

# STEWARDSHIP PLAN

## Saunders/Bristol Flats River Access

Saunders and Fuller Parcels, New Haven River, Bristol, VT



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**Prepared by:**

Amanda Garland

Vermont River Conservancy

50 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602

and

Bristol Conservation Commission and

Kristen Underwood

**DRAFT Plan with edits by Kristen Underwood,  
for review at June 2026 Bristol CC Meeting**

## Background and Introduction

The Bristol Flats River Area consists of two conserved parcels of land protected by conservation easements co-held by Vermont River Conservancy, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the Vermont Department of Conservation, and owned by the Town of Bristol. Together, they include nearly one mile of river corridor along the New Haven River downstream of the village of Bristol, totalling 59.5 acres

The Saunders parcel was acquired by the town in 2013. Named “The so-called “Saunders River Access” now also includes the former Paul Fuller parcel to the immediate south (acquired by the town as of 2020). The town of Bristol purchased the easement portion from Paul's estate in 2020 following his passing in 2018 and merged the Fuller easement into the Saunders easement and simply called the whole protected property, Saunders River Access, at Bristol Flats.

## Management Plan Development

The Vermont River Conservancy has coordinated the drafting of this Management Plan in coordination with the Bristol Conservation Commission, and the Town of Bristol, as an update to the Interim Management Plan dated xx XXXX and to address the merging of the Fuller parcel.

As a requirement of the conservation easements,

*The Management Plan shall:*

- 1. Provide for the use and management of the Protected Property in a fashion which is consistent with the Purposes of this Grant, including, but not limited to, providing for accommodations that address the anticipated equilibrium conditions and associated physical adjustment processes of the River, as well as, minimizing future conflicts between the anticipated physical adjustment processes of the River and incompatible land use and channel management activities on the Protected Property; and,*
- 2. Be designed to provide reasonable public access to recreational values and opportunities associated with the Protected Property; and,*
- 3. Be consistent with the purpose of conserving agricultural activities on the Protected*

*Property, subject to the natural movement of the River, as well as, conserving biological diversity, wildlife habitat, natural communities and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values of the Protected Property; and,*

4. *Otherwise be consistent with the terms and conditions of the easement.*

*Prior to the final adoption of each Management Plan, including updates, revisions and amendments, Grantor shall: (a) secure appropriate public input from the general public; (b) develop the Management Plan in a timely and responsive manner; and, (c) provide Grantees with a copy of each such Management Plan, as well as, a copy of each final adopted Management Plan.*

### **Management Plan Duration**

This document will be reviewed and updated every 10 years, or as amendments are needed.

### **Updates and Amendments**

All Management Plans, including all updates and amendments, will be shared for approval with easement holders no less than 30 days prior to any planned activity to ensure said activities are consistent with the Conservation Easement, ~~to be~~ held by Vermont River Conservancy and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and other property restrictions, conservation values, and Conservation Purposes as defined in the Easement (as may be amended).

### **Entity Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Town of Bristol (Landowner)**

The landowner is responsible for stewardship and maintenance of the property. The landowner must steward and maintain the property in accordance with the restrictions of the conservation easement. The landowner must report any issues that violate the easement or this management plan to easement holders. The landowner is responsible for updating the management plan in partnership with the easement holders.

#### **Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) - (Easement Holder)**

VRC co-holds a Public Access Conservation Easement on this property. VRC is responsible for monitoring of the easement to ensure there are no issues or violations. VRC can provide technical assistance to the landowner as it relates to stewardship, maintenance, or funding for improvements that improve recreational access or ecological function.

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) - (Easement Holder)  
VHCB co-holds a Public Access Conservation Easement on this property. They provide oversight of VRC, ensuring the property is being properly monitored and issues are resolved.

Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation- DEC (Easement Holder)  
Grantor grants VTDEC, and successor agencies, third-party enforcement rights under this Grant and acknowledges VTDEC's role in providing technical assistance and approvals for channel management (Section V). Upon request, VTDEC shall assist Grantor and Grantees with the Management Plan and related approvals, consulting as appropriate with VTFRP, VTFW, and VTAAFM.

## Property Overview

### Property location

The Saunders River Access (Saunders and Fuller parcels) is located along the Bristol Flats ins a mixed agricultural and residential area ofin the "Lower Watershed" of the New Haven River, roughly 2.4 miles downstream of the central village district of the town of Bristol village and 1.2 miles upstream of the village of New Haven Mills village.

To access the Protected Propertyland, use the farm lane located at approximately 1160 South 116 Rd, Bristol, VT, directly across from the barns and silos of Saunders Farm. There is a small, orange utility post on the shoulder of Rt 116 that marks the lane. At the end of the farm lane, you will see a kiosk, park there.

