

Town of Waitsfield Austin Parcel Invasive Plant Control Program

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

January 9, 2018

Introduction

The Town of Waitsfield Conservation Commission (the Commission) is seeking to address several mid- to long-term Management Objectives and Actions found in the [Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan](#) (the Plan) dated August, 2014. Specifically, the Commission, through this RFP, hopes to advance several Actions outlined in Objective 3: *Enhance Mad River floodplain and riparian natural communities*. Over the past several years the Commission has completed Action 3.a. which reads:

3.a. Obtain advice from the Friends of the Mad River and other river experts about the best strategies for protecting the function of the riparian zones and floodplains along the river, including types and locations of plantings (near-term).

In consultation with the Commission, The Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Friends of the Mad River have prepared a report summarizing current conditions and offering guidance for managing invasive plants on some of the Town-owned riparian parcels. This report titled [Invasive Plant Management Plan for the Town of Waitsfield Austin and Tardy Properties](#) (the VLT Report) provides a prioritized plan for achieving the land management goals identified in the Plan. The VLT Report was also informed by, and is complementary to, the [Town of Waitsfield, Austin Parcel Floodplain restoration plan](#) produced by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This restoration plan outlines a tree planting regime intended to facilitate restoration of a healthy floodplain forest as a riparian buffer with the benefits being noted as:

...enhancing flood resiliency along the Mad River and Mill Brook, improving water quality and wildlife habitat, and improving aesthetics

The Commission is now seeking to initiate Management Actions 3.b. and Action 3.d. of the *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan*. They read:

3.b. Allow the fields on the Austin Parcel to regenerate to forest or wetland to improve their effectiveness as flood release zones (near-term).

3.d. Promote native plant species associated with floodplain and riparian plant communities through a combination of passive management, planting, and non-native plant control (mid- to long-term).

To complete these Actions the Commission is seeking comprehensive proposals for an invasive plant control program specific to Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Shrub honeysuckle (*Lonicera sp.*), and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) on the Austin parcel as prioritized in the VLT Report.

It is critical to note that public input at Commission meetings, and at a July 24, 2017 public forum specific to this topic, has clarified that a manual and mechanical approach is preferred over an herbicide assisted solution. In addition, this approach needs to be supported by a program of education and outreach coupled with monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the invasives control. To that end, this Request for Proposals is for the design, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of a manual and mechanical based invasives control program. The program must include control methods, monitoring plans, and education and outreach activities.

The Waitsfield Conservation Commission

The Waitsfield Conservation Commission is comprised of nine volunteer members with responsibilities regarding the Town's natural resources and lands that have historic, educational, cultural, scientific, architectural or archaeological values in which the public has an interest. The Commission is charged with stewardship of a total of 793 acres of Town-owned land including parcels along the Mad River such as the Wu Ledges Town Forest and Austin and Tardy parcels. The Austin parcel, the focus of this request for proposals (RFP), has numerous species of invasive plants, most notably an expanding infestation of Japanese knotweed.

Austin Parcel

Designated as a Scenic Area in the *Waitsfield Town Plan 2012-2017*, the Austin Parcel has unique ecological and physical value to the Town. This includes important riparian habitat, flood protection, recreational opportunity, open space, and more. The Austin Parcel is a 5-acre parcel located along the Mad River that was donated to the Town of Waitsfield in 1999 and permanently conserved with a conservation easement held by the VLT (recorded in Book 86, Pages 463 & 464). The property is located south of Irasville and east of Vermont Route 100. It is bordered by Vermont Route 100 on the west, Mill Brook on the north, the Mad River on the East, and a private river access road on the south. All of the Austin Parcel is located in the 100-year floodplain as mapped by the National Flood Insurance Program, which defines Waitsfield's Flood Hazard Area Overlay District. The Mad River Path Association (the Path) maintains a pedestrian out-and-back trail on the Austin Parcel known as the Austin Walk.

For management purposes, the Commission has grouped the Austin parcel with the adjacent, larger Wu Ledges Town Forest across the Mad River to the east. More detailed site descriptions including historical use, policies and guidelines, and habitat details can be found in the VLT Report as well as the Plan.

Current Status

As noted in the VLT Report, the Austin parcel has five invasive plant species on the property including Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Shrub honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.), Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), and Dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*).

As noted in the *Waitsfield Town Plan 2012-2017*:

While some species like knotweed are already widespread, the good news is that many are not yet prolific locally and so offer an opportunity for effective management to prevent or limit their spread. Before the threat and impacts of existing and new exotic invasive species intensify, the Town should do whatever it can independently and in collaboration with others (e.g., the other Mad River Valley towns, appropriate state agencies, nonprofit organizations like the Friends of the Mad River and the Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy) to develop and implement an effective prevention and management regime.

