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

DATE: October 19, 2010   TIME: 1-4 PM   LOCATION: Central VT Chamber of Commerce Berlin, VT

Facilitator: Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension
Notetaker: Holly Knox, Green Mountain National Forest

Organizations and Clubs in Attendance: Lisa Chase (UVM Extension), Bill Valliere (UVM Rubenstein), Peter Pettengill (UVM Rubenstein), Colleen Madrid (USFS), Melissa Reichert (USFS), Jean Haigh (GMC), Dave Hardy (GMC), Kathryn Wrigley (GMC), Jessi Hudson (VAST), Alexis Nelson (VAST), Tom Butland (VASA and motorized uses), Doug Weber (VORA), Danny Hale (VASA and VT Trails and Greenways Council), Jessica Ricketson (VT FPR), Tom Berry (Leahy), Tony Clark (Moosalamoo Association), Sherry Winnie (VT FPR), Ed O'Leary (VT FPR), Brian Cotterill, Craig Whipple (VT State Parks), Mark Maghini (Silvio O. Conte), Jay Strand (USFS), Tim Tierney (Kingdom Trails), Dan Davis (Kingdom Trails), Holly Knox (USFS), Doug Blodgett (VT F&W), John Bennett (Windham RC), Keegan Tierney (VYCC), Patrick Kell (VMBA), Jeff Harvey (public), Bryant Watson (VAST), Amy Kelsey (CTA), Steve McLeod (VASA), Walter Opuszynski (Northern Forest Canoe Trail)

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). Follow-up meetings were held October 14, 2009 and April 14, 2010 to continue the discussion and to address various work group assignments and accomplishments (see Appendix A for additional details). Today's meeting is intended to hear updates from the following work groups and to address what happens when the 2 year process comes to an end (May 2011):

(1) Stewardship and Communication Work Group: This group is working closely with VT Trails and Greenways Council to improve interpretive and education information for recreational use in VT.

(2) Landscape Management Work Group: This group is evaluating ways to improve upon trail systems on the GMNF and beyond.

(3) Science Panel: This group is reviewing existing scientific studies related to trail use and impacts and prioritizing needs for future research efforts.

Agenda:
1:00 – 1:30 Introductions and Background
1:30 – 2:00 Stewardship and Communication
2:00 – 2:30 Science Panel
2:45 – 3:15 Landscape Management
3:15 – 4:00 Round Robin: What has been most useful so far? What needs to be accomplished in the next 6 months and into the future?

Notes:

Introduction and Overview by Lisa, Colleen, and Ed:
Introduction by Lisa Chase, including history of how we arrived to where we are today (see background above). Colleen Madrid, GMNF Forest Supervisor provided a welcome and thank you. Colleen addressed the unique environment we are working in today (open, respectful communication enabling Forest Service to make better future decisions). Colleen would love to see open discussions continue beyond the deadline that is approaching (in 6 months, Trail Collaborative working groups will have completed initial charges). Ed O'Leary noted two accomplishments: 1) People are talking to one another, respectfully; and 2) Amazing amount of work that has been accomplished--as will be reported today. Ed noted that we (the VT Trails Collaborative) have agreed upon common goals, needs and strategies for improving trail management in VT but this will be a continuous process and the VT Trails Collaborative has set the stage to keep the discussions open. Ed also noted that the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council embraced the idea of focusing on stewardship and communication but recognized they are all volunteers. Grant money allowed the hiring of Brian Cotterill, allowing people to commit and engage to a process that might have seemed overwhelming at first.
Stewardship and Communication: Report by Brian Cotterill

Objectives:
- Identify trail issues
- Develop universal and common set of trail behavior expectations
- Develop a way to “message” the expectations to users

Key Questions
- What are the trail resource issues?
- What messaging is needed to address the issues?
- What is the message delivery mode and how do you reach the audience?
- Success indicators?

