

# Newfields-Exeter Community Forest Rugg Property Purchase

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## VOTING MEASURES

### What are the petitioned warrant articles?

**Newfields Warrant Article #1:** 118 Newfields residents petitioned for this warrant article to raise funds for the project. The measure would raise up to \$3,700,000 for the land purchase, of which up to \$2,000,000 would be cost to the town - further broken down below.

**The landowners and project team SUPPORT this warrant article.**

**Exeter Warrant Article (number TBD):** 177 Exeter residents petitioned for this warrant article. The Exeter measure advises the town to move forward with the project and commence fundraising.

**The landowners and project team SUPPORT this warrant article.**

Text for Newfields Warrant Article 1 and Exeter Warrant Article X can be found at [www.savefortrock.org](http://www.savefortrock.org)

**Newfields Warrant Article #4:** This was submitted last-minute to the town with NO coordination with the project team or landowners. This measure includes no funding for the project and if passed it effectively serves as a vote **against conservation and likely would kill the project because it would not meet the Newfields funding deadline or 2025 closing deadline.** The landowner has been clear that a Newfields vote for funding is needed in March 2024 in order for them to continue with the project.

**The landowners and project team DO NOT SUPPORT this warrant article.**

### If I support the project, which Newfields measure should I vote for?

Newfields Article 1. The landowners and project team do not support Article 4.

### Can I vote for both Newfields measures?

While technically a resident can vote for both, **those in support of the project should only vote for Article 1.** If Article 1 and 4 both pass, the project will be at risk with an unclear outcome, and may not proceed. The landowners and project team do not support Article 4.

### Why now, what is the urgency?

The landowners have given the towns until mid-2025 to purchase the property for conservation, and until March 2024 to get approval of town funding from Newfields. To meet these timelines, Newfields must pass Article 1, the funding measure, and decline Article 4 in March 2024 – Newfields funding cannot wait until 2025. Then, with Newfields funding in place in 2024, Exeter can follow with a funding measure in 2025 and still meet the 2025 closing timeline. Further information on the timeline is below.

### When are the town meetings? When will residents vote?

The Deliberative Sessions are on February 3 (Exeter) and February 6 (Newfields) at which amendments to the warrant articles can be proposed and voted on. Thus, if you care about this project and are a registered voter, you should attend the Deliberative Session. Voting Day is March 12 for both towns. Other town meetings for the Newfields measure are January 9 (Newfields Budget Meeting) and January 16 (Newfields Bond Hearing). See other handout for detailed information on the town meetings.

<u>Voting Result</u>	<u>Impact on Conservation Effort</u>
<b>Article 1 passes and Article 4 fails</b>	<b>Conservation effort continues.</b>
<b>Articles 1 and 4 both pass</b>	<b>Project at risk with unclear outcome.*</b>
<b>Article 1 fails and Article 4 passes</b>	<b>Landowners sell for development.</b>
<b>Articles 1 and 4 both fail</b>	<b>Landowners sell for development.</b>

\*Have requested clarification from Select Board in advance of the Deliberative Session on February 6

**What happens if Newfields fails to pass the funding measure/ Article 1 this year? Or if Exeter fails to pass a funding measure next year?**

If Newfields fails to pass Article 1 which includes funding for the project, the loan and grant options that have been put together throughout 2023 will be gone, the funding deadlines will not be met, and the landowner will not proceed with a sale for conservation, close the trail system to the public, and sell the property for development. The landowner has been clear about this timeline and outcome, and has posted signs on their trails to this effect. Likewise, if Newfields passes Article 1 and next year Exeter fails to pass a warrant article that funds the project, the project will fail and the trail system will be closed.

**COSTS AND FUNDING**

**What are the costs and funding sources?**

Land Cost. The estimated land cost is based on an initial appraisal completed in June 2023 (see below for appraisal information). This came to \$3,525,000 for the Newfields 101 acres, and \$1,642,000 for the Exeter 47 acres. A 5% contingency was then applied to account for a potential increase in appraised value between the initial 2023 appraisal and a final 2024 appraisal (see below for price terms), resulting in a maximum land cost of \$3,700,000 for Newfields and \$1,724,000 for Exeter.

Price Terms. **The final land cost and price paid will be set by a final appraisal in 2024. No more than appraised value will be paid.** To bracket this, the landowner has agreed to a maximum price of 5% over the June 2023 appraisal (“ceiling”) and a minimum sales price of 10% under the June 2023 appraisal (“floor”). If the final appraisal is higher than the ceiling, the purchase price will be the ceiling. If the final appraisal is lower than the floor, the towns may choose to pay the floor price if allowed by other funding sources, or the sale may not proceed, at no cost to the town.

