



FORESTS, PARKS & RECREATION  
**VERMONT**



AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Worcester Range Management Unit Planning: Role of Public Input

OLIVER PIERSON, DIRECTOR OF FORESTS  
DRAWN LARGELY FROM WORK OF ANR BARRE STEWARDSHIP TEAM  
FEMC CONFERENCE 12/12/24



WELCOME

# Democracy or expertise? Objectivity as an elusive ideal in the resolution of a Vermont land use dispute

Thomas H.N. Young, GeoJournal (2011) 76:401–415



Focusing on a case in northern Vermont, it considers two different approaches to resolving conflict: reliance on a democratic process and turning decision making over to experts.

Attempts to implement these approaches were dogged by controversy. Both approaches rely on unexamined notions of objectivity that obscure the decisive role of underlying values.

On one hand, the standards by which to judge the effectiveness of democratic processes were a source of conflict, both in the designation of decision-making authority and in the definition of the constituency. On the other hand, the expertise of conservation biologists was challenged as being a front for environmental interests.

***While objectivity is likely to remain an elusive goal in future disputes, increased openness and acknowledgment of interest may be the most promising path to minimizing conflict***

# Guiding Statute for Forest Management



**10 VSA 2601(a):** The conservation of the forests, timberlands, woodlands, and soil and recreational resources of the State are hereby declared to be in the public interest. It is the policy of the State to encourage economic management of its forests and woodlands, to sustain long-term forest health, integrity, and productivity, to maintain, conserve, and improve its soil resources

**10 VSA 2603(b):** The Commissioner shall manage and plan for the use of publicly owned forests and park lands in order to implement the policy and purposes of this chapter; promote and protect the natural, productive, and recreational values of such lands; and provide for multiple uses of the lands in the public interest. The Commissioner may sell forest products and other resources on public lands...

# Guiding Principals and Policies

- ANR Philosophy on Use of State Lands
- ANR Public Land Management Principles
- Role of the Public in Planning
- *FPR Policy #21 – State Lands Management Planning*
- *ANR Policy: Public Involvement in ANR Lands Management*



## **ROLE OF THE PUBLIC** In planning and managing lands held by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources



Fall 2019

On behalf of the State of Vermont, the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) manages state-owned land for a variety of purposes, ranging from the protection of important natural resources to public uses of the land in appropriate places. The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources seeks input on an ongoing basis from the public with regard to the management of lands. This fact sheet was created to provide citizens with the information they need to provide comments to the ANR during the lands planning process. The three departments of the Agency — *Environmental Conservation*; *Fish and Wildlife*, and *Forests, Parks and Recreation* — manage approximately 475,000 acres of land (approximately 8 percent of Vermont's land base) in a combination of fee ownership, conservation easements, and hunting rights.

These lands are located in all 14 counties of the state and include a range of conditions from intensively managed and developed sites, such as dams, boat launches, and campgrounds, to managed forests and wildlife habitats, and to protected natural areas with little or no active management activity. Size varies from less than one acre to tens of thousands of acres.

The management of lands held by the ANR must be compatible with the mission statements of the three departments as shown below. The missions of the three departments were developed via substantial public input as part of strategic planning. These strategic plans were strongly supported by the general public. The Lands Management Principles shown on page 2 are derived from these strategic plans and assist the district offices in managing these lands.



### **Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation**

To practice and encourage high quality stewardship of Vermont's environment by:

- Monitoring and maintaining the health, integrity, and diversity of important species, natural communities, and ecological processes;
- Managing forests for sustainable use;
- Providing and promoting opportunities for compatible outdoor recreation; and
- Furnishing related information, education, and service.



### **Department of Fish & Wildlife**

The conservation of all species of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont. To accomplish this mission, the integrity, diversity, and vitality of their natural systems must be protected.



### **Department of Environmental Conservation**

To preserve, enhance restore, and conserve Vermont's natural resources, and protect human health for the benefit of this and future generations.

