



Community Forest Training Program: Community Engagement & Visioning

May 7, 2025

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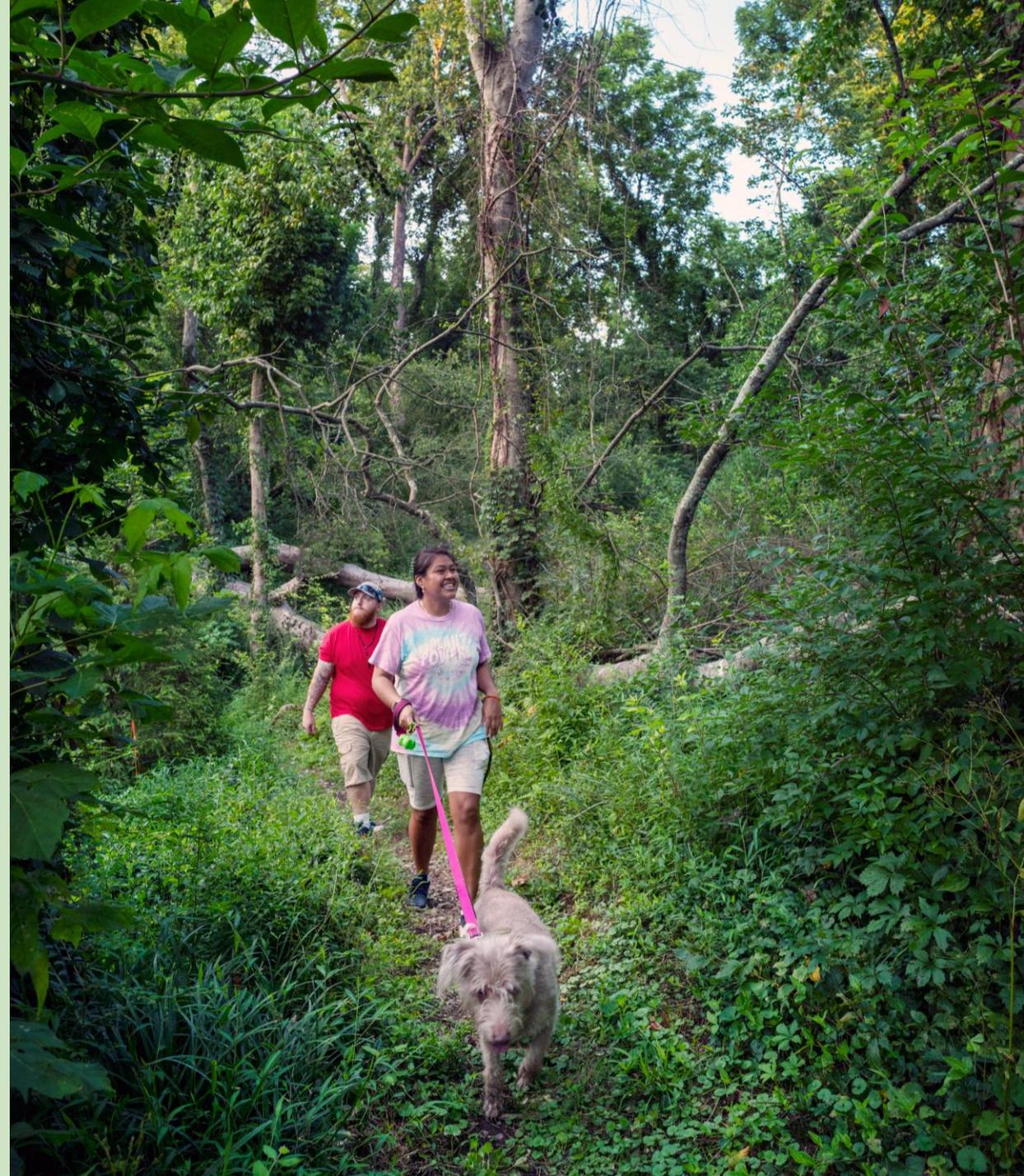
Welcome!

Warm-Up Poll: Which of the following community outreach strategies have you used for a community forest or other conservation project? (Select all that apply.)



