



# STOWE LAND TRUST

— STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLAN —



**- DEDICATION -**

This plan is dedicated to the greater Stowe community and the generous supporters of Stowe Land Trust.

Left: A bobcat soaks in the autumn light. While populations are bouncing back from a decline in the 1950's, bobcats are rarely seen in Vermont. The highly secretive creatures are small, about twice the size of a house cat, and are very wary of humans. Permanently protecting productive forests in order to maintain high-quality, intact habitats is a key strategy for keeping signature species like the bobcat common in Stowe and Vermont (photo: Sue Morse).

Cover: A view of Mountain Mansfield from **Sunset Rock** (photo: John Sharpless).



## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As the new Executive Director of Stowe Land Trust, it was both exciting and daunting to lead the charge in updating Stowe Land Trust's Strategic Conservation Plan. What task could be more critical to the success of a land conservation organization? While the scope and the weight of the job loomed large, undertaking this initiative could not have come at a better time. After almost 30 years of protecting Stowe's farms and forests, 3,500 acres of land has been protected. Stewardship responsibilities are a bigger part of our work now, as we fulfill our commitment to watch over conserved land forever. Refining our focus based on today's world, and having a deep understanding of the land and the resources will allow us to increase the quality and the impact of our work. That is, in my mind, the value of this plan.

This plan is an overview of the result of many hours of research, discussion, meetings, analysis and thought. Thanks to Stowe Land Trust staff and Board of Directors, with special thanks to the Lands Committee for their thoughtful participation. Thanks to the photographers who generously shared their work: Matt Bruhns, Charles Gangas, Mike Hitelman, Matt Hogan, Sue Morse, John Sharpless, Ryan Thibault and Sebastian Ventrone. Thanks to Ryan Thibault for providing graphic design services and for a charitable donation of time towards this project. Thanks to Jesse Mohr of Native Geographic, LLC for assistance with the inventory, assessment, and mapping work that informed this plan. Finally, thanks to the Land Trust Alliance Excellence Program for funding the development and printing of this plan.

*Caitrin Maloney*  
Caitrin Maloney

Left: Cyclists round the corner of Stowe Hollow Road and Upper Hollow Road, passing by an iconic, red barn on the conserved **Grandview Farm**. The barn is over 100 years old and can be seen in photographs of Stowe Hollow as early as 1935. Grandview Farm was in agriculture for more than 150 years. The farm's many uses included sheep farming, timber harvesting, dairy farming, and skier lodging. Today, while small pockets of agricultural land remain in Stowe Hollow, many of the hillside farms have been converted into rural residences (photo: Sebastian Ventrone).



## OUR VISION

Stowe Land Trust seeks to protect the fabric and character of Stowe's landscape forever and for the benefit of all. We work to conserve the rich agricultural, forestry, scenic and recreational heritage of this place and support the mutual success of viable farms, productive forests, thriving wildlife, healthy watersheds, and the tourism-based economy.

Our vision for the future is that Stowe is a beautiful and healthy place to live and visit.

Our vision includes a Stowe with:

Beautiful views

Abundant locally-grown food, fuel, and timber

Access to exceptional recreation opportunities

Healthy and diverse native wildlife

Clean water

## OUR MISSION

Stowe Land Trust is dedicated to the conservation of scenic, recreational, and productive farm and forest lands for the benefit of the greater Stowe community.

Left: **Bingham Falls**, located along Route 108, is a "must see" summer destination for tourists as well as a local favorite. Once sited for development by a resort hotel venture, the land was conserved by Stowe Land Trust in 2001, and is now owned by the State of Vermont. The area also includes an important travel corridor for black bear and other wildlife (photo: Matt Hogan).

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Right: Immature Barred Owls peek out from their nest in a tree cavity. Keeping Stowe's forests intact and well managed through land protection and other conservation efforts ensures that birds and other wildlife will continue to thrive (photo: Charles Gangas).





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stowe's natural beauty is a fundamental force that defines our sense of place. Undeveloped, open spaces maintain Stowe's authenticity and rural New England character. Intact forestland supports forestry traditions, is a source of local wood and forest products, and is the lifeblood of our natural environment. Productive farmland sustains our rich agricultural heritage and local food systems. It is this unique landscape that lends inspiration to our daily lives, provides a myriad of outdoor recreation opportunities, and draws visitors from far and wide.

The community, through the work of Stowe Land Trust, has been able to shape the Stowe landscape through conservation. Together, we have protected nearly 3,500 acres of land since 1987. Stowe Land Trust is a voice for conservation and a vehicle for action, putting hands and dollars to work to protect these resources in perpetuity.

Changes to the Stowe landscape over the coming decades will define our community into the future. This document is an overview of a plan designed to guide our land protection activities, so that our community can continue to thrive as a great place to live, work, recreate, and raise families. The plan defines a shared vision for land protection in Stowe, and effective, efficient systems to realize the vision. Although more than a third of Stowe's land is already protected and/or in public ownership, the integrity of our landscape is far from secure. Of course we cannot – and should not – protect “everything.” It is paramount that future land protection efforts are sharply focused on the most critical and vulnerable resources to ensure our efforts have the greatest positive impact.

### **BY PROTECTING LAND, TOGETHER WE CAN:**

Protect scenic qualities of the landscape.

Maintain the rural character of the town by supporting agriculture and forestry.

Support continued public access to trails, streams, and remote areas of undeveloped land.

Left: **Joe's Pond**, located in Morristown and conserved in 2005, is located in an important wetland complex just north of Stowe. Wetlands provide food and homes for animals, and also serve to store flood waters, helping to ease flooding. Joe's Pond also provides for recreational access, and is a great place for a quiet paddle (photo: Diane Biello).



## **THE CASE FOR LAND PROTECTION**

Land is a finite resource. Once forests and farms are lost to development, they are lost forever. While education and zoning regulations offer some protection by encouraging appropriate development, these strategies alone will not prevent the conversion of farmland into housing, keep land open for public recreation, or prevent the fragmentation and development of working forestland.

There is overwhelming support for land conservation in Stowe (Stowe Town Plan, 2015). Permanent land protection is a key tool for conserving these vulnerable resources. By transferring land to a land trust or government agency or by removing the development rights, important natural and community resources can be protected in perpetuity.

From 1990 to 2000, Stowe's population grew sharply. While current census data indicate that this trend has stabilized, land continues to be developed at a steady pace. Stowe is a popular place to be, and development trends indicate that the town is vulnerable to fragmentation – the breaking up of intact, healthy forests and viable farms. Strategic land protection keeps important forest and farmlands intact, accessible, and beautiful.

