



Agreement for Shared Stewardship
Between
THE STATE OF VERMONT
and the
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE



This agreement for Shared Stewardship is hereby made and entered into by and between the State of Vermont and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service).

Introduction

The State of Vermont and the Forest Service have developed mutual commitments to advance Shared Stewardship in Vermont. Shared Stewardship provides a framework that unites state and federal land managers in addressing landscape-scale resource needs while respecting individual direction and commitments. This document:

- supports the national vision and framework for Shared Stewardship;
- represents a lasting commitment to partnership and collaborative approaches to management; and
- reaffirms the Parties' existing close and strong working relationship in managing Vermont's natural resources.

This document is not an authorizing tool. Rather, the Parties will rely on all available authorities to implement priority projects (including, but not limited to, Good Neighbor Authority, Farm Bill Authorities, and the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act). The Parties will identify specific authorities for actions prior to any project development and implementation, and based on availability of appropriations.

Background

Vermont is the "Green Mountain State" and is defined by its forests. The Green Mountain range embodies much of what is representative of Vermont's character and quality of life – healthy forested hillsides and valleys interspersed by farms and village communities. The Green Mountains serve as an abiding connection of Vermont's people to the land and heighten the strong sense of place held by so many.

Vermont's forested ecosystem forms the basis for biological diversity, natural communities, wildlife habitats, scenic landscapes, and recreational opportunities. As a natural resource, Vermont's wild and working forests provide an economic base for employment, tourism, and recreation and support a diverse forest products industry. Livable communities and our quality of life depend on healthy, sustainable forests, which have the capacity for self-renewal of their ecological productivity, diversity, complexity, and resilience. A healthy forest can meet the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations. With the myriad of values of and threats to Vermont's forests, the State of

Vermont and the Forest Service owe a special duty to act in ways that help conserve, protect, and enhance Vermont's forested landscape, communities, and rural economy.

Purpose

In August 2018, the Forest Service released a document outlining a new strategy for land management called *Toward Shared Stewardship Across Landscapes: An Outcome-Based Investment Strategy*. This new strategy responds to the urgent and growing challenges faced by forest managers and owners across the nation, such as catastrophic wildfire, invasive species, climate change, forest industry that needs wood fiber and policy/regulatory reform to remain competitive in the global economy, drought, epidemics of forest insects and disease, and increased and diversified demand for public recreational access and use.

Through Shared Stewardship, the State of Vermont and Forest Service have an extraordinary opportunity to work together to set landscape-scale priorities, implement projects at an appropriate scale, co-manage risks, share resources, and learn from each other while building long-term capacity. This approach helps meet the most pressing short-term needs and builds opportunities to achieve long-term outcomes. Shared Stewardship envisions an outcome-based investment strategy that has three core elements:

1. Determine management needs on a state level;
2. Do the right work in the right places at the right scale; and
3. Use all available tools for active, outcome-focused management.

Statement of Mutual Benefit and Commitment

This Shared Stewardship Agreement is intended to enhance our partnership by prioritizing the shared goals of conserving working forests, protecting forests from harm, and enhancing public benefits from trees and forests. The State of Vermont and the Forest Service will set broad priorities which address ecological risks and natural resource concerns across landscapes and take an integrated approach to prioritizing investments in locally led conservation where they will have the greatest impact. A collaborative approach that addresses ecological risks across different ownership boundaries and habitat types will have direct and positive effects on land management practices and the residents of Vermont.

To demonstrate our commitment to advancing Shared Stewardship in Vermont, the Forest Service and State of Vermont, in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policy, will:

- Actively and sustainably manage forests and conserve high priority forest ecosystems and landscapes.
- Prevent and/or co-manage ecological health risks and natural catastrophes.
- Protect and enhance water quality and supply.
- Maintain and enhance the economic benefits and values of trees, forests, and related natural resources, features, and processes.
- Protect, conserve, and enhance wildlife, fish habitats, including rare species and rare communities.
- Connect people to trees, forests, wildlife, outdoor recreation, and other natural resources and engage them in environmental stewardship activities.
- Advance natural resource strategies contained in Vermont's Forest Action Plan, Wildlife Action Plan, and the Vermont Conservation Design.

- Evaluate and execute opportunities to increase or improve public access and outdoor recreation.

Priority Focus Areas of Shared Interest and Action

The State of Vermont and the Forest Service commit to the following priority focus areas of interest and action to advance Shared Stewardship in Vermont:

- **Working Lands** – We are committed to unifying groups and efforts across the state so that we are engaged in a dialogue, learning about, and demonstrating and promoting -- active, ecological management, and desired landscape-scale outcomes, including capacity building for forest work and utilizing wood and other forest products for innovative, value-adding businesses and economic development.
- **Forest Health and Ecological Restoration** – We are committed to expanding our capacity for restoration by working with towns, communities, private landowners, user- and advocacy-groups, academic and research institutions, and our other partners to strengthen resilience of ecosystems across boundaries. Specific emphases will include protecting forest health and productivity; enhancing forest composition, structure, and growth; and understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on forest health and productivity and the helpful role of forests in mitigating climate change effects and conferring landscape resilience.
- **Sustainable Recreation** – We are committed to providing a diverse array of healthy and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities, favoring investments that leverage our limited resources and extend our capacity through integration and partnerships. This includes initiatives and projects that integrate and optimize silvicultural and forest management activities that enhance recreational access, infrastructure, and opportunity as well as collaborations with recreation groups to maintain and enhance opportunities across the state.

Statement of Mutual Understanding and Agreement

- The State of Vermont and Forest Service will communicate on a regular basis to enhance and develop the institutional arrangements necessary to facilitate the purposes of this Agreement;
- The State of Vermont and Forest Service will conduct business pertaining to this Agreement by means of in-person meetings, conference calls and video conferencing, or other means and, in each calendar year, will meet at least once in person to evaluate the progress on the Agreement and plan for continuing work in furtherance of this Agreement; and
- The State of Vermont and Forest Service celebrate the long-standing and successful relationship we have built. Through Shared Stewardship we will further advance our collaboration to the benefit of forests and the people of Vermont.

State of Vermont

Date: 10/07/21



Julie Moore
Secretary, Agency of Natural Resources
State of Vermont

United States Department of Agriculture

Date: _____

Randy Moore
Chief, Forest Service
United States Department of Agriculture