

# MEMORIAL PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

## BRISTOL, VERMONT



## DRAFT FOR REVIEW

Prepared by:

Bristol Conservation Commission

January 2021

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## A. EXISTING CONDITIONS

### 1. General Description of Property

Memorial Park in Bristol has been known alternatively as Memorial Forest Park, and Veteran’s Memorial Park. A scenic waterfall, known locally as Burnham Falls, is the focal point of Memorial Park (Figure 1). This parcel is located in the northeastern corner of the town on the south side of VT Route 17 approximately 1.6 miles east of the junction with VT Route 116. The E911 address for the park is 1600 Drakes Woods Road. The property consists of 19.3 acres that straddle the Baldwin Creek, and its forested streamside areas are accessed by footpaths that lead from a gravel parking area off the south side of VT Route 17 near the Starksboro town line (Figure 2). Park lands were acquired by the town in the 1950s and are currently managed through the joint efforts of the Bristol Selectboard, the Bristol Conservation Commission, and the Bristol Recreation Department.



*Figure 1. Burnham Falls provides a scenic focal point at Memorial Park in Bristol.*

*Photo credit:*  
<http://www.newenglandwaterfalls.com/vt-bristolmemorialparkfalls.html>

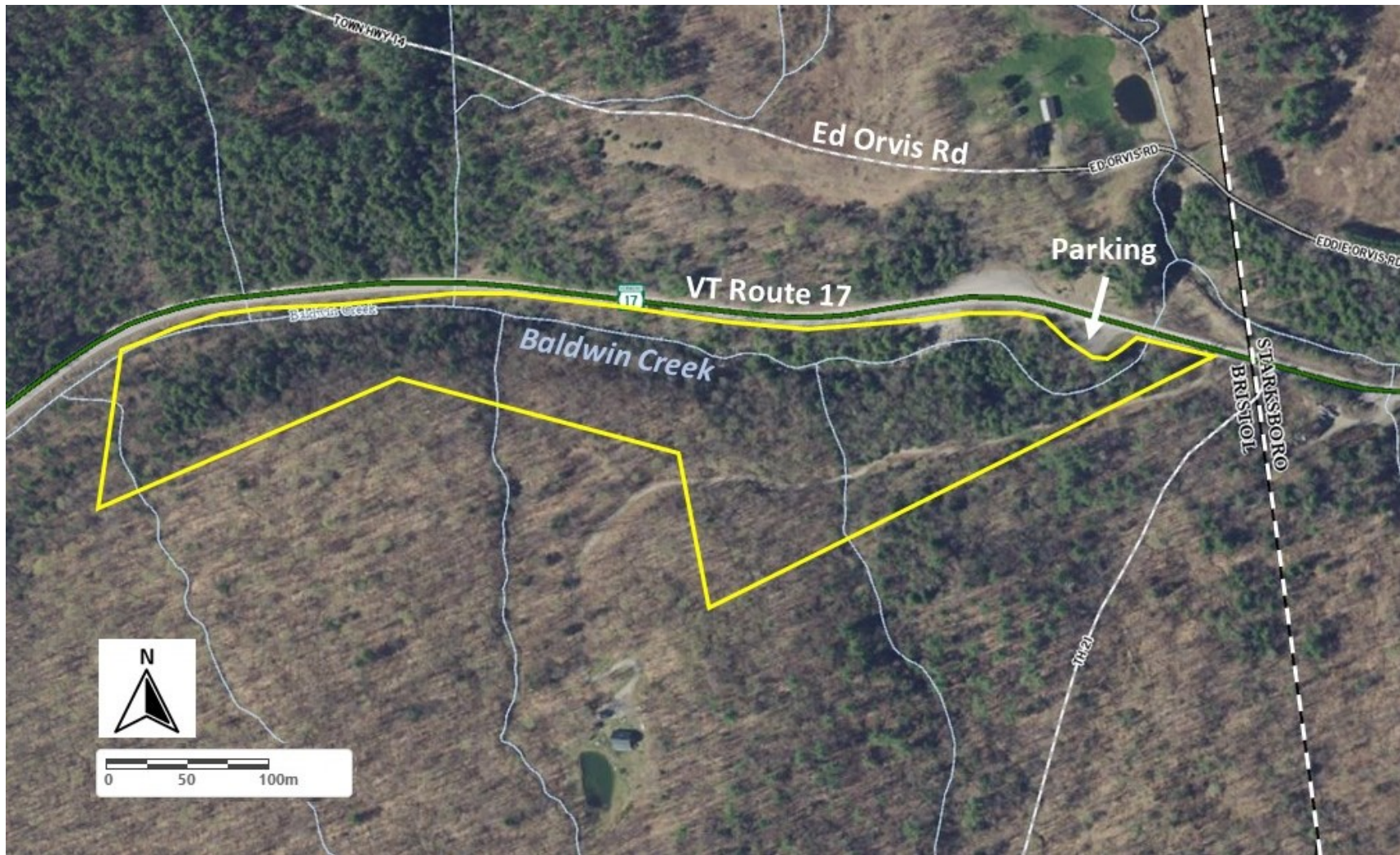
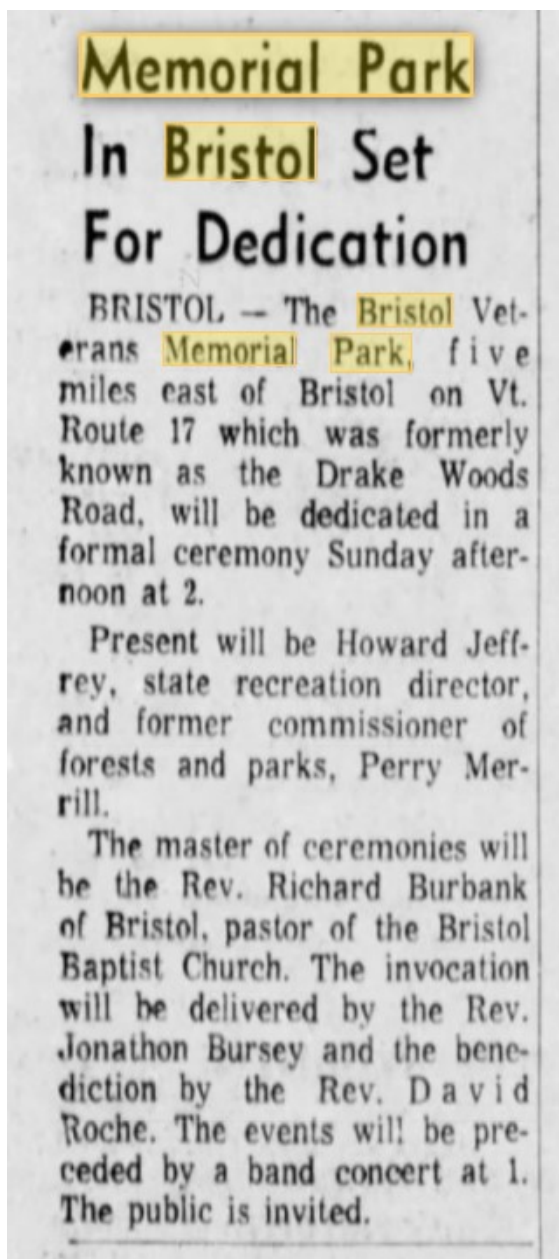


