

February 12
2025

Recreation Access Recognition

House Committee on Agriculture,
Food Resiliency and Forestry

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

Background

Outdoor recreation is woven into the fabric of Vermont

- 8,000+ miles of public access trails
- Strong collaboration between public land mgrs & nonprofit stewardship orgs (VTGC)
- A vibrant and highly diversified outdoor recreation business sector
- Dozens of outdoor recreation-oriented communities
- Public-access recreation is a designated purpose for conservation
- Accounts for 4.8% of State GDP (↑ 0.2%)
- Private landowners host 70% of trails



About the VTGC

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

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

<https://vermonttgc.org/>



Stewardship

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

- Balance equitable access with responsible use of Vermont's amazing landscape
- Apply Best Management Practices (BMPs) on trail design, construction, use, and maintenance
- Develop maintenance, access, and stewardship plans
- Professionally-led with support of VTGC coordinator and Volunteer-supported work
- Establish and cultivate lasting relationships with landowners who host trails
- Funded primarily through memberships, grants, and philanthropic support



The Benefits

Outdoor Recreation drives health, environmental, and economic impact

- Supports healthy & resilient communities
- Fosters ecological awareness & conservation
- Fuels sustainable economic development:
 - Hundreds of outdoor businesses
 - Attraction and retention of new residents
 - Supporting infrastructure and amenities
 - A driving force for so many of the 13+ million annual visitor trips
 - **Responsible for 4.8% of Vermont's GDP, behind only Hawaii**

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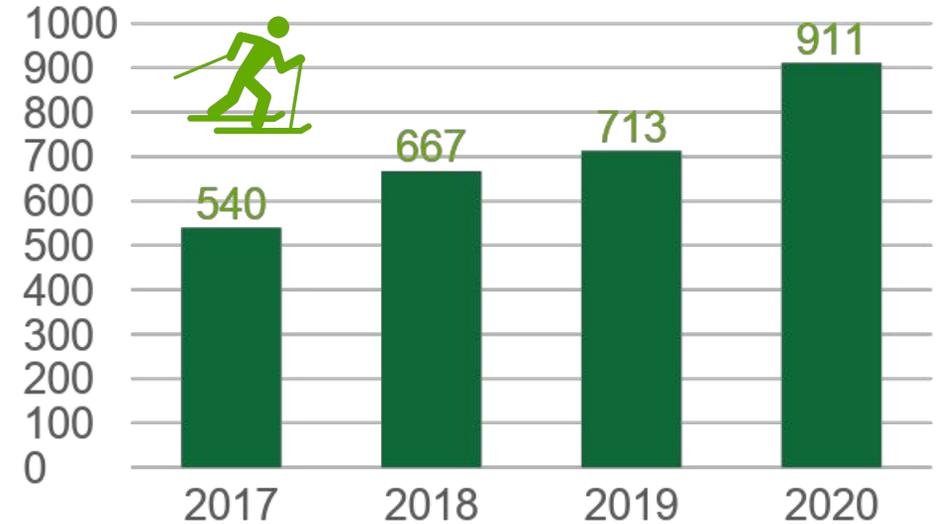
Source: Headwaters Economics

Growth

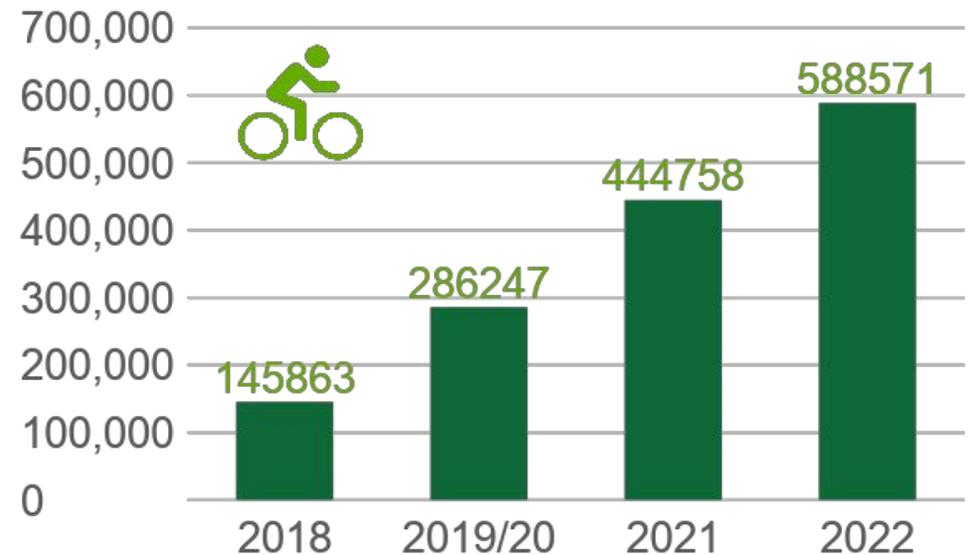
Vermonters and visitors rely on recreational trails, now more than ever

