

# Case Study

## Huntington Community Forest State Revolving Fund (SRF)

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### Overview of Project

Using a Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan, the Trust for Public Land partnered with the Town of Huntington, Vermont, the Vermont Land Trust, and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board to conserve a 245-acre piece of land as a community forest. The community forest includes **104 acres of Special Water Quality Zones**, providing water quality and other benefits for the land and the surrounding community.

### Key Players and Roles

- Trust for Public Land
  - National conservation nonprofit and project lead
- Town of Huntington
  - SRF loan applicant
- Huntington Conservation Commission
  - Volunteer board of town residents, local project catalyst and champions
- Arrowwood Environmental
  - Local environmental consulting firm
- Landowners
  - Sold land for community forest
- Vermont Land Trust
  - Statewide land trust
- Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
  - State agency that funds land conservation
- Vermont Municipal Bond Bank
  - Administers CWSRF dollars in Vermont

### Background on SRF use in Vermont

In 2019, the Vermont legislature passed the [Clean Water Service Delivery Act](#), which approved the use by nonprofits of Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) funding for land acquisition. Eligible projects must follow the criteria in Vermont's [Intended Use Plan](#), which follows the [Vermont Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan](#) and EPA CWSRF guidance.

Vermont offers three different ways to use CWSRF dollars for land conservation:

- Low interest loans – Available to nonprofits and municipalities for projects that provide a demonstrated water quality benefit.
- [Interim financing](#) – Listed on state priority list as “put-aside” funds for natural resource water quality infrastructure projects to be used after all eligible

municipal projects are funded. For terms no longer than 5 years, loans are given at 0% interest for municipal applicants and 0.6% for all other applicants (including nonprofits).

- Water Infrastructure Sponsorship Program ([WISPr](#)) – Funds for nonpoint source projects that are ‘sponsored by’ municipalities taking out loans for gray infrastructure projects.

Interim financing was used for the Huntington Community Forest project. Under Vermont's program at the time, a municipality could apply for a loan for the full cost of the property, including some associated acquisition costs. The portion of the loan that can be forgiven equals the same percentage of the property to be acquired that provides water quality benefits. Because 104.2 acres (42%) of the 245 acres had specific water quality attributes (source protection area for a public drinking water source, and wetlands, river corridors, floodplain, streams and their associated buffers), 42% of the acquisition cost was forgivable. Thus, since Trust for Public Land had already secured other federal and state grants, the Town chose to apply for the exact loan amount that would be forgivable.

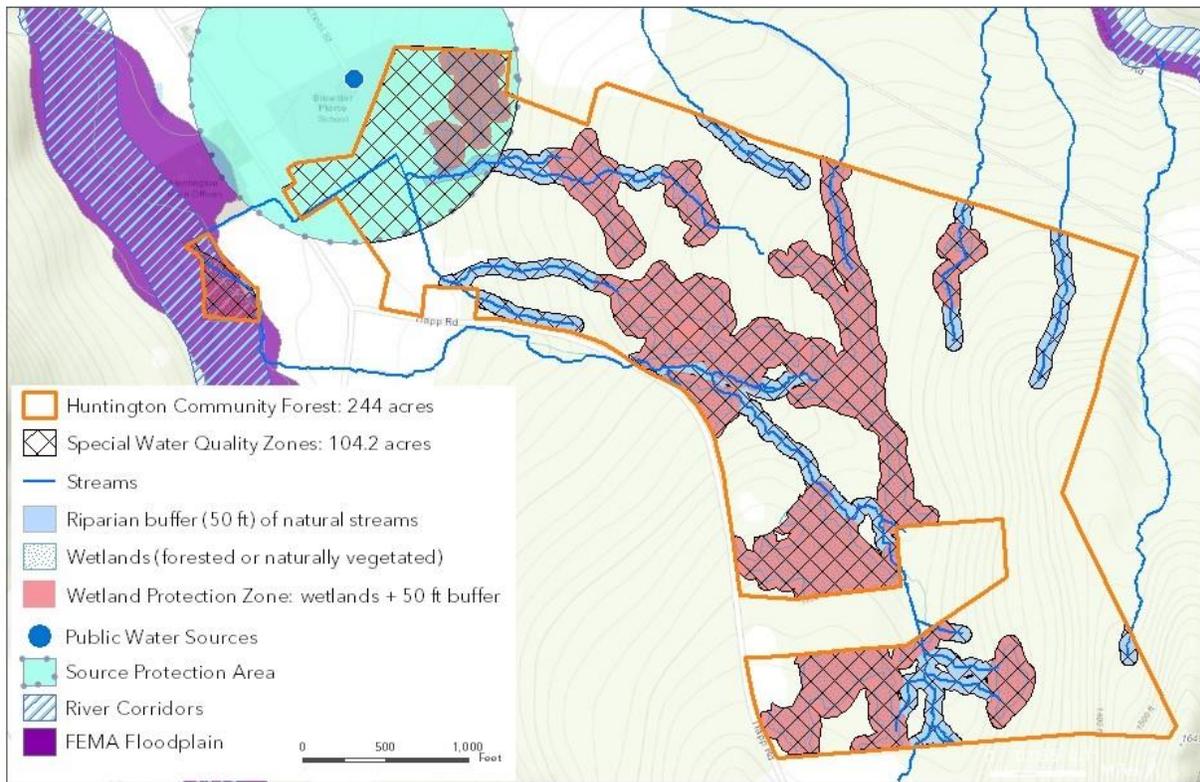
## **Description of Property**

The 245-acre community forest property abuts Huntington's town center and lies in close proximity to the town office. It is located right out the back door of the Brewster-Pierce Memorial School, and the students regularly use the community forest as an outdoor classroom. The property follows the curve of Huntington's Main Street and Trapp Road from north to south along the Huntington River. Several other streams and wetlands also crisscross the property.

