

S-000013432

Indoor Cultivator Tier 1 Small Cultivator Renewal

License Renewal

Approved

9/25/2025 9:36 AM

Renewal for Root to High Altitude

We will need to track the renewals on our own now. The State is not going to be sending us a notice about the renewals. We did ask for the complete list and we plan to start a shared tracking method (spreadsheet or similar document) to track the renewals so we know when they need to be addressed.

Email from Cannabis Board about renewals:

Hi Kristen,

Thank you for your email. New rules went into effect on 7/15/25 which states that "The Board will give notice to a local control commission upon receipt of a **new** application for licensure within its municipal borders". We are no longer notifying Local Control Commissions when we receive renewal applications, with the exception of an existing licensee who is moving to a municipality with a Local Control Commission.

Here is an excerpt of Rule 2.15 Municipalities:

Municipalities may regulate Cannabis Establishments to the extent permitted in 7 V.S.A. § 863. The Board will give notice to a local control commission upon receipt of a new application for licensure within its municipal borders.

To ensure coordination with the Board, municipalities must:

- (a) Notify the Board if they create or dissolve a local control commission. The Board will not require local approval as a condition of an application pursuant to 7 V.S.A. § 863(c) unless the Board has received notice of the creation of a local control commission from the municipality. The Board cannot recognize a local control commission that
 - i. does not operate as a public body with official minutes; or
 - ii. is situated in a municipality that has not adopted ordinances or bylaws.
- (b) Promptly transmit to the Board minutes recording any official action of a local control commission, including when a local control license is granted, denied, suspended, revoked, or conditioned.
- (c) Decide on grants or denials of local control licenses within 45 days of receiving an application. A delay of more than 45 days without a decision will constitute a presumptive grant of a local control license. This period may be tolled at the Board's discretion if the local control commission is communicating with the applicant about conditions the applicant must meet to be approved for a local control license.

If you would like us to provide you a list of the licensees in your municipality and the expiration dates, please let me know and I will email you a list.

TO: Hardwick Select Board

FROM: Kristen Leahy, Zoning & Floodplain Administrator / Resilience & Adaptation Coordinator and Tracy Martin, Community Development Coordinator

DATE: July 14, 2025

RE: Act 181 Implementation, Tier 1A/1B Planning, and Step 2 & 3 Center Designations

Good Afternoon,

Act 181 is a significant and evolving piece of legislation that reshapes Vermont's framework for community development, land use planning, and Act 250 permitting. We have been actively reviewing the changes and their implications for the Town of Hardwick, especially as they relate to our Designated Downtown, the East Hardwick Village Center, and surrounding growth areas.

Several components of Act 181 directly affect our current and future planning efforts:

I. Tier 1A and Tier 1B Designations (Act 250 Reform)

Act 181 introduces tiered Act 250 exemptions to promote housing and compact development in already-developed areas:

- **Tier 1A** provides a full Act 250 exemption within mapped areas of a Designated Downtown and its surrounding areas served by municipal water and sewer.
 - Only **three communities** in the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA – our regional planning commission) region are expected to apply for Tier 1A: **Hardwick, Newport, and St. Johnsbury.**
 - Hardwick **meets most eligibility criteria**, but two items still need to be addressed:
 - **Adoption of River Corridor protection standards** (currently under review by the Planning Commission as part of the Unified Development Bylaw update), and
 - **Incorporation of historical context** into our local rulemaking (we are developing a strategy for this requirement). Possible approaches include the following:
 - a) The municipality designated as a Certified Local Government community;
 - b) The municipality has adopted a local historic district in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4414(1)(F)
 - c) The municipality has adopted a design review district in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4414(1)(E) or comparable design regulations (including form-based code) that protects and enhances the historic character of the Tier 1A area
 - d) The applicant has executed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Division of Historic Preservation to provide binding recommendations for development applications seeking to alter significant historic resources.
 - The application period for Tier 1A is anticipated to fall between **January and July 2026**, and our Future Land Use Map (being developed by NVDA) will need to reflect this potential classification.
- **Tier 1B** provides a more limited Act 250 exemption specifically for qualifying housing developments.
 - Hardwick is eligible for Tier 1B in two areas:
 - Our **Designated Downtown** (as an alternative to Tier 1A if desired), and
 - The **East Hardwick Village Center.**

- Tier 1B offers a streamlined pathway for certain housing types but does not remove Act 250 jurisdiction entirely. The statute provides for an exemption for 50 units or fewer on 10 acres or less for housing and mixed-use development.

Kristen has contacted NVDA regarding their timeline for a Tier 1A/1B presentation to the Select Board. They plan to start in **Fall 2025**, once the final guidance for Tier 1A has been issued by the state. While we appreciate their coordination, we are concerned that this may not allow sufficient time for zoning or bylaw adjustments ahead of the 2026 application window.

As a proactive step, **we developed this initial presentation** for the Select Board to review independently. This provides an overview of Tier 1A and Tier 1B, outlines the requirements and benefits, and prepares the Board for the more detailed presentation from NVDA later this year.

II. Step 3 Center – Hardwick’s Designated Downtown

Under Act 181, Vermont has replaced the former Downtown and Village Center designations with a new “Step” classification system:

- **Step 1:** Historic settlement pattern, limited investment support.
- **Step 2:** Legacy Village Center or New Town Center status.
- **Step 3:** Former Designated Downtowns, with the highest level of recognition and program eligibility.

