



Case History: How Municipalities Destroy Forests



Fragmenting a Forest - Legally!

In 1900, the Village of Essex Junction began buying land in the Town of Essex as a watershed for Village reservoirs.

With the creation of the Champlain Water District and increased development, the reservoirs were not needed.

In the 1970s, chafing at property taxes charged by the Town for the land, Village trustees ignored citizen votes to keep the land in public hands and sold it to developers.

The Town established a special zoning district that enables recreation and also allowed a significant portion of the Saxon Hill Forest to be developed, creating extensive forest fragmentation.

A Warning - "Not only do we now possess a highly aesthetic area but we have land supporting a renewable resource, a highly productive water reserve and other multiple use benefits such as environmental education, recreation and wildlife habitat ... Surely, revenue could be generated by selling, but one must ask himself if we would be creating an urbanization paradox — the very thing that many moved here to get away from." — William P. Hall, Chittenden County Forester, circa 1978.

Saxon Hill Forest, Over 100 Years of Resource Management

Shortly after Essex Junction began for a water. Allen Martin, a prominent village official and member of the Commissioners, felt the natural Hill area would provide such an instrumental in the village's development.

Before the area was purchased was described as an "unproductive abandoned farms, light soil erosion." The first purchase included 10 acres around the reservoirs.

Maintaining a water reservoir connected by a trail was a challenge. Debris had to be removed from the reservoirs.

From the water reservoir, the forest was a beautiful view.

After the village and town joined the Champlain Water District in 1973, studies were made to determine the best use of the land. Several proposals for recreational use came forward, including a rope tow or Poma lift on Saxon Hill for skiing and tobogganing.

Much of the land was sold to a local development corporation. A 1993 plan to build the regional landfill on 102 acres of the land was seriously considered. It never came to fruition.

Now the area contains a large sand pit and several industries such as Brown's River Bindery, IBM, and Huber-Suhner, along Sand Hill Road, Allen Martin Drive and Thompson Drive. Some of the timber continues to be harvested. Around 662 acres remain open for passive recreation and nature study. The trails are accessible to the public.

Ninety acres on Saxon Hill are owned by the Essex Town.

explored the area's potential as a youth bobsled run. The proposal soon expanded into a family winter recreation area with a ski slope, ice rink, and cross country ski trails. The concern of the Water Board was centered on possible contamination of the water source. This was alleviated by a ruling from the Bureau of Environmental Sanitation. Soon the Kiwanis Club stepped forward with a three year plan for the construction of rope tows and trails. The area was never developed as a winter recreation area.

A Saxon Hill Forest tour, September 28, 1968.
William P. Hall photo



No Trespassing
Public Water
Supply
Board of Water
Commissioners
Village of
Essex Jct.

One mystery remains
to be solved.
Who was Saxon Hill
named after?

FOOTNOTES

1. Burlington Free Press, Oct. 1968.
2. "For Sale," Essex Town, 1973.



Saxon Hill Forest, circa 2003. See some of the former reservoirs for Essex Junction.



This building has been empty and for sale for several years.

Saxon Hill Forest was formerly public land. Now much is privately owned with increased development occurring. The bike trails are popular.

Saxon Hill Forest, circa 2018. Since then, there has been even more development.

03 Turning forest lands into “non-performing asphalt”



Previous entrance to a former IBM building complete with limited parking lot with shade trees.

In the last several years, large warehouses have been built with acres of impervious surfaces.



Former IBM offices were located to the left. Now (2020), large warehouses dominate the land.

04 An unvirtuous cycle

Forest → Sand pit → Reforestation → Deforestation → Solar

Previously forested land had been turned into a sand pit. Reforestation efforts had begun, but then the land was cleared for solar installation development, which is now even larger than shown below.





Naming roads after that which we destroy may temporarily salve our consciences but does nothing to preserve the Earth.