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## **The Mink Hills Recreational Study**

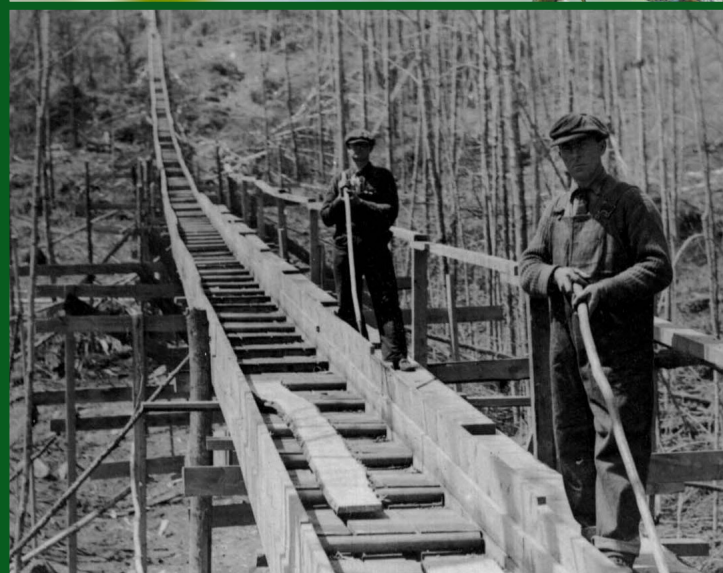
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# **A Recreational Plan to Preserve and Protect the Natural and Historic Resources of the Mink Hills**

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**Warner, New Hampshire**

**2023**





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There are many people who deserve thanks for their input, advice, and cooperation during the course of this project. Below are just some of those who have contributed to the success of the Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee.

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## I. Executive Summary

In the spring of 2020, the Warner Select Board appointed community members to the Mink Hills Recreational Study Committee (MHRSC). The MHRSC includes representatives from the Warner Select Board, Warner Conservation Commission, the Chandler Reservation Committee, Warner Historical Society, the Snail Trail Snowmobile Club, the Boundtree ATV Club, Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission, and hunters and landowners living in and adjacent to the Minks. The purpose of the committee as stated by the Select Board was “to develop a recreational plan while preserving and protecting the natural and historic resources in the Mink Hills.” This report is the product of the MHRSC and is the result of more than 2 years of research and public meetings.

The Mink Hills is a term used locally to describe a large relatively undeveloped tract of land in the towns of Warner, Hopkinton, Henniker, and Bradford. The entire tract encompasses approximately 26,800 acres, of which approximately 14,376 acres lie in Warner, comprising 40% of the Town (Map 1).

### *SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES*

- Warner Town road and land policies should encourage maintaining the Minks as a large intact block of forest.
- The Class VI roads and the Chandler Reservation trails are the two most heavily utilized recreational routes in the Minks. OHRVs and plated vehicles are the most impactful users of the Class VI roads resulting in increased erosion and altered drainage. Other users include hunters, hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riding, and in winter, snowmobiles, skiing and snowshoeing. The Chandler Mink trails are predominantly foot traffic, both summer and winter.
- Local knowledge of the trails and roads is primarily word-of-mouth, therefore the Minks may be underutilized by Warner residents.
- Education about appropriate uses, ecology, historical features, respecting property and land ethics is provided in documents, but is not easily available to the public.
- Parking to access trails and roads in the Minks is limited.
- The declining condition of the Class VI roads is a concern, and difficult to manage due to State laws limiting Town maintenance and expenditures, and the ongoing heavy use by wheeled vehicles.
- Past town attempts to limit travel on the roads during sensitive times (predominantly Spring mud season) have had limited success due to confusing signage and minimal enforcement.
- Organized private users provide the primary maintenance on the Class VI roads including the Kearsarge Trail Snails, the Boundtree ATV club and forestry operations.
- Additional recreation opportunities on private lands are not the purview of this committee.

*Recommendations*

*Overarching:*

- Create public awareness on the rights of and allowable uses of Class VI roads, as well as the limitation of seasonal access.
- The Mink Hills are an increasingly rare contiguous and unique area in southern NH. Management of the area should focus equally on the flora and fauna, recreational interests and cultural assets.
- Town-sponsored recreation should be focused in the Chandler Reservation and in Silver Lake Town Park.
- Class VI roads should receive sufficient maintenance for emergency access.
- Create a Stewardship Committee to monitor conditions, educate users and landowners, and to promote stewardship in the Minks. The committee will report issues and concerns to the Selectboard and Road committee.

*Signage:*

- Create consistent and clear signage for Class VI road closure during mud season.
- Coordinate with appropriate parties to map available parking Chandler Reservation and Silver Lake available parking
  - Bean Road (2 locations)
  - Howe Lane/Weaver Road
  - Horne Street
  - Mink Hill Lane
  - Silver Lake

*Awareness/Public Information:*

- Collaborate with Taking Action for Wildlife and the Chandler Reservation to support hiking and recreation through mapping, website, signage and trailhead kiosks.
- Reference Trail Finder on the Chandler Reservation website.
- Town website should be updated to reflect these recommendations.
- Educate the public about Class A & B trails, property rights and Class VI road emergency lane designation.
- Create educational materials about recreational impacts to wildlife and natural resources.



## Mink Hills Recreational Study Committee Final Report

### *Coordination/Relationships:*

- The Mink Hills Stewardship Committee should hold a yearly meeting and invite the following groups for feedback about activities in the Minks.
  - Warner Select Board
  - Chandler Reservation
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - Dept of Public Works
  - Warner Historical Society
  - NH Fish & Game
  - Kearsarge Trail Snails
  - Boundtree ATV
  - New England Mountain Biking Association
  - Harriman Chandler State Forest and Ashendon State Forest
  - Representatives of Henniker, Contoocook and Bradford.

### *Access:*

- Evaluate how to deal with Class VI roads submerged by beaver ponds, damaged culverts and other heavily eroded sections.
- Study the need for additional designated parking areas and sign them.
- Coordinate with the Chandler Reservation to trim around the old observation tower so that there is a view,.
- Coordinate with the stewardship committee of the Mink Hills, Warner Department of Public Works, Kearsarge Trail Snails, and Forest Fire Wardens to maintain access to Class VI roads by managing encroachment of vegetation.
- 

### *Uses:*

- Continue to close all Class VI roads during mud season and strengthen enforcement.
- ATV use within the Mink Hill area should not expand beyond its current authorization.
- Recommend all Class V seasonal roads remain as such.

## II: Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the Warner Select Board appointed community members to the Mink Hills Recreational Study Committee (MHRSC). The purpose of the committee as stated by the Select Board was “to develop a recreational plan while preserving and protecting the natural and historic resources in the Mink Hills.”

The MHRSC includes representatives from the Warner Select Board, Warner Conservation Commission, the Chandler Reservation Committee, Warner Historical Society, the Kearsarge Trail Snail Snowmobile Club, the Boundtree ATV Club, Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission, and hunters and landowners living in and adjacent to the Minks. The committee reviewed existing information about natural and historic resources, physical features, road conditions and structures. The committee also sought to clarify the current legal definitions, allowable uses and local maintenance options of Class VI roads, and to identify other road designations (Emergency Lanes and Class A and B Trails) that could be of value to the Town. The committee held a public meeting September 9, 2022 to receive public input from interested community members and landowners. A second public meeting was held on June 29, 2023 to present a draft of the recreational report for comments and discussion. Summaries of both meetings are provided in Appendix 4 and 5. This resulting final report contains recommendations and priorities for protecting the existing resources in the Minks and to enhance the public’s opportunity for a variety of recreational uses.

The MHRSC was created following the work begun in 2017 by Friends of the Mink Hills. Reports from Mink Hills landowners and hikers, mountain bikers and others who used the Minks for recreation told of roads that were no longer passable for non-motorized activities. Deteriorating Class VI road conditions and excessive noise were the predominant concerns. The deterioration was linked to successive agreements, beginning in 2010, between Warner Select Board and ATV clubs as more Mink Hills roads were opened to ATV traffic.

On December 4, 2019 the Select Board Agenda focused on the Boundtree ATV Agreement Renewal. Many people attended the meeting to speak to the issues. Along with representatives from the Boundtree ATV Club seeking expansion of the trail network, many others advocated for the rights of landowners, conservation of land, and protection of water and wildlife. After several hours of testimony with many more people wishing to speak, the Select Board continued the meeting to January 14, 2020. At the end of the second meeting, the Select Board decided to return to the original 2010 ATV agreement, which was the only trail expansion agreement that had included public input. Before adjourning the meeting, the Select Board announced that it would appoint representatives from a broad range of community groups “to develop a recreational plan while preserving and protecting the natural and historic resources in the Mink Hills”, which became the Mink Hills Recreational Study Committee.

Among many other documents, the following resources were key to developing this report (See Appendix 1):

- The 2004 Mink Hills Conservation Plan
- The 2011 Warner Master Plan
- The 2021 town-wide survey by the Warner Conservation Commission
- Warner’s OHRV Policy, 2011
- Warner’s Class VI Road Policy, 2015

### III. Study Area

#### Geographic Extent

The Mink Hills is a term used locally to describe a large relatively undeveloped tract of land in the towns of Warner, Hopkinton, Henniker, and Bradford. The entire tract encompasses approximately 26,800 acres, of which approximately 14,376 acres lie in Warner. This area comprises approximately 40% of the Town of Warner.

For the purposes of this committee, the Mink Hills study area is the same as was used by the 2004 Conservation Plan. It is bounded by the Warner town lines on the south and west, and by several Town roads on the north and east, such as Newmarket, Bean, and East Joppa Roads.

See Map 1 for a depiction of the geographic extent, roads, topography, streams and ponds, and parcel lines.