Hardwick’s **Designated Downtown** will automatically transition into a **Step 3 Center** once NVDA’s Future Land Use Map is approved by the State Land Use Review Board. No additional application will be required at this time, but additional criteria will need to be met by June of 2034 in order for Hardwick’s Downtown to maintain its Step 3 ranking.

Step 3 Center status allows continued access to:

- Downtown and Village Tax Credits
- Priority for infrastructure and streetscape funding (e.g., Better Connections)
- Historic preservation grants and technical support
- Streamlined permitting coordination and reduced duplication

This designation is separate from, but complementary to, the Tier 1A/1B Act 250 reform process. It reflects that our Downtown meets the highest standards for compact, walkable, service-supported development.

III. Step 2 Center – East Hardwick Village Center

The **East Hardwick Village Center** currently holds **legacy Village Center designation**, which under Act 181 translates into a **Step 2 Center** designation.

- Step 2 Centers retain access to core support programs such as tax credits, planning grants, and modest infrastructure assistance.
- East Hardwick is also **eligible for Tier 1B**, which provides potential Act 250 exemptions for qualifying housing developments.

- This designation underscores East Hardwick's importance as a secondary growth and investment center within the Town.

As the regional planning process advances, NVDA's mapping will help define East Hardwick's role within the broader land use and housing strategy.

IV. Next Actions and Recommendations

To ensure Hardwick remains prepared and positioned for both investment and regulatory flexibility, we recommend the following:

- **We will prepare an internal presentation** for the Select Board summarizing Tier 1A/1B eligibility and the transition to Step 2 and Step 3 Centers. (Done)
- **The Planning Commission will continue its work** on River Corridor protections and Unified Development Bylaw modernization.
- **We will coordinate with NVDA** to ensure the Future Land Use Map reflects our Downtown's readiness for Tier 1A, and East Hardwick's eligibility for Tier 1B.
- **We will explore tools and strategies** for promoting housing and resilience in both our primary and secondary centers.

Please share your thoughts, questions, or recommendations. We are committed to supporting a forward-looking, resilient planning strategy that leverages these new designations for the benefit of the Hardwick community.

Best Wishes,
Kristen Leahy
Tracy Martin



July 7, 2025

RE: Buffalo Mountain Town Forest

To the Hardwick Selectboard

Thank you for putting the Buffalo Mountain Town Forest discussion on the agenda for this week's meeting. Attached are two informational pieces about the project as Rachel Kane and I promised at the June 26 meeting.

Rachel and I will be joined at the meeting by Hannah Redmon from TPL and Jack Travelstead, chair of the NRLT Board of Trustees.

We look forward to talking with you on Thursday.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul A. Cillo".

Paul A. Cillo

Trustee

Northern Rivers Land Trust

Town Hall in the Woods: Community Forest Program



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.

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.

"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;

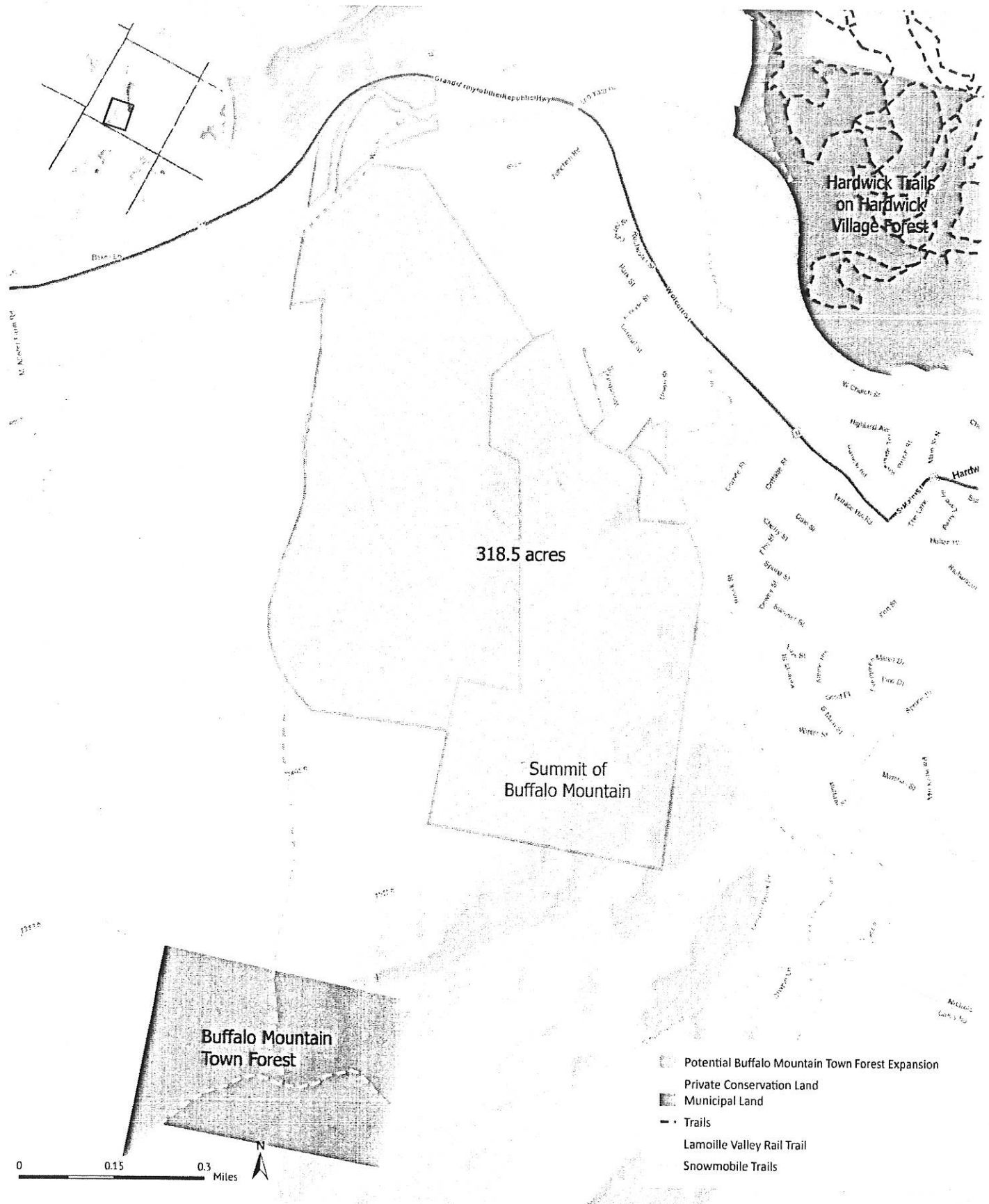
1. TNC's Biodiversity Protection Fund
 - a. Up to \$100,000 award
2. Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
 - a. Estimated award \$350,000
3. United States Forest Service Community Forest Program
 - a. Up to \$600,000 award, requires 50% match
4. Private foundations and individuals known to Trust for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

