

Report to the Act 47 Commission regarding Act 250 and Recreational
Trail Regulation in Vermont

In response to Act 194 of 2018

October 1, 2018

Developed by:

Act 194 Recreational Trails Working Group

Submitted by:

Diane B. Snelling, Chair

Vermont Natural Resources Board

Michael C. Snyder, Commissioner

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018 the Vermont General Assembly enacted Act 194 (S.276)¹, an act relating to rural economic development. Section 3 of Act 194 focused on Act 250 jurisdiction and recreational trails, and directed the Act 47 Commission on Act 250: the Next 50 Years (“Commission”) to *“evaluate the strengths and challenges associated with regulation of recreational trails under 10 V.S.A. Chapter 151 (Act 250) and alternative structures for the planning, review, and construction of future trail networks and the extension of existing trial networks”*.

Act 194 further instructed the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation (“FPR”) or designee and the Chair of the Natural Resources Board (“NRB”) or designee to form a recreational trails working group (“Working Group”) that *“shall offer an opportunity for submission of information and recommendations from affected parties, including recreational trail and environmental organizations”*. Act 194 requires that Working Group to submit a report to the Commission on or before October 1, 2018.

This report is intended to meet the submission requirement of Act 194; however, it is not the end of the Working Group’s efforts nor the final piece of testimony the Working Group intends to provide the Commission on this issue. The Working Group will meet on November 1, 2018 with a broad range of stakeholders to continue the Act 250 and trails conversation and will provide the Commission with updated information and additional recommendations at that time.

Working Group and Process

The FPR Commissioner and NRB Chair constituted the Working Group to include officers and staff from FPR, NRB and the Agency of Natural Resources (“ANR”). Specifically, from FPR:

- Michael Snyder, Commissioner
- Rebecca Washburn, Director of Lands Administration and Recreation
- Craig Whipple, Director of State Parks
- Jessica Savage, Recreation Program Manager

From NRB:

- Diane Snelling, Chair
- Donna Barlow Casey, Executive Director
- Greg Boulbol, General Counsel

From ANR:

- Billy Coster, Director of Planning

To ensure the Working Group was aware of and considered a broad range of information and perspectives, the Working Group invited a representative network of statewide and regional trail groups, environmental advocacy organizations, planners, and land conservation organizations that specialize in trail corridor protection to engage in a formal dialogue around Act 250 and recreational trail regulation.

¹ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT194/ACT194%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

Invited stakeholder representatives included:

- Catamount Trail Association
- Cross Vermont Trail Association
- Green Mountain Club
- Green Mountain Horse Association
- Kingdom Trail Association
- New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
- Stowe Land Trust
- The Nature Conservancy
- Trust for Public Land
- Upper Valley Trails Alliance
- Vermont Association of Snow Travelers
- Vermont Horse Council
- Vermont Hut Association
- Vermont Land Trust
- Vermont Mountain Bike Association
- Vermont Natural Resources Council in partnership with Audubon Vermont
- Windham Regional Commission
- Windham Hill Pinnacle Association

The Working Group also welcomed input from the Vermont Agency of Transportation, given their role as owners of significant rail-trail projects in Vermont, and the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council provided direct input to the FPR Commissioner and ANR staff. Because the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council is a statutorily constructed entity² designed to advise ANR, the Working Group concluded the Council should not participate directly in the process as an invited stakeholder, but rather advise and inform ANR's participation; that said, many of the member organization that make up the Council were invited to participate as stand-alone entities.

Once constituted, the Working Group asked the invited stakeholders to complete a written survey. The survey was intended to gather baseline information about Act 250 jurisdiction, recreational trails regulation, alternative regulatory models, and experiences with the Act 250 process, in order to provide foundational information and recommendations from affected parties to the Commission. All eighteen organizations listed above responded to the survey. Of the respondents, sixty-one percent (11) represented they were members of the Vermont Trail System; the remaining respondents represented planners, environmental advocates, and land trusts – some of which manage trails of their own.

This report largely includes and relies on the results of that survey. As indicated above, the Working Group will meet later this fall, in person with the invited representative stakeholders, to discuss in more detail the survey results and broader issues related to Act 250 and recreational trails regulation, with the goal of providing additional information and recommendations to the Commission at that time.

² <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/020/00445>

2. SURVEY RESULTS

Before discussing the survey results, it is important to note that the Working Group believes an adequate regulatory framework for recreational trail projects in Vermont is important and warranted. While individual members of the Working Group may be open to revisions to the existing Act 250 structure or alternative regulatory structures, the Working Group is unified in the belief that trail projects of a certain scale and impact require some level of state review.