- 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
- 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 hosted by private landowners, stewarded by non-profit organizations with limited public support

Trail Users, 'No-Name' Backcountry Area



TrailForks Trail Check-ins, State-wide



Challenges

Threats to the future prosperity of outdoor recreation in Vermont

- Deferred maintenance
- Underfunded stewardship
- Insufficient organizational capacity
- Ill-suited regulation & oversight system
- Dramatic increase in demand
- Limited understanding of the outdoor recreation economy
- Climate change
- Majority reliance on private landowners without any recognition or support

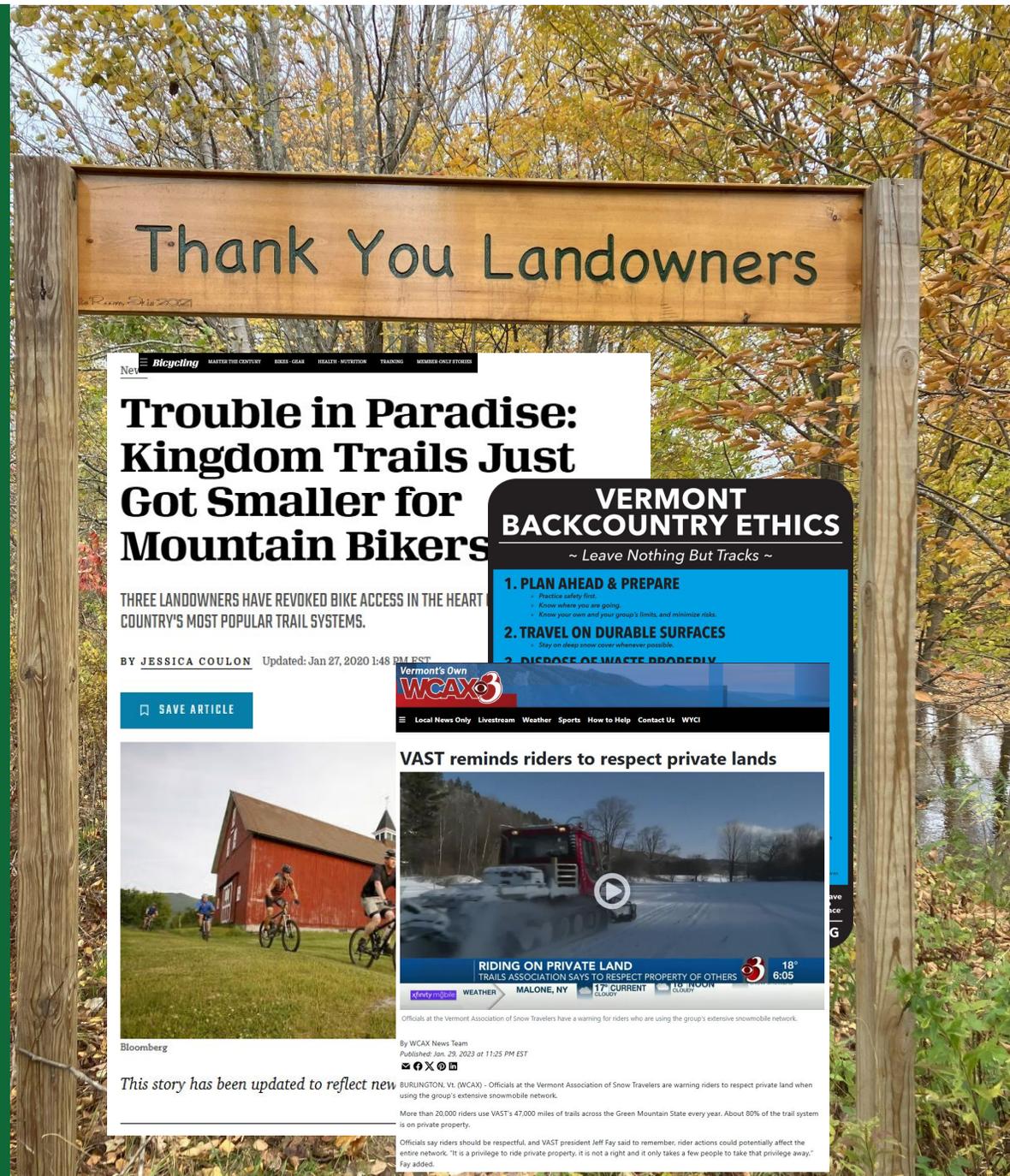


Private Landowners

Vital to Vermont's Outdoor Recreation Economy

- ~75% of public-access recreational trails are hosted by private landowners
- Different factors motivate Landowners to host public-access recreation, typically receiving no formal or tangible recognition
- Withdrawal of access can and has had serious impacts on connectivity and local economies
- Recreation managers act to address landowner concerns, though the scope of their ability to provide benefits is limited

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H.147 Objectives

An act relating to establishing the Recreational Trails Compensation Study Committee

1. Evaluate how private lands are currently used for public access trails
2. Assess landowner costs & liabilities
3. Estimate the economic value
4. Analyze other existing approaches
5. Recommend if and how host private landowners should be recognized
6. Consider how to ensure high quality trail construction & maintenance
