

A scenic view of a mountain peak with hikers and a dog. The foreground shows rocky terrain with patches of grass. In the middle ground, three hikers and a dog are standing on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast mountain range. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

January 28
2026

Vermont Conservation Plan

House Committee on Environment & Energy

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

Background

Outdoor recreation is woven into the fabric and landscape of Vermont

- 11,500+ miles of public-access trails
- Strong collaboration between public land managers & nonprofit stewardship orgs
- 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
- Private landowners host 70+% of public trails



About the VTGC

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

- 501(c)(3), founded in 1989
- Advisor to ANR, as designated in VT Statute
- Member organization w/ 1 PT Staff Member

Our organizational members:

- Represent 50,000+ individual members
- Log 100,000+ hours of volunteer time annually
- Manage and maintain 8,000+ miles of trails
- Support 16,000+ jobs statewide through outdoor businesses and 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/>



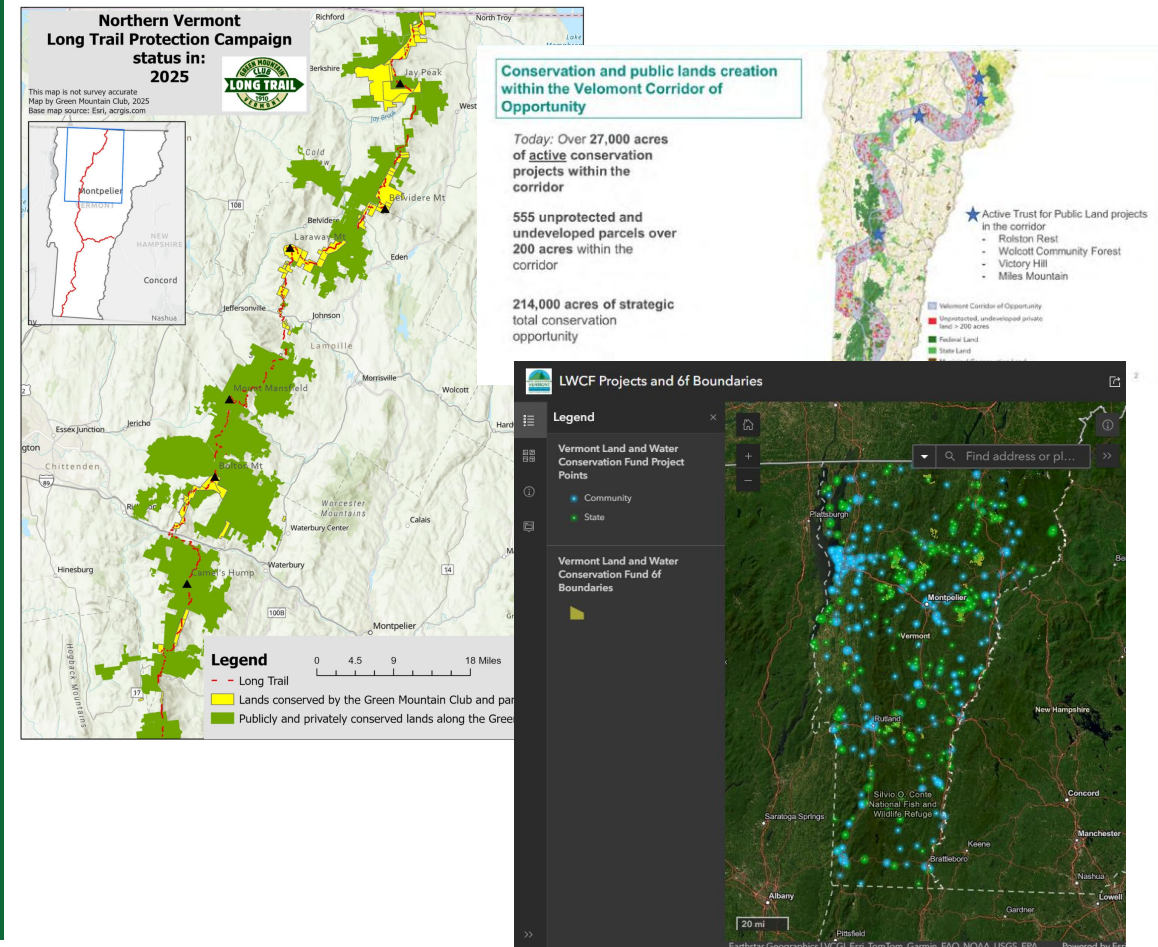
Recreation & Conservation

A primary way in which the public accesses protected lands and a driver for their conservation

