

MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Governor Peter Shumlin

**FROM:** Michael Snyder, Commissioner *MS*

**DATE:** April 16, 2015

**SUBJ:** Cascade Falls Natural Area Proposal – Mt. Ascutney State Park

Pursuant to Title 10, § 2607 the Commissioner may designate certain Department lands as natural areas, subject to the approval of the Governor. The Department is now submitting a proposal to create a new state natural area (Cascade Falls Natural Area) at Mt. Ascutney State Park.

**Cascade Falls Natural Area (Mt. Ascutney State Park, Town of Weathersfield, VT)**

The Department is proposing to establish a new state natural area (Cascade Falls Natural Area) at Mt. Ascutney State Park in the Town of Weathersfield, VT. The new state natural area consists of approximately 200 acres of land on the southern slopes of Mt. Ascutney (see attached map). The proposed new natural area includes several unique geological formations: Crystal Cascade Falls, Little Cascade Falls, and a small granite gorge with a seasonal waterfall surrounded by a large area consisting of steep granite ledges hosting a number of state significant natural communities. The popular Weathersfield Hiking Trail also bisects the area.

A highlight of the new natural area is Crystal Cascade Falls (known locally as Crystal Cascade). The falls consist of an exposed 84-foot open granite ledge that reflects Mt. Ascutney's "ring dike" origin where magma oozed up from the earth's core to form the mountain's nordmarkite core. The magma cooled and replaced much of the softer rock it encountered, but fragments of the parent rock remained suspended as the magma cooled. Crystal cascade Falls is particularly significant in that it is a large, wild cascade with a large pool-cascade chain in an undisturbed setting and is Vermont's only waterfall on a volcanic dike.

Little Cascade Falls and the granite gorge are located along the lower section of smaller, seasonal stream. These two geologic features are of regional significance and contain features similar to a

flume gorge where a stream eroded a dike in the existing rock, in this case creating a 15' wide, 70' deep gorge.

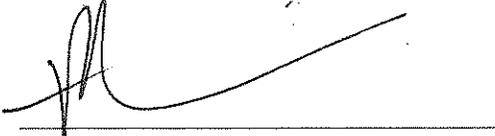
The area surrounding these three significant geologic features is very steep and inoperable for timber management purposes and includes a number of high quality and relatively undisturbed natural communities including Mesic Red Oak – Northern Hardwood Forest, Dry Oak Forest, Red Spruce – Red Oak Forest, Hemlock -Red Spruce Forest, Montaine Yellow Birch – Red Spruce Forest, and other smaller natural communities.

The only access to this proposed natural area is via the Weathersfield Hiking Trail which opened for public use in 1987. No management activities for the natural area are planned other than maintenance of the existing hiking trail and vistas.

This past spring, the Department held a public meeting on the draft long range management plan for the Ascutney Management Unit which includes Mt. Ascutney State Park and other nearby ANR land parcels. The proposed new Cascade Falls Natural Area was presented to the public as a component of the draft plan. There was unanimous support for this proposal at the meeting.

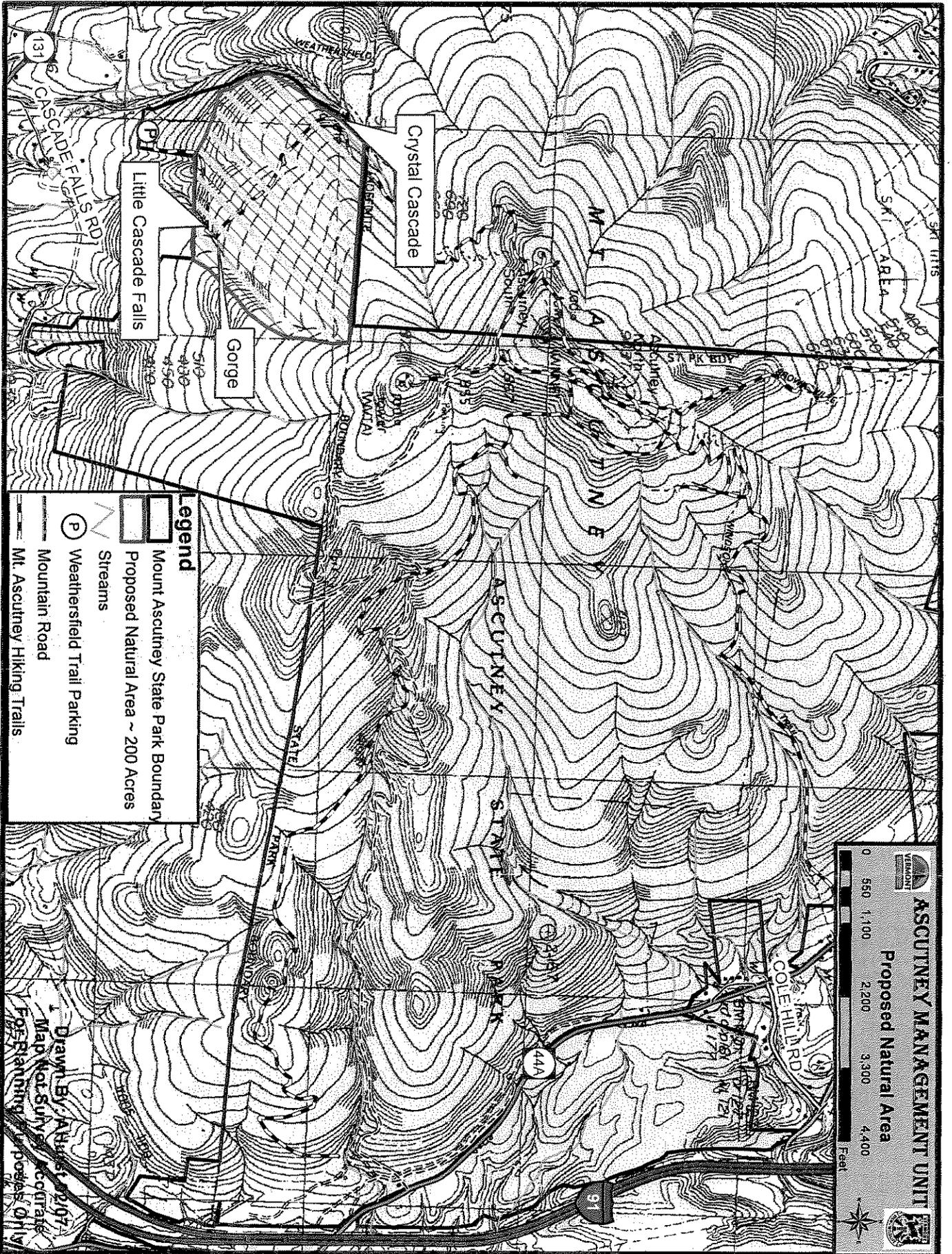
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Approved:



Peter Shumlin, Governor

10/5/14  
Date



Little Cascade Falls

Gorge

Crystal Cascade

- Legend**
-  Mount Ascutney State Park Boundary
  -  Proposed Natural Area ~ 200 Acres
  -  Streams
  -  Weatherfield Trail Parking
  -  Mountain Road
  -  Mt. Ascutney Hiking Trails

**AScutNEY MANAGEMENT UNIT**  
**Proposed Natural Area**

Scale: 0 550 1,100 2,200 3,300 4,400 Feet

North Arrow

Drawn By: ARS  
 Map Not To Scale  
 For Planning Purposes Only