Resources

The Town Forest Toolkit

TPL: 2021 Community Forest Economic Study Report

USFS Community Forest Program

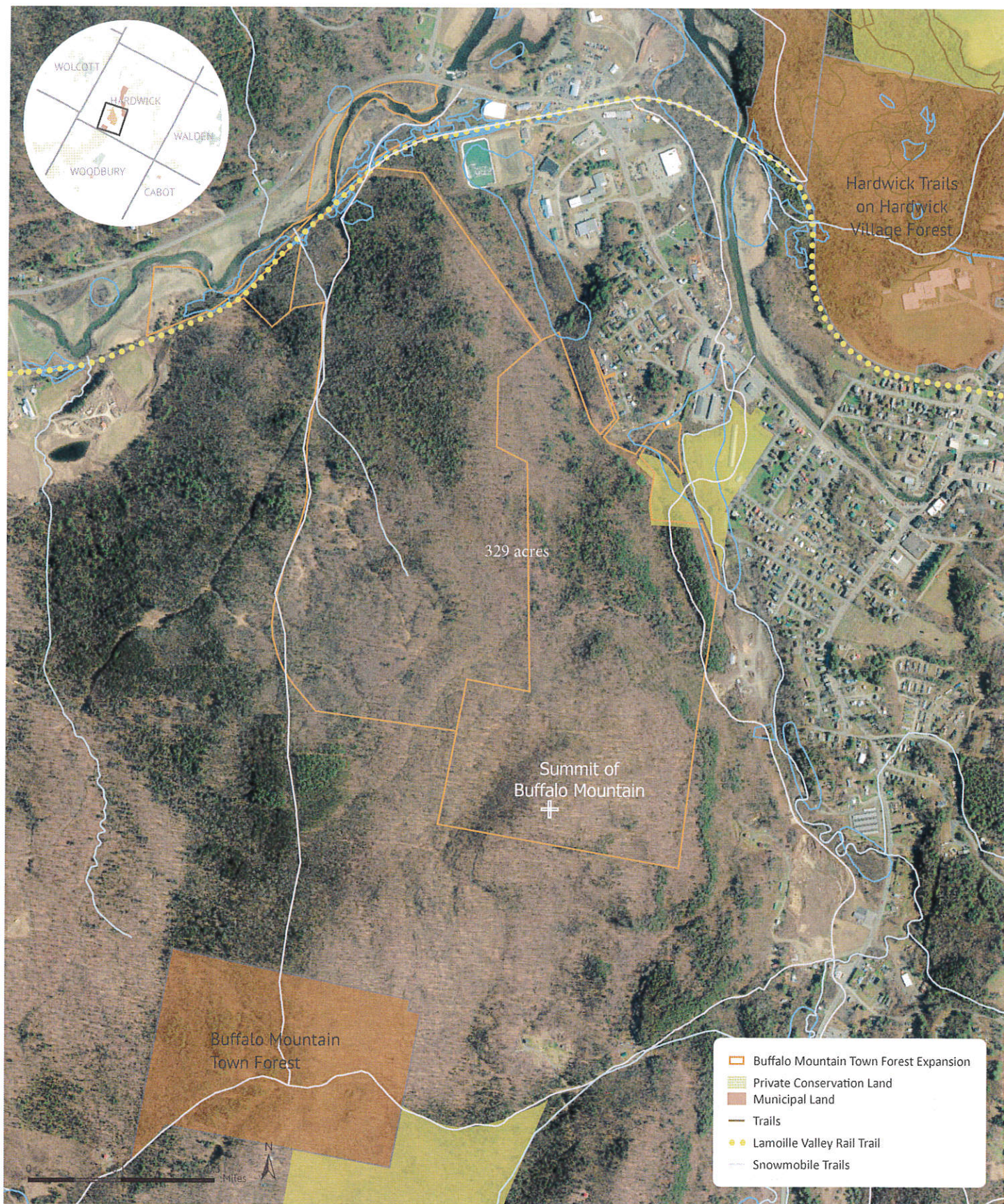


Potential Expansion of Buffalo Mountain Town Forest

Hardwick, Vermont

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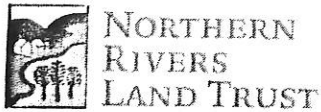


