

Thank you Chair Walker and committee for choosing to take our testimony on H. 894 today. Our objective is to prohibit the use of snowmobiles on the Beebe Spur Rail Trail.

The Rail Trail is 3.75 miles whereas the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers has over 5,000 miles of snowmobile trails. The Beebe Rail Trail was originally created as a pedestrian path 25 years ago and until recently all motorized vehicles had been banned. The Memphremagog Trails has maintained the trail as part of its cross-country skiing network of trails. In the winter it is used for cross-country skiing, biking and walking. In the summer it is used for walking and biking. In Newport, the trail begins near the hospital and ends before the US/Canadian Border. It is considered a safe, easily accessible trail system that serves the community well in its current recreational activities.

Originally when the trail was first created adjacent landowners were concerned with motorized vehicles being able to use the trail. A letter dated September 30, 1997, is included from the Office of the Attorney General Transportation Division discussing a Preliminary Ruling dated April 1, 1997 and that by November 17, 1997 the Agency of Transportation would have plans for the project that “are so settled in intention and purposes that it can be called ready to commence.” The September 30th letter also discusses signage being placed at the beginning/end of the trail to include “motorized vehicles are not permitted anywhere on the trail.”

An informal survey has been conducted supporting the banning of snowmobiles on the trail. There have been 793 petition signatories as of this past weekend. The breakdown for Newport City Residents is 274(14.18% of 2024 voters), Derby/Derby Line is 153 (5.67% of 2024 voters) followed by Charleston with 16 and Morgan at 14. These are the highest numbers recorded in the survey. Newport City Council recently passed a resolution requesting VTrans to close the trail to snowmobiles. The Town of Derby Select Board unanimously passed the resolution with an amendment stating that local abutters should have the ability to use the trail for access to the VAST Trail system.

There is also a safety issue for allowing snowmobilers on the Beebe Rail Trail. The trail cannot be compared to and is not the same as other rail trails in Vermont since the other trails were designed for snowmobile use. The Beebe Rail Trail is smaller and was never designed for use by snowmobiles. The path is approximately 7 to 8 feet wide and less than that for bridges. Various design guides for creating rail trails call for a minimum of a 10-foot width for moderate use and for a standard shared use path the width is recommended at 10 to 12 feet with 2ft on either side of the trail for shoulders. The Beebe Trail has some very steep banks on either side with large rocks and granite where someone could be badly hurt should they fall down an embankment. Since the Beebe Trail has been opened to snowmobile traffic there has been a number of vehicles that have traveled the entire length

of the trail, and it isn't just individuals that live along the trail that are using their snowmobiles on it. This change by the Agency of Transportation has created a situation where it is only a matter of time before someone gets hurt. The snowmobile traffic is also ruining the groomed trails for the cross-country skiers. Again, the request is to prohibit the use of snowmobiles on the Beebe Spur Rail Trail and we ask the committee for its support. Thank you for your time.

WOODMAN H. PAGE
VT House of Representatives
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