#### Physical Characteristics of the Mink Hills

The Mink Hills are a compact range of hills with elevations ranging from 1850 feet to 517 feet NGVD within Warner. The largest hills (Chandler Mink, Stewarts Peak and Windsor Ward) are 1750, 1850 and 922 feet, respectively.

The lowlands between the hills support multiple perennial streams, many of which are named (e.g., Ballard, Bartlett, Silver, Davis, Slaughter and Warner Brooks), and numerous tributaries. Most drainage flows northward to the Warner River, but on the southern and western edges of the Warner portion of the Minks, streams drain to the Contoocook River. Due to the relatively steep terrain, only two waterbodies lie within the Minks: Bear Pond and Cunningham Pond. Some long-established beaver ponds also occur in the Minks, as well as many smaller impoundments that support shorter-cycle beaver colonies.

The USDA Web Soil Survey (Appendix 3) shows that as of 2019 the Warner Minks supported a wide range of soil types, most of which were classified as steep and very stony, as appropriate given the hilly and rocky terrain that dominates the study area.

Vegetation in the Minks is predominantly forested, with cover ranging from mature to early successional due to the prevalence of logging activity. The NH Fish and Game Wildlife Action Plan's Habitat Map (Appendix 3) mapped the study area as predominantly Hemlock-Hardwood-Conifer with pockets of Northern Hardwood-Pine at higher elevations. According to the Nature of NH (Sperduto and Kimball 2011; Appendix 3), the dominant species in both categories are hemlock, sugar maple, beech, yellow birch, and white pine, with hemlock and red oak increasing in the lowlands, and hardwoods and red spruce increasing with elevation. Red maple, white birch, black cherry, and trembling aspen are also common.

Wetlands are prevalent throughout the Minks, ranging from beaver ponds, forested wetlands and shrub swamps to numerous smaller pocket wetlands and vernal pools in the lowlands. Seeps occur on the side slopes of many hills, and multiple wet depressions and vernal pools have been observed at higher elevations. The Warner study area includes approximately 35 miles of roads, including the Henniker Road (a Class V seasonal road) and multiple named Class VI roads (Map 2). As of Feb 2023, the Boundtree ATV Club has access to approximately 7.3 miles of Class VI roads and private roads. The

Minks also include snowmobile trails that follow Class VI roads as well as trails on private lands. There are hiking trails in the Chandler Forest as well as informal trails on private properties.

## Ecological Characteristics of the Mink Hills

### *Wildlife Habitat*

The Mink Hills provide habitat for many species of wildlife typical of large forested areas in NH, such as bear, moose, bobcat, fisher and snowshoe hare. Other common large mammals include white-tailed deer, coyote, fox, porcupine, beaver, and muskrat. Smaller mammals such as red and gray squirrels, several weasels, chipmunk, multiple mouse and vole species, and shrews abound. While common bat species have been decimated by white-nose syndrome, the Minks are likely to still support big brown and little brown bats, and possibly small-footed and red bats. Reptiles include garter and water snakes, and turtles such as snapping, painted and wood. Important amphibians occur in the uplands (red-backed salamander and eastern red-spotted newt) and many wetlands, from vernal pools with wood frogs, and spotted and blue-spotted salamanders, to larger ponds with green, bull, pickerel and leopard frogs, and the eastern red-spotted newt. Streams are known to support native brook trout, black-nosed dace, and dusky and two-lined salamanders. A long list of birds, particularly those of large forested habitats, occur in the Minks, including pileated woodpecker, wood and hermit thrushes, red and golden crowned kinglets, barred and sawwhet owls, raven, cooper’s and sharp-shinned hawks, ruffed grouse, woodcock and many woodwarblers such as bay-breasted, blackburnian, magnolia, black-throated blue, black-throated green, and pine.

The NHTG Wildlife Action Plan (2020b; Appendix 3)) analyzed the entire state to rank the ecological condition based on a variety of factors including species diversity, proximity to travel corridors and streams, known rare species, and size of the unfragmented parcel. Map 3 and Table 1 summarize the distribution of those habitats in the Mink Hills study area. The bright magenta is the highest value habitat in the state and composed 38.1% of the study area, followed by the green polygons which depict the highest value habitats in the biological region and composed 21.9% of the study area. Note that when combined, these two very important habitats compose 60% of the study area.

**Table 1.**  
**Summary of NH Wildlife Action Plan Highest Ranked Wildlife Habitat by Ecological Condition for Warner Mink Hills Study Area.**

Classification	Acres	% of Study Area
<b>Highest Ranked Habitat in NH</b>	5,453	38.1%
<b>Highest Ranked Habitat in Biological Region</b>	3,131	21.9%
<b>Supporting Habitats</b>	5,470	38.2%
<b>Not topped ranked (remaining lands)</b>	222	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	14,376	100%



Another method for considering the value of the Minks to wildlife lies with “Trails for People and Wildlife” (Appendix 3) that evaluates the location of a trail and its potential impacts to wildlife in the area. The goal of the analysis is to identify high-value wildlife habitat and overlay existing or potential trails. In the Mink Hills, the resulting map ranked wildlife habitat on a scale from Low Impact to Very High Impact depicted as shades of color (Map 4). The map clearly shows that wetlands and high elevations are important habitats, and that many of the Class VI roads are in low value areas as a result of the impacts of the roads. The analysis relies on data that indicate that disturbance from human activity in NH adversely affects wildlife within 400 feet of the road. Where roads and high-value habitats intersect (e.g., the southern ends of Judytown, Hoyt and Cunningham Pond Roads), impacts to wildlife are more likely.

#### *Unfragmented Condition*

As stated in the 2004 MHCP (Appendix 3), The Nature Conservancy in its analysis of New Hampshire, identified the Mink Hills forest block of some 26,800 acres in Warner, Henniker, Hopkinton and Bradford as an important ecological land unit because of the large contiguous extent of natural land cover. Almost twenty years later, this importance has only increased as development in the region has continued. The Warner Mink Hill study area has experienced some additional development around its periphery, but relatively little has changed in the interior. Maintaining the unfragmented condition of the area is an important component in protecting its ecological character, as defined by its wildlife and vegetation.

According to the NH Fish & Game’s Wildlife Corridor Study (2018: Appendix 3), “wildlife corridors connect habitats so that wildlife can move between areas and are critical to the conservation of species in New Hampshire. The loss of wildlife corridors may result in direct mortality, habitat fragmentation, and barriers to dispersal, which may result in the local extinction of some wildlife populations over time. At greatest risk are slow-moving species such as reptiles and amphibians, species that depend on high adult survivorship (e.g., turtle species), species that are long range dispersers (e.g., Canada lynx), and species with scarce populations (e.g., marbled salamanders).” The Wildlife Action Plan takes into account the value of the minimal fragmentation of habitats in the Mink Hills, but it is worth noting that even the Class V seasonal Henniker Road (not maintained in winter) presents a barrier to certain species.

#### *Rare species and communities*

Six known rare species locations and two known rare or exemplary natural community occurrences are recorded by the NH Natural Heritage Bureau for the Mink Hills. These are not shown on this map set to protect their locations. Due to the large size and diversity of the area, other rare species and communities may yet be identified in future surveys.

#### *Land Use in the Mink Hills*

An important characteristic of the Mink Hills is the minimal development for the majority of the area. Apart from the Henniker Road, which is a Class V seasonal road (not maintained in winter), no maintained roads traverse the interior of the parcel. Other major infrastructure such as power lines are also lacking. Residential homes and small farms lie on the fringes of the Minks along secondary roads, and a few camps and cabins that are “off the grid” occur along the Class VI roads.

The 2015 Warner zoning map depicts the majority of the Mink Hills as Open Recreation District (minimum 5-acre buildable area and 500 feet of road frontage) and Open Conservation District (minimum 5-acre buildable area and 300 feet of road frontage). The portions bordering secondary roads such as East and West Joppa, Waldron Hill, Bean Road and Newmarket are zoned Low Density Residential (minimum 3-acre buildable area and 250 feet of road frontage).

In the Warner Mink Hills study area, the majority of land is in private ownership. Approximately 4,842 acres are currently publicly owned, and most are in some form of protection or conservation. The remaining 9,534 are privately held. Of the conserved lands, the Chandler Reservation (1524 acres) is owned by the Town of Warner; the Town of Hopkinton owns 301 acres in 2 parcels; and two State Forests (Chandler-Harriman and Ashendon) encompass 565 acres in three parcels.

Conservation easements have been purchased or put in place by multiple private landowners (Map 1). These provide important protections against developing the lots, while continuing to allow the traditional uses of forestry and agriculture. Some form of public access is often a component of a conservation easement. Several of the conservation easements in the Minks are held by Ausbon-Sargent Land Preservation Trust, the Society for the Protection of NH Forests, and Five Rivers Conservation Trust.

Timber harvesting has long been a land practice in the Minks and continues today. Many parcels are harvested cyclically and therefore the forest in the study area exhibits a range of ages from recently logged to early- and mid-successional to mature. In some scenarios the Town requires the logger or property owner that is logging provide a road bond and discuss the planned equipment route(s) and road condition with the Warner Road Agent for each proposed forestry project. The logger will often be required to grade and/or bring in stone to improve the road and install or replace culverts. Prior to releasing the bond at the end of the project, the Road Agent will inspect the road and ensure that it is no worse than, and typically improved over, the previous condition. This is an important mechanism for maintaining the Class VI roads since the Town is restricted from performing routine maintenance.

