DRAFT

Recommendations for Action for Sustainable Trail Management in Vermont
Prepared by the Vermont Trails Collaborative - Landscape Management Work Group

The following recommendations for action were compiled from interested members of the public at meetings hosted by the VT Trails Collaborative - Landscape Management Work Group. These meetings were conducted in the spring and fall/winter of 2010 on the north and south zone areas within and surrounding the Green Mountain National Forest. The recommendations were derived by identifying the gap between the existing and desired conditions relative to each issue based on the information learned at the public meetings. Some recommendations are final products or conclusions resulting from efforts to achieve the objectives specific to this work group as provided by the collaborative process. The work group objectives relative to each issue preface each set of results or recommendations.

Issue I. Trail Connectivity/Trails with Multiple Landowners

Objectives:

1. Identify high priority state-wide or regionally important trails that transition across various landowners.
2. Determine priority trails for protection and management in perpetuity through identifying land interest acquisition (easements, fee, etc.) and/or management agreement priorities to protect against potential gaps or resolve existing gaps in the trail network.
3. Identify new opportunities to connect existing trail systems, segments and special features.

Results/Recommendations:

Objectives 1:

- Important trails at the state-wide level
  - Appalachian and Long Trail systems
  - Catamount Trail
  - Snowmobile trail system managed by VAST
- Important trails at the regional level
  - West River Trail (x-country ski, hike, bike)
  - Mad River Path (x-country ski, hike, bike)
  - Mountain Valley Trail system (x-country ski)
  - Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA) (ski, hike, bike)
- Continue to develop list of important trails at the regional or local level based on further surveys and/or meetings with user groups

Objective 2:

- Acquire land or obtain easement in to protect Appalachian Trail in Stamford, Winhall, Killington, Hartford, Norwich, and the Chataugay area (Stockbridge, Bridgewater and Barnard)
- Acquire land or obtain easement in Waitsfield and adjacent towns to protect Mad River Path and side trails
- User groups should identify priority regional or local trail segments that are in need of protection and management in perpetuity
  - ATC – Appalachian Trail (AT)
  - GMC - Long Trail (LT)
  - CTA - Catamount Trail
  - VAST - snowmobile trail
  - VASA - motorized trail
  - VMBA – mountain bike trail
Objective 3:
- The intent is to provide a comprehensive list of opportunities to have direct or loop trail connections for existing trail systems, segments or special features. Examples compiled to date include the following opportunities:
  North Zone
  - North Country Trail connect Crown Point, NY to AT (hike)
  - Mad River Path connect Warren to Moretown (x-country ski, hike, bike)
  - Pittsfield to Chittenden (bike)
  - Chittenden to Shrewsbury (snowmobile)
  South Zone
  - WHPA trail system to West River Trail system (x-country ski, hike, bike)
  - Emerald Lake to Dorset Peak (hike)
  - Equinox trail system to Merck Forest trail system (hike)
  - Mountain Valley Trail system (bike loop)
  - North of Route 9 to Kelley Stand (horse loop)
  - Connect existing trail system in Stratton/Somerset area (horse)
  - Grout Pond to TransCanada trail system or West River trail systems (hike)
  - Need trailheads for horse trailers along Route 9

General
- Improve disability access
- Continue to develop list of important trail connections at the regional or local level based on further surveys and/or meetings with user groups

Issue II. Ecological Impacts from Trails

Objectives:
1. Identify a set of physical/ecological indicators of concern.
2. Utilizing existing information, identify potential sources of physical and ecological impacts resulting from trail related activities.
3. Provide recommendations to address identified areas of concern where trails may be adversely impacting physical and ecological indicators.

