Trail Collaborative
Green Mountain National Forest and Surrounding Areas
Collaborative Planning Process Proposal
September 3, 2009

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, identifying/agreeing upon 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 who 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, as necessary, appropriate, and feasible.
- 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 municipal and regional planning 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 State Dept of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- Meg Mitchell – Green Mountain National Forest
- Chad VanOrmer – 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 the overall trail collaborative

User Compliance, Stewardship and Education 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 available as tools to address resource and social issues, and
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 representatives from different levels 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 transcending 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 priority trails for management in perpetuity through identifying land interest acquisition (easements, fee, etc.) and/or management 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 identifying and/or developing 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 that receive very little use for decommissioning.
- Identify potential new trails that are in sustainable locations, have a need based on supply and 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.)