Expansion of Buffalo Mountain Town Forest

Hardwick, Vermont

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Proposed Buffalo Mountain Town Forest Expansion Frequently Asked Questions

Compiled by Hannah Redmon, Trust for Public Land

July 7, 2025

Introduction: The Town of Hardwick has the opportunity to acquire a 319-acre property to add to the existing Buffalo Mountain Town Forest. Trust for Public Land, Northern Rivers Land Trust, and the Hardwick Conservation Commission have begun a conversation with one of the landowners, Ken Davis, to discuss a possible conservation acquisition of the property.

Where is the property?

The proposed Buffalo Mountain Town Forest expansion consists of two adjacent parcels:

- 179 acres with frontage on either side of the Lamoille River and on either side of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, and access from the Wright Farm Road, which runs south along the western edge of the parcel, owned by Ken and Chris Davis.
- 140 acres containing the summit of Buffalo Mountain, with access from three roads in the village center, owned by Chris Davis.

Why does Hardwick need a new town forest? How does this benefit the community?

1. Recreational Opportunities

The proposed Buffalo Mountain Town Forest expansion offers not only close-to-home recreation, but also a place for people to engage with their community and connect with nature. The property is within walking distance of the town center, including the Town Office, the public library, Atkins Field, Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, Hardwick Elementary School and Hazen Union School, and the downtown businesses.

Recreation on the property will likely include walking, running, hiking, hunting, wildlife viewing, and other pedestrian activities, and could include mechanized uses such as mountain biking, if highlighted by the community as priorities. Recreational opportunities will be discussed in more detail during the management planning process.

The summit of Buffalo Mountain is located on the property. A 2018 community survey regarding the existing town lands highlighted expanding use of the existing 70-acre Buffalo Mountain Town Forest and clearing a viewpoint somewhere on Buffalo Mountain as priorities. While not contiguous to the existing town forest, the expansion property is less than 1/2 of a mile away, connected by Wright Farm Road, which is a public Class 4 road, to the existing Buffalo Mountain Town Forest.

2. Economic Development

Recreation and tourism are recognized statewide as the fastest growing and cleanest forms of economic development. Outdoor recreation is an important industry in Vermont, annually

generating \$5.5 billion in retail sales and services (accounting for 18% of gross state product), supporting 51,000 jobs, and creating \$505 million in state tax revenue. Creation of a new trail network on the property will not only provide close-to-home recreation opportunities for a healthy community but will also support this recreation and tourism economy. Other trail systems in Vermont have demonstrated benefits to the local economy. For example, the mountain bike trails at Blueberry Lake in Green Mountain National Forest bring in \$1.8 million annually to the Mad River Valley. The trails in the Barre Town Forest provide an estimated \$25,000 in annual recreational use cost savings to residents and \$130,000 of annual direct spending by visitors. Having more public land at the center of town will help attract new residents who are looking for a high quality of life, strong outdoor education programs for their children, and close-to-home recreation opportunities. See <https://www.tpl.org/community-forest-economic-case-studies> for more examples of the numerous economic benefits that community forests across the country provide to their local communities.

3. Educational Opportunities

The property's proximity to Hardwick Elementary School in particular provides opportunities for outdoor educational activities. Town ownership of this land will help kids develop an interest in science and math through connection with nature, set up patterns for an active, healthy lifestyle, and help build familiarity with and appreciation of nature and stewardship skills for the environment.

4. Natural Resource Protection

According to Vermont Conservation Design, the property is within a Highest Priority Interior Forest Block and within a Highest Priority Connectivity Block. With elevation ranging from 800 feet along the Lamoille River to over 1,500 feet at the summit of Buffalo Mountain, the property allows species to move up the elevational gradient as the climate changes. In a state with much of our conserved lands at high elevations, protection of lower elevation forests like these is a priority.

5. Timber Revenue

Forest management could take place on the property under the Town's ownership, which can support local resource-based jobs and provide periodic timber revenues to the Town. Working with the Caledonia County Forester and with public input, the Town can create a management plan that finds an appropriate balance between recreation, wildlife habitat, water quality protection and timber harvesting. A timber cruise will be done this fall, which will provide the timber capital value and potential economic gain to the town. If desired, the Town can also choose to lease a portion of the forest for sugaring, which could also bring in regular revenue.

6. Health Benefits

Protection of the property will contribute to the health of local and regional residents by providing a close-to-home destination for outdoor recreation. Having public land close to population centers is important not only to the physical and mental health of the community but having protected areas within walking or biking distance reduces car travel, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the accidents and stress that are by-products of driving. Future trails on the property, in addition to the Class 4 road and the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, could help encourage walking and bicycling.

What is the status of the negotiations to buy the land?