**TAKE NOTE: Regardless where the final appraisal and purchase price lands, Newfield’s maximum contribution would be the \$2 million repayable portion of the \$2.5 million loan, and may be less, pending grants and fundraising success, as that maximum is established in the warrant article language.**

*See chart of cost and funding sources on next page.*



**Newfields Land:** Total maximum: \$3,700,000 (includes 5% contingency)

Town Loan: Up to \$2,500,000 from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF), selected for award in 2023. Anticipated loan terms: 20 to 30 years, 2.8% interest (final terms determined when the final loan application is submitted if the town votes to approve).

- **80% of the loan, up to \$2,000,000, would be repaid by the town. This is the maximum cost to Newfields.**
- 20% of the loan, up to \$500,000, would be forgiven/ grant (note: Additional \$100,000 CWSRF grant awarded for planning)

Anticipated grants/gifts/donations: Up to \$1,200,000

**Exeter Land:** Total maximum: \$1,724,000 (includes 5% contingency)

Town Loan or Bond: Up to \$1,150,000

Anticipated grants/gifts/ donations: Up to \$574,000

Associated Project Costs. \$600,000 is estimated for associated project costs including planning, community engagement, real estate due diligence, property stewardship and management funds, parking area and recreation improvements. These costs would not be paid by either town, and would be covered by grants and private funding.

**Detailed budgets and funding proposals have been developed throughout 2023 and January 2024, with the most recent budget available for public review.**

**What is the cost to Newfields for the project? What would it cost me as a resident? How does this compare to past investment in conservation (Piscassic Greenway)?**

The maximum cost of the project to Newfields is the \$2M repayable portion of the \$2.5M loan, as established in proposed Warrant Article 1. The estimated annual payment for a \$2M loan with an anticipated 30 year term and 2.8% interest is \$99,400, rounded to \$100K. Newfields has several options to repay this \$2M loan over 30 years, including through property taxes. This would cost homeowners 22 cents per \$1,000 of assessed home value per year in property taxes for the project.

This is similar to the Piscassic Greenway project, in which the town posted a \$1,500,000 bond in 2006 to support a land conservation project, and contributed another \$500,000 to the purchase, resulting in a \$2M contribution by the town. The town will finish paying off the Piscassic bond in 2026, the same year that the loan payments from the Rugg project would begin. Considering this, the incremental cost of the Rugg project will be much lower. From 2024 through 2026 the Town will pay approximately \$64,000 annually (including interest) for the Piscassic bond (prior payments were higher before the town refinanced). Considering this, the **incremental cost to the town after the Piscassic bond is paid off would be about \$36,000/year** (\$100K annual loan cost, less \$64K annual bond cost freed up). That is about 1.7% of the town’s proposed annual budget of \$2.1M in 2024. This represents **an incremental cost to homeowners of about 8 cents per \$1,000 of assessed home value per year in property taxes, down from 22 cents.** The property tax rate in Newfields is \$15.79 per \$1,000 of assessed home value, one of the lowest tax rates in the state. This incremental cost represents a 0.5% increase in the tax rate.



**Newfields Investment in Conservation**

	<b>2024- 2025 annual cost</b>	<b>2026 cost (overlap year)</b>	<b>2027 onward annual cost</b>
Piscassic Greenway Bond <u>\$1,500,000 in 2006</u> 20 year investment	\$64,000	\$64,000 (payment ends)	
Rugg Project Loan <u>\$2,000,000 in 2026</u> 30 year investment		\$100,000 (payment starts)	\$100,000
Total Conservation Cost & Tax Impact (per \$1,000 assessed value)	\$64,000 14 cents/ \$1000	\$170,000 (overlap year)	\$100,000 22 cents/ \$1000
<b><u>Incremental Conservation Cost &amp; Tax Increase</u></b>			<b>\$36,000 8 cents/\$1000 0.5% increase in tax rate</b>

**What is the cost to Exeter for the project? What would it cost me as a resident?**

Exeter is not voting on a funding measure this year, only an advisory measure. Exeter will vote on a funding measure next year, at which point these costs will be calculated with more information.