Results/Recommendations:

Objectives 1 & 2 (Indicators & sources for ecological impacts):
- Erosion and rutting
  - Illegal motorized use
  - Poor trail location and/or design
- Presence of non-native invasive plants (NNIP)
  - Open forest canopy
  - Equipment during construction and maintenance
  - Manure
  - Human distribution (e.g., hikers, bikes, vehicles)
- Flooded trail tread
  - Beaver
  - Poor trail location and/or design
- Trail “creep”
  - Circumventing physical barriers
Objective 3:
- Careful trail location, design (trail construction standards) and management
  - Reroute or construct trails in more sustainable locations
  - Consider temporary or permanent trail closures
  - Seasonal closure or designate timing of use
  - Conduct regular monitoring
  - Provide workshop/training opportunities for trail crews and managers
- Education, communication and/or outreach
  - Coordinate state-wide or regional message through media outlets why trails are closed
  - Provide reporting mechanism from trail users to provide feedback to managers (e.g., Trail Ethics signing)
- Implement NNIP preventive measures
  - Clean equipment before and after entering sites
  - Keep forest canopy as closed as possible
  - Use native or natural seed mix for erosion control
- Develop techniques to address beaver/flooding
  - Proper trail location and design
  - Beaver population control
- See Issue VI for recommendations to address illegal use of trails

Issue III. Trail User Relations

It should be noted that trail user conflict was not emphasized as a significant issue during public meetings but instead feedback indicated user groups work together productively most of the time.

Objectives:

1. Identify social factors (such as noise, conflicting uses, safety, etc.) that cause trail based user conflicts.
2. Identify locations and sources of existing and potential trail user conflicts.
3. Provide recommendations to address existing and potential trail user conflicts.

Results/Recommendations:

Objective 1:
- Motorized v. non-motorized
  - High speed can be a safety issue (snowmobiles and skiers on same trail)
  - Noise impacting backcountry experience
- Non-motorized v. non-motorized
  - Manure from horses or dogs (mushers or hikers)
  - Horses in winter impacting snow conditions for skiers
- Recreation v. non-recreation
  - Logging activities
Objective 2:
- Root Beer Ridge Trail in Weston area (x-country ski) impacts from logging activity
- IP Road (FR 341) in Stratton/Winhall areas; conflicts with snowmobiles and groomers with dog mushers
- Continue to develop list of site-specific user conflicts through collaboration with groups

Objective 3:
- Implement Vermont Universal Trail Ethics Education Initiative dated October 2010
- Develop and implement education activities for user groups focusing on accommodating other user needs and user habits
- Establish standard rules and regulations (posting speed limits, designation of single use trails, etc.)
- Separate uses when multiple use trails are identified to be a safety issue or when conflicts are self evident
- Separate trails spatially or temporally where unresolved conflicting use has been identified
- Encourage active collaboration with affected and interested user groups
- Design trails to accommodate multiple user types
- Improve signs that indicate allowed trail uses
- Establish and provide reliable and standardized trail maps that clearly show allowed uses

Issue IV. Existing Supply and Demand for Trails

Objectives:

1. Utilize existing data to identify/quantify supply A) of existing trail based recreation opportunities and B) the trends of demand for different public recreation activities.
2. Identify compatible uses that can be shared on multiple use/experience managed trails.
3. Provide recommendations to address areas where the existing supply of trail based recreation opportunities does not meet the public demand for experiences.

Results/Recommendations:

Objective 1A:
- This has not been completed
- Trails and Greenway Council should develop a mechanism or agreement with the Forest Service, ANR and user groups to compile existing data into a state-wide database by allowed trail uses. The database can be compiled into GIS layers by VT Center for Geographic Information (VCGI).
- Complete statewide assessment of existing trails by managed use to be conducted by UVM or Regional Planning Commissions.
- The Forest Service should update their trails data and produce maps that show trails by managed use

Objective 1B:
- Update the 2004 Social and Economic Assessment Report for the GMNF prepared by UVM that provides national, regional and state-wide recreation trends
- Update trend information as part of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) prepared by ANR
- Conduct formal user group survey

Objective 2:
- Horse use on snowmobile trail system (general)
- Bike use on snowmobile trail system on Grout Pond to West Trail in Stratton area
- Bike use on snowmobile trail system on Dome Trail/Stage Road in Readsboro area
- Bike use on Mountain Valley Trail system in Weston area
• Continue to develop list of site-specific opportunities for multiple use trails through collaboration with groups

