Meeting Notes
Vermont Trails Collaborative – Landscape Management Working Group
10/28/10 Public Meeting; Bennington, VT

Attending:

Chris Williams, D. Fredrickson, Jeff Johnson, Willenes R. Martin, Robin Breese, Stan Jones, Robin Verner, Arthur Haytko, Mark Tilley, Cosmo Catalano, Tim Marr, Dale Malekoff, Keld Alstrup, John Rowe, Mike Lynch, Scott Daniels, Kathleen Dunn, Martha Stitelman, Marge Fish, Dave Hardy, Jim Sullivan, Ken Norris, Kelly Rich, Lorraine Thurber, Hamilton Topping, Steve McLeod

Facilitating/Note taking:

Jay Strand (USFS), Melissa Reichert (USFS), John Bennett (Windham Planning Commission), Erick Walker (USFS), Joan McCloud (USFS), and Jim Henderson (Bennington Planning Commission)

Issues, concerns and opportunities expressed at the meeting have been summarized and placed into one of the following 6 themes:

1. Trail connectivity and trails with multiple landowners

Horses
Areas to make loops
- Pine Valley and Little Pond
- Landing Strip

IP Road
- No parking for trailers
- Connectivity from existing parking for snowmobiles east of Webster site (see map from meeting):
  - VAST trail connects but is not suitable for horse or pedestrian use; it is too wet
  - There is an alternative route in development using an old gravel-based logging road

Bikers
Manchester area
- Opportunity for connector trail from Beech Ridge to LT/VAST trail (see map from meeting)
- VAST trails to Griffith Lake from GMC parking lot on Rte. 11

Woodford
- Old Stage Road
- Would like access to Burgess Road across the Kelleys footbridge (see map from meeting)

Mountain Valley Trail system
- Utley brook area; Patrick Kell proposal (see map from meeting)

East Dorset biking group
- Gate FR 21 (see map from meeting)
Weston
- Along Moses Pond trail (FT 343) in Weston (see map from meeting)

Hikers
- Opportunity for connector trail between FR 21 and East Dorset (see map from meeting)

Maps
Legibility
- Forest Service maps differ from VAST, especially in numbering conventions
- Make two piece maps, Kelly Stand south and Kelly Stand north
- I think if you are working on connecting trails you need to take a GMNF map and superimpose a VAST map otherwise it is difficult to keep straight where trails and roads connect.
- Map doesn’t have NF bike trails
- Change map to have different colors

General (or undifferentiated)
- Separation of motorized and non-motorized necessary for happy campers
- Why can't VAST share trails with VASA?
- Glastenbury; maintain old woods roads as foot access, for loops, for access to AT/LT (see map from meeting)
- Windham and Bennington Counties have 20 percent of VAST membership, but only 10 percent of trails

Snow Valley
- Separation of VAST 7 and LT (see map from meeting)
- Deed west side of property to VAST; it does have legal entity set up to acquire easement

BCRC
- Landgrove
- Mad Tom Brook to East Dorset to Emerald Lake to Dorset Peak then Merck Forest and Rail Trail (add to Brattleboro along West River trail); Equinox to Merck connector

Miscellaneous
- Trail exists between the Bennington water treatment plant to Burgess Bros., but it is not mapped; Very useable with minimal work; Bikers have permission from Burgess Brothers (private landowners) (see map from meeting)
- A good network of trails is possible near the Bennington Fish Hatchery, but the property boundaries are not well marked (see map from meeting)
- North Adams watershed lands have AT go through; Town of Stamford not interested in losing the tax base? This should be a priority for GMNF acquisition (see map from meeting)
- Revisit the Southern VT Trail from the West River trail through Landgrove Dorset on to Merck Forest (Rupert) through GMNF, Rupert State Forest, Merck, and finally the Rail Trail; although Nature Conservancy may present issues (see map from meeting)
- Revisit connection from Equinox Mtn. to Merck Forest; Gap near Mother Myrick Mtn.

2. Ecological impacts from trails
- Concern there is trail tread impact from horse and bike use
- Trails need to be appropriately designed and located based on user type
Design trails with harder base if user type calls for it (e.g., bikes, horses)
Don’t take away from the experience when designing trails for heavier use (e.g., blend it in with surroundings as much as possible)
Take appropriate inventory of existing trail use and impacts that may be occurring to get a handle on the situation
Moose have impacts and trail tread because they are attracted to the trails in the winter
Deer like to gather around or adjacent to trails in the winter
Up Trail to Glastenbury Tower; first mile has severe erosion from illegal truck or ATV use (see map from meeting)
Need better signage to address illegal or inappropriate use of trail since this is major source of damage
Grout Pond Trail; ATV or trucks are impacting waterbars
Non-native plants are concern; e.g., spread by horses
Horse impacts are over-emphasized; research shows that horses do not spread non-native plants on trails; cite NH research
Bikers have trails that follow pre-existing trails or features; not too happy about experience since a lot follow roads
Season of use for bikes can be a problem to wet sections of trails
Need better location/designation of trails for horses so that they don’t cross wet areas; this would also eliminate conflicts between user groups since maintenance of trails for snowmobile/horse use could be complimentary throughout the year
Note that the website for Grayson Highlands State Park in Virginia indicates multi-use bridle trails as well as a horse campground
Many state parks in NY that have horse trails suggests that research could be done on what NY considers to be the ecological impact of horses on NY state lands – that could be applicable to VT
Any trail that is heavily used, wherever it is located, including exclusive hiking trails such as the Appalachian Trail, even trails made and used by wildlife, eventually show wear; as long as the surrounding area is not impacted there should not be a problem.
I have hiked and ridden many trails that have signs posted asking users to stay on the trail to protect the environment; this doesn’t mean that the trails should be closed but that user groups need to be proactive in maintaining the trails
Snowmobile trail between FR 273 and town of Bennington is impacted by Beaver pond (see map from meeting)
Japanese knotweed in parking area/Pine Valley trailhead; concern that it may spread downstream into wet areas (see map from meeting)

