Vermont Trail Collaborative  
Trails and Recreation in the Green Mountain National Forest and Surrounding Areas  
Meeting Notes  

DATE: April 14, 2010  
TIME: 1-4 PM  
LOCATION: Central VT Chamber of Commerce Berlin, VT  

Facilitator: Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension  
Notetaker: Peter Pettengill, University of Vermont Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources  

Participants: See Appendix A  

Background: About 40 stakeholders met on February 11, 2009 to discuss trail use on public lands within and surrounding the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF). Based on that discussion, a document was created and available at http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/?Page=vttrailcollaborative.html describing goals and a structure for the Vermont Trail Collaborative. On October 14, the document was discussed followed by break-out sessions for three work groups:  

(1) User Compliance, Stewardship and Education Work Group (now called Stewardship and Communication Work Group) -- Several organizations have expressed interest in working together to improve the educational and interpretive information available for trail users. The Vermont Trails and Greenways Council may be willing to take the lead on a coordinated effort throughout the state, in collaboration with the GMNF and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation.  

(2) Landscape Management Work Group -- Moving from north to south, the group will evaluate ways to improve upon the overall trail system in the GMNF and surrounding areas. A core group will attend regular meetings and additional stakeholders may bring local knowledge to the discussion as specific sites are addressed.  

(3) Science Panel -- A panel of stakeholders and scientists will review existing literature to determine the most relevant studies for trail management in the GMNF and surrounding areas. The panel will address research questions identified by the Landscape Management and User Compliance, Stewardship and Education Work Groups.  

On April 14, 2010, the three work groups will give updates on their progress during the past six months and plans for moving forward during the coming year.  

Upcoming meetings:  
Landscape Management public meeting, April 28, 6:30-8:30pm at the Warren Town Hall  
Vermont Trail Collaborative, Thursday, October 21, more details forthcoming  

Agenda for April 14 meeting:  

1:00 – 1:30  Introductions and updates from the Green Mountain National Forest and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation  
1:30 – 3:30  Updates from the three work groups:  
3:30 – 4:00  Open discussion of next steps for the Trail Collaborative and work groups.
Notes:

Introductions and overview-Lisa, Chad and Ed
USFS Update-Chad
  • Introduction of Colleen Madrid, new Forest Supervisor
  • Collaborative work coming together
  • Four Goals of white paper
    o 1. *Defining social and biological issues*, agreed upon by science panel, education group and landscape management group.
    o 2. *Sustainable trails system planning*: Communication is improving. Perspectives broadened across stakeholder groups. Recovery act funds are being capitalized upon to take care of USFS backlog of trail maintenance.
    o 3. *Understanding application of trail improvement*. Science panel and academia improving process. Research already ongoing on GMNF. VAST report on research is expected. Also, social surveys to be conducted this summer by GMNF. Integration of science.
    o 4. *Empowering stakeholder groups in process*. Relationship building is increasing. Greenways Council as a leader, as well as new partners in the process. New leaders are collaborating in process.
  • This is encouraging for future.
Forest Parks and Recreation Update-Ed
  • Leaner budget than usual. Positions not being replaced as some retire.
  • Will be able to distribute close to 1 million dollars in monies, including up $110,000 in Land water and conservation funds to municipalities. Groups here can help as corridor managers. Partnerships are important.
  • Lands continue to be acquired and acreage is increasing.
  • Recreation trail grant led to assessment, and hoping to do more in future.
  • Looking for recommendations from all groups, but in particular from stewardship group via the Greenways Council
  • ARRA (stimulus) funds leading to state park facility improvements.