Agenda

- Session 2 Recap
- Overview: Community Engagement & Visioning
- Northern Forest Center: Best Practices for Community Engagement
- Case Study: Spence Mountain Community Forest
- Case Study: Ascutney Mountain / West Windsor Community Forest
- Speaker Q&A
- Brainstorm Activity
- Next Steps



Community Forest Training Program: Series Overview

5-month, virtual workshop series designed to provide land managers with the **strategies, skills, and resources** needed to create and sustain community forests.

Session Dates:

- March 5: Principles of Community Forests
- April 2: Ownership, Governance, and Funding
- May 7: Community Engagement and Visioning
- June 4: Management and Stewardship
- July 2: Project Implementation



Community Forest Ownership & Governance

Who can own a community forest? How are decisions made about a community forest?

4 basic structures, with nuances:

Municipal Ownership

1. Volunteer-based Governance (Selectboard, Conservation Commission)
2. Professionalized Management (Parks, Forestry)
3. User Group Management/ Operation

County Ownership

1. Professionalized Governance
 - Elected officials dictate staffing

Nonprofit Ownership

1. Land Trust Ownership (local or regional)
2. User Group Ownership
3. Partnership with municipality or county

Tribal Ownership

1. Tribe Ownership
 - One or multiple tribes
2. Tribal Nonprofit Ownership

Community Forest Funding

How are community forests funded?

Federal & Regional

- USFS Community Forest Program
- USFS Forest Legacy Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program
- NFWF Mitigation Funds
- Cooperative Endg. Species Grant
- Scenic Byways Funds
- Appalachian Regional Commission Area Development Funding

State and Local

- State Conservation / Open Space Funds
- Municipal Bonds
- Clean Water Funds (SRF)
- Community Economic Development Funds

Private

- Philanthropy
- Private Grants
- Private Investors (land banking or shared revenue streams)

Revenue Generation

- Responsible Extraction (timber, etc.)
- Recreation
- Carbon Credits



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Noel Durant
Tennessee State Director



Community Engagement & Visioning

Why is broad community input critical for community forests? How do you build broad support?

- ❑ **It's not a *community* forest without *community* engagement.** Public ownership, input, and management is what sets community forests apart from other conservation projects.
- ❑ **The character of the community will influence the character of the community forest.** Community members must be bought into the long-term vision for the land in order for it to produce meaningful benefits. An established community vision sets the stage for management and stewardship.
- ❑ **Everyone needs a seat at the table.** Go beyond your usual suspects – actively seek out new stakeholders. A comprehensive, sustainable community vision means casting a wide net and bringing people into the process who may never have participated in conservation work before.
- ❑ **Be mindful of your message.** Whether you're engaging user groups or elected officials, clear and intentional messaging around the benefits and values of a community forest is critical for cultivating support.
- ❑ **Conflict is a when – not an if.** Conflict is to be expected when you're building consensus among diverse perspectives. Being prepared to manage conflict effectively is an essential component of a community forest process.



