

February 2
2023

Introduction to the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

House Agriculture, Food Resiliency and Forestry Committee

Nick Bennette, Executive Director, the Vermont Mountain Bike Association
Co-Chair, Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

Cindy Locke, Executive Director, the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers
Treasurer, Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

About the VTGC

The consolidated, expert voice and support hub for recreational trails in Vermont.

As of 2021, our organizational members:

- Represent 50,000+ individual members
- Log 100,000+ hours of volunteer time annually
- Manage and maintain 7,750+ miles of trails
- Support 50,000+ jobs statewide through the broader impact of our work
- Steward trails on private land, which hosts over 70% of public access trails in Vermont
- Partner closely with state and federal agencies to manage trails on public land



VTGC Members

Comprised of over 50 trail-related organizations and individuals

- 18 State-wide Trail Stewardship organizations
- 10 Regional Trail Stewardship organizations
- 6 Local/Community Groups
- 7 Townships & Municipalities
- 7 State/Federal Agencies (ex-officio)
- 5 Individual and Commercial members

<https://vermonttgc.org/members>



VTGC Board

- Nick Bennette, Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA), Co-Chair
- Danny Hale, Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association (VASA), Co-Chair
- Mariah Keagy, Sinuosity Flowing Trails, Co-Vice Chair
- RJ Thompson, Vermont Huts Association, Co-Vice Chair
- Cindy Locke, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), Treasurer
- Greg Western, Cross Vermont Trail, Secretary
- Abby Long, Kingdom Trails Association
- Matt Williams, Catamount Trail Association
- Caitrin Maloney, Velomont Trail Collective
- Carolyn Lawrence, Stowe Trails Partnership
- Rachel Batz, Town of Dorset
- Rosy Metcalfe, Independent Community Representative



