

posted 3/13/2023
Storinch

**TOWN OF VERNON
CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

Regular Meeting

Monday, March 20, 2023 at 7:00 P.M.

14 Park Place, Probate Court Room (1st Floor) Vernon, CT 06066

RECEIVED
VERNON TOWN CLERK
23 MAR 13 PM 1:19

AGENDA

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call**

2. **Administrative Actions/Requests**

2.1 Approval of the Minutes – January 23, 2023

3. **New Business**

3.1 Update regarding Planning and Zoning/Inland Wetlands Applications, if any:

- **APPROVED - PZ-2022-16, 985 Hartford Turnpike** - An application of Edward Johansen for a Site Plan and Special Permit (4.10.4.4) to renovate existing building for used car dealership and limited general repair, extend bituminous driveways into parking lot, spread current onsite fill piles at **985 Hartford Turnpike** [Tax Map 38, Block 72, Parcel 30]. The property is zoned Industrial.
- **APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS - PZ 2023-01 – 234 Talcottville Road** – An application of Benjamin Tinsley (Prime Wellness of Connecticut) for Site Plan and Special Permits (4.9.4.10 and 4.9.4.15.6) for a hybrid cannabis dispensary and cannabis retailer. The property is zoned Commercial [Map #10, Block #15, Lot #40].
- **APPROVED - PZ 2023-02, 10 Snipsic St.** – Application of Adam Wing, Project Engineer, Connecticut Water Company to construct a building for new aeration equipment to replace the aging infrastructure and storage building for equipment that is stored onsite for the treatment plant and reservoir Property is zoned Restricted Watershed [Map #45, Block #123, Lot #3].
- **APPROVED PZ 2023-03 – 0 Gerber Boulevard** An application of Clifton Chapman for a Site Plan, Erosion & Sedimentation Control Plan and Special Permits (4.24.4.3.1.; 4.24.4.3.4; 4.24.4.3.6; 4.24.4.3.10; 4.24.4.3.11; 4.24.4.3.15.1; 4.24.4.3.15.4) to construct two 14,000 square foot buildings for light industrial/ commercial uses. The property is zoned Planned Development Zone. [Map 04, Block# 0004, Lot #008A7]
- **ACCEPTED - CGS 8-24 – 686 Dart Hill Rd.**
Receipt of Land from Vernon Greenways to be used as open space.

4. **Other Business/Goals/Discussion**

4.1 Discussion **Vernon Holistic Health Fair - April 15 and 16, 2023, Vernon Center Middle School.**
Registration Deadline 3/24/23.

4.2 Discussion – Material Provided by Parks Director Martin Sitler
“Management of Facilities and Resources”, Valley Falls Park

5. **Adjournment**

**TOWN OF VERNON
CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

Regular Meeting Notice

Monday, January 23, 2023 at 7:00 P.M.

14 Park Place, Council Chambers (3rd Floor) Vernon, CT 06066

DRAFT MINUTES

RECEIVED
VERNON TOWN CLERK
23 JAN 24 AM 11:48

1. Call to Order and roll call

Commissioner Cranmer called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. **Commission members present:** Nicholas Cranmer, Jason Seacat, and Jeanette Smith. **Commission members absent:** Jeffrey Carlson. **Also present:** Karl Hasel, Vice President, Northern CT Land Trust, Ashley Stephens, Town Planner and Leslie Campolongo, Planning Specialist.

2. Administrative Actions/Requests

2.1 Approval of the Minutes - October 17, 2022 - Motion made by Commissioner Cranmer, seconded by Commissioner Smith to approve minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

- Presentation by Karl Hasel, Northern CT Land Trust

Mr. Hasel's Powerpoint presentation on the Northern CT Land Trust (NCLT) began at 7:04 pm and concluded at 7:22 pm. Discussion regarding the presentation ensued. Topics discussed included the NCLT Annual report and budget, additional partnerships, volunteerism, and the Webster Preserve signage.

- Update regarding Planning and Zoning/Inland Wetlands Applications, if any:

Ms. Stephens provided a verbal update on the following projects. Discussion ensued.

- **PZ 2023-01 – 234 Talcottville Road** – An application of Benjamin Tinsley (Prime Wellness of Connecticut) for Site Plan and Special Permits (4.9.4.10 and 4.9.4.15.6) for a hybrid cannabis dispensary and cannabis retailer. The property is zoned Commercial [Map #10, Block #15, Lot #40].

No action taken.