Northern Forest Center, NH

Julie Renaud Evans, Northern Forest Center



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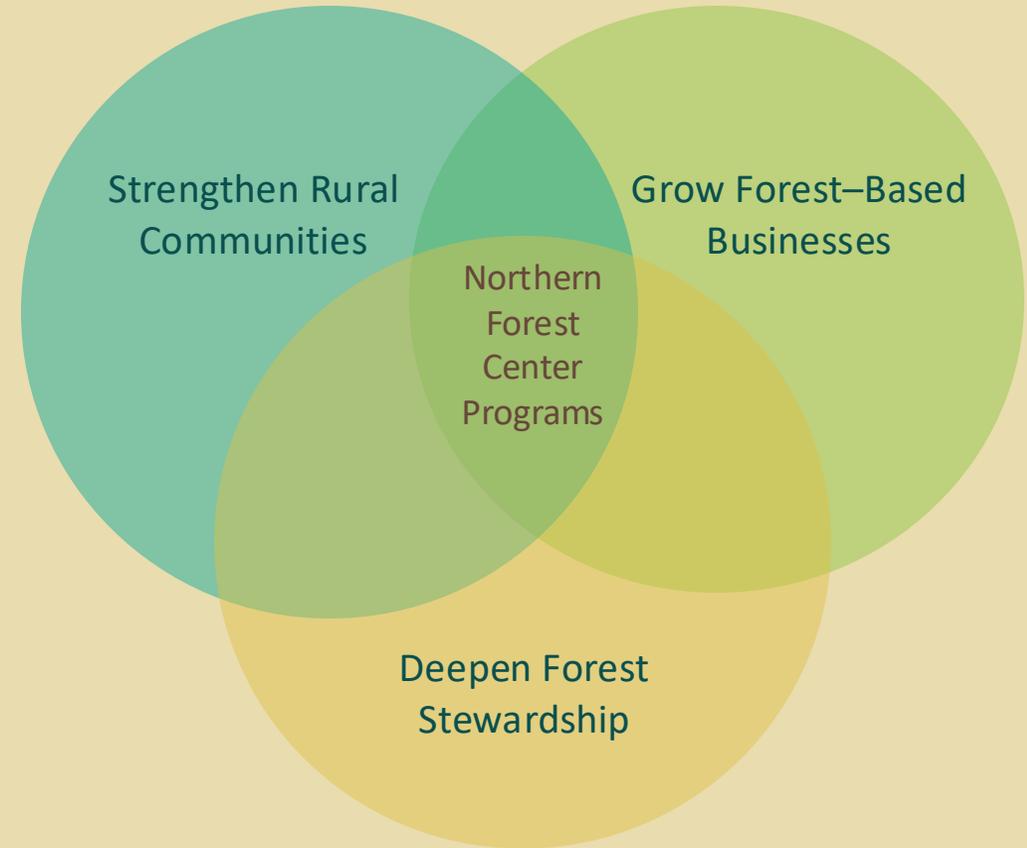
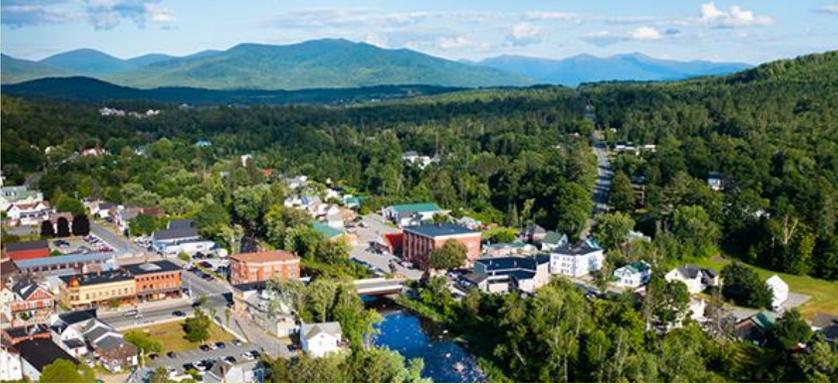
⤴ TPL Community Forest Training
Community Engagement – May 7, 2025



The Northern Forest Center is a **regional innovation and investment partner creating rural vibrancy** by connecting people, economy and the forest landscape.