As the invasives are aggressively propagating, the Commission is eager to rapidly respond to ensure the *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan* objectives are still feasible given limited resources. It is important to note that the VLT Report provides insight into the extent and nature of the invasive populations on Austin and should be consulted closely.

Objective

The Commission's primary objective with this RFP is to set the stage for the restoration of a floodplain forest through a comprehensive program that includes the active control of invasives on the parcel interior coupled with ongoing monitoring. Secondly the Commission is interested in leveraging this effort as an opportunity for community education and outreach.

The Waitsfield Town Plan, as noted above, recognizes exotic species pose a number of environmental, economic, and human health threats. This is echoed in the *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan* with near term, mid-term, and mid- to long term management objectives. Guided by these objectives, the Commission seeks to control invasives and promote desirable species and systems to resist further infestation through a site-led sustainable approach to invasive species control. This will facilitate achieving the management objective of enhancing the Mad River floodplain and native riparian natural communities.

Through a prioritization process that balances the lowest cost and effort for the highest benefit, the VLT Report recommends the Common buckthorn, Shrub honeysuckle, and Japanese knotweed infestation be controlled first. The Common buckthorn and Shrub honeysuckle populations are prioritized because they are relatively small and can be readily eradicated through manual control methods.

However, the Japanese knotweed infestation is more extensive. Given upstream conditions the infestation along the river's edge is not likely to respond to control measures. The recommended strategy is to create a mow strip (buffer) between the dense infestation at the river's edge and the parcel interior (refer to Map 3 in the Report). With establishment of the buffer, the less widespread interior infestation can be controlled.

The Commission acknowledges that invasive plant management is a long-term project. Additionally, because of the persistence of certain species found on the Austin parcel, it is likely impossible to completely remove all of them. However, the Commission seeks to manage and mitigate invasives as we steward the land toward an improved flood release zone and healthy riparian habitat flush with native species. To this end monitoring the effectiveness of control efforts is a critical element of the overall program.

The Commission envisions invasives control measures will be complemented by a separate, but related, native tree planting effort (outlined in the USFWS restoration plan) to facilitate floodplain forest re-establishment. The Commission hopes to embark on the planting project in the summer of 2018 or 2019.

Scope of Work

The Commission is seeking proposals to implement (as prioritized in the VLT Report) a Common buckthorn and Shrub honeysuckle control program for the entire Austin parcel coupled with a Japanese knotweed control program inside a mown buffer strip. This program must include maintenance of the buffer strip between the parcel interior and the river edge. In addition, the program must include an ongoing monitoring plan as well as an education and outreach plan that leverages existing assets (the Austin Walk) into its designs.

The proposed program must acknowledge and complement the proposed planting program as outlined in the USFWS restoration plan. In addition, any methodology proposed in response to this RFP must also specifically provide for the protection of desirable existing native regeneration stock already established onsite.

After significant public dialog and ongoing research, it is clear there are multiple means by which the objectives can be accomplished. To that end, a concise scope of work is dependent on the bidder's proposed methodology. As noted in the VLT Report, *"an integrated approach using a variety of control methods is often most successful. Managing invasive plants is an ongoing effort and requires that management be flexible from year to year."*

The Commission is open to any proposal based on best-practices, local knowledge, and expert experience. Proposals are to take into consideration the management priorities

and information presented in the VLT Report, the *Wu Ledges Forest Management Plan*, the USFWS restoration plan, and the *Waitsfield Town Plan*. Further, any proposal must take into account the public's desire for a manual and mechanical methodology. Proposals also will need to lay out a plan for monitoring and public outreach and education efforts during the project period. In addition, proposals should consider opportunities to coordinate with the Path to leverage the mow strip into an extension of the Austin Walk into a loop trail.

Proposal Content

Interested parties should provide:

1. Cover Letter

A brief introduction including a point of contact and executive summary of the proposed program.

2. Summary of Qualifications

A brief outline of the contractor's experience and capacity to perform. This outline must include:

- a. A statement of the educational background of person(s) who will be involved in the project including on-site mitigation work, ongoing monitoring, and education and outreach activities;
- b. A statement of relevant insurance requirements and capacity to supply a certificate prior to work beginning;
- c. A statement of understanding specific to the need to research both the presence of any rare, threatened, or endangered species as well as potential impacts on site wetlands;
- d. A statement about proposed performance metrics specific to the control objectives that will enable the Town to measure progress and efficacy;
- e. A statement assuring the bidder is able to provide all items necessary (equipment, person-power, expertise, oversight, etc.) to complete work proposed over the full tenure of the proposed program;
- f. Evidence of the bidder's knowledge about native plant species and habitats found on the Austin parcel.