### Historical and Cultural Features in the Mink Hills

The presence of Native Americans in New Hampshire dates back 12,000 years ago based on current archeological evidence. Based on the artifacts and tools used for fishing, agricultural, hunting and making pottery discovered along the Warner River in Davisville and Waterloo settlements were established in these locations. Villages were also established in Concord along the Merrimack River and in West Hopkinton along the Contoocook River based on archeological research. Secondary rivers in New Hampshire have sites that have not been studied and explored fully.

Walter Harriman wrote in his history of Warner that artifacts were also found along Schoodac Brook and in the Minks. The Native Americans considered the spring at the Bradford Bog to contain healing waters based on an account in the History of Bradford. As the settlers tried to establish rough log cabins and the beginnings of a sawmill at the falls in Davisville they were burned out during the French Indian War as European colonists were intruding on Native American land.

After the French and Indian War was settled in 1760 a large number of colonists settled the land lying between the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers. By 1770 fifty-five families were clearing land, building cabins, settling a minister, and creating a community in "New Almsbury". When New Almsbury applied

for its charter in 1774, its name was changed to Warner, supposedly after a friend of the Royal Governor, John Wentworth.

Many of the families living in the Minks settled the south facing hills and valleys. Others settled along ridges on the north and east side of the Minks in the Collins, Newmarket, and Joppa districts. By 1832 Warner had six gristmills, a paper mill, two clothing mills, and twelve sawmills, a number of which were in the Minks. Gradually, families moved from log cabins to framed and clapboarded homes, land was cleared for European style agriculture for pasture and crops, and school districts were created. Thirteen burial grounds are scattered throughout the study area and contain the graves of over 500 individuals. Seven of these lots contain fewer than ten burials.

Eventually ten distinct and independent school districts were established in the Minks; North Village, Kimball, Burnap, Collins, College, Liberty Union, Newmarket, Hoyt, Howe, and Joppa. Warner's population peaked by 1820 at 2,246. School attendance averaged between thirty and forty students in many of the districts.

In the late 1800's, the railroad and more fertile lands out west resulted in the decline of farming in the Minks. By 1892, fifty farm sites had been absorbed into surrounding farms or reverted to timber lots. By the 1900s due to dwindling population Kimball, College, Newmarket, Hoyt, and Howe schools were closed. The new Warner Grade School built in 1911 solidified the movement to consolidate school districts. By the 1920s all of the schools in the Minks had closed their doors.

Initially paths connected the settlers to each other. Some of these paths would have been created and used by Native Americans moving upriver and over around the Minks and Mt. Kearsarge. As the population continued to expand these paths were widened and roads were constructed where they made sense at the time. Warner had over thirty-two road districts responsible for the conditions of the roads in their defined area. Taxes were subscribed to each landowner and could be paid in the currency of the day or worked off on road maintenance. Usually, a man was elected to oversee the work to be accomplished and the payment of the road tax. The crew was charged with removing brush, downed trees or limbs, establishing water bars, building stone culverts over streams and smoothing out the road after mud season. Winter traffic depended on the roadbed being frozen to allow the passage of oxen and horse teams dragging a sleigh or wooden scoots. Eventually snow rollers came into existence which needed a team of at least four horses or more to pull the roller and pack the snow.

As people in the Minks moved away or died, roads were discontinued, and others were no longer plowed or maintained by the town. Many of these roads reverted to Class VI status when they were no longer being used by inhabitants for daily transportation. Some roads were thrown up and reverted to landowners on either side of the road. Farmhouses and barns were either torn down, burnt or abandoned to fall in. Gradually fields grew in and reverted to woods. Families or lumber companies managed the land for lumber production instead of crops. The miles of stonewalls, cellar holes, school sites, quarries, lime kilns, sugar arches, stone culverts, piles of fieldstone and burial grounds are testaments to be remembered and appreciated of the rise and decline of hardscrabble farms and families in the Mink Hills of Warner.

## IV. Existing Recreational Uses in the Mink Hills

### General Information about Mink Hills Recreational Activities

Most recreational activities in the Mink Hills are “informal” (unstructured and not formally organized), and as a result there is little data about the types and extent of recreation in the Mink Hills.

One data source came from a game camera on a Class VI road in the central Mink Hills that recorded 189 human and animal crossings, about one per day, from January 1 – June 30, 2021. Approximately 6% of the images were animals, and 94% were humans. During this first half of 2021, 43% of the images were snowmobiles, 28% were four-wheeled drive vehicles, and 7% motorcycles. A number of the 4WD vehicles were traveling in winter, or illegally on the Class VI road during mud season. There were virtually no ATV-style OHRVs on this Class VI road that was previously open to ATVs. Only 14% of the images were hikers, and 2% were mountain bikers.

There is some data about Warner residents’ recreational preferences from the 2021 survey by the Warner Conservation Commission (Appendix 1). Of the 128 respondents, 84% of respondents have used Warner conservation lands for recreational purposes. While not exclusive to the Mink Hills, the survey asked what types of recreational activities that respondents want to see more, the same, or less of. Only recreational activities relevant to the Mink Hills are included in Table 2 below, which show a strong preference for non-motorized recreational activities.

**Table 2:**

*Recreational Preferences in the Mink Hills*

<i>Activity</i>	<i>More of this</i>	<i>Stay the same</i>	<i>Fewer of or eliminate this</i>
<b>Walking</b>	66%	33%	1%
<b>Horseback Riding</b>	28%	65%	7%
<b>Mountain Biking</b>	33%	55%	12%
<b>Hunting</b>	16%	65%	19%
<b>Snowmobiling</b>	10%	64%	26%
<b>OHRV use</b>	11%	27%	62%
<b>Trapping</b>	5%	32%	73%

*Source: 2021 Warner Conservation Commission Community Survey*

These results are consistent with other surveys of Warner residents, such as in 2010 for the 2011 Master Plan.



Most undeveloped tracts of private land in the Mink Hills are enrolled in the State of New Hampshire's "Current Use" program, which "is available to qualifying landowners who maintain their land as undeveloped forest, farm, or open space. Current Use supports wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation by encouraging the preservation of open land. Current Use landowners who open their land to hunting, fishing, hiking, nature observation, skiing, and snowshoeing receive the Recreational Discount -- a 20% reduction in the Current Use assessment." In return, property owners benefit from a significant reduction in their property taxes. The relatively low tax receipts from Mink Hills Current Use private lands are balanced by the relatively low need for town services and free recreational access. The majority of the private property acreage in the Mink Hills is not posted against trespassing.

## Human-Powered Recreation in the Mink Hills

### *Hiking and Related Activities*

Hiking, casual walking, bird watching, and nature observation are considered collectively as "hiking," which appears to be somewhat popular in the Mink Hills. Anecdotal evidence and difficult access indicate that hiking is most likely by neighbors and other local people who are familiar with the Mink Hills. There are no formal trailheads nor parking areas for human-powered recreationists in the Warner Mink Hills, other than the Chandler Reservation old ski tow parking area on Mink Hill Lane, an area along Bean Road, Horne Lane and parking at Silver Lake Recreation Area. Other potential hiking trailheads, such as where town-maintained roads become Class VI, do not have any signage nor parking areas other than the side of the road, which is private land.

Other than Class VI roads, the only formal hiking trails in the Mink Hills are on the Chandler Reservation. The Chandler Reservation hiking map on the Town of Warner website is decades old and may be difficult for some to interpret. There are a number of other unofficial hiking trails in the Mink Hills. Some have been created without the permission of landowners, and others are old logging paths or snowmobile trails.

### *Human-Powered Winter Activities*

Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are typical activities of hikers in wintertime, and these activities appear to be even less common than hiking in the Mink Hills. Adventurous cross-country skiers may use snowmobile paths, while snowshoers may range more widely. There are no trails in the Mink Hills specifically groomed for cross-country skiing. Wintertime access for human powered recreationists is even more challenging with no plowed recreational parking areas other than the old ski tow area at the Chandler Reservation. With the mowing of the old ski tow area, sledding can now be added to the list of recreational activities in the Mink Hills.

### *Mountain Biking*

While still relatively few, there appear to be a growing number of mountain bikers in the Mink Hills, including fat tire bikers in the winter. Electronic mapping programs indicate mountain biking occurs mostly on Class VI roads. Mountain biking enthusiasts have had informal discussions with private property owners near Henniker Road and near Loud Lane as possible areas to establish single-track mountain biking trails.

### *Hunting and Trapping*

Hunting for small and large game has been a long-standing recreational activity in the Mink Hills, which is part of NH Fish and Game’s Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) I2. Popular game species which are tracked by NH F&G include deer, moose, wild turkey, and bear. Animals harvested each year vary due to many factors such as nut production, winter severity, hunter pressure, and NH F&G objectives, and other factors. NH F&G listed the following harvest statistics for the entire town of Warner for the 2021 hunting season:

<i>Animal</i>	<i>2021 Warner Harvest</i>
<b>Deer</b>	42
<b>Bear</b>	8
<b>Moose</b>	0
<b>Turkey</b>	24

(Source: NH F&G, 2021 New Hampshire Wildlife Harvest Summary, 2022)

Statewide, deer is the most popular animal hunted, with turkey in second place. In recent years, NH F&G has lengthened the bear hunting season to help keep bear population growth in check. There were only 41 moose hunting permits issued in all of New Hampshire for 2021, with none in WMU I2. The primary hunting season is fall, with an additional May turkey season and lengthened seasons for other non-game animals. Ruffed grouse are also hunted in the Mink Hills, but harvest levels are not tracked by NH F&G. Other species regulated by NH F&G include: coyote, gray squirrel, gray and red fox, raccoon, mink, beaver, otter, muskrat, and fisher. Furbearer animals have trapping seasons and extensive regulations. While NH Fish & Game does not release trapping data, depressed fur pelt markets suggest there is relatively little trapping in the Mink Hills except for nuisance trapping.

