

# Green Mountain Trails Collaborative Landscape Management Work Group

## Meeting Notes

**DATE:** February 4, 2010    **TIME:** 10-2:30    **LOCATION:** Rochester Ranger District Office

**Facilitator:** Chad VanOrmer, Green Mountain National Forest

**Notetaker:** Holly Knox, Green Mountain National Forest

**Organizations and Clubs in Attendance:**

Leslie Chadwell (VT Horse Council), Jim Henderson (Bennington Co Regional Commission), Patrick Kell (VMBA), Dave Hardy (GMC), Steve McLeod (VT Traditions Coalition, VASA, VOGA), Tony Clark (Moosalamoo Association), Dwight Gies (Mad River Path Assoc), Dun Cochrane (USFS), Holly Knox (USFS), Greg Smith (USFS), Dick Andrews (VT Sierra Club), Chad VanOrmer (USFS)

**Meeting Objectives:**

- Review collaborative work completed to date.
- Attain agreement on substance of Landscape Management Work Group Action Plan
- Solicit input from LMWG participants on current activities that are addressing issues
- Schedule time and locations of public information meetings
- Solicit assistance from Work Group members to help facilitate meeting

**Agenda and Notes:**

Agenda Item	Notes
Round Robin, Introductions and Background	<p>About 40 stakeholders met on February 11, 2009 as the Green Mountain Trails Collaborative (GMTC) to discuss trail use on public lands within and surrounding the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). On October 14, 2009 the group met again and broke out into several work groups, including this group-the Landscape Management Work Group (LMWG). The intent of this group is to evaluate ways to improve upon the overall trail system in the GMNF and surrounding areas. At the October meeting, we held a brainstorm session to identify potential issues and goals for the LMWG to address and discuss. As a follow-up, a summary document was sent to LMWG members identifying the outcomes from the brainstorm session and suggesting a draft action plan.</p> <p>The intent is to have a 12-18 month overall process. The entire Collaborative (all work groups) will reconvene April 14, 2010....location and time TBD.</p>
Review and discussion of the LMWG Issues, Objectives and Action Plan	<p>See Draft 12/11/09 handout regarding goals, issues, and proposed action plan.</p> <p>Review of 7 Broad Issues...Note: we are not prioritizing these issues (although it is recognized some may be more urgent)-we would like to tackle all of them. The idea of this group (our intended output) is to look at the issues and make general, landscape scale recommendations. Recommendations may be prioritized but it is recognized that we are not likely to make site-specific recommendations. This information and the recommendations could feed into the next round of Forest Planning (which may be less of a Plan overhaul in 2021 and more of a Plan adjustment after a few years if new planning regulations are implemented) or to be used by individuals, organizations, land management agencies or other trails related interest groups.</p> <p><b>Issue 1:</b> There has been a past trend where trail networks rely on the National Forest for connectivity. Trails transcend multiple land jurisdictions...when landowners change and trail connectivity is disrupted-organizations look to the USFS for a reroute that will re-establish lost connections. This happens on average once every 1.5 years</p>

lately-often for snowmobile trails (based on sheer number of trails) but this in turn affects other user groups (such as horse riders) who often utilize VAST trails. Can this be quantified? VAST and CTA may be able to provide some numbers for past 5 years.

**Issue 2:** This issue is aimed at addressing ecological and social impacts...how do we keep the trails sustainable? This issue dovetails with work being completed by the Science Work Group panel. The LMWG would need to identify social and ecological features/indicators of concern. Then it could be a spatial GIS exercise to identify where areas of concern intersect with trails. Recommendations may include noting if trail adjustments are needed to minimize impacts to sensitive ecological features or reduce social conflicts. Public meetings may be a key place to identify where social conflicts are arising.

Question: doesn't NEPA address ecological concerns? Yes- on site-specific projects, but not at the landscape level. Although public meetings may lean towards the gathering of site-specific information, it may be our role to take a step back as recreation and land managers to make recommendations that address issues beyond specific areas. Having said that, some recommendations may need to be very site-specific.