- **PZ-2022-16, 985 Hartford Turnpike** - An application of Edward Johansen for a Site Plan and Special Permit (4.10.4.4) to renovate existing building for used car dealership and limited general repair, extend bituminous driveways into parking lot, spread current onsite fill piles at **985 Hartford Turnpike** [Tax Map 38, Block 72, Parcel 30]. The property is zoned Industrial.

No action taken.

PZ-2022-17, Baker Road (Scenic Road) - An application of Shaun Gately, Director of Development Services, Town of Vernon, to make improvements to the current wire rope guide-rail system on Baker Road, a designated scenic road. The property is zoned Open Space.

No action taken.

IWC-2023-01, 10 Snipsic St. – Application of Adam Wing, Project Engineer, Connecticut Water Company to construct a building for new aeration equipment to replace the aging infrastructure and storage building for equipment that is stored onsite for the treatment plant and reservoir Property is zoned Restricted Watershed [Map #45, Block #123, Lot #3].

Request was made by the Commission for future agendas to include application/plans in packet where applicable.

No action taken.

4. Other Business/Goals/Discussion

4.1 Discussion - Vernon Holistic Health Fair, April 15 and 16, 2023, Vernon Center Middle School.

The Commission discussed its participation in the Health Fair. Ms. Stephens advised the Commission that any fees for participation would be waived as a Town commission. Discussion ensued regarding material to be presented, copies of such material, budget of the Commission. Commission requested to invite Mr. Ryan Goad to the next meeting to discuss past experience with the Fair and information presented there. Ms. Stephens will communicate with Mr. Goad to determine his availability to attend.

4.2 Discussion - Plan of Conservation and Development - *Implementation Plan, if any*

Discussion took place regarding the implementation plan, additional partnerships to be fostered by the Commission, identifying/targeting urban green space in Town.

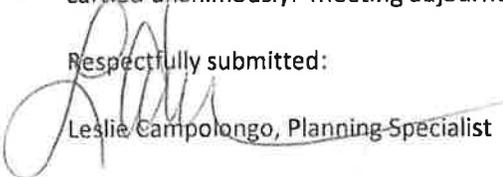
Potential additional partnerships include the CT League of Conservation Voters and organization collaboratives within the Town such as the Vernon Volunteers' Collaborative and the Vernon Community Network.

Ms. Campolongo will send additional information regarding the Plan of Conservation and Development, the Implementation Plan, and the budget portion of the NCLT Annual report to Commission members.

5. Adjournment

Mr. Cranmer motioned to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Commissioner Seacat. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:13 pm

Respectfully submitted:


Leslie Campolongo, Planning Specialist



OFFICE OF THE
TOWN PLANNER

TOWN OF VERNON

55 WEST MAIN ST, VERNON, CT 06066-3291

Tel: (860) 870-3667

E-mail: astephens@vernon-ct.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town of Vernon Planning and Zoning Commission

FROM: Ashley Stephens, Town Planner

SUBJECT: CGS 8-24 Referral – 686 Dart Hill Rd

DATE: February 2, 2023

The Town of Vernon has requested a CGS 8-24 referral to accept 686 Dart Hill Road from Vernon Greenways Volunteers. In 2000, a parcel of property bordering on Dart Hill Road and the Dart Hill South Park was transferred to the Friends of the Hockanum Park Linear Park of Vernon, Inc. to expand the trail system in Vernon. The intention was to transfer the parcel to the Town of Vernon, but was never done.

The Friends of the Hockanum Park Linear Park of Vernon, Inc. was merged with Vernon Greenway Volunteers in 2022, and renamed themselves to Vernon Greenways Volunteers, Inc. Vernon Greenway Volunteers, Inc. now holds the titled and wants to carry out the original plans of transferring this parcel to the Town of Vernon.

The state statute declares:

"No municipal agency or legislative body shall (1) locate, accept, abandon, widen, narrow or extend any street, bridge, parkway or other public way, (2) locate, relocate, substantially improve, acquire land for, abandon, sell or lease any airport, park, playground, school or other municipally owned property or public building, (3) locate or extend any public housing, development, redevelopment or urban renewal project, or (4) locate or extend public utilities and terminals for water, sewerage, light, power, transit and other purposes, until the proposal to take such action has been referred to the commission for a report."

The intent in this consideration is for the Commission to review the proposed action and issue a finding on its consistency or lack thereof with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

The town would continue this parcel's use for passive recreation. It was used to connect the trails that are on surrounding parcels and will remain that way to foster open space and trail connectivity. Per Section 8.1 of the POCD- Foster open space and trail connectivity, the acceptance of this parcel fits in with the goals of the POCD.