- Public-access recreation is a recognized purpose for conservation in Vermont Statute
- A history and future of combined Recreation & Conservation Funding Programs
 - LWCF: >\$45M since 1965
 - Long Trail Protection Campaign: 25,000 acres since the 1980s
 - Velomont: 214,000 acres of strategic conservation opportunity
- Outdoor recreation groups and businesses identified as a key stakeholder in Act 59

“Conservation rights and interests” mean rights held by a qualified holder to restrict or condition the use, modification, or subdivision of a land or water area and rights to perform, or require the performance of, specified activities with respect thereto. These rights and interests shall be for the purpose of maintaining, enhancing, and conserving that land or water area, including improvements thereon, predominantly in its natural, scenic, or open condition, or in agricultural, farming, forest, wildlife, or open space use, or for public recreation... ”

- 10 V.S.A § 821



Our Trail Map

Move Forward Together Vermont lays out a clear vision and priority actions for the outdoor rec community

- Vision: Foster **Healthy and Vibrant Communities** through Outdoor Recreation
- Cross-cutting Objectives
 - Equity
 - Climate Resilience
- 19 Priority Actions organized under three themes
 - Stewardship
 - Wellness
 - Economic Development

Develop recreational opportunities and conserve open spaces that strategically fill gaps in experiences and distribution across the state

Create and enhance in-community outdoor recreation opportunities that directly connect to where people live, learn, and work

<https://fpr.vermont.gov/move-forward-together-vermont>

5

Move Forward Together Vermont

A Vision for our Outdoor Recreation Future

VISION
FOSTER HEALTHY AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	Collaborative	Inclusive	Data-Driven
COMMON OBJECTIVES	Equity		Climate Resilience
THEMES	Stewardship PROTECT MAINTAIN CONSERVE	Wellness LEARN CREATE CONNECT	Economic Development CULTIVATE INVEST BUILD
FIVE YEAR PRIORITY ACTIONS	<p>Invest in stewarding and upgrading existing recreational infrastructure</p> <p>Strengthen guidance and education about climate resilient strategies that help communities interact with their rivers and water bodies</p> <p>Cultivate and promote a stewardship ethic among Vermonters and visitors</p> <p>Identify and support regional outdoor recreation planning and partnerships</p> <p>Create and promote a suite of technical assistance resources to strengthen the skills and expertise of non-profits, municipalities and businesses who manage recreation</p> <p>Reinforce and sustain public recreation on private lands</p>	<p>Create and enhance in-community outdoor recreation opportunities that directly connect to where people live, learn, and work</p> <p>Develop recreational opportunities and conserve open spaces that strategically fill gaps in experiences and distribution across the state</p> <p>Create safe, welcoming, and environmentally sustainable entry spaces into the outdoors</p> <p>Centralize, improve, and make more accessible informational resources about outdoor recreation opportunities and events</p> <p>Support programs that reduce the costs of outdoor recreation</p> <p>Strengthen connections between people working in health and wellness, people working in education, and people working in outdoor recreation</p> <p>Strengthen community awareness about improved health and wellness outcomes through outdoor recreation</p>	<p>Develop information and resources to demonstrate how outdoor recreation resources and vibrant local economies are connected</p> <p>Strengthen the capacity of municipalities to engage in Vermont's outdoor recreation economy</p> <p>Strengthen workforce opportunities in Vermont's outdoor sector</p> <p>Foster resilience and flexibility in outdoor recreation communities, organizations, and businesses to withstand major weather events and a variable climate</p> <p>Invest in organizations and businesses led by marginalized communities</p> <p>Support innovation in Vermont's outdoor sector by supporting entrepreneurship, providing resources to businesses, and seeking solutions to challenges</p>