**Objective 3:**
• Generally, the uses where demand is greater than supply are horses, bikes and ATVs
• Specifically, the following areas were identified to provide more opportunities for user types where they are currently lacking:
  North Zone
  ✓ Pittsford area (bike)
  ✓ General area (horse)
  ✓ General area (ATV)
  South Zone
  ✓ Good opportunity for trail network near Bennington Fish Hatchery (hike)
  ✓ White Rocks and Equinox areas (bike)
  ✓ Utley Brook area (bike)
  ✓ Glastenbury area (horse)
  ✓ Weston area (horse)
  ✓ Old Stage Road in Readsboro/Searburg area (ATV)
  ✓ Sucker Pond in Stamford area (ATV and bike)
  ✓ Bennington area (snowmobile)
  General
  ✓ High elevation ski trails
  ✓ Backcountry trail experience
• Conduct comprehensive trail planning
• Continue collaboration effort to identify user type demands and specific locations desired by user groups
• Use indicators such as over-use of existing trails or user group membership
• Identify areas that will support new trail uses or additional uses of existing trails in areas of high demand

**Issue V. Trail Funding/Volunteer Management**

**Objectives:**

1. Identify major sources of trail based funding that benefit trails.
2. Develop standard baseline cost estimates by use type for establishing and maintaining trails, including deferred maintenance.
3. Provide recommendations on how trail management organizations can work together to leverage scarce funding.
4. Provide recommendations on how to recruit and maintain volunteers

**Results/Recommendations:**

**Objective 1:**
• Target Forest Service funding to partners on NFS lands
• Enhancement funding through VTrans
• Explore monies from Public Lands Highway Fund
• Raise funds through membership fees and/or dues
• VT Recreational Trails Grants funds
• National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program coordinator to compile list of existing funding sources
Objective 2:
- Compile list of existing sources standard baseline cost estimates by use type for establishing and maintaining trails (including deferred maintenance)

Objective 3:
- Assign a state-wide trail funding coordinator to collaborate/facilitate funding and volunteer development program
- Conduct survey of user groups to establish standard baseline cost estimates
- Conduct grant writing workshops
- Collaborate – User groups should work together to pool finite resources to achieve common objectives

Objective 4:
- Streamline volunteer recruitment and maintenance program
- Provide free training to volunteers
- Develop volunteer incentives to increase volunteer interest
- Focus on the young and first time users through education/outreach

Issue VI. Unauthorized/Illegal Uses of Trails

Objectives:
1. Identify A) existing and B) locations of unauthorized uses.
2. Provide recommendations on how to address unauthorized uses to land managers.

Results/Recommendations:

Objective 1A:
- ATVs and 4x4s off-road and on-road when not authorized for that use
- Snowmobile use off designated trails or on property without landowner permission
- User generated trails when it involves cutting of trees or substantial impact to resources
- Use of trails on land that is specifically posted prohibiting access

Objective 1B:
- Reference VT Trails Collaborative – Landscape Management Work Group Public Meeting Issues Analysis for full list of existing locations of unauthorized use
- Examples include:
  ✓ ATV use on Appalachian Trail (AT) in Glastenbury area, near AT in near Sucker Pond in Stamford
  ✓ ATV use crossing Bald Mountain Trail (FT 435) near Bennington
  ✓ ATV/4x4 uses on Up Trail to Glastenbury Tower
  ✓ Bikes in Rob Ford Meadows in Granville
  ✓ Non-designated snowmobile trail leading out of Chittenden Reservoir area
  ✓ ATV use off Fassett Hill/Taylor Brook areas in Hancock
  ✓ Cutting trees and making ATV routes near AT/LT corridor near intersection of FR 273
- Continue to identify locations of illegal activity through collaboration with user groups and monitoring

Objective 2:
- Implement Vermont Universal Trail Ethics Education Initiative dated October 2010
- Initiate program for ATV vendors to provide information on where ATVs can ride legally
- Develop and initiate state-wide education campaign
- Identify areas for legal use
- Consider use of gates/barriers to prevent unauthorized uses
- Explore other barrier techniques to prevent unauthorized uses
- Increase use of consistent and standardized signing
- Develop and initiate user group education to promote self enforcement
- Develop and provide easily accessible maps showing allowed use

**Issue VII. Miscellaneous**

This issue was developed to document other suggestions that did not fit well into the other issue categories. Examples may include education, research, policy development and process improvement, improved or additional maps, and ancient roads. Completion of this section is ongoing.