

## State puts long range Groton plan on hold

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GROTON, Vt. (AP) - The state has put on hold its long-term plan for the Groton State Forest, answering criticism that it failed to gain public input and that it could do better in preserving Groton's wildlife and recreation.

A long-term plan to log the forest has been shelved, but an interim plan means the forest's trees could be logged for the next two years.

The state Agency of Natural Resources has launched several planning efforts to examine how best to protect biodiversity, improve management of Vermont forests and acquire new land for public ownership, according to documents and interviews.

One of the state's top priorities is getting the public more involved in the planning process, said Charles Johnson, the state's naturalist. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation has hired a consultant to survey Vermonters about what they consider to be the state's greatest conservation needs. The consultant will also hold "focus group" meetings with interested people to help guide the state's efforts.

"The sum of all this is yes, we are revising our long-range planning process and yes, there will be a lot of public involvement later, after we get our own thinking together. And yes, that will tie into the other planning process that's going on," Johnson said.

The state's Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation was criticized late last year for its proposed plan for Groton State Forest, a 26,170-acre tract of public land spread over seven towns in Washington, Orange and Caledonia counties. Environmentalists, led by Green Mountain Forest Watch of Brattleboro, complained that officials had failed to solicit public input for the plan, which mapped out the future of the forest until 2005.

They also said the state's plan emphasized logging over wildlife protection and recreation.

Last month, the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation agreed to delay the Groton plan and others until after the state reviews broader questions about its land management.