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## ANR Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Land Planning

- Planning is done by Agency teams at regional levels comprised of staff from all three departments
- Recognize unique, specific mission of each department and purposes for which lands were acquired
- Planning is strengthened by collaboration between Departments

District 4 - Barre

Stewardship Forester

State Lands Forester

Forest Recreation Specialist

Parks Regional Manager

Wildlife Biologist

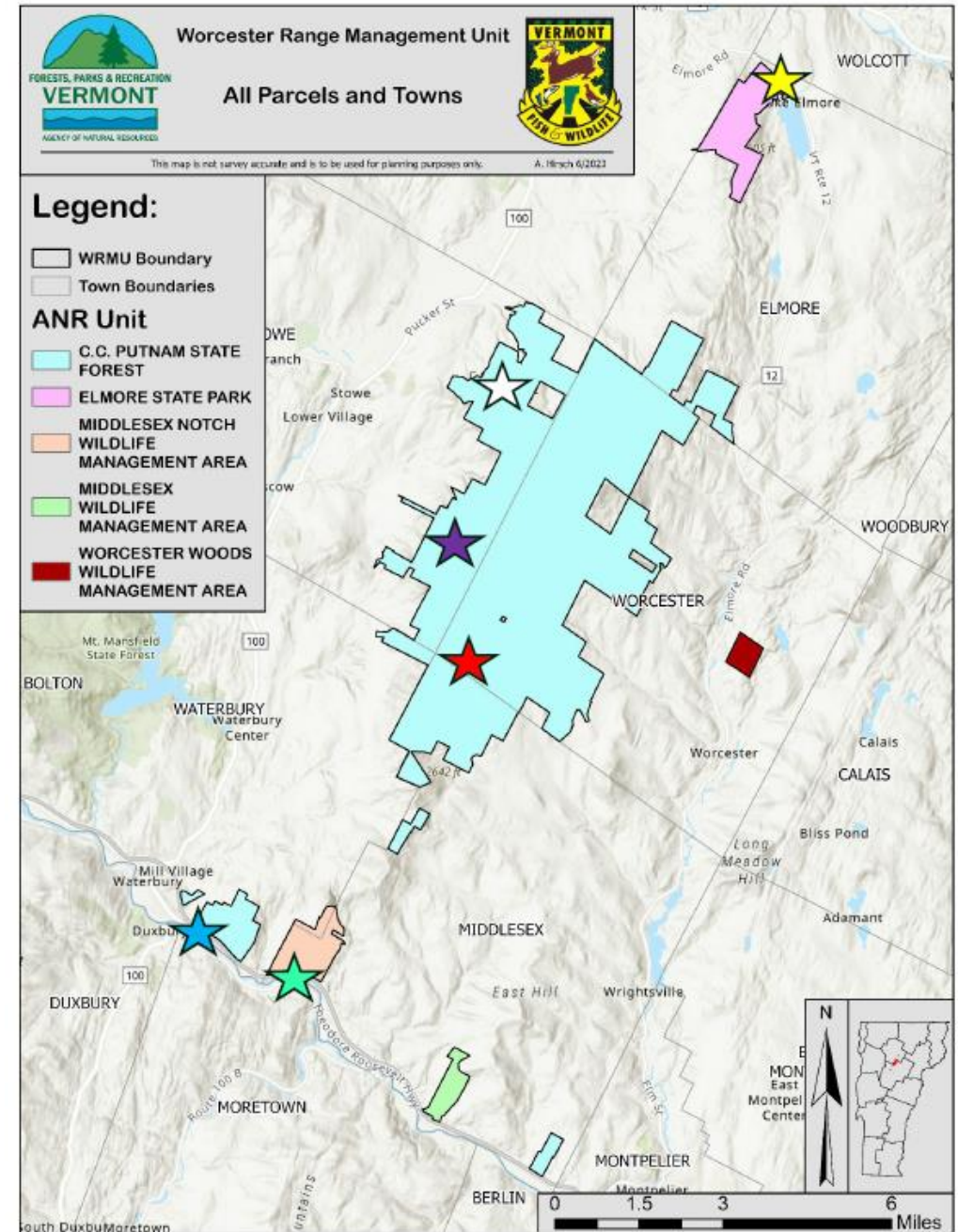
Fisheries Biologist

State Lands Ecologist

Basin Planner

# Worcester Range Overview

- 18,772 Acres across five properties
- Northern Green Mountains Biophysical region
- Significant Ecological and Wildlife Importance
- Range of Recreational Opportunities
- Important Water Resources



# Worcester Range Management Plan Development Process

- Public scoping (2020)
  - Story Map & Survey
  - 723 Comments Received
- Resource assessments (2018-2023)
- Draft management plan (November 2023)
  - Two Public Meetings – Stowe & Worcester
  - Media Engagement
  - Public Comment Period: Dec 13-Feb 2
- Evaluate 669 comments
- Develop revised management plan
  - Public Responsiveness Summary – 132 themes
  - Summary of Changes
- Final Plan Released – September 2024
- Implementation



Local News

## Proposed Worcester Range plan highlights tensions over forest management amid climate change

Vermont Public | By Abagael Giles  
Published February 2, 2024 at 5:00 AM EST



▶ LISTEN • 7:30

ENVIRONMENT

## Logging versus old growth? Plan for Vermont state forest debated

Critics say the plan sidesteps changing societal and ecological needs for wilderness.

