

Testimony before House Corrections and Institutions Committee

Green Mountain Club: Jean Haigh, Maisie Howard, Dave Hardy

28 January 2014

Opening Statement by Jean Haigh, President Green Mountain Club

- Green Mountain Club (GMC) is a 501(c)(3) organization of over 10,000 members that maintains, defends and protects the 272-mile Long Trail
- Over 1,000 people annually volunteer time and energy to maintain those trails
- Thank you for allowing us to explain our appropriation request for the Budget Adjustment of FY2015

GMC Land Protection Campaign by Maisie Howard, Interim Executive Director and Director of Development

- Our Land Protection Campaign began in 1986 when we learned 30 miles of Long Trail was on land up for sale and 30 more miles had no guarantee of public access
- Over 25,000 acres of Vermont mountain and forest land have been acquired from willing sellers and nearly all of it has been transferred to Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
- We still have 6.5 miles of Long Trail and 4.5 miles of side trail left to conserve
- We propose to acquire the Thomas tract with our \$150,000 budget adjustment request; this is an important part of a price tag of approximately \$220,000+
- This acquisition is important to the state to link an outlying property to the rest of Mt Mansfield State Forest, and is needed for our Long Trail relocation associated with our Winooski bridge project

History of Outstanding State Appropriations by Dave Hardy Director of Trail Programs

- State appropriations were granted in 2000 and 2001 for bridges and trail building and procurement of trail corridor land or easement
- Work began to fine tune trail relocation plans in 2000; these are complicated processes that require time and funds to get right
- Our Long Trail relocation and bridge across the Lamoille River was completed in 2005
- GMC's original plan across the Winooski Valley was approved in 1989 and moved to the center of Bolton in 2004 owing to railroad right of way issues; we needed an at grade RR crossing
- Years of negotiations with landowners led to another adjustment of our planned relocation further west to the Sarah Holbrook Bolton Town Forest in 2009 after a landowner finally said no way

Testimony before House Corrections and Institutions Committee
Green Mountain Club: Jean Haigh, Maisie Howard, Dave Hardy
28 January 2014

History of Outstanding State Appropriations (continued)

- In 2010 we achieved a crossing agreement in principle with the railroad and began land negotiations leading to the Smith tract acquisition
- We began our bridge permit process in 2011 with the Bolton Zoning Board and received our Conditional Use Permit in 2013; bridge design work by VHB of North Ferrisburgh paralleled our permit process
- In October 2013 we signed a contract for bridge footing and anchors that would fully spend the existing remaining state appropriation dollars with a specified completion date of Dec 31
- We hit rocks with our designed screw pile system at 13-feet in November and had to redesign footings and pilings; we now have a schedule for completion and full spending of existing appropriations in Winter 2014
- We are on schedule to complete bridge and open our trail relocation late summer 2014.

Closing Statements by Jean Haigh

- The current request for an appropriation of \$150,000 will defray the total cost (\$220,000+) of Thomas plus closing costs, a high priority for both the MMSF and GMC
- Green Mountain Club has a few more trail relocations to complete the final alignment of the Long Trail over the next decade or so
- **Excepting the two appropriations specified to crossing the Long Trail's two major river valleys in 2000 and 2001, all state appropriations have been for land acquisition for Long Trail corridor and State Forest priorities**
- **We have secured a loan so that costs will not delay completion of the bridge; GMC is committed to raising bridge funds from private sources**
- The public monies leverage private dollars and expertise to help achieve a public land corridor in a cost-efficient manner
- Thank you for this opportunity to clarify the need for this appropriation and report on the seminal initial outlay of funds to achieve crossings of important valleys and provide an intact Long Trail experience for everyone.