TRAIL ISSUES IN THE GREEN MOUNTAIN NATIONAL FOREST AND SURROUNDING AREAS
A discussion convened by the University of Vermont Extension
Sponsored by the Green Mountain National Forest and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

February 11, 2008 at the Vermont Technical College
Randolph, Vermont

USFS Opening Statement and Welcome:
• Seeking out common threads among stakeholders

Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation
• Coordinating their goals with stakeholders

Introductions-5 minutes each

Appalachian Trail Conservancy
• Membership organization that partners with other organizations
• 4 regional offices-CT to ME
• Primarily coordinators and facilitators
• AT as part of the National Scenic Trail system
• Unit of the NPS-cooperative management system
• GMC as primary partner in VT, GMNF, VTFPR, VYCC, VAST
• Success of volunteers and partnerships through common interests
• Issues-
  o national recognition of this system
  o Enjoyment from citizen stewardship/non-profit staff as well as recreation
  o Volunteer training and skills needed, sawyer training, etc. Administrative and coordination for lands

Catamount Trail Association
• Maintains and builds and promotes X-country skiing
• Maintaining relationships with landowners
• Marketing as a non-profit as a push for organization
• Issues
  o Jumping through hoops can be a roadblock
  o Interested in an expedited process for low-impact users
  o Parking, coordinating with snowmobilers

Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) speaking for Green Mountain Conservancy as well
• Was once Forest Watch
• Concerns about off-road motorized recreation
• FS has duty to maintain ecological values for today’s and future generation
• Careful guardianship and prohibition of uses with high negative impacts
• Decisions should be based on science
  o Issues with motorized uses
    ▪ Snowmobiles-negative impacts on land and other users; traffic and growth of snowmobiles; now studies or analysis has been
performed yet; soundscapes as an issue; disturbance of wildlife and vegetation; literature available
  • ATVs—concerned about similar impacts with snowmobiles
  • NEPA and full public notice should be used for any and all planning
  • See Appendix A for comment submission by CBD

Conservation Law Foundation
  • NE wide organization as well as Lake Champlain and NY interests
  • Shares views with CBD
  • Interested in seeing fulfillment of FS promise to monitor snowmobile impacts on the land and upon other forest users
  • Has seen ecological impacts that USFS has not acknowledged
  • Not just a winter issue—trail construction and reconstruction issues as well
  • Would like more public input as NEPA implies
  • Increasing intensity of use is a growing issue, esp. snowmobiles

Green Mountain Club
  • Protector of the Long Trail
  • Need additional financial resources to maintain the trail
  • Provide a pristine footpath in the woods
  • Need to retain some wild uses along with multiple use
  • Water conservation, endangered species, cultural icons, reduce reliance on traditional transportation

Green Mountain National Forest
  • Manage a resilient transportation system—roads and trails
  • Managing public access to the forest and maintaining
  • Important to local economies
  • New rules and handbooks as guidance
  • Not looking to expand current trails system
  • Looking to making for more resilient and maintained trails for a diversity of users
  • Comprehensive trail assessment to be conducted; want to know where to focus
    • Focus on 2-4 most important issues/goals
    • Achieve goals within 2 years
    • Needs to be sustainable
    • Not here to debate motorized use
    • Opportunities for short connectors and loops, esp. mountain bike use
    • Ecologically and economically sustainability
    • Bike and horse trail trends lead to new opportunities
    • Need to reduce deferral of trail maintenance
    • Need more monitoring within the forest
    • Winter trail challenges—
      • Would like to find priority issues like access via private lands
      • Need a geographic prioritization system
      • Groomed vs. ungroomed trails
      • Need to investigate easements as trails
      • Want to eliminate trails that are not needed
      • Focus dollars on highly used trails
Local Motion
- Burlington based bicycling group
- Multi-use trail promotion via internet
- Would like to expand free online trail maps to the rest of Vermont
- Works with landowners to promote use of trails
- Can work with GMNF to come up with a comprehensive mapping system
- Would like to create further partnerships, Addison County, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, etc.
- Launching forest maps this spring

Marsh Billings Rockefeller NHP
- National Historic Park in Woodstock
- Linkage project between the AT and Park
- Working with multiple organizations to make this happen

Moosalamoo Region
- National recreation area, 1 of 2 in VT
- Scenic highway passes through
- 60-70 miles of trails intensive network within the GMNF
- Substantial decrease in snowmobile use for 2 reasons
  - Major trail no longer accessible
  - Police presence
- Increase in use by young people possibly due to more local use in tough economy
- Not interested in any further trails
- Work with VYCC, Middlebury College, Catamount Trail, etc.
- Major problem-million plus dollars worth of damage