Currently, the land is listed for sale on the open market. Ken Davis has met with representatives of the Hardwick Conservation Commission, Trust for Public Land (a national land conservation organization), and Northern Rivers Land Trust (a local land trust) and is open to a town purchase of his and his brother's property, but if another buyer comes along before an agreement can be reached, the landowners must consider other offers.

How would Town ownership work?

The Town of Hardwick would acquire the property subject to a conservation easement held by the Northern Rivers Land Trust (NRLT). If funds from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) were used as part of the acquisition, VHCB would co-hold the easement. This easement would ensure that the property would be protected as forestland and open land, and that wildlife habitat, public access, and water quality would be protected in perpetuity. Specific easement terms will be determined by the town, Trust for Public Land (TPL), Northern Rivers Land Trust, and either VHCB or other funders. Sustainable timber harvesting would be allowed which could improve forest health and wildlife habitat or, if desired, be a source of income for the town.

The Selectboard has the ultimate authority over the town forest and management decisions for the land. TPL and NRLT recommend that the Town form a steering committee to guide the development of the management and use planning for the town forest. The steering committee would be responsible for engaging community input and creating a draft management plan for the Selectboard.

How will property be managed?

The uses allowed and management conducted on Buffalo Mountain Town Forest will be determined by the community within the broad allowances of the conservation easement. A management plan will be created by the Town with help from Trust for Public Land, the Caledonia County Forester and the Northern Rivers Land Trust, with significant public input. Based on initial discussions, and requirements of the proposed funding sources and easement holders, the Town Forest could be managed for multiple uses, including recreation, sustainable timber harvesting, watershed protection, education, community food forests, carbon sequestration, climate resiliency, and wildlife habitat.

Will hunting, fishing and trapping be allowed in the town forest?

The property will be conserved with a conservation easement that requires that the property be open to the general public for all types of noncommercial pedestrian recreational and educational uses, including birdwatching, cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, swimming, trapping, walking, and wildlife observation. However, the community may choose to limit or restrict public access to protect public safety or natural habitats (including the right to permit, regulate, or prohibit fishing, hunting, and trapping).

Should the Selectboard approve the project and an agreement be reached between the landowner and the project partners, a town forest stewardship committee will draft a management plan, using input gathered from the community, the county forester and staff from Department of Vermont Fish &

Wildlife. That committee will make recommendations to the Selectboard. The Selectboard has the ultimate authority over management decisions for the town forest. The management plan will be revised and updated over time. We encourage the public to be involved and share opinions on use and management of the town forest once the management planning process starts.

What other restrictions would there be on the land?

The property will be encumbered with a conservation easement requiring that wildlife habitat, public access, water quality, and cultural resources be protected, with final language agreed upon by the Town, Trust for Public Land, Northern Rivers Land Trust (NRLT), and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) and other funders. A town forest management plan must be approved by NRLT, VHCB, and the county forester.

Can the town log the property?

Yes, the Town can choose to harvest wood on the property. Sustainable timber harvesting for forest management purposes could provide Hardwick with periodic income, which could be rolled back into improvements to the property. The property may also be tapped for maple syrup. Other towns that have acquired productive timberland find that the revenue from periodic harvests can be used to fund special projects after any debts have been satisfied. Some towns make firewood available from their town forest to low-income families. Under the terms of the easement, the Town would be required to work with a professional forester to develop a forest management plan prior to any proposed harvests. A management plan may include provisions for logging restrictions in certain areas. Other possibilities include a community orchard or "food forest," which could include fruit and nut trees, berries, mushrooms, and more. There may also be scientific research opportunities for students of all ages.

How much will this property cost, and where will the funding come from?

The purchase price will be the fair market value of the land as determined by an independent appraiser. As soon as the Town approves the acquisition and the property is under option agreement, Trust for Public Land (TPL) will hire an independent appraiser to appraise the property. Currently, the property is listed at \$545,000.

Other costs associated with the project are estimated to total \$230,000, including title work, survey, appraisals, timber inventories, environmental investigation, legal costs, TPL staff costs, community forest program reinvestment, management endowment for the town forest, and a stewardship endowment for Northern Rivers Land Trust to monitor the conservation easement in perpetuity.

Depending on the community's desired outcomes for the property, there will be costs and additional funding opportunities associated with trail construction, signage, habitat restoration, or other recreation or natural resource-related activities.

The total estimated cost, just for the acquisition, before any specific improvements or management activities are budgeted, is \$775,000.

This is a long-term investment in the Town's future. Regarding the Town's contribution, there is no exact dollar amount or percentage of project costs that must be covered by the Town or its residents in order to demonstrate investment. Funding requests from federal, state and private sources are much more successful if the Town has shown financial commitment to the project. TPL, with cooperation from a local fundraising committee, will raise the remaining funds for the purchase and the transaction costs from a mix of federal, state, and private sources.

Has any money been committed to the project already?

Currently, the project is in its early stages, and funding has been neither requested nor committed. Once the Selectboard has approved the project and Trust for Public Land has negotiated a preliminary agreement with the landowners, fundraising will begin.

How will this acquisition affect property taxes?

