

Outdoor Recreation Day at the Statehouse
Senate Education
February 5, 2026
2:30 pm - 3:00 pm, Statehouse, Room 28

Good afternoon. My name is Carson Zundel, and I am a student at Vermont State University–Lyndon. I will be graduating this May with a degree in Outdoor Education, Leadership, and Tourism.

Thank you for the opportunity to share how my educational pathway has shaped my interests and skills in outdoor recreation.

I like to say that I am a Mainer by blood and a Vermonter by heart. In high school, I was fortunate to attend a Career and Technical Education program focused on Outdoor Education and Leadership in my hometown of Farmington, Maine. That program gave me early exposure to careers in the outdoor industry and helped me develop practical, transferable skills through hands-on learning.

Through this CTE program, I learned a wide range of outdoor and technical skills, many of which were taught by local industry professionals. This program was also known as “Oxbow Outdoors.” For those unfamiliar, an oxbow is a bend in a river where it changes direction and resembles the letter “U.” This feature became the program’s motto: *“Oxbow Outdoors: A place where learning changes directions.”* Like many students in my generation, I have never learned best by sitting still. I learn far more from hands-on experiences than by being talked at in a traditional classroom. This program gave me exactly what I needed: an opportunity to learn by “doing” and to develop practical, transferable skills in an outdoor setting.

My passion for the outdoors ultimately led me to enroll at Vermont State University, which is widely recognized for its Outdoor Education, Leadership, and Tourism program. VTSU builds directly on the foundation that CTE programs provide, reinforcing both technical and professional skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and time management which are skills that are applicable to ANY job or occupation.

VTSU’s Outdoor Education program is closely aligned with the needs of Vermont’s outdoor economy. Its alignment is reflected in job placement rates between 95 and 100 percent following graduation. Many graduates remain in Vermont, working for organizations such as the VYCC, GMC, and in numerous mountain operation positions.

Both my CTE program and VTSU also integrate industry-recognized professional certifications into their curriculum. These credentials are critical for emerging

professionals, as they demonstrate readiness for employment and help bridge the gap between education and the workforce.

As I complete my degree, I will be doing independently contracted work for the Vermont Huts and Trails Association along with additional professional development this spring. This opportunity would not have been possible without the education, certifications, and professional connections I gained through CTE and higher education programs like those I have described.

Beyond my own education, I have remained involved in CTE from another perspective. After graduating high school, I served on the advisory committee for my former Outdoor Education and Leadership program, and I have returned to speak with current students about careers in the outdoor industry and how the skills they are learning can be applied beyond high school.

The impact of these programs is not limited to my own experience. Of the 14 students in the 2022–2023 CTE cohort, eight are currently working in outdoor industry roles in positions including but not limited to trail crews, summit stewards, and mountain operations. These are real jobs that support local economies and keep young people connected to the places they care about.

I applaud the efforts of this Committee and others working to strengthen career pathways for Vermont students and adults who want to live and work here. Senate Bill S.313 is particularly promising because it recognizes CTE as a bridge from education to employment or continued education, rather than a side option. As I experienced firsthand, CTE programs help students match their interests with career exploration.

In a state like Vermont, where the outdoor industry is a major economic driver, I encourage continued efforts to expand CTE opportunities. These programs are essential to maintaining a strong, local talent pipeline from education to employment.

As my professor, Brad Moskowitz, said, *“Students coming from these technical high schools show themselves to be more dedicated, experienced, and prepared to succeed in both the workplace and higher education programs.”*

Thank you for your work to support student success. I would be happy to answer any questions.