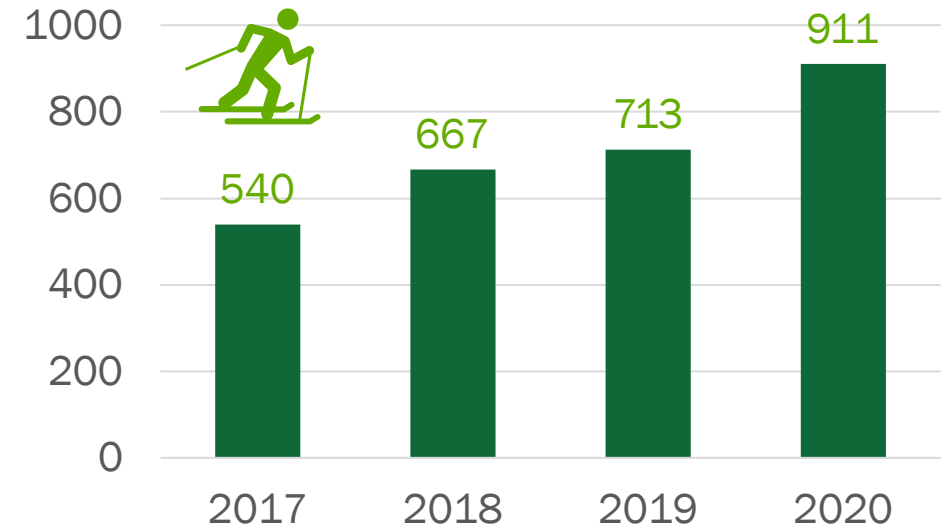
Meeting the need

Vermonters rely on recreational trails, now more than ever

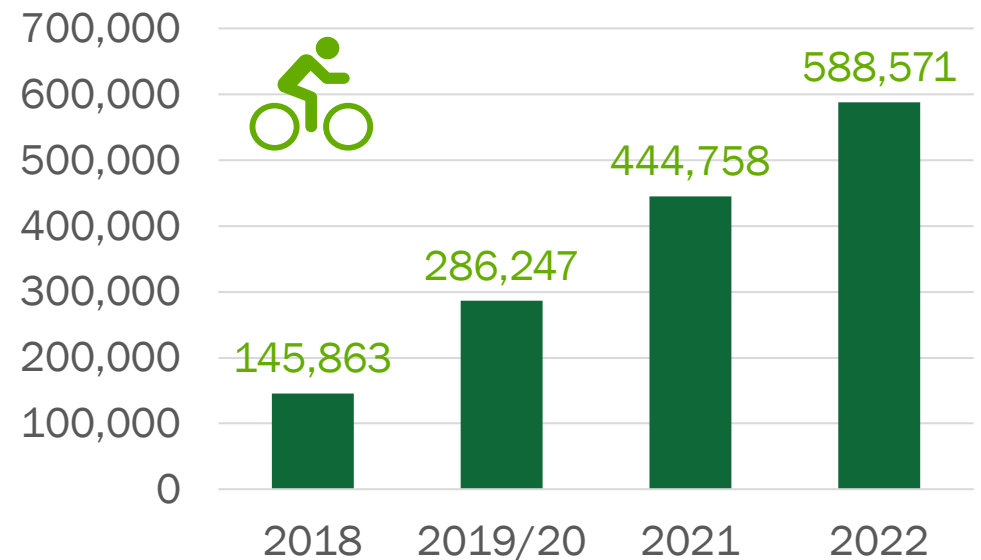
- Dramatic increase in demand for outdoor recreation over the last decade; accelerated through the pandemic
- Over half (54%) of Americans recreated outdoors in 2021, participation that has increased every year since 2014
- Vermont is a regional epicenter for outdoor recreation and a five-hour drive from over 80 million
- Outdoor recreation accounted for \$1.53B in spending in Vermont, 4.1% of State GDP (behind only HI and MT)
- Trail usage across usage types, motorized/non-motorized and seasons has increased 100-200% over the last 5 years
- Over 70% of Vermont's recreational trails are graciously hosted by private landowners, stewarded by non-profit orgs

The Council seeks the support from and active dialogue with Vermont's policymakers to ensure we chart a supportable, sustainable path forward.

Trail Users, 'No-Name' Backcountry Area



TrailForks Trail Check-ins, State-wide



Our Stewardship

Maintaining trail infrastructure through private landowner relationships and public land manager partnerships

- Guiding principle: balance equitable access with responsible use of Vermont's amazing landscape
- Application of rigorous Best Management Practices (BMPs) on trail design, construction, use, maintenance, and stewardship
- Advise the Agency of Natural Resources through our statutory role
- Co-manage the Vermont Trails System (VTS) with VT-FPR
- Provide valuable input to policymakers and help guide relevant legislation
- Continually work with members and external stakeholders to operationalize and evolve our BMPs



Landowners

More than 70% of Vermont's public access trails depend on private landowners

- Council Members establish and cultivate lasting relationships with landowners who host trails
- Individual trails may cross dozens of parcels
- Landowners receive no tax benefits or other direct incentives; efforts to give back through volunteerism
- Limited Landowner Liability is absolutely essential
- Maintenance, access, and co-stewardship plans
- Landowner Access Agreements to secure public funding (e.g. RTP) for trails on private land
- Council serves as a voice for landowners



Advisory Role

The Council has a statutory role to advise ANR on trail matters

- The Vermont Trail System (VTS), which designates the official public-access trails in Vermont
- The Recreation Trail Program (RTP), which provides Federal Highway Administration funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses
- The Vermont Outdoor Economic Collaborative (VOREC), with two Steering Committee seats
- Other trail-related policy and legislation

Vermont Statute: Title 10, Chapter 20

§ 441 Statement of Purpose

(a) In order to provide access to the use and enjoyment of the outdoor areas of Vermont, to conserve and use the natural resources of this State for healthful and recreational purposes, and to provide transportation from one place to another, it is declared to be the policy of this State to provide the means for maintaining and improving a network of trails to be known as the "Vermont trails system

§ 443 Vermont trails system

The Vermont trails system shall consist of those individual trails recognized by the Agency of Natural Resources with the advice of the Greenways Council. The Agency, with the advice of the Council, shall establish criteria for recognition of single use and shared use trails. (Added 1993, No. 211 (Adj. Sess.), § 28.)

§ 443 Advisory council designated

(a) The Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, Inc., an organization of trail using and trail providing groups, is designated as an advisory council to the Agency of Natural Resources and shall advise on all matters related to this chapter, including the allocation of State and federal funds appropriated for the purposes of this chapter.