Survey respondents largely agreed with this position. The survey indicated universal support for preventing serious environmental damage that could result from trail projects; however, there were a range of ideas how to achieve that goal ranging from the current Act 250 review process, to: a truncated Act 250 review with fewer criteria; an alternative regulatory model housed potentially at ANR; requiring compliance with trail building and use best practices and, 'self-policing' by trail groups. A summary of survey results is included as **Appendix A** of this report and a copy of the survey itself as **Appendix B**.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly value a regulatory process that is clear, consistent and that protects sensitive environmental areas. Respondents also consistently identified three categories of concern or need that appear to be key for significantly improving the regulatory process and facilitating new high, quality trail projects and connections within the state:

1. The need for increased clarity, more frequent communication, and training of all involved parties as to the needs and concerns of each other were clearly identified across most responses, as were suggestions for increased and ongoing conversation between trail organizations and the NRB. With more communication, the comments suggest, comes a deeper and fuller understanding of respective constraints and a better environment in which to anticipate each other's needs and constructively problem solve.
2. Respondents are generally not calling for elimination of permitting or a regulatory process for trail projects; instead there are suggestions for modifying the process so that it better reflects the unique attributes of trail projects and needs of the respective parties.
3. Time concerns represent a third focus area, specifically the length of time between submission of application and issuance of decisions; the duration of the Act 250 process that may result in postponement of trail building due to seasonality; the amount of time and effort required by volunteer organizations in navigating the regulatory process; and concerns about whether the current regulatory process adequately addresses the cumulative impact of trail build-out over the mid and long term.

In addition to the above, the following represent comments consistently offered by respondents:

- Recreational trails should not degrade the environment.
- Some form of regulatory oversight is appropriate once trails hit a certain scale.
- Act 250 has had a positive impact in Vermont and is a good and important program; however, some respondents believe it is not a good fit for recreational trail regulation.
- Recreational trail projects are often much different than other forms of development regulated by Act 250, as they often cross multiple parcels; have a narrow, linear footprint; often lack permanent infrastructure and associated impacts; and often lack the potential revenue base of commercial or residential development typically regulated by Act 250, making it difficult for

primarily non-profit or volunteer organizations to support the costs associated with the current regulatory process.

- Not all trail projects are the same; they vary in type, use and potential impact.
- Vermont would benefit from a clearing house of trail building/maintenance and regulatory information, as well as a better platform for peer-to-peer information sharing, such as an annual meeting or series of workshops.
- There is a perceived need for better clarity and consistency around the definition and application of certain key Act 250 terms such as “project” and “material change”.
- There is a perceived need for better consistency across Act 250 districts related to jurisdictional decisions and Act 250 regulation of trail projects.
- Not all of Act 250’s criteria appear relevant for most trail projects.
- Many trail organizations are seeking clarity as to whether the disturbance threshold used to determine jurisdiction ‘re-starts’ at property boundaries.
- The incremental build-out of trail networks may not afford the opportunity for cumulative review of networks, and it is unclear if the current review process addresses cumulative impact adequately.

The survey results offered no major surprises and all the comments generally fell within familiar themes expressed to the Working Group during the 2018 legislative session, albeit with some additional focus and specificity. The survey did identify a range of positions; however, it also confirmed there is a significant agreement around certain values and that an opportunity may exist for the Working Group and representative stakeholders to envision a regulatory process that better addresses the unique nature of recreation trail projects in Vermont without compromising environmental protection or the interests of abutters, municipalities and other engaged citizens.

3. NEXT STEPS

As indicated above, this report is in no way the end of the Working Group’s engagement around this issue. The Working Group plans to meet with the representative stakeholders on November 1 and will work over the next month to prepare for that meeting, analyze the survey results further, and develop questions and concepts through which to more constructively engage stakeholders. The Working Group would welcome the opportunity to supplement this report to the Commission after the November 1 meeting, and testify before the Commission in person if invited. Per a separate Commission request, the NRB is also gathering data on the number of Act 250 trail projects to share with the Commission.

4. CONCLUSION

The Working Group values the opportunity share this report with the Commission and appreciates the Commission’s attention to this timely and important regulatory issue. As Vermont seeks to expand trail-based outdoor recreational opportunities as a strategy to improve economic, health and quality of life population-scale indicators, it is critical that the state maintain a regulatory framework that is protective, transparent, and addresses the legitimate concerns of both the regulated community and engaged citizens. The Working Group looks forward to supplementing this report in the future and continuing to support the Commission’s work on Act 250 and recreational trail regulation.

