

May 5, 2022

**To: Hardwick Selectboard**

**From: Hardwick Conservation Commission**

**Re: Request for funding for a Natural Resources Inventory**

### **What is a Natural Resources Inventory?**

A Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) helps a community assess its wetlands, wildlife corridors and habitat, forest blocks, waterways, and rare and endangered species. This information is gathered both by experts and volunteers from Hardwick, and aggregated to provide an accurate map of local natural resources. Information is gathered on publicly-owned lands and only on private lands when the landowner is willing and has given permission.

Once the NRI is completed, this information can be made easily available to the town government, landowners, and citizens of the town. Good information about a town's resources is the foundation for good planning and conservation.

### **How does an NRI benefit the community?**

An NRI will enable Hardwick to make effective conservation efforts, protect and promote public health, and prepare for environmental changes with responsible development.

Citizens and landowners deserve an environment that provides healthy economic, social, and recreational opportunities that last for years. With an accurate map of the location and quality of resources, the people of Hardwick can continue to use resources without depleting them.

Information about sensitive wetlands, wildlife corridors and connectivity, and plant and forest communities can lead to conservation of these assets for use by all the Town's citizens into the future, while still allowing the Town to grow as needed. If the town needs a particular store, for example, but local hunters need an uninterrupted wildlife corridor, an NRI would enable the town to ensure that the need for the store is met without sacrificing the needs of the hunters. If the store is slated to be built on a site that may be affected by climate change, the town can begin conversations about either mitigation efforts or alternative building sites.

Awareness of the Town's resources can improve the relationships between local government and community members as well. As folks work together to collect good information, they can use it to directly benefit one another, so that farmers, landowners, fishermen, hunters, outdoor recreation users, local businesses, and all citizens see their lives improve immediately, and in years to come.

## **What does the Town Plan say about natural resources?**

Hardwick already recognizes the need for a Natural Resources Inventory. The following is taken from the current town plan.

*From Appendix A, Hardwick Municipal Plan, August 2019 (pages 45-46):*

### **"Natural Areas and Wildlife Resources:**

The Planning Commission and the Conservation Commission will support and provide guidance to any property owner with questions or concerns about their natural resources.

A Natural Resources Inventory should be conducted throughout Hardwick.

### **Water Resources:**

Public education and signage should be placed at all boat accesses and public accesses to notify the public of Eurasian Milfoil and other invasive species and how to protect the lake.

A wetland survey of the town should be conducted."

## **Budget and Timeline**

According to the VT Fish and Wildlife Department and the VT Association of Conservation Commissions, typical costs for a town-wide project range between \$15,000-20,000, usually broken into monthly payments. The on-the-ground process takes about a year, assuming that the organization completing it has late fall and winter to prepare.

### The Steps:

1. Decide on the scope of the NRI.
  - a. Based on public input, information gathered from the VT Agency of Natural Resources, local Land Trust officials, and other Conservation Commission projects, a Hardwick Natural Resources project would focus on water resources, wildlife connectivity and wetlands.
2. Advertise for bids, and select the appropriate bid.
3. Advertise the project to Hardwick's community.
  - a. The HCC will build public support for the project and organize volunteers to help collect information, particularly from landowners who may not know about the project, but want to participate.
4. Complete the NRI.
  - a. Remote mapping: remotely assessing natural communities, wetlands, and wildlife.
  - b. Field work: site visits to map natural communities, wetlands, and wildlife.
  - c. Report completion and presentation: Findings of the NRI are organized into a report. This report is then presented to the town and made available to all.