## **HOW WE DEVELOPED OUR PRIORITIES**

Stowe Land Trust staff and board identified goals and strategies for the Strategic Conservation Plan. Staff worked with a consulting ecologist to map and assess conservation resources and to analyze threats. We also gathered knowledge and input from the community through conversations with stakeholders, constituents and a focused stakeholder forum.

Left: Stowe Land Trust is cultivating the next generation of conservationists in many ways, including through our Summer Naturalist Program based at our **Mill Trail property** (photo: Tom & Julia Rogers).



**WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE**

**Wildlife and wild places are abundant and accessible, our water is clean, our landscape is pleasing to view, and there is ready access to trails and local sources of fuel, food and lumber.**



Left: The great green expanse of unbroken forest that is the Worcester Range sets the backdrop of Stowe Hollow as seen from the conserved **Burnham Farm**. The Worcester Range forms a large block of contiguous working forest that is also critical habitat for some long-ranging species such as black bear and moose (photo: Stowe Land Trust).

How much protected land is enough? We believe there should be, at a minimum, enough natural and working land to ensure that our community remains a desirable and healthy place to live.

To be successful, we will continue to protect the highest quality lands with the support and involvement of the community. This plan reflects the values of the organization and is consistent with our history. While the plan will evolve over time as necessary to keep pace with changing times, the plan is designed to guide our land protection work for the next 20 years.

The next section of the plan provides more detail about five categories of land protection priorities.

## HOW WE WORK

We work with willing landowners and partners to use the following tools to permanently protect lands important to the Stowe community:

**Conservation Easements:** These legally binding agreements made between a landowner and Stowe Land Trust protect lands with important conservation values forever. The landowner retains the land and most rights, but gives up the development rights. Conservation easements may be donated or purchased. This is the most common tool we use to permanently protect land.

**Land Acquisition:** Sometimes, Stowe Land Trust acquires land that is donated by a landowner or is purchased. Usually, we transfer ownership of the land to another entity or individual and only retain a conservation easement. We will consider owning additional land only when Stowe Land Trust is the most suitable owner and the burdens of ownership and stewardship are acceptable.

**Trail & Public Access Easements:** These legally binding agreements between a landowner and Stowe Land Trust secure public access to private land through a trail corridor or over a general area for activities such as hunting and fishing. In some cases, a partner organization may be best suited to hold and steward these easements.

Right: Volunteers chip in hundreds of hours each year to help care for Stowe Land Trust lands. This group just completed a spring trail clean-up at **Kirchner Woods** (credit: Stowe Land Trust).



- ### STRATEGIES FOR LAND PROTECTION
- Identify & secure a diversity of funding sources
  - Engage & work with the community
  - Use this plan as a guide
  - Nurture relationships with owners of most important lands
  - Strengthen partnerships
  - Maintain strong systems, an engaged board of directors, and effective staff
  - Grow our Stewardship Endowment Fund
  - Maintain Land Trust Alliance Accreditation
- ### LAND PROTECTION PARTNERS
- Private land owners
  - Town of Stowe
  - Stowe Conservation Commission
  - VT Dept. of Forest, Parks & Recreation
  - VT Dept. of Environmental Conservation
  - VT Fish & Wildlife Department
  - Sterling Falls Gorge Natural Area Trust
  - Stowe Mountain Bike Club & other recreation groups
  - Vermont Land Trust
  - The VT Housing & Conservation Board
  - The Nature Conservancy
  - Morristown Conservation Commission
  - Waterbury Conservation Commission
  - Private donors & supporters





## LAND PROTECTION PRIORITIES

We are working to protect the Stowe area's scenic beauty, working farmland, working forests, recreation opportunities, wildlife and biodiversity, and rivers.

### SCENIC BEAUTY

Preserving the scenic beauty of the Stowe landscape is important to the community, and is an aspect of each project we complete. By keeping productive land open, whether it is to protect a working farm, an expanse of forest, or a dazzling waterfall, we are able to protect the beauty of the Stowe landscape. We seek to protect land with outstanding scenic value that:

Is visually prominent, including gateways to the community, hillsides, and ridgelines.

Is viewed and enjoyed by many people.

Contributes significantly to Stowe's rural character.

Would likely be impaired without protection.

Will remain scenic even if nearby property is developed.

Left: **Sunset Rock**, the wooded hillside at the left of the image forms an iconic natural backdrop to historic Stowe Village. In 1999, in light of a proposal to develop the land, residents voted to dedicate funds toward Stowe Land Trust's effort to protect the land as public open space. More than a decade later, it is clear that Stowe Village would look, feel, and function very differently if Sunset Rock's forests, trails, and habitat had been replaced by buildings (photo: Ryan Thibault).

## WORKING FARMLAND

*Cultivate, Grow, Nourish*

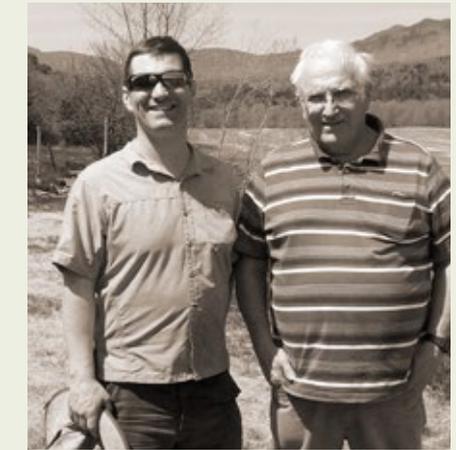
Stowe has a long, rich agricultural history; at one time, agriculture was a major part of the local economy. Today, only a fraction of the farms remain, and Stowe's agricultural future is uncertain. With increasing demand for locally-produced food and increasing concern about the sustainability of the national food system, the importance of local agriculture is huge. In addition to providing local farm products – such as dairy, meat, produce, and wool - these farms help maintain Stowe's rural character, a connection to our past and a local land-based economy.

### LAND AT RISK

Over the past 150 years, much of Stowe's open farmland has been developed. Much of the remaining farmland has been fragmented into smaller ownerships which can present management challenges. High land values combined with slim profit margins can make farmland unaffordable to the next generation of farmers.