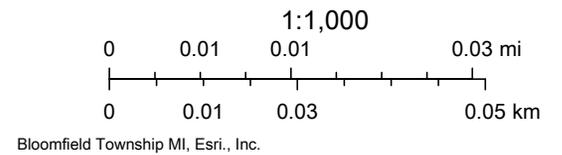
Draft Motion:

Moved, that the Planning & Zoning Commission finds that the acceptance of 686 Dart Hill Road is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

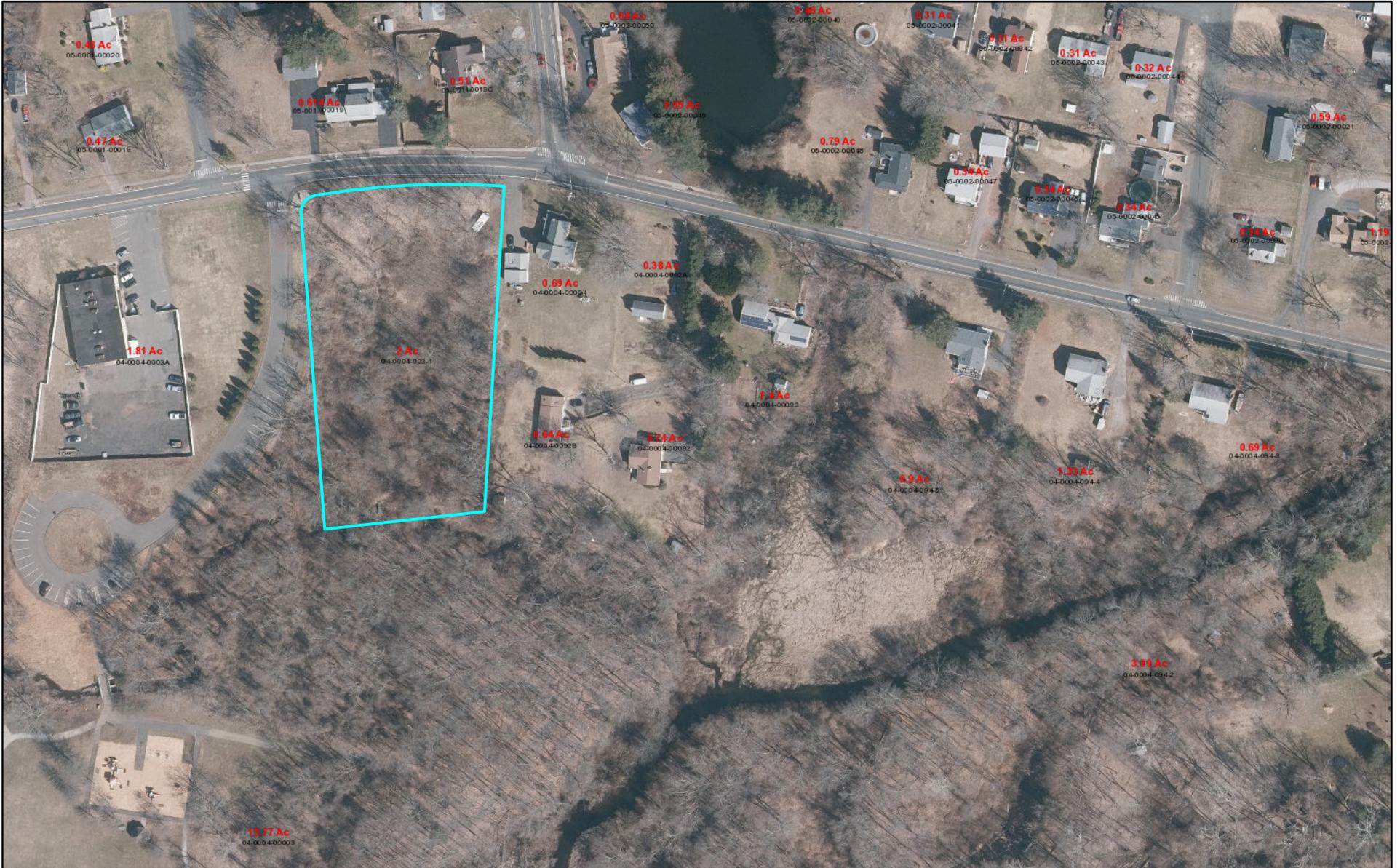
686 Dart Hill Rd



January 27, 2023



Town of Vernon, CT



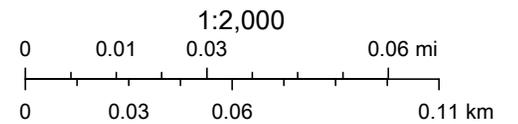
February 1, 2023

TaxParcelPublishing 2019

Red: Band_1

Green: Band_2

Blue: Band_3



Bloomfield Township MI, Esri., Inc.

