

4/1/26 Testimony

House Commerce and Community Development  
Kelly Ault, Executive Director, VOBA



## Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance

**VOBA** is a state-wide nonprofit organization established in 2018 to educate Vermonters on outdoor recreation and to educate businesses on development, collaboration initiatives, and outdoor recreation policy. VOBA members are dedicated to Vermont's natural and recreation resources and equitable access for all in the outdoors.

[www.vermontoutdoorbusinessalliance.org](http://www.vermontoutdoorbusinessalliance.org)



NETWORK  
BUILDING &  
LEARNING



BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT &  
TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE



WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT



ADVOCACY



RESEARCH &  
BRANDING



# A Time of Unprecedented Economic Challenge

Despite a tremendous winter for outdoor recreation, insurmountable headwinds continue to hinder a positive business outlook in 2026:

- Costs of tariffs
- Decline in Canadian visitation
- Drop in consumer confidence
- Impacts from climate change



- Tariffs cost a 5 - year old Vermont manufacturer 20% of their 2025 revenues and a well-established manufacturer \$200,000, equal to their 2025 net revenue.
- Tariff-driven increases of products led a retailer to reduce full-time staff by 27%.
- January foot traffic at an independent retailer anchored in a key downtown was 330,000, down 50% from pre-pandemic levels of 660,000 customers.
- A resort saw 20% less Canadian visitors this winter, guide service saw a 25% decline in bookings, another business experienced a 50% decrease in Canadian visitors renting bicycles last year.
- 67% of outdoor businesses surveyed experienced climate disruptions from unpredictable seasons, flooding, and extreme weather. 56% are feeling the financial strain in revenue, operational disruptions, and rising costs



# Legislative Asks: Economic Development

## **\$200,000 for Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Study**

- Focuses on economic development potential and gets at the multiplier effect in local communities
- Advances the economic development goals of VOREC's Move Forward Together Vermont and VOBA's MFTV innovation and climate resilience goals
- Prioritizes investments to stimulate economic growth and climate adaptation

## **\$100,000 for VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program**

- To facilitate technical assistance to small- and mid- sized companies at all stages of development for strategic and financial planning, market analysis and access, and climate adaptation and resilience.
- Outcomes would lead to stability and collaboration during a time of economic uncertainty.





# Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Study

Significant benefit to Vermont's outdoor economies in communities:

- Advances the economic development goals of Move Forward Together Vermont
- Articulates the value of direct and indirect outdoor recreation businesses at level helpful for decision making
- Highlights the most effective climate resiliency measures to stabilize the industry during climate events and shifts





## VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

VOBA provides business development services to 100 entrepreneurs and cured a service provider network of 30 business and financial advisors, trade and marketing consultants, and climate resilience planners offering specific outdoor sector expertise.

- 30 manufacturers producing gear, apparel and accessories attended 5 regional and national trade shows; 30 businesses were vendors at the VT Gear Makers Festival
- 10 businesses received 10 hours of pitchfest coaching; Presented at Outdoor Pitchfest

*"Going forward, the pitch coaching will shape how I talk about my business, both internally and externally. It helped me refine my core message, clarify my value proposition, and develop a more compelling narrative, all of which will support stronger partnerships and growth."*





## VOBA's Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

- 8 businesses participated in a 10 - week capital strategy cohort

*"We were selected for VOBA's financial planning resource to educate entrepreneurs and small business owners on how to raise capital. It was an eye-opening, inspiring experience and we would not have had the opportunity were it not for VOBA."*

- 50 attended VOBA Business Agility Workshop with trade, legal, and financial experts
- 8 businesses and organizations were profiled in VOBA climate resilience guidebook and provided demonstration grants for adaptations leading to economic outcomes



### Case Study: [The Boot Pro Ski & Bike Shop](#)

**The Context:** The Boot Pro began as a 600-square-foot ski boot-fitting shop at the base of Okemo Mountain Resort, growing over 17 years into a 6,800-square-foot, full-service ski & bike shop known for top-tier boot fitting and race tuning. As they assessed their climate exposure, owners Alex and Shon Racicot identified several





## Legislative Asks: Economic Development

In summary, we appreciate your consideration of investing in:

- \$200,000 for the outdoor recreation economic impact study
- \$100,000 for the VOBA Outdoor Entrepreneur Program

Small investments in both projects will have a positive ripple effect:

- Recommendations stemming from comprehensive economic impact data will lead to strategic investments as a state and industry
- An investment in VOBA business technical assistance will bolster the success of 40 Vermont companies

