

Catamount Community Forest

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The Catamount Outdoor Family Center in Williston, Vermont got its start in the late 1970s when Jim and Lucy McCullough inherited the historic 500-acre property and opened it to the public for cross country skiing. By 1990 their small experiment in the outdoor industry had become a wildly successful four-season operation that is still open for hiking, biking, skiing, and educational opportunities for children, college students, and adults.

At first, transforming the farm into an outdoor recreation hub was simply a way to supplement the family's farming business. But its success had other benefits, too, as it helped stem encroaching development and protect the rural quality of life that long defined the community. Today it is a regional icon that attracts more than 20,000 visitors per year.

Despite this success, financial constraints are now forcing the family to sell 376 acres of the property, an outcome that could drastically change the fabric of Williston if not carefully managed (a recent buildout analysis suggests that up to 150 homes could be developed on the property under current regulations). But true to the Vermont values by which they live, the family has embraced an opportunity to sell the land as a community forest, perhaps the last chance to protect the property from incompatible development.

Now, The Trust for Public Land is working with the family and the Town of Williston to secure the property once and for all. The new Catamount Community Forest, will be owned by the Town, offer free public access, and will safeguard the property's natural resources and protect its function as a recreational hub for generations to come.

About the property

Set in the foothills of the Green Mountains and just a half mile from the main stem of the Winooski River, the proposed Catamount Community Forest is notable for its natural beauty and high ecological value.

At the top of the property's Indian Lookout trail, visitors are treated to sweeping views of the river valley and Camel's Hump to the southeast. Down below, 20 miles of trails meander through a diverse landscape of open meadows and forested ridges, which support a mosaic of northern hardwood, white pine, hemlock, mesic red oak and more. Nearly eight acres of wetlands and marshes can be found on the land, including two ponds that support Canada geese, mallards, and great blue herons. The property supports a variety of other birds, too, including wood thrush, veery, red-eyed vireo, and ovenbird, and provides important deer wintering habitat.

In many ways, the proposed Catamount Community Forest can be seen as a microcosm of Vermont's wild backcountry within the fastest growing town in the fastest growing county in the state. Protecting it will help preserve the region's dwindling natural landscapes and the diversity of life that depends on them.

Our vision

The Trust for Public Land is working to create the new Catamount Community Forest with 376 acres of land from the outdoor center and an additional 17 acres of adjoining land donated by a generous neighbor. Once protected, the property will be part of a 660-acre corridor of public and private conservation land – the largest core forest block in the Town of Williston.

The community forest will be safe from potential development, be open to free public access, and remain a community resource for generations to come. Protection of the existing trail system will help sustain Vermont's outdoor recreation industry, which directly supports 34,000 local jobs and brings \$2.5 billion to the state each year.

While the forest will be owned by the town, it will continue to be operated by the Catamount Outdoor Family Center and its board of directors to ensure high quality programming and uninterrupted service to the community. An easement will be co-held by Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Housing & Conservation Board.

Please join us

The property is worth \$2.3 million, but the landowners are willing to sell for \$1.6 million, donating a stunning \$700,000 of land value. With project costs and stewardship endowments, we must secure approximately \$1.9 million by spring 2018. A combination of federal, state, and municipal funding will get us close to reaching our goal, but private philanthropy will be crucial to closing the gap. Please join us to learn how you can help protect the Catamount Community Forest.



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livable communities for
generations to come.

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