



February 12th
2025

Introduction to VTGC & S.4 - Maintenance and Use of Legal Trails Senate Committee on Transportation

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Vice-Chair, Vermont Trails & Greenways Council

Motorized Rep to Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC)

Background

Outdoor recreation is woven into the fabric of Vermont

- 8,000+ miles of public access trails, 70%+ hosted by private landowners
- Public-access recreation is a designated purpose for conservation
- Strong collaboration between public land mgrs & nonprofit stewardship orgs (VTGC)
- A vibrant and highly diversified outdoor recreation business sector
- Dozens of outdoor recreation-oriented communities
- Accounts for 4.8% of State GDP (↑ 0.2%) ○



About the VTGC

The consolidated, expert voice and support hub for recreational trails in Vermont.

Our organizational members:

- Represent 50,000+ individual members
- Log 100,000+ hours of volunteer time annually
- Manage and maintain 7,750+ miles of trails
- Support 50,000+ jobs statewide through the broader impact of our work
- Steward trails on private land, which hosts over 70% of public access trails in Vermont
- Partner closely with state and federal agencies to manage trails on public land

<https://vermonttgc.org/>



Stewardship

Maintaining and growing trail infrastructure through private landowner relationships and public land manager partnerships

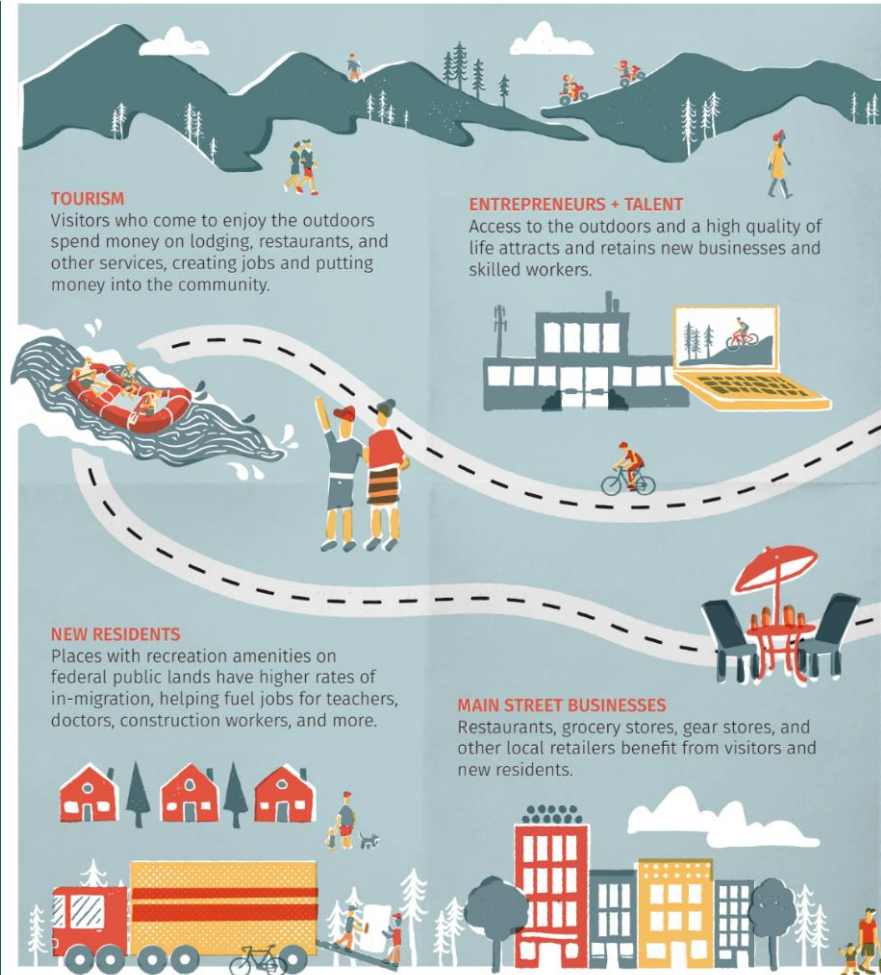
- Balance equitable access with responsible use of Vermont's amazing landscape
- Apply Best Management Practices (BMPs) on trail design, construction, use, and maintenance
- Develop maintenance, access, and stewardship plans
- Professionally-led with support of VTGC coordinator and Volunteer-supported work
- Establish and cultivate lasting relationships with landowners who host trails
- Funded primarily through memberships, grants, and philanthropic support