Regional Planning Commissions
- 11 regions in state
- Transportation planners and mappers
- Partner and find community needs-local needs recreation or otherwise
- Multi-modal encouragement, has worked with many types of transportation
- Connector project-trails and busses-point to point hiking and scenic highways

Sierra Club
- Primary interest in NF, preserve, protect, and enjoy
- Environmental impacts
- Recreational conflicts
- Trails and mechanized routes
  - ATVs, snowmobiles, and mountain bikes
  - Exotic species transfer
  - Trash transfer
  - Erosion

Snowmobile trails as winter roads
- Mountain bikes-thrill cyclists as damaging lands
- Off road use
• Mechanized routes must be taken as seriously as any roads
• Preservation of large intact tracts of lands
• Keep uses that are compatible together
• Need a comprehensive study

Vermont Association of Snow Travelers
• Motorized users primarily local volunteer maintenance
• Issues
  o Dwindling funding resources
  o Funding based primarily on membership
  o Lack of snow and age of members creating dwindling funds
  o Maintain existing trail system-private and public
  o Heavily reliant on agreement with USFS
  o Seeking out long-term easements with private landowners
  o Continued access and support needed
  o Collaborative and communicative process wanted

Vermont ATV Sportsman Association
• Like VAST, but for ATVs
• 20 local clubs throughout the state
• Construction and maintenance of trails
• Landowner relations important and rider education
• Local clubs prevent negative impacts from ATV use
• Clubs as members of community and participation in civic projects
• Donations of ATVs to local rescue squads
• ATV essential element for physically impaired individuals to reach the outdoors

Vermont Dept. of Forest, Parks, and Recreation
• Here with rec. trail coordinators
• Been here for 100 years
• Recreational use is on the increase
• Challenges
  o Balancing public demands
  o User conflicts and use conflicts
  o Use of resource increasing, but resources (i.e. staff and funding) dwindling
  o Infrastructure in need of repair
  o Partnerships and corridor management program as a means of success
• Political will and priorities are always shifting
• Priorities are not always clear
• Self-created trails are becoming more of an issue
• Conflicts between users and user groups, becoming more difficult to manage
• Education regarding challenges should be promoted
• We need to cooperate and share more in the future

Vermont Fish and Wildlife
• Protects wildlife species and habitats through Act 240 and Act 250
• A land manager as well
• Most lands purchased through earmarks of sportsman taxes and fees for sportsman use
• Typically a wildlife based approach and not recreation
• New and increasing uses are beginning to conflict with traditional sportsman use
• Looking at special use permits for VTFW lands
• Encourages groups to look into special use permitting system
• Coordinates funding with GMNF as well
• Illegal uses as an issue; mud-bogging, etc.
• Special easement lands specifically managed for endangered species
• Look at original intent of land purchase for coinciding uses

Vermont Horse Council
• Diverse horse community and uses
• Limited use for horses within the GMNF
• Attempting to work where they can with limited funds
• Access is a primary issue
• NEK on Champion lands as well as Groton State Forest as examples of success of local clubs
• Limited trails are an issue-trails are closed unless posted open

Vermont Mountain Bike Association
• Productive relationship being built with USFS, VT Parks & Rec
• Demographics-compelling for families and children, need more data to find out if true
• 20 chapters across Vermont
• 3,000 members strong and growing around state
• Help maintain trails in coordination with access provisions
• Working with Moosalamoo trails system
• $35,000 to be used for trail maintenance
• More designation of trails

Vermont Natural Resources Council- not in attendance

Vermont Highway Off Road Vehicle Association
• Education as a primary goal, respect lands and rights
• Alleviate trespassing issues through education
• Need more lands/access to alleviate the issue
• Donations made to local communities
• Speaking on behalf of CCC-historical use of motorcycle- Law enforcement within the FS used them
• Evidence based science should be used as guiding principles for management
• Plans should include a diversity of users across diverse landscapes
• Not in Vermont within trail capacity but would like to pursue that, just roads at this point

Vermont Trails and Greenways Council
• Organization to plan for future diverse reek activities, across many different corridors
• Currently reviewing strategic plan
• Several members of council are here today
• Use today as a tool seek out issues and help organize

Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
• Organization with mission to teach personal responsibility to youth conservation projects and education projects to achieve this
• Provide a service to accomplish goals of other organizations
• Want to know what organizations are willing to partner and accomplish work within the National Forest
• Strong ability to leverage funds from across diverse fields

Bob Paquin- Vermont Congressional Delegation
• Public lands highway program as a means of funding projects in state
• Awaiting outcome of stimulus package for additional funding as well
• Want to help in any way possible, funding or otherwise

Break for lunch 12:00-1:15

Common Threads: Finding opportunities to work together

Education of Users
Funding
Unauthorized Uses
Science based approach and Environmental Impacts