Methods
- Held 6 trail summits to address 4 key questions
- Reached 10,000 individuals with 881 respondents

Survey Results
- Established population of people who took surveys (what recreation activities people participate in and preferred recreation activity) (top two preferred recreation activities= ATV and mountain biking, lowest preferred activity=rock climbing)
- Established Trail Resource Issues (most concern=allowable access) and messages needed to address the issues
- How to deliver messages: top three ideas= 1) trailhead kiosks; 2) on trail promotion; and 3) in gear shops/recreation hubs
- What are success indicators? 1) trails open and in good condition; 2) natural resource impact; 3) collaboration across user groups

Conceptual Products and Conclusions:
- Branding message created: VT symbol that has “Vermont Trail Ethic” wording
- 10 Trail Ethic messages created
  - Share the trail and respect other users
  - Respect landowners and private property
  - Use good judgment and tread lightly; trail conditions are subject to change at any time
  - Stay on marked trails
  - Leave no trace with respect to natural resources, historic structures and wildlife
  - Be prepared with food, water and first aid
  - Pack out your trash
  - Report misuse
  - Plan ahead, be safe and have fun
  - Know the allowable and appropriate use of the trail you are traveling on
- Need a “Vermont feel” with a flexible logo
- Message is branded and has universal expectations with contact information
- Over 550 people wanting to know more and contribute time/money
- Need additional organizations and collaborators
- How to implement? Is future funding needed?
What is Next?

- Brian’s last day is today…how do we continue momentum and ensure work done to date is carried forward?
- Everyone could adopt “Trail Ethic” into messages and information we are providing (example on websites, trail signs, etc)
- How do we get the VT Trail Ethic message to be in-grained in similar fashion to the International Association of Snowmobilers Safe Rider program (adopted in ‘90s) where snowmobilers nationally recognize symbol and identify with safety messages?
- VT FPR and GMNF funds were needed to get to this point. VT FPR supports requesting additional money as a State-wide priority to continue this effort.
- Final report will be posted sharing all the Stewardship and Communication Work Groups results and information

Q&A and Reactions for Brian and Work Group:

- Q: How representative is survey of VT Trail Users?
  - A: Survey was sent around to multiple user groups to distribute to all stakeholders. Open access to survey and those most interested filled out the survey. Not a random sample and not clear how representative it is of VT trail users.
- Q: Is survey data available?
  - A: Yes, it is all public and available online at: http://www.uvm.edu/tourismresearch/trails/Vermont_Trail_Ethic_Presentation.pdf
- Q: How do we make important messages really effective? Many users may not read entire sign-has a professional sign person reviewed messages and order (should safety messages be first in order)?
- Q: How do you report misuse? No information provided on Trail Ethic sign
- Q: How do non-Vermonters get input in process
- Q: Can you combine #1 and #10?
- Note: good to start seeing this information online showing people across the country the collaborative nature of VT user groups
- Note: Leave No Trace may be trademarked
- Q: What about a message regarding pets on trails?
- Q: Is there a way to spread the word by creating a cadre of trail user ethic “teachers” (a la Leave No Trace instruction)
- Q: How do we address illegal trail cutting in our messaging?
- Note: messages are dense and could dilute some messages that already exist (example, trail closures during mud season)
- Q: Could this be flexible enough that it could be pulled into other messages and information without using specifically branded sign?
  - A: There is a desire to separate logo from message so that message can be used in other people’s information/signage
- Note: important to have everyone adopt trail ethics, across all user groups

Science Panel: Report by William Valliere

There are a lot of comments and ideas from the Science Panel regarding literature interpretations and future research needs. The panel is trying to balance different findings and establish research priorities. Need a full perspective so the more input, the better product we will have…please feel free to add more studies (Quebec, Maine, NH, NY) and/or input.