The Benefits

Outdoor Recreation drives health, environmental, and economic impact

- Supports healthy & resilient communities
- Fosters ecological awareness & conservation
- Fuels sustainable economic development:
 - Hundreds of outdoor businesses
 - Attraction and retention of new residents
 - Supporting infrastructure and amenities
 - A driving force for so many of the 13+ million annual visitor trips
 - **Responsible for 4.8% of Vermont's GDP, behind only Hawaii**



Source: Headwaters
Economics

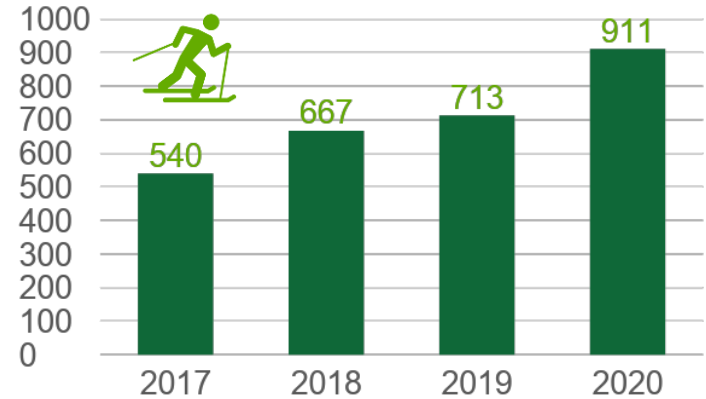
Growth

Vermonters and visitors rely on recreational trails, now more than ever

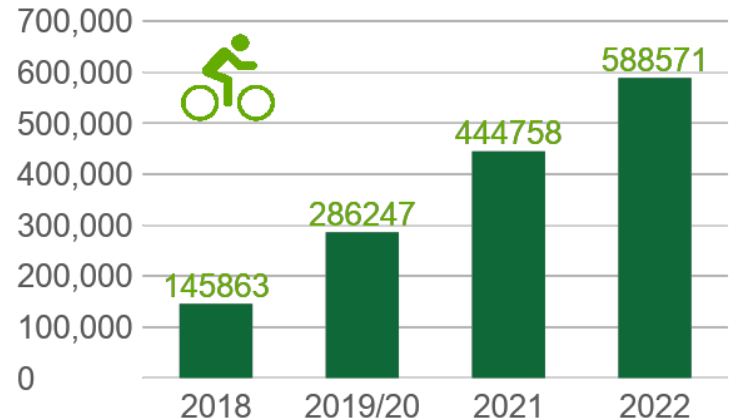
- Dramatic increase in demand for outdoor recreation over the last decade; accelerated through the pandemic
- Over half (54%) of Americans recreated outdoors in 2021, participation that has increased every year since 2014
- Trail usage across usage types, motorized/non-motorized and seasons has increased 100-200% over the last 5 years
- Over 70% of Vermont's recreational trails are hosted by private landowners, stewarded by non-profit organizations with limited public support