Strategic Framework

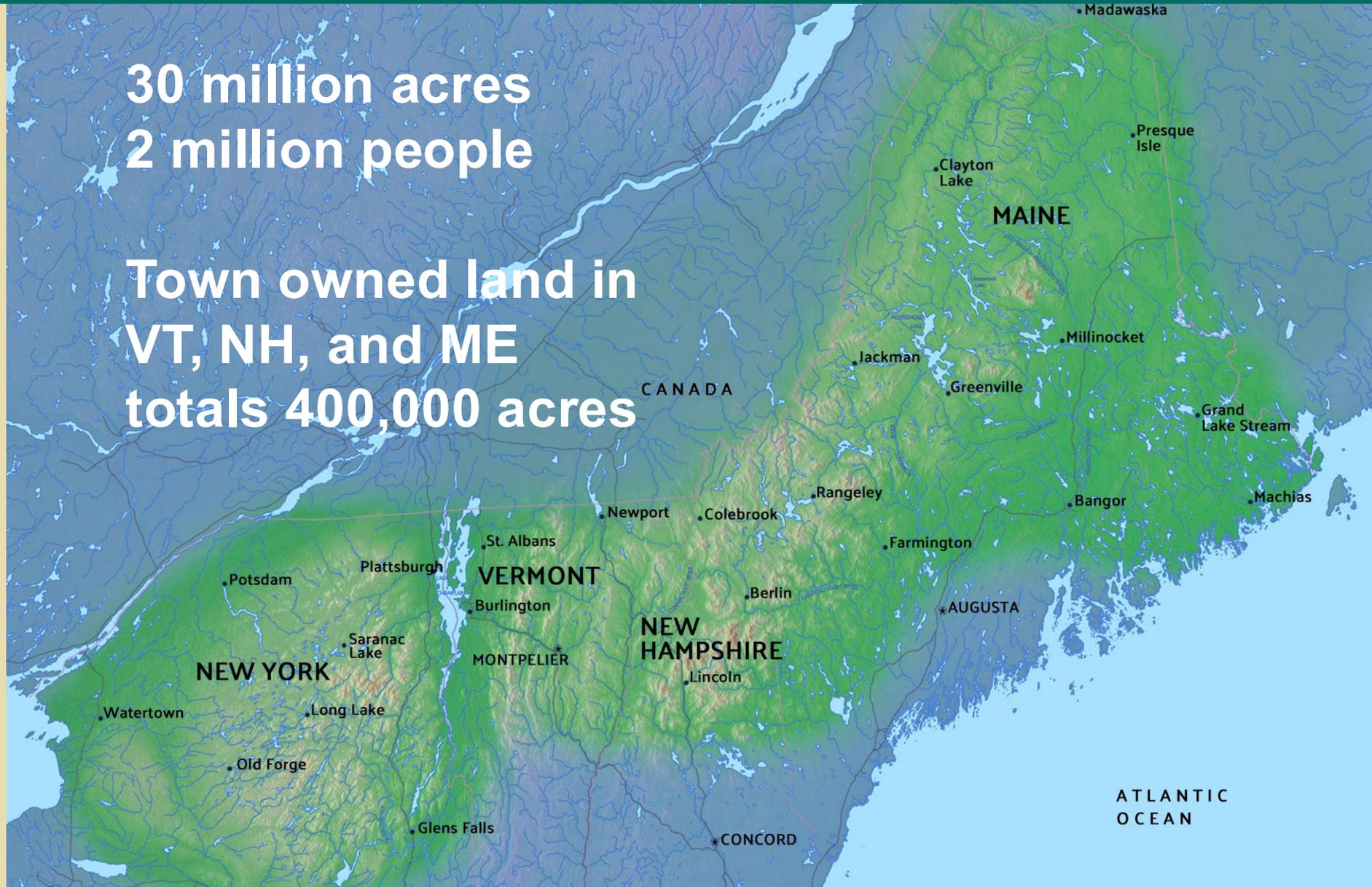




Northern Forest Region

30 million acres
2 million people

Town owned land in
VT, NH, and ME
totals 400,000 acres



Community Forest Model



- Community or non-profit ownership
- **Community participation in management**
- Community benefits tied to community priorities
- Permanent Protection

Community Engagement

- Intentional
- Inclusive
- Long term
- Requires
 - Planning
 - Communication
 - Patience





Three Phases of Engagement



- Pre-acquisition
 - *Build support*
- Planning
 - *Learn & Plan together*
- Post ownership
 - *Ongoing*



Pre-Acquisition



- Build project support
- Find your Champion
- Small conversations
- Who will host CE process?