Trails Survey Results

(September 2018)

The following information is intended to offer a quick review of survey responses and arrive at a general comparison of opinions offered. This is not a verbatim representation of what is presented in each survey that has been submitted. To understand the complexity of responses and their nuances, it is best to read each of the submittals.

- 18 submittals
 - 11 are members of the Vermont Trails System; 7 are not members
 - 61% of all submittals were members; 38.8% were not
- **Act 250 experience.** Question: *Have you experienced any challenges in obtaining Act 250 permits for trails (please explain)? Please limit your response to personal experiences that you or your organization have experienced.*
 - Because of the different choices by respondents (as noted below) it is not possible to correlate answers with direct experiences.
 - In some situations, respondents answered “NO” to experiencing challenges, and then stated that they hadn’t had to apply. In other instances, a “No” answer meant they had applied and not found it to be a challenge.
 - Some applicants skipped answering this question, and then offered input into how Act 250 should change, or improve, leaving the reader to wonder how they had knowledge to inform the opinion(s) they articulated in answering other questions.
- **Have you experienced any challenges in obtaining 250 permits for trails?**
 - 8 surveys, or less than half of the respondents answered “Yes”; Of the remaining 10 respondents, 5 responded “No”; 5 responded N/A.

Responses are characterized below.

- LVRT and Phen Basin (two surveys reflect same negative impact)
- It’s too much work, a cumbersome experience.
- GMC had a vision for Long Trail to cross Winooski River Valley. Ultimately the plan we could implement did not reach the 250 thresholds of 10 acres of disturbance. What if 250 considered the Plan for a trail from MA to Canada that included building a bridge across the Winooski. That consideration would significantly impact 250 ‘s jurisdiction and the administrative process for the permittee.
- The Vermont Horse Council has had limited experience with building trails but some of our members have had issues with the Act 250 process when working on maintaining trails.
- Property had once been considered for development and was then conserved. 250 still had jurisdiction. Forced to reroute the trail away from Beaver pond despite old logging trail (unofficial trail) was long since established. Other times

we've done initial legwork only to be told that 250 won't be triggered. Inconsistencies are challenging for small organizations.

- Applied for 3 permits. Application very time-consuming. Some criteria difficult to interpret in relation to trails. Significant differences in interpretation of regulations from different 250 offices. In one we were required to file an amendment to reroute small section around a rare plant; in another with similar issue we were told it was a non-significant change – no amendment required.
 - Setback to biggest trail project in history of the UVTA – an ADA trail for VINS. Due to delays in 250 approval process, it will not be built this fall.
- If you or your organization has been through Act 250 process with respect to trails, please recommend any changes including, but not limited to:
- *A. How to make the process more efficient? B. How to make the process a better fit for the unique development aspects of trails. C. If Act 250 jurisdictional Triggers are not clear, identify how the jurisdictional triggers should be clarified.*
 - **A. How to make the process more efficient? There were 3 identical responses, synopsisized as follows:**
 - Terms need be clearly defined. District Coordinators and judicial officers need a common understanding of definitions to avoid inconsistency in applying them.
 - Need clear and shared understanding of when disturbance threshold clock starts.
 - District Coordinators should have benefit of legal counsel prior to any judicial proceeding so they fully understand process, with outcome of less time in the entire process and less need for expensive judicial process.
 - Important for third party enforced environmental standards
 - Oversight that ensures trails don't disrupt important wildlife habitat, wetlands, water quality, neighboring property owners.
 - Define *project*, *commercial* and *material change* more clearly so that they apply to trails
 - Synchronize understanding and application of definitions across the districts
 - Clarify handling of trail projects that cross property boundaries
 - Allow simple definition for a trail project that does not include a existing or abutting trails in a given network
 - Recognize difference between public trail network and commercial outdoor recreation business – streamline process of the former while maintaining protections for the latter
 - Design a special application for trails
 - Trails should have a checklist that triggers Act 250 and assesses whether there are notable impacts
 - Create clarity around key terms/thresholds
 - What types of trail development constitute a "project"? Apply consistently in each district

- What is considered a material change with regards to trails? Apply consistently in each district
- Clarify whether or not crossing property boundaries “re-starts” the disturbance threshold.
- Use the VT State Trails System designation and environmental/trail standards mandated as part of that system as a way to differentiate trail development by groups part of VSTS
- Greater Efficiency would involve the following:
 - Define what constitutes a project; ensure Coordinators understand the application
 - Synchronize Coordinators and their interpretation of the Act
 - Create reporting process that covers approved criteria that Coordinators send to trail orgs
 - Clarify whether or not property boundaries “re-start” disturbance threshold
 - FPR should facilitate annual meeting between trail organizations and District Coordinators

The following separate and distinct responses were provided by the other 15 respondents answering item A.