Partner Role

The Council works closely with VT-FPR across a host of functions:

- As major landholder, managing 360,000+ acres directly and another 130,000+ through conservation easements
- In managing the VTS, including trail/member application and modifications to the program
- Coordinating on policy development and response
- Through individual member stewardship cooperative agreements for trail development and maintenance
- On initiatives like the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
- In the development of tools and refinement of BMPs

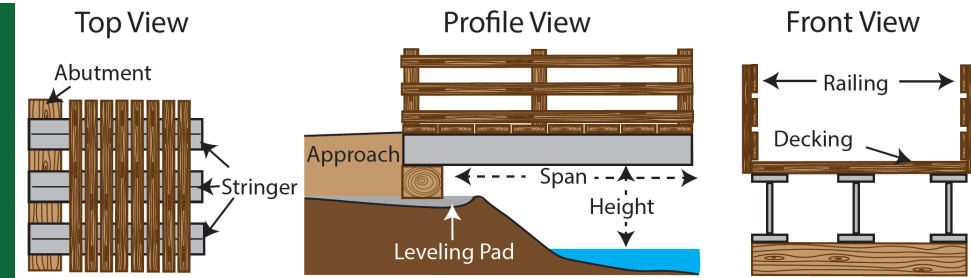


Defining BMPs

Best Management Practices (BMPs):

- Coined by the USFS nearly 35 years ago to describe acceptable practices that could be implemented to protect water quality and promote soil conservation during forestry activities
- Can be a structural "thing" (e.g. runoff diversions, silt fence, stream buffers and groundcover vegetation over bare soil areas)
- Can also be part of the "process" that you use to plan, conduct, or close-out a [forestry] project
- For our purposes:

“A practice, or combination of practices, that is determined to be an effective and practicable means of minimizing impact and/or maximizing the sustainability and user experience of a recreational trail.”



HOW TO BUILD: Depending on the type of bridge you are building, it may require special construction techniques. In general, the basic steps to building a bridge are:

1. Obtain necessary permits and permissions
2. Clear the site
3. Set the abutments
4. Attach the stringers
5. Put on the decking and railings
6. Finalize the site



Rationale

Why we establish and follow BMPs

 Establishing value/purpose

 Environmental impact

 Social / community impact

 Legal considerations

 Efficiency & effectiveness



Burrows Trail – Original Build

Rationale

Why we establish and follow BMPs



Establishing value/purpose



Environmental impact



Social / community impact



Legal considerations



Efficiency & effectiveness



Rebuild applying modern BMPs



Planning
& Design



Construction



Use &
Management



Maintenance

Trail-based BMPs

Best Management Practices Categories

For legislators

Five desired legislative outcomes:

1. Take no immediate action regarding an alternative to Act 250 for recreational trails
2. Secure sustainable funding in order to fulfill the Council's statutory role
3. Establish more institutional capacity for Vermont Forests, Parks & Recreation
4. Obtain specific clarifications regarding Act 250 jurisdiction over recreational trails
5. Develop a roadmap to include public access recreation in the Use Value Appraisal program



H.131

An act relating to the creation of the Green Mountain Recreation Fund

- Creates a dedicated role for the Council to fulfill its statutory role and stewardship activities
- Creates a dedicated role for FPR to more actively oversee and manage the Vermont Trails System
- Creates a dedicated role for FPR to administer a Green Mountain Recreation Fund that would provide grants for:
 - Nonprofit trail organizational capacity
 - Nonprofits and municipalities to advance the objectives of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative

1 H.131
2 SHORT FORM
3 Introduced by Representatives Sims of Craftsbury, Boyden of Cambridge,
4 Buss of Woodstock, Campbell of St. Johnsbury, Demrow of
5 Corinth, Elder of Starksboro, Harrison of Chittenden, Jerome of
6 Brandon, Leavitt of Grand Isle, Lipsky of Stowe, Masland of
7 Thetford, Morris of Springfield, Priestley of Bradford,
8 Surprenant of Barnard, and Torre of Moretown
9 Referred to Committee on
10 Date:
11 Subject: Conservation and development; recreational trails
12 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the
13 Green Mountain Recreation Fund as a sustainable source of funding for
14 organizational capacity and recreation related development and stewardship.
15 The Fund would be funded from five percent of the existing tax on the
16 gallonage sale of malt and vinous beverages. The Fund would be used to fund:
17 (1) one full-time staff position at the Vermont Trails and Greenways
18 Council (VTGC) whose duties would be to:
19 (A) administer membership to the VTGC;
20 (B) manage VTGC meetings, activities, operations, and budget;

19 (B) host trainings and other events to support applicants and grantees;
20 (C) develop and maintain a regular grant cycle; and
21 (D) manage a grant selection process;



THANK YOU!

The VTGC Board of Directors; board@vermonttgc.org