3. Methodology

The bidder is to propose a methodology that achieves the aforementioned objectives safely, effectively, efficiently, and sustainably. As noted, the preferred methodology should be manual and mechanical based. Clarity on bidder capability to engage and bring to bear sufficient resources over the long term will be critical. The proposed *Methodology* must also include:

- a. Meeting with the Commission on-site prior to work commencing to review infestation levels, review target control areas, and confirm selectivity in control to prevent compromising native species health.
- b. Timing and duration of treatments for control of the 3 targeted invasive species (Common buckthorn, Bush honeysuckle and Japanese knotweed) – i.e., how many treatments per year over how many years are expected to be needed to effectively control the target species?
- c. Estimated effectiveness of proposed control program in reducing prevalence of targeted species.
- d. Any public access restrictions during treatments.
- e. Presenting status reports at regularly scheduled Commission meetings before the beginning and near the end of each growing season when treatments are applied.
- f. A clear plan for dealing with any invasive materials resulting from the control activities. The plan should specifically state how plant materials will be treated, disposed of, etc., either on-site or otherwise.

4. Monitoring Plan

The bidder is to provide a Monitoring Plan to continually evaluate efficacy of the program over the duration of the proposed treatment period. This plan must include an outline of site visits, measures, and reporting documentation that will be provided to the Commission to support its ongoing assessment of the program effectiveness.

5. Education and Outreach Plan

The bidder is to provide an Education and Outreach Plan to accompany the proposed control program. The Commission acknowledges this effort provides a unique opportunity to educate the public about the threats of invasive species in the Mad River Valley, the significant challenges in mitigating them, and techniques for controlling them. It is the hope of the Commission that the program will support demonstrating to the public the Town of Waitsfield's commitment to thoughtfully stewarding its natural resources through best practices, long-term commitment, flexibility, and creative problem solving.

6. References

The bidder is encouraged to provide references for projects of comparable scope. References must include a brief summary of the work performed, dates performed, and contact information. Contact information must include the name and contact number for an individual able to speak to the project successes and challenges. If the bidder is unable to provide such references, a statement of capacity to perform the work outlined must be provided. This statement must include the name and contact number for an individual able to speak to the organization's ability to achieve success.

7. Project Cost

The *Project Cost* section should outline all costs specific to the *Methodology*, *Monitoring Plan*, and *Education and Outreach Plan* sections. The Commission is interested in discovering the range of costs according of different methods and will not base selection on cost alone.

8. Time Line

A comprehensive timeline must be based on the bidder's control methods. The time line should indicate key tasks and milestones from the *Methodology*, *Monitoring Plan*, and *Education and Outreach Plan* sections. The project tenure is estimated to be from 2-5 years and bidder time lines should reflect this.

Potential Additional Elements

Bidders are welcome to recommend potential additional program elements/benefits (for example, on-site bee-keeping, trail extensions and recreation access improvements, coordination with local schools, engagement with qualified external resources, outreach and engagement with neighboring towns, etc.) that could facilitate public engagement, education, and overall community buy-in. The estimated cost of such elements should be provided separately from the required Project Costs outlined in #7 above.

Selection Criteria

The Commission will evaluate proposals based on:

- ✓ Cost
- ✓ Experience
- ✓ Capacity to perform
- ✓ Local engagement and collaboration
- ✓ Clarity and likely efficacy of methodology
- ✓ Comprehensive program details
- ✓ Innovative program elements
- ✓ Favorable references

Ultimately the Commission reserves the right to select the contractor that it feels provides the best value to the Town toward achieving the stated objectives, and to reject all bidders at its discretion. To that end bidders are encouraged to collaborate with local organizations and resources and show creativity in meeting RFP requirements.

RFP Time Line

- January 16, 2018: RFP release
- February 6, 2018: Bidder questions due close of business (5:00pm)
- February 20, 2018: Bidder questions response posted close of business (5:00pm)
- March 27, 2018: Proposals due
- April 10, 2018: Bidder selected (final approval will be by Waitsfield Select Board)

Please forward any questions to Tom Dean, Waitsfield Conservation Commission by February 6, 2018. Proposals are due March 27, 2018. Communications should be directed to Tom Dean at: tfdean27@gmail.com.