7. Structure a merit-based model for recognition / compensation

1 H.147
2 Introduced by Representatives Marcotte of Coventry, Bosch of Clarendon,
3 Boutin of Barre City, Burditt of West Rutland, Carris-Duncan
4 of Whitingham, Cina of Burlington, Cooper of Pownal, Duke of
5 Burlington, Graning of Jericho, Kascenska of Burke, Lalley of
6 Shelburne, Lipsky of Stowe, Masland of Thetford, Nigro of
7 Bennington, Noyes of Wolcott, Ode of Burlington, Olson of
8 Starksboro, Priestley of Bradford, Squirrel of Underhill,
9 Suprenant of Barnard, Torre of Moretown, Waszazak of Barre
10 City, and White of Bethel
11 Referred to Committee on
12 Date:
13 Subject: Conservation and development; real property; trail use; compensation
14 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the
15 Recreational Trails Compensation Study Committee to review and recommend
16 to the General Assembly whether real property owners who allow use of their
17 property for public recreational trails should receive compensation or other
18 benefit.
19 An act relating to establishing the Recreational Trails Compensation Study
20 Committee

H.147 - Details

The Committee

- FPR Commissioner* - Chair
- Dept of Taxes Commissioner*
- VTGC representative
- VOREC representative
- Land conservation representative
- Host landowner, with easement
- Host landowner, without easement
- Trail planning, design, building, & maintenance expert
- VLCT Representative
- Others as invited (*non-voting*)

The Cost

- Per diem expenses for Committee members (6 meetings)
- \$250,000 for consultant support

The Output

- Report to the General Assembly due on or before December 15th, 2026
 1. Findings
 2. Any legislative recommendations