Planning

- 12-24 months
- Build relationships
- Engage students
- Many interests/users
- Hybrid for everyone
- Agendas and Follow through
- Balance outdoor and indoor work – site visits through the seasons





Post Ownership



- **Create a treasured community asset**
- Field trips
 - *All ages*
 - *All seasons*
 - *All interests*
- Annual meetings
- Sustainable



Strategies – Best Practices



Planned set-up

- Who is Hosting?
- Welcoming space
- Inclusive communication





Strategies – Best Practices

Email list

Posters

**Facebook
pages**

**Partner
Newsletters**

- Communication
 - Diverse platforms
 - Regular
 - Never too much
- Facilitation

Newspaper

**Tables at
Events**

**Social
Media**



Strategies – *GET OUTSIDE*





Final Thoughts

- Make it EASY for people to engage and stay with you
- Use WE language
- Smile, Have Fun!



www.northernforest.org

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LIVE THE NEW FOREST FUTURE

The logo features a stylized white letter 'N' on a red background. Inside the top curve of the 'N', there is a white silhouette of a coniferous tree. To the right of the 'N', the words 'orthern Forest Center' are written in a white, sans-serif font.
Northern Forest Center



Photo: Klamath Trails Alliance

Spence Mountain Community Forest, OR

Drew Honzel, Klamath Trails Alliance



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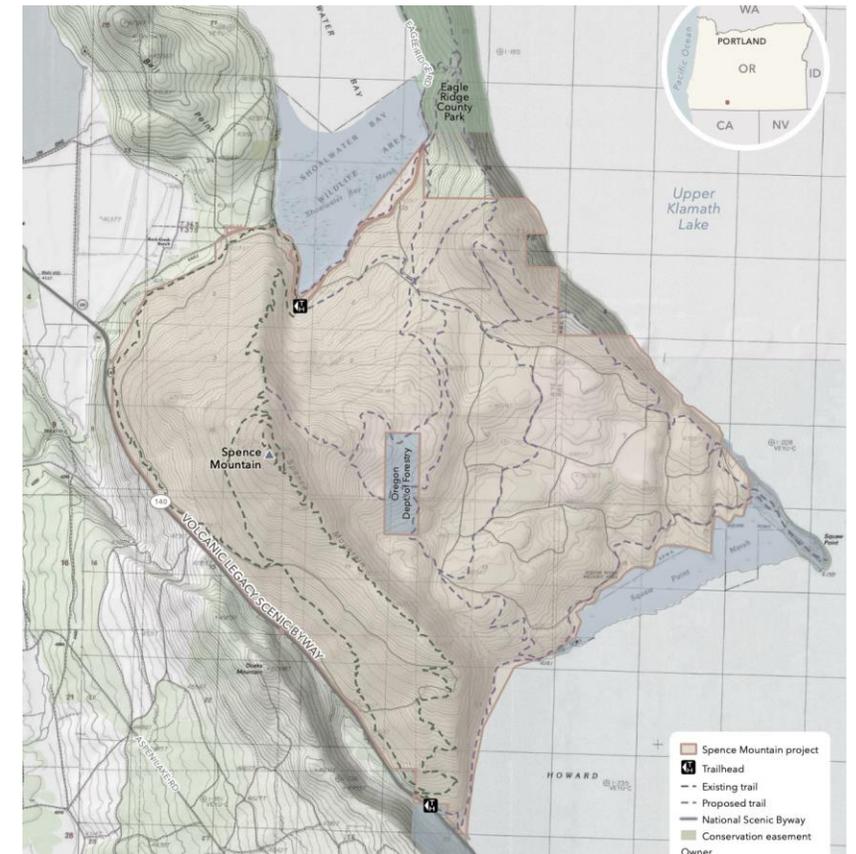
Spence Mountain Community Forest

By Drew Honzel
Klamath Trails Alliance



Meet Spence Mountain!

- **Location** – 15 miles west of Klamath Falls, Oregon.
- **Property** – a 7,500-acre mixed conifer forest with elevations ranging from 4,100' at lake level to 5,880' at the summit.
- **Ownership** – since 2022, the property has been publicly owned by Klamath County. Prior to 2022, it was privately held and possessed development potential.
- **Trails** – a trail system initiated in 2014, now comprises 55 miles of purpose-built trails for mountain biking.
- **Economic Impact of Trails** – Spence Mountain attracts an average of 9,200 recreation visits per year. Six in ten users are residents, but visitors accounted for \$900,000 in spending annually.