Trail Users, 'No-Name' Backcountry Area



TrailForks Trail Check-ins, State-wide



Challenges

Threats to the future prosperity of outdoor recreation in Vermont

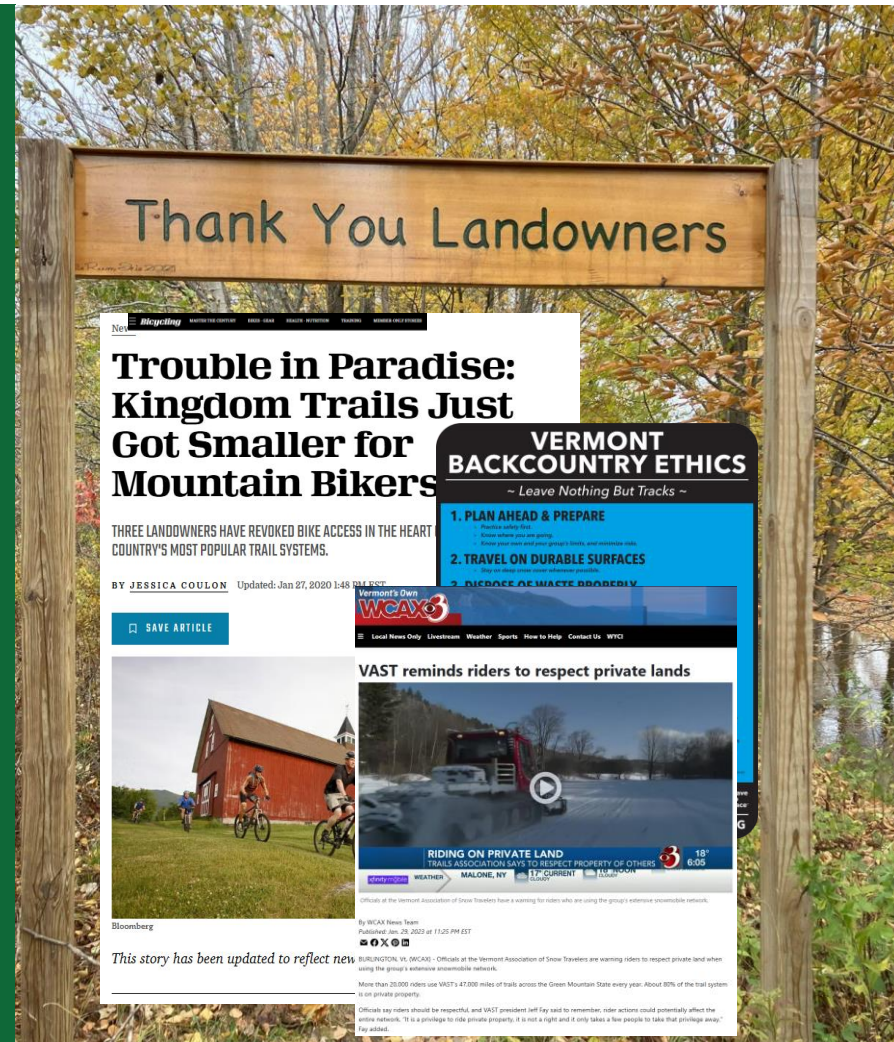
- Majority reliance on private landowners without any recognition or support
- Limited understanding of the outdoor recreation economy
- Deferred maintenance
- Underfunded stewardship
- Insufficient organizational capacity
- Ill-suited regulation & oversight system
- Dramatic increase in demand
- Climate change



Private Landowners

Vital to Vermont's Outdoor Recreation Economy

- ~75% of public-access recreational trails are hosted by private landowners
- Different factors motivate Landowners to host public-access recreation, typically receiving no formal or tangible recognition
- Withdrawal of access can and has had serious impacts on connectivity and local economies
- Recreation managers act to address landowner concerns, though the scope of their ability to provide benefits is limited



Support of S.4

- S.4 - Legal Trails
 - Provides Explicit authority for municipalities to manage Legal Trails



Maintenance

“Municipalities have the authority to exclusively or cooperatively maintain”

Exclusive Maintenance:

Allows for trails to be repaired quicker and most work can be done in a more efficient manner