- Q: Any economic research?
  - A: not much economic impact research has been compiled…but there could be more effort in next 6 months.
- Q: Hope that peer-reviewed literature is being weighted as such…make sure information compiled is legitimate.
  - A: Most documents were peer reviewed or agency studies…not from random websites!
Literature Review Key Findings:

- Social and ecological impacts result from outdoor recreation. Degree varies by recreation type and setting
- Recreation conflict is perceived to be increasing...due partially to new technologies/equipment
- User-caused noise in recreation settings negatively affects wildlife and visitor experiences at times.
- Lots of recreation research has focused on hiking and resource impacts...less is known about hiking effects on wildlife
- Ecological impacts of mountain biking is inconclusive and greatly impacted by trail slope/construction/location/use intensity
- A number of studies have reviewed impacts from motorized recreation on air, water, vegetation, soil and wildlife. Motorized recreation has greater impact than non-motorized.
- OHVs offer access to areas that are typically more remote and allow access for people who may not have otherwise been able to enjoy the outdoors. Negative environmental impacts result from OHVs in unauthorized areas, user conflicts, and user-caused noise.
- Most research on horseback riding/pack stock has been done in western US. Some concerns are stock spreading NNIS and impacting trail tread

Research Needs

- Recreation conflict for activities growing rapidly in VT (mtn bike and OHV use)
- User-caused noise in recreation settings (special areas in VT we want to keep serene)
- Effects of recreation on soil and vegetation (specific areas in VT)
- Non-motorized winter recreation effects and conflicts
- Snowmobile affect on air and water quality
- Motorized recreation impacts in VT
- Trail riding and pack stock effects in VT

VAST Study: Motorized Recreation Impact on Water and Soil

- Desire was to supplement studies done in western US (example, snowmobile use in Yellowstone)
- Asked Trail Collaborative to buy into a QUAP (quality assurance plan? Holly may have gotten this acronym wrong!) and PAHS (policyclic aromatic hydrocarbons)
- Hired VHB Pioneer to do assessment of 11 trail sites (on public land-Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, GMNF, Conte) utilizing 1 Wilderness area as reference. Took samples from various times (busy and non-busy seasons, spring runoff) and in multiple locations on the trail (center, side, etc).
- Final report submitted August 24, 2010 and is available at http://www.vtvast.org
- Only one location that had any reference above EPA standard was in area where Lamoille Valley Rail Trail is adjacent to automobile intersection.
- Highest use with average 75 snowmobiles/day=S Zone of GMNF; second=Lamoille Valley at 73 snowmobiles/day
- Trail use of snowmobiles may result in VOCs and PAHs but they are far below acceptable levels.

Landscape Management:

Jay read the Work Group Goals and Objectives available on Trail Collaborative UVM site. The Work Group created six issues based on the objectives:

1. Trail connectivity and trails with multiple land owners
2. Trail Funding and Volunteers
3. Unauthorized/illegal use of trails
4. Trail User conflicts and safety
5. Ecological impacts
6. Supply and demand
End product desired: recommendations to help land and trail managers provide a more sustainable trail system, more consistent management across boundaries, and a better recreation experience (2/2010 Landscape Management Work Group meeting notes). Several public meetings have been held in the northern part of VT (Warren, Brandon, Pittsfield)….and 4 more are planned for the southern half of the State. Southern agenda/times/locations were made available today as were summary notes from the N Zone meetings. Note that the effort is not confined to the GMNF…we are looking beyond federal ownership boundaries when seeking input at public meetings. South Zone meetings 6:30-8:30 PM in Towns of Manchester, Weston, Dover.

N Zone meeting summary: General and specific concerns received. As an example, specific concerns included desire to make Mad River Path connect from Warren to Moretown and to connect mtn bike trails from Pittsfield to Killington. More general comments were ideas such as: utilize seasonal use restrictions to diffuse user conflict.

- Q: Why are meetings focused on GMNF when Trail Collaborative effort spreads across State?
  - A: Landscape Management Work Group was looking to use GMNF data acquisition process and apply it to the rest of VT to gain additional information. At this point in collaborative process, need to spread to further reaches of the State.

- Concern that some work groups are working on a State-wide level while Landscape Management Work Group is focused on GMNF. Need to be clear when presenting information to public that different geographic boundaries were utilized.
  - Response: The majority of the issues identified are not site-specific and do apply across boundaries.

