Landscape Management Work Group Notes:

Participants:
John Bennett (work group facilitator), Amy Diller (CTA), Alexis Nowalk (VAST), Patrick Kell (VMBA), Dave Hardy (GMC), Tom Myers (CCC), Jim Henderson (BCRPC), Dwight Gies (Mad River Path Assoc), Mike Benoit (VT Horse Council), Jer Marr (GMNF), Chad VanOrmer (GMNF), Clare Rock (Central VT RPC), Holly Knox (GMNF), Justin Kenney (VYCC), Steve McLeod (VT Traditions Coalition)

Introductions, interests and why people are at the table:
- Access opportunities (ex. motorized bike use)
- Net loss in opportunities from Wilderness
- Trail opportunities for mtn bikes, snowmobiles, horseback riding, x/c skiing, hiking, etc.
- Long Trail
- Participating in a functional process and goals that produce achievable deliverables
- Sharing information and increasing communication with other user groups/partners
- Ensuring multiple use trails are in right place with right safety precautions
- Preserve/develop/protect GMNF
- Identifying trail connections and promoting outdoor activity
- Multi-use where appropriate and separating shared corridors where safety is questionable
- Conserving land against future development and potential trail closures
- Trail maintenance for 4 season use
- Liability of user groups on various properties
- Potential access/lack of access on new land acquisitions by GMNF…needing open and honest processes by FS

Objectives for this work group (in blue) and comments from participants (in black):

1. 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. The issue is not looking at particular trails but instead, addressing the transitions from federal to State and private land. The Forest Service relies on many trail organizations to help us manage trails that run across federal, State and private lands. How can we identify the high priority areas that we want to protect in perpetuity (or at least longer term) so that trails do not end up as dead ends when property owners change? Investment in trail system is lost when trail segments are cut off. Where can we find portals that are protected for long-term management? Question: does this issue get at managing for various uses too? In some places you may easily get permission for one activity but not another. This objective is one of our greatest challenges. When a trail is vulnerable, it is difficult to spend the time and investment…how can we minimize vulnerability first and then address the multiple use issues. This objective will tie closely with the work of the stewardship and education group.

2. 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 Challenge is the need to a) identify what key factors we will use to say an area is vulnerable (deer winter areas? Steep slopes?) and b) where are those vulnerable areas across landscape? This topic overlaps with the science group…they may be able to help us identify parameters and define what are unacceptable ecological impacts. May need to consider that it is not just trails impacting ecological resources but ecological resources (ex. beaver) impacting existing trail network. In addition, need to consider that a net loss of trail is also an unacceptable consequence of the social kind….need to balance ecological and social impacts while looking at if trail closures are appropriate. Question was raised about how easy it is for GMNF to implement desired reroutes (if the group were to identify them). Brief discussion about Forest Service NEPA process.

3. 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. There are places where multiple uses are appropriate and places where multiple use is not desirable. Focus is on existing trail system and seeing if we can add more uses. Ned to consider season of use!! Should broaden this from multi-use to also multi-experience (such as difficulty level,
groomed versus backcountry). May need to establish criteria that will help us determine what uses are compatible on a given trail, while also considering that for some user groups (ex. VAST) multiple use designation is up to the land owner. If terrain can support multiple uses but the uses are not compatible…can we separate use based on days (ex. can hike with dogs on T/Th but not M/W/F.

4. 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). Safety concerns are priority for Forest Service to deal with. Example of snowmobile use on plowed road…recipe for disaster. Mountain bikes and horseback riders may be best separated. Road crossings are another safety concern (ex. snowmobiles running down state highway instead of a direct crossing). Question: does this include public health issues (restrooms, water quality). Can we identify abuse of dispersed recreation sites (places where trash and human waste are a problem).

5. Identify existing trails that are determined to not be ecologically sustainable and/or receive very little use for decommissioning. Nobody wants access to trails that are not sustainable and require a constant maintenance battle…if this is the case the trail is probably not meant to be there! Must consider not only ecological sustainability but maintenance capabilities. What are trail standards that must be met on different lands? Must consider that the So Zone of the GMNF is largely one giant wetland (as it is on a plateau)…may need to consider Taconic Range as a recreation resource due to different geological nature there, a place where you can make up for trail losses in other areas.

6. 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. Need to consider potential for more loop trails. What are our coarse filters (no trails in wetlands for example). Supply and demand based on user data (ex. Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring and National Survey on Recreation and the Environment). Forest Service should consider asking local clubs if there is a need for additional trails-soliciting feedback in an enhanced manner other than just national surveys. This will be a difficult objective to tackle as trends are difficult to predict and demands may change…need wiggle room to accommodate potential changes. Should include transparency and inclusiveness in this process (of identifying trail needs and potential trail locations.

7. Establish cost estimates for operating and maintaining the existing and proposed trail system, including any existing backlog of maintenance needs. Federal and State may take lead for identifying this on their respective lands; however, partners may be particularly impacted by other costs (such as acquisition and easement costs). All groups should help to identify areas needing attention, if multi-use…opportunity to country barter the different skills that neighbors/organizations may have. Give and take on the local level…and some companies offer reduced rates to non-profit organizations doing volunteer type work. Perhaps we could generate a list of resources (a laundry list of businesses or people who can contribute services or reduced rate rentals).

8. Identify areas with particular compliance concerns and develop strategies and priorities to address these concerns (i.e. signage, education, joint enforcement, etc.).

Suggestion to add an additional bullet (#9): Goal to avoid net loss of trail opportunity

Logistics for this working group:
NOTE: Steering Committee is considering having several spatially oriented meetings-so local experts can join in discussion when we review site-specific areas.

Next step: take today’s notes and refine objectives of this work group. Next meeting we can adjust the result, prioritize, and agree to move on.

1. How often will we meet?
2. What venue will we meet in (conference call, in person, etc)? Set up a Google group and/or voice thread (voice thread allows people to post maps and make comments on it vocally-yikes we are so technologically advanced!!). Chad will set up a Google group.