DRAFT

REVISION and UPDATE to
SECTION 4, “MANAGEMENT OF FACILITIES and RESOURCES – FIELDS”,
of the
1998 MANAGEMENT PLAN for VALLEY FALLS PARK

Prepared by

The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

in consultation with

Jane Seymour, Wildlife Biologist, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental
Protection (DEEP)

Tom Ouellette, Environmental Analyst (CT DEEP, retired); Former Chairman, Vernon
Conservation Commission

Sheryl McMullen, Wildlife Rehabilitator; Former Chairman, Vernon Conservation Commission

Prepared for

Town of Vernon, Parks and Recreation Department

February 21, 2023



Replace the section titled “Fields”, pages 31 and 32 of the “Management Plan for Valley Falls Park, 1998”, with the pages of this document

OLD FIELDS and SHRUBLANDS

Background Information

The old fields and shrublands in Valley Falls Park were once part of the cultivated acreage that produced corn, hay and oats for the owners of Valley Falls Farm from 1850 to 1950. They are typical of abandoned farmlands found throughout New England that today are critical wildlife habitats and are essential for the survival of many wildlife species.

Referred to as “early successional habitat”, old fields and shrublands are viewed as an important natural resource. Their natural vegetation is predominately grasses, grass-like plants, forbs (herbaceous flowering plants) and/or shrubs. This type of habitat attracts a wide variety of birds, reptiles and mammals, including many ground and shrub nesting songbirds. This habitat is also found to have a higher proportion of state-listed butterflies and moths than other natural community types.

There has been a steady decline of these old fields and shrublands in Connecticut. Unless they are managed to remain in their current state, they will continue to evolve into a woodland/shrub cover, and the wildlife diversity they support will disappear. Efforts to preserve remaining old fields and shrublands habitats are ongoing on conservation and state-managed lands throughout the state. These same efforts should continue at Valley Falls Park.

Management Practices for Valley Falls Fields

- Locations: There are several old fields and shrublands areas within Valley Falls Park that are representative of “early successional habitat” vegetative cover. Management and mowing of these areas was initiated in 1998. This work has prevented them from further succession into woodland cover. The specific location of these areas can be seen in an aerial view of the relevant section of the Park (Figure 1, attachments). The areas are identified and numbered #1 to #5 for discussion and reference herein. A three-year rotation schedule for annual mowing of the field areas is given below.
- Control of Growth: In general, control of growth in the old fields and shrublands can be done using a variety of management options, including mechanical mowing, selective removal of trees, controlled burning, seeding, and grazing. Annual review and site evaluation will pinpoint specific means of growth control needed at that time. Growth

control should also include evaluation by experts of the optimum location of species currently growing in these areas. Soil type (upland or wetlands) in a given area will determine what plant types will flourish best in the upland areas and those that will flourish in the wetlands areas.

- Field grasses should be mowed on a rotational basis to a height of about 3-4 inches to provide refuge for small mammals, reptiles, hibernating box turtles and other wildlife until the next mowing. Growth of a few shrubs within the grassy areas can be beneficial and is encouraged. Leaving a few hollow wildflower and grass stalks is also beneficial to tunnel-nesting native bees. All fields should otherwise be maintained in grasses and forbs.
- The shrublands areas around the perimeter of the grassed fields are an important part of this wildlife habitat area and also require annual maintenance. Beneficial shrubs that provide food and shelter for wildlife should be left in place here. An example of a typical shrublands area is shown in the Figure 2 photograph. In particular, the shrublands areas around the field area #3 should be cut back to the woods line to keep woods from further encroaching on the field.

Bluebirds are attracted to shrublands areas. Several bluebird boxes have been installed in these areas around the fields to encourage habitation (Figure 3). Annual cleaning and maintenance of the boxes in these areas in late April or early May is recommended.

Selective clearing of tree growth and removal of invasive plants should be done in these areas. Small trees can be left to grow until they get too large. Dead trees provide habitat and nesting places for wildlife and insects, and can remain.