Learn more by visiting bit.ly/MoveTogetherVT

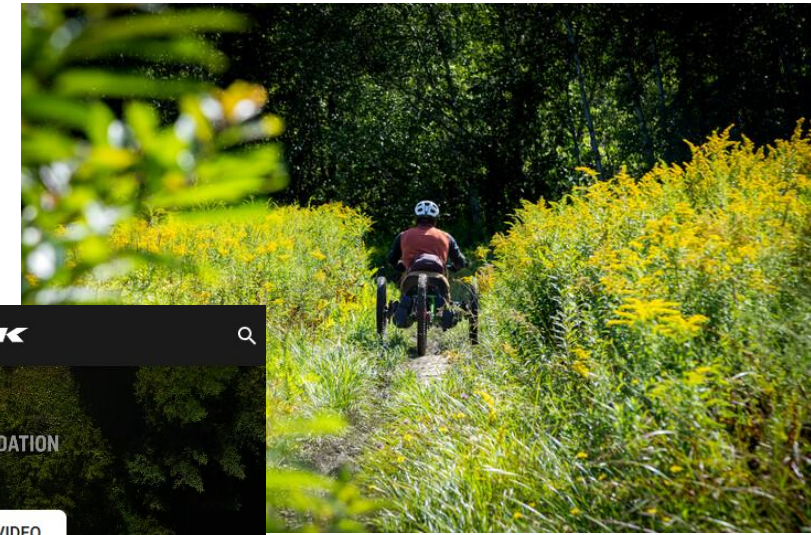
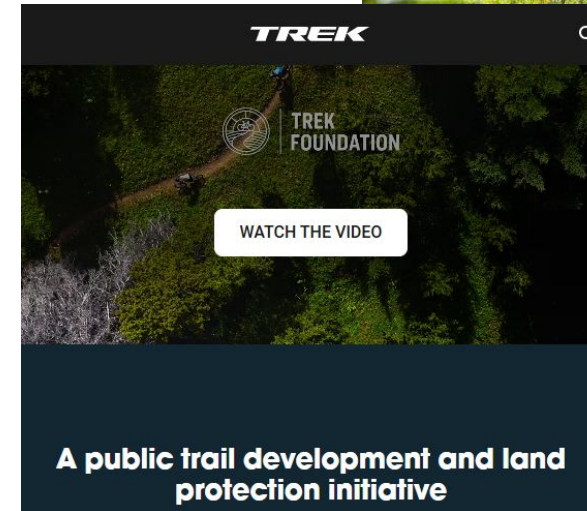
Role in the Vermont Conservation Plan

Three major ways we envision trail-based recreation as part of our 30x30 and 50x50 efforts

- Providing equitable access to conserved spaces
- Promoting community resilience through health, well-being, and economic vitality
- As a driver to conserve new spaces and source of critical resources & capacity

Incorporation into the Current Draft Framework

- *Promote Outdoor Recreation as a pathway under Objective 2: Conservation for Communities*
- Additionally vital to:
 - *Pathway 2.1: Increase Equitable Access*
 - *Pathway 3.1: Increase and Optimize Funding and Financing*



Engaging our Community

Outdoor Rec Day on February 5th!

- 100+ registered outdoor recreation advocates
- Focus on community impact stories
- Lunch with constituents (12-1) at the Pavillion

<https://www.vermontoutdoorbusinessalliance.org/post/outdoor-recreation-day-at-the-statehouse>

Vermont Conservation Plan: Outdoor Recreation Virtual Listening Session (March 9th)

- Co-hosted by VTGC, VOBA, and VRPA
- Follows regional listening sessions, which we are promoting as an educational opportunity
- Focus on soliciting community feedback on the public version of the expanded framework



VERMONT CONSERVATION PLAN OUTDOOR RECREATION VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION

HOSTED BY VOBA, VRPA & VTGC



THANK YOU!

nick@vmba.org