

January 17  
2025

# VTGC Introduction

House Committee on Commerce & Economic Development

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

**Tommy O'Connor**, Executive Director, Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association  
Vice-Chair, Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

**Abby Long**, Executive Director, Kingdom Trail Association  
Board Member, Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

# Background

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## Outdoor recreation is woven into the fabric of Vermont

- 8,000+ miles of public access trails, 70%+ hosted by private landowners
- Public-access recreation is a designated purpose for conservation
- 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
- Accounts for 4.8% of State GDP (↑ 0.2%)



# 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

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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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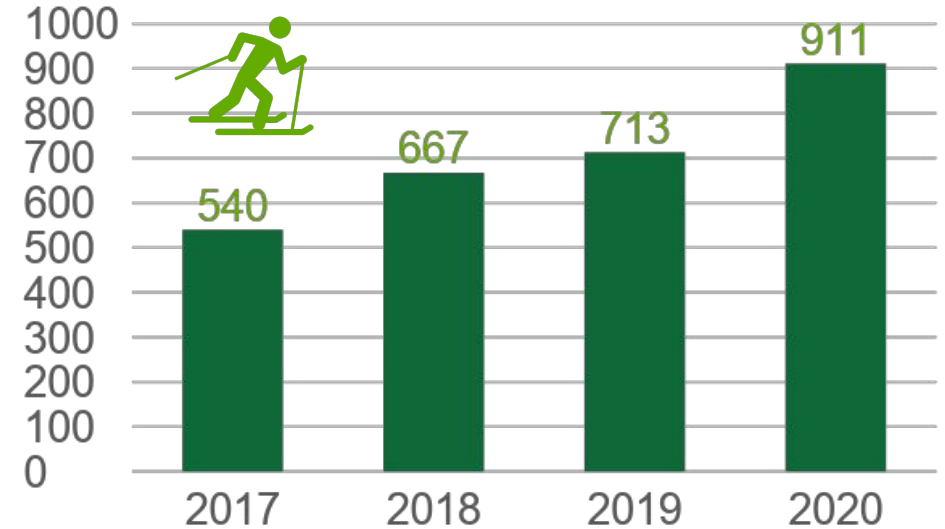
Source: Headwaters Economics

# Growth

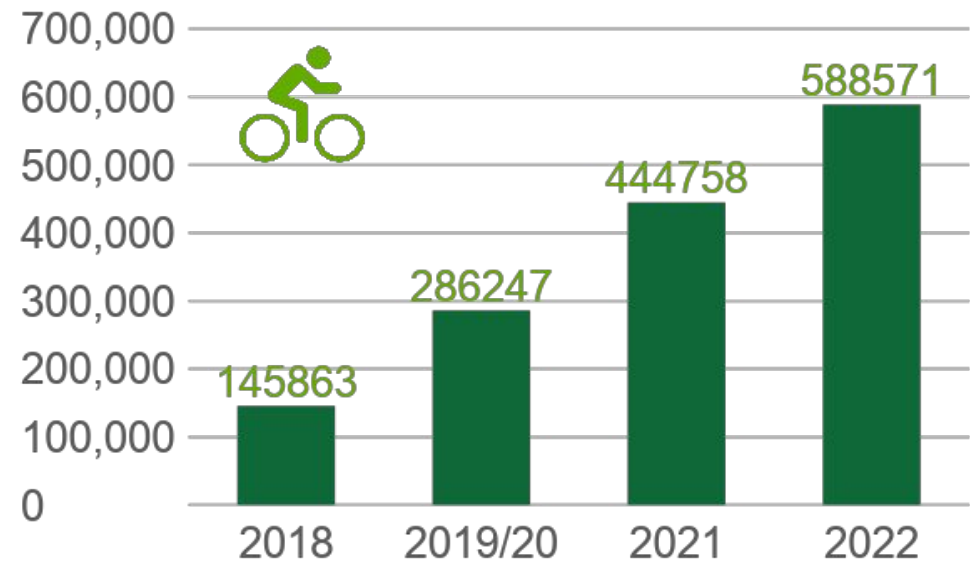
Vermonters and visitors rely on recreational trails, now more than ever