# Worcester Range Management Plan Key Features



## **Management Goals**

- Protect the ecologically functional landscape and natural and cultural resources of WRMU
- Provide diverse recreational opportunities & trail systems where appropriate, compatible
- Promote climate adaptability & carbon resilience to address climate change impacts
- Use a variety of management strategies to support healthy and resilient forests and support the production of sustainably harvested forest products where appropriate
- Provide high-quality habitat for plant and wildlife species.
- Promote Climate Resiliency and Water Quality

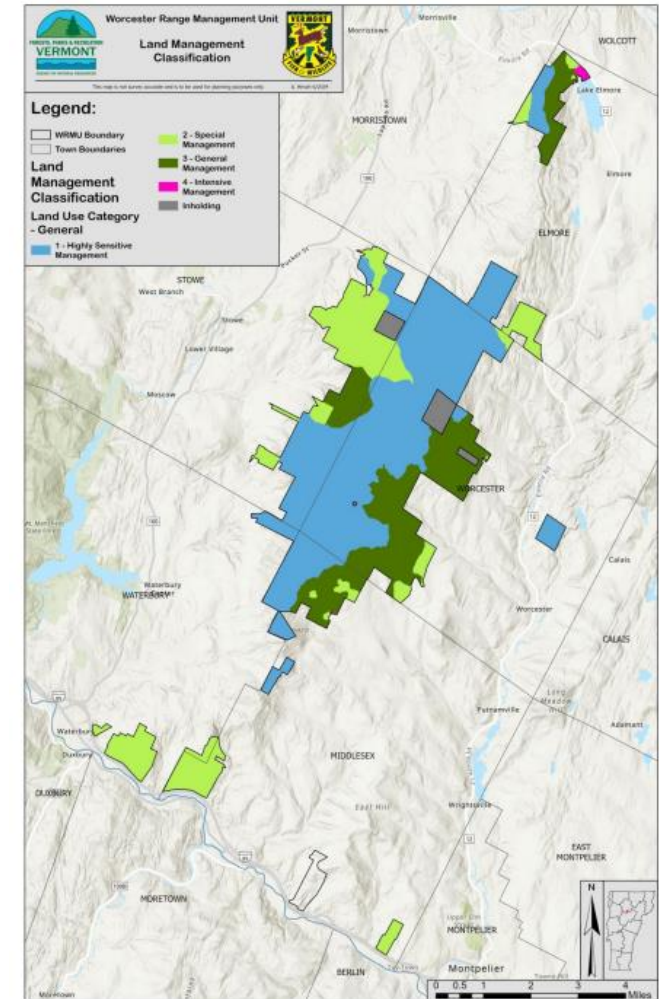
## **Alignment with Vermont Conservation Design**

- Plan maintains maintaining the ecologically functional landscape envisioned by VCD
- Plan adds 5,500 acres of HSMA, making a significant contribution to old forest target



# Worcester Range Management Plan Land Classifications

- Highly Sensitive Management (9,961 acres; 53.8%)
  - Areas with uncommon or outstanding biological, ecological, geological, scenic, cultural, or historical significance;
  - Limited Active Management, No Timber Harvests
- Special Management (4,186 acres; 22.6%)
  - Areas where protection and/or enhancement of those resources is an important consideration for management, management shouldn't impact special features
- General Management (4,302 acres; 23.3%)
  - uses include vegetation management for timber and wildlife habitat, concentrated trail networks, and dispersed recreation
- Intensive Management (49 acres; 0.3%, Elmore State Park)



# Worcester Range Management Plan Impact of Public Comment



## **Key Changes after Public Comment**

- 309 acres were added to the Highly Sensitive Management Area
  - Worcester Woods and Renosco-Hoyt Lot
- Green Crow parcel was changed Wildlife Corridor to emphasize wildlife connectivity values
- Two Wetlands changed to wetland designation to correct oversight in draft
  