Stewardship and Communication Work Group Update-Walter and Brian Cotterill
  • Objectives developed through brainstorming-Walter
    o Closely related to education goals of Greenways Council.
    o Want to contract some services out for statewide scope.
    o Cost/share grant procured and RFP posted.
      ▪ Proposals are being looked at.
    o Facilitator secured- Brian Cotterill
  • Update from Brian Cotterill
    o Gathering members of stewardship committee.
    o Having individuals bring research to group meetings.
    o Goals
      ▪ Safe informed users
      ▪ Good feedback mechanisms
- Improve relationship with state
- Users understand purpose of land they are using
- Uniform signage across trails
  - How do we know we will be successful?
    - In process of defining the process
    - Four key questions to reach out to stakeholders
      - 1. What are resources?
      - 2. What are messages we want to apply to all users?
      - 3. How do we brand it across state and make it usable?
      - 4. How do we know that this initiative is working, what are the indicators and how do we monitor them?
    - Currently in process of defining this process through…
      - 1. Survey data
      - 2. Focus groups
      - 3. Best forms of communications/outlets
  - About education and communication, and interconnectedness of the trail system, big challenge is in finding a uniform messaging system
- Open comments
  - Inclusiveness is being stressed for all stakeholders in this process-steering committee should provide guidance in this process, and that scheduling conflicts are minimized, and consolidation of meetings maximized
  - Does fish and game play a role and what about water trails?
  - Jurisdiction may be an issue in regards to water trails. Access areas may be the venue to address this. Activities on the water are not necessarily governed by fish and wildlife other than enforcement regarding safety and license checks, as well as impromptu education.
  - Parking conflicts as an issue to be addressed. Fishing in conflict with other uses. Can these issues be addressed here? Is registration a means to address this? Are fee structures a means to address these issues? Who are the funders who can help with access issues/parking?
  - How does organization of process help address these issues? Communication welcomed from all groups. First Wednesday of every month conference calls held. Lisa will provide this information/updates via e-mail.
  - Social conflict an issue in high use areas on water…this could be a good means to identify and address this issue.
  - Connecticut river paddler’s trail may be a means of assessing access points and different types of boating use. Also a means of redefining stewardship ethic on the water. VT Rivers Conservancy may be a good source.
  - Lake Champlain Paddler’s trail study may provide some insight into this in the future.

**Science Panel Update-Bill, Jim, and Bryant**

- Document handed out to provide insight here
  - See on website for details
- Monthly calls to chat about research issues
  - Addressed in table on handout
- Input from landscape management group ties in with science panel issues
  - Members taking leads on different topics
- Jim Harding and students leading annotated bibliography
  - Issues of recreational behavior being addressed
  - Soil, vegetation, wildlife impacts being addressed
  - User types also being addressed
    - Hiking
    - ORVs, ATVs
    - Winter Use
    - Mountain Biking
    - Horseback riding
- Motorized-snowmobiles, ATV's etc. Can increase soil compaction, erosion, etc. Depending on site-specificity. Maintaining a vegetative cover may help. Most damage occurs on upward grade. Motorized vehicles have bigger impacts on soil than other uses/hiking. Wildlife issues too.
- Horse use-erosion and grazing issues. Root and trunk damage from tethering to trees, but hitching posts could help. Also, potential seed dispersion from this use. Shod hooves and heavier weights can have higher impacts. Group size is often larger as well. This is exemplified by campsite impacts.
- Winter use-snowmobiles contribute to noise pollution and user conflict. Impacts can be on wildlife as well this often depends on site of recreation.
- Mountain biking-comparable to hiking use. Trampling and wildlife disturbance included in being to comparable to hiking, but ability to cover longer distances may increase that impact. Areas of most impact are around corners and on steep grades. Channeling of water also increases.
- Hiking-loss of vegetation and trail widening are issues. Usually depending on season, muddiness of trails. Root exposure often increases in higher elevations.
- Students may continue to be able to help in future by adopting methodologies from these studies and adapting them to GMNF.
- Regardless of use, oftentimes impacts are offered in degrees compared to hiking
- An annotated bibliography will be a final product from the science panel. Synthesizing of literature is ongoing.
- Timeline- finish lit review and annotated bibliography by next October. Submit to the larger group, seek out gaps in research, and tackle issues on GMNF through primary research.
- Science panel encourages input from other stakeholders. Work and studies are available on the website. We encourage more literature from everyone to post on trail collaborative website.