**What are the municipal service costs if the land is developed?**

The municipal service costs are not known and it would depend on the final size of the subdivision, type and value of the homes, and other factors. However, even with a wide range of potential lots, there would be substantive costs to the town to provide services. Whether or not those costs would be offset by property tax revenue from new houses or whether they represent a net cost to the town is not known. This level of fiscal analysis is not within the scope of the landowner’s offer to sell the land for conservation, and is not required for conservation fundraising, nor for the appraisal of the land value.

Regarding potential impact to the school, this would depend on the increase in student enrollment that would result if the land were developed into a subdivision, which is difficult to estimate. According to a report produced by the Newfields Elementary School (NES) Board, current enrollment is 121 students with a maximum capacity of 182 students. The cost per student per year is approximately \$23,500. Current class size is 17 students. At maximum capacity, class sizes would increase to 25-30 students, up to 4 new teachers and staff would be needed, and there would no longer be dedicated classrooms for music, art and STEM. Beyond NES, there would be other impacts for middle and high schools.

**What grants and donations are anticipated?**

Funding from the state and federal grants is proposed. Applications have been submitted to 6 different grants and funding programs in 2023 and 2024, with additional applications planned for 2024.



**Grants Summary:**

- \$2,500,000 awarded – Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Loan (Newfields) – applied and recommended for award in 2023, requires town vote in March 2024
- \$100,000 awarded – CWSRF grant for planning – applied and recommended for award in 2023
- up to \$500,000 – NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (**LCHIP**) (state grant) – applied 2023, not awarded, reapplying 2024
- up to \$600,000 – US Forest Service Community Forest Program (**CFP**)(federal grant) – applied 2024, under review
- up to \$500,000 – NH Department of Parks and Recreation Land and Water Conservation Fund (**LWCF**) (federal grant) – applied in 2023, under review
- up to \$500,000 – NH Department of Environmental Service Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund (**DWGTF**), applied 2023, not awarded, reapplying 2024

Additional grants and donations, including private foundation grants and individual gifts, are being considered to try to further lower the cost to the towns. The goal is to fund 40-50% of the land cost with grants and donations, with each town covering the remaining 50-60%.

**How will the grants be divided between the towns?**

For administrative reasons and limitations of the grant programs, it is not practical to divide all grants between both towns. Instead, different grants are proposed for the different towns with a goal of having a relatively equal percent of each town's land cost covered by grants.

**What is the appraisal process to determine the land value?**

The land value is determined by an appraisal of "fair market value" done by an independent, qualified, licensed appraiser meeting state and federal ("yellowbook") standards. All public funding sources (loans and grants) have strict appraisal requirements and rigorous appraisal review processes. Typically the appraisal is a two-part process — a first appraisal used for budgeting and fundraising, and a second final appraisal used to set the final purchase price, which is reviewed by the funders. The reason for two appraisals is that appraisals typically go stale after a year and, similar to this initiative, the fundraising process is often two years or more.

An initial, first appraisal was completed in June 2023 for project budgeting, grant proposals, and consideration by the town and landowner. It was done by a competitively selected, licensed, and highly recommended appraiser paid for by the nonprofit organization and project lead Trust For Public Land. The appraisal was done to federal "yellow book" standards. The appraised value and a summary report was submitted to the town of Newfields in June and the full report provided in August. The appraisal was also submitted to state and federal grant agencies as part of grant applications throughout 2023.

A second and final appraisal will be done in 2024 to state and federal standards, which will set the final purchase price as described above. Both the Town of Newfields and the Town of Exeter will be named as users of that report, and will have the opportunity to review, provide input on and ask questions about the appraisal approach, and provide information and data to the appraiser that they would like to be considered. This final appraisal will have a 4-part review to ensure it is publicly transparent and rigorous: review by both towns, review by the state of NH, review by federal funding agencies, and review by an independent third-party appraiser.

### **What concerns were expressed about the appraisal and how were they addressed?**

In the fall of 2023, the Newfields Select Board provided questions and concerns about the appraisal to Trust for Public Land. Those questions were sent to and answered by the appraiser, and a call was set up with the appraiser and all three Select Board members to address their questions. The Select Board's main concerns were around the comparable sales used, mixing land sales with approved/permittted lots with raw land that has not gone through permitting, and that raising the comparable sales average/metric used. The appraiser's response was that he had evaluated the most comparable land sales and considered all data available as of the date of valuation, including properties in all stages of development; that he discussed current development costs with multiple local developers; that the parcel is NOT being appraised as a fully permitted subdivision rather vacant land parcel for speculative development (consistent with the conceptual level of engineering plans that were done by the Ruggs); and that he was not basing the appraisal on the "average" of the sales, so the idea that the data is being skewed by fully permitted sales is incorrect. He notes this is discussed in detail in the appraisal. The Select Board did not provide additional questions or follow up requests on the appraisal following this.

