

Town Hall in the Woods: Community Forest Program



What makes a community forest?

- Community-driven planning, use, and management.
- Economic benefits flow to the local community.
- Permanent protection of the land.

The benefits of a community forest:

- Source of revenue and jobs from timber harvesting and tourism.
- Close-to-home recreational opportunities to enhance residents' health and quality of life.
- Outdoor classroom for local schools and education programs.
- Protect remaining natural areas from development.

Following the collapse of vital industries like timber, a desire to address climate change, and a decline in funding for resources like schools and fire departments – towns are turning to their public land to sustainably invest in the wellbeing of their communities. The Trust for Public Land works closely with northern New Englanders to help create Community Forests that reflect local values and fulfill residents' vision for the future.

"Tourism and timber are the two economic driving forces up here. We wanted to make sure we could practice sustainable timber harvest. And we wanted to maintain the character of the land for tourism, and make sure there was game in the woods and fish in the water. Now, all that's left to do is figure out how we're going to spend all this newfound wealth." -BILL FREEDMAN ON 13 MILE WOODS COMMUNITY FOREST IN ERROL, NEW HAMPSHIRE



The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

tpl.org

Hardwick Community Forest Opportunity: Buffalo Mountain

Location

The property being considered for acquisition to expand the existing town forest on Buffalo Mountain in Hardwick, Vermont is a 319-acre forest property south of Vermont Route 15 and containing the summit of Buffalo Mountain.

Community Benefits

- Preservation of an iconic natural landscape with the highest point in town near to and easily accessible from the village
- Proximity to the Elementary School provides an opportunity for outdoor educational programs
- Hiking, running, snowshoeing and other recreational activities improve community health
- Resources such as sugaring and timber harvesting can provide income to the town
- Conservation of Lamoille River corridor enhances flood resiliency
- Public access off of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and preservation of scenic views from the trail increase awareness of Hardwick as a recreation destination, bringing traffic to local businesses
- Public open space improves quality of life and attracts residents and visitors to the area, increasing long-term investment in town

Conservation Attributes

- Highest priority forest and connectivity block per Vermont Conservation Design
- Contains highest quality habitat for two bird species of Greatest Conservation Need: Canada Warbler and Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Much of the property has High Resilience and High Flow, according to The Nature Conservancy (TNC).
 - High Resilience means the property is more likely to sustain biodiversity and ecological function amidst climate change because it has diverse microclimates and landscape diversity.
 - High Flow means the property facilitates climate flow, enabling the movement of species and ecosystems in response to a changing climate
- Scenic views of Buffalo Mountain are central to the viewshed from Hardwick's village center

Partners

Proposed Landowner: Town of Hardwick

- Represented by Selectboard, Conservation Commission, and future Buffalo Mountain steering committee

Proposed Conservation Easement Holder: Northern Rivers Land Trust (NRLT)

Proposed Project Management Partner: Trust for Public Land (TPL)

Potential Timeline

June 2025

- Initial meeting with landowner
- Presentation to Hardwick Conservation Commission
- Hardwick Conservation Commission makes determination of support for Buffalo Mountain Community Forest project
- Individual outreach to Town Manager and Selectboard members begins by Conservation Commission and NRLT
- Individual outreach to community members to generate and assess interest

July 2025

- Hardwick Selectboard meeting, TPL and NRLT to present with support from Hardwick Conservation Commission and community members
- Post Selectboard Approval: TPL negotiates an option agreement with landowner to secure property while due diligence and fundraising are completed
- TPL contracts appraisal and title work

September 2025

- Receive appraisal: landowner decides whether or not to accept value and move forward with sale
- Contract ecological assessment

October 2025

- Establish steering committee, begin community outreach campaign
 - Could include community meetings, survey, site walks, other forms of outreach

Fall 2025

- Funding application due to Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- **November 15:** Funding application due to TNC's Biodiversity Protection Fund

January 2026

- Funding application due to State Forester for United States Forest Service Community Forest Program

Spring 2026

- Funding award notices

Summer 2026

- Complete environmental site assessment, baseline development report, and survey
- Complete stewardship and forest management plans
- Complete federal appraisal review if federal funds are involved

2027

- Acquire property and implement stewardship plan

Funding

Almost all of the funding for the acquisition, project costs, and planning will be fundraised by TPL and NRLT from public and private grants and philanthropic donors. As a result, the Town of Hardwick will gain a large town forest expansion at a very small fraction of the cost of the land.

It is essential to the success of a community forest that the community, as represented by the Town and by its residents, demonstrates investment in the acquisition and maintenance of the community forest. There is no exact dollar amount or percentage of costs that must be covered by a Town or its residents in order to demonstrate investment, but projects with some financial investment compete better for state, federal, and other private funding. Financial investment is seen as a representation of a community's enthusiasm for and long-term commitment to the community forest project.