Once municipally owned, the property would be taken off the tax rolls, and based on the preliminary numbers from the 2025 town-wide reappraisal the grand list would decrease by \$4,626. The annual municipal tax loss from this property resulting from the expansion of the Town Forest is estimated to be approximately \$5,000. The creation of open space has been clearly documented to increase resale values of homes adjacent to the conserved land. Nearby property owners will benefit from higher property values when they sell their homes and the town will benefit from an increased tax base, over time. According to a 2001 survey by the National Association of REALTORS® by Public Opinion Strategies, 50 percent of respondents said they would pay 10 percent more for a house located near a park or open space. Lastly, a town forest with a trail network that connects to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail would likely attract new residents and new businesses.

How about the long-term responsibility and cost of maintaining the property?

The Town will be responsible for maintaining the property, with assistance from volunteers for specific activities. The Town is eligible for public grants to create new trails or infrastructure such as a parking lot or natural resource projects such as stream bank restoration. The project budget includes \$20,000 for a town forest management endowment, controlled by the Town, to be used for the maintenance and improvement of the property for public use.

When will this acquisition happen?

If the Town and Trust for Public Land are able to secure the necessary funding, the property could be conveyed to Town ownership in 2027.

Are there any environmental issues with the property?

Prior to acquiring the property, there will be a thorough investigation by a professional firm assessing any environmental issues or title problems like old rights of way or mineral rights controlled by third parties. Under the terms of the contract, the property must not have any significant defects in order for the acquisition to go forward. The results of the environmental and title investigations will be made available to the Selectboard prior to the commitment of any funds.

What happens if the Town does not purchase the property?

If a conservation outcome fails, the landowners would likely put some or all of the property back on the market, and it could be fragmented or restricted from public access. Fragmentation has been characterized as the dominant regional stressor on Vermont's forests. Erosion of the health of Vermont's forests through fragmentation has serious ecological, economic, and cultural implications for landowners and communities. Fragmentation leads to loss of biodiversity; increases the incidence of invasive plants, pests, and pathogens; and reduces water quality. Reducing forest fragmentation where possible now will create more resilient, adaptable forests for the future. Fragmentation and conversion of forests not only decreases resiliency to floods and climate change; it also limits public access, degrades wildlife habitat, decreases human health and well-being, and forever alters the landscape.

What are the roles of Trust for Public Land and the Northern Rivers Land Trust?

Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national non-profit land conservation organization with a mission of conserving land for people. TPL is leading the real estate negotiations, due diligence and fundraising for the land acquisition. TPL has considerable expertise in real estate, law, finance, and fundraising in support of purchasing conservation land for public agencies and municipalities. TPL operates a community forest program in New England that assists towns in the creation of new municipally owned forests. TPL has successfully created new community forests in Wolcott, Williston, Hinesburg, West Fairlee, Barre Town, West Windsor, and Huntington, Vermont and in Errol, Freedom, Randolph, Milan, and Meredith, New Hampshire, among other places. Please see tpl.org/our-work/community-forests for more information.

The Northern Rivers Land Trust is a non-profit conservation organization serving the towns of Hardwick, Woodbury, Walden, Wolcott, Albany, Greensboro, and Craftsbury. They are dedicated to protecting the natural, scenic, and working landscapes in the headwaters of the Winooski, Lamoille, and Black Rivers and are excited to engage with the Hardwick community on the expansion of the Buffalo Mountain Town Forest. The Northern Rivers Land Trust will hold the conservation easement (or potentially, co-hold the easement with Vermont Housing and Conservation Board) in perpetuity. NRLT will assist with creation of the management plan, monitor the easement annually, and work cooperatively with the Town to ensure the conservation values of the property are protected.



Town of Hardwick
Office of the Zoning and Floodplain Administrator
P.O. Box 523
Hardwick, Vermont 05843
phone: (802) 472-1686
e-mail: zoning.administrator@hardwickvt.gov

July 10, 2025

Hardwick Select Board

Re: Buffalo Mountain Land Acquisition – Planning Commission Support

Dear Select Board Members,

Please accept this letter of support from the Hardwick Planning Commission regarding the Hardwick Conservation Commission's exploration of acquiring the Davis property on Buffalo Mountain. Retention of this property would advance several of Hardwick's long-standing goals in conservation, flood hazard mitigation, and recreation, as articulated in our planning documents.

This proposed acquisition aligns with the following sections of the Hardwick Municipal Plan:

- *"Maintain and enhance the abundance and diversity of game and non-game wildlife in Hardwick." (p. 24)*
- *"Critical wildlife habitat should be protected from development and other uses that threaten the ability of the habitat to support its species." (p. 24)*
- *"Flood plains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be protected and restored." (p. 28)*
- *"Core habitat areas and interconnecting links (e.g. wetland areas, riparian zones, and travel corridors) are to be preserved." (p. 24)*
- *"The town supports the efforts of organizations in the purchase of development rights and other conservation methods provided the land protected meets the objectives of this plan." (p. 22)*
- *"Continue to protect and expand access to local natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities." (Recreation section)*

The proposed exploration of this opportunity complements other flood resilience and conservation efforts across the region. The current Hardwick Town Plan is available at www.hardwickvt.gov.

Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact me if further information is needed.