### *Other Non-Motorized Recreation*

Fishing and boating are uncommon in the Warner Mink Hills because most streams and ponds are too small and/or too remote to sustain significant sport fisheries. Likewise, swimming is rare in the Warner Mink Hills due to lack of access and no beach areas. The exception is Silver Lake town park at North Village and Bean roads, which has a swimming beach and encourages fishing. While Bear Pond is large water body in the Warner Mink Hills, as the Town of Hopkinton’s water supply it is off-limits to fishing, boating, and swimming. Cunningham Pond does not have public access. Some other Mink Hills water bodies outside of Warner support swimming, fishing, and boating.

For nature study, the Chandler Reservation has reinvigorated the interpretative nature trail with QR codes at various stops. There is also a new pollinator garden nearby. In fact, the Chandler Reservation parking area is now the hub of activities by the “Taking Action for Wildlife Committee” in conjunction with UNH Cooperative Extension and Chandler Reservation. Birders and nature enthusiasts have informally explored the Mink Hills but the area is not a focal point for such activities. Horseback riding is

limited in the Mink Hills, due to limited parking for trailers, and relatively few farms within the Minks that have horses.

## Motorized Recreation

### *OHRVs Definition*

The State of New Hampshire defines off-highway recreational vehicles or OHRVs as “any mechanically propelled vehicle used off of a public way for recreational or pleasure purposes and dependent on the ground or other surface for travel. All legally registered motorized vehicles used off the highway for these purposes shall be deemed as an OHRV. Snowmobiles are not considered OHRVs.”

The Town of Warner uses a similar definition of OHRV in its “Town of Warner OHRV Policy, dated June 7, 2011 (Appendix 3).

For purposes of this report, OHRVs include ATVs (all-terrain vehicles), UTVs (utility terrain vehicles), and motorized trail bikes. Also included are plated street-legal four-wheel drive vehicles and motorcycles (“plated vehicles” or “4WDs”) used off-highway for recreational purposes, which are a particular type of OHRV under state and municipal law. Plated four-wheel drive vehicles used for non-recreational transportation are not classified as OHRV.

### *OHRV Use in the Mink Hills*

The popularity of off-highway recreational vehicles or OHRVs has increased substantially in the past several decades, from approximately 11,000 NH registrations in 1997 to over 42,000 in 2020. A sizable and growing percentage of OHRV registrations are to out-of-state riders. These registrations do not include plated vehicles that travel off-highway.

All OHRVs operating off the owner’s property and not otherwise plated must purchase an annual registration from NH Fish and Game. Out-of-state OHRV registrations are more expensive than in-state. Many OHRV owners join a State-recognized OHRV club, which enables the registrant a discount over the non-affiliated registration. In return, OHRV clubs get a percentage of the registration fee for trail maintenance and improvements.

As noted in a previous section and shown on Map 2, there are several Class VI roads in the southeast area of the Warner Mink Hills that ATVs are allowed to use. These ATV routes are maintained by the Boundtree ATV Club which also has additional OHRV trails in Hopkinton and Contoocook. The Contoocook Valley ATV Club maintains and develops OHRV trails in Henniker and Hillsborough, some which abut to non-OHRV Class VI roads in Warner. Both clubs jointly operate a OHRV trailhead and parking lot on Pine Street in Henniker. These trails are generally open from late May through November 30, conditions permitting. Club maintenance of roads and trails includes signage, removing fallen limbs and trees, maintaining culverts, bridges and water crossings, and light surface maintenance.

ATV clubs help enforce OHRV rules, with NH F&G having the ultimate enforcement authority. Warner police have little jurisdiction over illegal ATV riding in Warner.

The Town of Warner Highway Department posts all Warner Class VI roads against motorized vehicle use during the spring mud season, which runs into mid May, or sometimes later if a wet spring. Roads in Warner which previously allowed ATV riding but have since been prohibited also have “No ATVs Allowed” signs at strategic intersections erected by the Highway Department. Additional signage has

been provided by the ATV clubs, although as of January 2023 an out-of-date 2018 Boundtree ATV trail map is still posted on a NH State Parks OHRV web page. Anecdotal evidence indicates that club-affiliated ATV rider compliance with the OHRV restrictions is generally high. Some rogue OHRV use has been observed in the winter, and the most common infractions are 4WD vehicles and ATVs riding on roads in spring prior to the end of mud season.

While most OHRV riders in the Mink Hills are recreationists, some may use OHRVs or 4WDs for “transportation” to reach their cabins, for hunting, for forest management or other purposes beyond recreational riding. Per state regulations, recreational riders in plated vehicles are classified as OHRVs, and subject to State of NH and Town of Warner’s OHRV rules, while 4WD plated vehicles engaged in non-recreational “transportation” on Class VI roads are not subject to these rules. The distinction between recreational riding and transportation is vague and difficult to enforce.

In the past 10 years, there has been an increase in recreational plated vehicle riders in the Mink Hills on Class VI roads, who are often riding in groups. Some plated vehicles appear to be members of 4WD clubs, which are based outside of Warner and out-of-state. According to NH F&G and reports from Mink Hills landowners, illegal off-road OHRV and 4WD riding is a moderate problem in the Warner Mink Hills, but is a more severe problem in parts of Henniker and other areas (Bronson, 2023).

### *Snowmobiles*

The State of NH classifies snowmobiles in a separate category of motorized recreational vehicle compared to OHRVs. Similar to OHRVs, there is a snowmobile registration and club system, and part of snowmobile registration fees goes to clubs for trail maintenance and development. The Kearsarge Trail Snails (KTS) maintain approximately 25 miles of snowmobile trails in the Warner Mink Hills and environs. Many of these trails are on Class VI roads, and some are on private property with landowner permission.

KTS maintains trails during the season with an 8’ width Sno-Cat grooming machine. Prior to the season, the club prepares trails by removing fallen trees and limbs, improving stream crossings, and occasional brushing to remove new growth on or near the trail. The area snowmobile season has become shorter in recent years, often only weeks rather than months. By comparison, northern NH and Maine have longer snowmobile seasons, but climate change is generally reducing the snowmobile and other outdoor winter recreation season throughout the region.

## V. Class VI Roads in the Mink Hills

### Definition of Class VI roads

The State of NH (RSA 255:5, VII) defines Class VI highways as “other existing public ways [not Class I, II, III, IV or V highways], and shall include all highways discontinued as open highways and made subject to gates and bars, except as provided in paragraph II-a [boating access highway], and all highways which have not been maintained and repaired by the town in suitable condition for travel thereon for 5 successive years or more”. According to the NH Municipal Association (2004), the key points in this definition are that Class VI roads are public roads, and that the town does not have a duty to maintain them.



The use of gates and bars on Class VI roads dates back to the farming era when such structures were used by abutting landowners to confine livestock, hence the requirement that gates and bars not prohibit travel by the public.

### Allowed uses on Class VI roads

NH State Statutes require that Class VI roads be open to public travel via legally-registered motor-powered vehicles. Class VI roads are not open to off highway recreational vehicles (OHRVs) without the express consent of the Select Board (RSA 215-A:6 IX). The 2011 Warner OHRV policy (Appendix 1) states that “[no] motorized wheeled vehicle of any type shall be allowed to operate on Class VI roads within the Town of Warner for the sole purpose of “recreational riding”, without any other intended purpose for being operated on these roads.”

### Existing management of Class VI roads in the Mink Hills

The Town of Warner has no routine or planned maintenance of Class VI roads in the Minks because State Law restricts it, as described above. In September 2015, the Warner Select Board adopted the “Select Board’s Policy for Class VI Roads” to clarify the Town’s authority. In summary, the Town is authorized to review and approve if appropriate:

- construction on properties abutting or having right-of-way access to a Class VI road;
- alteration of terrain along a Class VI ROW (snowplowing, excavation, construction and physical alteration);
- posting load weight limits as needed seasonally or otherwise;
- requiring heavy haul permit for timbering and other materials;
- establishing emergency lanes on Class VI roads for public safety or welfare; and
- OHRV usage.

Since that date, the Town has posted signs at the entrances of most Class VI roads in the Minks prohibiting access by motorized wheeled vehicles during mud season, typically listing closure from March through mid-May.

As part of the Class VI road policy, the town may enter into “specific agreements with recreational vehicle organizations or clubs giving permission to use designated Class VI roads”. Since 1970, the Town has allowed the Kearsarge Trail Snails Snowmobile Club (KTS) to use all the Class VI roads in the Minks for snowmobiling. Over the years, KTS has routinely conducted significant maintenance of the roads, including annual mowing if needed; water bars on steep sections; and drains and fords in wet areas.

In 2010, the Town gave the Boundtree ATV Club (BAC) in Hopkinton permission to use a subset of the Class VI roads in the Minks, approximately 7.3 miles in the southeast quadrant (Map 2). BAC members have installed signage indicating the ATV route and “patrolled” for litter and rogue riders. In subsequent years the Club requested and received permission to expand incrementally to a total of 13.1 miles (2011, 0.9 miles; 2013, 2.6 miles; and 2016, 2.3 miles). In 2018 and 2019, multiple complaints from landowners and other users of the Minks about noise and road degradation were voiced at several Select Board public hearings and resulted in the Select Board reducing the permissible use area by BAC to the original 2010 footprint.

### Condition of Class VI roads

The Class VI roads in the Minks are changing over time, generally losing soil and eroding as usage has increased. One interest of the MHRSC was to evaluate the existing road conditions and adjacent natural and cultural resources, and to establish a baseline with which to monitor changes over time. The results will help identify problem areas and sensitive resources, which can guide management methods and/or recommendations in the future. The MHRSC walked all of the Class VI roads in the Minks between March 28 – April 29, 2022 with the concept that the roads were most vulnerable to damage during the Spring.