Figure 2. Approximate boundaries of Memorial Park, accessed from a parking area on the south side of VT Route 17. (Property boundaries, approximated from Bristol Tax Parcel Maps, are for planning purposes only and do not represent actual surveyed boundaries. Abutting properties are depicted on a tax parcel map in Appendix A.)

## 2. Recent History

According to the History of Bristol, Vermont (Bristol Historical Society, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2012), Memorial Park was conceived at Town Meeting in 1959 to honor World War II and Korean Conflict veterans from Bristol. Acquisition of the park was also supported as a means to address a state mandate for creation of town forests (Weed, 1962). At the west end of the parking area, a stone monument forms the backdrop for a bronze plaque that reads *“This area has been set apart by the people of Bristol to honor those who served and perpetuate the memory of those who sacrificed their lives in World War II and the Korean Conflict. A living memorial dedicated to the use of future generations as a continuing symbol of the gratitude of a free people. Erected 1966.”*



Today, this park continues to provide opportunity for quiet reflection. Common activities include picnicking, bird-watching, and hiking. A footpath leads from the parking area toward a footbridge over the Baldwin Creek which provides views of Burnham Falls. Originally, town citizens built a wooden staircase to connect the path to the bridge (Figure 4). However, due to the decline in structural condition and safety concerns, this staircase was removed in the fall of 2019. A recent engineering evaluation of the bridge has indicated that it has possibly 5 more years of use before repairs are warranted.

Future plans include a revitalization of the park trails and possible plans for improved ADA accessibility.

Figure 3. Memorial Park was dedicated in a ceremony held on Sunday, 4 September 1966 (Burlington Free Press, 1966 Sept 1)



Figure 4. Original wooden staircase leading to footbridge over chasm for viewing Burnham Falls. Due to deteriorating conditions and safety concerns, this staircase was dismantled in the fall of 2019, and the bridge trail was closed until further notice.

