

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This FAQ document will be updated on a rolling basis by staff on the Barre District Stewardship Team to address questions that are arising frequently throughout the comment period (December 13, 2023 through February 2, 2024) for the draft long-range management plan. If you have a question about the draft management plan, please contact Brad Greenough, Stewardship Forester, 802-595-3143, brad.greenough@vermont.gov. Comments received will be addressed through a public responsiveness summary in the final draft of the management plan.

How are Vermont Conservation Design old forest/young forest targets applied at the management unit scale?

Summary: *The Worcester Range Management Unit (WRMU) long range management plan (LRMP) considers Vermont Conservation Design, and the draft LRMP is consistent with Vermont Conservation Design. The draft LRMP proposes multiple objectives that contribute to the vision of Vermont Conservation Design, including more than doubling the amount of area that is designated to develop into old forest and contribute to meeting the old forest targets in VCD.*

Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) is a scientific vision for maintaining the state's ecologically functional landscape. It provides maps of and guidance on the forest blocks, riparian areas, natural communities, and habitats that are highest priority for sustaining Vermont's biodiversity now and into the future. State lands are critical to achieving the vision in VCD, and VCD is a key tool that informs the parcel- and unit-specific strategies included in state lands long-range management plans.

Well-managed forests provide many benefits to landowners and the public, including timber and other forest products, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and storage, and recreational opportunities. Maintaining well-managed forests, and thereby providing the economic incentives to keep forests intact, is critical to sustaining the ecologically functional landscape envisioned in Vermont Conservation Design.

Vermont Conservation Design offers a clear, scientifically robust framework for the importance of maintaining a balance of forest structures, conditions, and uses across the landscape. VCD sets science-based targets to have approximately 3-5% of Vermont's forest as young forest, distributed across all biophysical regions, and approximately 9% of Vermont's forest as old forest, distributed across all biophysical regions and representing the range of matrix natural community types. At present, Vermont lacks adequate young and old forest to meet these targets. Efforts to create more young forest, and restore more old forest, are needed across the state. These efforts should be based on finding suitable areas that meet the natural community representation goals identified in VCD. Achieving these targets should also consider a balance with other benefits provided by forests, including recreation opportunities and the local, sustainable production of forest products.

Specifically, VCD identifies a target of restoring 95,000 acres of old forest, representing examples of multiple common natural community types, in the Northern Green Mountains biophysical region, the region in which the WRMU is located. A 2021 analysis by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife identified 75,087 acres of land in that region that are already conserved and managed in a way that is expected to result in the eventual development of old forest. Existing Natural Areas (lands managed for the preservation of their natural condition) in the WRMU, including the 4,138-acre Worcester Range Natural Area and the 80-acre Moss Glen Falls Natural Area, were counted in those 75,087 acres identified. Beyond the two Natural Areas, the draft LRMP proposes that 5,512 acres of the management unit be managed as Highly Sensitive Management Areas (HSMA).

The HSMAs include a mosaic of natural community types, including Northern Hardwood Forest, Red Spruce-Northern Hardwood, and Hemlock-Northern Hardwood Forest natural communities. In general, HSMAs will develop under natural processes and natural disturbance regimes and will not be subject to active forest or habitat management. While trees and other vegetation may be cut, this will happen only to restore natural community species composition and structure in limited locations; manage specific habitat conditions for rare, threatened, and endangered species; and to maintain safe and enjoyable recreational conditions.

Collectively, these Natural Areas and the proposed HSMAs in the LRMP will more than double the amount of area in the WRMU that is in a land management designation expected to result in the eventual development of old forest, adding significantly to progress towards the overall regional old forest target in VCD.

ANR will work to opportunistically identify places on the WRMU where young forest creation can be incorporated in planned forest management projects, called uneven-aged management treatments in the draft plan, provided this approach meets management objectives and silvicultural guides. Young forest creation targets can also be supported by maintaining existing openings (fields and landings) by mowing or burning, and if appropriate and practical, by establishing new young forest openings in previously disturbed sites (e.g. old homesteads, pastures, previously burned or logged sites). In addition to ANR's efforts, note that recent timber harvesting adjacent to the WRMU on privately-owned conserved lands with a public access easement has created a substantial increase of young forest habitat in the Worcester Range forest block, contributing to achieving the VCD target for this forest type.

The inclusion of these and many other strategies ensures that the Worcester Range Management Unit contributes to maintaining the ecologically functional landscape envisioned by Vermont Conservation Design.

What are the timber harvests on the WRMU proposing to achieve?

Summary: ANR is proposing to use sustainable, ecological forestry to conduct timber harvests on up to thirteen sites over twenty years (~1900 acres or around ten percent of the WRMU) to improve the

future health and growth of our forests. Forest management projects, such as the commercial timber harvests envisioned in the Plan, are an important tool to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat, forest health, resilience to climatic stressors, and biodiversity. The proposed harvests will also provide forest products from well-managed forests on state lands, helping FPR in its mission to support Vermont's vibrant forest-based economy.

The timber harvests proposed in the long range management plan for the WRMU will achieve a number of important benefits for the forests and people of Vermont, from maintaining and enhancing plant and wildlife habitat to improving forest health while increasing resilience and biodiversity and addressing climate change threats. The Agency is proposing to use sustainable timber harvests based on a science-based silvicultural approach at up to thirteen sites over twenty years as a tool to achieve these outcomes. In addition, this active management on the WRMU creates opportunities for forest research, education, and outreach and to demonstrate exemplary forest management techniques to the public. The proposed harvests will also provide forest products from well-managed stands on state land, helping FPR in its mission to support the working forested landscape and a vibrant forest-based economy in Vermont.