#### Road Condition

Road condition was classified using a method developed by the Bradford, NH Conservation Commission (2020; Appendix 3) for their Class VI Road system, modified to collect additional data of interest to the MHRSC. Each road was broken into segments based on observed conditions and land features such as road junctions, ponds and slopes. The driving condition of each road segment was qualitatively ranked as Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor (Table 3). If impairment was observed, the cause was noted and any ecological issues were identified. Each section was mapped with a handheld GPS and photodocumented.

Table 3. Driving Condition Evaluation

Condition	Bradford Definition	Warner interpretation
<b>Excellent</b>	Generally suitable for licensed vehicles and non-motorized travel	Used Class V seasonal (Henniker Rd) as example
<b>Good</b>	Suitable for licensed vehicles and non-motorized travel, but not excellent. May have isolated rocks and mud	Obstructions, hazards and grades passable by 2WD vehicle
<b>Fair</b>	More frequent and significant road hazards may be encountered. Appropriate only for licensed 4-wheel drive vehicles with high ground clearance and non-motorized travel.	4WD only
<b>Poor</b>	Substantial and frequent mud and rock obstacles are present. Suitable only for specialized, licensed 4-wheel drive vehicles, as well as non-motorized travel.	Specialized 4WD

The findings of the 2022 evaluation indicate that a range of conditions were observed across the Minks. By definition, the only road that qualified as Excellent is the Henniker Road, a seasonally maintained Class V road. The Class VI roads were classified as 14.2% Good, 36.6% Fair and 49.2% Poor (Map 5). Most roads had a few short Good sections but were predominantly classified as Fair and Poor. Three roads (Dummer, Page and Badger Lane) had no sections classified as Good. Long sections of Page Road,

Cunningham Pond, Hoyt/Loud Lane and Judytown Roads were classified as Poor. In general, the road sections that were classified as Good had minimal grades, little exposed soil and were relatively dry. Road sections that were classified as Poor were typically the reverse of those conditions: steep, with exposed roots, protruding rocks, and/or wet from seepage, adjacent wetlands or streams. Road sections classified as Fair were intermediate in those conditions, with some root and rock obstacles, and/or moderately deep puddles and ruts.

Most of the Class VI roads show evidence of wheeled vehicle traffic in the form of ruts, and widened roads as vehicles swerve to the edges to avoid obstacles and deep water. Roads on steep slopes are typically incised as the loss of soil has cut the road into the hill. On really steep sections (Judytown, Loud Lane, Badger and Daisy Hollow), the road is down to bare rock, roots and boulders as soil has been eroded away. Even during mud season, when the Class VI roads were posted for closure (and most vulnerable to erosion), vehicle tire ruts were routinely observed.

#### *Ecological Condition*

The most common natural resource observed was wetlands, which border the Class VI roads in many low-lying areas. Examples include the beaver ponds on the southern ends of Cunningham Pond and Hoyt Roads, the extensive shrub swamps on both sides of Sisco and Wiggins Roads, and the many small depressions that border one or more sections of just about every road in the Minks. All of these wetlands provide important wildlife habitat for birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. Egg masses from amphibians that rely on vernal pools for breeding (wood frog, spotted salamander and Jefferson salamander) were observed in many pools adjacent to the roads, as well as in deep puddles within the roadbed. Due to the frequency of vehicle use, it is unlikely any of the amphibians in the puddles survive to maturity. Wetlands that receive flow from the roads provide water quality treatment by removing silt and sediment running off the roads, but adverse impacts to some of these wetlands from excessive sediment deposition and infilling was evident.

Numerous small unnamed streams cross the Class VI roads in the Minks. Many of these have been culverted, either historically with stone or more recently during timbering with corrugated metal or plastic pipes. A number of culverts are partially or fully failed due to clogging by leaves and branches, causing the stream to run onto the road during high flow. In some cases, the stream crosses the road, in other cases it diverts down the road. Examples can be found on Judytown, Hoyt, Daisy Hollow, Horne and Davis Roads.

#### *Cultural Condition*

Evidence of early settlers is common along the Class VI Roads and are reminders of the early, busy communities scattered through the Minks. In addition to the roads themselves, the features most closely associated with the roads are the historic stone culverts at stream crossings. Often constructed with very large flat stones, these culverts are an engineering feat when considering the weight of the stone and the men and oxen who moved them. Examples of stone culverts can be found on Hoyt and Horne Roads. Historic cemeteries abut several roads, including Hoyt, Sisco and Page. Structures such as foundations for old mills, barns, farmhouses, and the ubiquitous stone walls can be found along all of the roads, some dating to the early settlers in the mid 1700's and others were abandoned as recently as the 1950's.

## VI. Issues

1. A large majority of Warner residents have consistently indicated that the wild nature of the Mink Hills is an important asset to the town for quality of life, including recreation, and visual benefits. Development is restricted in 4,842 acres of the Warner Minks by Town or State ownership, or some form of conservation easement. These protected lands are important in maintaining the unfragmented condition of the area. Additional acreage is in Current Use, which incentivizes private landowners to keep the land undeveloped while allowing forestry and agricultural use.
2. The Class VI roads and the Chandler Reservation trails are the two most heavily utilized recreational routes in the Minks. OHRVs and plated vehicles are the most impactful users of the Class VI roads resulting in increased erosion and altered drainage, noise, water body siltation, transportation of invasive species, and direct fatalities of slow-moving wildlife. Other users include hunters, hikers, cyclists, and horseback riding, and in winter, snowmobiles, skiing and snowshoeing. The Chandler Mink trails are predominantly foot traffic, both summer and winter. Many recreational users may not fully recognize the impact they are having on wildlife, which may extend on the order of 400 feet around the user.
3. Local knowledge of the trails and roads is primarily word-of-mouth, therefore the Minks may be underutilized by Warner residents.
4. Education about appropriate uses, ecology, historical features, respecting property and land ethics is provided in documents, but is not easily available to the public.
5. Parking to access trails and roads in the Minks is limited. The Chandler Reservation and Harriman State Forest have parking for 1-2 vehicles at several trail heads on Bean Road, and Horne and Howe Lanes. Mink Hill Lane and Silver Lake have parking for more vehicles. Parking options at the start of most/all Class VI roads are limited because they are bordered by private property.
6. The declining condition of the Class VI roads is a concern, but difficult to manage due to State laws limiting Town maintenance and expenditures, and the ongoing heavy use by OHRVs and plated vehicles. Because the roads must remain open to the public in most cases, all registered vehicles have the legal right to travel the roads for non-recreational purposes.
7. Past town attempts to limit travel on the roads during sensitive times (predominantly Spring mud season) have had limited success due to confusing signage and minimal enforcement. The signage can be improved but patrolling by police and NHFG will not likely increase due to manpower and vehicle constraints.
8. Organized private users provide the primary maintenance on the Class VI roads. As is allowed under State law and with Town approval, the Kearsarge Trail Snails conduct mowing, bridge repair and drainage improvements on their snowmobile trail system in the Minks. The Boundtree ATV club posts signs and “patrols” the Class VI roads they are allowed to use. Forestry operations fill and grade roads and install culverts and other water control structures during timber harvests to allow equipment to travel the roads.
9. Hunters, nature observers, and other recreators do venture off Class VI roads onto private lands in the Mink Hills. Because most Mink Hills properties are not posted against these uses, such activities are allowed per state law on unposted private land. The MHRSC decided it was beyond the purview of the Town to get involved in pursuing recreational opportunities on private land in the Minks.

## VII. Recommendations

### *Overarching:*

- Create public awareness on the allowable uses of Class VI roads, as well as seasonal road closures.
- The Mink Hills are an increasingly rare contiguous and unique area in southern NH. Management of the area should focus equally on the flora and fauna, recreational interests and cultural assets.
- Town-sponsored recreation should be focused in the Chandler Reservation and in Silver Lake Town Park.
- Class VI roads should receive sufficient maintenance for emergency access.
- Create a Stewardship Committee to monitor conditions, educate users and landowners, and to promote stewardship in the Minks. The committee will report issues and concerns to the Selectboard and Road committee.

### *Signage:*

- Create consistent and clear signage for Class VI road closure during mud season.
- Coordinate with appropriate parties to map available parking at Chandler Reservation and Silver Lake Town Park
  - Bean Road (2 locations)
  - Howe Lane/Weaver Road
  - Horne Street
  - Mink Hill Lane
  - Silver Lake

### *Awareness/Public Information:*

- Collaborate with the Chandler Reservation and the Taking Action for Wildlife committee to support hiking and recreation through mapping, website, signage and trailhead kiosks.
- Reference Trail Finder on the Chandler Reservation website.
- Town website should be updated to reflect these recommendations.
- Educate the public about Class A & B trails, Class VI road emergency lane designation, property rights and land ethics.
- Create educational materials about recreational impacts to wildlife and natural resources.

## Mink Hills Recreational Study Committee Final Report

### *Coordination/Relationships:*

- The Mink Hills Stewardship Committee should hold a yearly meeting and invite the following groups for feedback about activities in the Minks.
  - Warner Select Board
  - Chandler Reservation
  - Police Department
  - Fire Department
  - Dept of Public Works
  - Warner Historical Society
  - NH Fish & Game
  - Kearsarge Trail Snails
  - Boundtree ATV club
  - New England Mountain Biking Association
  - Harriman Chandler State Forest and Ashendon State Forest
  - Representatives of Henniker, Contoocook and Bradford.