- Exclude the need for landowners to be co-applicants as long as trail org’s have secured landowner permission for access
 - Eliminate the requirement to address criteria that trails do not impact, such as impacts on water supply or utility services.
 - 1. Define a “project” “commercial” and “material change” more clearly so that they apply to trails; 2. synchronize understanding and application of definitions across the districts – right now there is inconsistency in how they are applied; 3. Clarify how you will handle trail projects that cross property boundaries; 4. Allow a simple definition for a trail project that does not include existing or abutting trails in a given network. 5. Recognize that there is a difference between a public trail network and a commercial outdoor recreation business - Streamline the process for the former while maintaining protections for the latter.
- **B. How to make the process a better fit for the unique development aspects of trails:**
- Eliminate the requirement to address criteria that trails do not impact: water supply, utility services
 - Trails need their own definition since they are not traditional development
 - The process should change based on the type of trail (e.g. dirt vs. paved, 8ft vs 12 ft wide, motorized winter vs. non-motorized winter., etc.)
 - Consider: the density and location of trails when considering a permit for a new trail; encroachment into ‘remote’ areas; a maximum number of trails in a certain density

- Those charged with applying 250 standards need better education about VT State Trail System and how it functions so that they are able to differentiate between the “project” of a commercial development the system of low-impact recreational trails. Environmental stewardship is already deeply engrained in the culture of trails management. Many small towns rely on trail system for economic survival. Inconsistent interpretation creates and places unnecessary burdens on private landowners. If trail regulation becomes unnecessarily burdensome, landowners will withdraw permission for public access.
 - Suggestion to mirror the EPA process in evaluating the cumulative impact(s) of projects.
 - Clarity on what constitutes a project and what constitutes a plan for determining jurisdiction. Consistent application of Act 250 criteria across jurisdictions. Cumulative impact and what constitute a project for determining jurisdiction as it relates to trail systems is an issue. Does Act 250 encumber a trail system forever or is it applied on a project by project basis?
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- **C. If Act 250 jurisdictional Triggers are not clear, how should the jurisdictional triggers be clarified**
 - Improvements to existing trail/road corridors should not be considered a material change
 - Beyond more consistent application of the triggers, it would be helpful to clarify what constitutes a “commercial” trail. Is any trail that is open to the public considered commercial?
 - The different Act 250 districts have their own way of dealing with trails. Trails on minimally disturbed soils existing forest roads, ancient roads, railroad beds, etc. should not have to go through the Act 250 process. New trails added to a previous Act 250 trail project that are limited to minimally disturbed soils, existing forest roads, ancient roads, railroad beds, etc. should not have to go through the Act 250 process.
 - Trails need their own definition since they are not traditional development
 - It’s unclear where trails fall in the ACT 250 DOES REGULATE AND CONTROL list. If trails fall under number 2: “The construction of improvements for any commercial or industrial purpose...” further defining the terms “improvements,” “commercial,” and “industrial” would be helpful to the reader.
 - They are not clear. They are not well defined, nor are they commonly and consistently understood and applied. Wherever possible, our trail system makes use of existing trails (e.g. old logging roads.) We don’t feel that rehabilitating these trails for low-impact recreational use should be considered a “material change,” for purposes of triggering Act 250, especially when, rather than degrading the environment, trails management actually enhances the environment by preventing run-off into rivers and streams created by flooded and deteriorated old logging roads and other abandoned road beds.

- **What are the strengths of Act 250's regulation of trails?**
 - Strength is that trail development can trigger 250 review. Removing it will allow for willy-nilly trail building, with rapid degradation of soils, waters, and natural areas.
 - Act 250 regulates development of commercial trail projects. Act 250 regulates trail development at a scale and intensity that could have significant social and environmental impacts.
 - The strength of Act 250 is it considers and minimizes environmental impacts, allows for input from affected landowners, and addresses impacts tot rail related uses, such as parking areas.
 - (3 identical responses) Act seems popular with public who might otherwise not have a voice in the regulation of projects. Adjoining neighbors who fear increased noise or traffic. Should be a limit on how much one person or party can appeal a decision so that it cannot be used as a means of stalling a project. Example: VAST & LVRT.

