

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

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