### 3. Ecological Description

Memorial Park is located along a steep-gradient, bedrock reach of the Baldwin Creek, a tributary to the New Haven River. The ecology of the site is closely tied to the river and its flooding history and frequency. Natural community types found at the park include Riverside Outcrops of bedrock and Hemlock - Northern Hardwood Forest, which have been described in a book entitled: Wetland, Woodland Wildland: A Guide to the Natural Communities of Vermont (Thompson & Sorenson, 2000). Tree species include Eastern Hemlock, White Pine, Yellow and White Birch, Sugar Maple and Red Maple (Appendix B).

The park is located within Drake Woods Forest Block identified as an important forest block resource in the town of Bristol (Bristol Town Plan, 2021). This “a medium-sized forest habitat block (500-5000 acres) extending into Lincoln and Starksboro, ...that

contains known deer wintering areas and was identified as a preferred Black bear travel corridor in 2003.” (p. 81, Bristol Town Plan, 2021).

#### 4. Wildlife Resources

The forested riparian habitat at Memorial Park likely supports <<< what species >>> that have been sighted within the general area. The Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity Map in the Bristol Town Plan (2021, p.84) depicts a bobcat corridor traversing the eastern corner of the Park. Fish within the Baldwin Creek in this park include native brown trout.<sup>[KU1]</sup>

<< bird species - Checked eBird and did not find reports of bird surveys at the Park >> *We could have Middlebury College do some surveys? Including mammals?*

<< No fish or macroinvertebrate sampling on this tributary by VTDEC >>  
*We could have a Mt Abe or Middlebury College class do some kick-net work (if appropriate and safe)*

<< No water quality data from VTDEC (IWIS on the VT Natural Resource Atlas); and Addison County River Watch has not recently sampled this tributary>>.  
*Perhaps Middlebury College could do some sampling?*

#### 5. Historical and Cultural Resources

In the middle 1800s, two forges for the manufacture of iron from regionally-sourced ore were constructed on the Baldwin Creek and utilized the power of the falls (Smith, 1886; Munsill, 1979). One was constructed in 1832 by Thurston and James Chase and partners (Munsill, 1979; Rolando, 2007). A second forge was built by Oliver W. Burnham on the north side of Baldwin Creek near the Starksboro town line. At least this forge was likely located within the current Memorial Park, and both forges had a short existence (Smith, 1886).

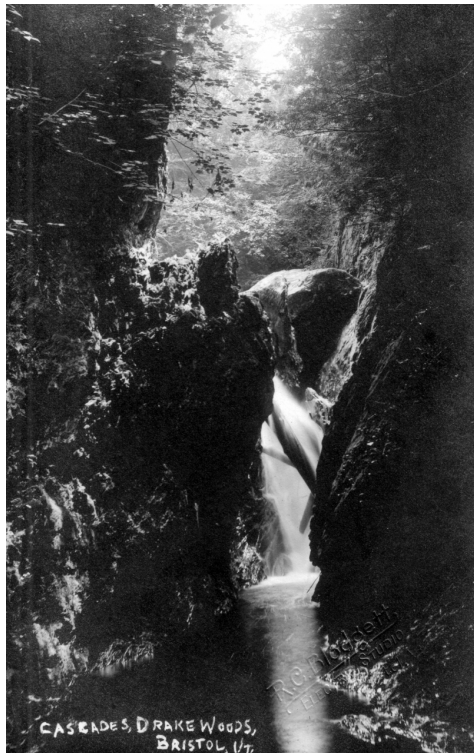
The falls are named for Orin Burnham, brother to Oliver and an early owner/operator of the forge, who committed suicide in June of 1850 by jumping from the top of the falls when business at the forge was going poorly (Anonymous, 1850; Jay, 1928; McWhorter, 1954; Munsill, 1979; Bristol Historical Society, 2012).

*“In that early <sup>[KU2]</sup>day there was no road up thru [sic] Drake Woods. The only roads leading to that section known as South Starksboro came up by way of Lincoln. A forge stood at a point just above Burnham’s Falls and ore was hauled over the road with oxen*



*from the Lake shore where it had been brought from New York state<sup>1</sup>. It seems that the unhappy victum [sic] of this story had an interest in the forge but things did'nt [sic] go well with the business and probably financial difficulties played a large part in driving him to such desprate [sic] measures.” (Bristol Herald, 27 Sept 1928, “Burnham’s Falls: A Historical Sketch”).*

In the 1880s, the area was also known as Chase Hollow, named for Thurston Chase (Smith, 1886). The falls has also been known as The Cascades at Drake Woods (Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Historic photograph of the falls archived at the Landscape Change Program web site. This c.1911 postcard refers to the waterfall as the Cascades at Drake Woods, Bristol, VT.*

Source: UVM Landscape Change Program  
[https://glcp.uvm.edu/landscape\\_new/](https://glcp.uvm.edu/landscape_new/)  
Image LS08226\_000

## 6. Archeological Resources

Limited archaeological inspections were completed at the property as part of a study of Vermont’s iron industry (Rolando, 2007). Pieces of iron slag were recovered during a 1990 site inspection, but remnants of the forge(s) may have been disturbed or obscured during past bridge construction activities (Rolando, 2007, p.105-106).

