Winooski Valley Park District

Strategic Plan 2026–2031

Conservation.
Parks. People.
Connected for a resilient future.



Salmon Hole on the Winooski River

Introduction

This five-year strategic plan outlines WVPD's priorities for meeting current and future challenges, seizing emerging opportunities, and strengthening its long-term impact.

Our Story

For over 50 years, the Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) has brought together communities in Chittenden County, Vermont, to connect people with the natural landscapes of the Lower Winooski River Valley. Established in 1972 through a cooperative agreement among member municipalities, WVPD now manages over 1,750 acres of permanently conserved land within 18 parks and natural areas, including 24 miles of trails and 12 miles of lake and river shoreline.This regional collaboration allows WVPD and its member communities to share expertise and resources to protect vital ecosystems, improve access to nature, and strengthen resilience. WVPD's parks serve as outdoor classrooms, recreation spaces, and green infrastructure that help sustain clean water, biodiversity, and community well-being.

Our Purpose



VISIONA future where municipalities and community partners of the Lower Winooski River Valley work together to sustain thriving ecosystems, expand access to nature, and cultivate vibrant community connections between people and the land.

MISSION To collaborate with member municipalities to conserve and protect the lands and waters within the Lower Winooski River Valley for purposes of conservation and restoration of natural areas, and the establishment of parks that connect people to the outdoors.

MUNICIPAL MEMBERS

Section 1: Who We Are

The Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) is a public non-profit organization that manages a large network of natural areas[1] through a model of municipal partnership. Established as a municipal corporation, WVPD represents eight member communities in Chittenden County—Burlington, Colchester, Essex Junction, Essex Town, Jericho, South Burlington, Williston, and Winooski—each located along the Winooski River. Together, these municipalities collaborate to conserve and connect the region's natural landscapes while providing public access to parks, trails, and waterways.

VISION

A future where municipalities and community partners of the Lower Winooski River Valley work together to sustain thriving ecosystems, expand access to nature, and cultivate vibrant community connections between people and the land.

MISSION

To collaborate with member municipalities to conserve and protect the lands and waters within the Lower Winooski River Valley for purposes of conservation and restoration of natural areas, and the establishment of parks that connect people to the outdoors.

History

Founded in 1972 through a cooperative agreement among member municipalities, WVPD was established to steward the natural landscapes of the Winooski River Valley. This was achieved when towns voted to collaboratively pursue opportunities for conservation[2], recreation, park

[1] WVPD defines "natural areas" as lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, open spaces, visual aesthetics, and buffering. Consists of sites that exhibit natural resources, including geological features, watersheds, protection of rare, threatened, or endangered species, forest/woodsheds, and/or wildlife habitat.

[2] WVPD defines "conservation" as The sustainable management and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity to ensure their survival for future generations.

establishment, and the preservation[3] of natural areas. Over the past five decades, the Park District has grown into a cornerstone of regional conservation, managing 18 parks that encompass more than 1,750 acres of natural lands, 24 miles of trails, and over 12 miles of shoreline along rivers, lakes, and ponds. Each of its eight member municipalities appoints a representative to the Board of Trustees, which sets policy direction and bridges the work between municipalities and WVPD staff. The day-to-day operations are supported by three full-time staff members, the Executive Director, Operations Manager, and Parks Superintendent, as well as a seasonal maintenance crew and a wide array of dedicated volunteer groups.

Why Protecting the Lower Winooski River Valley Matters

The Lower Winooski River Valley is more than a scenic corridor — it is a vital ecological, recreational, and community asset in one of Vermont's most densely-populated regions. The river and its riparian buffers[4] support wildlife habitats and act as critical corridors for species such as bobcats, beavers, river otters, muskrats, and mink, fish such as native brook trout and salmon, alongside many birds such as osprey, kingfishers, herons, ducks (mallards, goldeneyes), and songbirds. The floodplain forests and wetlands[5] absorb and filter stormwater, help mitigate erosion, and reduce downstream flood risk.



Winooski River from Ethan Allen Homestead

Across Vermont and beyond, communities are facing intensifying impacts of extreme weather—rising temperatures, weather events such as floods and wind storms, habitat loss, declining biodiversity, and increasing pressures on land and water. These challenges pose a threat to

[3] WVPD defines "preservation" as he practice of protecting natural environments, ecosystems, and wildlife by keeping them in a pristine, untouched state, free from human development and consumption. For more information see Annex C: Definitions.

[4] Riparian buffers are vegetated ecosystems—composed of trees, shrubs, and ground plants—situated along the banks of rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands.

[5] Wetlands are ecosystems where water covers the soil or is present at/near the surface for varying periods, typically during the growing season.

both ecological health and equitable access to nature. As a regional leader and steward of the Winooski River Valley, WVPD plays a vital role in conserving and restoring forests, wetlands, and waterways that protect biodiversity, improve water quality, and strengthen regional resilience to extreme weather events by balancing environmental conservation and development goals of municipal partners.

Municipal Members and Geographic Focus

All of WVPD's municipal partners share a common goal of sustaining this flourishing ecosystem for the benefit of the entire region and its residents. WVPD operates within the boundaries of these member municipalities, making collaboration with member municipalities essential to advancing WVPD's mission, ensuring the long-term health of the river valley's ecosystems, and realizing a shared vision for regional conservation and resilience.

The Winooski River Valley has unique ecological significance stemming from its post-glacial geology, diverse habitats, and its position as a critical wildlife corridor and migratory bird stopover. It is a striking natural feature in a largely built environment, with a thriving ecosystem and vital wetlands near its mouth at Lake Champlain.

