

# Charlotte Park & Wildlife Refuge

## Notes on Management Plan Updates by section

### A. Overview of Park

Paragraph 1 - Stays the same

Paragraph 2 - Rewrote the park description to better reflect how the Park looks today. Added a sentence about how the Park is used.

Paragraph 3 – Added to include a description of the Thorp Barn in the management plan.

Paragraph 4 ('99 P. 3) - Added a sentence about invasives & why controlling them is a priority.

Paragraph 5 ("99 P. 4) - Added "ephemeral" and a sentence about Holmes Brook and the significance of water quality.

Paragraph 6 ("99 P. 5) – Added "designated trails" to equestrian use. Added a sentence about the self-guided trail, sign in sheet and illustrated nature guide.

Paragraph 7, 8 & 9 ('99 P6,7 &8) Has been replaced with a more detailed and accurate description of the wildlife on the property, as it exists today. Added ebird list of birds seen in park to Exhibit 2.

Paragraph 10 – Added to describe and highlight the diversity of plants, shrubs and trees in the park. The original Exhibit 5 (Recommended plantings for hedge rows, woodlands...) has been deleted and replaced with a list of plants found in the park – see exhibit list.

Paragraph 11 – Added a sentence noting the increased use of the Park.

### B. Management Structure

Paragraph 1 – Changed the tense of the paragraph. Example have to has. Took out the sentence related to Demeter Fund, the conveyance is complete.

Paragraph 2 – Took out day-to-day management by the Recreation Committee and added the description of the Oversight committee's make up.

Paragraph 3 – Assigned the day-to-day management of the Park to the Oversight Committee. Moved the make up of the committee up to paragraph 3 otherwise remains the same.

Paragraph 4 – remains the same.

### C. Management Issues renamed "Security & Other Provisions"

#### Security

Paragraph 1 & 2 – Took out reference to Advisory committee and replaced it with a paragraph about the Ordinance of Conduct – Exhibit 9.

### Hours /Daily Procedures

Paragraph 1, 2 & 3 – Changed Recreation to the Oversight Committee, took out the reference to the agricultural entrances, removed Recreation and Conservation from the list of key holders.

Paragraph 4 - Added a paragraph about guidelines for access from rt. 7.

### Trail Patrol - changes to Trail Inspection and Monitoring

Paragraph 1 Took out paragraph about the trail patrol and replaced with a description of the Oversight Committee's responsibility to monitor and patrol the trails and Park lands, formalizing the role that has evolved over time.

Emergency Guidelines – remains the same as 1999.

### Other Provisions

Paragraph 1 - remains the same

Paragraph 2 – added “except with permission”

Paragraph 3.- added use of authorized bicycles and other vehicles.

Paragraph 4 - replaced ordinance paragraph, which was moved to the top of this section with a description of the volunteer program managed by the Oversight Committee.

## A. Overview of the Park

The purpose of the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge (the "Park") is to preserve the Park lands in their undeveloped state, protecting the scenic vistas, biodiversity, and natural beauty of the property, while continuing some historic agricultural uses as appropriate; and to provide the residents of Charlotte and the general public with opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment, passive outdoor recreation and the study of nature. **Exhibit 1** is a map of the Park with management units noted.

The Park, located between U.S. Route 7 and Greenbush Road in Charlotte, Vermont, has been managed as an agrarian landscape for two hundred years. This approximately 290-acre property consists of both active agricultural fields and non-agricultural land. It is a significant wildlife habitat, with a good mosaic of forest, successional woodland, shrubland, meadows and wetlands. There are approximately 2.25 miles of gravel and clover trails winding through farm fields, meadows and woodlands. Additional hiking trails through the forested area in the southern portion of the Park and through the woodlands and wetlands in the western portion allow visitors to experience further the diversity of ecosystems that make up the Champlain Valley landscape. It is a popular place for riding horses, walking, hiking, bird-watching and nature observation in all seasons.

A farm barn (the "Thorp Barn") stands near the existing farm access road on Route 7. The oldest section of the barn, dating from the late 1700s, and subsequent additions reflect changes in agricultural practices in the Champlain Valley over the last 200 years.