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<sup>1</sup> “People...cut timber and burned charcoal to operate the forge which smelted ore brought from Port Henry, NY” (McWhorter, 1954).

Given the location of Memorial Park along the river, and the scenic beauty of the falls, it is possible that Native Americans actively used the area, especially as a temporary encampment and hunting/fishing ground.

## **7. Topography and Geology**

Memorial Park is positioned on steeply sloping lands that contour to the Baldwin Creek. Elevations range from 1100 feet at the southern-most corner to 880 feet in the river channel at the western property boundary. The Baldwin Creek has an overall gradient of 6.2% through the property. Much of this elevation drop occurs at the Burnham Falls.

Soils at the park consist of glacial till and exposed bedrock (Springston & Kim, 2013). Glaciers overrode the region more than 20,000 years ago and left a veneer of till over bedrock when they receded from the region approximately 12,000 years ago (Stewart and MacClintock, 1969). Till is a poorly-sorted mix of sediments ranging in size from gravels to boulders, in a silt to sand-sized matrix.

Bedrock exposed in the park is more than 500 million years old, and consists of dolomitic marble and metagreywacke (Kim et al., 2013). Regionally, these rocks are part of the Hinesburg Thrust, a fault zone that trends north-south following the Route 116 valley. A thrust fault is a series of older rock layers that are pushed above younger rocks during progressive collision of crustal plates.

## **8. Hydrology and Geomorphology**

Memorial Park is located within the New Haven River watershed along the Baldwin Creek tributary. Nine square miles of land area drain to the Baldwin Creek at Memorial Park including the northwest slopes of Mount Ellen, and portions of Starksboro, Lincoln, Buels Gore, and Fayston.

The Baldwin Creek and New Haven River are “flashy” rivers, rising quickly in response to rain and snowmelt events. Several large floods (1830, 1927, 1936, 1938, 1976, 1998, and 2011) have impacted the New Haven River watershed, with the 1927 flood being the one of largest magnitude on record. Within the gorge at Memorial Park, exposed bedrock offers stability to the channel in the face of these floodwaters. However, scour along Baldwin Creek has led to erosion damages along VT Route 17 on the north boundary of the park in the floods of 1998 and 2011.

The culvert that conveys Baldwin Creek under VT Route 17 near the eastern extent of the Park is undersized, with a span (13.5 ft) that is only 45% of the measured bankfull width of the channel (30 ft), based on a culvert report accessed through the Vermont Natural Resource Atlas.<sup>2</sup> The natural stream valley is entirely blocked by fill material for the VT Route 17 culvert approaches. The culvert outlet (Figure 6A) is perched and presents a barrier to upstream fish passage. The upstream culvert inlet (Figure 6B) is quite narrow and positioned at a sharp angle to the channel, presenting a risk of debris blockage during flooding. Such culvert blockages could lead to sudden and severe erosion of VT Route 17 during a future flood, and possibly impact the nearby parking area at Memorial Park.