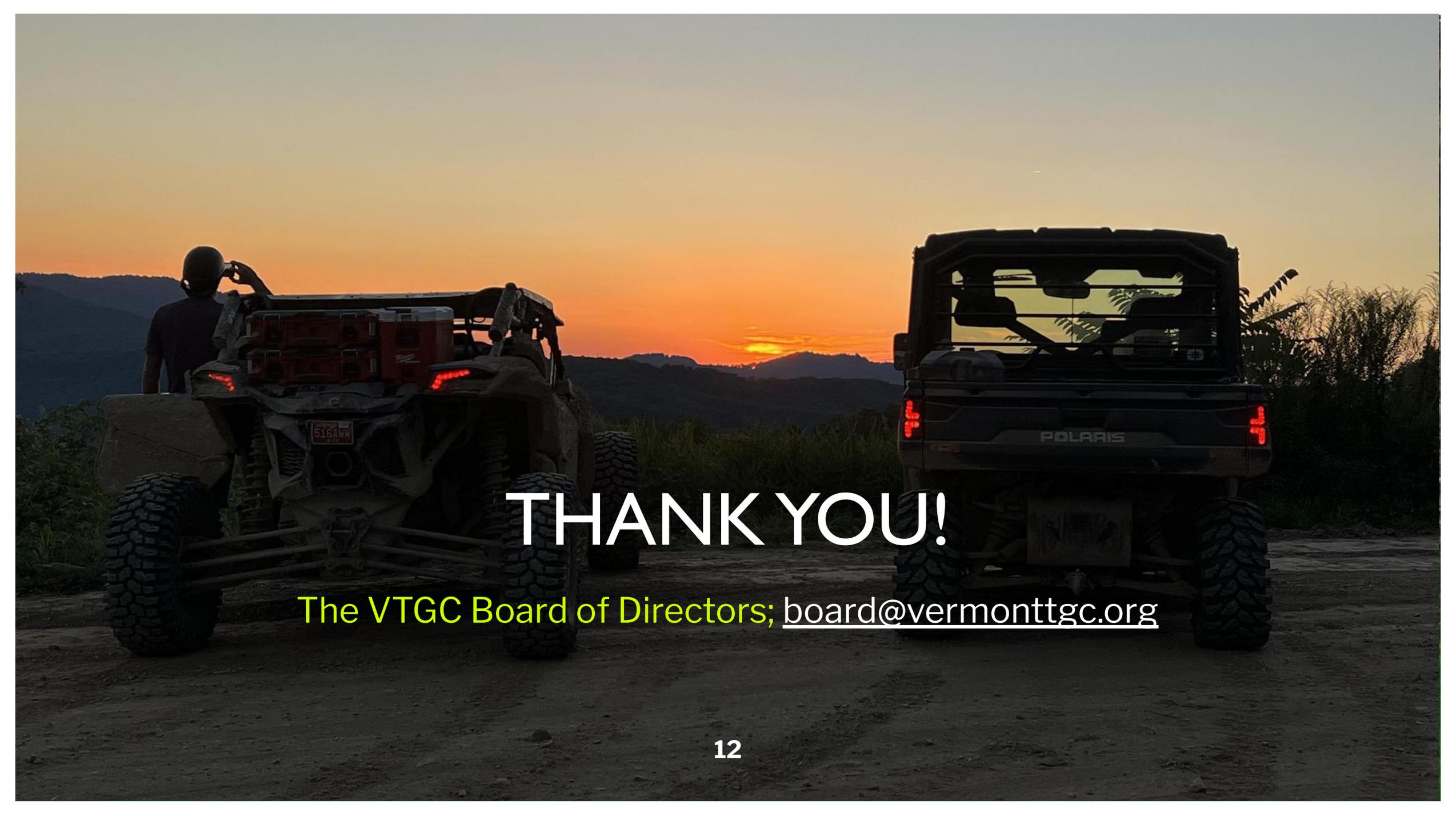
H.147 - Summary

Why this bill and why now

- Trail-based recreation is vital to Vermont's economic, social, and physical health
- Despite being vital to that landscape, private landowners receive no recognition or compensation for hosting public-access trails
- H.147 will provide the necessary information to develop a recreation access recognition program in the future
- Without action, access to current vital recreation assets is at risk, threatening communities that rely on these resources

H.673 SPONSORS

- **Marcotte of Coventry**
- Bosch of Clarendon
- Boutin of Barre City
- Burditt of West Rutland
- Carris-Duncan of Whitingham
- Cina of Burlington
- Cooper of Pownal
- Duke of Burlington
- Graning of Jericho
- Kascenska of Burke
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- Priestley of Bradford
- Squirrell of Underhill
- Suprenant of Barnard
- Torre of Moretown
- Waszazak of Barre City
- White of Bethel

A photograph of two off-road vehicles on a dirt road at sunset. The vehicle on the left is a grey utility vehicle with a person standing behind it. The vehicle on the right is a black Polaris utility vehicle. The background shows a sunset over a mountain range.