Question: hasn't the Forest Plan addressed some of the issues we are tackling? As an example of social conflicts: if you want quiet areas-go to wilderness. If you want more diverse recreation opportunities-go to Diverse Forest Use Management Area. We do not want this process to be redundant or to further restrict areas that are not already restricted. We do not see this as amending Forest Plan direction or further restricting areas. The recommendations we make should comply with the existing Forest Plan but is also an opportunity to check in with what has happened since the Forest Plan was completed. We are capitalizing on issues we heard during plan revision to see if they still exist and if we can work to further address those that do. Things change-such as glade skiing...it was not an issue in 2006. In addition, the Forest Plan said we would take a more refined look at the issues we are addressing. In addition, this group is looking beyond the GMNF...this is a State-wide look at trails.

Question: What about the social issue of renegade backcountry activities that involve illegal cutting and illegal trail development? This is likely something we will address as part of Issue 7-b/c it is an illegal use and a compliance concern.

Question: Does the GMNF provide areas that are managed for open glade skiing? No-we are not developing prescriptions and managing the safety aspects that would be needed.

**Issue 3:** This issue addresses public health and safety concerns (such as mixing motorized uses or trails crossing busy roads)

**Issue 4:** Originally this was identified as identifying trails for decommissioning based on negative ecological or social impacts and/or trails that do not get used. To avoid site-specific discussions, perhaps our goal should be to develop criteria for identifying and agreeing when a trail may need to be decommissioned. To some members, this is a high priority issue...restoring areas that are not appropriate or not being used is necessary or we have an unmanageable system. Better to have high-quality trails as opposed to just a high quantity of trails. Low use is not always a reason to decommission-but low use combined with ecological/social impacts is a valid reason.

There was a strong sentiment expressed at the previous LMWG meeting that there

should be no net loss of trails b/c the reason people are in the Forest is to enjoy trails. Some people disagree-often those people who say they desire no net loss are NOT the people out there with shovels in hand, they take it for granted that the trails are there. To keep trails, we rely on partner/volunteer maintenance activities.

Need to be careful before closing trails....what may not be a good snowmobile trail may be an excellent bike trail. Ensure all user groups are in agreement that it is not needed or could not be maintained by another group.

Question: Does decommission mean we leave the trail to the hands of mother nature or actively obliterate it? To USFS, decommissioning means we no longer manage it as a system trail and the use is no longer allowed on the trail. This may mean brushing it back in so it is not a recognizable trail (if it is actively used but damaging resources) or it may mean just letting it revert by nature alone if it is not used much.

Question: Are we going to address recreation sites (such as campgrounds)? Not original intention of the LMWG but perhaps if we accomplish all the trail objectives ☺

**Issue 5:** Identifying new trails or trails where we could add new uses. Why is this an issue to make multiple use-isn't it nice to have some single use trails? It is impossible to deliver exclusive use trail systems on the GMNF...we are working off an existing system and don't have the maintenance capacity to maintain a separate trail system for each user group. Do uses get squeezed together when they don't have to be?

Again, the LMWG may look more at developing criteria for identifying new trails or trails for multiple use as opposed to site-specific trail recommendations...although both may be appropriate.

**Action Item:** Chad change Issues 4 and 5 to say "Identify criteria to..." instead of identification of specific trails.

**Issue 6:** This group may look at what the costs are for maintaining trails and where trail funding comes from. This would allow trail organizations to use the figures to go after grants and funding and to see potential funding opportunities. Cost estimates would be baseline costs (what it would take if you had no volunteer work force in average conditions?). \$12,000/mile is industry standard for building a mountain bike trail...just as a reference. The figures we would look to identify would be maintenance costs more than implementation costs for new trails. This would likely be a gathering of data from multiple trail organizations-both on financial costs and volunteer labor estimates.

**Action item:** Chad talk to different user groups (such as Alexis at VAST) to gather numbers

Question: Is 6a different than 6b? It could be...proposed trails would likely be built with better science and more knowledge/experience about how to prevent resource impacts than existing trails may have been.

