

## **Introduction**

The Peacham Town Forest is approximately 190 acres of land located in the Northwest corner of the town, close to the town line with Cabot. The tract is the former Ike Peck farm and was acquired by the town as payment for delinquent taxes in 1954. An old town road known as the Cow Hill Road bisects the property. This road was discontinued or “thrown up” by the Town Selectmen sometime in the past leaving the parcel without a public right of way. An outstanding scenic feature of the town forest is a steep rocky section with views in the northeast corner just below the summit of Cow Hill.

The town forest was designated as a Municipal Forest under Vermont Statutes as part of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation’s Municipal Forest Program in 1959. Soon after, 25 acres of the tract were planted to White Spruce. According to the records, the property had been under management by previous owners working in cooperation with the Caledonia County Forester. Between 1909 and 1958, 25,000 seedlings had been planted on the property.

In 1961, under the Municipal Forest Program, a management plan for the town forest was written. Since that time a number of forest and wildlife management activities have taken place on the town forest with the assistance of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

## **Property Boundary and Survey Evidence**

Research in the Town Office did not produce any maps of the property or description of the property other than references to owners. Over the last year and a half several visits to the forest have been made to locate the property boundaries and corners. The town tax maps and adjoining landowner maps were helpful in locating property line evidence on the ground. A map made by the Municipal Forester in 1960 and an aerial photograph (1945?) from the state files were also helpful. There is a discrepancy between the 1960 map and the town tax map as to the layout and size of the tract. Survey evidence found on the ground favors the tax map.

GPS technology was used to collect existing survey evidence and produce a map. Stonewalls, corner pins, blazed and painted property lines, and an old fence line were mapped. Most likely, the corner pins and blazed lines found are from surveys made by adjoining landowners.

## **Resources**

### **Timber**

With the exception of the wettest and steepest areas of the town forest, this tract was cleared and farmed for many years prior to town ownership. Under town ownership the areas that were open fields and pasture have seeded in naturally and some areas have been planted.

A timber cruise and inventory was conducted which identified six stands or areas to consider.

Stand 1 is a 10-acre Norway spruce plantation. The diameter of this stand is 10 inches, putting it in the small saw log class. Cutting last took place in 1987 and 1996.

Stand 2 is a 90-acre Spruce/Fir stand. The diameter of this stand is 11 inches, putting it in the saw log class. This is a predominately natural stand mixed with planted white spruce and red pine and some hardwood. Cutting last took place in 1987.

Stand 3 is a 43-acre Spruce/Fir stand. This stand is regenerating from the cutting that took place in 1987. A fair amount of the regeneration is red spruce.

Stand 4 is a 23-acre low quality hardwood stand mixed with some spruce and fir. This stand was last cut in 1999.

Stand 5 is a 4-acre open area around the old farmstead and apple orchard.

Stand 6 is a 20-acre steep area on the side of Cow Hill. There are pockets of paper birch and small spruce and fir growing on the mostly steep, rocky, shallow soils. This area is inoperable for timber.

Timber access has been from the north using the old Cow Hill Road, and crossing private property. The town forest has been used two times within the past 10 years to access adjoining private property.

### Fish and Wildlife

No detailed survey was conducted of the fisheries or wildlife resources on the town forest. Information from Geographic Information System (GIS) data layers indicates there are no mapped deer wintering areas, wetlands, or any rare, threatened, or endangered species on the town forest. Two small streams that are tributaries of Kidder Brook flow through the tract.

### Cultural

The remnants of past land use of the Peacham Town Forest are evident throughout the parcel. The stone foundations of several buildings are evident as well as the stone walls on the east and west property lines. Other stonewalls are found on the edges of old pastures and fields. An old apple orchard is still in existence in the open area surrounding the old home site.

### Recreation/Access

Due to the location of the forest within the town, it is not that easily accessible by the public. At the present time there is no public right of way to the town forest. The old

“Cow Hill Road” from the north via Cabot accesses it by crossing private property. Access is also available from the south using Penny Street to the intersection of the “Cow Hill Road”, also crossing private property.