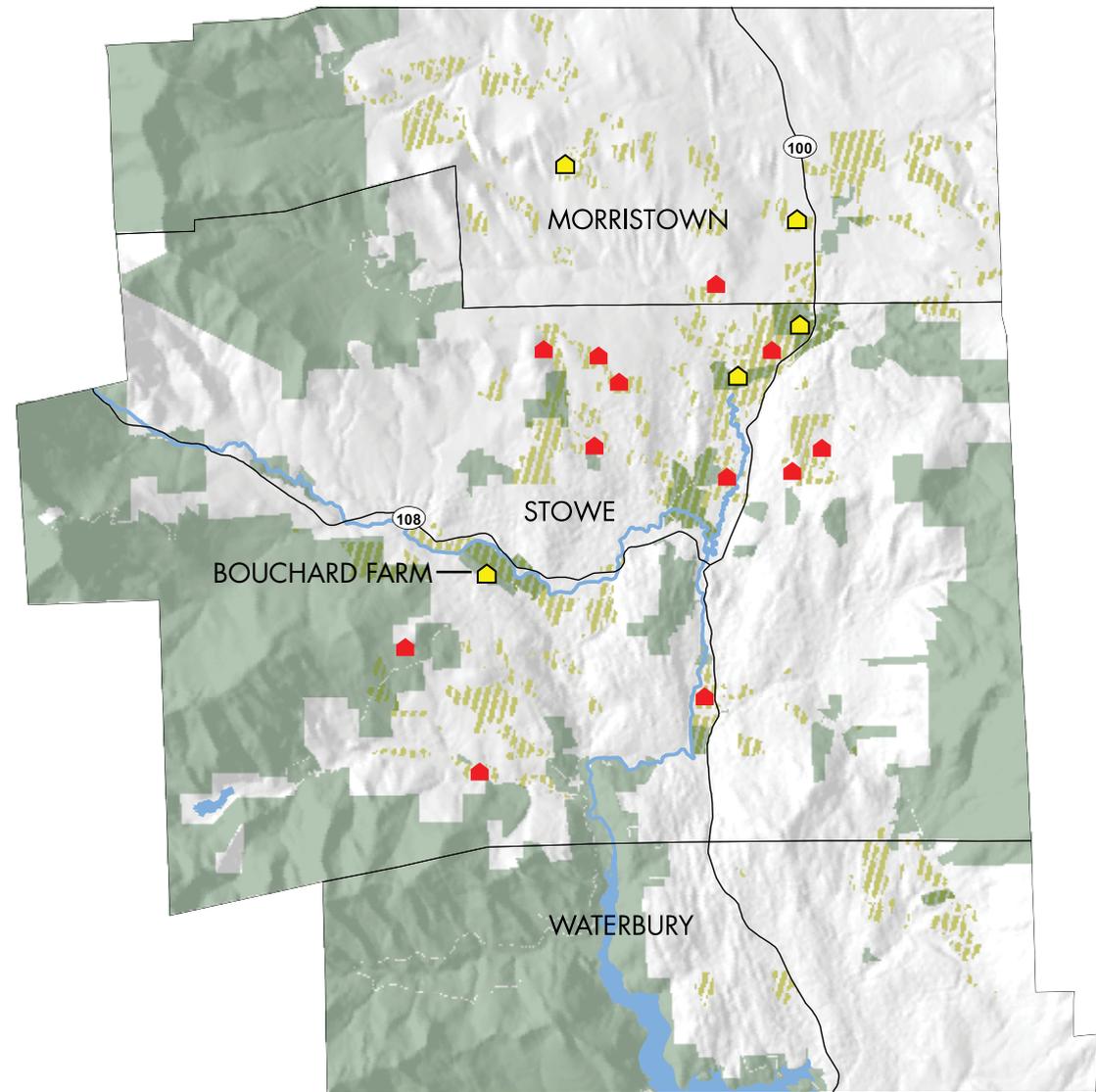


### SPOTLIGHT: THE PERCY FAMILY & BOUCHARD FARM



Paul Percy owns the Bouchard Farm and manages it with his son, Ryan, as part of their 500-cow dairy operation. The Percys have been farming in Stowe since the 1940s. In 1998, Stowe Land Trust worked with Paul to permanently protect 180 acres of the Bouchard Farm along with the nearby Landmark Meadow. This working farm features stunning views of Mount Mansfield, which can be enjoyed from the Stowe Recreation Path as it winds along the northeast side of the property.

Above: Ryan (left) and Paul (right) Percy. Left: The **Bouchard Farm** in early summer (photo: John Sharpless).



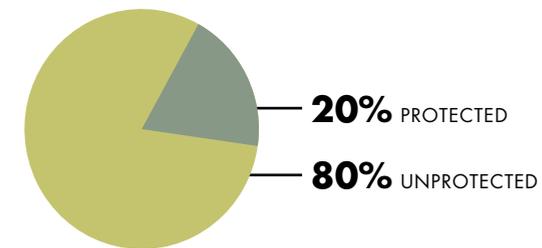
Farmed Agricultural Soils
  Farmstead
  Conserved & Public Land
  Protected Farmstead

### Working Farmland

The number of commercial farms in Stowe has declined over the last century, with the remaining larger farmsteads concentrated along the Route 100 corridor and located off of Route 108. Several smaller farms still operate in the Nebraska Valley, Weeks Hill, and Brownsville neighborhoods. Only three of Stowe's fourteen farmsteads are permanently protected.

Agricultural soils are defined as the most suitable for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. The Stowe area has over 30,000 acres of agricultural soil; today less than 5,000 acres are being actively farmed. This map shows agricultural soils in Stowe that are still open (undeveloped) today, and are being used by farmers as pasture, hayfields, or cropland. Approximately 80% of these lands are unprotected.

#### ACTIVELY FARMED AGRICULTURAL SOILS IN THE STOWE AREA



### GOAL

Protect productive farmland that can support a thriving local food economy and is affordable for future farmers

### FARMLAND PRIORITIES

- Currently in active production
- High-quality soils and other agricultural resources
- Part of a viable farm operation
- Farmsteads with infrastructure
- Under sound resource management

### STRATEGIES

- Build and maintain relationships with local farmers
- Partner with Vermont Land Trust to include affordability options in farmland easements
- Participate in local food system initiatives

## WORKING FORESTS

### *Local Wood, Local Good*

At 85% forested, Stowe is rich in forests. They are one of our most important ecological, economic, and social assets. Working forests are managed for timber and other forest products while providing a host of other benefits including clean water, flood control, wildlife habitat, clean air, carbon sequestration, beautiful scenery, and more. Forest-based recreation and tourism including skiing, mountain biking, and leaf peeping have replaced Stowe's local wood manufacturing industry that prospered in the 19th century. Still, Stowe's working forests continue to be local sources of lumber, firewood, maple syrup, and wild edibles. Private woodlands owned by individuals, families, and businesses – along with publicly-owned State and Town Forests – are all significant contributors to Stowe's working forest landscape. Much of the Stowe area's private forestland is enrolled in the State's Use Value Appraisal Program.

