

Vermont House Committee on Corrections and Institutions
Chair: Representative Alice M. Emmons
Testimony by Mike DeBonis
Executive Director, Green Mountain Club, Inc.
Tuesday, March 16, 2021

Good morning, my name is Mike DeBonis and I am the executive director of the Green Mountain Club. Thank you, Chair Emmons and members of the committee, for inviting the club to speak to you today.

The 111-year old Green Mountain Club is the founder and maintainer of Vermont's Long Trail – the oldest long-distance hiking trail in the United States. The Long Trail runs for 272-miles along the crest of the Green Mountains from Massachusetts to Canada.

In 1985 the Vermont Legislature, recognized the Long Trail as a *“unique, historic and irreplaceable resource, whose protection is of great benefit to the people of the State of Vermont”* and resolved that the *“General Assembly supports the efforts of the Green Mountain Club to protect the Long Trail System.”*

The words of the General Assembly have even more resonance as COVID -19 has amplified the importance of outdoor public spaces. This past hiking season saw a steady 35% increase in use across the Long Trail System. The ability to spend time and escape to the outdoors whether on the Long Trail or a local park has proven essential.

The Green Mountain Club launched the Long Trail Protection Campaign in 1986, and over the last thirty-five years, the Club has worked with private landowners; the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation; and partner organizations to protect over 88 miles of the Long Trail and conserve more than 25,000 acres of land.

Over 17,500 acres has been added to the Vermont State Forest system thanks to over \$3.5 Million in appropriations funding through the state's capital bill.

Nobody had a global pandemic in mind 30 plus years ago when making the decision to protect the Long Trail System, But the pandemic shows us now the importance of that decision and the value public lands have in the lives of Vermonters.

I am pleased to share with the committee a recent Long Trail protection success and current opportunity.

The success:

In 2019, the General Assembly generously provided \$130,000 for the Coddington Hollow Long Trail Acquisition Project. This 160-acre property that straddles the Johnson-Waterville town line hosts 1/3 of a mile of the Long Trail, I am happy to report that this property was successfully conserved in the fall of 2020 with the land being added to the Long Trail State Forest.

The Opportunity:

Last year, the club was in negotiations with a landowner in Johnson that had potential to be an exciting addition to the Long Trail State Forest and a key piece of land in the club's effort to protect the Long Trail and provide much needed trailhead parking in Johnson.

At the end of 2020, The Club in partnership with the Trust for Public Land purchased the 12.9 acre Judevine property. This parcel hosts a log landing that will become trailhead parking, Long Trail treadway, and forestland around the Long Trail.

The Green Mountain Club is seeking a Legislative appropriation of \$85,000 which includes 75% of the land purchase price, and project and closing costs (Survey, Appraisal, title, environmental analysis, establishment of a trailhead parking area, contribution to the state stewardship fund). The Club and TPL will cover 25% of the acquisition cost, project management costs, and GMC easement stewardship funds.

The Green Mountain Club has been working to protect this portion of the Long Trail for 34 years. This 12.9 acre parcel is an important piece of trail land that will close a long-standing gap in the Long Trail corridor in northern Vermont and bring us closer to our shared goal of forever protecting the Long Trail System.

Thank you.

Michael DeBonis
Executive Director
Green Mountain Club