VAST update on snowmobiling study
- Hardcopy of snowmobile studies available from Bryant, but not able to post on website yet. Trying to post on website soon.
• Hoping to address water and air quality of snowmobiling study on eastern lands.
• RFP sent out, VHB Pioneer accepted as consultant for project.
• Locations picked, water and snowpack samples taken over time. Comparison between water and soil samples can then be made.
• USFS, USFWS are partners in this process. Lands of theirs included. Northern and southern half of state as well as wilderness areas.
• Final sample being taken this week. Numerous tests have been made.
• Full study will be prepared. A draft will be prepared for June. Preliminary results appear to be favorable for snowmobiling.
• Final draft should be ready for August and available on the UVM website.
• Closing remarks-please provide the science panel with any information you find important.
• Comments-This can be shared with American Trails website
  o Doing research together provides a good basis for decision-making
  o Is there a future for the science panel after 2 years?
  o How were VAST study locations chosen?
    ▪ Areas picked in partnership with USFS and USFWS
    ▪ High use areas picked based on traffic counts

Landscape Management Work Group Update-Chad and John
• Six step process looking at landscape scale issues beginning in Northern section of GMNF
  o See posters posted online for detailed steps
  o 1. Identify issues
  o 2. Identify objectives
  o 3. Look at existing conditions
  o 4. Gap analysis-the differences be objectives and existing conditions
  o 5. Recommendations provided based on gap analysis
    ▪ Examples, best practices, education, etc.
  o 6. Final report
    ▪ Preliminary reports will be available by section
• Large set of issues that have been defined for this process
  o See posters posted online for details
  o 1. Connectivity of trails over multiple landowners and protection in perpetuity
  o 2. Identify ecological impacts and enhance sustainability of trail system, application of objective science is important for this step
  o 3. Identify issues of user conflict and improve recreational experience across users
  o 4. Supply and demand issues-increased trails or multiple compatible uses among trails
  o 5. Funding and volunteers-try to identify sources of trail funding and develop baseline cost estimates for trail construction and maintenance. Foster partnerships for mutual benefits in regards to this.
  o 6. Try to decrease unauthorized trail use.
• Synopsis
  o Gleaning local data in order to gain expertise in the form of public meetings
  o Only one public information meeting so far
    ▪ Format of meetings
      • Introducing the subject
      • Followed by informal discussions in breakout groups
      • Then synthesis of breakout groups
    ▪ In Pittsfield, good showing of multiple stakeholders. NNIS impacts are of concern there. Efforts underway to protect ecosystems regionally across state and national borders. Unintended conflicts could be addressed by seasonal uses or restructuring of trail.
    ▪ In Pittsfield, supply of mountain biking trails good. Access for snowmobile use is limited. Desire to connect Chittenden to Shrewsbury.
    ▪ Want to have no net loss in trail.
    ▪ Trail connectivity continues to be pursued.
    ▪ Municipalities want to be covered under the Vermont landowner liability laws.
    ▪ Section of snowmobile trail on a plowed road in Chittenden is of concern.
    ▪ Overlapping of VAST and Catamount trails in some sections, but no conflicts reported.
    ▪ 10 areas of unauthorized use/ATV’s being reported.
    ▪ Funding and volunteers potential through Recreation Trails Program/Transportation Enhancements.
    ▪ GMNF primarily depends on partners for trail maintenance.
  o These meetings will continue across the northern section and then to the southern section of GMNF.
  o Preliminary report will available hopefully this summer.
  o Fall southern sections will be addressed and hopefully next April a preliminary report will be available for the southern section.

• Comments
  o How does ADA impact trail standards? USFS has not seen this as an issue yet, but warrants looking at in regards to supply and demand for disabled individuals. USFS is guided by ABA standards in regards to this issue.