### **LAND AT RISK**

Although forests dominate Stowe's landscape, their integrity, health, and viability are at risk. High land values and prices – which are especially elevated in Stowe's resort community – along with rising property taxes make private forestland increasingly vulnerable to subdivision and development. These trends, combined with sprawling rural residential development patterns, are shrinking the size of woodland parcels and gradually fragmenting the forest into smaller more disconnected pieces. In addition to compromising forest health, fragmentation often results in loss of access and options for viable forest management. Also, as Stowe's demographics change, fewer residents, visitors, and woodland owners are familiar or comfortable with the rural traditions of forestry and logging, resulting in reduced interest in and public support for management for forest products.



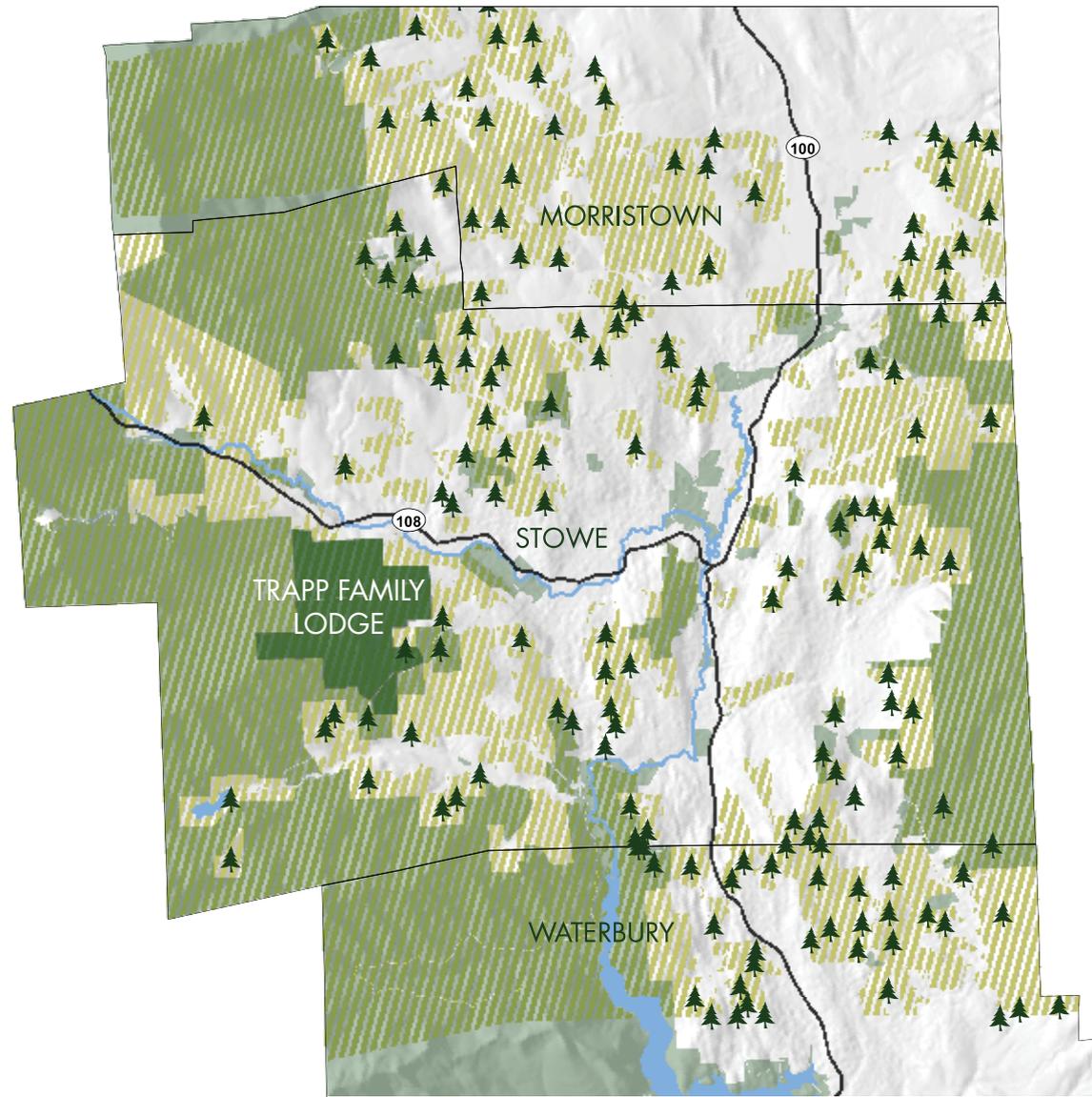
### **SPOTLIGHT: THE TRAPP FAMILY LODGE**



Having studied forestry at Yale, Johannes von Trapp has a deep appreciation for Stowe and its working forests. In 1995, Johannes donated a conservation easement on 1,100 acres of the Trapp Family Lodge's forestland. A decade later, the family worked with Stowe Land Trust to protect the Adam's Camp parcel, protecting another 513 acres of their forestland.

The easements ensure that these forests can continue to be actively managed for timber, wildlife habitat, and recreation as they have been for more than 70 years. Today, the forest supplies hundreds of cords of firewood to heat the buildings on the Lodge's property each year and sustains a 1200-tap sugarbush.

Above: The **Trapp Family Lodge** works with a professional forester and loggers to manage its working forests. Left: Round Top is a distinctive landmark on the Trapp Family Lodge property (photos: Stowe Land Trust).