The community forest property protects water quality in a variety of ways:

- Protection of 104.2 acres of Special Water Quality Zones
- Protection of Source Water Protection Area for the Brewster-Pierce Memorial School and the town of Huntington
- Protection of the main stem of the Huntington River
- Protection of riparian areas, wetlands, and river corridors

Other benefits of this project include: Increased flood resiliency in the Winooski River Watershed; wildlife habitat protection; recreational opportunities through trail access for hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, and mountain biking; and outdoor classroom access for the elementary school.



## Huntington Community Forest Special Water Quality Zones

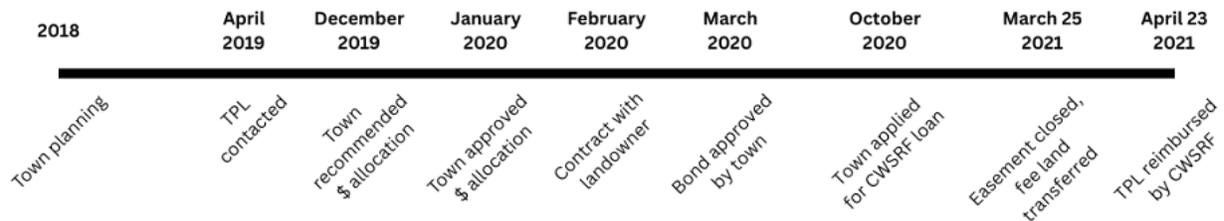
### Project Timeline

In April 2019, the Huntington Conservation Commission approached Trust for Public Land (TPL) for help acquiring the land, which the owner was open to selling. That December, the Commission proposed using \$140,000 from the Community Reserve Fund to support the project. Throughout the whole project the Commission was a key champion and performed a lot of work to drive the project forward.

A public meeting in January 2020 led to unanimous approval by the town selectboard of the funding proposal. In February, TPL signed a two-year contract with the landowner to allow time to secure the remaining funds. The town’s use of an SRF loan would require a bond vote by the town residents. The Huntington Conservation Commission worked locally to inform residents about the project, holding public hearings, conducting nature walks through the proposed community forest, and mailing flyers to residents in anticipation of the vote. In March, Huntington voters approved a \$309,000 bond, which would then be fully covered by the CWSRF.

TPL prepared the town’s SRF loan application and submitted it in October 2020. Arrowwood Environmental provided a free ecological assessment which documented the property’s water quality benefits, which was critical for justifying the CWSRF loan. To meet CWSRF requirements, the conservation easement had to be held by an entity other than the fee owner of the land. On March 25, 2021, TPL finalized the conservation

easement: the easement would be held by the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and the town would be the restricted fee owner of the property. TPL advanced the purchase funds and was repaid by the Town within a month, after being reimbursed by the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank (which administers the CWSRF for the state of Vermont).



## Funding Sources

The table below summarizes the final financial breakdown of the project.

Expenses	Final Budget
Land Acquisition of 245 acres, includes donation of 2.7 acres	\$727,000
TPL staff time (project management, legal, fundraising, federal affairs)	\$122,126
Office Costs	\$11,273
Professional Services	\$43,230
Educational Programming and Infrastructure	\$30,000
Staff costs for Vermont Land Trust (baseline documentation, mapping, easement drafting)	\$15,000
Easement endowment for Vermont Land Trust	\$25,000
Management Endowment for Huntington Community Forest + parking lot	\$40,000
Travel and Meetings	\$948
Indirect (essential support of programmatic and general operations of The Trust for Public Land)	\$43,136
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,057,713</b>
Revenue	
Town of Huntington (from community reserve fund)	\$140,000
USFS Community Forest Program	\$385,000

VT Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)	\$75,500
VT Clean Water State Revolving Fund	\$309,000
Foundations & Individual Donors	\$116,900
L.L. Bean Community Impact Fund	\$50,000
Fieldstone Foundation	\$5,000
Davis Conservation Foundation	\$10,000
Lintilhac Foundation	\$10,000
Oakland Foundation	\$2,500
RiseVT	\$1,800
Family Foundations and Individual Donors	\$37,600
Trust for Public Land (in-kind)	\$31,313
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,057,713</b>

## Challenges

Passing the bond measure was the hardest part of this project. Local project champions, through the Huntington Conservation Commission, helped share information about the proposed community forest by leading public walks, community meetings, and disseminating information to residents.

## Replication

A number of recent [forestland conservation projects](#) in Vermont, such as TPL's Hunger Mountain Headwaters project and Vermont Land Trust's Worcester Woods project, have used CWSRF loans to protect forestland with source water features. Replicating this project (and other green infrastructure projects) outside of Vermont depends on the eligibility requirements within each state's CWSRF Intended Use Plan.

## Lessons Learned – “Ingredients for Success”

- Work with partners with relevant expertise and experience and local connections: The Trust for Public Land knew how to navigate SRF funding and handled the loan application for Huntington. The town's Conservation Commission were key project champions and helped get neighbors excited about the project. A local environmental consulting firm, Arrowwood Environmental, was willing to donate their expertise.
- Early success under a new rule: The Huntington Community Forest was the first project to be funded by the new Interim Financing program of the Vermont Clean

Water State Revolving Fund. This motivated partners to successfully complete the project and demonstrate the funding source's efficacy

- Creative co-benefits can be beneficial in building community support: The community forest has direct water quality benefits, but also protects other co-benefits such as recreation, outdoor education, and biodiversity. The Huntington Conservation Commission highlighted all of these project elements to get residents excited to support the project.