

BASELINE DOCUMENTATION REPORT



ASHLEY COMMUNITY FOREST PROPERTY Sharon and Strafford, Vermont

VLT Project No. 131650
VHCB No. 2019-002-001

Prepared by:
Vermont Land Trust
8 Bailey Ave
Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-5234

 Vermont Land Trust
CONSERVING LAND FOR THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

Vermont Land Trust ■ Conservation Stewardship

The Conservation Stewardship Program is staffed by a vice president for stewardship, foresters, ecologists, a legal team, mappers and regional project and stewardship directors.

The responsibilities of the Conservation Stewardship Program include maintaining land related records, tracking changes in land ownership, monitoring conserved properties at least annually, photo-documenting land uses periodically, answering landowner questions, interpreting or approving permitted activities, and correcting violations through voluntary compliance or, if necessary, legal proceedings. Stewardship Program staff also support landowners as stewards of their land by offering information and advice on sound and sustainable uses of conserved properties.

This Report Contains the Following Information:

- Introduction and description of the current uses of the property
- Summary of Grantor's and Grantees' rights
- References
- Signature pages
- Conserved property location map
- USGS topographic map
- Orthophoto map
- Conservation Easement map
- Photopoint map
- Photographic documentation

ASHLEY COMMUNITY FOREST PROPERTY Sharon and Strafford, Vermont

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to describe the physical features and current land uses of the **Ashley Community Forest Property** on which the development rights, a perpetual conservation easement and restrictions, and a public access easement are being conveyed to the Vermont Land Trust, Inc. (VLT) and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). The Grant conveying these rights will be recorded in the Sharon and Strafford Land Records.

This report is based, in part, on documentation visits by Donna Foster (Regional Project Director) for the Vermont Land Trust on May 6, and December 7, 2021, and previous field visits to the property. Bob Linck (former VLT Project Director), Allaire Diamond (VLT Ecologist), Michael Sacca (AVC), AJ Follensbee (Windsor North County Forester) and David Paganelli (Orange County Forester) were present during previous visits. Donna assembled the report and digital photographs; maps were prepared by Donna and VLT GIS staff.

Purposes of the Grant

The primary purposes of the easement are to conserve productive forestland, wildlife habitats, biological diversity, natural communities, riparian buffers, wetlands, soil productivity, water quality, native flora and fauna and the ecological processes that sustain these natural resource values; to provide non-motorized, non-commercial recreational and educational use; to conserve open space values and scenic resources of the property; and to enlist public guidance in management planning.

The purposes of the Grant will be advanced by conserving the property because it possesses the following attributes:

- 256.4 acres of forest available for long-term sustainable management for the production of forest products;
- is located in Sharon and Strafford and is considered by town residents to be an important property for maintaining the beauty, unique rural Vermont character and strong sense of place for community residents;
- can be used for numerous recreational, cultural and educational purposes by the Towns, local schools, and the community;
- streams, including headwater tributaries of Fay Brook that, with wooded buffers and natural flow, provide an array of ecological benefits including maintaining water quality and providing corridors for species movement;
- wetlands, including seeps and other small areas of open, shrub, and stream-associated wetlands; and

- additional wetland, upland, and riparian habitat for wildlife.

Description and Current Use of the Property

Property Overview

The Alliance for Vermont Communities, Inc. (AVC) is conserving ±256.4 acres of predominantly forested land located in Sharon and Strafford. The mission of AVC is to protect working farms, forests and communities of central Vermont and to promote responsible development that will sustain the rural heritage and values for present and future generations. AVC was established in 2016 in direct response to New Vistas, a proposed 20,000-person development that would cover approximately 5,000 acres in the four towns of Sharon, Strafford, Royalton and Tunbridge. A decided majority of residents of all four towns voted at each of their town meetings in 2017 to oppose New Vistas, and to seek alternatives to support their communities' land use goals and values, including recreation and protection of ecologically sensitive lands.

The Ashley Community Forest Property is a large, undeveloped, and mostly wooded parcel at the heart of the four-town region, adjacent to a large tract New Vistas had previously acquired. An offer by New Vistas prompted the landowner, Rosamond Ashley and her niece Holly Kicklighter as her legal guardian, to work with AVC for their acquisition of the property and eventual transfer to the towns of Sharon and Strafford for a jointly managed community forest. AVC launched a successful fundraising campaign and was able to purchase the Ashley property, with the hope it would become a two-town community forest for all to enjoy. AVC intended to hold the property until the towns of Sharon and Strafford would accept their gift of the land and associated management fund. After a series of public meetings, engaging residents in the possibilities for the future of the land, both towns voted to accept the gift of land with a conservation easement in place, which was subsequently approved by both the Sharon and Strafford Selectboards.