WVPD's eight member municipalities: Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Jericho, South Burlington, Williston, Winooski.

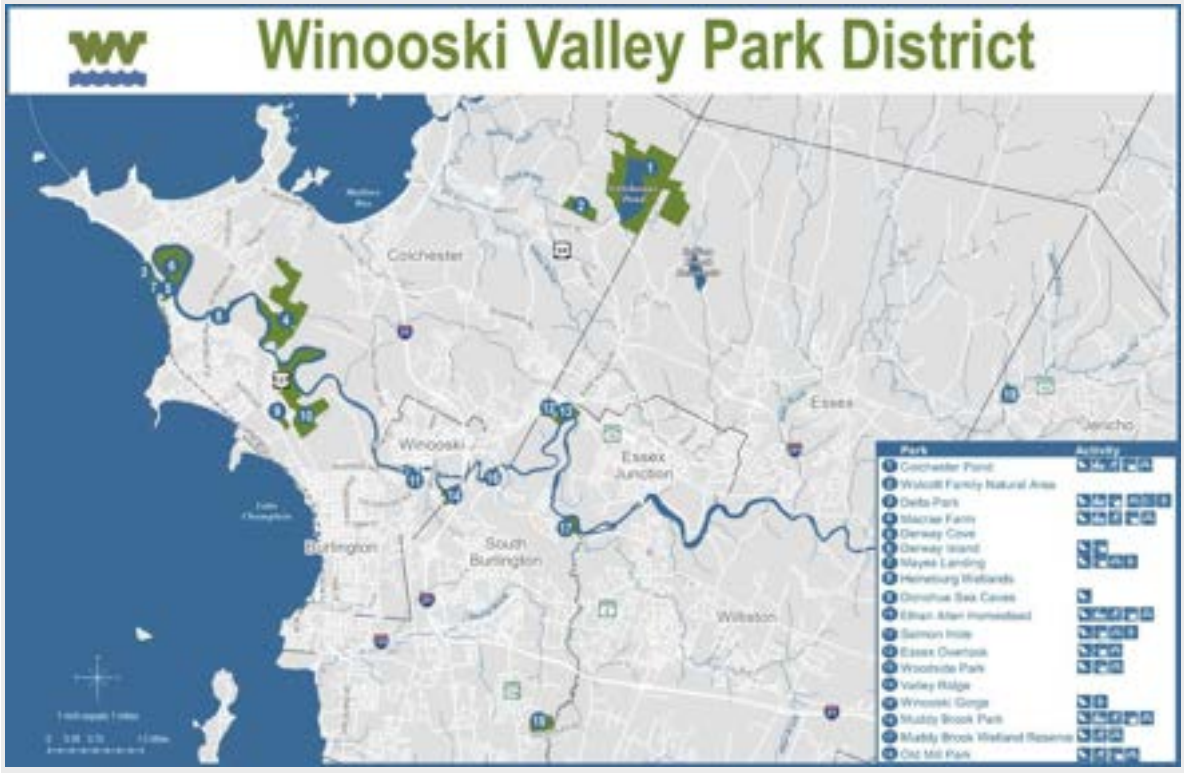


Section 2: WVPD Parks and Natural Areas

The natural areas and parks actively managed[6] by the Winooski Valley Park District enhance the biodiversity and scenic beauty of its member towns, offering opportunities for connection to nature and outdoor recreation close to where people live and work. WVPD's parks offer nature trails, scenic overlooks, picnic facilities, cross-country skiing, canoe and kayak launches, fishing access, areas for community gatherings, and community garden plots.

WVPD Parks At a Glance

The Winooski Valley Park District owns and actively manages 18 parks and natural areas across its eight member municipalities in Chittenden County, consisting of over 1,750 acres of conserved land, with 24 miles of trails, and 12 miles of protected shoreline along lakes, rivers, and ponds in the Lower Winooski River Valley. Parks are open to the public free of charge from dawn to dusk each day, providing residents of member towns and the general public the opportunity to experience the natural environment with minimal human disturbance.



[6] WVPD defines "active management" of parks and natural areas as the deliberate, ongoing, and human interventions designed to maintain, restore, or improve specific ecological conditions, biodiversity, or habitat quality, rather than leaving the area to natural succession. For more information please see Appendix C: Definitions.

How to use this strategic plan: a living, adaptive framework

This Strategic Plan is intended to guide WVPD's priorities, investments, and partnerships over the next five years, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing conditions. As a living document, it will be revisited regularly by staff and the Board of Trustees to assess progress, update actions, and adapt strategies as new challenges and opportunities arise. This adaptive management approach ensures that WVPD can remain responsive to climate impacts, community needs, staffing capacity, and emerging conservation priorities—allowing the organization to learn, adjust, and continuously improve its stewardship of the lands and waters it manages.

Section 3: Strategic Priorities 2026–2031

This five-year strategic plan provides WVPD with a focus on what is needed today and in the future to meet challenges and seize opportunities with resilience, as well as a framework to enhance its impact.

STRATEGIC GOALS

WVPD's work over the next five years will focus on four strategic goal areas, along with a cross-cutting goal to enhance organizational sustainability:



Goal 1. Effective Park Management

Manage existing parks to preserve and enhance their natural features, provide welcoming public spaces, and improve access for all people to enjoy and connect with nature.

Effective management of WVPD's parks is central to the District's mission, the ecological health of the Lower Winooski River Valley, and the public's access to natural areas in and around their communities. WVPD's parks are among the region's most accessible natural spaces, supporting

passive recreation[7], educational opportunities, and daily connection to nature for thousands of residents. Park conditions directly influence user experience and long-term community support for conservation.