Possible funding sources to support the acquisition of the Buffalo Mountain land include;

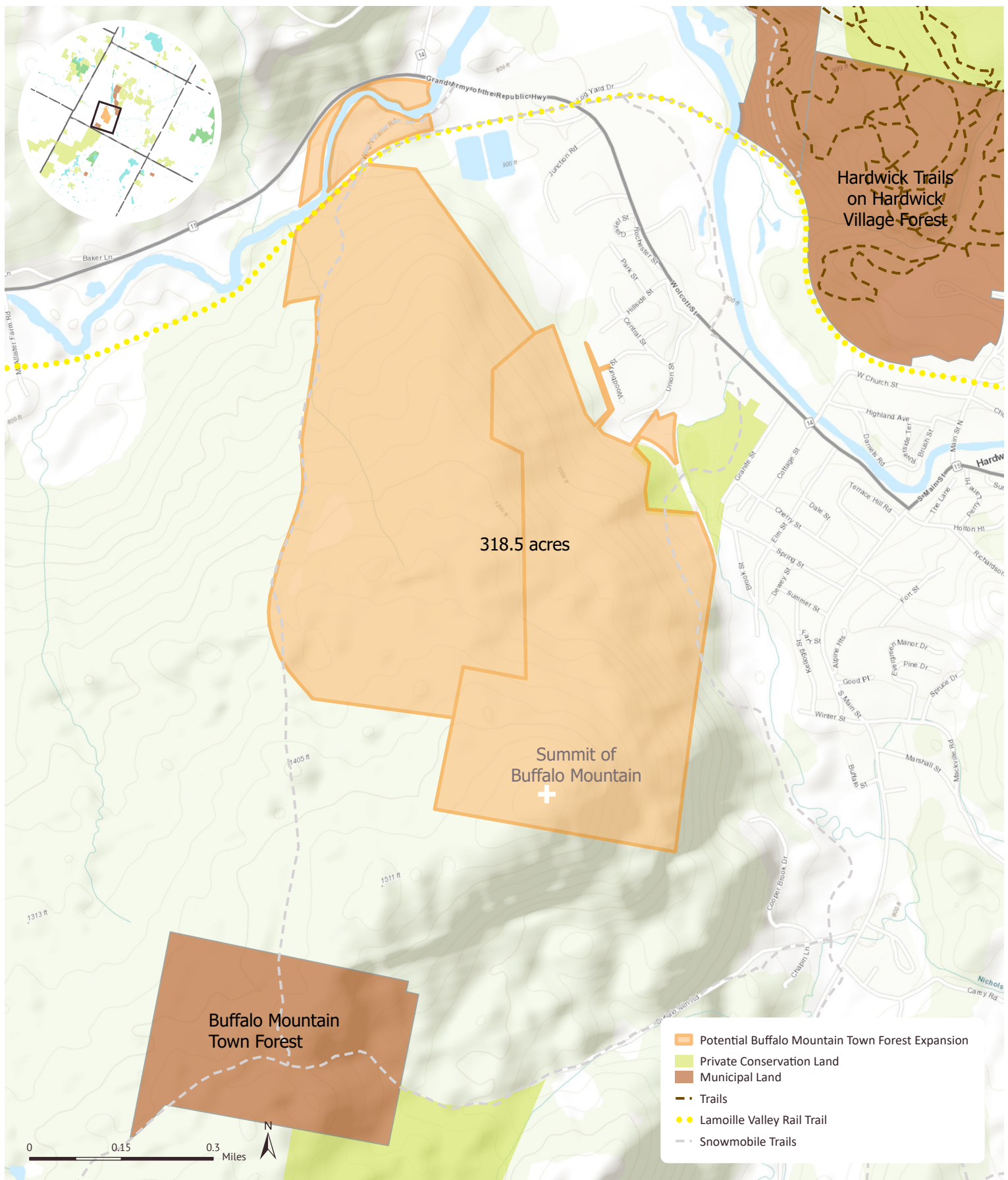
1. TNC's Biodiversity Protection Fund
 - a. Up to \$100,000 award
2. Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
 - a. Estimated award \$350,000
3. United States Forest Service Community Forest Program
 - a. Up to \$600,000 award, requires 50% match
4. Private foundations and individuals known to Trust for Public Land and Northern Rivers Land Trust

Resources

[The Town Forest Toolkit](#)

[TPL: 2021 Community Forest Economic Study Report](#)

[USFS Community Forest Program](#)



Potential Expansion of Buffalo Mountain Town Forest

Hardwick, Vermont

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