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Investing in House Mountain's Future

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Twenty-five years after working with partners in Rockbridge County to purchase House Mountain as a public resource, the Virginia Outdoors Foundation is looking to flesh out a management plan outline that was drafted by the partners in 1988, but never fully developed or implemented.

VOF is making the development of a formal management plan its highest priority for House Mountain over the next year.

"The original draft plan serves as a solid foundation for a new management plan," says Amanda Scheps, manager of VOF's [public reserves](#). "The lack of a plan has been a long-standing oversight, but an opportunity now exists to develop a plan that is consistent with practices on other state-owned lands, sustains the traditional uses of the mountain, meets the needs and expectations of visitors, and provides transparency and accountability to the public."

Key objectives of the original draft plan included enhancing the sustainability of the trail system, improving access to the property, locating an appropriate parking area, hiring personnel, and providing for the safety of visitors. A copy of the plan can be downloaded below.

The draft also emphasized preservation of the diverse forested landscape, which comprises nearly the entire property. To achieve that, the outline recommended no cutting of any trees or shrubs on the property.

VOF's primary partner in the property's management, the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council (RACC), sought advice from the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) regarding forest management in 1991, and again in 1995. VDOF developed two forest stewardship plans for the property that were provided to RACC.

The plans recommended limited timber harvesting on the north side of Little House Mountain as an appropriate and useful management tool. Not only would it help to

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maintain the successive forest conditions on the property, but it would also, in the words of one VDOF forester, "provide some financial returns for other purposes on this land."

Neither of the plans were implemented.

After 20 years without a forest stewardship plan, in 2012 VOF requested, as required by the Code of Virginia (§ 10.1-1122), that VDOF develop a new forest stewardship plan for the property. The goals in the 2012 plan were similar to those from the 1990s:

1. Improvement of the forest resources for a healthy forest.
2. Improvement of non-wildlife outdoor recreation (hiking trails, mountain biking, horseback riding, etc.)
3. Protect rare and threatened natural areas and species on the property.
4. Potential timber income for improvement/maintenance of the property.

VOF feels strongly that a careful, low-impact timber harvest, in combination with other forestry practices and with the assistance of VDOF, would not only improve the ecological health of the mountain but also provide a modest stream of revenue that can be reinvested back into the management of the property.

"VOF has no interest in profiting from any activity on House Mountain," adds Scheps. "Any revenue generated from the property would be entirely reinvested back into its management for the public good. As a state agency, VOF has neither the intention to derive profits from a public resource, nor the ability to do so."

Instead, the funds would be utilized to achieve the unimplemented plans originally outlined in 1988.

VOF believes that developing a formal management plan and establishing funding to execute the plan would increase the property's value as a public recreational resource.

"We want to ensure that the recreational opportunities that people have been enjoying for many years, such as hiking and hunting, remain a part of House Mountain's value to the public," says Scheps. "And we want to partner with community groups, neighbors, students, and others who love the property and want to participate in its conservation."

As VOF develops a new management plan, it will be seeking input from citizens, partner agencies, and land management experts. If you have questions about this process, please contact Amanda Scheps at ascheps@vofonline.org.

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- [1988 Draft Management Plan](#)
- [1991 Forest Stewardship Plan](#)
- [1995 Forest Stewardship Plan](#)
- [2012 Forest Stewardship Plan](#)

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