**Issue 7:** Compliance concerns. This would be identifying geographical areas and what concerns exist there. Note: signage is not about trail signage or sign pollution as much as it does educational signage. We can also seek out other ways to educate user groups and the public at large (example of utilizing town plans to spread messages).

Did we miss anything?? To consider as: a) a new issue or b) as a potential criteria for

	<p>addressing Issue 5 or c) a social conflict issue as part of Issue 2: If there is a possibility to reconfigure trails, Sierra Club would be happy to see additional trail miles if they were periphery trails, leaving large land masses undisturbed as a core. Remote, trail-free areas are scarce and could be used by recreationists...or the trail-free areas could be no recreation zones devoid of roads and trails. When looking to coordinate activities on large land masses, opportunities should be taken to create an “un-trailed core.” This issue needs explored a bit...perhaps it is a goal not a criteria. For example, some trails go to points of interest-you wouldn’t want to preclude that by having a set criteria but it is just one non-binding consideration among others.</p> <p>Page 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph: we may not always need to reduce occurrences of mixed motorized uses as much as mitigate the concerns.</p>
<p>Defining Recommendations</p>	<p>What will the recommendations this group make look like (what are the end products of our group)?</p> <p>We will develop a set of recommendations that address the issues identified by the GMTC and the LMWG. The recommendations will primarily consist of broad landscape actions but may include a limited number of site-specific examples. We will first focus on northern area with a goal of having recommendations by July. Focus will shift to southern area with products anticipated by August.</p> <p>Recommendations may fit the following general categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land management policy</li> <li>• Ground disturbing activities (ex. making an adjustment to a specific trail on the ground...adding a use, moving a trail)</li> <li>• Interpretation and education</li> <li>• Monitoring</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Regulations/restrictions</li> <li>• Unmet trail needs/demand</li> </ul>
<p>Planning for Public Meetings</p>	<p><b>Analysis area:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMNF plus surrounding buffer (Braintree Ridge/Pittsfield area as eastern boundary, App Gap as northern boundary, Route 7/Middlebury area as western boundary and Route 4 as southern boundary)</li> </ul> <p><b>Meeting set-up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening: 1 person (John, Chad) talk about collaborative efforts for first 30 minutes-explain: 1) why we are here, 2) what information we are gathering and 3) how that info will be utilized.</li> <li>• Open house forum: 1 issue represented at each table. Tables staffed by LMWG participants.</li> </ul> <p><b>Locations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pittsfield, perhaps with VMBA hosting</li> <li>• Ripton, perhaps with Moosalamoo Association hosting</li> <li>• Warren</li> </ul> <p><b>Dates and times –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in March and 1 in April and 1 in May</li> <li>• 7 PM</li> <li>• Tues, Wed, or Thurs nights</li> </ul> <p><b>Action Item:</b> Chad will create a Doodle poll to identify what dates will work for public meetings.</p>

	<p><b>Action Item:</b> Chad will create a sign-up sheet for people to agree to staff an issue table at the public meetings.</p> <p><b>Action Item:</b> Chad will add a spot on the homework assignment where people can add names and email addresses of people who may not be attending but who are interested in receiving email communications on the process.</p>
Other Business	<p>April 14: Next meeting of Green Mountain Trails Collab...mark your calendars</p> <p>June 12-13 (Sat-Sun): International Mountain Bike Association and their Trail Care Crew will be hosting a training to address trail sustainability and design. All are welcome!</p>
Closeout	<p><b>Decision:</b> Google group is being decommissioned. All FS meetings must be open to the public...to keep Google group open to the public allows a lot of spam. Communication will be via an email list. People can add others to the email list.</p> <p><b>Action Item:</b> All LMWG attendees were given a homework assignment! Chad will send the document as an email attachment to entire GMTC so people can identify what activities they are currently conducting to address issues we've identified. This information, combined with public information we gather, will confirm our existing condition and help with the gap analysis.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> Conference Calls are a potential...even if meeting face-to-face, have opportunity to attend by conference.</p> <p>Next LMWG meeting-may not need one before public meeting. Alternative is to have LMWG people meet an hour prior to public meeting to touch base.</p>