## **STATUS, PLANNING, & TIMELINE**

### **What planning, information gathering, and review has been done? Coordination with the towns? Public engagement?**

There has been an extensive amount of information gathering, planning, review, budgeting, and coordination with the towns, landowner, and potential funding partners since the fall of 2022. Before this, the landowner had discussed the project with the towns for many years. In fall of 2022, the landowner agreed to work with Trust for Public Land and Southeast Land Trust to advance the project with the towns. In total, well over 600 hours of project team staff and volunteer time have been spent on the project in the last year.

Coordination with Towns: Throughout 2023, the project team has held over 20 meetings and site visits including with both town's Conservation Commissions, with the Newfields Planning Board and staff, with the Newfields Select Board, with Exeter staff, and with the Exeter Select Board.

Public Engagement: Two public hearings dedicated to the project were held in Newfields in July 2023 (estimated attendance of 80+) and November 2023 (estimated attendance of 60+). One general public meeting/ information session was held in Exeter, open to people from any town (estimated attendance of 130+). Public engagement at public meetings has been overwhelmingly supportive of the project. Dozens of residents have written to town officials and attended additional public meetings where the project was discussed. Over 1,200 people from across New England have signed onto an open public letter of support, including 319 residents of Newfields and Exeter and hundreds more from surrounding communities.

Property Information and Due Diligence: Extensive information collection and due diligence has been completed including: a preliminary appraisal, title research, a title report and title commitment, a boundary survey and plan, a conceptual subdivision plan and revisions to the plan, a fundraising plan, and detailed budgets. All of this information has been sent or made available to the towns.

Funding Applications: Trust for Public Land worked in cooperation with the Town of Newfields (Select Board and Conservation Commission) and Town of Exeter (Conservation Commission) to submit five



extensive state and federal funding applications – in Exeter, one state grant application; in Newfields, one state grant, one state loan, and two federal grants. Detailed information on grant funding requirements was provided to Newfields, along with extensive coordination with and review by funding agency staff.

Social Media and Website: A Facebook group has been established which can be accessed here: "[Save Fort Rock](#)," and there is a website for the project here: [www.savefortrocktrails.org](http://www.savefortrocktrails.org).

**Will there be more review before the town purchases the land?**

Yes. As with any real estate transaction, final due diligence will need to be completed by the towns and funding partners before the land is purchased. That includes a final appraisal, title review, an environmental assessment to look for any contamination, boundary survey review and resolution of the boundary question with Exeter, and all the documentation required for public grant funding. This will all be reviewed by the project team, towns, and funding agencies in 2024 and early 2025.

**What is the project timeline?**

Past/ Completed

2019	Landowners started talking with SELT and the towns about conservation
Fall/winter 2022	Landowners agree to work with TPL and SELT to conserve land
Spring 2023	Initial meetings with Newfields and Exeter, landowners sign letter of intent
Summer-fall 2023	Initial appraisal, town/public meetings, grant applications, due diligence review
Dec-Jan 2023	Warrant article petitions signed, additional grant applications

Future/ Planned

Jan-Feb 2024	Public Meetings prior to Town Votes
March 2024	Town Votes, first fundraising deadline (Newfields funding)
2024 to 2025	Additional fundraising/grants, due diligence, second/ final appraisal
2024 to 2015	Public meetings/ engagement re: Community Forest Planning
March 2025	Final fundraising deadline (Exeter funding)
Mid-2025	Closing Deadline

Detailed timelines have been provided to the towns throughout 2023, and are available to the public.

**Do both Newfields and Exeter need to proceed, are they linked? What happens if Newfields proceeds but Exeter does not, is there a cost to Newfields?**

Both must proceed together. The landowners will only sell both parcels together, so the project is linked/ dependent on both towns proceeding. If Newfields proceeds and Exeter fails to proceed, the project would stop and there would be no cost to Newfields, because the loan would not be taken out, and all of the project planning and due diligence cost is covered by grants and other non-town funding. While the purchases may not close at the exact same time, the Newfields purchase could not close until the Exeter purchase is lined up.