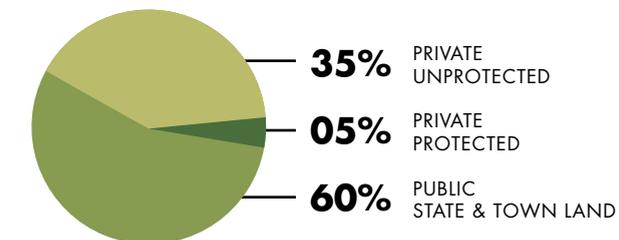
🌲 Use Value Appraisal Parcels    🌊 Water    🌿 Conserved & Public Land  
 🟡 Ownerships with 25+ Acres Forest

## Working Forests

For the purposes of this plan, we defined “working forests” as forest ownerships with at least 25 acres of forest. This is generally the minimum area necessary to support viable forest management. While 60% of Stowe’s working forests are publicly owned state and town lands, many parcels are privately owned. Most of these private forestlands are enrolled in the State of Vermont’s Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program. The UVA program helps to keep privately-owned working forests intact and under sound management by providing a tax incentive and requiring a management plan. However, most of this private forestland - 35% of Stowe’s working forests - is not permanently protected.

Parcels with fewer than 25 acres of forest comprise a significant proportion of Stowe’s forests. Although not large enough to be economically productive, collectively these forests provide important ecological and community benefits such as wildlife habitat and access to trails.

## STOWE’S WORKING FORESTS



## GOAL

Protect productive forestland that can help support a sustainable and innovative forest-based economy

## FOREST PRIORITIES

- Under sound forest management
- Productive soils and growing conditions
- Sufficient forest acreage and access for viable forest management

## STRATEGIES

- Build and maintain relationships with forestland owners
- Collaborate with partners on landscape-scale working forest protection projects
- Connect forestland owners with resources for sound management

## RECREATION

### *Refresh, Relax, Restore*

Recreation-based tourism has a long history in Stowe and is the focus of the local economy today. Since the construction of the first single chair ski lift on Mount Mansfield in 1940, Stowe Mountain Resort has grown to host more than 350,000 skier visits each year. Trapp Family Lodge and the Stowe Mountain Resort Nordic Center continue to support the long-standing tradition of Nordic skiing on 147 miles of trails. Hiking was the number one outdoor recreation activity reported by second home owners in Stowe in a recent survey, and Stowe is fast becoming a premiere destination for mountain biking. The five-mile Stowe Recreation Path, 70 miles of hiking trails, and 30 miles of biking trails are officially open to the public. Many more miles of informal trails – mostly across private land – provide neighborhood access and vital links between formal networks. Dispersed recreation, such as hunting, fishing and backcountry skiing are also important and popular activities. Recreation fields, sledding hills, parks, and other community outdoor spaces are also vital resources for the community.

### LAND AT RISK

The top threat to land-based recreation in Stowe is the loss of access – particularly on and across private land. Although Stowe and Vermont have a long-standing tradition of private landowners allowing the public access to their land and Vermont law provides a limitation on landowner liability to landowners who make their land and water available to the public for no fee for recreational uses, an increasing number of landowners are posting their land and closing it to the public. Informal permission for access granted by landowners can be lost when ownership changes or land is subdivided and developed. At a stakeholder meeting held in 2014, local recreation groups identified the threat of loss of access to informal trails linking public trail networks as a main concern.

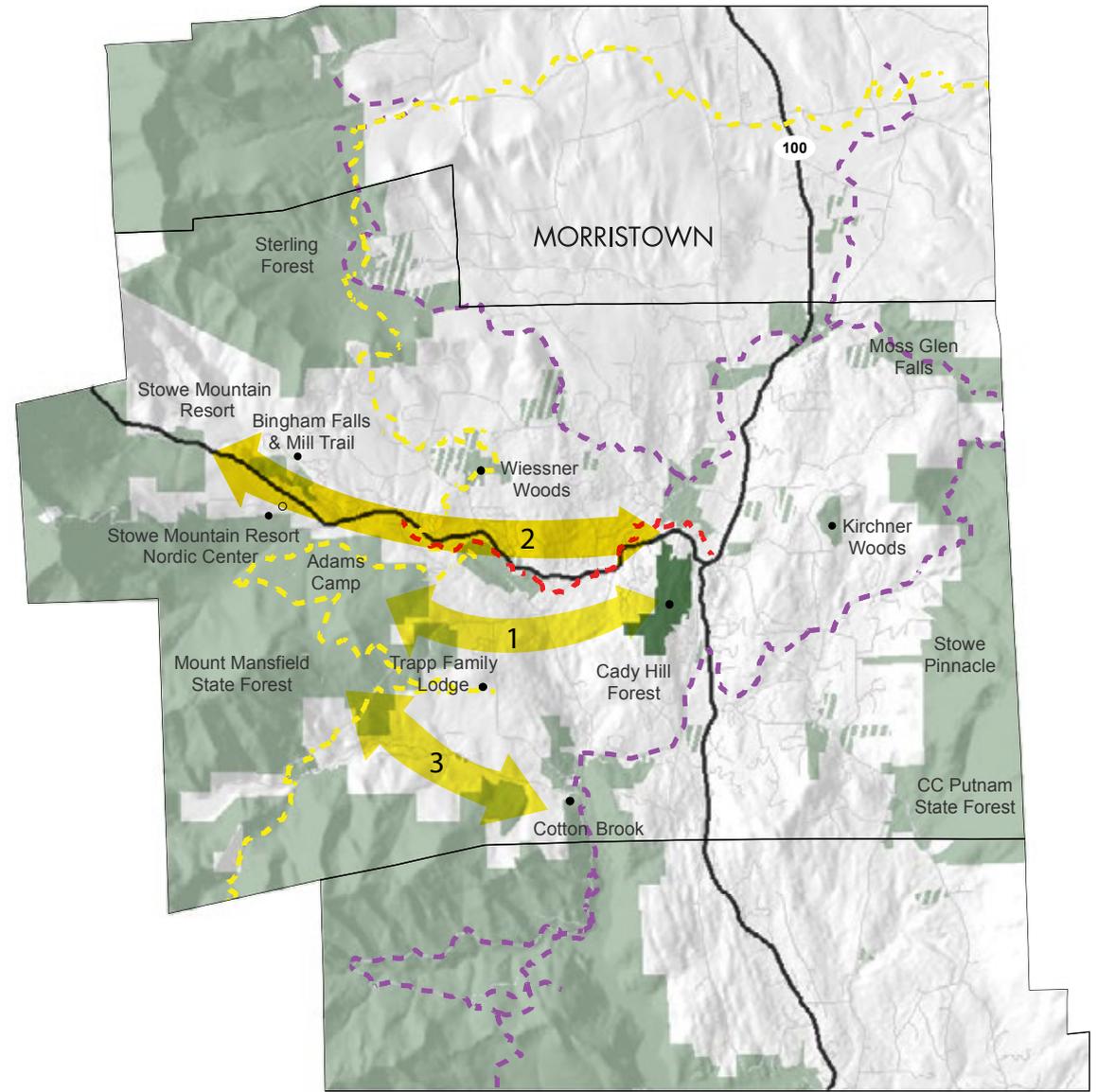


### SPOTLIGHT: CADY HILL FOREST



In 2012, Stowe Land Trust and the Stowe community engaged in a monumental effort to conserve 258 acres in the heart of Stowe Village. This land, together with an existing town-owned parcel, formed the 320-acre Cady Hill Forest. The forest, now owned by the Town of Stowe, is a wonderful recreational resource, offering more than 11 miles of shared use trails. The trails offer a great place for the community to bike, walk and run, and enhance Stowe's tourism economy by providing a premier mountain biking destination. The Town of Stowe partners with the Stowe Mountain Bike Club to manage the trails.