As a jointly held town forest, Sharon will own approximately 149.7 acres, and Strafford 106.7. The community forest project supports both towns' goals of promoting forest protection, preserving rural character, and expanding recreational opportunities. An Interim Management Plan has been developed by VLT and AVC to inform use of the property until conveyance to the town. After public input on the potential uses of the property, a full management plan will be developed by the two towns. Located near other properties conserved with VLT and the Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT), the Ashley property's conservation will protect contiguous wildlife habitat and unfragmented forest, and work to enhance climate change resiliency.

The Ashley Forest is predominantly hardwood forest, with mixed hemlock-hardwood forest. A forest management plan was developed by AJ Follensbee and David Paganelli, Windsor County Forester and Orange County Forester respectively, and the property was enrolled in the Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program (Current Use). The entire property provides valuable wildlife habitat, and various mammal tracks as well as many songbirds have been sighted. A network of forest roads provides multi-use, recreational opportunities. Since its ownership, AVC has held a series of public outings each year to engage residents in the

enjoyment of its abundant natural resources. Numerous residents have attended walks to explore the flora and fauna of the property, its historic attributes, and its natural environment. AVC has collaborated with the two towns' conservation commissions, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, consulting foresters, ecologists, and historians to lead education and fun walks and talks. Local schools have made use of the property for its many educational, scientific, and outdoor recreational opportunities.

The majority of the Ashley property is forested, with five acres of open land, and two acres of wetland area. Streams traverse the property, tributaries to Fay Brook, which flow into the White River. The open fields and old stone foundations provide a glimpse of the property's historic agricultural past. The well preserved foundations, wells, and stone walls paint a picture of a 19th Century farm, which was last farmed 75-100 years ago. Originally known as the Preston Farm, the property was last inhabited in the 1970s by Rosamond Ashley. Since then, the small fields have been kept open and the trails have been maintained.

The Ashley property boundaries are very well marked with stone walls, wire fencing, stone monuments, paint blazes on trees, and a few iron pins. AVC had the entire property surveyed by Holt Gilmour Survey Associates in 2020. Developed access to the property is from the end of Nutting Road, located off Brook Road in the Robinson District of Strafford.

Management Plans

The two towns are required to develop a comprehensive management plan including updates, revisions and amendments. The management plan will present a plan for the use and management of the property that is consistent with the easement's purposes, and will balance all the resource attributes and human use of the protected property. The two towns shall solicit public input from residents of Sharon and Strafford and the general public. The management plan should be developed in a timely and responsive manner and VLT shall be provided a copy of each management plan and a copy of each final adopted management plan.

Before any active timber harvesting, sugaring, or other forestry activities may take place, the two towns must submit a forest management plan (FMP) to VLT for review and approval. The forest management plan must be updated every ten years and any amended or updated plan must be submitted to VLT for approval before commencing any activities prescribed in the plan. Amendments are required for any proposed change in the treatments prescribed in the approved plan, but no amendment is needed for changes in timing of treatments unless the change is greater than five years. *For more information on requirements for the management plans, refer to Section I, B&C of the easement.*

Public Access

The property will be available to the general public for all types of non-commercial, non-motorized, non-mechanized dispersed recreational and educational purposes (including bird watching, boating, cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, swimming, trapping, walking and wildlife observation) and educational activities consistent with the easement's purposes. Any proposed new trails or other uses will be accounted for

in the new comprehensive management plan for the property. The landowner may limit or restrict public access to the protected property to assure compliance with the easement, to protect natural habitats, or to protect the public health or safety (including, but not limited to, the right to permit, regulate or prohibit fishing, hunting and trapping). *For more information about public access, refer to Section IV of the easement.*

Natural Resources

The Ashley Community Forest property in Strafford is mostly forested, with a small area of wetland and open meadows near its eastern side along Nutting Road. The property's approximately 256 acres include a ridge running north-south, with the western slope dropping steeply down to a south-flowing tributary of Fay Brook. An arm of the ridge extends east and is partially open with expansive views of the surrounding area. Nutting Road's terminus soon reaches a cellar hole of an historic farmhouse, as well as stone walls and rows of large old trees that once lined farm roads. Elevations range from a high point of about 1600' on a hilltop in the center of the property, down to a low point of about 1180' where the stream flows off the southern boundary. The land is underlain by three bedrock types: the calcium-rich, easily weathering metamorphosed limestone of the Waits River Formation lies under most of the property, but is interrupted by a narrow north-south band of metamorphosed volcanic rock – amphibolite and greenstone – also of the Waits River Formation, and the eastern edge of the property has an area of quartzite bedrock of the Gile Mountain Formation. A ledgy band along the ridge likely indicates a bedrock transition. The forest is largely hardwood forest, with mixed hemlock-hardwood forest on the shadier, steeper slopes surrounding the stream. Sugar maple, black cherry, eastern hophornbeam, American basswood, white ash, and American beech are all common on the higher slopes.