Sincerely,

Kristen Leahy, Zoning & Floodplain Administrator
On behalf of the Hardwick Planning Commission

Town Manager's Office
Town Clerk's Office
Town Highway Department

David Upson, Jr.
Tonia Chase
Tom Fadden

(802) 472-6120
(802) 472-5971
(802) 472-6029

Town of Hardwick

Date: June 24, 2025

To: Hardwick Select Board

From: Kristen Leahy, Zoning and Floodplain Administrator | Resilience & Adaptation Coordinator

Subject: Policy Support for Land Acquisition – Buffalo Mountain, Floodplain Protection, Recreation Access, and Multi-Use Conservation

Dear Select Board Members,

This memo provides planning and ecological justification for the acquisition or permanent protection of land in the Buffalo Mountain and Lamoille River floodplain area. The proposal advances key community goals identified in the 2019 Hardwick Municipal Plan and the 2024 Ecological Inventory of Hardwick, Vermont, as well as the 2018 Hardwick Recreation Plan. The proposal supports conservation, flood resilience, habitat connectivity, and public recreation.

Ecological and Community Significance

Buffalo Mountain is recognized as one of the most ecologically significant areas in Hardwick. It supports multiple natural communities and a high degree of biodiversity (Ecological Inventory, pp. 40-42). The adjacent Lamoille River floodplain plays a vital role in reducing flood impacts, filtering water, and maintaining landscape-level habitat connectivity (pp. 44-46). These areas together present a rare opportunity to protect a landscape that contributes to public safety, environmental health, and outdoor access.

Forest Habitat, Wildlife Corridors, and Recreation Potential

Buffalo Mountain forms part of one of the largest and most intact forest blocks in the region, providing essential habitat and movement corridors for wildlife (Ecological Inventory, p. 21-24). The area also offers outstanding potential for low-impact public recreation, including trail expansion, nature observation, and scenic access. The Ecological Inventory recommends developing management strategies that balance ecological protection with recreational access (pp. 30).

The Hardwick Recreation Plan reinforces this potential, identifying Buffalo Mountain as a high-priority area for future trail planning and public access (Recreation Plan, p. 30). The Plan emphasizes that residents value nature access and support conservation strategies

that allow for passive recreation such as hiking and snowshoeing while protecting sensitive natural resources (Recreation Plan, pp. 7-9).

Alignment with the 2019 Hardwick Municipal Plan

The Municipal Plan offers strong policy support for this initiative, including the following policies and goals:

“Maintain and enhance the abundance and diversity of game and non-game wildlife in Hardwick.” (p. 24) “Critical wildlife habitat should be protected from development and other uses that threaten the ability of the habitat to support its species.” (p. 24)

- **“Flood plains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be protected and restored.” (p. 28)**

- “Core habitat areas and interconnecting links (e.g. wetland areas, riparian zones, and travel corridors) are to be preserved.” (p. 24)

- “The town supports the efforts of organizations in the purchase of development rights and other conservation methods provided the land protected meets the objectives of this plan.” (p. 22)

- “Continue to protect and expand access to local natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.” (Recreation section)

Recommendation

The protection of land in the Buffalo Mountain–Lamoille River corridor represents a strategic opportunity to achieve multiple goals: flood hazard mitigation, biodiversity protection, forest conservation, habitat connectivity, and public recreation. This initiative is strongly supported by the 2019 Hardwick Municipal Plan, the 2024 Hardwick Ecological Inventory, and the 2018 Hardwick Recreation Plan. I recommend that the Town explore partnerships with land trusts, recreational organizations, and grant funding sources to pursue this opportunity.

Best regards,

Kristen Leahy

Zoning and Floodplain Administrator

Resilience & Adaptation Coordinator

Town of Hardwick

2025-2026 Sewer Revenues

	<u>2023-2024</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>2024-2025</u> <u>Budget</u>	<u>2025-2026</u> <u>Proposed</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>%</u> <u>Diff.</u>
Interest/Misc Income (includes debt forgiveness & ins*)	\$1,921,446	\$4,000	\$7,000	\$3,000	0.00%
Penalties & Interest	\$6,261	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$0	0.00%
General & Water Transfers	\$1,920	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$0	0.00%
Sewer Charges	\$456,099	\$540,192	\$582,725	\$42,533	7.87%
TOTALS	\$ 2,385,726	\$553,277	\$598,125	\$44,848	8.11%

FY26 Expense Budget: \$598,125

debt forgiveness shows as revenue but isn't cash coming in & insurance proceeds/grant are one time to offset expenses we had

2024-2025 BUDGET

<u>Quarterly Allocations</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>New Annual</u> <u>Rates</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Quarterly</u> <u>Rates</u>	<u>Old</u> <u>Annual</u>
Unmetered	69	\$600.00	\$41,400	\$150.00	\$558.00
Residential (8,000)	347	\$522.00	\$181,134	\$130.50	\$462.00
Commercial Low Users (8,000)	77	\$522.00	\$40,194	\$130.50	\$462.00
Commercial/Residential (20,000)	33	\$1,084.00	\$35,772	\$271.00	\$960.00
Commercial (25,000)	19	\$1,430.00	\$27,170	\$357.50	\$1,270.00
Industrial (40,000)	7	\$2,140.00	\$14,980	\$535.00	\$1,940.00
Institutional Rate	2	\$13,000.00	\$26,000	\$3,250.00	\$13,000.00
Sewer Off Rate	33	\$240.00	\$7,920	\$60.00	\$240.00
Residential Gallons over 8,000 MS1	2,500,000	\$0.0180	\$45,000		
Commercial Low Over 8,000 BCS1	500,000	\$0.0180	\$9,000		
Res/Commer Gallons over 20,000 BCS2	2,250,000	\$0.0180	\$40,500		
Commercial Gallons Over 25,000 BCS3	1,000,000	\$0.0180	\$18,000		
Industrial Gallons Over 40,000 BIS1	2,950,000	\$0.0180	\$53,100		
		Base charges	\$374,570		
		Usage charges	\$165,600		
Total estimated users	587		\$540,192		

