

**SUMMARY REPORT**

# **A Trail For Everyone**

*A Community Conversation on the  
Future of the Pittsfield Town Forests*

**A Pittsfield Listens Summary Report**

**May 31, 2017**



**Compiled by Pittsfield Listens**

74 Main Street | P.O. Box 206 Pittsfield, NH 03263 | 603.312.6980 | [www.pittsfieldlistens.org](http://www.pittsfieldlistens.org)

## ABOUT PITTSFIELD LISTENS

**Pittsfield Listens** brings community members together in a safe and authentic way to share ideas, get informed, discuss issues, support solutions, and help make Pittsfield a great place for everyone to live, learn, work, and play. Since 2011, we have built tremendous momentum in engaging the voices and supporting the development of leadership, with a specific focus on engaging those who have historically been underrepresented in educational decision making in the Pittsfield community and its schools.

### **Our Work:**

- Boost Pittsfield's civic health, with increased participation in public life.
- Support engaged and equitable community.
- Support the development of adult and youth leaders through participatory methods and diverse leadership opportunities.
- Improve community problem solving.
- Develop a culture of *Roundtables, Not Podiums*.

**Civic Engagement** Bring people together for engaged conversations. We work to bring people together from all walks of life, provide time for in-depth informed conversations, respect differences as well as seek common ground, and achieve outcomes that lead to informed community solutions.

**Pittsfield Youth Voice *in it Together* (PYViiT)** encourages the power of youth voice on issues and policies that directly affect their education and their life in the town of Pittsfield, NH. PYViiT is a place where youth share their stories, engage their leadership, and create change in their community.

**Family & Community Engagement (FACE)** encourages the power of parent and family voice on issues and policies in the Pittsfield Schools. FACE works to support student achievement and school improvement through a thriving Family-School Partnership.

### **Pittsfield Listens**

*Working together to help make Pittsfield a great place for everyone to live, learn, work, and play.*

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## **We heard you!**

On Wednesday May 31, 2017 over 20 people participated in A Trail for Everyone: A Community Conversation on the Future of the Pittsfield Town Forests in Pittsfield, NH. The focus was on questions, ideas, concerns, and hopes for the future of the Pittsfield's Town Forests. Participants joined in small facilitated group discussions to explore questions, including: *What are the most important criteria for determining the best use of the Town Forests? What are the key priorities you want to share with our decision makers? How can the Town Forests best serve the community's needs?* They were given information on the three Pittsfield town forests- including their histories, current uses, and maps. Participants discussed ideas important to them and expressed a range of perspectives and ideas, which were recorded by facilitators. Each group reported out final priorities as based on their conversations, including common-ground thoughts or ideas as well as diverse points of view. Prior to the dialogue community members were invited to tour the newly acquired Rocky Ridge Town Forest. On Saturday May 20th, 15 people joined for the tour- as led by Tim Fleury, a Merrimack County Forester.

The following information highlights the priorities and action ideas that rose to the top. These ideas will inform next steps for the Pittsfield Conservation Commission, as well as individuals and organizations. For more information or to get involved with the Pittsfield Conservation Commission, contact Chris Hill [motrmech@metrocast.net](mailto:motrmech@metrocast.net).

### **Key Findings**

#### **Environmental Impact**

All three small groups discussed impact on the environment, expressing concern on the balance of use and protecting wildlife and habitat. Priority was named on the importance to preserve green space and wetlands, especially old and rare vegetation. There was also a priority of modeling sustainable environmentally friendly land use, with one example of this being in tree preservation. Participants discussed the priority of tree harvesting being to benefit the management of the forest. A priority for using only sustainable logging practices was also discussed. Two of three groups named having the town forests in conservation easements to best protect the land.

#### **Accessibility**

Making the town forests accessible for everybody was a priority named by all three small groups. Participants discussed making sure the forests and trailheads are well marked so that community members know of their location, and that trails are clearly marked so they are accessible for everyone to navigate (See more under communication, below). In addition, one group named creating a trail loop that is wheelchair and stroller friendly- with secure footing- as priority to make it accessible for all. Having a variety of trail lengths and levels of difficulties was discussed as a way to support people of all abilities to have access. Another priority named was that of parking and road accessibility to the three town forests. Two of three groups named having toilets or outhouses as priority to make it welcoming and convenient.

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## **Communication**

All three groups named communication as a priority, including to help community members to feel welcome and to support community members in knowing about and feeling a part of the town forests.

One priority named across all three groups was in the context of communication about the town forests and the opportunities they present- to prioritize marketing and advertising the town forests to help spread the word and make it visible for residents and non-residents- flyers, website, social media. In addition, fostering a school-forest connection to support students connection would help spread the word and foster a sense of belonging and connection. Two of three groups named hosting events, including guided and sponsored walks. One group specifically named the opportunity to market the positive impacts town forests have on the entire town and to clearly identify the current use of lands and the resource it presents- including economic and community development, bringing in folks to local restaurants and stores, and to welcome outdoor companies and schools from other communities.