More…Ideas for working together

• Forest and Parks problems are everyone’s problems. If groups can work to help with trails work it will beneficial.
• A Statewide vision of goals for trails.
• Marketing and outreach
• Incorporating local communities into planning on public lands
• Sustainable partnerships—a long-term conservation approach
  o This has been challenging due to competition and conflict between groups increasing with more recreation and diversity of recreation opportunities
  o Is the state capable of organizing at a higher level?
  o How can we organize effectively?
• Moosalamoo meets with Forest Service once a month for an effective partnership
• Meet with and establish relationships as much as possible
• Creating an effective system for road and trail maintenance
  o Need a uniform guidance system to achieve these goals
• All groups rely on volunteers, why do we not coordinate and organize volunteers statewide?
  o Create guideline for volunteers to use
• How do we get more children more involved in outdoor recreation? Create a passion for the outdoors at an early age and we will have an educated nature-oriented future. They are the leaders of tomorrow.
• Concerns over our aging volunteer base? How do we bring people together and engage the next generation? Let’s create a future that incorporates a system of environmental stewards.
• The best way to care for nature is to get people into the woods, but what do we want to protect and how do we protect it? Do we need to make changes today for tomorrow?
• Is this an opportunity to reassess environmental impacts?
• Trail work can be very cyclical. A volunteer base is available, but it is up to us to get them involved and incorporated into fulfilling the needs of the GMNF.
• Youth in Vermont is moving. How do we retain young people? What are the success stories of our core groups/volunteers? Let’s keep who we have. Focus on our past strengths.
• Education and user dissemination through marketing and outreach. Everyone benefits from having partnerships here. If one person loses out, so does the whole group. Using web-based tools and citizen science to improve overall outdoor ethics message.
• Rules should be promulgated and distributed publicly and clearly.
• Need to pull existing data together to help USFS.
• Let’s have a defined set of rules we can aspire to all use.
• ATC is a link to something greater. A biological corridor that leads to more local conservation efforts.
• There may be some shared interests between non-profits and agencies. “A trail to every classroom” as an example of service based projects. Can work together to make this happen. Another project, “the mega transect,” may require more linkages.
• If we all have websites and codes of ethics why are there negative impacts? At some point users need to take responsibility for their actions.
• Variety of ownerships through state. Number of legal encumbrances across trails. Private landowners may have different restrictions on their easements and properties.
• Local Motion has an effective trail finder program that distributes information and regulations across properties. Getting information from landowners is just as important as disseminating information. Members’ only maps promote higher memberships.
• What about internet access? Forest and parks rely on distributing information to those without internet access.
• Some disobedience may come with any trail.
• How do you measure value for the services available within public lands? In recreation, how do you measure satisfaction? Is what is happening on the ground actually having a positive affect on the public? How do we measure success? Let’s perpetuate the need and want for recreational use within forests by keeping youth involved in any way shape or form.
• We can identify unauthorized use, but CLF believes public land managers have a higher obligation to protecting lands. Certain types of recreation, even within the rules, may have footprint that exceeds the capacity of public land regulation. We need to look at cumulative impacts of authorized uses.
• Observing ecological impacts requires further research. Every type of recreation may have an impact. We just need to acknowledge them and weigh their costs and benefits. Some uses may have greater impacts than others.
• Recreation in Vermont is a critical part of the economy.
- Decisions must be based upon “good” and agreed upon science. Snowmobiling is not on the increase in today’s economy. New machines are even cleaner than most of today’s cars.
- The amount of time that staff deals with misbehavior on state lands could be spent on better work. Ask of all groups and users to let the GMNF know about the negative uses on lands they frequently use.
- We all have recreation on public lands in common. How do we come up with a collective plan across the state? As government employees may come and go, a sustainable partnership could perpetuate effective FS planning.
- 802.241.3683: Phone number for illegal dumping etc. Call if it is absolutely wrong. Get info and relay to Law Enforcement.
- The FS is here to help. Open door for any assistance.
- Can a user fee be integrated into the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum?
- The GMNF relies on partners for trail maintenance. Fees for membership also apply to maintenance, therefore fees have not been considered seriously in the state.
- Focusing on the partnerships we do have particularly in this economy. This may require and broader and more collective partnership for effective future recreation.
- Continue process of building partnerships. We are all in it together. Must make it work for the public in order to keep the funding resources for the future.
- In pulling together science based issues, let’s agree on a baseline. How do you manage the baseline impacts? What is the answer? Can we at least narrow that down? If we use status quo, is that sufficient and how do we use it?
- Is there any current science underway for addressing recreation impacts?
- We need to narrow exactly what we are looking at first.
- GMNF is currently looking at some recreational impacts. Are we looking at the trail itself, wildlife populations, erosion, etc.? What baselines have been identified and where do we want to go from there? Most of the work has been data collection and monitoring. A mix of social sciences and physical sciences to compile. Possibly could make it available online.
- The role of the agency is to determine the best possible uses of the forest, regardless of local partnerships and stakeholders. Serving a higher public interest. To do this we may need greater communication and public input. Transparency within democracy.
- User fees may get in the way of outdoor use especially in tough economic times. They would require high amounts of enforcement as well. Sweat equity should be entered into the equation as well.
- USFS has research stations and data that may be applicable to our problems. Is statistical enumeration an appropriate basis for decision-making?
- Explaining on an individual basis that taxes devoted for USFS are not a bad thing.
- Open to taking a second look at the trail system as well as trying to use the current trail system differently to provide access appropriately for different user groups. Future facilitation of this process may be necessary for certain issues.
- Let’s take a look at the priorities of snowmobile systems. Promote a balance of uses. Open to looking at areas for change, if there is energy to support it.
- A facilitator may be needed to continue this dialogue. Taking a look at the maps, the current system as a common point of reference. Where do issues arise and
let’s take a harder look at them. User groups may have more information than the USFS in some cases.