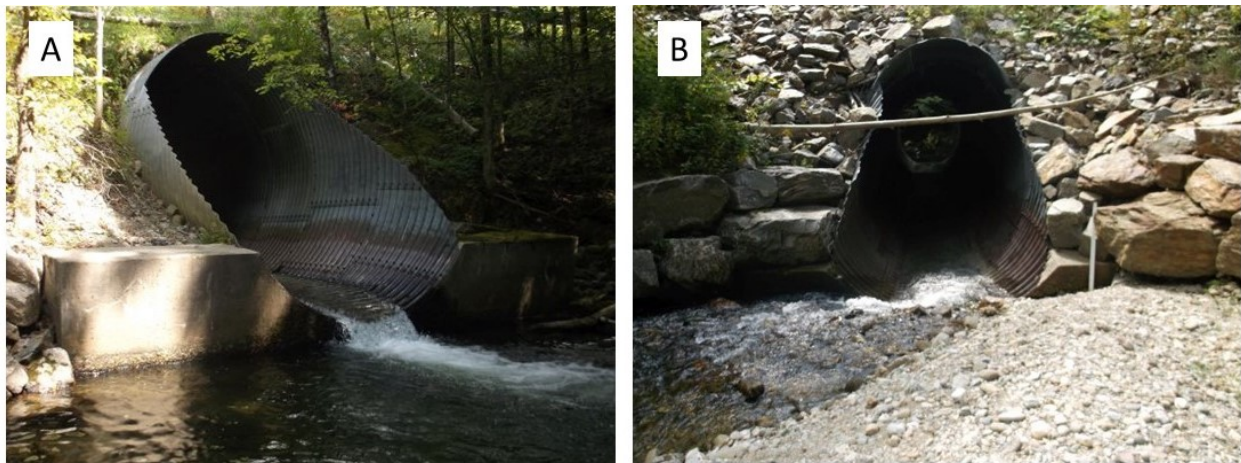


Figure 6. Culvert conveying Baldwin Creek under VT Route 17: A) downstream culvert outlet; B) upstream culvert inlet.

## B. CURRENT USES

Current uses are divided according either to the level of activity - Active and Passive Open Space - or to the type of use - Right-of-Way for Adjacent Landowner.

### 1. Active Open Space

Active open space may be defined as land surfaces utilized for specialized recreational activities, often with equipment in place (e.g., ballfields, sports areas, picnicking). Other than a small picnic area near the parking lot, there are no active open spaces in use at Memorial Park.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/Documents/FWD\\_SGACulvertReports/300017000001032.pdf](http://anrmaps.vermont.gov/websites/Documents/FWD_SGACulvertReports/300017000001032.pdf)

## **2. Passive Open Space**

Passive open space describes an area where the natural condition of the land provides the setting for human activities. Relevant activities at Memorial Park include bird-watching, hiking, fishing, and wading, and nearly the full park acreage could be classified as passive open space.

## **3. Right-of-Way for Adjacent Landowner**

A residential parcel to the immediate south and west of the park is accessed by a private driveway that traverses the southern third of the town parcel. This adjacent property has no other reasonable means of entry/egress; as such, the landowner has a deeded right-of-way across town property.

## **C. CURRENT ISSUES**

Along with all the beneficial uses described above, public land may be subject to occasional conflicts of use, inappropriate use or other conditions that pose concerns. Current issues related to use of Memorial Park include:

### **1. Structural Condition of Existing Footpath and Bridge**

The bridge over the chasm for viewing Burnham Falls was constructed in the 1960s, and originally, the trail system to access this bridge included a steep wooden staircase to traverse a steep bedrock slope (Figure 4). Due to deteriorating conditions of this staircase and related safety concerns, it was dismantled by the Conservation Commission in the fall of 2019, and the bridge trail was closed until further notice. Wooden planking and caution tape along with signage are used to block the trail at the former location of the head of staircase (Figure 7). Caution tape was also used to block access to the east end of the bridge. During weekly inspections of this area, the Recreation Department has reported occasional breaching of the caution tape, and has reinstalled the tape.



*Figure 7. Signage, caution tape, and wooden planking mark the end of the footpath and closure of the bridge crossing at Memorial Park.*

Through collaborations with the Bristol Trail Network, the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department are exploring funding and design options to re-route the trail system at the park to resume use of the bridge. A structural engineering review of the bridge has also been secured with funding

## **2. Winter Conditions**

Given the natural setting of the park, ice and snow accumulations on the trail can make conditions unsafe for use during the winter months. The Recreation Department has added signage at the parking lot to indicate winter park closure. The Bristol Public Works Department will not plow or maintain the parking lot during winter months, which will further discourage access. Notice of winter closure has also been added to the park description available on the town's web site.

## **3. Use After Dark and Unsanctioned Activities**

During weekly inspections, the Recreation Department has noted evidence of unsanctioned disposal of human waste at the park. There has historically been no placement of a porta-let at the park, and there are no future plans to install one, due to the relatively limited frequency of visitors at the park. The Bristol Recreation

Department has added a “Pack it in; pack it out” sign at the entry to the trail off the parking lot. Weekly inspections during non-winter months by the Recreation Department will continue to monitor whether this issue persists.

#### **4. Invasive Plants**

Presence of invasive plants at the park is minimal at present. A few buckthorn plants were noted during Fall 2021 inspections, and the Conservation Commission will coordinate future work sessions to remove these and provide instruction in invasives management for Bristol citizens. At present, the number of invasive plants is minor; therefore, establishment of an invasives control management area (Section D.2) is not warranted.