ANR's approach to management planning is comprehensive and focused on the future growth and health of our forests. Managing forests and trees requires many different approaches, from attention to a few individual trees or invasive plants to actions that affect larger stands of trees, and the tools used to meet those needs are selected and applied based on conditions on the ground. Timber harvests are an important tool in achieving healthy, productive, and resilient forests, and are part of a suite of planned management activities in the LRMP that, together, will meet ANR's overall management goals for the WRMU. Prior to any activities affecting trees and the forest, ANR's foresters carefully consider all potential impacts and incorporate input from experts across the Agency through both the long-range management planning process and District Stewardship Team review of individual projects.

The thirteen harvests proposed in the draft plan were identified using a combination of forest inventory data and site visits by District Stewardship Team members. The inventory data collected over the previous plan cycle provides a baseline for understanding the species mix, sizes of trees, and forest conditions on the ground, allowing foresters to group areas of similar species mixes and sizes into stands. A working group including the state lands ecologist, wildlife biologist and state lands foresters visited stands that could be eligible for harvesting. This team

The District Stewardship Team (DST) is an interdisciplinary team of Agency staff that meets monthly to develop management plans and discuss projects on state lands. There are five DSTs across the state. Each team contains an ecologist, a forester, a recreation specialist, a wildlife biologist, a fisheries biologist, a Parks regional manager, and a watershed basin planner. This ensures that all natural resources are thoroughly considered as plans are developed and projects are implemented. This comprehensive and collaborative planning framework establishes Vermont state lands as a model of excellence for other landowners.

assessed the suitability of the sites for providing high-quality, sustainable forest products and their ability to advance the ecological, wildlife and water quality goals of the plan, allowing the team to identify areas that could be proposed for harvesting during this plan.

Many of these treatments will increase the diversity and resilience of the WRMU's forest stands. Harvests that create greater variety in the tree species, size and density across the landscape lead to forest conditions that support a greater variety of birds, insects, bats, plants and other species than a forest where all the trees are the same age. This diversity also increases the resilience of forest stands by providing a more diverse mix of tree species and sizes that together help a forest respond to stress such as natural disturbances and the pressures of climate change more quickly and effectively.

The first treatment proposed in the plan is a great example of what can be accomplished with ecological forestry and active forest management like timber harvests. Treatment 1 is a 159-acre northern hardwood stand where all prior management on this stand was conducted by a previous owner. The stand is currently made up almost entirely of sugar maples of a similar age class. There is a more diverse mix of northern hardwood seedlings and saplings growing below these trees and distributed throughout the stand.

If no management occurs on Treatment #1 during the plan, the stand will continue to develop as an unnatural monoculture of sugar maple that is more susceptible to damage from forest pest outbreaks and weather events. The lack of variation in the size and species of trees would continue to provide only limited wildlife habitat and few opportunities for a more diverse range of animals and plants. Finally, over time, the large trees will begin to shade out and kill the current seedlings and saplings, resulting in the loss of the future generation of trees that cover a wider range of ages and species.

By comparison, the proposed active management in the draft plan for Treatment #1 would move the stand towards a state that is structurally complex, contains a diversity of species across a range of sizes and ages, and provides more ecosystem services than if left unmanaged. The proposed management would be rehabilitative in nature and would accelerate the stand moving towards a multi-aged condition typical of northern hardwood forests. This will increase the resilience of the stand to disturbance and climate change, provide better and more diverse wildlife habitat, and ensure the existing seedlings and saplings can grow into the healthy forests of the future envisioned for the Worcester Range.

How does Act 59 influence the WRMU draft plan?

Act 59, the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (CRBPA), tasks the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB), and the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), with creating "an inventory of Vermont's conserved land and conservation policies..." by (or before) July 1, 2024. The inventory includes "an assessment of how State lands will be used to increase conserved ecological reserve areas." The Act also requires VHCB and ANR to "develop a plan to implement the conservation goals of Vermont Conservation Design" on or before December 31, 2025. ANR staff are actively engaged in this

inventory and planning effort alongside many other conservation partners. Information about the CRBPA and information about how to participate in this effort is available on VHCB's website: [Vermont Conservation Strategy Initiative](#).

Act 59 defines three conservation categories – ecological reserve areas, biodiversity conservation areas, and natural resource management areas. These categories are intended to inform how existing conserved land, including state land, are accounted for through the inventory due by July 1, 2024. Lands that comprise the WRMU are among the conserved lands in Vermont that will be inventoried as part of this process but due to the timeline for the deliverables of Act 59, it wasn't possible to reflect that work in the WRMU plan. Once the Act 59 inventory is finalized, the different state land management classification units that comprise the WRMU will be accounted for based on how they align with the Act's definitions.

It is important to remember that all land management classifications and designations in the LRMP, will be included in the conserved land inventory and become the baseline for the conservation plan which will serve as a roadmap to meet the 30x30 goal. There is no requirement in Act 59 to pause ongoing land management planning processes, and ANR believes our efforts to develop the LRMP for the WRMU can be done concurrently with the Act 59 inventory efforts, as our planned management activities in the WRMU are entirely consistent with Act 59's objectives.