- Q: Could Landscape Management Work Group hold process for areas outside GMNF boundaries?
  - A: It would be ideal to consider holding meetings outside GMNF boundaries before final May 2011 meeting.

**Round Robin:**

What has been useful? We have 6 months left with next meeting May 2, 2011 -- where do we need to focus?

- Heard concern that VAST study did not take climatic change into effect. Bryant noted that Quality Assurance Project Plan was adopted and this comment was not heard prior to that plan’s approval.
- Need to expand beyond GMNF boundaries
- Excellent to have user groups together to network and hear shared concerns
- Needing to focus on end product that we expect in next 6 months
- Hearing dialogue has been helpful…collective thoughts good to hear
- Need implementation plan to know what to do with end products from here
- Not a lot of participation at 3 public meetings held by Landscape Management Work Group…either people don’t have issues or they are apathetic and feel they can’t impact process. Need to address why this is so
- FS needs to ensure we follow all applicable federal laws (during NEPA analyses)…excited that bibliography provides some basis for using “best available science” as part of this process
- This group is one-stop shopping for all trail user groups in the State of VT.
- Value gained during discussions is getting people to talk to each other and work together towards some end.
- Steering committee needs to decide what the end products will look like to have everyone feel like we have accomplished something.
- Has learned a lot-lot of passionate voices who believe in importance of recreation. Non-scientific survey provided comments that showed the importance they place on recreation. Trail collaborative extends beyond this group to the entire Stat of VT and its recreation users (who are important to economy)
- Important to make channels clear for any recommendations that come at the end of the process…where are they going?
• Spending the last 18 months together has been useful. State has to come up with a State-wide Recreation Plan and will make use of the surveys and other information that has been gathered as background for this Plan.
• What’s next? What will happen with results of all energy and time spent? How do we implement Trail Ethic and other recommendations? This needs framed by Steering Committee soon and sent to the group for approval. Action Plan for future needs developed
• Impressive that everybody’s voice has been heard throughout the process...including utilizing facilitators (Lisa and Brian) to capture those voices
• Would like to see a simple plan on how to use Vermont Trail Ethics in the work we all do
• Nice to see all users being civil to one another and respecting each other’s recreation types
• Jewel of a trail network in VT and it is not being utilized to full potential. How can this group interact with Tourism/Ag agencies or VT Fresh to make use of economic potential of recreation opportunities. Would like to see criss-crossing of State agencies working together.
• Valuable process of navel-gazing to promote internal discussions across user groups
• Potential for external message and final products to have value is immense (including for VT policy makers at national level)...what 2 page list could group come up with that legislators could help us get done?
• Enjoyed council coming together. Interesting to see overlaps and divergence between working groups. Now what do we do with the logo and ethic? And let me know how I can help in other parts of the state.
• Good experience working together. Just need to continue working towards our goal in the future.
• lots of value in working together. In conclusion what will we say and how will it be used?
• An uplifting experience. Most useful have been the relationships that have been made between user groups. Good effort to move the ball forward. This info should be used for planning. Where is the restoration component? We should be incorporating it as good land stewards for future generations and the environment. From an action point of view we should pick one or two items to implement and measure the success of our results.
• A true example of keeping recreation thriving in the state of VT. A good opportunity for the trails and greenways group to continue working together.
• Impressed with number and diversity of user groups coming together to work towards same goals. In the future it would be important to demonstrate the ethic as more than just a sign. A common message for all users is important and we need to find a way to disseminate that information.
• Good to have a trail ethic, but it is important to relate it to the users in the future.
• first time all agencies have managed to get together. Very positive. Hopes this will keep going. It is an ongoing process and needs to be adapted beyond the National Forest. What will happen in Northern Vermont? This could be a very interesting and different experience, but collaborative experience could extend on.
• Educators should take heart at what this group has done. Let’s get project to continue into the NEK.
• Impressed with the work that has been done. Working towards a great trail system that can become greater and this will help. An action plan for the next six months would be helpful. A statewide look is a good way of looking at these things and should be considered more in the future.
• Everyone has done a great job. After working lots of different places the issues are often the same. Agree in going beyond southern VT, and it is important to incorporate views of users out of state as well. Looking for recommendations to sustain the resource without high impact. The GMNF is the 10th most used National Forest in the country and it is important to keep users happy.
• Important for VT’s recreation program as a whole and it would be good to see it continue. This has been a good way to see how groups get together and work together. Good for the future of his work personally, has learned a lot from this experience. A good way to get a perspective on the state as a whole and a chance to know what eachother’s challenges are, and how we can work together on similar issues. In regards to carrying on the products, all the groups have done great work, but what about economics? Does recreation have an impact on our economy and how can we leverage it for more initiatives.
• A process can be useful. But what can you piece together in the future? Where do we go after the process is through? How do we continue to work together?
Public meetings have been important and hearing everyone’s opinions. Wants a product from the VT Trail Ethic. Something tangible like a sticker that we may show off with pride.

