Interim Management Plan for Burns Woods

Charlotte, Vermont

Prepared by:
December ___, 2015

Purpose of the Interim Management Plan

This interim management plan is a guiding document for the management of Burns Woods, located in Charlotte, Vermont. This is an interim management plan with the intention of drafting a full, comprehensive management plan in the near future.

Property Description

The Burns Property is a 54-acre Town-owned property located at the south edge of the existing Charlotte village between Route 7 and Greenbush Road. The property is adjacent to the conserved Mack Farm, and across Route 7 from Pease Mountain. "Burns Woods" includes 22 acres of the Burns property that will be conserved under a conservation easement held by Vermont Land Trust (VLT). These 22 acres are the focus of this Interim Management Plan.

Burns Woods is a primarily forested, roughly rectangular, block of woodland. There are two trails running through the woods, including an old farm road that has been maintained as a trail. The land is primarily made up of clayplain forest. According to a 2006 analysis of the site completed by Marc Lapin, the forest has a relatively mature structure and great plant diversity, and it represents one of the best examples of valley clayplain forest in the state. The Lapin report identifies three rare and uncommon plant species found, which include a large population of rare broad beech fern (*Phegopteris hexagonoptera*), a small population of rare-uncommon loose sedge (*Carex laxiculmis*), and a small population of uncommon Gray's sedge (*Carex grayi*).

The elevation of Burns Woods ranges from 75m (246ft) to 80m (262ft). Burns Woods is a headwaters area for Thorp Brook, with a stream flowing through the center of the woods.

Historical Background

According to the Lapin report, this wooded area was at least partially open in the recent past, according to 1962 aerial photography. These open areas were used for agriculture into the middle or later decades of the 20th century. Because of this land-use history, the clayplain forest is in various stages of succession. The general age of Burns Woods was ascertained by coring several trees, which shows that the clayplain forest stand is approximately 100 years old.

In 2000, the Town purchased 54 acres of the former Burns property with the assistance of the Charlotte Land Trust, the Vermont Land Trust (VLT), and the Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV). In 2002, the Selectboard appointed a committee (called the Burns Property Committee) to undertake a public planning process for the future use of this property as required by an agreement with VLT and the PTV. This planning process was an extensive and broadly inclusive process that considered municipal and school needs, recreation and trails possibilities, affordable housing, conservation, and other identified community goals. The town of Charlotte Conservation Commission arranged an ecological assessment of the property in 2006 by Marc Lapin. The 2006 Lapin assessment is attached to this plan.

In February of 2015, The Town of Charlotte, PTV, and VLT entered into a Memorandum of Agreement about the future of the Burns Property. The signed MOA is attached as an addendum to this Plan. It was agreed upon in the MOA that the 22-acre Burns Woods portion would be conserved under a conservation easement held by VLT.

Vermont Land Trust Conservation Easement

The purpose of the Conservation Easement for Burns Woods as stated in the conservation easement:

1. *The principal objective of this Grant is to conserve biological diversity, native flora and fauna, wildlife habitat and the environments and ecological processes which support them, as those values exist on the date of this instrument and as they may evolve in the future*
2. *The secondary objective of this Grant is to provide opportunities for recreational education and limited silvicultural uses of the Protected Property and conservation of its scenic resources.*
3. *To advance these purposes by conserving the Protected Property because it possesses the following attributes:*
    a. *It contains a Natural Heritage site containing rate and unique forest communities including areas of Wet-Mesic Clayplain Forest, Very Wet Clayplain Forest, and Mesic Maple-Ash-Hickory-Oak Forest;*
    b. *It has ## acres of wetlands;*
    c. *It contains a headwaters area of and is traversed by ## feet of Thorp Brook, and ## feet of two unnamed tributaries of Thorp Brook;*
    d. *It contains habitat for several species, including the rare broad beech fern (Phegopteris hexagonoptera), uncommon loose sedge (Carex laxiculmis), and uncommon Gray's sedge (Carex grayi);*
    e. *It provides scenic views along two public highways: Greenbush Road and VT Route 7;*
    f. *It is in the vicinity of ## other properties previously protected by Grantee; and*
    g. *It contains trails or paths used by the public;*

A copy of the conservation easement is included as an addendum to this plan.

