

Statement of Phil White
649 Sunset Acres
Derby, Vermont

By way of introduction, I served as Orleans County State's Attorney during the 1980's and then as a trial attorney and managing partner at Wilson & White, PC for another 25 years. During the past two decades of my life, I have founded Kingdom Games and dedicated myself to promoting running, biking, and swimming events in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and the Eastern Townships of Quebec. While many local residents participate in our events, the Northeast Kingdom is now well recognized as an "unlikely mecca" of open water swimming, drawing swimmers from 47 states (including even Alaska and Hawaii), five Canadian Provinces, as well as 13 other nations: Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, India, Scotland, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Russia and Finland.

I am neither a regular cross country skier nor am I a snowmobiler. Although I live along the bike path, that is not why I speak out.

I am a strong supporter of the Newport area and the value of outdoor recreational activity as inherently beneficial to members of our community and also as an important economic driver for our hard pressed, economically challenged area.

I firmly believe that VAST'S 470 miles of groomed trails and Memphremagog Trails' 18 miles of groomed trails are both of extraordinary value and should and can be protected and promoted without adverse impacts by one to the other.

What I know about the Beebe Spur

My experience this winter:

- The Spur was used by snowmobilers not just at the beginning and end of the season (to avoid thin ice on the lake) it was used throughout the winter, even when the ice was 2 feet thick.
- One person owning a vacation house near the Johns River would invite his friends up from Massachusetts and they would use the Beebe Spur with 5 to 7 snowmobilers in the caravan.
- One local snowmobiler complained to me in an e-mail that he was snowmobiling down the bike path and a cross country skier refused to get out of his way.
- Snow mobile traffic after a snow storm and after grooming regularly destroyed the skate skiing track created by the groomer.

- The snowmobile use was not restricted to a few abutting landowners. Many other snowmobilers used the Spur this winter. In short, once it is opened to a few, for all practical purposes, it is open to all.
- I know some cross country skiers who chose not to ski the Spur this winter because of their concern about encountering a snowmobile, especially at one of the narrower points with steep embankments on either side,

The Spur is unlike other rail trails in Vermont

- It was opened 25 years ago; the other rail trails were opened a couple of years ago
- At the time it opened, AoT promised that no motorized vehicles would be allowed. The other rail trails have always allowed snowmobile traffic
- Signs have been in place for 25 years prohibiting motorized vehicles on the Beebe Spur. Anybody who says that snowmobiles have always been allowed on the Beebe Spur is mistaken.
- It was opened at the same time the Memphremagog Ski Touring Foundation was founded, in part to make use of the Beebe Spur as part of its trail system.
- MSTF, now known as Memphremagog Trails, relying in part on the promise that no motorized traffic would be allowed, invested in grooming equipment and recruited volunteers to groom the Beebe Spur for cross country skiing in the winter. It has been regularly grooming the trail every winter after snow fall for the past 25 years. The Spur constitutes 4 of 18 miles of groomed cross country ski trails. There are hundreds of cross country skiers who regularly use the Beebe Spur each year. The Petition to Save Beebe Spur and prohibit the change of use was signed by over 800 people, 2/3rds of whom live in Derby, Derby Line or Newport. Both the Newport City Council and the Derby Selectboard have unanimously voiced their opposition to the generalized use of the Beebe Spur by snowmobiles.
- The groomed track includes two tracks for diagonal (traditional) skiing and one broader track for skate skiing (what you see now in competitive events)
- It is too narrow to be groomed by normal snow mobile groomers. VAST already grooms 470 miles of trails in Orleans County. Other rail trails are wider and are groomed by VAST.
- The Beebe Spur is not listed on the VAST network of trails. The other rail trails are included in the VAST trail maps.
- The Beebe Spur is too narrow in most spots for snowmobiles to pass each other traveling in opposite directions. It is too narrow in many spots for snow mobiles and skiers to pass each other safely.
- It is true that diagonal cross country skiers can ski on groomed snowmobile trails, but not skate skiers. They need the four-foot wide corduroy track, which is, more often than not, ruined by even a single snowmobile traveling over it.

- At the time VTrans changed the use of Beebe Spur to allow snowmobiles for the first time in 25 years, it excluded abutting property owners and regular cross country ski users from any discussions, saying that they had no standing to object. Nor did VTrans appear to consider the adverse impact on our cherished cross country ski center.
- Other rail trails do not have established cross country ski centers grooming any portion of their trails.
- This is not a battle between snowmobilers and cross country skiers. They are both valued assets in our effort to promote outdoor recreational activity in Orleans County that includes local residents and recreational tourists. It is an effort to preserve both our significant VAST trail network AND a cherished cross country ski center. It is an effort to prevent a few who have asked for access to this trail for their convenience from destroying the Beebe Spur as an important cross country ski offering by an established ski touring center.
- Some may invite some sort of a legislative or administrative study before acting to ban motorized use on the Beebe Spur. First of all, the existence of a vibrant and cherished cross country ski center grooming this path and the regular use by hundreds of cross country skiers each year should provide reason enough to distinguish this four mile stretch from other rail trails. Second, if a study should be done, it should be noted that VTrans conducted no detailed cost/benefit evaluation including input from existing users prior to changing the use of the path to allow motorized traffic for the first time in 25 years. It intentionally excluded us. The remedy should be to return the Spur to its Status Quo Ante, banning snowmobiles unless and until any study concludes that such a change will not have an adverse impact on existing use of the Beebe Spur.

Thank you for giving us your time and hearing us out. Your consideration is much appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil White, Director
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