A headwater tributary of Fay Brook, which is itself a tributary of the White River, begins north of the property and flows south through its western side. The stream has well-developed channel features including small floodplain terraces, gravel bars, and pools. Scattered black ash and yellow birch trees grow in these small floodplain forests over stands of ostrich fern, sensitive fern, and jewelweed. Seeps and seepage runs occur along the stream banks, and these small, sensitive wetlands are characterized by organic soils and plants including toothwort, maidenhair fern, sensitive fern, miterwort, foamflower, jewelweed, and Jack-in-the-pulpit. Fallen trees lie across the stream in some places. There is also an area of wetland near the boundary at the end of Nutting Road.

Moose tracks were noted and the property also provides habitat for forest-dwelling songbirds; Black-throated Green Warblers and Chestnut-sided Warblers have been heard, along with many other varieties of songbirds. The ledges and riparian areas provide additional habitat diversity.

Vermont Land Trust's Flood Sensitivity Screen, a GIS model, considers the Fay Brook tributary to be moderately sensitive to erosion during flood events because of its relatively high stream power. There are some areas of relatively recent erosion and downcutting along the stream. Features like the small-stream floodplain areas can hold flood waters and mitigate the effects of extreme flooding downstream. The Vermont Conservation Design (2015), a landscape-level conservation prioritization from Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, places the forested portion of the property in a

6,948-acre unfragmented forest block that is considered both a Priority Interior Forest Block and a Priority Connectivity Block, providing critical ecological function on a statewide level.

To protect all important stream and wetland resources of the property, the easement designates water protection areas within all naturally vegetated areas 50 feet landward from the top of the bank of any stream as defined in the Vermont Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs (AMPs) and 50 feet landward of all significant wetlands as defined by the Vermont Wetland Rules (or successor document). The riparian areas along the streams and wetland areas are largely forested, providing existing buffers and protecting the water quality of these important resources. For a detailed description of the function and restrictions of the water protection areas, see Section III-5 of the easement.

Inventory of Existing Structures

There are no structures located on the protected property.

Excluded Parcels

There are no parcels excluded from the terms of the easement.

Summary of Grantor's¹ Rights and Restrictions

Conservation rights and restrictions allow the protected property to be used for agricultural, forestry, education, non-commercial recreation, and open space purposes. For the specific restricted and permitted uses included in the easement, refer to the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement, (referred to as the easement throughout this document).

Summary of Grantees'² Rights

The Grantees' primary intent is to conserve and protect productive agricultural and forestry uses, and secondarily to encourage sustainable management of soil resources. Other goals in conserving this property include promoting non-commercial recreational opportunities and activities and other natural resource and scenic values of the protected property for present and future generations. Aside from holding the development rights on the protected

¹ Grantor is the landowner, **Alliance for Vermont Communities, Inc.**, its successors, and assigns.

² Grantees are the **Vermont Land Trust, Inc.** and the **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board**, their successors and assigns.

property, the Grantee has the right to periodically monitor the property and enforce the Conservation Restrictions.

This is a summary of the Grantor's and Grantees' legal rights. For a complete description of these rights, refer to the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement.

References

- Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement, Ashley Community Forest Property, 2022
- VHCB Application, Ashley Community Forest Property, 2017
- Forest Management Plan of Ashley Community Forest Property, AJ Follensbee and David Paganelli (Windsor and Orange County Foresters respectively), 2019
- Ecological Report, Ashley Community Forest Property, Allaire Diamond, Ecologist for VLT, 2018
- Survey of Ashley Community Forest property, 'Boundary Retracement Survey, Ashley Community Forest Sharon & Strafford, Windsor & Orange Counties, Vermont Tax Parcel R17958L4', Holt Gilmour Survey Associates, LLC, 2020
- Appraisal Report, Ashley Community Forest Property, Stephen Lagasse, 2018
- Ashley Community Forest property Interim Management Plan, AVC and VLT, 2021
- Alliancevermont.org

Ashley Community Forest Property ♦ Sharon and Strafford, Vermont

I, Michael Sacca, duly authorized agent of the ALLIANCE FOR VERMONT COMMUNITIES, INC., have signed this Baseline Documentation Report with the understanding and agreement that this Report will be used for, but its use will not be limited to, monitoring the property depicted and described in this Report for compliance with the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement, signed by me. I have read this Report and understand it. I agree that this Report, including the maps and photographs, accurately describes and depicts the physical features, relevant site conditions, and current structures and land uses on the property conserved by the Grant. I affirm that there are no activities ongoing on the property that are inconsistent with the Grant.