Importance of Burns Woods to the Town of Charlotte

The Charlotte Town Plan (2013) identifies the importance of both natural resources and recreational services, for which the Burns Woods serves both purposes.

The importance of natural resources are described as follows:
The Town of Charlotte is rich with natural resources. These resources are critical to the Town's rural character and the health and integrity of its environment. Natural resources which have been identified in the Town include forest lands, wetlands, critical wildlife habitat, groundwater (aquifers), surface waters, and special natural areas.

The importance of recreation is described as follows:
With the growing population, the demand for cultural and recreational services has been increasing. Both the type and amount of recreation facilities need to be expanded. As more land gets developed and posted against trespassing, lands traditionally accessible to Town residents for hunting, fishing, hiking, riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling are closed. The high cost of land, particularly along the shoreline, natural resource protection areas, soils and drainage constraints, and steep topography are affecting the ability of the Town to obtain new property for recreation facilities. Residential development also creates the demand for geographic distribution of recreation facilities; currently, recreation services are concentrated in the western section of Town.

Boundary Marking and Signage

The Burns property has been surveyed, and several corners are well-marked. If not completed sooner, the drafting of the comprehensive management plan should consider a plan for improved boundary marking. On the northeastern corner of Burns Woods, a mowed area and trail maintained by an adjoining landowner appear to encroach upon the town property. [insert approach when determined]

Public Access

The property is currently open to the public for pedestrian uses along the trail and in the woods. Members of the public can access the property from the eastern and western sides across Town-owned land that will be excluded from the area subject to the conservation easement. Parking is provided on the east side of the property and accessed from Route 7. Use of horses and bikes is currently allowed on the existing farm road. Hunting is currently not (?) permitted on the property. [true?] There are currently a few small signs marking the trails. A plan for improved signage and a trail map should be considered when drafting the comprehensive management plan.

Current Physical Improvements

The only existing improvements on the 22 acres include an existing farm road and loop trail. According to the conservation easement, the farm road may be resurfaced to conform to the "Town Link Trail" (stabilized base, landscape cloth, gravel surface), provided that such resurfacing and trail maintenance utilizes applicable best management practices and erosion control devices for roads and stream crossings as detailed in AMPs. The existing loop trail will be maintained as a footpath with compacted earthen surface only.

There is currently a water line that runs through Burns Woods from the existing well located on the eastern part of the parcel and excluded from the conservation easement. The line runs westerly across Burns Woods to the western side of the Burns Property. There is a 20-foot wide easement corridor centered on the existing water line for which maintenance and improvement can occur. The surface of the water line corridor is to be returned to prior conditions following any disturbance.

Proposed Physical Improvements

There are no proposed new physical improvements for the Burns property prior to the drafting of a comprehensive management plan.

Invasive Species

According to the Lapin assessment, there are three invasive plant species found in the Burns Woods, common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica)*, Morrow's honeysuckle (*Lonicera morrowii*), and Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*). Japanese barberry has the smallest population, with scattered individuals in various places. Buckthorn populations are scattered, with the highest populations in the northern part of the woods. Morrow's honeysuckle occurs in the greatest density, particularly along paths and in open patches. It would be beneficial to consider invasive species control, particularly of Japanese barberry, as it is shade-tolerant and can take over forest understory. It is also beneficial to consider ways to prevent further spread of invasive species.

Rare and Uncommon Species

As mentioned above, the property hosts three populations of rare and uncommon species: rare broad beech fern (*Phegopteris hexagonoptera*), rare-uncommon loose sedge (*Carex laxiculmis*), and uncommon Gray's sedge (*Carex grayi*). In his ecological assessment of the property, Lapin suggests that the most sensitive species in the woods is the broad beech fern, and he suggests that the sites with this species be monitored every two or three years for signs of decrease or encroachment from non-native plants. If such decreases are observed, Lapin recommends consulting the State Botanist. Lapin also recommends that the Gray's sedge population be monitored for the presence of invasive species in the vicinity. Similar to the broad beech fern, Lapin recommends that Gray's sedge be monitored on a 2-3 year cycle to assess population and threat status.