- Looking at a two year process for a comprehensive review surrounding 3-4 issues. Could lead to more site-specific review. Identify the hotspots to start.
- Where there is a common thread let’s focus on education, volunteers, and youth.
- Where trails cross we have opportunities to work together. Use this process as a means of where there may chances to work together.
- Environmental stewardship message should be the same across the board. Let’s be consistent as much as possible. Where are the trails and what are the behavioral expectations?
- Potential for consistent signage. Can we all agree on a uniform language?
- Provide visitors with a spectrum of recreation opportunities.
- Keep comprehensive review process efficient and effective. What can we do together? How do our goals align?
- Can this lead to job creation within the state? VYCC as an opportunity to change this. Leads to work elsewhere but not here historically. Is this a chance to keep people here?
- Thanks to USFS for the opportunity to be involved. Expanding a volunteer base to share for prioritized needs.
- Linking communities and science bases.
- Combining state and federal land as boon for all organizations.

Closing Statements

MBR: Keep this program going, youth engagement as positive,
CLF: Need to have USFS lead with decisive action at some point
ATC: Stress the power of partnerships
VYCC: Good to see multiple user groups-keep us involved
CTA: Valuable experience and keep involved and working together
Local Motion: Excited to partner with as many people as possible; be broker of online information
CBD: Appreciate openness of USFS, and maintains that USFS needs to come to a definitive conclusion in decision-making, keep process as transparent as possible, and can agreements be lasting?
Moosalamoo: Has a history of bringing stakeholders together and would like to continue the process. A common goal should be reachable.
RPC: How can RPC be productive, technical services can be provided as things become more site-specific
Sierra Club: Interested in science based approach to impacts.
VAST: Partnerships and collaboration are needed for success. VAST is ready to work with others. Challenges in the future.
VT Greenways: Good meeting.
GMC: Positive experience in VT thus far, thanks for the hosting the meeting, and looking forward to more focused conversations.
VASA: ATVs will want access to public land in the future, a small % land needed to connect a private land system. Looking to work collaboratively in the future. Please consider increase of access as loss from recent wilderness designation.
Horse: Positive experience and remember joint use of trails and coordination for future work.
VMBA: Good experience and likes idea of combining state and federal lands. Good networking.
VT Fish and Wildlife: Positive.
CCC: Turn this process into an action plan. Keep kids in the woods.
State Parks and Rec: Opportunity to share ideas is good. Coming up with a common vision for the state is appropriate. Want sound science, and input for part of the process.
USFS: Let’s continue dialogues. Taking home a message for common educational messages. Begin development now. Ratchet down to site-specific areas. Find areas of focus for next time.
Appendix A: Opening Remarks Submitted Electronically

Organizations attending the February 11, 2009 meeting were given the opportunity to submit the opening remarks presented by their organization. The opening remark submissions are presented alphabetically by organization title and include comments made by the Center for Biological Diversity, Green Mountain Club, Green Mountain National Forest, Local Motion, and Vermont Sierra Club.

Center for Biological Diversity
Confronting Off-Road Recreation on the Green Mountain National Forest: Talking Points and Important Facts

Summary
The Forest Service has signaled its intent to make trail-based recreation a major focus for the Green Mountain National Forest. Given the dearth of public lands in the Northeast region, and the large number of people within a day’s drive of the Forest (approximately 70 million), the emphasis on trail recreation makes good sense, in principle.