ALLIANCE FOR VERMONT COMMUNITIES, INC.

Michael Sacca
Its Duly Authorized Agent

01/27/2022

Date

STATE OF VERMONT
WINDSOR COUNTY, ss

At NORWICH, this 27 day of January, 2022,
MICHAEL SACCA, duly authorized agent of the ALLIANCE FOR VERMONT COMMUNITIES, INC., personally appeared and he acknowledged this instrument, by him sealed and subscribed, to be his free act and deed.

Before me, Don Crossman
Print Name:
Notary Public, State of Vermont
Commission No:
My Commission Expires: 01/31/2023

Ashley Community Forest Property ♦ Sharon and Strafford, Vermont

I, DONNA FOSTER, duly authorized agent of the VERMONT LAND TRUST, INC., have signed this Baseline Documentation Report with the understanding and agreement that this Report will be used for, but its use will not be limited to, monitoring the property depicted and described in this Report for compliance with the Grant of Development Rights, Conservation Restrictions, and Public Access Easement, about to be executed. I affirm that VLT staff visited this property and that this Report including the maps and photographs accurately describes and depicts the physical features, relevant site conditions, and current structures and land uses on the property conserved by the Grant.

VERMONT LAND TRUST, INC.

Donna Foster

By: _____
Its Duly Authorized Agent

01/31/2022

Date

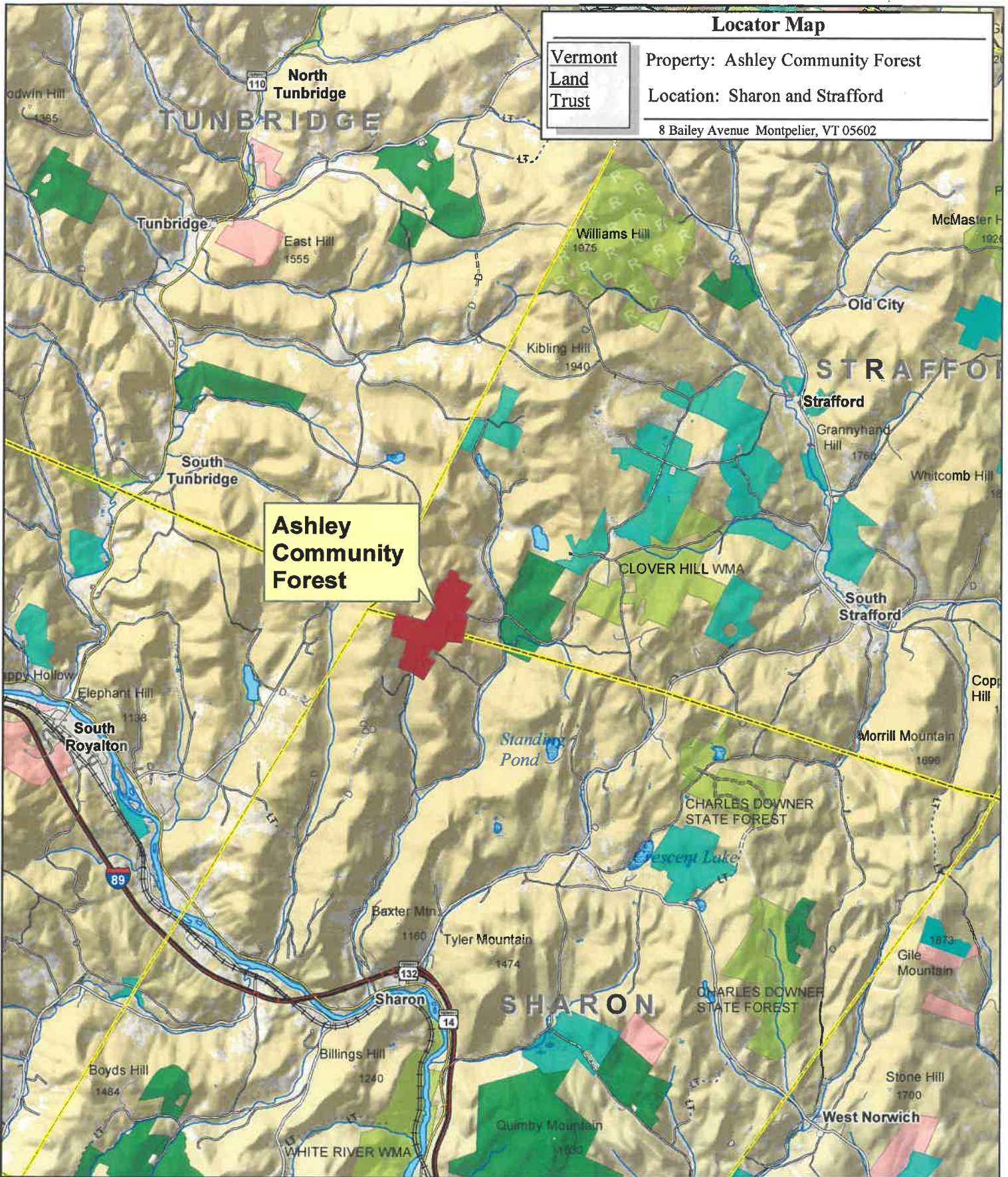
STATE OF VERMONT
WASHINGTON COUNTY, ss

At Montpelier this 31st day of January, 2022, DONNA FOSTER, duly authorized agent of the VERMONT LAND TRUST, INC., personally appeared and she acknowledged this instrument, by her sealed and subscribed, to be her free act and deed and the free act and deed of the VERMONT LAND TRUST, INC.

Before me, 

Print Name: *Caitlin Belcher*
Notary Public, State of Vermont
Commission No: *157.0005342*
My Commission Expires: 01/31/2023

Caitlin Belcher
Notary Public State of Vermont
Commission Expires: *01/31/2023*
Commission # 157.0005342



Locator Map

Vermont
Land
Trust

Property: Ashley Community Forest
Location: Sharon and Strafford
8 Bailey Avenue Montpelier, VT 05602

**Ashley
Community
Forest**

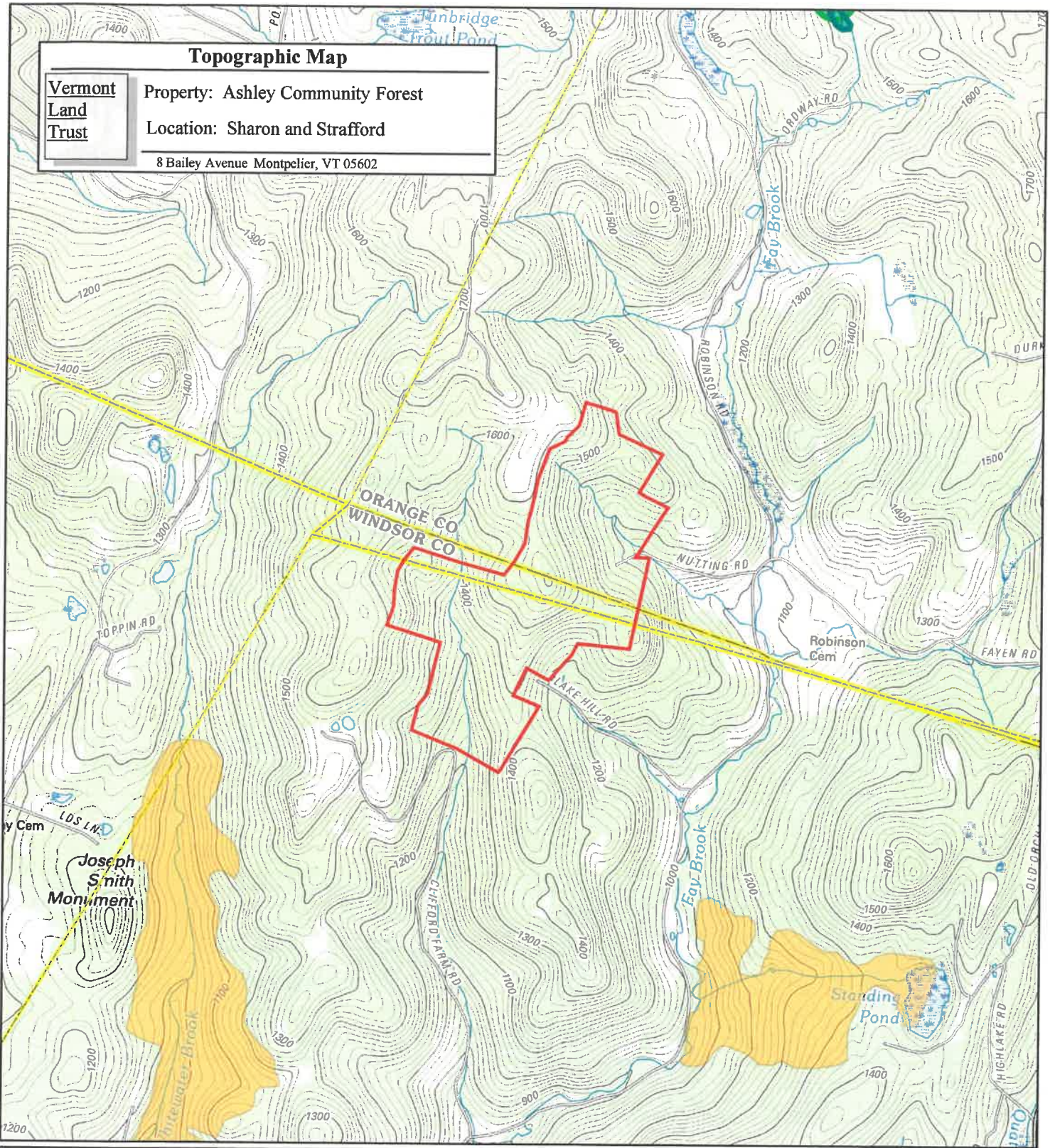
Property Address and Access Notes:

