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# Wheeler Mountain is now public land, conserved forever for hiking, rock climbing

Vermont Public | By [Abagael Giles](#)

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Wheeler Mountain has long been a popular destination for hiking and rock climbing. Now it will be permanently protected from development as public land and part of Willoughby State Forest.

An iconic and ancient granite dome in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom will now be conserved forever as public land.

Wheeler Mountain lies to the west of Mount Hor, Lake Willoughby and Mount Pisgah in the town of Sutton. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation announced this week it has purchased the land that encompasses the peak as part of a nearly 120-acre acquisition.

The area includes the cliffs, high ridgeline and summit of Wheeler Mountain, which is a popular hiking and historic rock climbing destination.

"In addition to those recreational features, the cliffs offer some unique natural habitats as well," said Gannon Osborn, who manages the Land Conservation Program at the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. "They have served as nesting habitat for peregrine falcons in the past, and there's kind of this high elevation forest community."

Evidence of rock climbing on the peak's granite slabs and cracks dates back to at least 1947.

Hikers and climbers have historically accessed the mountain via a trail that runs through private land. The easement for the trail was due to expire in the next few years, and landowner John Kriebel approached the state to see about ways to continue public access.

"It really is one of the last places where you really can't hear any sounds of civilization, except for the occasional car or chainsaw, or maybe you can hear the railroad train down in Barton. But most of the time, it's really, really quiet."

John Kriebel, former property owner

Kriebel's family purchased Wheeler Mountain from the Wheeler family and their farm decades ago, and he said preserving the long tradition of public access there was important to both families.

Kriebel said he sold the property to the state because he wants to continue that legacy and conserve the mountain forever.

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The state purchased the property using a combination of funding from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's Habitat Stamp program.

The move protects views of the glacially carved landscape around Willoughby State Forest, since Wheeler Mountain is prominent in the viewshed from Mount Pisgah, Mount Hor and Wheeler Pond.

Additionally, the swath of land will add to a significant wildlife corridor that runs south to the Worcester Range.

Big swaths of connected forest land — particularly those with diverse topography — are increasingly important to help wild animals adapt to human-caused climate change. They allow wildlife to move northward and up and down in elevation as the climate warms and their ecosystems change over time.

"From a climate perspective, there's a lot of elevation change along the cliffs that create different micro-habitats for rare and unique species," Osborn said.