- 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

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

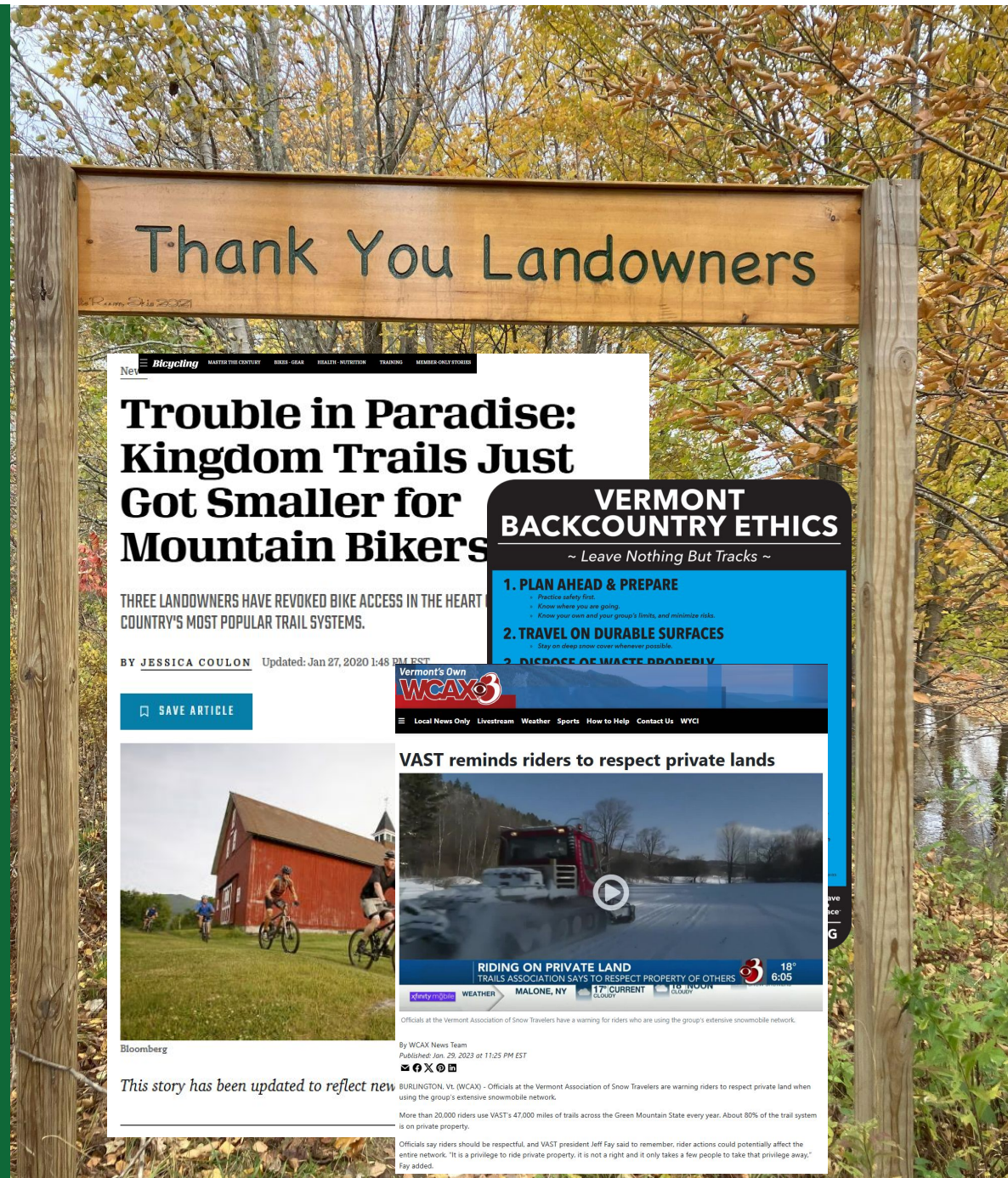


# Private Landowners

## 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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# Legislative Priorities

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## Private Landowner Recognition Mechanism

- Draft bill - that includes the creation of a:
  - Study Commission led by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and the VT Trails and Greenways Council to develop Landowner Incentives for Public Recreation;
  - The Commission will analyze the economic impact of public trails on private land, what motivates landowners to provide public access, what prevents landowners from hosting public access and prepare a report with recommendations for how to support obtaining and maintaining public access trails on private land;
  - Modernize the Vermont Trail System through codifying Best Management Practice (BMP) aggregation & consolidation



# 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	<b>Equity</b> We will collectively expand opportunities and reduce barriers so that all people feel welcome in Vermont's outdoors.		<b>Climate Resilience</b> We will collectively strengthen the sustainability, flexibility, and resilience of our communities so that we can weather the impacts of climate change.
THEMES	<b>Stewardship</b> PROTECT MAINTAIN CONSERVE We will ensure that we protect the health of our environment and cultivate and preserve high quality outdoor recreation experiences.	<b>Wellness</b> 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.	<b>Economic Development</b> 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

# Questions?

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*And... See you at Outdoor Recreation Day next month!*



**VERMONT  
OUTDOOR  
REC DAY**

**February 12, 2025**



Come to the Montpelier Statehouse to learn about a Vermont vision and advocate for the Vermont Outdoors

**Register Today!**



A photograph of two off-road vehicles parked on a dirt road at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The vehicle on the left is a dark-colored utility vehicle with a person standing behind it, looking towards the horizon. The vehicle on the right is a Polaris utility vehicle, also dark-colored, with its rear lights illuminated. The word "POLARIS" is visible on the rear of the right vehicle. The overall scene is silhouetted against the bright sunset.

THANK YOU!

The VTGC Board of Directors; [board@vermonttgc.org](mailto:board@vermonttgc.org)

# 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>

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# VTGC Board

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- 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