However, not all forms of recreation are the same in their impacts, and the Forest Service has a duty above all to safeguard the environmental integrity and greater public values of the Forest. The interests of recreational user groups must be subservient to the overarching need to protect clean air and water, imperiled species, ecosystem health, climate, and a precious heritage of natural, undeveloped landscapes.

Public lands are uniquely able to provide important values and ecological services that private lands usually do not. The fact that public lands are limited, and that not every activity can be accommodated on every acre, means that careful guardianship of these lands requires selectivity and limit-setting. Some activities have so many negative impacts, such as pollution, excessive noise, and damage to water and soils, that they should be prohibited from public lands entirely. Others must be seriously reconsidered and probably curbed, so as to lessen their impact on the national forest.

Whether or not there is a strong constituency for a certain activity, the Forest Service’s job is to make choices based on science and the highest and best use of public lands. It is not the job of the Forest Service to say “yes” to every type of recreation that might be possible on the Forest.

Snowmobiling on the GMNF
Snowmobiles are off-road vehicles (ORVs) that are used in the snow. Despite a common belief that their over-snow use makes them relatively benign, they have many of the same impacts on the environment, and on other outdoor recreationists, as ATVs, dirt bikes, and other kinds of ORVs.

The snowmobile network on the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) has grown from nothing to nearly 500 miles over the last few decades. Snowmobile traffic on the Forest as grown also. There has never been a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of snowmobiling on the Forest, nor a public process by which the size and scope of the snowmobile program could be addressed by all interested parties, not just snowmobile proponents and the Forest Service. The lack of analysis and public involvement with regard to snowmobiling has led to the gradual erosion of many important values of the GMNF, including natural quiet in winter and shrinkage of remote wildlife habitat and areas for primitive, non-motorized backcountry recreation. There have been other costs, as well.

Pollution
Two-stroke engines, used by the majority of snowmobiles, dump 25-30% of their fuel, a mixture of gas and oil, directly into the environment. This is in contrast to automobiles, which have 97% fewer emissions. Thus for every snowmobile fill-up (10-12 gallons), approximately three gallons of raw fuel ends up dumped into the environment.
Seven hours on a snowmobile produces more pollution than driving a car over 100,000 miles—the equivalent of circling the earth four times.

Snowmobiles discharge 1,000 times more carbon monoxide than automobiles. CO levels behind a single snowmobile are equal to exposure limits set by the state of Montana. Snowmobile riders who travel behind others are particularly at risk of CO poisoning.

Pollutants dumped into the snowpack from snowmobiles accumulate until snowmelt, creating a sudden pulse of toxins into aquatic ecosystems—increasing the levels of these contaminants up to 30 times. Research has shown that these exhaust components can move into the food chain, through absorption by fish and aquatic invertebrates.

Snowmobile travel over frozen ponds and lakes, legal in the state of Vermont, means the direct discharge of exhaust pollutants into the water.

Noise
The legal limit for noise levels for a snowmobile in the state of Vermont is 73 decibels at 50 feet. At a recent snowmobile event on the national forest, decibel levels for individual snowmobiles—going slowly on flat ground—were measured at 75-85 decibels.

Not only are snowmobiles loud up close; they can be heard from a long distance away. A study of snowmobile noise at Grand Teton National Park found that a group of 12 “quiet” snowmobiles were audible nearly two miles away.

Wildlife
Snowmobiles can disturb and displace wintering wildlife. Consequences for ungulates are best understood. Repeated exposure to snowmobiles over the course of a winter can deplete crucial energy reserves, increasing winter mortality. Research has shown that stress levels rise in elk and wolves when snowmobiles pass. This is so even for animals habituated to frequent snowmobile traffic.

Snow compaction caused by snowmobiles is often overlooked, but can cause severe impacts to wildlife, especially small mammals that depend on the “subnivean” environment, between the snow surface and the ground surface, for winter survival.

Meadows are often laced with many snowmobile paths. Most compaction occurs in the first pass of a snowmobile, so damage can be widespread. Compacted snow is more difficult for deer, foxes, and other to paw through to get to forage or prey.

Vegetation
Snowmobiles can cause significant damage to plants. Exposed roots, seedlings, shrubs, and saplings may be abraded and broken. Even plants buried in snow can be harmed by snow compaction. E.g. seed germination is delayed or does not occur due to later snowmelt.

According to a study in Nova Scotia, productivity of plants can drop following a winter of being ridden over by snowmobiles.