WVPD faces increasing pressures that demand consistent and proactive park management. Climate-driven storms, flooding, erosion, and introduced non-native species[8] strain natural systems, while encampments, waste, and off-leash dog conflicts create new operational and safety challenges. Although WVPD has a strong history of leveraging resources and support from volunteers and member communities, challenges such as limited staffing capacity and aging or inadequate maintenance equipment could constrain WVPD's ability to meet rising demand.

Strong, consistent park management and stewardship are the foundation of WVPD's impact. By maintaining safe, welcoming, and ecologically healthy parks, WVPD strengthens community trust, protects vital natural resources, and builds the resilience needed for ongoing conservation and restoration efforts.

Actions to Implement Effective Park Management

- Maintain and continuously improve trails, signage, park infrastructure, buildings, and visitor facilities.
- Restore and protect riparian areas, diverse habitats, wildlife corridors, and water resources.
- Improve access and wayfinding across all parks.
- Foster public involvement, educational opportunities, and outreach through strengthened volunteer coordination, community stewardship, public communications, and strategic partnerships.
- Maintain and enhance WVPD infrastructure and equipment, and update the District's asset management plan to ensure critical assets, such as vehicles and mowing and park maintenance equipment, are available to carry out needed park management tasks.

[7] WVPD defines "passive recreation" as Nature-based activities and/or activities that require minimal, no, or temporary equipment/set-up, facilities, or infrastructure, and have a lower environmental impact.

[8] WVPD defines "introduced non-native species" as plants, animals, fungi, or microorganisms that have been moved—intentionally or accidentally—outside their natural geographic range by human activity. For more information see Annex C: Definitions.

Expected Outcomes

1.1 Parks that are consistently safe, welcoming, and well-maintained.

1.2 The park system is more accessible and navigable with clear, consistent signage.

1.3 Increased ecological resilience through improved habitat and riparian restoration.

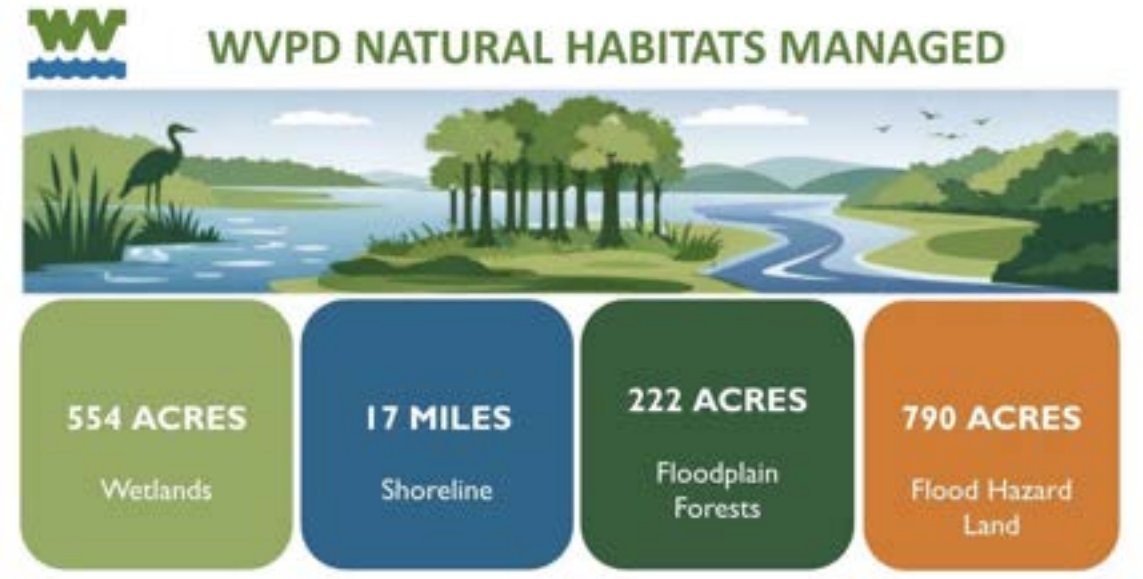


Macrae Farm Park

Goal 2. Protection of Important Natural Areas

Protect priority natural areas—including wetlands and ecologically significant lands—to improve biodiversity, restore habitat and wildlife corridors, enhance water quality, mitigate flood impacts, and strengthen resilience.

Protecting the Winooski River Valley's most ecologically significant lands and waters is essential to WVPD's mission and to the long-term health of the region's ecosystems. Wetlands, floodplain forests[9], and wildlife corridors support biodiversity, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk—benefits that grow increasingly important to address the impacts of increased flooding and other weather events. As of 2025, WVPD actively manages more than 1,750 acres of parks, and the protection of these important natural areas underpins the organization's approach to park management.



WVPD faces mounting pressures that threaten these natural systems, including extreme weather events, the introduction of non-native plant species, encampments, and expanding residential development goals in the region. Ensuring that trails, park improvements, and public access do not disturb sensitive habitats requires careful planning, updated natural resource inventories, and strong coordination with partners.

[9] Floodplain forests (often referred to as "flood forests" or "riverine forests") are unique, seasonally flooded wetland natural communities that occur along larger rivers and lakes. For more information see Annex C - Definitions.

Conserving and restoring natural areas strengthens regional climate resilience and safeguards the ecological assets that define the Lower Winooski River Valley. Through strategic land acquisition, ecologically informed park design, and collaboration with municipalities and conservation partners, WVPD can protect lands that provide irreplaceable ecological, recreational, and community benefits.