3. Trail user conflicts

Separate motor and non-motorized use; just won’t get along
VAST & VASA – getting 2 motorized systems – need a quiet place to go
On AT/LT most conflicting uses cross perpendicular to the trail
Illegal uses take money away from trail management; having crossings of conflicting uses may help.
Lye Brook trail is also hard to follow
Snowmobiles and musher conflicts on FR 71
Kelly Stand (these are the heaviest used snowmobile trails in VT) and IP Road; run at night, concerned about musher safety! Always on the wrong side of the road; Outfitter guides – commercial dog sled tours – frequent occurrence in the spring (see map from meeting)
Also mountain lake groups at Glastenbury tower
Motorized use on AT in North Adams watershed; some does not show as GMNF; possibility to buy?
Some conflicts with vehicles and horses on roads; need better signs

4. Existing supply and demand for trails

Vermont Trail Trotters has requested in written proposals several loops of the VAST and old logging trails we would like for horse travel. We were originally granted 35 miles of trails and since then we have not been successful in obtaining more. We would like to have more.
The area that concerns us (VT Trail Trotters) most is access to the IP road or 341 North off the Kelley Stand road. This is a safety issue for horses and trailers. We have researched a trail from the large parking lot closest to the entrance. It cuts around a large wet area on the snowmobile trail and is dry. It could be cleared with minimal brush removal.
Interest in horse use on the Glastenbury trails
Horse loop trails are needed!
VASA has no trail access on FS; Old Stage Rd.
Need loops for bikers
Lots of gravel-base logging roads available for horse trails
Aiken has become a center for backcountry skiing; concern about maintaining backcountry trail system in the Aiken wilderness
Backcountry trail demand in VT; need to maintain
Forest Service does not count uses in Wilderness; need to get a count of winter use in Aiken, Adams parking lot (see map from meeting).
There are blazed trails in Aiken Wilderness; what is their status?
Old logging roads in Glastenbury would make good hiking and ski trails that would alleviate some stress on other trails (see map from meeting).
Large demand for motorized trails and a small supply; heaviest used area for snowmobiles in the state; also very heavy ATV use especially from out of state.
Mountain bike folks want some trails – FR 273 to the Stage Rd.; also Harmon Hill trails – connector to the water treatment plant in Woodford to Burgess Rd.; trail exists on the ground
Mountain bike opportunity on Little Pond, Pine Valley, Woodford Powerline & Red Mill Access trails (see map from meeting)
Trail to Griffith Lake from Manchester Beech Ridge Area; look at areas to connect in E. Dorset (see map from meeting).
Pine Valley; Red Mill potential Mountain lake; concerns about it being wet
Mountain bike trails exist southeast of Bennington – not shown on map (see map from meeting)
Trail used by bikes exist (not shown on map) between FR 72 near water plant & Burgess Brothers to the south (see map from meeting)

Side Note: need to collect sign in sheets at Lye Brook (FT 431) trail head.

5. Trail funding

LMBA does grant writing
Specialized company – matching funds or other
Supply camping or other sites for free to volunteers; state / FS
VAST needs volunteers; extensive system getting vegetation overgrown
Where are the young people?
Must have trail ethics
• Biggest problem is volunteers for snowmobiles

6. Unauthorized/illegal uses of trails

• Make sure LE Manchester comes to VAST meeting
• Pack and Saddle Trail not showing; Maps hard to tell where illegal use is, hard to show on map
• Need a better trail marking system
• Uptrail; 4x4 bad erosion; needs signing ASAP; VAST
• ATV use on AT in Glastenbury and on Rte 9 South; Sucker Pond
• ATV use near AT in west Stamford (see map from meeting)
• Up Trail to Glastenbury Tower; first mile has severe erosion from illegal truck or ATV use (see map from meeting)
• ATV use between AT and FR 273; Old Stagecoach trail – town of Woodford? (see map from meeting)
• ATV use crossing Bald Mountain Trail (FT 435) near Bennington (see map from meeting)