The Ashley Community Forest is located at the end of Nutting Road, off of Brook Road in Strafford. From Sharon, the property is accessed via Fay Brook Road, which turns into Brook Road at the Sharon/Strafford town line.

Topographic Map

Vermont
Land
Trust




Property: Ashley Community Forest
Location: Sharon and Strafford
8 Bailey Avenue Montpelier, VT 05602



USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle:
Sharon; 2012

Nongame & Natural Heritage
Element Occurrence Type³

Scale: 1:24,000

-  Subject Property
-  Deer Wintering Areas¹
-  Wetlands (VSWI)²

-  Animal
-  Community
-  Plant



1. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 1997, revised 2008, Deer Wintering Areas in Vermont.
2. Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, 2011, Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory.
3. Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage Program, Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2018. The Biological and Conservation Data System, Rare Species and Significant Natural Community Digital Data Set. Waterbury, Vermont.

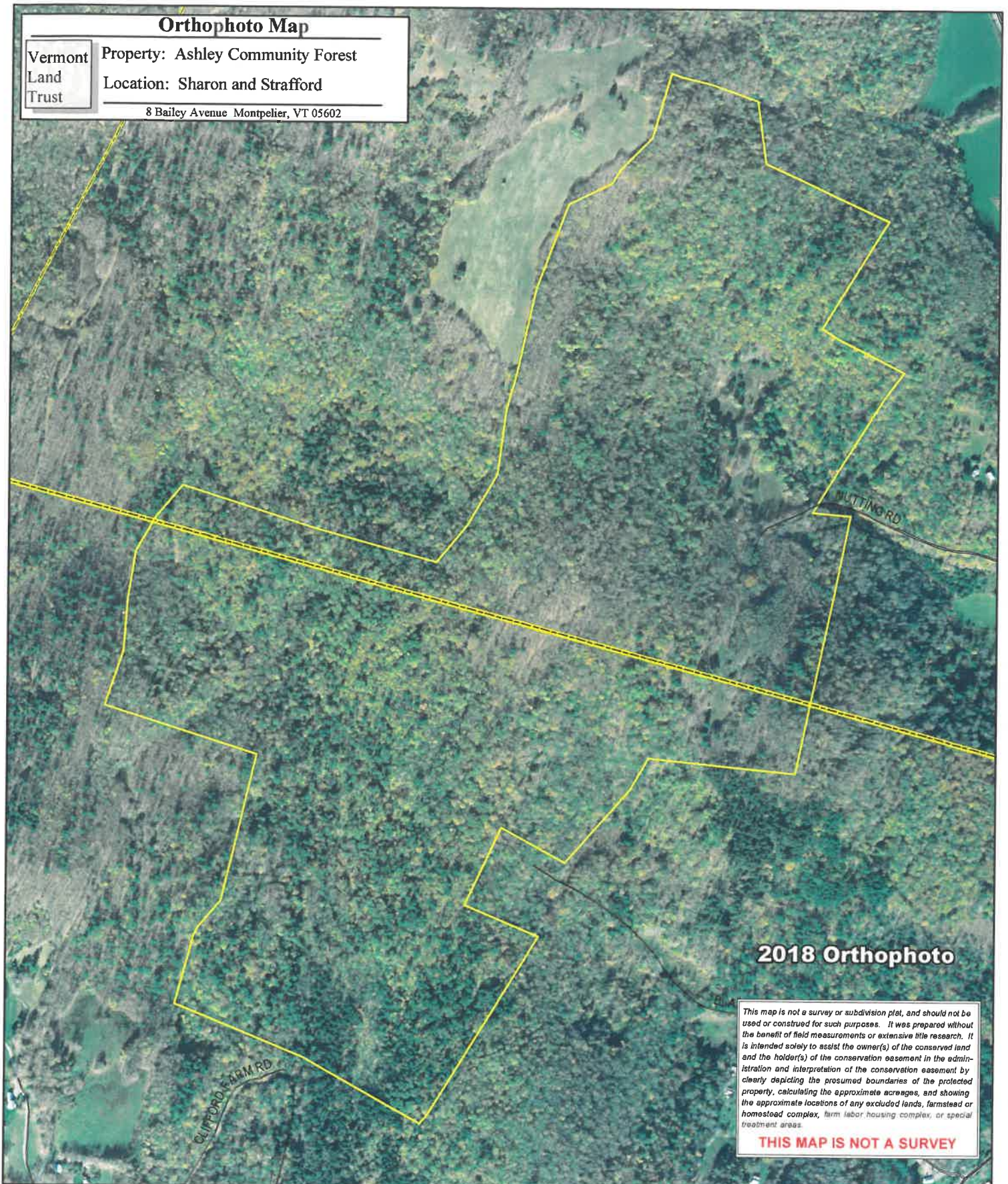
Orthophoto Map

Vermont
Land
Trust

Property: Ashley Community Forest

Location: Sharon and Strafford

8 Bailey Avenue Montpelier, VT 05602



2018 Orthophoto

This map is not a survey or subdivision plot, and should not be used or construed for such purposes. It was prepared without the benefit of field measurements or extensive title research. It is intended solely to assist the owner(s) of the conserved land and the holder(s) of the conservation easement in the administration and interpretation of the conservation easement by clearly depicting the presumed boundaries of the protected property, calculating the approximate acreages, and showing the approximate locations of any excluded lands, farmstead or homestead complex, farm labor housing complex, or special treatment areas.