**Why is Exeter “behind” Newfields in the timeline? What is the boundary question?**

Exeter is behind Newfields in the timeline due to a boundary question between the Rugg property and Town of Exeter property that both parties are working to resolve. Refer to boundary survey Plan D-44047 recorded at the Rockingham County Registry of Deeds. The landowner, at their own initiation and significant cost, contracted a surveyor and title researcher to do a detailed boundary survey and detailed title research for the property, an effort that took more than a year. They submitted the title research





report and the above-referenced boundary Plan to Exeter in July 2023. It was still under review as of December 2023, when the warrant articles were being developed. As such, an advisory measure was proposed for Exeter in 2024 with a funding measure following in 2025. Even without funding included, passage of the advisory measure in Exeter in 2024 is critical, as it will show funding programs that there is strong support from Exeter for the project.

### **What is the alternative if the towns do not buy the land?**

Unfortunately, the landowners must sell the land to settle their estate — preferably to the towns for conservation, but if not, then for development. Development and subdivision would eliminate the 12 miles of trails and public access, harm water quality and groundwater supplies, fragment wildlife habitat, and increase municipal service costs. If Newfields does not pass the funding measure in 2024, and Exeter does not pass a funding measure in 2025, and if the towns do not complete the purchase in 2025, the landowners will sell for development.

### **Is this land developable? How many houses could be built? How does this affect value?**

The landowner contracted an engineer to develop a conceptual engineering plan showing 67 house lots across the 148 acres. There are two versions of the plan – a “yield plan” which shows lots spread between Newfields and Exeter, and a “conservation yield plan” which shows lots clustered in Newfields. The engineer took into consideration several elements of feasibility: topographic mapping, wetland mapping, ingress/ egress of roads, zoning and local regulations. The plan was revised to avoid wetlands following a field review, which included walking the entire extent of the proposed road system. The landowner and the engineer presented the conceptual subdivision plan to the Newfields Planning Board several times in 2023 with a request for a preliminary review of feasibility. The Planning Board was unable to provide a preliminary review and suggested the landowner submit a full permit application.

Full, approved and permitted engineering plans would be needed to know the exact number of lots. However, it is highly unusual to do this for conservation and not recommended for the reasons outlined in the next question. As such, the landowner has chosen not to pursue full engineering plans and approval by the Planning Board at this time and is selling the land as-is with a conceptual level plan that was accounted for in the appraisal.

### **In the Newfields Piscassic Greenway project the developer had full engineering plans and permits before selling. Isn't that the normal conservation process?**

No. That was a highly unusual project because the property was owned by a developer and initially proposed for development. This is not the normal conservation process, and not recommended by conservation organizations including Trust for Public Land (TPL) and Southeast Land Trust (SELT) for several reasons: 1) full engineering plans and permits are very costly and take a lot of time to complete, which can significantly impact a landowner's interest, and delay and risk the project not proceeding; 2) full plans are not needed for an accurate appraisal of the land's Fair Market Value value as-is, and in fact can complicate the appraisal process and agency review and approval; 3) given the cost and time involved, fully permitted plans drive up the land value substantially, often putting it beyond conservation funding potential; and 4) the land then usually goes the route of development and not conservation.

In 50+ years of experience across 100+ land conservation projects, TPL and SELT staff involved have seen very few conservation projects done that had full engineering plans/ permits for development.



## ABOUT THE PROJECT

### What is the project?

The project is the purchase of 148 acres of private, undeveloped, forested property owned by the Rugg family in Newfields (101 acres) and Exeter (47 acres). If approved, these lands would become public with the Newfields portion owned by the Town of Newfields and the Exeter portion owned by Exeter. The land would be managed as a community forest with input from the community.

### What are the goals and benefits of the project?

There are many goals and benefits of this project, whether you regularly use the trails, sometimes use the trails, or never use the trails! The project has multiple benefits for the local community.

1. **Create new public land, expanding and connecting two town forests** – Inland Acres expanded by ~265% (~40 > 140 acres), Exeter Oaklands Town Forest expanded by ~24% (~200 > 250 acres)
2. **Protect 30% of the Fort Rock Trails** (12 miles out ~40 miles), preserve trail connections between the two towns and neighborhoods, and support economic benefits to local stores and businesses created by the recreational economy.
3. **Protect water supply of two drinking water wells** in Exeter (property in “wellhead protection area”) and **water quality of two nearby impaired coastal rivers** – Piscassic and Squamscott – through preserving forests and wetlands that filter and absorb stormwater and help with aquifer recharge, and through avoiding the runoff, nitrogen loading, and new wells that may overtax groundwater supplies that would occur with development.
4. **Preserve wildlife habitat**, including potential habitat for 7 state and federally listed species.
5. **Preserve open space, rural scenic character, and quality of life** of the towns.
6. **Improve public access** to the trail network through a new trailhead and parking area.
7. **Establish a Community Forest** where the community has ongoing input into use and management, including recreation/ trails, potential youth engagement/ outdoor education opportunities in partnership with the local schools, and potential sustainable forestry.

