

ABBY LONG
2020 NEK DAY @ STATEHOUSE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, FISH & WILDLIFE

Thank you to the NEK Collaborative for organizing another celebratory NEK Day at the Statehouse.

And thank you to the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife for your time and willingness to listen.

My name is Abby Long, Executive Director Kingdom Trail Association. Kingdom Trails is a nonprofit trail organization located in the NEK- Burke, Lyndonville, Kirby, and Essex's Country's East Haven

This past year we celebrated our 25th anniversary dedicated to our mission of providing recreation and education opportunities by managing, maintaining, and building trails to foster the health of our local community, surrounding environment, and regional economy.

We strive to accomplish this mission by offering miles of quality, nonmotorized, multi-use, all season and all level of all ability trails.

But before I go any further, I cannot stress enough that our trails are solely made possible by 97 private landowners who so generously allow our trails to cross their beautiful properties.

These landowners, neighbor after neighbor, my own neighbors even, see the vision, see the asset, see the positive impact Kingdom Trails is having in one of the most economically and socially challenged regions of the state.

That is why they are willing to allow access on their private land to others.

They receive no benefit by having trails on their land, other than the knowledge that they are contributing to uplifting their community.

Therefore, I must protect Kingdom Trail's relationship with our 97 private landowners and their property.

Our landowners do not want the uncertainty that Act250 jurisdiction may be applied to their properties.

And this feeling goes beyond Kingdom Trails.

70% of public trails in Vermont, trail that are part of the designated VT State Trail System, which KT is a part of, are on private property, dependent on the goodwill and commitment of private landowners. VMBA Chapters, the Catamount Trail, Green

Mtn. Club, VAST, to name a few, have over 12,000 private landowners spanning the entire state.

And these trail groups believe there is a more improved way to address the concern of how Act 250 is being applied to recreational trails.

And unless we work together to revise a more encouraging way, there will be a chilling effect, ramifications throughout the state on landowners' willingness to participate, or continue to participate, in any voluntary arrangement to host trails in Vermont.

A large group of motorized and non-motorized trail organizations, many of who I just listed, have recently formed the Vermont Trail Alliance. Kingdom Trails is proud to be a part of the VTA.

We are trail users and conservationists dedicated to building environmentally sound and sustainable trails, with the majority of trail projects focused on improvements and maintenance.

We simultaneously educate and inspire stewardship amongst trail users, local community, youth, and volunteers. Many new trail projects are focused on making important connections to enhance public access and provide more Vermont communities with the myriad benefits of trails.

The primary focus of the VTA has been working on the creation a new program that would be an alternative to Act 250 regulation for recreational trails.

This would place the responsibility on trail organizations to site, build and maintain recreational trails in an environmentally responsible manner guided by a robust set of Best Management Practices.

VTA has been working diligently and collaboratively with the Forest Partnership and the State to design such a program and still have work to do, but we have made great progress, and I personally have enjoyed being part of the process.

I understand that you will hear testimony from VTA, FP and State in the coming days with more detail.

But for now, I ask, especially as you are in the process of reviewing Act250 and the next 50 years, please work with us, reach out for our input, and consider the stakeholders and consequences, in order to find an alternative more appropriate oversight process for recreational trails, to further continue and advance the Kingdom, the entire state of Vermont, as a leader in outdoor recreation balancing our community's economic interests and stewardship.

Thank you, I am so grateful.

