



Vermont Outdoor Recreation Day February 5, 2026

Good morning. My name is Sarah Alberghini Winters, and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Parks Forever, the nonprofit foundation for Vermont's 55 state parks. Thank you for the opportunity to share some good news with all of you today for Outdoor Recreation Day.

Vermont Parks Forever began in 2013 and works closely with the great folks at Vermont State Parks to make the parks even better by investing in nature education programming and materials, paid youth internships in the parks, and the heart of our work, creating programs like the Park Access Fund to increase access and equity in the outdoors. We do this by removing barriers so that as many people as possible can enjoy all the state parks have to offer.

The Park Access Fund started over 10 years ago with a small grant of 100 park passes to help more foster families get into the parks and since then we've seen program growth of over 1400%. In 2025 we granted 14,000 free day passes to over 60 community partners who do the critical work of helping their clients get out into the parks through dedicated programming or other supports. We've also provided funding for 6 new beach wheelchairs and roll out access mats throughout the park system.

Today I'm here to talk about a major expansion to the Park Access Fund. It's a first-in-the-nation Pilot Program that Vermont Parks Forever launched in 2025 with the help of volunteer Scott Brown, and partners Vermont State Parks, the Dept. for Children and Families, and the Dept. of Health's WIC program.

The Park Access Fund's Pilot Program offers free day-use access to Vermont State Parks for 100,000 eligible Vermonters with lower incomes who receive benefits through 7 assistance programs. This privately funded program is simple to administer. Eligible Vermonters present their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, their WIC card, or a special Pilot Program card to staff at the park entrance, and their household is able to



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enter the park for free. The Park Access Fund Pilot Program, through generous donations, covers the cost of the entrance fees. Offering free day-use access to state parks is a cost-effective way to enhance the health of our communities and provide more equitable access to lower-income Vermonters.

I'm happy to report that this pilot program was a big success resulting in 30,000 additional visits to the state parks in 2025. Nearly all the day use parks were visited by program participants, bringing individuals and families to the parks to relax, renew, and make lifelong connections with nature in our beautiful state parks.

After surveying 240 participants at the end of last year's park season, we learned almost 3/4 of those surveyed would not have gone to the state parks without this program due to cost. 99% of those surveyed will use this program in its second year. In other words, we learned it worked!

Countless studies show that spending time outside, and off screens, is critical for childhood health and wellness. Over half of the visitors to the parks through the pilot program were Vermont's children.

So as we head into the second year of the pilot, we know there is more work needed get the word out and make sure everyone eligible for the pilot program knows about it.

You can help ensure the success of the program in 2026 by sharing the news of the Pilot Program with your constituents when it officially launches this spring and by encouraging your legislative colleagues to do the same.

I mentioned that we are the nonprofit foundation for the parks, and that this program is privately funded. Another way you can ensure this program can continue is by connecting us with any businesses or individuals who would be interested in supporting this work through the Park Access Fund.



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I'd like to share some feedback we received from two program participants that illustrates the impact this program has on Vermonters:

"My family would not have been able to visit any state parks without this program. This has allowed myself and my children to get out, see and learn about nature, and walk around when we otherwise would have been stuck at home."

"This program is amazing! With a 3 year old and brand new baby our funds are very tight each month. This program allowed us to visit many parks and ones we had not previously been to. It allowed me to access beautiful scenery and get my children outside in fresh air on a weekly basis. I am so grateful for this program!"

Like all of you, Vermont Parks Forever believes the outdoors are for everyone.

I hope you and your families have a chance to enjoy time in Vermont's amazing state parks this year.

Thank you for your time today.

To learn more: <https://www.vermontparksforever.org/paf-pilot>
or contact info@vermontparksforever.org

View the [2025 Park Access Report](#)

View the [2025 Vermont Parks Forever Impact Report](#)