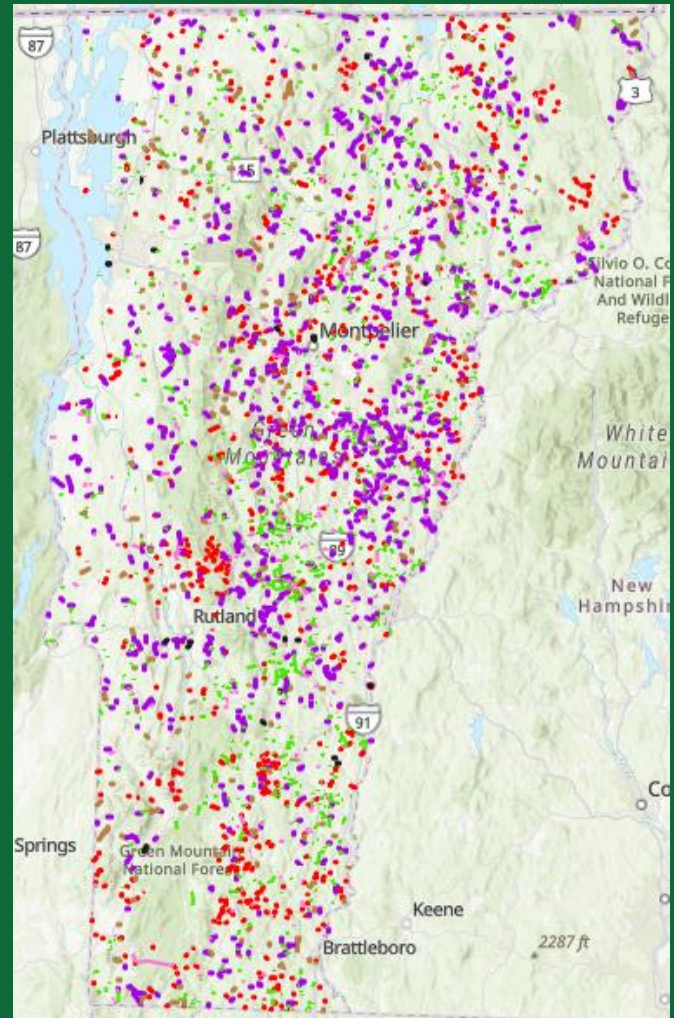
Most municipalities create budget lines for recreational maintenance

Cooperative Maintenance:

Several trail organizations across Vermont work closely with municipalities to create and execute maintenance plans

By sharing maintenance responsibilities, municipalities can keep more trails open and accessible to the public

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/>

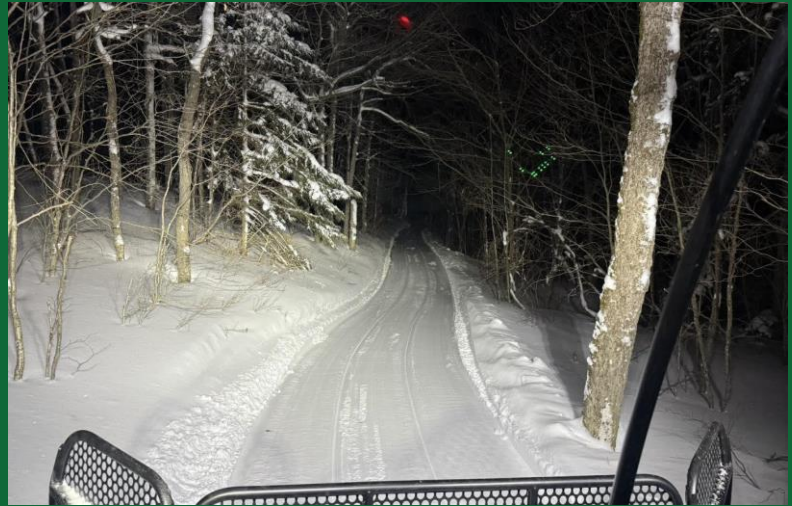


Town Autonomy

It shall be the duty and responsibility of the selectboard of the town, appointed board, or road commissioner...

The town and their elected selectboard, or the committee designated with the responsibility of right of ways shall have the expressed authority to oversee said right of ways.

This allows the municipality to work with its citizens to operate in the best interest of their community and gives the municipality the oversight to the citizens requests



A photograph of two off-road vehicles parked on a dirt road at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a glow over the scene. The vehicle on the left is a dark-colored SUV with a person standing behind it. The vehicle on the right is a Polaris utility vehicle. The text "THANK YOU!" is overlaid in the center, and the contact information for the VTGC Board of Directors is at the bottom.

THANK YOU!

The VTGC Board of Directors; board@vermonttgc.org

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