### *Access:*

- Evaluate how to deal with Class VI roads submerged by beaver ponds, damaged culverts and other heavily eroded sections.
- Study the need for additional designated parking areas and sign them.
- Coordinate with the Chandler Reservation to trim around the old observation tower so that there is a view.
- Coordinate with the Mink Hills Stewardship Committee, Warner Department of Public Works, Kearsarge Trail Snails, and Forest Fire Wardens to maintain access to Class VI roads by managing encroachment of vegetation.
- 

### *Uses:*

- Continue to close all Class VI roads during mud season and strengthen enforcement.
- ATV use within the Mink Hill area should not expand beyond its current authorization.
- Recommend all Class V seasonal roads remain as such.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Supporting Resources

#### **The 2004 Mink Hills Conservation Plan**

<https://warner.nh.us/minkhills/>

The plan addresses the goal of increasing protection for cultural, historical, and natural resources. The information developed through this process is useful in improving public knowledge of these resources and landowner awareness of their importance to the history of Warner. The plan supports working with willing landowners and partners to protect large unfragmented tracts of land in order to meet several goals, such as protecting clean water, providing wildlife habitat, maintaining commercially viable forests and farms, and providing for recreational opportunities like hiking, skiing, and snowmobiling.

#### **The 2011 Warner Master Plan**

[https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/masterplan\\_2011/MasterPlan.pdf](https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/masterplan_2011/MasterPlan.pdf)

The vision for Warner expressed by residents during the master planning process in 2008-2010 expresses Warner residents' shared values, concerns, and wishes for the future. The 2011 Master Plan builds upon the views expressed in the previous plan adopted in 1999. Although change occurs and community attitudes are not static, many members in the Warner community continue to value Warner's rural character and the beauty of its natural resources, as well as its social and cultural vitality. A vision of the future outlined in the 2011 Master Plan promotes key conservation goals.

- Continuing protection of open space, to ensure that the rural character, the natural, scenic, and recreational amenities in Warner continue to be available.
- Protection for natural resources, especially drinking water sources, floodplains, and sensitive habitat areas
- The preservation of links to the past with protected historic areas and structures that contribute to the town's character

The Master Plan also focuses on the Mink Hills region, below are some relevant notes from the 2011 Warner Master Plan that apply to the Mink Hills.

- Maintenance and expansion of recreation opportunities compatible with natural resources protection by working with other recreation interests in town and with the State Forests Division and NH Fish & Game.
- Expansion of recreational opportunities, particularly for adult and elderly citizens, with a well marked multi-use trail system linked throughout town
- Use of strong zoning and land use regulations to protect sensitive environmental areas, particularly in the Mink Hills, along the Warner River, and around Mount Kearsarge
- Achieve a MH Conservation Target of 40%, 6,012 acres. Current Protected Acres 31%, 4,652 acres | Acres Shy of Goal: 1,360 acres
- Designation of some Class VI roads to Class A trails to connect large areas of open space, conservation and/or agricultural lands to create a community system of



greenway trails that could be maintained by the town but would not limit landowners access to their property

- “Scenic Road” designation of some Mink Hills roads for recreational access and maintaining historic and environmental qualities
- Maintenance of natural integrity of hill tops and ridgelines, and limitation of future development in remote areas and on Class VI roads.
- Promote current use designation as compatible with certain types of recreation, such as hunting and wildlife appreciation

### **The 2021 town-wide survey by the Warner Conservation Commission**

[https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/ConComm/ConComSurvey\\_Results\\_2021-03-10.pdf](https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/ConComm/ConComSurvey_Results_2021-03-10.pdf)

In 2021 the Warner Conservation Commission sent an electronic survey to Warner residents which included recreational questions. This was not a scientific sample; 128 people responded. From the survey, 84% of respondents have used Warner conservation lands for recreational purposes. While not exclusive to the Mink Hills, the survey asked what types of recreational activities that respondents want to see more, the same, or less of.

### **Warner’s OHRV Policy, 2011**

[https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/OHRV\\_Policy.pdf](https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/OHRV_Policy.pdf)

This policy is in accordance with RSA 215-A and RSA 215-C which authorizes municipal select boards to regulate the operation of OHRVs and snowmobiles within the town borders through either bylaws or a select board ordinance.

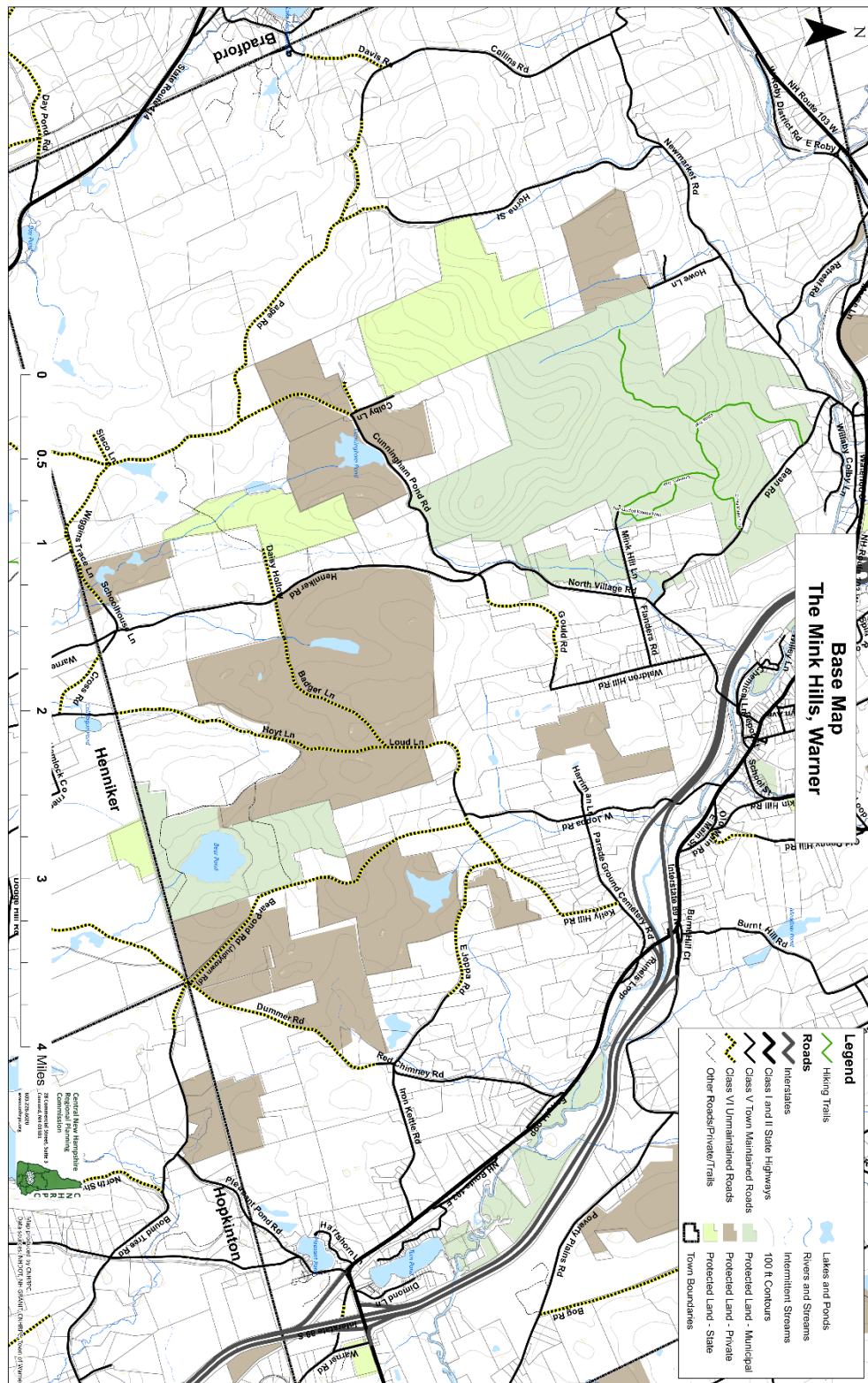
### **Warner Class VI Road Policy**

[Class VI Road Policy.pdf \(warner.nh.us\)](#)