Actions to Protect Important Natural Areas

- Promote the ecological benefits of WVPD lands, including flood mitigation, habitat connectivity, and water quality protection.
- Serve as an active leader and collaborator with municipalities.
- Coordinate with non-profit and philanthropic organizations, state and regional agencies, and local land trusts to advance conservation priorities.
- Serve as an active partner in regional conservation planning by participating in existing networks, such as the Champlain Valley Conservation Partnership and Burlington Wildways.
- Prioritize strategic land acquisition and conservation of wetlands, wildlife corridors, and ecologically significant areas.
- Utilize data evidence for informed decision-making by leveraging natural resource inventories, such as Vermont BioFinder, and member municipal planning tools to guide protection efforts and park design.

Expected Outcomes

2.1 Expanded protection of natural areas that support biodiversity and climate resilience.

2.2 Better-designed parks and trails that avoid disturbance to sensitive habitats.

2.3 Stronger regional alignment in conservation goals and decision-making.

2.4 Greater public awareness of the ecosystem services provided by WVPD lands.

Goal 3. Community Engagement and Park Stewardship

Promote community engagement and park stewardship by facilitating educational, programmatic, and recreational opportunities for member municipalities, partner organizations, and the public to build community and connect with nature in ways that enhance conservation, biodiversity, and resilience.

Community engagement is essential to fostering a regional culture of conservation and strengthening meaningful connections to nature. WVPD's parks serve as outdoor classrooms, gathering places, and recreation spaces for residents of all ages. Strengthening educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and public-facing communications deepens public understanding of the value of natural areas and builds a broader base of stewardship.

At the same time, WVPD faces challenges, including limited capacity to track volunteer involvement for events hosted without WVPD support, the need for more consistent outreach, and the importance of creating accessible materials and programming opportunities tailored to each member municipality. The growing demand for inclusive and equitable access—such as improved signage, trail information, and parking—also underscores the need for a focused community engagement strategy.

Engaged and informed communities are essential partners in conservation. By expanding programming, strengthening partnerships with schools and local organizations, and improving communication tools, WVPD can further empower municipal partners and residents to participate in caring for the region's parks and natural areas.

Actions to Engage the Community in Park Stewardship

- Gather park user feedback and data on park usage through the deployment of automated trail counters and seasonal park user surveys.
- Expand opportunities for member municipalities and other community-based organizations, schools, and universities to host volunteer opportunities, educational programs, nature walks, and events at WVPD parks.
- Improve communications, outreach, self-guided materials, and strategic communications around park amenities, access, weather events, and timely trail access updates.
- Enhance inclusive public access with improved signage, trail information, parking, and amenities when feasible.

Expected Outcomes

3.1 More residents from municipal member communities are participating in education, stewardship, and conservation activities.

3.2 Increased volunteer capacity and stronger community ownership of WVPD parks.

3.3 Improved, more equitable access to natural areas for all community members.

3.4 Clear, consistent outreach and communication strengthen public trust and engagement.



Volunteers planting buffer trees at Ethan Allen Homestead Park

Goal 4. Strengthened Partnerships and Regional Collaboration

Partner with member municipalities and other local stakeholders to strategically manage and protect existing parks and natural areas, and selectively acquire areas with ecological significance to create and safeguard community spaces where future generations can continue to enjoy parks and open spaces.

WVPD's success is rooted in strong relationships with its member municipalities and the many regional partners who share responsibility for stewarding the Lower Winooski River Valley. Coordinated planning across towns, conservation organizations, state agencies, universities, and community groups ensures that natural areas are protected strategically and that resources are used efficiently.

This work has become even more important as regional priorities shift, climate events impact the region, and land-use pressures intensify. Maintaining alignment with municipal planning efforts, engaging actively in conservation networks, and nurturing trust among partners require sustained coordination.

Regional collaboration is essential to protecting connected habitats, expanding access to open space, and building long-term resilience. By strengthening trustee engagement, pursuing joint initiatives, and participating actively in regional conservation planning, WVPD can elevate its impact and help ensure that shared natural resources are protected for future generations.

Actions to Strengthen Partnerships and Regional Collaboration

- Strengthen collaboration and partnership with member municipalities and trustees through more regular communication and joint initiatives. This could be facilitated through rotating municipal updates from trustees, bi-annual check-in meetings, and other informal engagements.
- Continue and strengthen partnerships with regional partners, conservation organizations, land trusts, state agencies, regional planning bodies, and universities. This could be through collaboration on grant applications, cross-posting communications to shared networks, and having more regular informal check-ins.
- Build on the successful approaches of WVPD's fiscal agent model and collaboration with town conservation commissions, and develop strong, replicable collaboration models with existing partner organizations to maintain and improve trust and effectiveness.
- Maintain active participation in regional planning and conservation networks.

Expected Outcomes

4.1 Highly coordinated conservation, planning, and stewardship across municipal boundaries.

4.2 Strong partnerships that increase WVPD's ability to leverage resources and advance shared goals.

4.3 Active trustee engagement and improved municipal alignment with WVPD priorities.

Cross-Cutting Goal: Enhanced Organizational Capacity & Resilience

Strengthen internal systems, staffing, governance, and funding to ensure long-term sustainability and effective stewardship of WVPD parks and natural areas. By investing in organizational capacity now, the District can better adapt to changing demands and support its mission for generations to come.

Long-term organizational capacity and resilience are essential for WVPD to fulfill its mission and manage its existing and potentially expanding system of parks, natural areas, and regional partnerships. As demands on WVPD grow—including more complex stewardship needs, increased community expectations, and greater administrative responsibilities—so does the need for strong internal systems, stable funding, and a resilient workforce.

