



**House Commerce and Economic Development Committee  
VOREC Funding Impact for FY27 Budget Committee Letter  
Vermont Trails & Greenways Council and the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance  
2.17.2026**

**Please Support Sustainable Investment of the VOREC Community Grant Program**  
The VOREC grant program is a proven tool that has strengthened communities, grown local economies, and inspired stewardship of natural resources. This program has a strong return on investment with **\$11.2 million invested in 84 grants to businesses, organizations, and municipalities across all 14 counties since 2019.**

Through the Governor's FY27 proposed \$500,000 one-time investment into the VOREC Community Grant Program, Vermont's outdoor sector has an opportunity to continue the impact of this community catalyst for economic development. The Vermont Trails & Greenways Council (VTGC) and the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance (VOBA) urge your Committee **to prioritize this investment as base funding in your H. Commerce Committee FY27 Budget Letter** to the House Appropriations Committee. This program is the right mechanism to foster healthy recreation and economic development through consistent & flexible funding for projects, stewardship, and community organizations across Vermont.

**Please read through a sampling of testimonials of the impact of the VOREC community grant program:**

**2023**

***North Branch Nature Center, Montpelier, VT  
NBNC Flood Recovery & Repair***

***\$6,500***

North Branch Nature Center's Flood Equity VOREC grant allowed us to repair the damage caused by the 2023 flood at our center in Montpelier, Vermont. VOREC funding allowed us to repair our driveway and parking lot, rebuild the farm road that provides access to the community garden housed at NBNC, replace a very old sump pump that had stopped working, replace the benches and picnic tables that washed downstream in the flood with new, accessible tables and benches with tethers, and dispose of boardwalks that were broken in the flood. These essential tasks allowed us to keep the public trails at NBC open and meant we could continue to offer our year-round programming for adults, families, and students. Our trails and buildings

became a hub of safety post-flood, in part thanks to this VOREC support. - **Naomi Heindel, Executive Director**

**2024**

**Friends of the Winooski River, Barre, VT  
Barre City River Access Community Connection Project  
\$102,000**

Friends of the Winooski River, with Barre Rivers Collective, was awarded \$102,000 from VOREC in June 2024. A project team that included key Barre City staff and other organizations and individuals in the community with an interest in outdoor recreation met monthly for over a year to guide the process of developing a River Access Master Plan. We contracted with DuBois & King to undertake an assessment of all potential public river access sites in Barre, to elicit feedback from the community to help determine what steps need to be taken to make those sites accessible, safe, and welcoming, and to design wayfinding signage to lead people to the sites. They also completed engineering plans for an accessible overlook trail from Rotary Park to a gorgeous natural waterfall at a site where we removed a dam in 2025.

What is great about the River Access Master Plan is how vigorously it has been adopted for implementation. Mayor Lauzon wants to see five sites completed in five years, and has committed City resources to support that goal. The National Parks Service RTCA program that is working on concept plans for parks associated with flood mitigation projects has prioritized Barre because they have such a solid start with the Plan. Vermont Community Foundation learned of the work, and has committed funding for implementation, and Vermont River Conservancy has a large grant that they want to use for implementation this year. This VOREC-funded project is leveraging a substantial investment in outdoor recreation and access to nature in Barre. It is going to be transformative, and it is going to be an economic boon to the City and a great benefit to the wellbeing of Barre's populace. - **Michele Braun, Executive Director of the Friends of the Winooski River**

**2023**

**Northwoods Stewardship Center, East Charleston, VT  
Access for All Initiative  
\$195,700**

VOREC funds made it possible for NorthWoods to complete a 3/4 mile accessible trail and improved year round parking lot at our campus in East Charleston. VOREC funds also subsidized school programs and community outreach events to invite the community to participate and celebrate universal access. In this rural corner of Vermont, access to the outdoors is one of the greatest assets of the region. VOREC funds ensured that this is available to everyone. These improvements allow us to grow as a community resource in conservation and recreation - an important connection that

defines what makes this region a wonderful place to live or visit - essential to workforce development and vibrant rural economy. - **Maria Young, Executive Director of the Northwoods Stewardship Center**

**2023**

***Smokey House Center, Danby, Vermont  
Community Science Recreation Program  
\$92,298***

Smokey House Center recently completed a two year planning grant funded through VOREC that focused on revitalizing its historic but degraded trail system. The funds helped us strategically identify trails to revitalize that will fill voids in the broader outdoor recreation landscape in our region as well as design a visitor center that will act as a community cornerstone once built. The future of meaningful, accessible, and fun recreation at Smokey House Center and in southwestern Vermont is bright thanks to this program. - **Walker Cammack, Shared Leadership at Smokey House Center**

***2020, Multi-use Accessible Trail, \$25,400***

***2022, Town to Trails, \$213,000***

***Parks Department, City of Montpelier, Vermont***

In the wake of flooding in 2023 and the prior pandemic, Montpelier is searching for a new identity. The VOREC program has been deeply impactful in helping us pivot towards a future where outdoor recreation is a major part of our local economy. While we are just starting out on this journey, the trails, kiosks, maps, plans, videos, and partnerships that VOREC helped us develop have elevated the importance of outdoor recreation for our community. We understand that pairing flood resilience with outdoor recreation is a winning formula. We envision a thriving local economy in Central Vermont, and we need more programs like VOREC to help us build needed infrastructure, tell the right story, and partner with our neighboring communities to lift the fortunes of our whole region. - **Alec Ellsworth, City of Montpelier Parks Director**