#### **5. Emerald Ash Borer**

text[KU3]

#### **6. Boundary Issues**

Memorial Park is bounded by VT Route 116 along the north boundary, Vermont Family Forests to the west and south, and privately owned parcels to the southwest and southeast. A tax parcel map is included in Appendix A.

A private driveway traverses the southern third of the town parcel, providing access to a private residential parcel to the southwest. Historically, this driveway has served as a foot trail for park visitors to loop back to Route 116 and the parking lot from the west side of the bridge over the chasm. But public use of this driveway as a path has likely diminished since this bridge trail was closed in 2019.

*KU reached out by phone to property owners of the parcel that has a right-of-way to ask how/if they use the Park and if they experience any issues from the public use of the park. – as of 1/10/22 no reply from them.*

#### **7. Trash Dumping**

Dumping of trash has been an issue historically at Memorial Park, typically concentrated near the parking area. Green Up activities in the spring of each year coordinated by the Conservation Commission have organized citizens to remove trash from the park. In more recent years, the Recreation Department has monitored the park on a weekly basis. This regular visitation has reduced the occurrence of trash.

### **D. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

## 1. Objectives

Memorial Park is a town-owned open space that has potential for a combination of uses and conditions, including a small area of active recreation (picnic table [KU4] near the parking area) and passive open space. The property offers unique opportunities not only for recreational use associated with access to the scenic waterfalls, but also for educational activities by school groups and residents.

Management objectives and related management practices must be carefully balanced with the resource concerns and scenic nature of the river itself. Accordingly, listed below are overarching objectives that address both uses and conservation:

- Access to the river by the hiking, fishing [KU5], and bird-watching community is integral to the recreational function of the open space and should be enhanced as best practices allow.
- The use of Memorial Park for educational purposes should be pursued and enhanced whenever possible.
- Public access to the park should be weighed against the protection of sensitive resources.

## 2. Management Areas

To accomplish these objectives the property can be divided into (4) land management types:

- Active recreation area and gravel parking lot: The small picnic area [KU6] near the parking lot will be managed by the Recreation Department. The parking lot will be maintained by the Department of Public Works crew or contractors, as determined by the Selectboard and Recreation Department.
- Riparian zone: a zone approximately 10 feet landward from the outermost edge of the river channel.
- Passive open space: areas not included in the other two.

Possible activities in these management areas include:

### Active Recreation Areas

Picnic table (with controlled use of fire rings [KU7])

### Passive Open Space

Hiking / Fitness

Bird watching

- Photography
- Fishing
- Wading
- Birding
- Geology
- Fish & invertebrate identification
- Plant & tree identification
- Mammal identification
- Trail building & maintenance instruction
- Management of invasive plants

Memorial Park is a day-use site open from dawn to dusk in spring, summer and fall seasons. No public access is allowed between dusk and dawn. Winter use of the park is discouraged due to ice and snow accumulations on the trail that can make conditions unsafe on the current trail system, that itself is in a state of disrepair. Trespassers between dusk and dawn or during Winter months will be handled according to the Town's Trespass Ordinance.

Nature trails and a timber bridge on steel I-beams were developed at the park in the 1960s, so that users would have access to view the falls, and explore the ecology and geology of the park. Conditions of the trail, timber steps, railings and bridge have since deteriorated over the decades.

Because of the steep topography and shallow soils, mountain biking and motorized vehicles are not permitted at the park<sup>[KU8]</sup>.

In 2018, the Bristol Trail Network (Bristol Rec Club), Conservation Commission and Selectboard commissioned an inspection of the trail network by Timber & Stone, LLC, and a structural inspection and analysis of the bridge by DeWolfe Engineering. DeWolfe Engineering found that some components of the bridge do not meet current applicable codes, and repair or replacement of the bridge was recommended within a two to five-year timeframe. A detailed design for rehabilitation of the trail network, including a combination of stone steps, elevated timber decking, and a bridge replacement option, was prepared by Timber & Stone.

The timber staircase that once scaled a steep bedrock wall to connect the foot path to the chasm bridge was dismantled in the fall of 2019 by the Conservation Commission and the bridge trail was closed by the town until further notice.



## **E. MANAGEMENT ROLES**

Management of Memorial Park will be achieved through cooperative actions of several groups.

### **1. Conservation Commission**

The Bristol Conservation Commission is a town board with a mission to conserve Bristol's natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations, raise public awareness for these resources and provide opportunities for greater involvement by the community (<http://bristolvt.org/boards-commissions-committees/conservation/>). The Commission has developed this management plan for Memorial Park in keeping with implementation actions outlined in the Bristol Town Plan (2020). Along with the Selectboard and Recreation Department, the Commission is charged with maintaining existing public facilities and outdoor spaces that encourage social and leisure time activities among town residents. The Commission works closely with the Recreation Department on maintenance of Memorial Park. The Commission is also working with the Bristol Trail Network to improve and extend hiking trails at the park. This is an ongoing activity, which will require volunteer efforts of the Commission and other community members.