WVPD's commitment to environmental stewardship and long-term sustainability informs the organization's day-to-day operations. This includes transitioning from gas-powered to electric equipment when feasible to reduce emissions, noise, and reliance on fossil fuels—aligning operational practices with conservation values while improving working conditions for staff and visitors.

WVPD faces challenges common to other small, mission-driven organizations, including limited staff capacity, reliance on seasonal labor, and the need to plan for staff and leadership transitions and long-term land management. By prioritizing organizational capacity and resilience, WVPD strengthens the foundation that supports all its other goal areas—ensuring it can steward its lands effectively, support its municipal partners, and adapt to changing environmental and community needs.

Actions to Enhance Organizational Capacity and Resilience

- Diversify and strengthen revenue streams through grants, leasing, contracted field work for park maintenance, and private fundraising.

- Develop and enhance long-term financial planning tools, such as the Designated Fund at the Vermont Community Foundation, and explore endowments for land management and acquisitions.
- Update Asset Management Plan to respond quickly to funding opportunities and ensure a reasonable budget to maintain and update needed vehicles, mowers, and other equipment. Proactively seek funding through collaboration with member municipalities and other local agencies when they are phasing out equipment or vehicles that could be donated or acquired by WVPD at a more affordable rate.
- Improve communication infrastructure and systems, such as the website and external communications to the public, such as annual reports.
- Enhance governance and organizational transparency by supporting an engaged and informed Board of Trustees.
- Continue to build staff capacity through providing a positive work environment, opportunities for professional development, evolving staffing structure to meet demands, and maintaining and updating job descriptions. Improve the sustainability of internal operations by documenting institutional knowledge, clarifying processes, and adopting more efficient management practices and tools.

Expected Outcomes

- Greater long-term organizational stability through diversified funding and sustainable operational practices.
- Enhanced staff readiness, governance structures, and partner alignment to support WVPD's mission and resilience.
- Enhanced organizational structures and improved systems through improved communication, data collection, and documentation.

The Ethan Allen Homestead: A Flagship Park with Distinct Needs

The Ethan Allen Homestead is a distinct park with broad community recognition—serving simultaneously as a natural area, historic site, community hub, and partnership campus. Its complexity requires a tailored approach to achieving WVPD's strategic goals.

The Ethan Allen Homestead (EAH) plays a unique role within the Winooski Valley Park District's park system. Unlike most WVPD parks, which are managed primarily as natural areas for passive recreation and conservation, EAH functions as a multi-use campus where ecological stewardship, historic preservation, education, community programming, and partner-led activities intersect. This combination makes EAH both a flagship property and one of the most complex sites in the system.

EAH encompasses sensitive floodplain forests, wetlands, and riverfront habitat along the Winooski River, while also hosting the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum, community gardens, WVPD offices, and multiple valued community partner organizations, including: Ethan Allen Homestead Museum, Burlington Forest Preschool, Association of Africans Living in Vermont New Farms for New Americans Program (AALV), The Family Room, Burlington Parks Recreation & Waterfront'sBurlington Area Community Gardens, Vermont Garden Network, and Burlington Wildways,, and Alnobawi.

High park visitation, ongoing programming by partner organizations, and diverse uses require a higher level of coordination and maintenance than other parks, particularly to balance public access, safety, and infrastructure needs with protection of fragile ecological systems vulnerable to flooding and erosion. Conservation and restoration efforts at EAH must be carefully integrated with public programming and partner activities. Habitat restoration, shoreline stabilization, and introduced non-native species management are also highly visible here, demonstrating how conservation and community use can coexist through thoughtful planning and collaboration.

Together, these factors make the Ethan Allen Homestead a distinct and invaluable asset within WVPD's portfolio—one that advances the District's mission in ways that differ from other parks and benefits from a tailored management strategy to ensure its long-term ecological health, cultural significance, and community value.



VALUED PARTNERS AT ETHAN ALLEN HOMESTEAD

Section 4: Implementation & Measurement

WVPD will use this plan to guide annual work planning, decision-making, and resource allocation over the next five years. Implementation will be supported by streamlined internal processes, clear performance measures, and an adaptive management approach that allows the organization to respond to changing conditions.

To support effective implementation, WVPD will streamline work planning and internal coordination, including evaluating and updating how shared office tools are used for project planning, grant development, and reporting, and seasonal field operations. These improvements will help align staff capacity with priorities and improve efficiency across programs.

WVPD will also update and refine its performance assessment and management planning processes to ensure that current data and best practices inform park management, conservation, and engagement efforts. A set of core metrics and indicators will be developed to track progress across strategic goals. These may include measures such as acres conserved, visitors engaged, students served, volunteer hours contributed, and management of introduced non-native species. Where appropriate, WVPD will develop or adapt tools—such as trail counters and monitoring systems—drawing on approaches used by regional partners, including the Intervale Center and Burlington Wildways.

This Strategic Plan is a living document, and WVPD will apply an adaptive management approach throughout implementation over the next five years. A formal mid-point review in 2027 will provide an opportunity to assess progress, revisit assumptions, and adjust strategies in response to new information, emerging challenges, opportunities, and evolving community needs. Through regular reflection and course correction, WVPD will ensure that the plan remains relevant, actionable, and aligned with its mission over time.

WVPD will track a small set of practical, performance indicators to monitor progress toward its strategic goals. These measures are intended to support learning, transparency, and adaptive management rather than exhaustive reporting.