- Removal of invasive plants is an important part of the maintenance of old fields and shrublands areas. Removal should be done using currently recommended tools and herbicidal application protocols. If needed, consult with experts to identify the invasive plants, as well as the beneficial shrubs that are present on site. The list of Connecticut invasive plants is updated annually by the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group and can be found here: https://cipwg.uconn.edu/invasive_plant_list/

Current observations indicate the presence of the following invasive plant colonies near the fields: Multiflora rose in all five field areas; Japanese knotweed (next to the exercise area); Japanese stilt grass (along the road to the bat house, near Field #1); Asian bittersweet (southeast corner of Field Area #3). Removal of these plants was done during the summer-fall, 2021. In the future they should be checked annually for new growth and removed expeditiously.

- **Timing** is an important management consideration. Generally, mowing should not be done between April 1st and November 15th. Mowing is best done in winter months between November 15th and April 1st. February is the optimum month to mow, if feasible. This timing minimizes the impacts to wildlife, avoids the nesting and brood rearing time of year, and gives wildflower seeds a chance to establish. A three year rotation schedule is suggested for mowing the fields, starting in the fall 2023.

**Suggested Schedule for Annual Mowing of Field Areas and
Selectively Clearing Perimeters**

Three-Year Field Rotation

Year	Field Area #
1	#1 & one-third of #5
2	#3 & one-third of #5
3	#2, #4 & one-third of #5

Site Specific Wildlife and Native Plant Observations at Valley Falls Park

Numerous studies, plans and reports have been prepared over the years documenting the wildlife resources in Valley Falls Park (Table 1, attachments). The most diverse populations of wildlife resources have been observed in the old fields and shrublands habitat areas, labeled #1 - #5 on the Figure 1 aerial view. Some of these observations are noted below to provide guidance for the annual mowing and clearing work.

Birds: The shrublands areas around the perimeter of the fields are preferred by some species, including Eastern bluebirds (Figure 3), Common yellowthroats, Tree swallows, Yellow warblers and Baltimore orioles. Ground nesting of American woodcock can be seen in the old fields areas, though this activity has been decreasing in recent years.

Reptiles and Amphibians: Eastern box turtles have been observed in the old fields and shrublands area. A vernal pool has been identified and officially documented here by experts. It is located near the pond, as shown in the aerial view, Figure 1. The vernal pool is #49 on the list of verified vernal pools in the Town of Vernon, and is mapped on page 17 of the 2021 Town of Vernon Plan of Conservation & Development. Connecticut “Greatest Conservation Needs (GCN)” species observed in the vernal pool are wood frogs and spotted salamander (Figure 4).

Flora: Most of the landscape in the old fields and shrublands areas is dry upland with a few pockets of wetlands near Valley Falls Pond and the streams feeding the pond. There are numerous species of native plants growing in the field areas. Nine species are shown in the Figure 5 photograph, including Joe Pye Weed, Common Evening Primrose and Bracken Fern.

Additional Note: In 2017 several truckloads of asphalt millings were dumped in the upper area of field # 5, on the access site off Bolton Road. Some of the millings were subsequently removed, but some remained and were pushed back on the site and leveled, creating a larger parking area. Soil was later brought in as a cover, and grasses have begun to grow. We make note of this circumstance should there be any future issues or questions that may arise as a result of this activity.

Future Goals

- Continue to preserve and enhance the natural resource value of the old fields and shrublands habitats in Valley Falls Park.
- Given the important resource value of the old fields and shrublands habitat and the need to preserve these areas, there should be no future intention to convert any of these areas to flat-mowed fields for active recreational use.
- Keep abreast of new techniques and information related to management of old fields and shrublands habitats. Engage with a representative from the Friends of Valley Falls and/or the Vernon Conservation Commission for a one-hour consultation in late summer or early fall of each year to review the current needs and status of the old fields areas.

References:

- Management Plan for Valley Falls Park, 1998, Friends of Valley Falls
- “Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan”, updated 2016, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
- “Managing Grasslands, Shrublands, and Young Forest Habitats for Wildlife: A Guide for the Northeast”, Oehler, et al; 2006, Northeast Upland Habitat Technical Committee and Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

ATTACHMENTS

Figure 1 – Valley Falls Park - Partial Aerial View Showing Old Fields Areas

Figure 2 – Photograph, Early Successional Habitat, Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Area

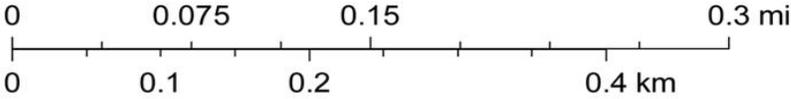
Figure 3 – Photograph, Nesting Bluebirds in Valley Falls Park

