



KINGDOM TRAILS

Abby Long, Executive Director Kingdom Trail Association
Senate Ag
Testimony 2.12.25 / 10am

Act to Incentivize Landowner Participation in Public Recreation

Hello! Thank you so much, Senator Ingalls, and to the committee.

My name is Abby Long. I am the Executive Director of the Kingdom Trail Association. I also serve on the Vermont Trails & Greenway Council, am a member of the VOREC Steering Committee, and am the Board Chair for the NEK Collaborative, as the Kingdom Trail's 100+ miles extends throughout Caledonia County's Burke, Kirby, and Lyndonville, plus Essex County's East Haven. It is actually Essex County, where the world's #2 rated MTB trail is located! We are also proud that 58 miles of our trail network is adaptive (aMTB) mountain bike friendly, welcoming every 'body' to enjoy the outdoors in the NEK.

KT is a world-class trail system deeply intertwined with the local community. In 1994, it was Northeast Kingdom community members, private landowners, who banded together to develop the multi-use nonprofit trail network that now generates over \$10,000,000 in annual direct spending for the Northeast Kingdom, a region, as Russ knows, with significant social and economic challenges.

KT's 106 private landowners, neighbors after neighbors, my own neighbors even, who host our trails know firsthand the positive economic, public health, and conservation benefits of communities investing in outdoor recreation. However, they do not receive compensation for their generosity. Stewardship organizations, such as KT, are prohibited from directly compensating host landowners, as it would compromise the landowner's protection under the state's liability statute.

Although our trails are a remarkable recreation resource with tremendous economic impact, KT wholeheartedly acknowledges this level of use places pressure and stress on the private landowners who make our trails possible. In 2019, KT experienced a landowner who chose to restrict access to Mountain bikers on their property. This was detrimental to KT's continuous network, and the loss of beloved trails devastated our community and trail users. These landowners saw area businesses reaping the economic benefits of outdoor recreation, but they themselves were not receiving anything, even though they were the ones hosting miles of trails on their land.

These KT landowners are not alone. VAST, Craftsbury Outdoor Center, and others have all experienced landowners withdrawing access. Currently, over 70% of Vermont's public-access trails are on private land and dependent on the benevolence of private landowners. With increased demand on our trail assets, these non-profit trail stewardship organizations face more and more challenges in retaining public access to vital trail corridors.

This question of how we develop an appropriate mechanism to recognize private landowners will be a critical component of how we retain public access to Vermont's trail system, how VT remains a national leader in outdoor recreation.



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Therefore I ask, when the time comes to please support H.147 a bill to establish the Recreational Trails Compensation Study Committee, a proposal that would analyze how to create a mechanism to recognize landowners that provide public access for trails. This proposal includes a localized outdoor recreation economic impact study to better understand the value across recreational activities and land ownership. The \$250,000 cost for the study is a vital investment in sustaining recreation on private land and supporting Vermont's \$2.1B, almost 5% of the state's GDP, outdoor recreation economy.

Now I would like to introduce Georgia Gould, as I believe it will be powerful to hear directly from one of KT's 106 private landowners. Thank you all.