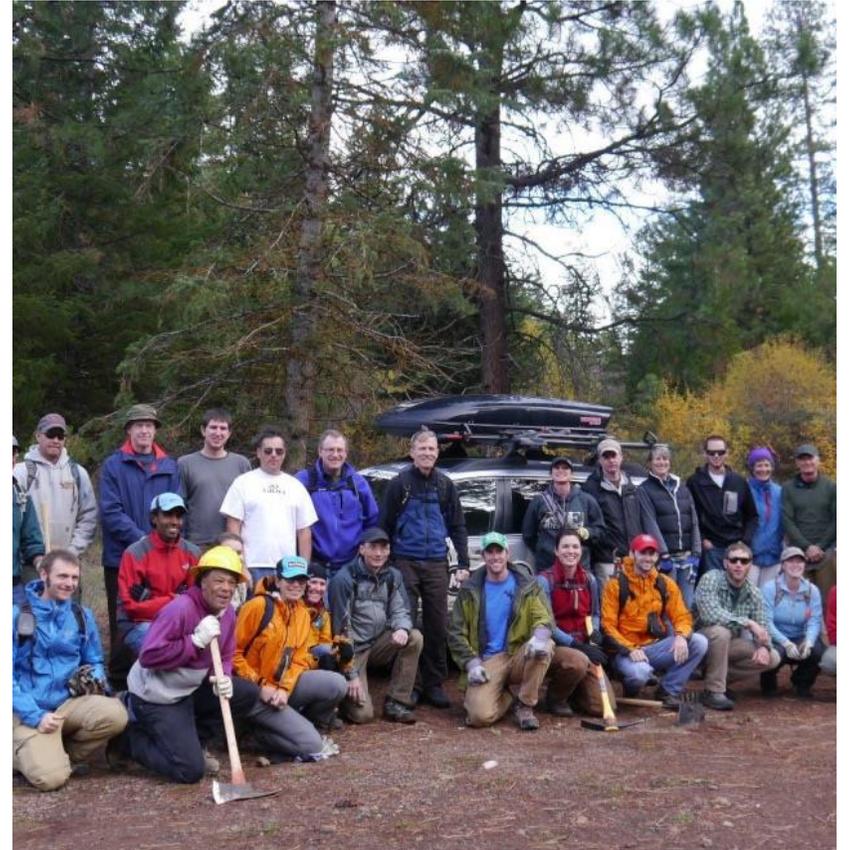


Spence Mountain Flyover



Community Engagement Klamath Trails Alliance

- **Better Living Through Trails Presentation (2014):** an IMBA-sponsored event that drew over 50 trail advocates and key organizations to learn about the value of trails.
- **Community Presentations:** to various organizations, including Rotary, Soroptimist, economic development, tourism, local government, and realtor groups.
- **Monthly Trail Meetings:** open to the public, these meetings provide an open forum for discussions on ways to further KTA's mission of developing and maintaining recreational trails.
- **Community Events:** actively participated in health fairs, downtown street fairs, school events, tourism summits, and trail summits.



Community Engagement TPL Acquisition Phase

- **Forest Legacy Grant** - secured local and regional support from Trout Unlimited, Tribes, Economic Development, Oregon Dept of Forestry, USFS, Visitors Association, Healthy Klamath, Audubon Society & State Representatives.
- **Klamath County** – engaged in numerous meetings with Commissioners and Staff to gain support of the acquisition and eventual ownership of Spence Mountain.
- **Forest Management Plan** – was developed through funding from TPL, which involved key stakeholder input on how Spence Mountain should be managed.
- **Media Coverage** – a well orchestrated public information campaign by TPL regarding acquisition status.



Community Engagement Post Acquisition

- **Spence Mountain Advisory Committee** – was established by the County Commissioners and comprises a 7-member advisory committee with representation from trails/recreation, industry, tribes, agriculture, County and two at-large members.
- **Spence Mountain Master Plan** – the advisory committee has recommended that the County undertake a comprehensive community-wide master plan for Spence.



Thank You!