Left: **Cady Hill Forest's** world class mountain bike trails are popular with locals and visitors alike (photo: Matt Bruhns). Above: Cady Hill mountain bike trail infrastructure (photo: Ryan Thibault).



- - Stowe Rec Path    - - Catamount Trail    - - VAST Trails    // Protected Land Without Public Access  
 ■ Conserved & Public Land with Public Access    ■ Recreation Corridor Priorities

## Recreation

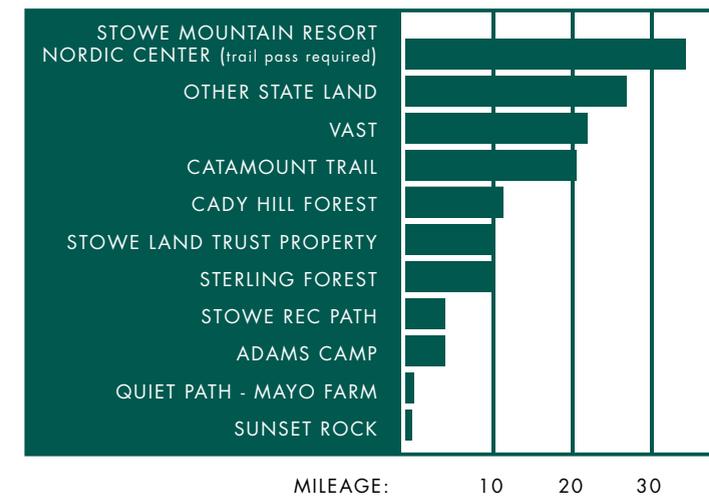
Stowe's recreational resources are abundant and diverse, making them challenging to display on an overview map. This map does not show all of the trails in Stowe, rather it highlights primary trail corridors and lands with public trails.

Stowe Land Trust's primary goal is to help protect or establish connections between existing trail networks and recreational hubs. Critical corridors include:

- 1:** Cady Hill Forest to Trapp Family Lodge and Adams Camp
- 2:** Stowe Village to Stowe Mountain Resort along the Stowe Recreation Path
- 3:** Trapp Family Lodge and Adams Camp to Cotton Brook and Little River

By protecting these corridors, the recreational value of existing resources would be greatly enhanced.

## PUBLIC TRAIL TYPE BY MILE



## GOAL

Protect public access to and between community recreation areas

## RECREATION PRIORITIES

Existing trail networks and connections between them

Community features such as swimming holes or ball fields

Areas that benefit a broad segment of the Stowe community

Includes a clear plan for the future management of trails, facilities, and public access

## STRATEGIES

Collaborate with recreation partners to secure trail and public access easements

Participate in local trail and recreation planning initiatives

Continue to support the sound management of Stowe's existing protected trails and recreation features

## WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY

*Survive, Flourish, Connect*

Stowe is home to an exceptional diversity of plants and animals. Forests are the dominant habitat that supports this diversity, from fragments of floodplains along valley bottoms to the alpine zone on top of Mount Mansfield and everything in between. Bear, moose, and many other species rely on large expanses of uninterrupted forests to thrive. These forests are important globally for nesting songbirds like the Bicknell's Thrush and other neotropical migrants. Wildlife also depends on being able to travel safely between habitats during seasonal migrations, to reproduce, or to find new suitable habitat in a changing climate.

### LAND AT RISK

The network of diverse, high-quality, connected habitats required to sustain Stowe's wildlife and biodiversity are at risk. Although approximately 75% of the forest along the Green Mountain's upper slopes has been protected, habitat at mid- and lower-elevations in between is being lost to or degraded by human development. These lower slopes, riparian areas, wetlands, and valley bottoms are rich sites which support many species that cannot survive at higher elevations. Along with climate change, scattered residential development in rural areas is currently the greatest threat to Stowe's native species. This pattern of development erodes the quality of larger habitat patches and the remaining connections between them.

