

WHEREAS, Orleans County is blessed with a bounty of outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, boating, kayaking, running, biking, hiking, walking, snowmobiling, cross country skiing and downhill skiing, along with cherished and well used recreational infrastructure such as the 450 miles of groomed VAST snowmobile trails, The Craftsbury Outdoor Center, The Memphremagog Ski Touring Foundation (now known as Memphremagog Trails), and Jay Peak Resort that are a part of the lifeblood of our community and create a hub of outdoor recreation activity that draws visitors from near and far.

WHEREAS, when the Beebe Spur was first converted to a rail trail, in or around 1998, the Environmental Board ruled that there would be no adverse environmental impact (and no Act 250 jurisdiction to review the project) because no motorized vehicles would be allowed on the four miles of trail. As a result, Memphremagog Trails obtained permission to groom the trail in winter for traditional, two track skiing and for skating. In doing so, the Beebe Spur became linked to the cross-country ski trails in Primeau Woods and elsewhere.

WHEREAS, the Beebe Spur is four miles long, three of them in the Town of Derby and one of them within the City of Newport.

WHEREAS, for almost three decades, Memphremagog Trails, has invested in grooming equipment, its volunteers have regularly groomed the trail throughout the winter, and hundreds, if not thousands, of cross-country skiers and other pedestrians have made regular use of the trail, it being especially well used by young families, seniors, and elite skate skiers. Its gentle grade and extraordinary views make it an ideal and relatively pristine place for non-motorized winter recreation.

WHEREAS, the City of Newport and the Newport Downtown Development Corporation have spent years and significant resources promoting Newport and the surrounding towns of Orleans County as a hub of world-class outdoor recreational activity, including our VAST trail system and the Memphremagog Trail system. This includes a brochure featuring the Waterfront Recreational Path stretching from Newport to Beebe and including Memphremagog Trails.

WHEREAS, the 450 miles of the groomed VAST trail system in Orleans County and the groomed Memphremagog Trail system have co-existed together without adverse impact on either and to the mutual benefit of our entire community.

WHEREAS a handful of landowners abutting the Beebe Spur are intent on using the trail for access to the VAST Trail system and VTrans is intent on allowing such use.

WHEREAS. Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 217(h), motorized vehicles are not permitted on nonmotorized trails and pedestrian walkways funded under 23 U.S.C. Exceptions to this general rule exist for maintenance purposes, motorized wheelchairs, snowmobiles (when snow conditions **and State or local regulations permit**), electric bicycles, “and such other circumstances as the Secretary [of the United States Department of Transportation] deems appropriate.”

WHEREAS, 5 V.S.A. § 3408a (b)(11) prohibits the use of all motorized vehicles on the four Vermont Rail Trails, except for:

- A. maintenance purposes;
- B. snowmobiles, **subject to applicable State rules**, when the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. has declared the Statewide Snowmobile Trail System officially open;

WHEREAS, the four-mile Beebe Spur Rail Trail is only 7 feet wide in many parts (compared with LVRT and MVRT which are at least 8 and 10 feet wide), with steep embankments in many places, making it impossible for two-way snowmobile traffic and inherently dangerous for shared use with other users.

WHEREAS, any use of the trail by even a few snowmobiles will **ruin** the grooming designed for cross-country skiing, rendering such shared use of this resource incompatible in addition to being inherently dangerous.

WHEREAS, once opened to a handful of snowmobilers, others can't be prevented from using the trail. In fact, VTrans now advertises that the Beebe Spur is open to **all** snowmobilers.

WHEREFORE, by this resolution,

The City of Newport declares its opposition to allowing snowmobiles on the Beebe Spur Rail Trail during the winter.

Because it is wholly incompatible with the existing, long standing, and cherished use of this trail as a well-groomed cross-country ski trail and the investment of Memphremagog Trails in this recreational resource which is now used regularly throughout the winter by hundreds from near and far.

Because the trail is only 7 feet wide in most places, with steep embankments on either side in many places, its use by snowmobiles is inherently dangerous to two-way snowmobile traffic as well as crosscountry skiing and other pedestrian users.

Because, closing this four-mile stretch of trail to snowmobiles has no adverse impact on the 450 miles of groomed VAST trails in Orleans County.

Because it is detrimental to the efforts of Newport and Newport Downtown Development to promote itself as a hub of outstanding outdoor recreational activity.

The City of Newport urges

VTrans to use its regulatory authority under 5 V.S.A. § 3408a (b) to close the Beebe Spur to snowmobiles for all of these reasons and,

in the absence of such action by VTrans.

The City of Newport urges

the Vermont legislature to amend 5 V.S.A. § 3408a (b) to prohibit the use of the Beebe Spur Rail Trail by snowmobiles because of the special local conditions that exist on this four-mile stretch of rail trail.