More information about each of these goals can be found in the public grant applications.

### What are the plans if the project is successful? How will the land be managed?

The land will be owned and managed by each town, with permanent restrictions to ensure it remains open to the public for multiple recreational uses and kept in conservation. The land would not be able to be sold, subdivided, developed, or converted to another use. Parking would be allowed with limitations (see below). The same multiple recreational uses that currently exist would continue, including hiking, running, biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, birdwatching, geocaching, and snowmobiling on established routes. Buffers for ecologically sensitive areas such as wetlands and vernal pools would be established. Volunteers with the group Fort Rock Riders would continue to manage trails, as they have already done for years, in coordination with the towns. Trail management and other uses would follow a Management Plan adopted by the towns. The vision is that the land would be managed as a Community Forest with input from the public – see below.

### What is the proposed Community Forest model?

Please reference the “Proposed Community Forest Model” document for information. In short, this will involve a public planning process and Community Forest Committee to guide decisions on the forest.



### **What parking exists, and what new parking is proposed?**

Currently there are 5 existing parking areas of various sizes that serve the larger Fort Rock trail system. Four are located in Exeter and one is located in Newfields which is the smallest of them supporting three cars, possibly four. Currently, most of the parking areas are best located to serve Exeter and people traveling from the southern part of the region. The Save Fort Rock effort proposes adding additional parking in Newfields using the conservation project's frontage on Route 87 (Piscassic Road). The new parking area is currently envisioned to hold 10 to 15 cars, possibly as high as 20 but these are estimates and an exact number will be determined through further planning in 2024 and 2025 based on site conditions and design parameters. The lot would have a gravel surface including a kiosk with information about allowed/prohibited uses and maps, and a new trail connecting the parking area to the trail system. The parking area would be visible from Route 87 for public safety and to prevent illicit activities. Route 87 is a state highway and there will be no parking along Route 87. Detailed issues like plowing, hours of operation, and trash receptacle can all be addressed by the community through the Community Forest Planning process and is a decision to be made by the Town. The Town will be responsible for the parking area long-term. It is envisioned the parking area will be built within 1 year of the closing. Design details have not been initiated yet, but could start once funding from the communities and grants are further along. The cost for the design and construction of the parking area will be raised as part of the project and SELT will assist the Town in the design and hiring of the contractors to construct the lot.

### **What is the Fort Rock trail system? How does the Rugg Property fit in with the trail network?**

"Fort Rock" is the collective name used to describe the multi-use trail system that exists in Newfields and Exeter. Consisting of about 40 miles of trails, the network includes land owned by the Town of Newfields, the Town of Exeter, and private landowners. The trail network connects the two towns via a culvert tunnel under Route 101. This trail network is popular for a variety of uses in all seasons - hiking, biking, trail running, snow sports, dog walking, wildlife viewing, photography, etc. and it is known for its wide variety of natural terrain. The recent implementation of newer trail signage and the adoption of phone-based mapping apps for trail usage has led to improved navigation and safety on the network.

The Rugg family have graciously opened their property to the public, and it has been actively used for outdoor recreation for many decades. The Rugg Property contains about 12 miles of the Fort Rock network with trails ranging from wider, doubletrack trails, access roads, to narrower singletrack sections. Their property is the vital link that connects together the Inland Acres Town Forest in Newfields with the Oaklands Town Forest in Exeter.

### **Who is the project team? What is the project structure?**

The project is led by the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit conservation organization, with support from Southeast Land Trust, a regional nonprofit conservation organization, and Fort Rock Riders, a local volunteer mountain biking group. This team is working in cooperation with both town's Conservation Commissions and Select Boards, with significant support from residents and community volunteers. Trust for Public Land has negotiated purchase terms with the landowner, and will hold an Option Agreement for purchase of the land, with the ability to direct the deeds to the towns.

### **Contact for More Information**

Lynnette Batt, Project Manager, Trust for Public Land, [lynnette.batt@tpl.org](mailto:lynnette.batt@tpl.org)