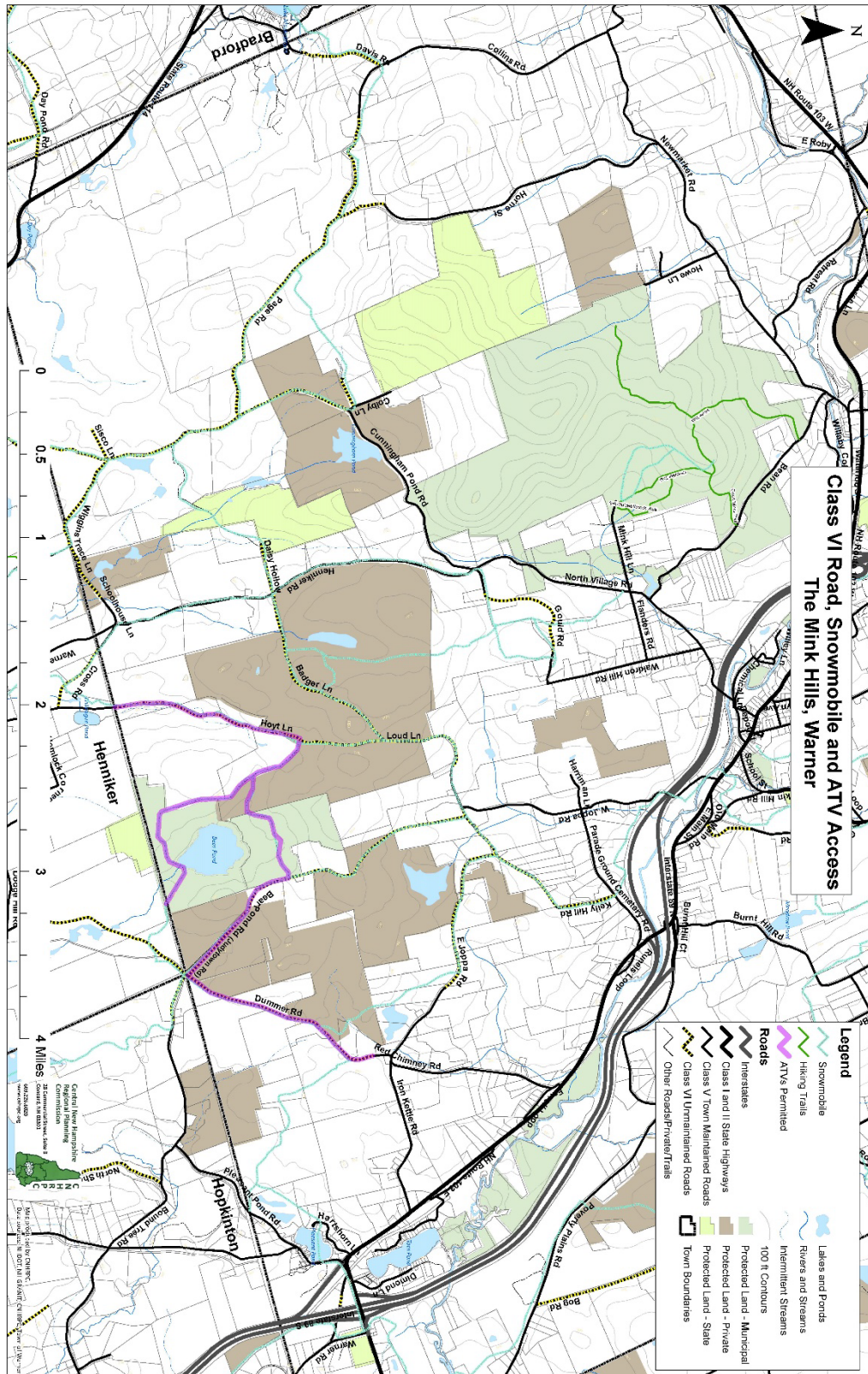
This policy establishes the intent of the Warner Select Board to comply with the NH Statutes that apply to Class VI Road. The policy strives to clarify the Board’s position on specific uses of Class VI road and the means by which residents can obtain permission to use Class VI road in the Town of Warner where required and appropriate.