Figure 4 – Photograph, Spotted Salamander in Valley Falls Park

Figure 5 – Photographs, Nine of the Many Native Plants Present at Valley Falls Park

Table 1 – List of Studies, Reports and Plans Conducted at Valley Falls Park, 1968 to present

FIGURE 1 - PARTIAL AERIAL VIEW OF VALLEY FALLS PARK



Valley Falls Park

Partial view showing numbered fields
● Vernal pool

**FIGURE 2 - EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT, TANKERHOUSEN
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**



FIGURE 3 - BLUEBIRDS IN VALLEY FALLS PARK



Photo by Tom Ouellette

FIGURE 4 - SPOTTED SALAMANDER, VALLEY FALLS PARK



FIGURE 5

Nine of the many native plants present in Valley Falls Park fields.



Goldenrod



Joe Pye Weed



Virgin's Bower



Ironweed



Common Evening Primrose



Sensitive Fern



Daisy Fleabane



Bracken Fern



Jewelweed

Photographs by Tom Ouellette

TABLE 1
List of Reports, Plans and Studies Conducted at Valley Falls Park
1968 to Present

- 1968** “Valley Falls Nature Center – Valley Falls Park”, by National Audubon Society; prepared for the Vernon Recreation Commission.
A 98-page survey report and educational-use plan for a nature center at VFP; four parts, including observations of the natural and other resources in the park
- 1975** “A Development Plan for Valley Falls Park and Camp Newhoca”, by the Department of Community Affairs, State of Connecticut; prepared for the Town of Vernon.
A comprehensive 130-page report identifying existing conditions, issues, future needs, and recommendations for park improvements and future use of the two park sites.
- 1988** “Management Report – Valley Falls Pond and Eckers Pond”, by Robert W. Kortmann, PhD and George Knoecklein, Ecosystems Consulting Service, Inc.; prepared for the Town of Vernon, Parks and Recreation Department.
A 33-page in-depth analysis water quality and chemistry of the two ponds, with recommendations for improving water flow, turbidity and VF pond beach erosion.
- 1988** Letter Report – Forest Study by the State of Connecticut, Department of Environmental Protection, James C. Parada, Forester; prepared for the Vernon Conservation Commission and the Parks & Recreation Department.
A 6-page report / inventory of the tree stands in Valley Falls Park, with recommended management practices to enhance forest health.
- 1993** “Vascular Plant Inventory of the Valley Falls / Bolton Notch Watershed”, by Karen Sexton; prepared for the Vernon Conservation Commission, the Bolton Conservation Commission, and the Friends of Valley Falls.
A 37-page detailed report /inventory of vascular plants on approximately 1400 acres in the Railroad Brook/Tankerhoosen River watershed.
- 1997** “Valley Falls Dam Inspection Report”, by Karl F. Acimovic; prepared for the Town of Vernon
A 12-page report detailing conditions of the dam and recommended actions for improvements.

- 1998 “Management Plan for Valley Falls Park” by the Friends of Valley Falls, prepared for the Vernon Parks & Recreation Department.**
A 58-page report listing the various facilities, structures, trails and fields, with recommendations for scheduled maintenance; the history of the park site is also given.
- 1998 “Report on Sedimentation at Valley Falls Pond” by Baystate Environmental Consultants, Inc; prepared for the Director, Parks & Recreation Department.**
A 30-page report addressing the substantial deposition of silt in Valley Falls Pond, with recommendations for dredging.
- 1998 “Annual Review of the Trails and Woodlands in Valley Falls Park” by the Friends of Valley Falls; prepared for the Director, Parks & Recreation Department.**
A report that focussed on the physical condition of the trails, with recommendations for addressing the identified issues.
- 2002 “Valley Falls Park” by the Eastern Connecticut Environmental Review Team; prepared for the Vernon Conservation Commission.**
A 66-page comprehensive report addressing concerns about the dredging of the pond, trail locations, control of erosion on steep slopes, reclamation of the meadow areas, and managing public access.
- 1990s National Register of Historic Places – Applications for two sites within Valley Falls Park (Sharp’s Trout Hatchery Site and Valley Falls Cotton Mill Site) by the Vernon Historical Society.**
Two reports detailing the historical importance of two sites within Valley Falls Park; the sites have since been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Valley Falls area is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and includes Valley Falls Park and Valley Falls Farm.