Management Plan Update

This plan serves as an interim management plan that should be updated within a year or so to a comprehensive management plan. No significant changes to the current management of the property will occur before the comprehensive plan is drafted, and the Plan will be amended prior to any subsequent major changes in management.

Contact List

The following is a list of important stakeholders of the Burns property and their contact information.

Town of Charlotte contact information needed

Vermont Land Trust
Cara Montgomery, Regional Stewardship Manager
Cara@vlt.org
802-861-6406

Attachments

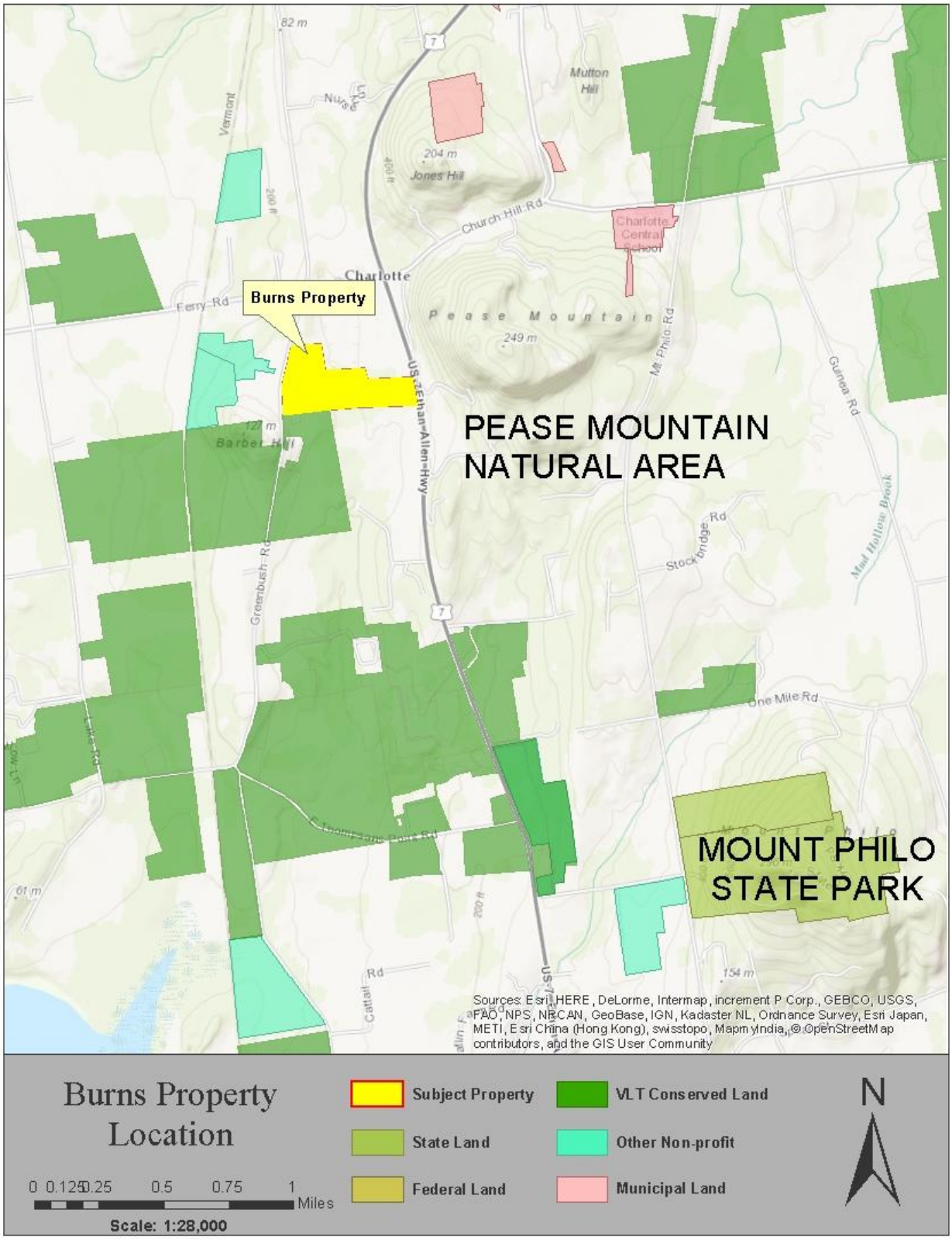
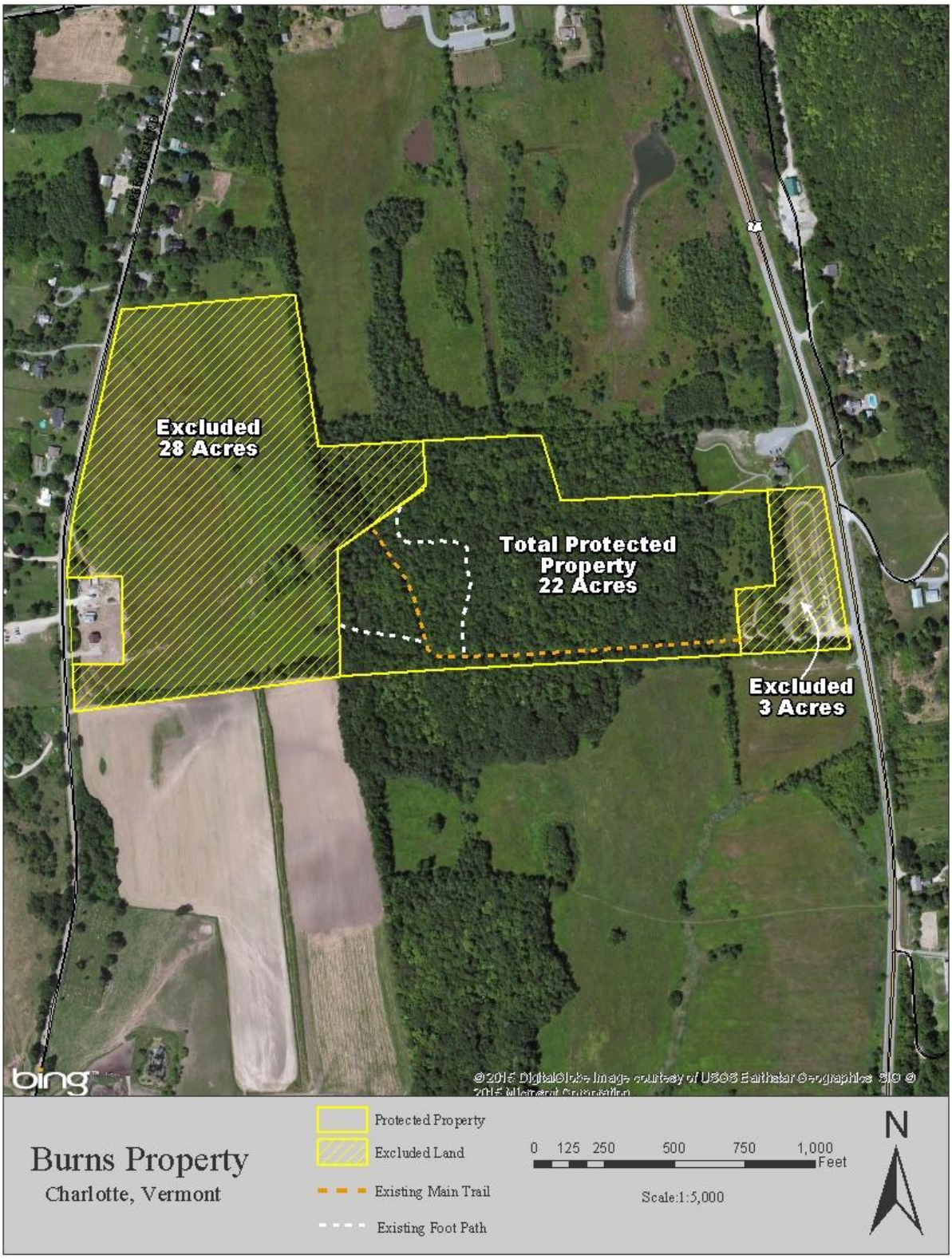
Locator Map
Property Map
Conservation Easement
Ecological Assessment and Management Recommendations, Marc Lapin, 2006 and Map
Memorandum of Agreement – Town of Charlotte, VLT, PTV, 2015

Interim Management Plan Approved:

_____ _____

_____, Town of Charlotte Date

Map A: Burns Property Location



Map B: Burns Property