THANK YOU!

The VTGC Board of Directors; board@vermonttgc.org

Legislative Priorities

Other policies we are following in 2025:

- S.4 - Legal Trails
 - Provides Explicit authority for municipalities to manage Legal Trails
- H.126 / Act 59 - 30 x 30
 - Conserved lands Inventory (July '24)
 - Plan (December '25)
- Move Forward Together Vermont
 - SCORP
 - VOREC Action Plan
 - Possible Base Funding for VOREC

MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER VERMONT VISION			
FOSTER HEALTHY AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION			
PURPOSE	Support partnerships, projects, and programs at the local, regional and statewide scale that protect Vermont's healthy, functioning environment, establish and maintain high-quality and inviting outdoor recreation spaces, and cultivate communities that are diverse in the people they engage and the opportunities they support.		
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	Collaborative	Inclusive	Data-Driven
COMMON OBJECTIVES	Equity We will collectively expand opportunities and reduce barriers so that all people feel welcome in Vermont's outdoors.		Climate Resilience We will collectively strengthen the sustainability, flexibility, and resilience of our communities so that we can weather the impacts of climate change.
THEMES	Stewardship PROTECT MAINTAIN CONSERVE We will ensure that we protect the health of our environment and cultivate and preserve high quality outdoor recreation experiences.	Wellness LEARN CREATE CONNECT We will create and steward places and connections that welcome all people and allow them to heal, learn, grow, and live their lives fully.	Economic Development CULTIVATE INVEST BUILD We will support communities to be proactive in using outdoor recreation to create a sustainable, vibrant, future.
FIVE YEAR PRIORITY ACTIONS	Invest in stewarding and upgrading existing recreational infrastructure Strengthen guidance and education about climate resilient strategies that help communities interact with their rivers and water bodies Cultivate and promote a stewardship ethic among Vermonters and visitors Identify and support regional outdoor recreation planning and partnerships. Create and promote a suite of technical assistance resources to strengthen the skills and expertise of non-profits, municipalities and businesses who manage recreation Reinforce and sustain public recreation on private lands	Create and enhance in-community outdoor recreation opportunities that directly connect to where people live, learn, and work Develop recreational opportunities and conserve open spaces that strategically fill gaps in experiences and distribution across the state Create safe, welcoming, and environmentally sustainable entry spaces into the outdoors Centralize, improve, and make more accessible informational resources about outdoor recreation opportunities and events Support programs that reduce the costs of outdoor recreation Strengthen connections between people working in health and wellness, people working in education, and people working in outdoor recreation Strengthen community awareness about improved health and wellness outcomes through outdoor recreation	Develop information and resources to demonstrate how outdoor recreation resources and vibrant local economies are connected Strengthen the capacity of municipalities to engage in Vermont's outdoor recreation economy Strengthen workforce opportunities in Vermont's outdoor sector Foster resilience and flexibility in outdoor recreation communities, organizations, and businesses to withstand major weather events and a variable climate Invest in organizations and businesses led by marginalized communities Support innovation in Vermont's outdoor sector by supporting entrepreneurship, providing resources to businesses, and seeking solutions to challenges

VTGC Members

Comprised of over 50 trail-related organizations and individuals

- 18 Statewide 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), Chair
- Tommy O'Connor, Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association (VASA) Vice-Chair
- Caitrin Maloney, Slate Valley Trails, Treasurer
- Carolyn Lawrence, Stowe Trails Partnership, Secretary
- Mariah Keagy, Sinuosity Flowing Trails
- Abby Long, Kingdom Trails Association
- Monica Raymond, Vermont Horse Council
- Jeff Nugent, Windham Regional Planning Commission
- Cindy Locke, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST)
- Rachel Batz, Town of Dorset