The largely westerly exposed property is gently rolling to steeply sloped. Typical of the area, its soils are mostly clay based and therefore poorly to moderately drained. There are, however, some gentle slopes of moderate to well drained loam. The Park's open fields are intended to remain in agricultural use, thereby perpetuating its historical use and visual character. Many of the abandoned fields, reverting to shrub growth with successional hardwoods and pine, are being threatened by the aggressive growth of non-native invasive plants. In the past decade, control of these plants has been a priority, and the Park serves as a demonstration site for invasive plant management.

One of the Park's important aesthetic attributes is its panoramic views of the Green Mountains, Adirondack Mountains and Lake Champlain, particularly from viewpoints at the eastern extremities of the property and from U.S. Route 7. The highest elevation, at 428 feet, is located just west of Route 7 near Snowdrift Lane. As the property slopes down to the west its character changes from open agricultural lands to relatively mature woodlands grading to successional forests with several ephemeral streams flowing into a wetland near the western perimeter. The principal stream is a headwater tributary of Holmes Brook, which flows to Lake Champlain. Lake water quality, a major focus of State efforts, is an important function of the Park. The lowest point, at approximately 180 feet, is near the railroad overpass at the western edge of the property at Greenbush Road

The Park is designed to promote enjoyment of its natural and visual amenities. The network of trails is laid out for recreational use such as walking, hiking and cross-country skiing. Equestrian use is allowed on designated trails. Benches are located at scenic or other special sites. Scenic corridors along Route 7 have been protected for the benefit of motorists. A small parking area is located at Greenbush Road, in the southwestern corner of the property. Access to the trails and a self-guided nature walk, just over a mile in length, begins here. There is a visitor sign-in sheet and an illustrated nature guide available at the entrance.

As a designated “Wildlife Refuge” in this Champlain Valley landscape, it functions admirably. Wildlife species that benefit from this diverse mosaic of habitats are those that find food, water, safe cover, breeding and nesting/denning areas in the open fields, hedgerows, brushy areas, forests, forest edges, dead snags and wetlands that characterize the Park. Some species that have been seen or are expected in these habitat niches have been documented by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and are presented in **Exhibit 2**. A more comprehensive list of the avian species registered for this site at the Laboratory of Ornithology, Cornell University is also appended in **Exhibit 2**. Of particular interest are rare species of grassland birds (bobolink and savannah sparrow) that are nesting in some of the upper hay fields. A special management regime has been designated for these fields, and they are part of a Champlain Valley Grassland Bird Program that includes several neighboring properties.

The deer population is not excessive. Understorey damage has not been experienced, even though there is no hunting. Bobcat sightings are increasing. Beaver have recently returned to their traditional wetland. The Park is an important connectivity east-west link for animal movement from Pease Mountain and Mutton Hill, and for north-south linkage along the railway and transmission line corridor. More birds of prey are being seen. It has also just become known (2016) that the Park is one of the key locations as the easternmost shrinking range of the golden-winged warbler, and that it will host an Audubon research project.

To protect wildlife, no pets are permitted in the Park (ground-nesting birds as well as other types of wildlife are vulnerable to dogs, even on a leash), nor is hunting allowed except upon action by the Charlotte Selectboard.

The Park’s various habitats are home to a wide diversity of native plants. Dr Norman Pellet compiled the comprehensive list of woody plants outlined in **Exhibit 5**, in 1999. **Exhibit 5** is also a list of herbaceous plants found in the Park. This is being compiled and updated continually. To aid in addressing the significant problem of non-native invasive plants found in the park, a list is being developed that documents the plants as they are discovered (**Exhibit 5**).

In summary, the Park contains many types of habitat and an abundance of edge conditions. Due to the diminution of surrounding habitats by development, the Park will be increasingly important as a refuge for wildlife as expansion of the Burlington suburban area proceeds. The recreational use of the Park increases with each passing year making it a valued outdoor space for town residents and beyond

## **B. Management Structure**

The operating principles and governance structure for the Park were set forth in an executed Memorandum of Understanding dated May 9, 1997, between the Town of Charlotte and the Demeter Fund (**Exhibit 3**), which has functioned as an operational element of this plan. The governance of the Park consists of an Oversight Committee, appointed by the Selectboard, comprised of Charlotte citizens interested in the Park as well as representatives of municipal committees.

The Selectboard shall determine the number of Oversight Committee members and their length of service. To the extent feasible, members will include a representative of the Charlotte Selectboard, the Town Tree Warden, a Park neighbor, local equestrian trail rider, a member from of the Conservation Commission and Trails Committee. The Demeter Fund shall have the right to appoint a representative to the Oversight Committee.