Open discussion
• What is the relationship between the informal and formal processes for this planning regime? What are the practical implications? Is this a consensus process?
  o Goals and objectives are a collaborative process
  o VT Forest parks and recreation-thorough and complex process for long range planning that depends on gathering information, drafting plans, and involving the public. Still, considered informal with public involvement and this process allows for valid recommendations that may be built into this process. State lands are managed for citizens therefore they take what they can from this process to include in decision-making.
USFS-Public should redeem responsibility for its public lands. This process aids in that process. NEPA is involved anytime there is any ground disturbance. So there it has not been triggered yet in regards to this process. We make better decisions when we work together, so this process is good for that reason.

For land and water conservation funds, a statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation is required. SCORP is still in existence, but a plan will be needed in order to access Federal land and water conservation funds. This can be construed as the public involvement component of SCORP for the future.

What are other practical applications of this for other organizations too?

- VAST believes it provides a better understanding of perspectives of other users.
- GMC is impressed by organizations working together with agencies to work with limited resources they have.
- Sierra Club cares about scientific components in regards to the perpetual aspect of recreation on public lands. Interested in reducing impacts, but wants to take information from process to inform that decision.
- CBD concerned that ecological considerations have not always been incorporated in decision-making. That degradation has potentially occurred incrementally. Wants a legal review of the process and decision-making for projects. Wants to know if cumulative affects are being considered.
- USFS wants to look at impacts at a larger landscape scale and collaboratively to better address site-specific issues when they come up.
- VYCC interested in statewide message. Deals with a range of stakeholders and is interested in uniform appropriate management frameworks available to local groups. Better standards for better trail systems.
- Interested in managed trails not unauthorized use in regards to science and studies used within the process. Should we be considering any uses that are not already allowed?
- With no managed ATV trails, is it an appropriate setting to discuss science related to ATV use and impacts?
- Moosalamoo-good to have baseline information for future planning. Concerned we are not engaging the general public in this process.
- USFWS-beneficial to see user groups assessing land management. Also good to see mutual interests.
- Should coordinate future meetings as much as possible. How can we use this process to promote and advocate sustainable recreation in Vermont?
- This process is designed to benefit future planning in specific, practical ways

Closing: Thanks to GMNF, FPR, and all participants.
## Appendix A: Participant List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dick</td>
<td>Andrews</td>
<td>Sierra Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>Windham Regional Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Blogett</td>
<td>Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Butland</td>
<td>Green Mountain Plonkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>UVM Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Clark</td>
<td>Moosalamoo Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Cotterill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don</td>
<td>Dickson</td>
<td>Sierra Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Haigh</td>
<td>Green Mountain Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>Hale</td>
<td>Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association, Inc. (VASA)/ VT Trails &amp; Greenways Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Harding</td>
<td>Green Mountain College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Last Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>Hardy</td>
<td>Green Mountain Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rees</td>
<td>Harris</td>
<td>CCCofVT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Hoelscher</td>
<td>USFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>Iarrapino</td>
<td>Conservation Law Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Kell</td>
<td>Vermont Mountain Bike Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Kenney</td>
<td>VYCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>USFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Maghini</td>
<td>FWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mollie</td>
<td>Matteson</td>
<td>Center for Biological Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>VASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>Vermont Association of Snow Travelers/ VT Trails &amp; Greenways Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>O'Leary</td>
<td>Vermont Department of Forests, Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Opuszynski</td>
<td>Northern Forest Canoe Trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Pettengill</td>
<td>UVM grad student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Ricketson</td>
<td>Vermont Department of Forests, Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Smecker Winnie</td>
<td>Vermont Department of Forests, Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td>VASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Strand</td>
<td>USFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Valliere</td>
<td>UVM Rubenstein School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Van Ormer</td>
<td>USFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Waite</td>
<td>National Park Service Rivers &amp; Trails Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>Wanner</td>
<td>Moosalamoo Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryant</td>
<td>Watson</td>
<td>Vermont Association of Snow Travelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doug</td>
<td>Weber</td>
<td>VORA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>Whitson</td>
<td>Green Mountain Club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also in attendance were 9 students from Jim Harding’s senior natural resources seminar at Green Mountain College.