Recreation use has included a County VAST Trail for snowmobiles using the Cow Hill Road and a logging road for the trail. At present, this trail has been discontinued for use through the forest. Occasional use by hikers, mountain bikes, and hunters has been noted.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made in an advisory capacity. These recommendations follow the outline above and are not prioritized or in any particular order. They are meant to give the Peacham Select board, Conservation Commission and Planning Commission a direction for the future of the Town Forest. Volunteers, and the tree warden, with assistance from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, can easily complete some of the recommendations at little or no cost to the town. Others recommendations, such as survey work will require the services of a registered surveyor.

### **Boundary and Survey**

Continue with research in town records to locate a map or description of the property. Utilize existing maps and surveys of adjoining landowners to produce a map of the town forest.

Contract a surveyor to research records and produce a map. Contract a surveyor to complete boundary lines and corners that are missing and to resolve the discrepancy between the state map and the town tax map as to the layout and size of the tract. This would include the line in the southeast corner and the line along the north boundary where there is some evidence of old fence line.

Remark existing lines. Produce a sign or signs to be placed where the boundary line crosses the Cow Hill road. Purchase and hang small boundary tags on the boundary lines. These signs and tags will let people know when they are entering onto the town forest.

### **Resources**

#### **Timber.**

Under the Municipal Forest Program, the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation could provide all timber marking and administration at no cost to the town. The town, if it so chooses could contract with a consultant forester for services to accomplish any of this work.

Stand 1. Norway Spruce plantation. Since the last cutting took place nearly 20 years ago, this stand could use a thinning. The recommendation would be to cut every other row. When finished, revisit this stand in 20 years.

Stand 2. Spruce/Fir stand. This stand was cut 20 years ago. Parts of the stand were cut heavier than others. In these areas there is spruce and fir regeneration that should be released and allow to grow. Other areas are thick and need to be thinned out. This stand lends itself to uneven aged management. Enter this stand every 20 years or so and harvest trees of different ages and sizes to make it a mix of trees of different ages and species. This will allow for the occasional timber sale every 20 years, rather than one large cut every 50 to 60 years. This type of management will also benefit wildlife providing a number of different types of habitat and diversity. Cut this stand in small groups and patches to release existing regeneration and to establish a new age class of regeneration.

Stand 3. Spruce/Fir stand. Since this area was cut heavier in 1987 and has regenerated, no treatment is needed. There are some residual over story trees. Any attempt to cut these trees would damage the well-established regeneration. Revisit in 20 years.

Stand 4. Hardwood. This stand was cut in 1999. No treatment necessary. Revisit in 20 years.

Stand 5. Open. This area was last treated in 1986. Release apple trees and prune. Bush hog the open area to prevent early successional species from overgrowing.

Stand 6. This stand is steep and rocky making it inoperable.

### Wildlife/Fisheries

Manage stands uneven aged to provide a mix of species and age classes as recommended above. Buffer streams and use management practices to maintain water quality. Use openings as log landings. Clean up and reseed to maintain openings for wildlife.

### Cultural

Known cultural features should be mapped and documented. New features should be mapped and documented as they are found. During any activity such as logging, these features should be protected following the practices recommended in the publication Stonewalls and Cellarholes: A Guide For Landowners On Historic Features And Landscapes in Vermont's Forests by Vermont ANR, 1994.

## Recreation

Produce maps to inform the public of the town forest location. Investigate the use of the “Cow Hill Road” as a trail to provide access from Penny Street. Construct a hiking trail around the town forest with the trail to a lookout on the steep area of Cow Hill.

## Summary

“The Peacham Town Forest is a valuable asset to the Town of Peacham. Under proper management, this forest should provide a small income in the near future, and gradually increasing amounts of income as the younger stands mature”

This is taken from the summary of the forest management plan written by the Municipal Forester in 1961. The forest has matured and has provided income several times since this was written. Continuing with proper management, the forest will continue to provide income at intervals while maintaining other values such as wildlife, recreation, and its cultural and historic features.