### **2. Recreation Department**

Bristol Recreation Department ([www.bristolvt.myrec.com](http://www.bristolvt.myrec.com)) is committed to offering lifelong learning opportunities through a wide range of quality recreational and performing arts activities to people of all ages. The Recreation Department has contributed to this management plan for Memorial Park, and oversees weekly maintenance activities at the park.

### **3. Selectboard**

The Bristol Selectboard is ultimately responsible for recreation and healthy living in the town of Bristol, with support from the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department. The Selectboard reviews and approved this management plan for Memorial Park, and works with the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department to secure the necessary resources to maintain and improve the town parks.

### **4. Bristol Trail Network**

The Bristol Trail Network operates under the auspices of the Bristol Recreation Club, Inc., a non-profit (501(c)3), volunteer-run, membership organization, open to all in the community. The mission of the Bristol Recreation Club is to maintain outdoor

recreation space for the amusement, enjoyment, and recreation of the residents of Bristol ([www.bristolrecclub.org](http://www.bristolrecclub.org)). The Bristol Trail Network is a project of the Bristol Recreation Club launched in 2017 ([www.bristolrecclub.org/bristol-trail-network](http://www.bristolrecclub.org/bristol-trail-network)). In addition to the main focus of building a loop of interconnected trails around the Bristol village, BTN volunteers are also improving and expanding trails on other town-owned properties. At Memorial Park, BTN and the Conservation Commission have applied for grants to fund the proposed scope of work for trail and bridge rehabilitation. Future funding opportunities will continue to be sought.

#### **5. American Legion Post #19**

Members of American Legion Post #19 have been involved in park maintenance activities in the past, and opportunities exist for this group to be involved on a volunteer basis and through fundraising in future years.

#### **6. Other Volunteer Organizations**

Other volunteer organizations that may contribute to future maintenance and improvements at the park include the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, as well as students from Mount Abraham Union High School. The current sign at the park (Figure 8) was designed and constructed by students from the Mount Abe Design Technologies Education Department in 2018. New Haven River Anglers, is a regional group dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the New Haven River, including the Baldwin Creek tributary that flows through the park.



*Figure 8. Park sign fabricated in 2018 by Mount Abe Design Technologies Education Department.*

## **F. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

### **1. Actions by the Conservation Commission**

- Continue active involvement as overseers of the protection and enhancement of the natural resources at the park.
- Continue to coordinate Green-Up Day clean-ups at the park.
- Continue collaborating with the Bristol Trail Network to secure funding for rehabilitation or replacement of the chasm bridge and rehabilitation of the trail network. Conservation Reserve Fund could be used as matching funds for state/federal/private foundation grants, subject to approval by the Selectboard.
- **Consider development of signposts or kiosk<sup>[KU9]</sup> to highlight cultural and/or historical aspects of the park.**
- Encourage public participation in on-site invasive management activities.
- Coordinate with experts, watershed groups, and/or academic groups to conduct inventories of bird, plant, mammalian, fish and invertebrate species at the park.
- Develop management plans for control and eradication of invasive plant species.
- Continue to work cooperatively with Bristol Selectboard, Recreation Department and others for the protection and enhancement of the park.

### **2. Actions by the Recreation Department**

- Continue active maintenance activities at the park including weekly inspections.
- Work with the Conservation Commission and Bristol Trail Network to design trail improvements at the park.

### **3. Actions by the Selectboard**

- Work with the Conservation Commission on items involving the protection and enhancement of natural resources at the park.
- Work with the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department to provide funding to support activities and facility improvements at the park.
- Through activities of the Emerald Ash Borer<sup>[KU10]</sup>town committee, inventory the ash trees at the parcel and develop a management plan for these ash trees.
- Closely monitor any actions by the Recreation Department concerning unsanctioned or overnight activities at the park.
- Closely monitor any actions by the Police Department relating to illegal activities at the park.
- Provide oversight of the activities of all municipal boards and public groups at the park.

- Coordinate with the State of Vermont Agency of Transportation regarding the construction/maintenance of State Route 116 along the northern park boundary, and eventual replacement of the Rt. 116 crossing over Baldwin Creek.