In addition, having clear communications at the town forests and trail heads about their use and any rules for use was named as a priority. This is to include flag trails and trail markers, points of interest- including waterfalls and wild blueberries, hours of use, signage to mark the edges of the town forests, any guidelines to help respect abutters, having maps and brochures, and to post rules and guidelines, including on fires, trash, cutting trees, camping, dogs, and hunting, to wear orange during hunting season, and a carry in- carry out policy.

## **Creating an Outdoor Recreation Community**

There were a range of ideas discussed across the three groups as options for shared use- including trails to nature trails to walk, hike, bike, cross country ski, snowshoe, and horseback ride. While only one group specified multi seasonal use, all three groups named activities across the seasons as priority. Two of three groups named hunting during permitted months, with signs posted to ensure people's safety and requests for people to wear orange for safety to alert people hunting. Participants described concerns about motorized use, with discussion about protecting the forest for year-round multiple non-motorized uses. ATVs were specifically named as a concern. While two of three groups expressed desire for non-motorized use, the third group named motorized vehicles only in asking if it would be permitted and that this needed to be determined. The ideas to have benches and picnic tables to encourage sitting and picnics was shared, as well as exploring the opportunity for overnight camping to be permitted. One of three groups named a priority to make the forests more dog friendly, with the opportunities to include a dog park section, signs to share that they are welcome, and poop bags at the trailhead to encourage dog owners to help keep the trails clear. Another group named having geocaching- a container with a logbook and some with items for trade, as found by coordinates or in letterboxing- a process that uses clues instead of coordinates. The potential opportunity to partner with neighbors for longer trail networks was discussed in one group. One of three groups also discussed how to support a clean forest and a carry-in/carry-out culture, and named having signage and trash cans at the trailheads as a possibility. Overall, participants expressed a value on outdoor recreation as an opportunity to experience the beauty of the natural environment as

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well as the community aspect of including meeting new people, family activities, and recreation as an opportunity to bring people together.

### **Education**

Education arose across all three groups as a priority, naming the opportunities to support educational opportunities for all ages. All three groups named a connection to the schools as priority opportunity, including use for research, recreation, and outdoor classroom space. Across all three groups ideas were generated on ways to lift up the educational values, including marking/identifying plant and tree types with signs, having learning kiosks at the trailheads or along the way, incorporating the town forests into the school's curriculum- including science- for further place based learning opportunities, and supporting community members to host town forest cultural and educational opportunities.

### **Working Together and Sustainability**

Who is going to do the work and where are we going to get the money? Those were two of the most asked questions across all three groups. All three groups identified planning for sustainability as a priority- including across environment, fiscal, and human resources.

Planning for environmental sustainability was a theme across all groups, with protection of plants and wildlife and discussion on the importance of having a clear forest management plan in place. Utilizing the support of volunteers was named as part of a sustainability plan, with opportunities to support volunteer groups to build and maintain trails and steward. Potential partners named included the University of New Hampshire, the local Pittsfield schools, local Girl and Boy Scout troops, and the Pittsfield Youth Workshop. One of three groups discussed strategies for fiscal sustainability. The group discussed grants and fundraising- including from private donors. In addition, they discussed strategic use of logging for revenue.

### **Conclusion**

Many of the ideas and action steps shared are efforts that can be taken locally. The community should expect to hear from the Pittsfield Conservation Commission as they work to move this forward, and people who wish to stay engaged are encouraged to join efforts with the Pittsfield Conservation Commission. For more information, please contact Chris Hill- Chair of the Pittsfield Conservation Commission at [motrmech@metrocast.net](mailto:motrmech@metrocast.net).

**A Trail for Everyone Partners:** Pittsfield Listens was asked to partner with the Pittsfield Conservation commission to co-host the event. The following partners also contributed to the planning: Ross Morse- *Suncook Valley Sun and Community Liaison of Pittsfield Schools*; Roland Carter-*Community Development Committee*; Amber Ricci- PMHS Student and Leader with Pittsfield Youth Voice; Peter Dow- Resident; Neighbors to Rocky Ridge Town Forest, including Gail Nickerson and Kevin Sherman; Paula Martel- Pittsfield Youth Workshop; and Tim Fleury- Merrimack County Forester.

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Appendices can be found at [www.Pittsfieldlistens.org](http://www.Pittsfieldlistens.org)

Appendix

A\_TrailForEveryone\_DiscussionGuide

B\_5.31.17\_AllSmallGroupNotes\_Transcribed

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