West Windsor Town Forest, VT

Natalie Starr, Ascutney Outdoors



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West Windsor Town Forest and Ascutney Outdoors

Natalie Starr, Board Member / Ascutney Outdoors

Our Town Forest

- Nearly 1600 acres today
- Placed under Conservation Easement
- Designated Recreation Area – 138 acres multi-use plus 73 acres backcountry area
- Trails permitted under Vermont Land Use Law (Act 250)
- Hiking, Mountain Biking, Small Alpine Ski Area, Outdoor Center and event space



History

- Town Forest (created in 1979) about 1100 acres and managed by a Town Forest committee appointed by the Selectboard
- Uses were recreation (biking, hiking, hunting, skiing) and forest management
- Adjacent ski area (@ 500 acres) went bankrupt in 2010
- Town had to decide – purchase ski area and add to Town forest or leave its' future use up to fate



Community Viewpoints

- Town forest recreation use was very limited – neighbors, hunters, local bikers and hikers
- Some wanted bankruptcy sale
 - But over 18 months numerous potential buyers backed out due to lack of snow making capacity – costly due to limited water resources
 - Condominiums and second homes were put up for sale with no buyers, and local store went bankrupt due to lack of business
- Others wanted to buy ski area - Small group of town leaders met and decided that the only potential solution was for Town to purchase
- Adjacent Resort (time share condos, hotel, restaurant, rec center) wanted ski area back
- Town Forest values include drinking water source protection, ecological biodiversity, wildlife habitat and corridor, large unfragmented area

Community Members for Town Purchase

- Wanted to control future uses of ski area land (could be sold into private development)
- Worked with Trust for Public Lands to find money to fund conservation easement and land purchase:
 - Town donated Conservation Easement as matching funds for purchase of ski area through State grants (this put numerous restrictions on town land)
 - Financial support included grant from State (VT Housing and Conservation Board), Town conservation fund, and private fundraising
- Had to convince voters to make purchase
- Would develop a non-profit to manage land and recreation uses



Working with the Community

- Ad hoc group reached out to many community members
- Town held public information meetings
- Mountain bike and backcountry skiers a supporting voice
- Former passholders and (local) employees wanted a ski area
- Conservation advocates recognized the value of a forever conservation easement
- Town Conservation Commission played a large role
- Contracted with professional regional forester to create a forest management plan
- TPL led the Town to find grant support

Our Community Rallied

PRESS INCLUDED:

Outside Magazine: Vermont Town Raising Money to Resurrect Ski Area Jun 3, 2015

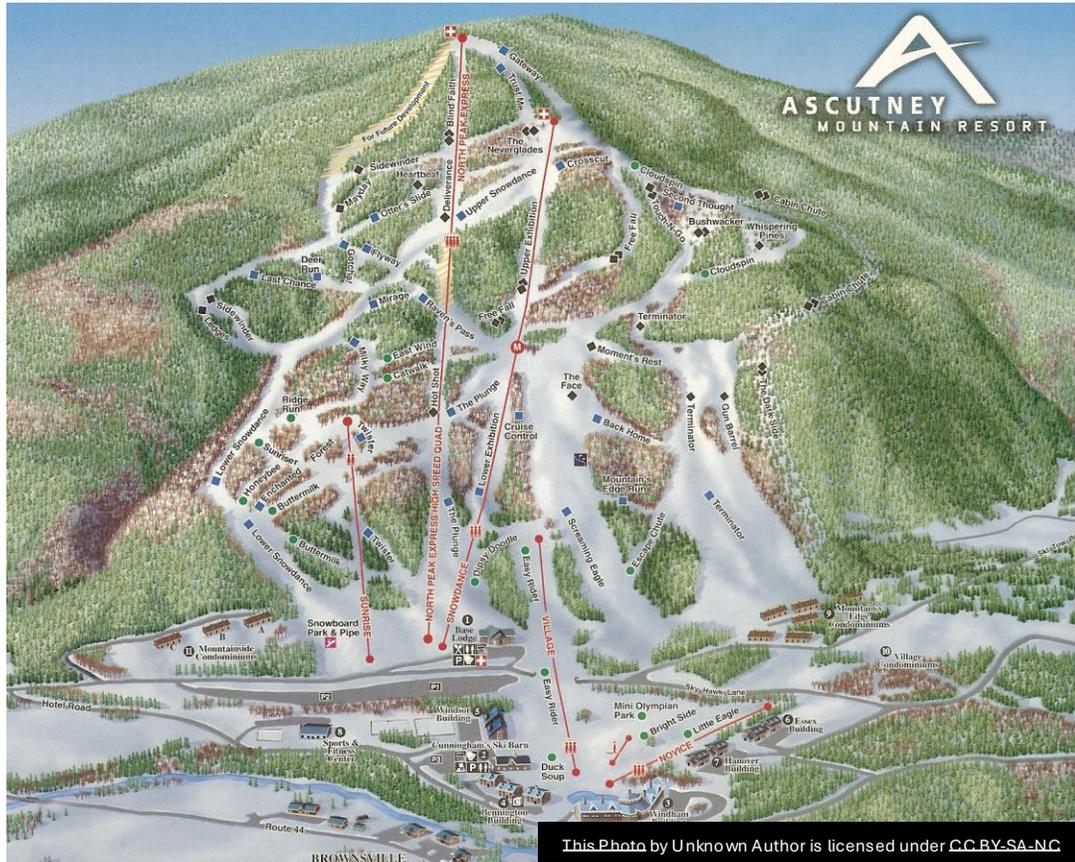
New York Times: How One Ski Town Rallied in a Warming World A community in Vermont took charge after the local hill closed.