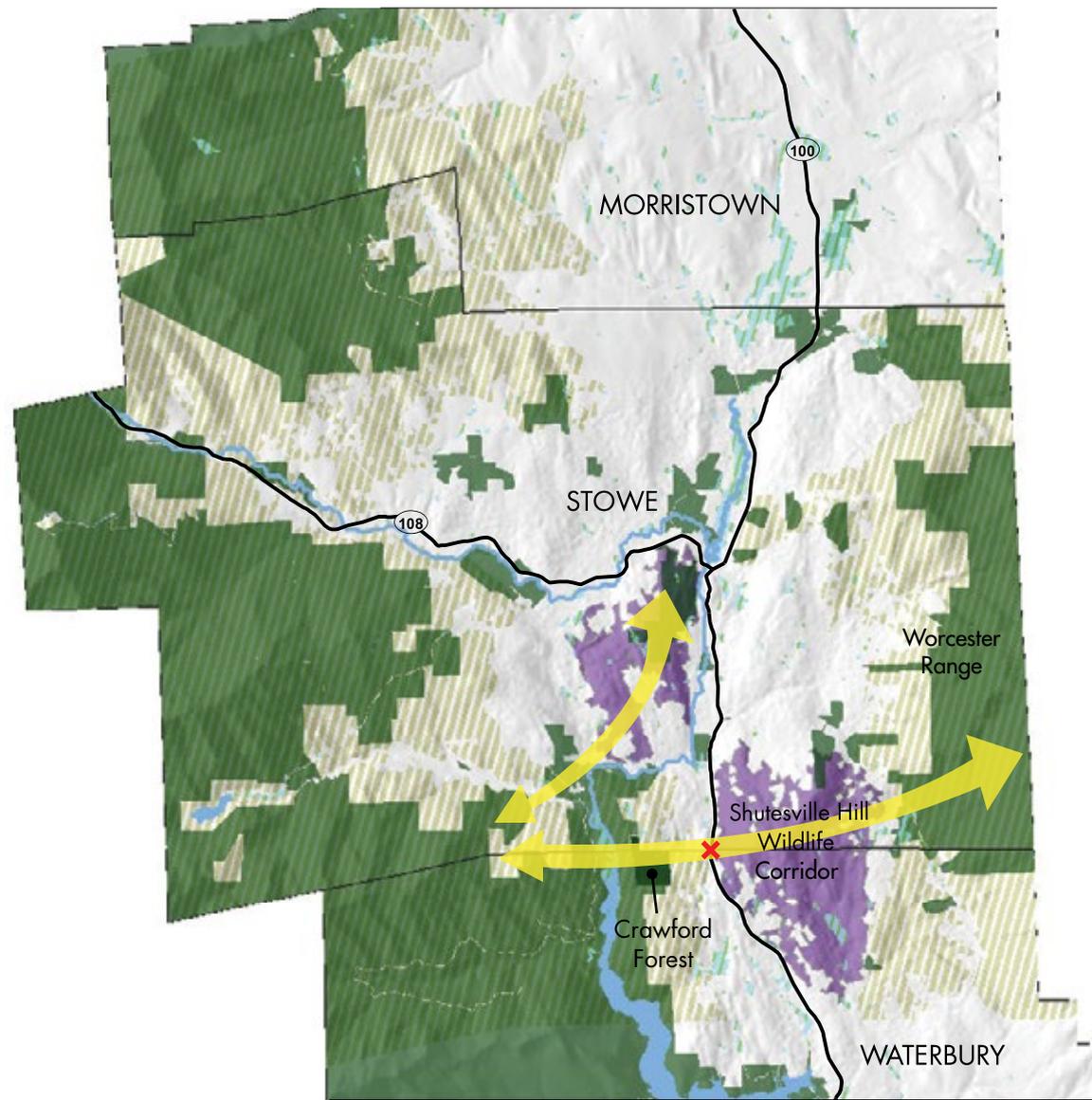


### SPOTLIGHT: CRAWFORD FAMILY FOREST



The Crawford family donated a conservation easement on their land along the Stowe – Waterbury town line to Stowe Land Trust in 2002. The land is part of the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor that provides a place for moose, bear, and other animals to cross Route 100. This crossing is a vital regional link between the Green Mountains and Worcester Range. The easement ensures that wildlife will always have safe passage through the **Crawford Family Forest** no matter how long or short their stay. A public access easement also guarantees that human visitors will always be able to enjoy the land, whether walking along the Wall Trail or exploring the beaver wetlands in hopes of spotting a moose.

Left: A White-throated Sparrow sings its high, clear song from the branch of a spruce tree. Forest fragmentation and climate change are currently the top threats to many forest songbirds and other wildlife in Vermont (photo: Charles Gangas).



## Wildlife & Biodiversity

We will focus our land protection efforts on maintaining and enhancing a network of high-quality, diverse, and connected habitats across the Stowe area landscape. These features include those described below and shown on the map to the left (Source: VT Fish & Wildlife Department):

**Anchor Blocks:** Large unfragmented forest blocks that include a diversity of high-quality habitats.

**Connecting Blocks and Corridors:** Smaller forest blocks that serve as important stepping stones between anchor blocks for species moving between habitats or across ranges.

**Wildlife Road Crossings:** Road segments with cover on both sides of the road that are critical pinchpoints in larger corridors and aid safe crossing between habitats for wildlife.

Although not shown on this map, we have also identified other important landscape and smaller scale features such as wetlands; rare and representative physical landscapes; and occurrences of rare, threatened and endangered species (Data source: State of Vermont). Since forest is the dominant habitat in Stowe, in many cases, important wildlife habitat overlaps with working forest land (see map on Page 19). In many cases, careful management for timber and other forest products can be compatible with maintaining or even improving habitat quality.

## GOAL

Protect high-quality habitat and critical connectors to support a diversity of native plants and animals

## WILDLIFE & BIODIVERSITY PRIORITIES

Part of a large, unfragmented forest (anchor block) or the forest connecting them (connecting block)

Important wildlife corridors and land adjacent to critical road crossings

Important wetlands, surface waters, and riparian corridors

Diverse physical landscapes

Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat

Significant natural communities or complexes of communities

## STRATEGIES

Collaborate with local and state partners to protect the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor

Help educate the Stowe community about wildlife needs and habitat threats

Build and maintain relationships with owners of critical habitat

## RIVERS

### *Flow, Flood, Balance*

Stowe's primary rivers are the East Branch, the West Branch, and the main stem of the Little River. These are dynamic systems that provide wildlife habitat, opportunities to swim and fish, and are beautiful to behold. Bingham Falls, the Recreation Path winding along the West Branch, and other swimming holes are some of the most popular scenic and recreation destinations in town.

### LAND AT RISK

Living, building, and farming along Stowe's rivers have come with a cost. Straightening river channels, armoring riverbanks, and dredging in order to contain and control rivers has caused rivers in Stowe and across Vermont to become out of balance. The West Branch is one of the most intensively managed rivers in Vermont. Without access to its floodplain, the high-energy waters of the West Branch are causing both excessive accumulation of sediment and erosion which threatens public safety, roads, bridges, culverts, and water quality. Flooding and erosion may become more severe and frequent as a result of extreme weather and climate change.



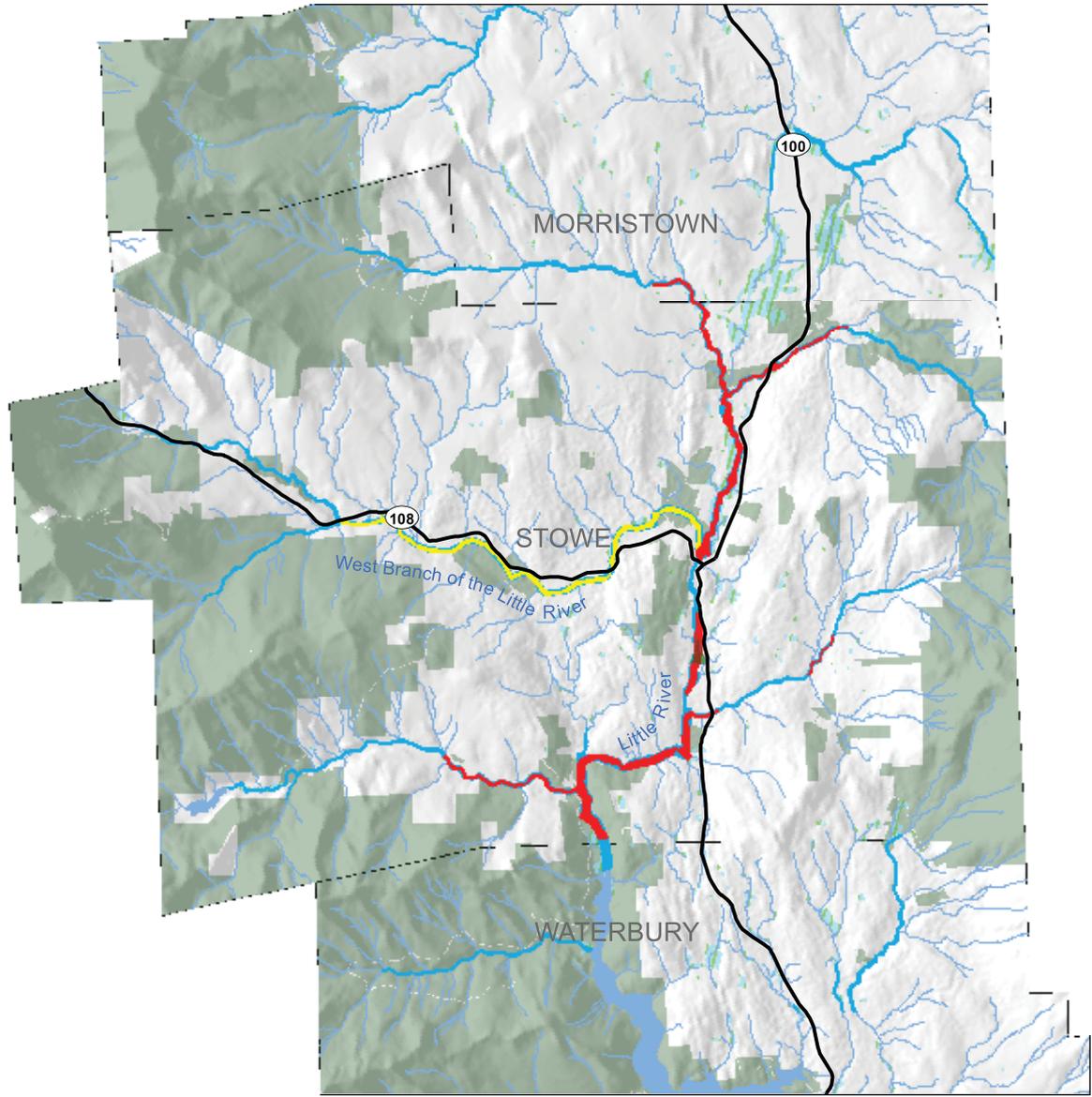
### SPOTLIGHT: THE LITTLE RIVER



Amy and Phil Farley moved to Stowe with their infant son in 2014. Their home on River Road includes land along the Little River protected with Stowe Land Trust in 2008. The Farleys are the third family to own the property since it was conserved and are looking forward to gardening and playing by the river while giving it room to move and change.

Heather and Marc Palmer also protected the river corridor on their land in 2012. They lease a portion of their land to a local farmer and have planted trees along the river as part of restoring a healthy riparian ecosystem. These easements are the first stand-alone river corridor easements in Vermont and are helping to rebalance the Little River system, both up and downstream.

Above: Amy Farley (left) and Heather Palmer (right) along the **Little River**. Left: A bird's eye view of the easement areas (photo: Mike Hitelman).



■ Fluvial Erosion Hazard Overlay District    ■ Conserved & Public Land  
■ Priority River Corridors    ■ Water    ▨ Wetlands

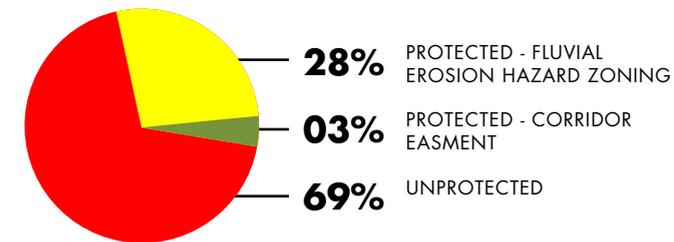
### Rivers

Land adjacent to rivers, where the river is likely to move and erode over the very long term, is called the river corridor. Protecting river corridors, and preventing development of houses, bridges and roads in these areas, ensures that a river will have enough room to move over time, adjusting as necessary to maintain a stable state. Certain stretches of river corridor are especially important to protect, and can add stability to the river system as a whole.

There are still some opportunities – primarily along the main stem of the Little River – where it is possible to allow the river to adjust to a more balanced state. To achieve this balance, the river needs to be free to move within its corridor and have access to its floodplain.

Land within the West Branch Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zone – the area where the river channel is likely to meander - is currently protected from further development by Stowe’s zoning regulations. The corridor of the main stem of the Little River is not subject to Fluvial Erosion Hazard Zoning protections. The recommended strategy to protect this area is to work with willing landowners to place river corridor easements on threatened stretches of the river.

### MILES OF PRIORITY RIVER CORRIDOR



### GOAL

Maintain and enhance the stability of Stowe’s rivers

### RIVER PRIORITIES

Priority lands identified by the Vermont River Management Program

Land with public access to the river

### STRATEGIES

Partner with willing landowners and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation to secure river corridor easements

Raise awareness in the Stowe community and among landowners about the importance and benefits of river corridor protection



Stowe Land Trust

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## A CALL TO ACTION

Thanks to the support of many, we have successfully worked for nearly 30 years to protect the critical areas of our community. With this updated Strategic Conservation Plan, Stowe Land Trust continues our land protection and stewardship work. We invite you to join us today. Together, we can protect the fabric and character of Stowe's landscape for the benefit of all.

We invite you to:

[Share your ideas and suggestions](#)

[Become a Stowe Land Trust member](#)

[Donate or give a gift](#)

[Volunteer](#)

[Consider protecting your land](#)

### Contact Us

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Left: The restored, historic cabin at our **Mill Trail** property was once part of Stowe's first ski-in lodging and is now used by Stowe Land Trust as an educational and community space (photo: John Sharpless).



STOWE LAND TRUST

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2016 STRATEGIC CONSERVATION PLAN

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