### Property description

The Saunders River AccessBristol Flats consists of two adjacent conserved parcels: The Saunders parcel and the Fuller parcel.

The SaundersSuanders parcel consists of 40.1 acres on both sides of the New Haven River containing a mix of forested floodplain and hay field, where historic dredging and straightening has occurred due to the dynamic conditions present there. The property was protected as a way to allow the river to continue to find equilibrium by accessing its floodplains and changing course as needed, dropping out sediment and flood debris.

The Fuller parcel consists of 19.4 acres between Route 116 and the New Haven River, and is accessed through the Saunders Parcel. It is valued for its native riparian buffer zone and ability to allow the New Haven River access to its floodplain.

Collectively, the Protected Property serves as a permanently protected floodplain that slows high-velocity floodwater, protects water quality, expands public access to the river through 3,800 feet of frontage, and acts as a vital riparian habitat for birds, amphibians and mammals.

## **Primary Stewardship Objectives and Management Activities**

**Goal A: To allow the New Haven River to re-establish its natural slope, meander pattern and access to natural floodplains.**

- 1) **Buffer Vegetation:** A riparian buffer zone measured 50 ft landward from the top of bank will remain unmanaged and adjust based on the movement of the river.
- 2) Easement holder has channel management rights, meaning any activity that impacts the river's natural course is not allowed without permission.

**GOAL B: To conserve and protect wildlife habitat, natural communities, native flora and fauna, and ecological processes on the Protected Property**

- 1) **Introduced or Noxious Species:** If mechanical or chemical control of any introduced or noxious vegetation is warranted, a treatment plan will be reviewed and approved by landowners and site partners.
- 2)

**GOAL C: To provide for non-commercial, non-motorized public recreational use to the land, including birding, horse-back riding, and walking, as well as access to the New Haven River for swimming and angling, provided such uses are conducted in a manner that minimizes negative impacts on the natural resource values of the Protected Property and the farmer's field.**

- 1) **Allowed Uses:** Low impact activities such as: walking, picnicking, swimming, horse-back riding, fishing, boating.
- 2) **Signage:**
  - a. **Kiosk and Educational Signage:** The kiosk purpose is to communicate the use and purpose of the conserved land and to acknowledge funders who helped protect the property. The E911 address for the site may be added to the kiosk post.

- b. Wayfinding signs: A road sign will not be installed, in line with the management goals of the site.
- c. Safety signs: *Offer of swimming safety signage from VRC, possibly some info on noxious weeds present*

- 3) **Parking:** From dawn to dusk, cars are able to park at the end of the farm field laneroad, near the kiosk.
- 4) **Trails:** There are no trails at this time.
- 5) **Dogs:** Dogs are allowed on site, and must be on a leash or under control of their owner. All pet waste must be picked up and removed from the property.
- 6) **Litter / Trash:** No trash receptacles will be provided on site. All visitors must carry out any waste they brought with them according to Leave No Trace guidelines.
- 7) **Vehicles:** Motorized vehicles will be prohibited on the property, except:
  - Equipment related to agricultural and land management activities, outside the 50 ft riparian buffer.
  - Along the public access mowed-farm laneroad to the kiosk. Vehicular access along this grass pathway may be restricted by the town of Bristol for public safety and/or land management reasons.
  - Snowmobiles? (allowable use outside the buffer zone)
- 8) **Picnic Tables:** No picnic tables will be installed at this time.
- 9) **Campfires:** Campfires are not allowed, both to dissuade camping and ensure the existing woody vegetation is not cut or burned. If evidence of campfires is found, stones, ash, coals, and burnt wood will be dispersed to dissuade continued use.
- 10) **Loitering / Squatting:** Public access on the Protected Property is allowed during daylight hours only from dawn to dusk. If unwanted loitering or squatting occurs on this property, the eConservation eCommission and/or Bristol Recreation Director will ~~meet to~~ discuss and enact reasonable and timely responses, possibly including telling squatters to vacate the premises, notifying authorities (Bristol Police Department, Addison County SherriffTown Constable, State Police, etc) to help relocate, or installing “No camping, you are on video” signage, and possibly installing cameras. VRC is able to assist with these efforts.
- 11) **Privy:** No privy access.
- 12) **Plowing:** No plowing will occur in the area. The property will be managed as a three season river access area, not inclusive of winter. Winter visitors are allowed, but no provisions will be made for them.

## **Inventory of Existing Buildings, Structures or Utilities**

There are no existing buildings, structures, or utilities on the property other than a kiosk.