Route Network, Construction, and Maintenance
Groomed snowmobile routes are usually at least four feet wide; most on the GMNF are at least eight feet wide. Snowmobiles travel at speeds of 25-35 mph on these routes; sometimes much faster. Speed and unsafe vehicle operation poses dangers to both snowmobile riders and pedestrians. For all these reasons and more, these are not “trails” in the conventional sense of the word. They are winter roads, and they should be understood and managed as such.
Though some snowmobile routes are co-located with Forest Service roads, many are not. In an important respect, the GMNF is a more motorized landscape in winter than in the summer months. Many of the problems associated with roads and motorized recreation generally characterize snowmobiling, including habitat fragmentation, disturbance of sensitive wildlife, and the loss of naturally quiet, peaceful landscapes.

Being more like roads than trails, snowmobile routes often require culverts—a particularly insidious problem for aquatic systems, which are fragmented by improperly placed culverts. Fish and aquatic invertebrates may find it impossible to navigate culverts, or culverts may lead to concentrated flows that erode streams.

Snow compaction retards melting of snow, and thus leads to muddy trails and roads, which are then susceptible to significant damage, erosion, and enlargement. This is particularly problematic where ATVs utilize snowmobile routes in the non-snow months. Eventually, damage and drainage problems on snowmobile routes can lead to the “need” for significant route maintenance or relocation/reconstruction, usually involving heavy equipment and further disturbance of soils, water, and hydrological regimes.

In order to allow snowmobile routes to be constructed and repaired, the Forest Service often grants volunteer maintenance crews permission to access the national forest by ATVs. Thus, the sheer existence of the routes themselves and the need for maintenance leads to even more motorized entry of backcountry areas, some of them otherwise fairly remote.

**ATVs on the GMNF**

ATVs are illegal on the national forest, except in special instances, as cited above. However, illegal use is rampant in certain places, and the Forest Service has been largely unsuccessful in reining it in.

ATV proponents assert that if they are given legal routes, the problems with illegal use will diminish. This is wrong on several counts.

First, it ignores the impacts associated with ATVs, whether on trails “legally” or not. ATVs have many of the same impacts on the environment as snowmobiles, including pollution, disturbance of wildlife, and harm to soil and water. Furthermore, they are even more disruptive and reviled by most non-motorized users than snowmobiles.

Second, it assumes that if legal routes exist, ATV riders will stick to them and not “pioneer” others. This has been shown to be patently untrue nearly every place this approach has been tried. Legal routes are simply the jumping off points for illegal routes. The problem on the GMNF would only be compounded by allowing ATVs some legal access onto the Forest.

Third, ATVs are even more demanding of road-like conditions than snowmobiles, especially if there’s an interest in trying to reduce problems with erosion and sedimentation. Hardened route surfaces are much better than soft trail surfaces at resisting the wear and tear imposed by ATVs. However, hardened routes are essentially roads, with all the problems associated with them.

Law enforcement demands for policing ATVs, whether “legal” or not, are very high. The Forest Service simply does not have the budget to adequately protect national forest resources or the experiences of other recreational users, if ATVs are granted legal access to the Forest. Problems will grow, not diminish.

**The Solution**

Keep ATVs off the GMNF.
Conduct a scientific analysis of snowmobiling and other ORV impacts. This should include a literature review of studies done on impacts to air, water, soils, vegetation, wildlife, climate, and public health, as well as carefully selected, scientifically controlled studies either on the Forest or in a comparable area in the state.

Follow the requirements of NEPA in administering Special Use Permits for snowmobile group rides, for guides, for route maintenance and construction. This includes no CEs, and providing opportunity for public notice, comment and appeal.

Follow the requirements of NEPA in assessing the total snowmobile network before any further projects are permitted. Impacts to soil, water, air, wildlife, and climate should be included.

Identify snowmobile routes for closure that cause particularly intensive or problematic environmental harm, fragment core unroaded or lightly roaded areas, are little used, difficult and/or expensive to maintain, are a frequent or excessive source of conflict, and/or are a safety hazard to other national forest visitors.

Public notice, participation, and opportunity to weigh in on decision making must be a part of any future “trail” recreation plan. Any agreement must be enforceable. Without that level of accountability, an agreement made today will have little meaning in the future.

Green Mountain Club

Green Mountain Club or GMC, is the Founder, Maintainer and Protector of the Long Trail, a 272-mile 99-year-old hiking trail which provides the original, traditional, recreational use of the Green Mountains. The Long Trail has long served as an organizing principle of Vermont’s recreation and public land management and is a precious icon of our rugged landscape.

You ask for the road blocks for GMC to operate and maintain an existing trail system. Besides shrinking public funding, I prefer Reality to Road Block. And that reality is we work with necessary and important permit processes just like everyone else to effectively manage our public lands. We need additional financial resources to allow one of the oldest public/private outdoor partnerships in Vermont to keep up with deteriorating Long Trail shelters, bridges and treadway so that little problems don’t turn into big ones.