- Multi-use connector trail connecting Perry Hill and Waterbury to Little River State Park
- Backcountry skiing proposals would be considered more broadly in the management unit
- Management goal of concentrating use to managed trails in sensitive high-elevation areas
- Accessibility: adaptive MTB standards, universally accessible trails
  
- Plan significantly updated to include enhanced discussion of climate adaptation and carbon
- Enhanced info on water quality monitoring and efforts to maintain water quality

# Worcester Range Management Plan Impact of Public Comment



## Forest Management Changes

- Include primary & secondary management objectives for treatments
- Use Recreation Opportunity Spectrum to preserve experience on rec sites near timber sales
- Added *Active Forest Management as a Tool to Increase Climate Resilience* Document
  - Forests Through the Lens of the Past and Present
  - Forests in a Changing Climate
  - Active Forest Management as a Tool for Invasive Species-Related Forest Health Threats
  - Active Forest Management Can Increase Structural Complexity in a Forest
- Acres of timber harvests largely unchanged from draft plan to final plan
  - Forest management strategies focus on enhancing habitat, biodiversity, forest health, and vigor to maximize the benefits and services of healthy forests.
  - 12 commercial timber harvests ranging in size from up to 74 acres to 298 acres
  - Areas identified for treatment in this LRMP will receive additional review and inventory
  - Promote uneven aged, resilient forests and will take place in winter



# Worcester Range Management Plan Impact of Public Comment



## Forest Management Changes

Treatment #	Schedule	Acres	ANR Unit	Forest Type	Management	Primary Management Objective(s)	Secondary Management Objective(s)
#1	2025	298	C.C. Putnam State Forest	Sugar Maple-Beech-Yellow Birch Red Spruce-Sugar Maple-Beech	Uneven-Aged	Begin conversion from even aged stand condition to multi aged stand condition.	Release established desirable regeneration. Retain and recruit standing and down woody debris.  Improve species composition.  Increase tree vigor.  Improve vertical and horizontal structure within existing stands.  Improve species composition of both hardwood and softwood species.

# Worcester Range Management Plan Impact of Public Comment



## Forest Management Comments and Responses

**Comment:** *Timber harvested on state lands is de minimis and wood production should occur on private lands*

**Response:** Commercial harvests are designed and used as a tool to improve forest health, resiliency, diversify species and structure, and other benefits; aligns w/ other mgmt. goals

While the state provides a small percent of Vermont's wood supply, it can be a meaningful amount of work in a rural economy and aligns with FPR's mission to support working forests

Many harvests also incorporate a donation to the Woods Warms initiative.

Another benefit of silviculture on state lands is an opportunity to participate in research studies or provide demonstrations that can help guide forestry on private lands.



# Worcester Range Management Plan Impact of Public Comment



## Forest Management Comments and Responses

**Comment:** *Vermont should harvest more on state lands. It would help mitigate blow downs and create better wildlife habitat.*

**Response:** ANR works to balance the many benefits that forests / forest management provide

Part of that balancing effort is to utilize both active and passive management strategies.

While less than half of the WRMU is to allow for timber harvests, these acres were analyzed and considered for treatment based on the overarching resource mgmt. goals of the LRMP.

After extensive review, ANR has determined that the forest management implementation schedule appropriately balances all the goals and objectives of this LRMP.



## A few lessons learned

- Planning for Multiple Use Mgmt is still complex!
  - Enhance ANR Planning Capacity (33% covered)
  - Future Statewide Planning Rule to update process
- Clarify how Planning Process and ACT 59 interact
- Greater Focus on Telling our Story to Public
  - Increase Engagement with Local Partners, Towns
  - Engagement w/ Media is Important, Unpredictable
- Worcester Range Plan, at 394 pages, is a good faith effort to balance public input and ANR expertise
- ***Increased openness & acknowledgment of interest may be the most promising path to minimizing conflict.***

OPINION

## **Conservation organizations: The Worcester Range plan balances diverse approaches to preserving healthy forests**

OP/ED

Letter to the editor: Science-based work saves forests

November 27, 2024

By Lauren Oates

ENVIRONMENT

## **In new plan for Worcester Range, state attempts to balance logging and preservation**



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# Worcester Range Management Plan Key Features

1. Expansion of HSMA by 5,821 acres to 9,961 acres to 54% (limited mgmt.)
2. Sustainable forest management on 1,928 acres (10% of the unit)
3. Non-Commercial Forms of Active Management (36% of WRMU)
4. Expand Recreation Opportunities, Improve Rec Experience
5. Promote Climate Resiliency and Water Quality