2025-2026 BUDGET

<u>Quarterly Allocations</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>New Annual</u> <u>Rates</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Quarterly</u> <u>Rates</u>	<u>Old</u> <u>Annual</u>	<u>Annual</u> <u>Increase</u>	<u>%</u>
Unmetered	62	\$622.00	\$38,564	\$155.50	\$600.00	\$22.00	0.04
Residential (8,000)	352	\$556.00	\$195,712	\$139.00	\$522.00	\$34.00	0.07
Commercial Low Users (8,000)	77	\$556.00	\$42,812	\$139.00	\$522.00	\$34.00	0.07
Commercial/Residential (20,000)	34	\$1,160.00	\$39,440	\$290.00	\$1,084.00	\$76.00	0.07
Commercial (25,000)	18	\$1,530.00	\$27,540	\$382.50	\$1,430.00	\$100.00	0.07
Industrial (40,000)	9	\$2,280.00	\$20,520	\$570.00	\$2,140.00	\$140.00	0.07
Institutional Rate	2	\$13,200.00	\$26,400	\$3,300.00	\$13,000.00	\$200.00	0.02
Sewer Off Rate	31	\$240.00	\$7,440	\$60.00	\$240.00	\$0.00	0.00
Overage Gallons	9,450,000	\$0.0195	\$184,275	usage increasing from \$.018 to \$.0195			
		Base charges	\$398,428				
		Usage charges	\$184,275				
Total estimated users	585		\$582,725				

revenue \$179,103 in FY25

9,950,000 gallons

Town of Hardwick FY 2026 Budget Update Through 09-30-2025

Revenues:

Overall, revenues from the General Fund are on track to meet the budget.

The tax revenue shows over 100% because we have not paid the school their portion yet. The budget amount is what the Town expects to receive after paying the schools and the actual amount that you see below is a "billed" amount that has not been all collected.

If we estimate that the Town has collected 25% of our *expected* tax revenues (25% of \$3,799,474), the overall percentage would be at about 30%. Therefore, we are slightly ahead of schedule for revenue. Revenue is ahead of schedule due to the FEMA grant revenue of almost \$110,000. This is of course a reimbursement from expenses we had in the last fiscal year.

We would expect revenues to be at about 25% at this point in the fiscal year. Grant revenue is over budget due to a Municipal Planning grant and receiving funds from the 2024 flood that we deferred in FY25 and the funds came in this year. Other revenue is over due to interest income, which will be redistributed at year end to other funds, such as capital, cemetery, water, sewer, etc.

Town of Hardwick Revenue Summary			
Department	Budget	Actual	% Collected
Tax Revenues	\$3,799,474	\$6,998,092	184.19%
Office Revenues [Licenses, Recordings, etc.]	\$40,250	\$11,831	29.39%
Highway Revenues	\$195,476	\$45,553	23.30%
Police Revenues [Tickets, Grants, etc.]	\$41,150	\$5,922	14.39%
Grant Revenue - Other	\$400	\$12,558	3139.48%
Other Revenue [Misc, Interest, W/S Transfers]	\$394,963	\$223,173	56.50%
	\$4,471,713.00	\$7,297,128.72	163.18%

Expenses:

Overall, total expenses are at 23.27% when we would typically expect them to be at about 25%. County taxes and gravel pit taxes are not due until November. Appropriations are being paid as organizations submit their requests.

Trails is over budget by about 10% just because they have paid out expenses for one-time events – nothing to be concerned about. This is very nominal considering the total of their overall budget. All other departments are on track with where they should be at this time of the budget year. We are on track to meet our expense budget.

Town of Hardwick Expense Summary				
Department	Budget	Actual	\$ (Remaining) or Over Budget	% Used
Office [Clerk/Manager/Supplies, Etc.]	\$815,189	\$176,927	(\$638,262)	21.70%
Other Payroll [Stipend employees, etc.]	\$108,569	\$21,223	(\$87,346)	19.55%
Buildings	\$66,767	\$9,245	(\$57,522)	13.85%
Police Department	\$1,014,585	\$202,613	(\$811,972)	19.97%
Fire Department	\$61,421	\$9,767	(\$51,654)	15.90%
Highway Department	\$1,121,981	\$273,858	(\$848,123)	24.41%
Flood Expenses	\$0	\$44,622	\$44,622	100.00%
Rescue Squad	\$96,472	\$0	(\$96,472)	0.00%
Appropriations	\$53,961	\$19,561	(\$34,400)	36.25%
County & Gravel Pit Taxes	\$36,008	\$0	(\$36,008)	0.00%
Line Items	\$1,064,772	\$278,135	(\$786,637)	26.12%
Recreation	\$20,412	\$620	(\$19,792)	3.04%
Trails	\$11,577	\$4,060	(\$7,517)	35.07%
	\$4,471,714.00	\$1,040,633.67	-\$3,431,080.33	23.27%
<i>Without Flood</i>	\$4,471,714.00	\$996,012.15	-\$3,475,701.85	22.27%