Since this was the first meeting I was able to attend I really can't comment on question number one other than to say this is a very worthwhile venture. I lived next to the Green Mountain forest for a number of years and had to struggle to find a place to ride my mountain bike. Most of it by poaching. The powers then in charge of the forest didn't want mountain bikes. Now the world has changed, in part because of the collaborative. And in my view all for the better. As for question number two: how about the development of trail standards for various trail users? I think it would help establish the appropriate use for the terrain. A standard for a hiking trail would be different than that of a mountain bike trail. A trail for a snow machine would have even different parameters. If trails are built to a standard it will mitigate lots of issues. If it is not built to standards then it should not be open to use. My other observation is the need for some more time to network. I didn't get the opportunity to talk to some of the folks at the meeting.

Thanks for the time and effort from everyone. It would be nice to have a tangible product in addition to the relationships we have built. Let’s wrap up with a solid plan for implementation.
Appendix A: Trails Collaborative Goals, Principles and Structure

Goals:
Establish a collaborative process to improve management of trails and recreation in the Green Mountain National Forest and surrounding areas. Complete the formal collaborative process within two years (spring 2011). Success is defined by each member of the collaborative agreeing that:
1) The process has made a substantial contribution to the betterment of social and biological health in the region
2) The trail system is more sustainable today than it was two years ago and this will continue into the foreseeable future
3) Our understanding of and application of science to trail and recreation management has improved
4) We have empowered local or regional groups to continue making progress

Principles:
- Focus on common values while working to resolve issues that can only be dealt with at a larger scale (e.g., addressing social conflicts and perceived equity among various types of trail recreation, mitigating landscape level effects to wildlife and important habitats, quantifying possible cumulative effects to soil/water/air, identifying common priorities and strategies for user compliance and education, common maintenance practices or standards, etc.) while engaging and empowering local place-based groups, communities and citizens to resolve issues that are site-specific.
- Engage groups and individuals that represent the diversity of views, interests and demographics. Include individuals that are creative or civic leaders that may not belong to a particular interest group and are leaders in their communities, arts, schools etc. Include youth.
- Make process transparent and invite participation early, often and throughout. Follow Federal Advisory Committee Act requirements by ensuring all meetings are advertised and open to the public. Use technology effectively to unify, build trust and be open and transparent.
- Incorporate best available science that is relevant to this particular landscape. Include science in the process itself, social sciences and physical or biological sciences. Focus on a few key priorities to expand or create ‘new’ science.
- Utilize an ‘adaptive’ approach (i.e., don’t try to answer all questions, or resolve all conflicts, for all time). Make agreed upon changes that will substantially improve the current situation over the next 10-15 years.
- Based on common, shared information from the collaborative, each landowner will make decisions that it deems appropriate, using methods it deems are appropriate. Any ‘sideboards’ that landowners and governments have should be made known.

Structure:

Overall Trail Collaborative - Has at least one representative from each group/organization that wants to participate. Includes individual participants willing and interested in volunteering their time over the course of two years. This group meets 2-4 times per year to review and provide feedback to the steering committee, science panel, and each work group.