## **Proposed Physical Improvements**

In the spring of 2026, 4-foot-tall buffer stakes will be placed to mark the 50-foot buffer zone in areas where the river has moved into the conserved area towards the hay field. These stakes will assist the farmer who hays the land to identify areas where haying is restricted.

## **Restoration Activities**

There is opportunity for planting native riparian species within the newly staked areas of the buffer zone. However, given mature species present in the current buffer, regeneration is likely to take place naturally. Areas regenerating naturally should be observed to ensure native species are taking hold, planning for the management of any invasive species that move into that area.

## **Summary of Allowed and Restricted Uses**

Given the use pattern and success of other river access areas in the region, this land is being managed mainly for its flood resiliency and wildlife benefits, allowing for low impact use by anglers and other nature enthusiasts.

Restricted Uses of the Protected Property, based on the Saunders conservation easement:

1. The Protected Property shall be maintained in its natural condition as a conservation area in perpetuity. No residential, commercial, industrial or mining activities shall be permitted on the Protected Property and no building or structure associated with such activities shall be constructed, created, erected or moved onto the Protected Property, except for fences that may be erected and maintained for normal agricultural practices. The term structure as used in the preceding sentence shall include, but not be limited to, any telecommunications, broadcasting or transmission facility. No other building or structure shall be constructed, created, erected or moved onto the Protected Property, except as specifically permitted by the Management Plan or by this Grant.
2. No rights-of-way, easements of ingress or egress, driveways, roads, utility lines, other easements or use restrictions shall be constructed, developed, granted or maintained into, on, over, under, or across the Protected Property without the prior written permission of Grantees. Grantees may grant such permission if they determine, in their sole discretion,

that the proposed right-of-way, easement of ingress or egress, driveway, road, utility line, other easement or use restriction is consistent with the Purposes of this Grant.

3. There shall be no signs, billboards, or outdoor advertising of any kind erected or displayed on the Protected Property; provided, however, that Grantor may erect and maintain reasonable signs including, but not limited to, signs indicating the name of the Protected Property and its ownership by Grantor, boundary markers, directional signs, memorial plaques, informational and interpretive signs, and signs limiting access or use (subject to the limitations of Section VI, below). With prior written permission of Grantor, Grantees may erect and maintain signs designating the Protected Property as land under easement protection by Grantees.
4. The placement, collection or storage of trash, human waste, or any other unsightly or offensive material on the Protected Property shall not be permitted except at locations, if any, and in a manner that is consistent with this Grant and permitted by the Management Plan. The temporary storage of trash in receptacles for periodic off-site disposal shall be permitted.
5. There shall be no disturbance of the surface of the Protected Property including, but not limited to, filling, excavation, removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rocks or minerals, or change of the topography of the land in any manner, except as may be reasonably necessary to carry out the uses allowed under Section IV and V of this Grant in a manner consistent with the Purposes of this Grant, and as provided for in the Management Plan, or as may be permitted by the State of Vermont Division for Historic Preservation or successor agency for the purposes of conducting archeological investigations. In no cases shall surface mining of subsurface oil, gas or other minerals be permitted.
6. Grantor shall not give, grant, sell, convey, subdivide, transfer, mortgage, pledge, lease or otherwise encumber the Protected Property without the prior written approval of Grantees which approval may be granted, denied or conditioned – including the condition that the Protected Property be sold for only nominal consideration - in the Grantees' sole discretion.
7. There shall be no operation of motorized vehicles on the Protected Property except for uses specifically reserved, such as for agricultural purposes, property management and for emergency purposes. Snowmobiling may be permitted as provided for in the Management Plan. There shall be no all-terrain vehicle use permitted on the Protected Property except for emergency or management purposes. However, Grantor may permit motorized personal assistive mobility devices for use by persons with mobility disabilities on the Protected Property if consistent with the Purposes of this Grant. For

purposes of this Grant, all-terrain vehicles include, but are not limited to, motorized four wheeled, three-wheeled and two-wheeled or tracked vehicles.

8. There shall be no manipulation or alteration of natural watercourses, wetlands, water levels, and/or flow of rivers or their tributaries, or of other waterbodies, except as may be provided for in the Management Plan, or as may be permitted under Section V of this Grant.

9. No use shall be made of the Protected Property, and no activity thereon shall be permitted which, in the reasonable opinion of Grantees, is not or is likely to not be consistent with the Purposes of this Grant

### **Potential Threats, Violations, Conflicts, Areas of Concern**

(Highlight invasive species, sensitive natural communities or species, neighboring land use, risk of encroachment, vandalism, dumping, etc)

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