VERMONT PUBLIC : West Windsor Buys Land At Closed Mt. Ascutney Resort December 25, 2015





Abandoned Base Lodge burned after Town purchase, but AO raised money and resources to design and build new outdoor center to scale





Community volunteers
fully invested

Our Town Forest Today

- Town Forest “Community Forest Management Plan” created for and approved by State Housing and Conservation Board and the Upper Valley Land Trust as a requirement of the Conservation Easement
- Land is now 10% of the small Town (pop 1400)
- Small ski area, outdoor center (built to scale of uses), mountain bike network, interpretive and hiking trails and event venue
- Serves regional community with learn to ski school programs, mountain bike club, hiking and community events
- Attracts visitors from afar for skiing, hiking/biking and large events



Activities scaled
to community

Closing

- Our Town owned land no longer faces the possibility of another bankruptcy at the ski area
- Our general store which also went bankrupt is now a thriving store and café attracting many mountain visitors
- Our town forest is forever conserved – rich unfragmented habitat with adjacent State Park
- Our community rallied successfully and recognizes it is stronger when we work together



Q&A

Please share your questions in the chat!



Reflection

For the next few minutes...

- Continue page 2 of ***Setting the Table for Success: Getting Started***. Building on the stakeholder list you've generated in previous sessions, name some ideas for how you might bring in new groups.
- As a group, design a community engagement event for a group that has not yet been engaged in conservation work. Consider:
 - How will you reach them?
 - What will your event look like?
 - How will you build long-term buy-in?

Pick one representative to share a 1 min. summary.

Questions?

Setting the Table for Success: Getting Started

Before you begin, it's critical to lay the groundwork for a successful community forest by setting realistic expectations, engaging a diverse array of stakeholders, and identifying how best to champion this initiative in your area.

Use the worksheet below to assess how community forests can benefit your community and how to get started.

Name Your Goals: What are your community's top priorities?

1. List your community priorities below.

2. Circle, **highlight**, or **bold** any priorities that community forests may be able to help you address.



Since 1972, TPL has protected 4 million acres of public land; created 5,364 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places; raised \$93 billion in public funding for parks and public lands; and connected nearly 9.4 million people to the outdoors.

To learn more, visit [tpl.org](https://www.tpl.org).

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Next Steps

- **Homework:**
 - Continue the worksheet *Setting the Table for Success: Getting Started*.
 - Share one takeaway from today's session with a colleague.
- Report-Out Slides & Recording
- **Session 4: June 4, 2025**
Management & Stewardship

Thank You!