Table 1: Illustrative Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Definition	Method of Data Collection
Goal 1: Effective Park Management		
Miles of trails and park infrastructure maintained	Total miles of trails, boardwalks, bridges, and related infrastructure receiving routine maintenance or repair during the year	Seasonal maintenance logs; staff reports
Acres of habitat or riparian areas restored or managed	Total number of acres of wetlands, floodplain forest, riparian buffers, or other habitats restored or actively managed	Project summaries; grant reports
Volunteer stewardship events supported	Number of volunteer workdays or stewardship events facilitated or supported by WVPD	Event calendars; volunteer sign-in sheets
Goal 2: Protection of Important Natural Areas		
Total acres of conserved land actively managed	Total acreage of land owned or managed by WVPD under conservation	Land records; GIS data
Acres of wetlands, floodplain forest, or riparian buffers protected or restored	Acres of priority natural areas protected through acquisition, easement, or restoration activities	Conservation project documentation
Conservation or land-protection projects advanced in partnership	Number of conservation initiatives or land-protection efforts pursued jointly with partners	Board agendas, grant applications, and MOUs
Goal 3: Community Engagement & Park Stewardship		
Estimated annual park visitation	Approximate number of park visits across WVPD sites annually	Trail counters; seasonal observation estimates
Volunteers engaged and volunteer hours contributed	Number of individual volunteers and total hours contributed annually	Volunteer sign-in sheets; partner reports
Educational programs or community events hosted	Number of WVPD-led or partner-led programs, events, or activities held in WVPD parks (disaggregated by program implementer)	Program calendars; event tracking
Goal 4: Strengthened Partnerships & Regional Collaboration		
Active municipal and regional partners	Number of municipalities, organizations, or agencies actively collaborating with WVPD during the year	Annual partner list

Joint projects, grants, or initiatives with partners	Number of collaborative projects or funding efforts implemented with partners	Project lists; grant records
Formal coordination activities with trustees and municipalities	Number of meetings, updates, site visits, or formal coordination efforts involving trustees or municipal partners	Meeting records; annual summary
Goal 5: Organizational Capacity & Resilience		
Increased diversity of funding sources	Number of distinct funding sources contributing to WVPD's annual operating budget	Annual financial statements
Core staff roles with updated documentation	Percentage of core staff positions (permanent and seasonal roles) with current job descriptions and documented procedures	Internal checklist
Equipment transitioned from gas to electric	Percentage of small park maintenance equipment converted from gas-powered to electric	Asset inventory

Appendix A: WVPD Member Municipalities and Partner Organizations

City or Town	WVPD Member Since (year)	Total Population (2020 Census)	WVPD Managed Parks
Burlington	1972	44,743	Derway Island Nature Preserve, Ethan Allen Homestead, Donohue Sea Caves, Heineburg Wetlands, Mayes Landing, Salmon Hole and Riverwalk Trail, Derway Cove
Colchester	1972	17,524	Macrae Farm Park, Colchester Pond Natural Area, Delta Park, Wolcott Family Natural Area
Essex	1972	11,504	Woodside Natural Area, Essex Overlook
Essex Junction	2022	10,590	Woodside Natural Area
Jericho	1988	5,104	Old Mill Park
South Burlington	1972	20,292	Valley Ridge, Muddy Brook Park, Muddy Brook Wetland Reserve, Winooski Gorge
Williston*	1985	10,103	Muddy Brook Wetland Reserve
Winooski*	1972	7,997	

* WVPD does not currently own or manage parks in Williston and Winooski (a few acres of Muddy Brook Wetland Reserve are within the Williston town boundaries). WVPD works closely with these member communities to provide technical assistance for park maintenance, planning, and design, along with conservation management planning support. WVPD also provides trail building/maintenance services through contracted work on town/city-owned parks and natural areas. Past contracted work projects include trail building, bridge repair and building, and park clean-ups.

Appendix B: WVPD Parks

WVPD Managed Park	Municipal Member	Summary Description	Acres Estimate
Derway Cove	Burlington	Derway Cove is a quiet park at the mouth of the Winooski River that offers public access for non-motorized boats, fishing, and enjoying the natural beauty of Lake Champlain. Once the site of a working marina, the cove is now protected under a conservation easement and is being restored to a natural shoreline and floodplain forest.	2.47
Derway Island Nature Preserve	Burlington	A 148-acre nature preserve along the Winooski River with a variety of floodplain ecosystems. Lands contain important waterfowl nesting habitat.	148
Donohue Sea Caves	Burlington	A 15-acre park covered by cattail marsh, featuring ancient limestone dolomite caves.	15
Ethan Allen Homestead	Burlington	A 284-acre park along the Winooski River in Burlington featuring numerous wildlife species, an elevated boardwalk through a cattail marsh, and 4 miles of trails along the river and through floodplain forests. Visit the Ethan Allen Homestead Museum to tour Ethan and Fanny Allen's restored 1787 farmhouse. The park is also home to various community gardens and the Winooski Valley Park District offices.	284
Heineburg Wetlands	Burlington	Undeveloped 12 acres of conserved wetland and floodplain forest along the Winooski River.	12
Mayes Landing	Burlington	A quiet spot near the mouth of the Winooski River, next to the Burlington Bike Path, featuring a grassy area with picnic tables surrounded by shade trees. It is a popular fishing spot and a pause place along the bike path.	0.69
Salmon Hole and Riverwalk Trail	Burlington	Salmon Hole Park lies at the bottom of the Winooski River Falls on the Burlington-Winooski border. Riverwalk Trail follows the Winooski River for about a 1/2 mile to Riverwalk Park on Intervale Road.	5.6
Colchester Pond Natural Area	Colchester	An 182-acre pond and surrounding forest are situated within a large tract of contiguous forest. Colchester Pond offers a 3.5-mile trail through forest and fields that circles the pond, canoe and kayak access, fishing, picnic areas, and wildlife viewing.	703
Delta Park	Colchester	A 55-acre park at the mouth of the Winooski River encompasses several diverse ecosystems, including floodplain forest, marshy wetlands, and a half mile of natural sandy beaches that provide nesting habitat for turtles. Elevated bike path and walking trail provide amazing views of Lake Champlain and wildlife viewing opportunities throughout the park.	55