The most important issues that affect our constituency enjoying the trail system? GMC is conservative and cautious in the very best Vermont way, and our goal is to cooperatively manage the Long Trail to provide a consistent experience from generation to generation. Our guiding principle is to provide a pristine walk in the woods, one that has been called the Footpath in the Wilderness since the 1930s. Our trail corridor cannot absorb an infinite amount of competing use without ceasing to be. We recognize that we do not exist in a vacuum and that these are multi-use forests, but it’s important that our public lands retain some wild places and challenge that people can seek out on hiking trails.

Other issues related to trail use and impacts of recreational use that need to be addressed to ensure good management of the forest resource? Wise trail use and development should conserve precious water resources, protect threatened and endangered species, preserve cultural artifacts, maintain viable wildlife habitat, reduce reliance on private transportation, and connect people to nature to ensure Vermont, with its Long Trail, remains at the forefront of public recreation in America’s forests.
Green Mountain National Forest
Overview (Meg)

- One of the most important focus areas (strategic goal) for us over the next 10 years is managing a resilient, sustainable and well maintained transportation system with partners (roads and trails). We can’t do it alone... we need you, and there is no are more important to the public than managing their access to the forest and their key way to connect and learn from natural landscapes.
- Trails are also of economic importance to communities and Vermont.
- In addition to recently revised National manuals and handbooks, our Forest Plan provides overall direction for trail management on the forest.
- Forest is not looking to expand the physical infrastructure of our existing trail system.
- However, we are looking to better utilize our current physical infrastructure for an increasing diversity of users where appropriate, and make the trail system more resilient (to more frequent storm events and higher intensity storms, better maintained) or reduce trail miles that are not in good locations, aren’t being adequately maintained, get low use, or are duplicative.
- Our Forest Plan calls for a Forest-wide comprehensive trail assessment and planning effort to be conducted. The scope and scale of this review is not defined in the Forest Plan and is something we need to determine. One of my purposes today is to get your thoughts on the most important areas we should focus on.
- My desires and sideboards for this effort are that 1) we focus on the 2-4 most important outcomes or public issues that should be addressed at a Forest-wide scale, and 2) that it’s achievable within 2 years (For these reasons, it will not be a NEPA analysis in and of itself, but it can lead to NEPA or provide the basis and rationale for site specific priorities for NEPA. It could also identify priorities for management, administrative actions, or lead to changes in forest policies or practices).
- What I’d like to do next is put some possible ideas on the table for areas we can work together on collaboratively over the next two years… summer and winter system.

Possible Focus Areas for Summer Trail System Comprehensive Review (Chad)

- Forest is not looking to expand the physical infrastructure of our existing trail system unless there’s a need for the addition of short sections that serve as connector routes, improve on existing locations, increase access for those with varying abilities, or incorporate the North Country Trail (hiking).
- We also need to address which trails we are going to keep or do away with on lands we have acquired.
- Uses are changing as demographics change. People are seeking more water-based opportunities. There are more horse and especially bike users.
- We have some opportunities to allow other uses/users on our trail system where appropriate. The AT/LT isn’t appropriate, but we have other existing trails where some of these uses could be allowed without significant user conflicts or environmental effects OR connect to horse and bike trails on other lands adjacent to the Forest.
- We have a desperate need to work together to improve the information that summer trail users get and development of a forest-wide strategy for monitoring trail uses and managing unauthorized use in concert with our partners or by engaging citizens and volunteers (easy to use protocols for monitoring or web based tools).

Possible Focus Areas for Winter Trail System Comprehensive Review (Meg or Chad or Rob)

- Again, physical infrastructure is in place, but winter challenges are a little different.
- Identify priority routes and portals for the snowmobile system. Increasing private land changes in ownership or fragmentation is resulting in desired changes to the snowmobile system in and around us. The Forest can’t keep up with or absorb all the desires for change, so we need a sense of the priorities across the Forest.
• Take a comprehensive look at the need for groomed vs. ungroomed trails.
• Identify priority routes and portals. We can assist with prioritizing and securing easements for important portals or segments that cross private lands because we can often offer private landowners reciprocal easements.
• Look at and review the snowmobile system for how it interacts with the X-country ski, jouiring, dog racing and other winter uses to better provide separation of uses (we believe this is a bigger problem on the south end of the forest).
• Eliminate trails or segments we don’t want or are not a priority so we can focus our maintenance and management on the most important trails.
• We have an increasing problem in some locations with people cutting their own Backcountry Downhill skiing and telemarking trails.

Locations on the Forest where we have the biggest issues described above and may need site specific analysis to resolve (in order of priority):
• South end- South of Route 9 where we have acquired the most land over time.
• South end- White Rocks Recreation Area
• South end- Dover-Wardsborough Area
• North end- Recent Flood area (currently already looking at upper white river)

Local Motion
I’m Brooke Scatchard from Local Motion, a Burlington based non-profit focused on promotion and expansion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. I’m the Trail Coordinator for Local Motion’s Trail Finder project. I also work with the Fellowship of the Wheel, the Chittenden County chapter of VMBA.