Steering Committee - Consists of the overall facilitator for the effort (UVM Extension) and government leaders (i.e., Federal agencies, State agencies, and a member of a Regional Planning Commission to represent Town government perspectives). This group meets to determine the process, and consult as necessary on policy or decision-making issues related to the process. Members of the Steering Committee include:
- Lisa Chase – University of Vermont Extension
- Ed O’Leary – Vermont Dept of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- Colleen Madrid – Green Mountain National Forest
- Jay Strand – Green Mountain National Forest
- Melissa Reichert – Green Mountain National Forest
- John Bennett – Windham Regional Commission
Science Panel - An independent panel of 8-10 representatives from the research community and collaborative group that interacts with all other groups and is charged with reviewing existing science and literature to determine the most relevant to trail management issues in this landscape. The panel will recommend the most relevant new science (i.e., original research) priorities to be pursued. Lisa Chase will facilitate the panel.

Members of the Science Panel include:
- Bob Manning, University of Vermont
- Jim Harding, Green Mountain College
- Other representatives from overall trail collaborative

Stewardship and Communication Work Group - This group will focus on expanding and prioritizing common efforts to:
1) develop a common set of trail behavior expectations regardless of land ownership,
2) increase volunteerism and user stewardship across all user groups,
3) increase the amount and quality of information and education as a tool to address resource and social issues,
4) develop common trail construction and maintenance best management practices

A proposal has been presented to the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council to facilitate this group. One does not need to be a member of the Council to participate in the work group.

Landscape Management Work Group - Exact membership of this group will be somewhat fluid, as we move from north to south across the Green Mountains. This group will evaluate ways to improve upon the overall existing trail system in the Green Mountains. We will invite any interested persons to participate and groups with local knowledge to engage in workshops. A core group will consist of at least one representative from each level of government and the science panel. The facilitator will be John Bennett. Web-based systems or other technologies may also be used for keeping people engaged and soliciting feedback. The core group will keep the overall collaborative engaged and updated periodically.

Generally, the objectives of the group will be to address landscape scale issues that transcend landownership and jurisdictional boundaries which have been identified from local knowledge, previous planning and the collaborative process. The general trail management objectives the group will address include:
- Identify high priority statewide or regionally important trails that transition across various land owners. Determine which trails need to be managed in perpetuity by identifying land acquisition (easements, fee, etc.) and/or agreement priorities.
- Identify sources and possible actions to remedy unacceptable ecological impacts (i.e., soil erosion, deer wintering areas, etc.) and/or social conflicts (noise, conflicting uses, etc.) on the existing trails system.
- Identify existing trails that may be appropriate for multiple use management by adding additional uses. This process will include criteria that will determine the sustainability (both social and ecological) of the proposed trail.
- Identify and address any public health and safety concerns of the existing trail system, such as mixed motorized uses (i.e., snowmobiles and automobiles using the same travel route).
- Identify existing trails that are determined to not be ecologically sustainable and/or receive very little use for decommissioning.
- Identify potential new trails in sustainable locations, have a need based on supply & demand and are supported by multiple user groups to assist in the long-term operations and maintenance.
- Establish cost estimates for operating and maintaining the existing and proposed trail system, including any existing backlog of maintenance needs.
- Identify areas with particular compliance concerns and develop strategies and priorities to address these concerns (i.e. signage, education, joint enforcement, etc.).

(Note- On federal lands, the NEPA process may apply and be utilized in order to evaluate any site specific options and alternatives identified by the landscape management group)
## Appendix B: Participant List

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<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Partner Organization Name</th>
<th>In Attendance</th>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>Windham Regional Commission</td>
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<td>Tom</td>
<td>Berry</td>
<td>Senator Patrick Leahy</td>
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<td>Craig</td>
<td>Whipple</td>
<td>Vermont Department of Forests, Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>Wrigley</td>
<td>GMC</td>
<td>X</td>
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