WVPD Managed Park	Municipal Member	Summary Description	Acres Estimate
Macrae Farm Park	Colchester	A 288-acre park with floodplains, meadows, and upland hardwood forests offering hiking and cross-country trails.	288
Wolcott Family Natural Area	Colchester	Generously donated by the Wolcott Family in 2012, the Wolcott Family Natural Area is a 61.7-acre park featuring a variety of habitats, including marshes and riparian areas along Pond Brook, which flows from Colchester Pond. The park features a 1-mile loop trail and accompanying viewing areas to provide educational and passive recreational opportunities.	61.7
Essex Overlook	Essex	Seasonal picnic area off of Rt. 15 with shade trees and picnic tables.	5
Woodside Natural Area	Essex	Woodside Natural Area consists of a wide range of habitats, with forest and beaver-impacted wetlands at its center. Enjoy a 1.5-mile loop trail that offers views of the Winooski River and wetlands.	53.35
Old Mill Park	Jericho	Enjoy a hike through the white pine-dominated forest with views of the Browns River along the way, a popular spot to fish or swim and cool off during the summer.	12
Winooski Gorge	South Burlington	Winooski Gorge is an 11-acre natural area in South Burlington featuring a deep river gorge and a Limestone Bluff Cedar-Pine Forest.	10.7
Valley Ridge	South Burlington	Currently undeveloped 18-acre natural area with riparian forest along the Winooski River.	24.56
Muddy Brook Park	South Burlington	A 27.5-acre park in South Burlington featuring several diverse ecosystems, including Winooski River frontage, and a 0.7-mile loop trail.	27.5
Muddy Brook Wetland Reserve	South Burlington & Williston	A 48-acre park with constructed and natural wetlands, offering hiking and cross-country ski trails.	48.8

Appendix C: Definitions

Term	Definition
Conservation	The sustainable management and protection of natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity to ensure their survival for future generations. Nature conservation is the ethical/moral philosophy and conservation movement focused on protecting species from extinction, maintaining and restoring habitats, enhancing ecosystem services, and protecting biological diversity. For WVPD, conservation encompasses identifying values of a park or natural area and actively managing to maintain and enhance those values to be enjoyed into the future. WVPD values included ecological significance/importance, recreational opportunities, and historical significance.
Preservation	Nature preservation is the practice of protecting natural environments, ecosystems, and wildlife by keeping them in a pristine, untouched state, free from human development and consumption. Unlike conservation, which focuses on sustainable use, preservation aims to set aside land to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity and natural landscapes.
WVPD Managed Open Space or Natural Area	Lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, open spaces, visual aesthetics, and buffering. Consists of sites that exhibit natural resources, including geological features, watersheds, protection of rare, threatened, or endangered species, forest/woodsheds, and/or wildlife habitat. Public access and recreation are not always required or encouraged for natural resource conservation/preservation.
WVPD-Managed Parks	Established parks that include natural areas and are owned by the Winooski Valley Park District that serve member community residents as well as other residents in the region, and the general public. Uses may include passive recreation such as walking, hiking, birding, or snowshoeing. Some WVPD-managed parks also have amenities such as boat launches, picnic shelters, and benches. Some parking should be available on-site, with the size of the parking area determined by park size and use.
Actively-Managed	"Actively managed" parks and natural areas for conservation refer to deliberate, ongoing, and direct human interventions designed to maintain, restore, or improve specific ecological conditions, biodiversity, or habitat quality, rather than leaving the area to natural succession. This approach is often utilized in fragmented or human-impacted landscapes where natural processes alone cannot sustain ecosystem health, requiring proactive, hands-on management practices. For WVPD, this includes management/removal of introduced non-native plant species, planting native trees, shrubs, and other plants for habitat restoration, and shoreline erosion mitigation practices.
Flood Forests	In Vermont, floodplain forests (often referred to as "flood forests" or "riverine forests") are unique, seasonally flooded wetland natural communities that occur along larger rivers and lakes. These forests are adapted to withstand, and often rely on, periodic inundation by water and ice, which deposits nutrient-rich sediment.
Flood Hazard Land	In Vermont, flood hazard land consists of Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) (100-year floodplains) mapped by FEMA, and River Corridors designated by the state. These areas are subject to inundation, high-velocity water flow, or fluvial erosion, with regulations restricting