## References

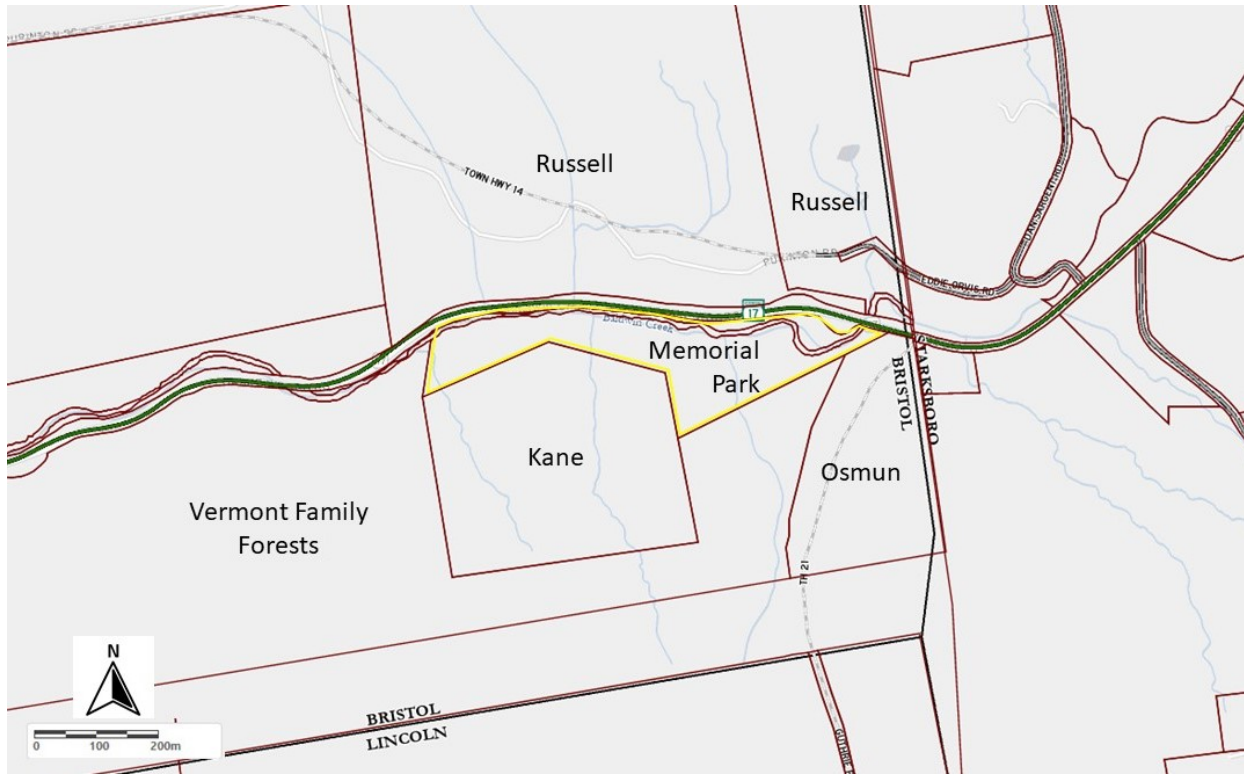
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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A – Memorial Park Tax Parcel Map**

**APPENDIX B – Trees of Memorial Park**

## APPENDIX A - Memorial Park Tax Parcel Map



Location of Memorial Park (highlighted parcel) and abutting parcel owners. (Parcel boundaries are for planning purposes only, obtained from VT Natural Resources Atlas, <https://anr.vermont.gov/maps/nr-atlas>)

## APPENDIX B – Trees at Memorial Park

### Species list from September 7, 2021

Compiled by Helen Young and Don Stratton

Common Name	Latin name
Eastern Hemlock	<i>Thuja canadensis</i>
White Pine	<i>Pinus strobus</i>
White ash	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>
Basswood (= linden)	<i>Tilia americana</i>
*Buckthorn	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>
Yellow birch	<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>
White (paper) birch	<i>Betula papyrifera</i>
Quaking aspen	<i>Populus tremuloides</i>
Big-toothed aspen	<i>Populus grandidentata</i>
Cottonwood	<i>Populus deltoides</i>
Willow	<i>Salix sp.</i>
American beech	<i>Fagus grandiflora</i>
Sugar maple	<i>Acer saccharum</i>
Red maple	<i>Acer rubric</i>
Black maple	<i>Acer nigrum</i>
Mountain maple	<i>Acer spicatum</i>
Striped maple	<i>Acer pensylvanicum</i>
Box Elder	<i>Acer negundo</i>
Elm (American or White)	<i>Ulnus Americana</i>
Red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus sp.</i>
Cherry	<i>Prunus sp.</i>
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sp.</i>