**2023**

***TetraSki Project: Expanding Access to Adaptive Skiing  
Green Mountain Adaptive, Stowe, Vermont  
\$61,310***

The TetraSki is the only Vermont owned ski, and one of only 25 in the world. It had a huge impact on the 23 people with disabilities who participated, empowering them to do something they never thought possible. The program also raised considerable awareness about adaptive sports and the power they have to shape people's life experiences. From our TetraSkier Chuck: "For my whole life, but especially after becoming a wheelchair user, I found winter to be a long, hard, (emotionally and physically) difficult time - until this year – such a wonderful gift and an entire change of

perspective.” The program has doubled in size this season.- **Cynthia Needham, President, Board of Directors, Green Mountain Adaptive Sports**

**2024**

**Manchester Riverwalk Association, Manchester, Vermont**

**Manchester Riverwalk Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge**

**\$400,000**

On behalf of the Manchester Riverwalk Association, I would like to again express our deep gratitude for the award granted us from VOREC in 2024. We were incredibly fortunate to have received \$400,000 in funding to help us build our Manchester Riverwalk Pedestrian Bridge, a 110 foot ADA-compliant bridge which spans the West Branch of the Batten Kill River, linking our Town Green and our Main Street Historic District.

It will be one year this June since the bridge was completed and opened to the public. While we do not have data to provide you with at this point in time, anecdotally we have heard from both our community and visitors that they believe it is a great addition to our town. Numerous folks have contacted us to share their enthusiasm and the local businesses that line Main Street have reported increased foot traffic, especially during the high tourist seasons. Given more time, we can perhaps survey these businesses more formally to track changes. Here is a [link](#) from NBC5 who reported the bridge's opening and spoke to various individuals about their opinions, as well as to both our Board President and Vice President. It is worth watching to understand the beauty and impact of this addition to our town. - **Eileen Braheney, Board of Directors, Manchester Riverwalk Association**

**2023**

**The Vermont Mountain Bike Association, Waterbury, VT**

**Flood Recovery & Repair**

**\$59,995**

In the wake of the historic storms that hit Vermont in July 2023, VMBA saw widespread damage to the 900+ miles of trails we steward across the state, many of which are older, heritage trails constructed prior to modern climate-resilient techniques. Nearly \$60,000 in VOREC Community Grant funding allowed us to implement critical repairs and upgrades to fourteen trail systems, repairing or rebuilding over 7,300 feet of trail and replacing more than 40 drainage structures. We saw the impact of the weather-induced trail closures on trail use, with the percentage of Vermonters riding trails at least weekly dropping from 8.4% in 2022 to 2.8% in 2023. Thanks in large part to VOREC-funded repairs and improvement, that number was up to 8.8% in 2024, despite the return of historic storms to many areas of the state.

A survey of our trail users in 2023 found that the average visitor spent \$127 locally on food, fuel, and lodging. The climate recovery and resilience investments made possible through the VOREC Community Grant program drove thousands of additional visits to networks that would have otherwise been closed, a net impact in the millions of dollars on Vermont's tourism economy. - **Nick Bennette, Executive Director of VMBA**

**2020**

**Bluff Mountain Trailhead Improvement**

**Town of Brighton, Vermont**

**\$62,500**

The VOREC grant that the Town of Brighton received was instrumental in our efforts to brand ourselves as an outdoor recreational destination. I was showing some visitors the VOREC dock on Island Pond Lake last summer when a boater pulled up to go shopping at the nearby hardware store and told me the dock was the best thing Island Pond ever did. Island Pond is one of very few places where there is a downtown commercial area adjacent to a lake, and it means people do not have to go back to their lake homes, get in the car, and drive downtown to get supplies. The town also benefitted by the upgrade to the popular Bluff Mountain Trail. - **Joel Cope, Brighton Town Administrator**

**2023**

**Unlikely Riders, Statewide**

**BIPOC-Centered Outdoor Experiences**

**\$226,885**

Last winter, a participant arrived at our gear closet and picked up a set of snow gear that actually fit them for their very first time. They told us they had always loved the idea of skiing but never felt comfortable showing up, didn't know exactly what they needed to begin, and the cost of new equipment was out of reach. With the gear closet, they not only had the hardgoods and softgoods to participate, but they felt affirmed, welcomed, and celebrated in a space built for them as a queer person of color. Later that season, they joined one of our volunteer-led ski days, mentored by leaders who themselves had come up through our certification programs. Watching them click into their skis and ride with a group of BIPOC and QTBIPOC peers was a vivid reminder of what this project is about. Beyond equipment, courses, or events, Unlikely Riders is building belonging, confidence, and helping new skiers and riders develop a lifelong passion for the sport. Funding from VOREC to support our Gear Closet was pivotal in making this moment and dozens of others like it happen. - **Abby Crisostomo, Co-Founder of Unlikely Riders**

**2022**

***Mad River Valley Recreation District***

***Mad River Valley Recreation Hub, Waitsfield/Warren, Vermont***

***\$408,019***

The Mad River Valley Recreation District, on behalf of five local partners, received the largest VOREC Grant in 2022, \$408,019 for the Mad River Valley Recreation Hub. The project included an indoor Welcome Center with an interactive trip planner, an 85 ft. bike and pedestrian bridge that connects trails from the Howe Block, near Sugarbush Resort, to downtown Waitsfield including a riparian buffer to protect the Mill Brook, an enhanced trail to get from the Rec Hub to downtown businesses and a community-wide project called Conservation and Recreation Visioning (CRV) to balance recreation and trails with environmental sustainability that includes an online interactive map and can be used as a template for other Vermont towns. Since finishing the project in 2025, we have seen three new restaurants open, one in the same building as the Rec Hub, the other two within .2 miles of the Hub. Multiple local business owners have sent in testimonials about increased business due to more bikers and walkers in Waitsfield. We urge the Governor to put at least \$500,000 into the budget to continue the excellent results of VOREC investments to date. - ***Laura Arnesen, Exec. Director, Mad River Valley Recreation District***