Term	Definition
	development to minimize risk to life and property.
Introduced Non-Native Species	Introduced non-native species are plants, animals, fungi, or microorganisms that have been moved—intentionally or accidentally—outside their natural geographic range by human activity and established in a new environment where they did not historically occur. Introduced non-native species tend to harm the local environment by outcompeting native plants and animals, and disrupting ecosystem functions.
Lower Winooski River Valley	The Lower Winooski River Valley is the interconnected landscape of river, wetlands, forests, and communities along the Lower reaches of the Winooski River, from its mid-valley corridor to its confluence with Lake Champlain. Encompassing portions of Chittenden County, the valley supports critical ecological functions, outdoor recreation, and community connections across the region.
Recreation, Passive	Nature-based activities and/or activities that require minimal, no, or temporary equipment/set-up, facilities, or infrastructure, and have a lower environmental impact. Examples include walking, trail running, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, birding and wildlife viewing, and nature photography or art.
Recreation, Active	Physically engaging activities that often require built facilities/infrastructure and equipment, and/or maintained fields/green space. Examples can include team sports, such as soccer, basketball, baseball, and tennis, playgrounds, and skateparks. WVPD does not manage any parks or facilities that host active recreation opportunities.
Riparian Buffers	Riparian buffers are vegetated ecosystems—composed of trees, shrubs, and ground plants—situated along the banks of rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands. They act as natural filters, protecting water quality by trapping sediment and nutrients, stabilizing banks against erosion, providing wildlife habitat, and managing stormwater runoff.
Wetlands	Wetlands are ecosystems where water covers the soil or is present at/near the surface for varying periods, typically during the growing season. Defined by unique hydrology, hydric soils, and water-adapted vegetation, they act as transitional zones between land and water. Key types include marshes, swamps, bogs, and fens. Inland/non-tidal wetlands are most common on floodplains along rivers and streams (riparian wetlands), in isolated depressions surrounded by dry land (for example, playas, basins and "potholes"), along the margins of lakes and ponds, and in other low-lying areas where the groundwater intercepts the soil surface or where precipitation sufficiently saturates the soil (vernal pools and bogs). Inland wetlands include marshes and wet meadows dominated by herbaceous plants, swamps dominated by shrubs, and wooded swamps dominated by trees.

Appendix D: WVPD Land Acquisition Methodology

Winooski Valley Park District
LAND ACQUISITION & RESOURCE PROTECTION
Assessment Guidelines & Best Practices

Purpose

The Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) receives both solicited and unsolicited requests related to land acquisition and resource protection. Requests may originate from private landowners, member municipalities, state agencies, or internal WVPD initiatives.

Given limited staff capacity and financial resources, WVPD uses the following guidelines to **quickly, consistently, and effectively evaluate potential projects** for alignment with the District's mission, strategic priorities, and long-term stewardship capacity.

Projects that advance through staff review may be recommended by the Executive Director for formal consideration by the Board of Trustees.

1. Initial Screening: Project Intake

All prospective parcels or projects undergo an initial intake to determine whether further review is warranted.

Best practices include:

- Collecting basic parcel information (location, size, ownership, current use)
- Documenting the source of the request
- Identifying any conditions or expectations placed on the District
- Conducting a high-level assessment of mission alignment and feasibility

Projects that do not meet baseline criteria may be declined at this stage.

2. Resource Priority Classification

Projects advancing beyond intake are assigned a **resource priority category** to guide further evaluation.

Top Priority Resources

- Riparian lands and water-adjacent corridors
- Significant natural areas
- Rare, threatened, or endangered species habitat

High Priority Resources

- Public recreation or environmental education sites
- Greenways and trail corridors
- Historic or archaeological resources

Priority Resources

- Agricultural or forest lands
- Scenic or landscape-scale resources

3. Resource Value Assessment

Projects are evaluated based on the significance and integrity of the resource.

Key considerations include:

- Uniqueness or rarity of the resource
- Ecological, cultural, or recreational quality
- Importance to surrounding ecosystems or landscapes
- Vulnerability to incompatible development
- Whether the parcel size is sufficient to protect identified values

4. Comparative Ranking

Projects are comparatively ranked relative to other opportunities under consideration, helping staff and the Board prioritize limited resources.

5. Stewardship & Management Feasibility

WVPD evaluates whether long-term protection and stewardship are realistic and responsible.

Assessment factors include:

- Risk of near-term land-use change or development
- Appropriateness of fee ownership versus conservation easement
- Likelihood that resource values can be maintained over time
- Potential hazardous materials or contamination concerns
- Anticipated remediation costs
- Ongoing management capacity and financial sustainability

6. Strategic & Organizational Review

Projects passing prior stages are reviewed by the Executive Director and, when appropriate, an Acquisition Committee.

Review criteria include:

- Availability and feasibility of funding
- Consistency with adopted plans and strategies (local, regional, state, or WVPD)
- Public benefit and equity of access
- Suitability of WVPD as the long-term owner versus another organization
- Local political context and community support
- Cost relative to conservation, recreational, or public value
- Potential impacts on historic or traditional uses (e.g., hunting)

7. Recommendation & Next Steps

Based on the full assessment, staff may:

- Recommend the project for Board consideration
- Defer for additional information or future opportunities
- Decline the project with a documented rationale

Ongoing Planning & Coordination

To proactively identify opportunities:

- WVPD staff monitor municipal plans and planning processes within member towns
- WVPD collaborates with regional partners, including efforts to develop GIS-based resource overlays to identify resources of county or regional significance

Guiding Principle

WVPD's land acquisition and protection efforts aim to **maximize public benefit, conserve critical resources, and ensure long-term stewardship**, while remaining responsive to community needs and organizational capacity.

Contact

Winooski Valley Park District
1 Ethan Allen Homestead
Burlington, VT 054087
www.wvpd.org | info@wvpd.org

Acknowledgments

This strategic plan reflects the shared commitment of those who steward, support, and enjoy parks and conserved lands across the Winooski Valley. We are grateful to WVPD staff and trustees, municipal members, funders, partners, volunteers, and community members whose insights, collaboration, and care for place helped shape this vision.

Together, we are advancing conservation, strengthening public access, and connecting people to land and water—today and for generations to come.