The Oversight Committee shall conduct the day-to-day management of trails and other features of the Park. The Oversight Committee will be directly responsible for interpreting and revising, if necessary, the Management Plan, to recommend policy for the Park as circumstances warrant, and for managing the subcontractors working in the Park. The Selectboard shall approve Management Plan revisions. The Charlotte Selectboard will implement a lease program with local farmers. The management of the agricultural lease will be the responsibility of the Oversight Committee.

A conservation easement was imposed on the property prior to its conveyance to the Town of Charlotte. The easement restricts use to open space, agricultural, and specified non-commercial, recreational uses. The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) is the lead agency responsible for enforcing the terms of easement. Any physical changes to the Park require written approval in advance by the VLT, as set forth in the easement (**Exhibit 4**).

## C. Security & Other Provisions

### Security

A security program is essential to maintenance of public safety as well as the orderly use, physical integrity and appearance of the Park.

The Ordinance Regulating Conduct in the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge (**Exhibit 9**) was enacted to insure use of the Park “in a manner consistent with the goals of maintaining the Park as a wildlife preserve and for passive recreational activities that do not impact wildlife or the plant communities existing within the Park.” The Selectboard is responsible for enforcing the Ordinance.

Park rules will be posted at designated Park accesses. Park land will be legally posted against hunting, fishing and trapping.

### Hours/Daily Procedures

The Park will be open to the public year-round from 8 a.m. to 1/2 hour after sunset. The parking lot will be open, weather permitting, on the same schedule. Town personnel reporting to the Park Oversight Committee will conduct opening and closing the parking lot gate.

Typical daily security operations include:

1. Open gate at the Greenbush Road parking area at 8 a.m.
2. Lock gate at the Greenbush Road parking area 1/2 hour after sunset.
3. Pick up any trash debris in the parking lot area.

Keys to Park gates will be distributed to each of the following people: personnel responsible for daily opening and closing of the gate(s), a member of the Park Oversight Committee, a member of Charlotte Fire and Rescue, a designated person at the Town Offices. The farmer who holds the lease on Park agricultural lands will be given a key to gates at farm accesses.

Access from Route 7 is restricted to the following: emergencies, park maintenance and agricultural uses. Town permission is necessary to use any entrance off Route 7 for research and other Park related activities, for equestrian use, and for use by individuals with disabilities that prevent them from accessing the Park from the Greenbush Road parking area. The Park entrances located on Route 7 shall be closed and/or locked when not in use.

### Trail Inspection and Monitoring

The Park Oversight Committee is responsible for monitoring and patrolling the trails and Park lands. Close monitoring of Park maintenance by the Oversight Committee has taken the place of the “Trail Patrol” envisioned when the park was created. Maintenance issues should be addressed as soon as possible, and appropriate signage

displayed if trails or portions of the park are closed due to wet or deteriorated conditions.

### Emergency Guidelines

Emergency contact information and instructions will be posted at the Greenbush Road parking area. Protocols shall be developed with Charlotte Fire and Rescue for emergency procedures.

### Other Provisions

- Pets are prohibited throughout the Park.
- Except with Town permission, bicycles and all forms of motorized vehicles operated by the public shall be restricted to the parking lot off Greenbush Road.
- Authorized personnel are permitted to use bicycles and motorized vehicles throughout the park for security, emergency services, maintenance, and agricultural and woodlands management.
- A volunteer program initiated and managed by the Oversight Committee exists to support and augment the various activities including trail patrols, maintenance and clean-up.

**Table of Exhibits**

**Exhibit 1 (same as '99 plan) – Map of Park with management units noted on Page 1,**

**Exhibit 2 – (same as 1999) Correspondence from Agency of Natural Resources (we need most recent letter. List of Wildlife Species and added to exhibit updated bird list from ebird.) pg 2**

**Exhibit 3 – (same as 1999) Executed Memorandum of Understanding dated May 9, 1997 between Town and Demeter Fund.**

**Exhibit 4 – (same as '99) Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) Development Rights and Conservation Restrictions**

**Exhibit 5 – (Eliminate existing #5 - Recommended plantings for Hedge Rows...) replaced with the list of Woody and herbaceous Plants found in the Park. This exhibit is updated regularly. Pg 2**

**Exhibit 9 – Ordinance Regulating Conduct in Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge**