

# MANAGEMENT PLAN SUMMARY



The Birch Ridge Community Forest (BRCF) was protected in June 2019 through a partnership between the Southeast Land Trust of NH (SELT), Moose Mountains Regional Greenway (MMRG) and the Merrymeeting Lake Association (MMLA) as a Community Forest with significant funding through the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest and Open Space Program. Located just south of Merrymeeting Lake in New Durham, NH, this 2,027-acre property was heavily logged as recent as 2019 by the former owner and is now about 75% young forest with the rest consisting of wetlands, fields, log landings, blueberry and some areas of more mature forests. Notable features include Coldrain Pond on the southern end and four striking and steep land masses – Birch Ridge, Mt. Eleanor, Rattlesnake Mountain and a steep hill north of Coldrain Pond.

BRCF is now owned by SELT with a conservation easement held by MMRG and the Town of New Durham. Additional partners that made the BRCF possible were New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program and generous contributions from hundreds of area residents.

As a Community Forest, the BRCF will provide a variety of recreational and environmental benefits to the Town of New Durham and the surrounding communities including:

- Public access for hiking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, hunting and wildlife viewing
- Public trail system that will be improved and further developed over the next few years
- Wetlands and forested upland buffers provide significant habitats for a diverse wildlife community
- Preservation of scenic views from both on and off the BRCF
- Protection of water quality with protection of the remaining shoreline of Coldrain Pond and stream and wetlands systems that drain into Merrymeeting Lake, Merrymeeting River, Hayes Brook and Ela River.

## PARTNERSHIP FOR BIRCH RIDGE COMMUNITY FOREST



# VISION & GOALS

The BRCF Steering Committee, made up of representatives of SELT, MMRG, MMLA, the Powder Mill Snowmobile Club, other local groups and New Durham residents, was formed in 2018. The Steering Committee utilized public input from the 2018 community survey and community forum to develop and adopt a *Vision for the Birch Ridge Community Forest*. The Vision statement provides a framework for understanding the community's desires and hopes for the future of the BRCF:

*The Birch Ridge Community Forest grows into a mature woodland of high-quality trees, interspersed with young forest stands and openings that provide landscape views and habitat for native wildlife. The property is permanently conserved and sustainably managed for multiple benefits, including water quality, wildlife habitat, forestry, trails and recreation, educational programs, scenic views, and climate change mitigation. Educational and outreach events occur frequently, and build awareness, understanding, and support for the Community Forest. The property welcomes a diversity of activities in all seasons. Access points and trails are constructed and maintained in a manner that is sensitive to the conservation of the property's natural resources. When viewed from on or off the property, the Birch Ridge Community Forest contributes dramatically to the visual landscape of the Merrymeeting Lake watershed while providing cultural, economic, and other benefits to New Durham and the surrounding communities.*

To focus work toward achieving this Vision, the Steering Committee identified eight broad goals covering the principal community benefits and natural resource values provided by the BRCF. *(For the complete language of the goals please refer to the full BRCF Management Plan.)*

- **Non-motorized Recreation, including hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing and mountain biking**
- **Snowmobiling, including Corridor 22**
- **Education & Outreach for area schools and non-profits**
- **Scenic views to and from BRCF**
- **Forestry, sustainable and well-managed**
- **Wildlife Habitat for a diversity of species**
- **Water Quality for Merrymeeting Lake, River, and more**
- **Climate Change Mitigation**

# MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2020-2022

In order to achieve these goals, the Management Plan identifies the following actions to be initiated in 2020 and undertaken over the next several years. Following this chart are more details regarding specific areas of activity.

Goal	2020	2021	2022
<b>Public Access &amp; Infrastructure</b>	Install parking & kiosks on Merrymeeting Rd. & Birch Hill Rd.		
	Install gates or other control measures to control access by off-highway recreational vehicles		
	Complete further repair of Corridor 22 and Lake Trail		Monitor and repair as needed
<b>Recreation &amp; Public Use</b>	Build trails for Mt. Eleanor and Rattlesnake Mountain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build Birch Ridge Loop</li> <li>• Locate community access trail from South Shore Rd.</li> </ul>	Engage community on potential trails for horseback riding
	Design universally accessible trail	Build universally accessible trail as funding allows	
	Begin discussions on cabin use	Update maps and trail guide	Install final trail maps, kiosks, and guides
<b>Education &amp; Outreach Programs</b>	SELT and/or MMRG conduct 4 - 6 education/outreach programs annually		
	Determine and reach out to potential partners for use of BRCF for youth and adult education and research opportunities		
<b>Scenic Views</b>	Identify locations along higher elevation trails to create and/or maintain scenic views		
	Restore old-field habitat near cabin		
<b>Forest Management &amp; Wildlife Habitat</b>	Maintain log landings in herbaceous cover as needed		
	Monitor tree & shrub species regrowth to help determine locations for forest and wildlife habitat management		
	Secure funding and as possible, implement early successional habitat and timber stand improvement		
	Restore old-field habitat near cabin		Create fire management plan for blueberry barrens
<b>Water quality</b>	Restore three stream crossings	Inventory and restore/install additional stream crossings as needed	
	Conduct stream testing to monitor the water quality		
<b>Climate Change Mitigation</b>	Continue to identify ways the BRCF can help mitigate the impacts of climate change		

# PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

This summer and fall formal access points for the public will be created through the installation of two parking lots with informational kiosks at trailheads. One parking lot will be installed off Birch Hill Road with the second on Merrymeeting Road near the intersection of Brackett Road. In addition, the BRCF includes separate access points for SELT's management and for snowmobile access. Existing access points will be maintained, and additional access points evaluated for future needs. Additionally, in 2020, the location and feasibility of a universally accessible trail beginning at the Birch Hill Road parking lot, continuing to the cabin and beyond, will be evaluated.

Along with recreational access, repair and improvement of the internal road system for property management purposes, including forestry, wildlife habitat and other stewardship activities, will continue in 2020 and includes repairing several stream crossings over the next few years.

Finally, the use of the cabin will be evaluated. Over the past winter the cabin was used by the Snowmobile Club as a warming hut. The BRCF Steering Committee will explore additional opportunities for it to be used for activities to benefit the greater New Durham community. Along with this, the need for sanitary facilities will also be evaluated, especially if BRCF becomes a destination for educational use by local schools or camps.



PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

# PUBLIC RECREATION

BRCF is open to the public for activities including hiking, hunting and fishing. Additional uses including mountain biking and snowmobiling will be limited to designated trails. Activities not allowed include target shooting, recreational trapping, baiting wildlife and motorized recreation (other than snowmobiling). The following map depicts current and future trails, *some of which do not exist at this time*.

Over the next several years existing woods road and trails will be improved, and new trails for Rattlesnake Mountain and Birch Ridge will be created with an expected approximately ten miles of maintained trails for public use. The Powder Mill Snowmobile Club will continue to help maintain six miles of trails on Corridor 22, the Lake Trail and the Scenic Loop, as well as winter access only trails for snowmobile use. In addition to those trails, an additional four miles of trails will be maintained by SELT for uses such as hiking, snowshoeing and mountain biking.

As more progress is made with the management of the land such as the trail system, other uses may be considered in the future such as camping. Equestrian use on designated trails is anticipated to be allowed in future years; however, the Steering Committee agreed that further planning and coordination with the horse community must occur before implementation. This evaluative work is expected over the next two to three years.

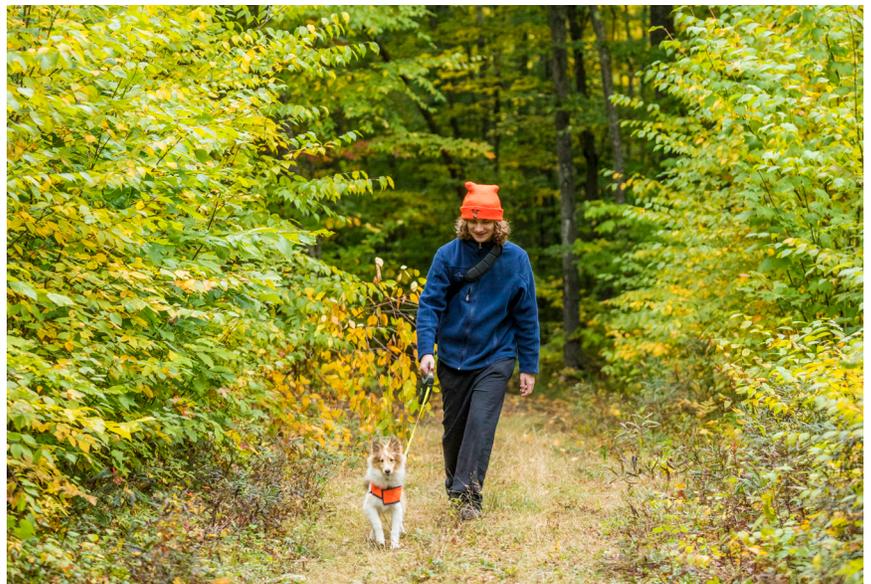
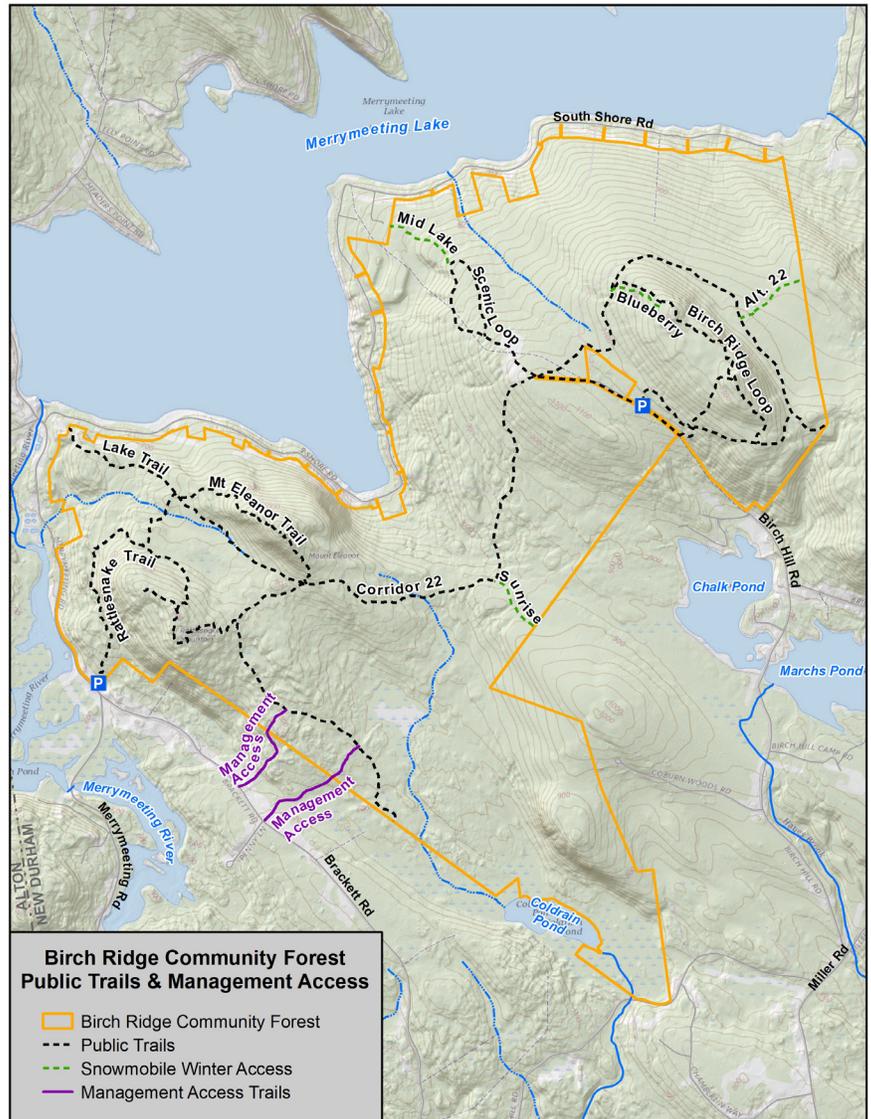


PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

## EDUCATION & OUTREACH

We hope the BRCF will be a resource for community education and outreach for area schools, non-profit organizations, clubs, area businesses and adult education. Events hosted by SELT, MMRG, and the Snowmobile Club have occurred and will continue to occur such as guided hikes and hawk watches. We will work to identify partners to help develop educational and research opportunities.



PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

## FOREST MANAGEMENT

With the recent and extensive harvest prior to SELT's ownership of BRCF, the Plan's focus is on the long-term goal of creating a high-quality hardwood and conifer stand to provide both economic and wildlife habitat values. This means that in the short-term we must continue to watch to see how the forests regenerate and determine where intermediate work such as timber stand improvement should occur. Over the next 5–10 years we will do work as needed to promote the regeneration and growth of oak, birch and softwoods and attempt to limit the spread of less desired tree species such as beech.



PHOTO CREDIT: BILL MCCLURE

## SCENIC VIEWS

The BRCF provides a scenic backdrop for Merrymeeting Lake and the surrounding New Durham area. Additionally, there are opportunities to maintain scenic views from the property to the surrounding area, including views of Mount Washington. Locations along the trails will be identified for such views to be maintained and/or created. This includes improving the scenic views from the old field habitat near the cabin, and from various locations along some of the higher elevation recreational trails.



PHOTO CREDIT: DEBORAH GOARD

# WILDLIFE HABITAT

BRCF contains a diversity of wildlife habitat and we will work to provide and maintain a diversity of vegetative communities as the BRCF continues to recover from the intense harvest. As the forest continues to mature, some land will be kept in young forest, rotated around portions of the property. The beaver impoundment near Coldrain Pond and surrounding wetlands will be designated as a wildlife focus area. Goals also include encouraging nut producing trees, conifer regeneration and a diversity of habitat around wetlands. Specifically, an area of approximately 5-acres will be reclaimed into old field habitat by the cabin, the former blueberry fields on the north end of Birch Ridge will be restored and log landings will be maintained as open grassy areas. As we see how the land recovers, we will be able to better determine where more wildlife specific management is needed.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHARLIE BRIDGES

# WATER QUALITY

With the protection of the water resources both on and surrounding the BRCF an important management goal, we will work to ensure the management activities and public uses of the property are done in a way to ensure the ground and surface water quality and quantity is protected. BRCF has 125 +/- acres of wetlands, including 31 vernal pools, 2,300 +/- feet of frontage on Coldrain Pond and 1,028 +/- feet of perennial streams within and adjacent to the BRCF. Keeping this water clean is important to the overall health of the lakes, ponds and rivers the BRCF drains into.

# CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

As the BRCF continues to grow and return to a more mature forested landscape, it will provide a meaningful contribution to carbon sequestration. In addition, its variation in topography and proximity to other conserved lands makes it a place available for plant and animal species to adjust to disturbances relating to climate change.

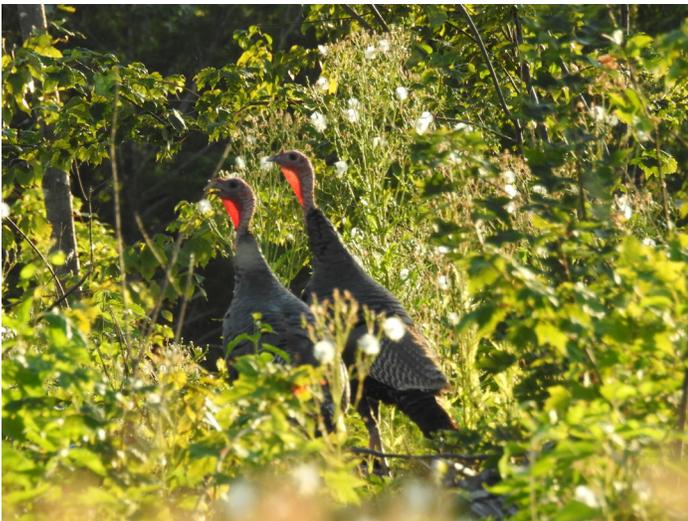


PHOTO CREDIT: MATT MURPHY



PHOTO CREDIT: JERRY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

# GOVERNANCE

The work to date developing the proposed Management Plan was undertaken by the BRCF Steering Committee and a large group of community members and partners, who bring their unique perspective to the discussion about the future of this special place. Once the Management Plan is adopted, the governance of the BRCF will shift to a Management Committee comprised of six designated representatives of specific organizations (New Durham resident, New Durham Conservation Commission, Merrymeeting Lake

Association, Moose Mountains Regional Greenways, SELT, and Powder Mill Snowmobile Club) and five at large representatives for specific interests (hunting/fishing, K-12 education, non-motorized recreation, forestry, wildlife). The Management Committee will continue to act as a community liason with SELT, support implementation of the Management Plan, support community engagement on the BRCF, and update and revise the Management Plan as may be needed.

## THE FUTURE OF THE BIRCH RIDGE COMMUNITY FOREST

### *Learn More and Share Your Voice*

As a Community Forest, SELT and the Birch Ridge Community Forest Steering Committee would like your input on the proposed Management Plan. Please attend this listening session and provide your feedback, or email your comments to SELT directly at [BRCF@seltnh.org](mailto:BRCF@seltnh.org). Comments will be shared with the BRCF Steering Committee.

**When:** Wednesday, July 22, 2020 • 6:00pm to 7:30pm

**Where:** The comfort of your home via Zoom

During this virtual session, SELT and members of the Steering Committee will present a summary of the Management Plan and the proposed addition to the BRCF. Participants will have the chance to ask questions and provide feedback. To receive the Zoom credentials, please register at [seltnh.org/events-page](http://seltnh.org/events-page) or by calling 778-6088. Don't worry – if you can't make it, a recording will be available.

## PARTNERSHIP FOR BIRCH RIDGE COMMUNITY FOREST