THIS MAP IS NOT A SURVEY



Protected Property

0 50 100 200 300 400 Meters

0 250 500 1,000 1,500 Feet

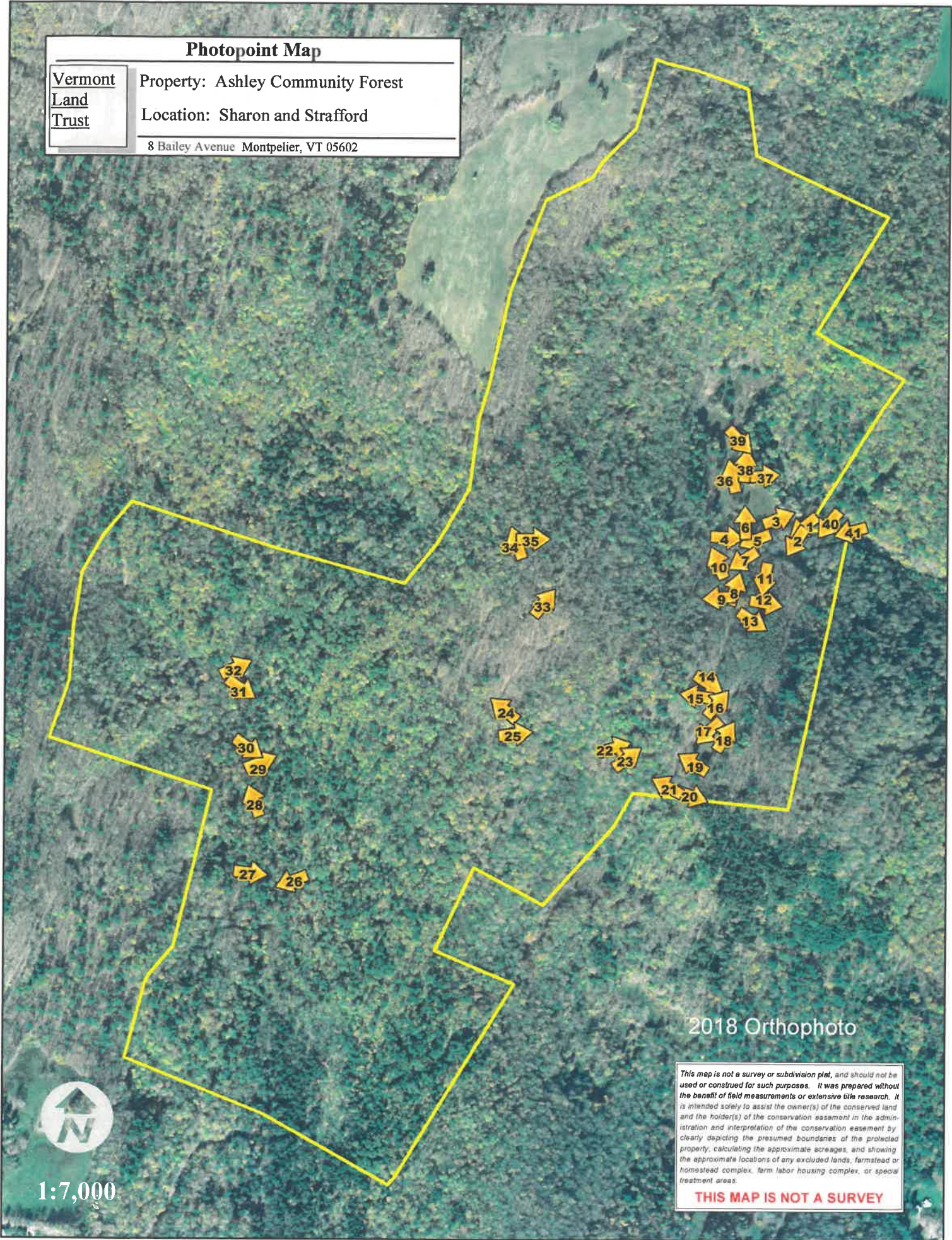


Scale: 1:7,929

Photopoint Map

Vermont
Land
Trust

Property: Ashley Community Forest
Location: Sharon and Strafford
8 Bailey Avenue Montpelier, VT 05602



2018 Orthophoto



1:7,000

This map is not a survey or subdivision plat, and should not be used or construed for such purposes. It was prepared without the benefit of field measurements or extensive title research. It is intended solely to assist the owner(s) of the conserved land and the holder(s) of the conservation easement in the administration and interpretation of the conservation easement by clearly depicting the presumed boundaries of the protected property, calculating the approximate acreages, and showing the approximate locations of any excluded lands, farmstead or homestead complex, farm labor housing complex, or special treatment areas.

THIS MAP IS NOT A SURVEY



Photo 1 Subject: Woods road



Photo 2 Subject: Access road



Photo 3 Subject: Wet area



Photo 4 Subject: Woods road



Photo 5 Subject: Woods road



Photo 6 Subject: Lower meadow



Photo 7 Subject: Remnants of stone foundation

Photo 8 Subject: Remnants of stone foundation



Photo 9 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 10 Subject: Recreation trail



Photo 11 Subject: Stone walls and foundation remnants

Photo 12 Subject: Stone wall and foundation remnants along trail



Photo 13 Subject: Forest along trail

Photo 14 Subject: Open meadow



Photo 15 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 16 Subject: Trail on edge of meadow



Photo 17 Subject: Upper meadow

Photo 18 Subject: Recreation trail



Photo 19 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 20 Subject: Recreation trail



Photo 21 Subject: Recreation trail along property boundary

Photo 22 Subject: Recreation trail



Photo 23 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 24 Subject: Recreation trail



05/06/2021



06/12/2018

Photo 25 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 26 Subject: Wet area, barberry in understory



06/12/2018



06/12/2018

Photo 27 Subject: Ferns and barberry in understory

Photo 28 Subject: Ferns in understory



06/12/2018



06/12/2018

Photo 29 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook

Photo 30 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook



Photo 31 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook

Photo 32 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook



Photo 33 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 34 Subject: Recreation trail



Photo 35 Subject: Recreation trail

Photo 36 Subject: Lower meadow



Photo 37 Subject: Stone foundation remnants



Photo 38 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook



Photo 39 Subject: Tributary to Fay Brook



Photo 40 Subject: New parking area



Photo 41 Subject: Property boundary corner