Appendix 2: Maps

Map 1: Warner Mink Hills Base Map

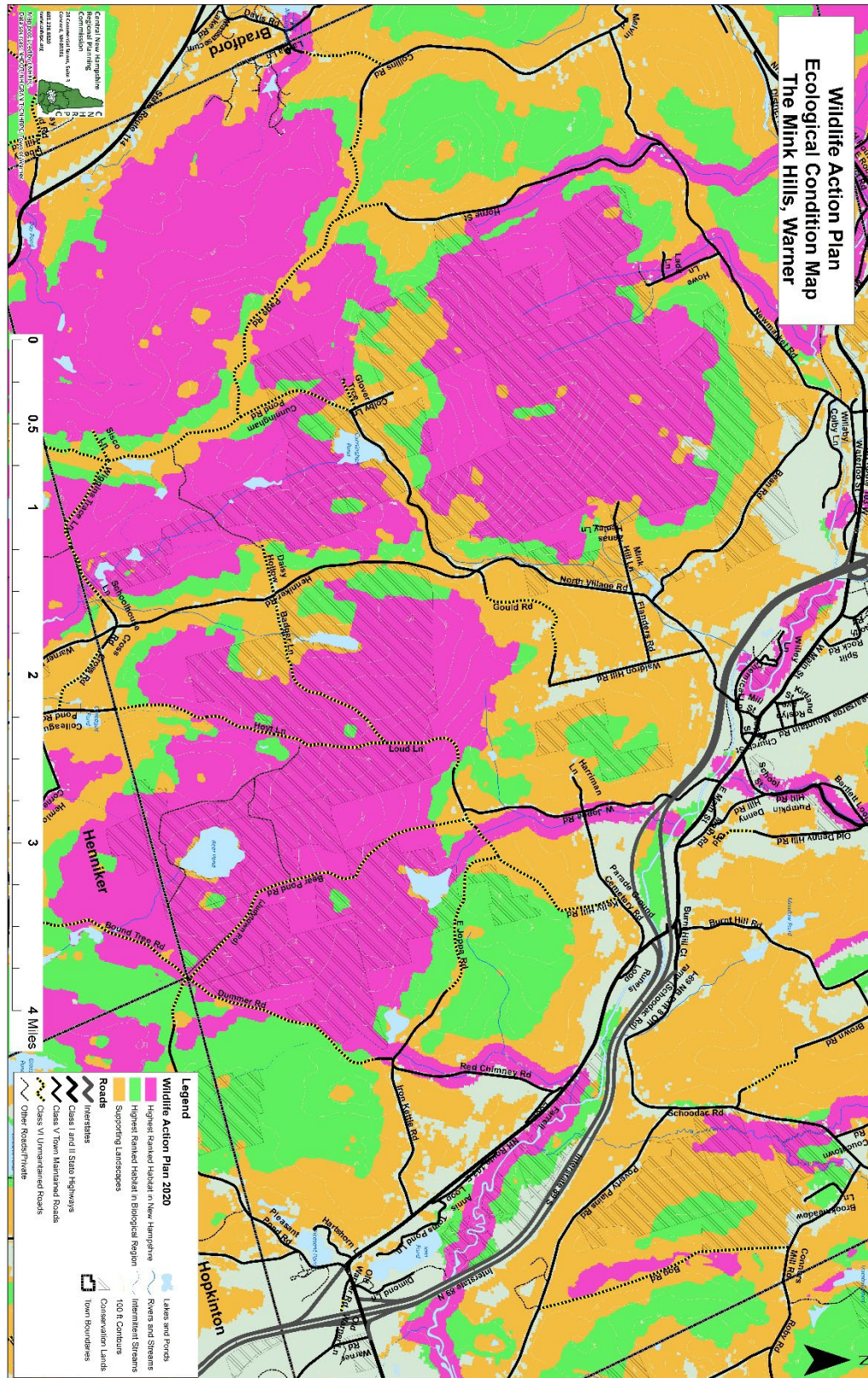


Map 2: Class VI Road, Snowmobile, and ATV Access Map



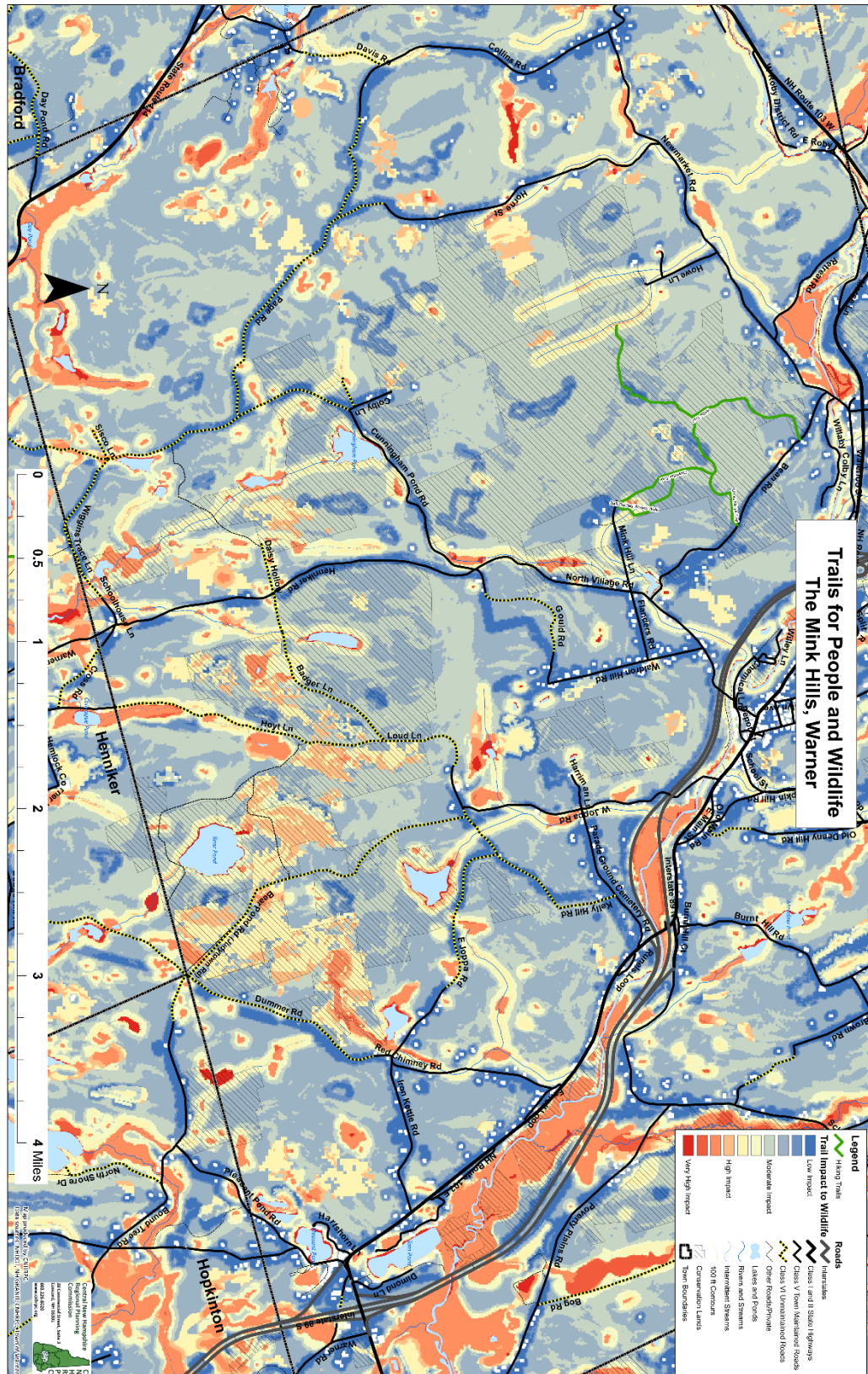


Map 3: Wildlife Action Plan Ecological Condition Map, Mink hills, Warner

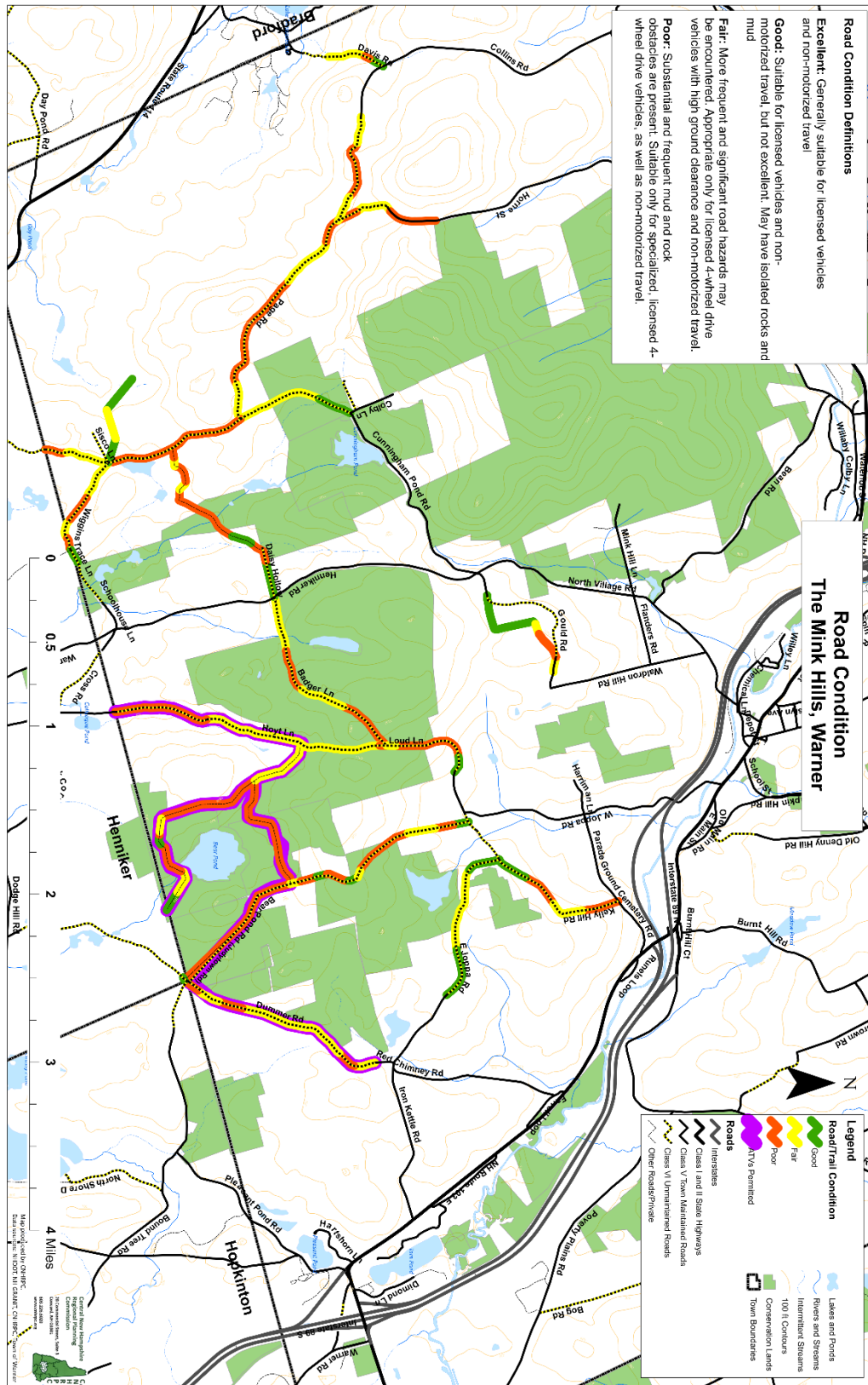




Map 4: Trails for People and Wildlife



Map 5: Class VI Road Condition – Collected April 2022



### Appendix 3: External Links and Supporting Material

- BoundTree ATV Club: <https://www.boundtreeatv.com/>
- ATV Registration change over time:  
<https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1684&context=thesis>  
<https://www.nhstateparks.org/getmedia/cc60322e-0ce2-4bf2-ba78-27c7c7972e41/2020-OHRV-Economic-Study-2021.pdf>
- Town of Warner OHRV Policy: [https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/OHRV\\_Policy.pdf](https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/OHRV_Policy.pdf)
- NH Municipal Association. 2004. Class VI Roads and Maintenance Issues: <https://www.nhmunicipal.org/town-city-article/class-vi-roads-and-maintenance-issues>
- CNHRPC 2014. Fact Sheet: Class VI roads: <https://cnhrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Class-VI-Road-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- OHRV Definition: <https://www.eregulations.com/newhampshire/ohrv/definitions>
- Current Use: <https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/landshare/current-use.html>
- Chandler Reservation Hiking Map: <https://warner.nh.us/tow/downloads/chandler-map.pdf>
- Chandler Reservation: [Chandler | Town of Warner](#)
- Kearsarge Trail Snails Website: <https://kearsargetrailandsnails.com/>
- Harriman Chandler State forest and Ashendon State Forest: [Harriman Chandler State Forest, a New Hampshire State Forest located near Concord, Goffstown \(stateparks.com\)](#)
- New England Mountain Biking Association: [Trails — New England Mountain Bike Association](#)
- USDA Web Soil Survey: [Web Soil Survey - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)
- Sperduto, D.D. and Kimball, B. (2011) The Nature of New Hampshire: Natural Communities of the Granite State. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- New Hampshire Fish & Game Wildlife Action Plan: [Wildlife Action Plan | Wildlife | New Hampshire Fish and Game Department \(state.nh.us\)](#)
- New Hampshire Fish & Game Wildlife Corridor Report (2018): [nh-wildlife-corr-rpt.pdf \(state.nh.us\)](#)
- Warner Zoning Map: [2015 Zoning Map.pdf \(warner.nh.us\)](#)
- 2021 NH Wildlife Harvest Summary: [2021-harvest-summary.pdf \(state.nh.us\)](#)
- New Hampshire Municipal Association: A Hard Road to Travel: [A Hard Road to Travel: New Hampshire Law of Local Highways, Streets, and Trails 2022 | New Hampshire Municipal Association \(nhmunicipal.org\)](#)
- Bradford Class VI Road Condition Classification System: [Adopt a Road Spring 2020 Report \(bradfordnh.org\)](#)



#### Appendix 4: September 8, 2022 Mink Hills Public Forum Discussion Findings

The Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee hosted a public forum to understand community and landowner use and perspectives of the Mink Hills. This forum was open to the public to participate. Approximately 50 people were in attendance consisting of landowners, recreationalists, town officials, and others.

The meeting began with an introduction of the Committee's charge, as well as work done to date. There was a brief presentation of the research and data gathered to date, including a brief overview of the maps and data that were on hand at the public forum.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to gather public input on the Mink Hills on a range of basic questions around how the Minks are used and enjoyed. What do people like? What concerns do people have? In order to facilitate conversations, the group was broken into 4 smaller groups for discussion.

#### **Findings from 4 Breakout Discussions**

These meeting notes reflect conversations and opinions that were reflected during the breakout discussions, and do not constitute official positions or recommendations. Each of the four groups had slightly different conversations with slightly different perspectives, but overall a range of themes and consistencies emerged. They include:

- The Mink Hills area is beloved to many;
- The wide range of recreational activities available in the Minks is enjoyed and valued;
- The condition of class VI roads in the Minks is not as good as people would like, which has negatively affected access and recreational opportunities for many;
- The natural resources and wildlife habitat supported in the Minks is very important;
- Overuse of the Minks is a concern, particularly by motorized use (except snowmobiles), but large amounts of traffic of any kind is not preferable to most;
- It was preferred by most that the Minks not be actively publicized as a destination;
- Access to property for landowners is important, for camps and recreation as well as access to woodlots;
- Inappropriate use of class VI roads ("mudding", motorized overuse, disobeying seasonal closures etc.) are major concerns, and are difficult to police or manage;
- Inappropriate use of adjacent lands, including trespassing, abusing or disrespecting private or public lands, are major concerns, and are difficult to police;
- Despite a range of stakeholders and perspectives being present, there was mutual respect and understanding for other's needs and values, and a large amount of common ground.

### Appendix 5: June 27, 2023 Mink Hills Recreational Report Draft Review & Public Comment Session

The Mink Hills Recreation Study Committee held a public meeting to present the findings of the Mink Hills Recreational Study Report as a final draft before publishing. The meeting was open to the public and copies of the draft report were made available to review before the meeting. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting. The meeting began with a presentation of the findings of the report and focused on the issues and recommendations sections. A review of the maps that support the report followed.

Upon conclusion of the formal presentation, the floor was opened for comments and questions regarding the report. There were comments and questions centered around several topics including gates and bars on Class VI roads, consideration and review of the potential for certain Class VI roads and road sections to be converted to a Class A trail designation, concern about illegal ATV use where it is not authorized, and wetland protection.

Following discussion and questions there were no recommended changes to the draft report, and the meeting concluded.