The Trail Finder seeks to inventory hiking, biking, skiing, and walking trails in Vermont. The maps for Chittenden County have been completed and can be seen at www.localmotion.org/trails. Our plan for the second phase of the project is to map all of the trails and associated points of interest in Addison County the northern half of the National Forest.

Along with a Google Earth based map of the trail, the Trail Finder will contain information about the trail surface, it’s managing group, allowed uses, length, available amenities, nearby attractions, and directions to get there. All of this information will be presented in a user-friendly, searchable website that will be an asset for both local outdoor enthusiasts and visitors alike. We'll be launching phase two in the spring.

The next steps for the project include partnering with other outdoor organizations to bring the Trail Finder to the rest of Vermont. We have applied for a grant to map central and northern Vermont with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, RAPAC, and Upper Valley Trails Alliance.

This spring Local Motion is also working with the Fellowship of the Wheel to host enhanced, members-only versions of our trail maps on the Trail Finder. We see this as a model that can be adapted to work collaboratively with other trail managers. Our vision for the Trail Finder is a free, online, statewide multi-use trail database that encourages partnerships with similar organizations to expand the use and awareness of non-motorized trails.

Vermont Sierra Club
The interest of the Sierra Club is to apply its motto, “Preserve, protect and enjoy the planet,” to issues surrounding trails. We are pleased that the Green Mountain National Forest and the Vermont Department of Forests and Parks are examining issues concerning trails on their lands.
The primary concern of the Sierra Club in connection with trails and mechanized routes on the Green Mountain National Forest is their environmental impacts. We are also concerned with recreational conflicts, but these, though important, are secondary.

I have distinguished between trails and mechanized routes. This is necessary, because from an ecological standpoint, virtually all mechanized or highly constructed routes are equivalent to roads. We are principally concerned about mechanized routes used by three types of off-road vehicles: all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes, snowmobiles, and mountain bikes.

Such routes have essentially all the environmental impacts of roads: disruption of surface hydrology, erosion, siltation, water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, trash transport and dispersal, exotic species transport, obliteration of remoteness, increased human disturbance, and facilitation of hunting. In many cases, ATV routes especially, impacts are arguably even worse than roads, because ATV routes generally do not have surfaces hardened to resist erosion, and regular law enforcement usually cannot use them.

About the only road impacts that might be missing from mechanized routes are road kill, and in some cases canopy opening. If impacts differ, it is only in degree.

Snowmobile so-called trails are winter roads, and have greater impact than commonly realized. They typically require mechanical excavation for construction and maintenance, include drainage structures, often lie on steep slopes, and host vehicles with highly polluting two-cycle engines. Many attract illicit ATV use as well.

Mountain bikes are a special mechanized case. I own one, and I suspect most Sierra Club members own them. However, with few exceptions we are utility cyclists rather than thrill cyclists: our bikes substitute for SUVs or pickup trucks to negotiate four-wheel-drive roads to reach hiking trails.

We have already received complaints from walkers in the north unit of the Forest of thrill cyclists using unauthorized roads and trails, and even going off trails, challenging themselves with vernal pools and other apparently attractive muddy places. As well as causing damage, riding mountain bikes off Forest roads is incompatible with walkers seeking connection with the forest environment rather than thrills. They also destroy remoteness, a scarce and valuable quality in our motorized world.

Thus, mechanized routes of all sorts require great care to plan and monitor, and their impacts must be taken as seriously as those of roads. In particular, as constraints on energy use and carbon emissions tighten, motorized routes must be kept to a minimum.

Our primary interest in the Green Mountain National Forest is the preservation of large, intact ecosystems. Therefore, we strongly recommend that whatever funding the Forest can devote to managing mechanized routes should be devoted to relocating them out of the cores of large contiguous tracts of land to peripheral areas, and hardening them for co-location of compatible uses—for instance, horses and snowmobiles. Mountain biking might be compatible with those two uses, but it is not compatible with hiking.

Second, funding should be used to repair problems on the existing trails that remain after re-aligning the network, especially drainage and erosion problems.

Co-location of compatible uses would reduce the total network length. It also would make the mechanized and/or horse network more accessible to excavation machinery, thus more economical and less disturbing for maintenance and repairs, because most of it would be closer to roads.
We also strongly urge the Forest Service to make a comprehensive study of the cumulative effects of mechanized recreation in the Forest, including the impact of decades of exhaust emissions on soil, water and wildlife.

Thank you.