hunting. The committee did not want to expand the approximately four months of hunting seasons currently in the plan, due to feedback from different groups. Adding seasons was considered, but introduces the complexity of partial seasons, additional weapons allowed at different times, etc. Ultimately the final draft remains the same for seasons.</p> <p>The committee also looked further into concerns about the right of a municipality to act as an owner of land, with the same rights as an individual or private organization. While a municipality cannot restrict hunting seasons town wide or create a new season it can exercise ownership rights on land it directly owns and manages (such as the Town Forest, Morse Park, the town offices, etc.). The Vermont Supreme Court confirmed this authority in the case of Hunters, Anglers &amp; Trappers Ass'n of Vermont, Inc. v. Winooski Valley Park Dist., 2006 VT 82, 2, 181 Vt. 12, 14, 913 A.2d 391, 394 (2006). The decision can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
<b>Trapping</b>	Trapping - is not allowed on the property, except by permission of the MTFC to address a			The committee did not receive substantial new feedback on trapping and the final draft remains the same.	The committee also looked further into concerns about the right of a municipality to act as an owner of land, with the same rights as an individual or private organization. While a municipality cannot restrict trapping townwide or create a new trapping season it can exercise ownership rights on land it directly owns and manages (such as the Town Forest, Morse Park, etc.). The Vermont Supreme Court confirmed this authority in the case of Hunters, Anglers & Trappers Ass'n of Vermont, Inc.

	nuisance situation.				v. Winooski Valley Park Dist., 2006 VT 82, 2, 181 Vt. 12, 14, 913 A.2d 391, 394 (2006). The decision can be found <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>Foraging</b>			No substantial concerns, but wording was described as unclear as to what was allowed and not allowed.	Clarified language to be specific	
<b>Access</b>	Parking locations on Hardscrabble, Old Airport Rd., Old Lover's Lane	<b>Primary reasons:</b> to disperse visitors and provide easy access to different parts of this large property for all ages.	<b>Pro:</b> the committee received very clear guidance from Vermont Land Trust (March 2025) that good access to the ~300 acres west of Old Airport Rd. is an expectation of the easement holder. The Town is well within its rights to maintain a curb cut and some parking on OAR. Using the existing parking location saves the Town money. <b>Con:</b> concern about muddy parking on OAR - should focus on Hardscrabble. Discussed improving the surface with stone. Concern about the location of Old Lover's Lane (OLL) parking (1-2 spots). Visible parking reduces dumping and improves safety.	No Changes to access points	Given the size, features and topography of the property, the three parking areas will provide reasonable and appropriate access to the forest for community members.
<b>Kaolin Dam</b>			Feedback received that we should mention Kaolin dam maintenance	<b>Kaolin Dam added to proposed improvements</b> , specifically the evaluation and execution of next steps to address unsatisfactory status as well as researching the possibility of decommissioning (partial or full removal).	
<b>Property Mowing</b>	The plan described mowing best-practices, but suggested mowing would not happen during warmer months.		Feedback that we should reconcile the use of wheeled vehicles for maintenance with rare reptile concerns. Also, that mowing is good for visitors/ticks/etc.	<b>MTFC will adopt a best-practice for mowing</b> during warmer months, minimizing frequency and managing timing to reduce potential interactions.	Best practices can minimize the risk of a maintenance vehicle injuring a reptile, including frequency, timing of year and timing of day/weather. In 2024 the forest roads were mowed only 3 times, for instance. The committee will create a best-practices document for mowing on this property and follow it prior to any mowing during the Management Plan period.