- **How is 250 beneficial to environmental quality of the state with respect to regulation of trails?**
 - Act 250 is only beneficial to the environmental quality of the state if trails are reviewed.
 - Through its established criteria and process, Act 250 helps ensure that trail development is done in a way that does not result in significant degradation of Vermont's environmental quality in all its forms.
 - Make the process better fit for the unique development aspect of trails.
 - Eliminate the requirement to address criteria that trails do not impact: water supply, utility services.
 - This is unclear to me. Trails make it difficult to develop land, they serve as a restraint to land development. Trails should be encouraged as a another tool to maintain large forest blocks and undeveloped land...
 - (4 respondents provided duplicative responses with minor wording changes to what follows:) Existing permitting (stormwater, wetlands, etc.) for trails is what ensures environmental protection, along with the ongoing and culturally engrained commitment to environmental quality in the organizations that maintain the trail system. For trails, therefore, Act 250 is a redundant layer of compliance.

- **What are the most relevant criteria with respect to trails** – The number of respondents choosing a specific criterion as being the most relevant is indicated in parenthesis.
 - Criterion 1 (3) 1e & 1f only (1)
L impact to stream and wetlands
 - Criterion 2 (2)
 - Criterion 3 (1)

- Criterion 4 (4)
Erosion caused by trail development/use
- Criterion 5 (4)
- Criterion 6
- Criterion 7
- Criterion 8 (6)
- 8A (1)
- Criterion 1c
- Criterion 9 (1) Some parts of 9 – B & C particularly;
(1) 9 A – C
(1) 9C
- Criterion 10 (4)
- N/A & No Answer (3)
- For trails, 250 seems to be redundant layer of compliance. (6)
- Other answers:
 - Act 250 originally written w/out clear intent around regulation of trail development.
 - All criteria have relevance; some are more important (those have been counted in above)
 - Relevant criteria include looking at the big picture of trail development/remote character of location/stream & soil requirements (knowing that trails WILL cause erosion).
- **Least relevant criteria with respect to trails**
 - Criterion 1 1C (1)
 - Criterion 2 (3)
 - Criterion 3 (3)
 - Criterion 5 (1)
 - Criterion 6 (4)
 - Criterion 7 (3)
 - Criterion 8
 - Criterion 1c (1)
 - Criterion 9 (1)
sub-criteria other than 9 B & C (1)
All sub-criteria (1)
 - Criterion 10 Difficult to classify trail projects as either developments or subdivisions; leads to subjectivity and inconsistent application of the rule as it was intended.
 - Do not believe trail system constitutes “greatest potential for impact” (6)
 - No, but should be clear/logical threshold for trigger and clear understanding of when Act should not be triggered
 - All criteria are important

- Current footprint requirements less relevant; know trail has impacts 100m on each side, despite relatively small size; Parcel size triggers not particularly relevant since large impacts can occur on small or large parcels.
- N/A & No Answer (5)
- **Should all trail projects be exempt from 250 review?**
 - YES (1)
 - NO (9)
 - N/A & No answer (1)
 - Unclear/Depends/don't have enough info (1)
 - Not all, but most (1)
 - No, but there should clear and logical threshold for trigger & clear understanding of when Act should not be triggered. (5)
 - Do not see why there should be 250 trigger every time section of new trail connects to existing sections
 - W/out clear definitions for development/subdivision impossible to answer question
 - Do not believe trails should be exempt unless there is an adequate alternate structure in place to review and minimize potential adverse impacts of trails
- **Should some trail projects be exempt from 250 review? Yes? What types? Why?**
 - No answer. (3)
 - Probably.
 - Yes. Pre-qualify members of the VT Trails System. Develop a best management practices guideline could be developed. Suspend trails group if they fail to follow trail construction guidelines. Under certain conditions. For development and maintenance by VT Trails System members, apply exemption if project proponent can meet certain criteria: comply with development/maintenance standards; consistent with town/regional planning; landowner consent to use land for this purpose; meets state and Federal regulatory requirements. (3)
 - No. Trails should not be exempt. Even small projects have potential to be part of a larger collective network. This needs wise oversight.
 - Don't see why 250 is triggered every time section of new trail connects two existing trails. Interconnectedness is seen as desirable rather than inspiring suspicion. (4)
 - Exempt municipal or other publicly owned property. These entities have their own processes that are sufficient. Private landowners and conservation organizations who want to make their land available for public trails should also be exempt.
 - Encourage landsharing. The trigger for jurisdiction should be related to construction and facilities – buildings, parking lots, etc.
 - Possibly. Another approach: expedited review for projects likely to have minimal impacts such as short, linear trail open only for foot traffic, sited in

non-sensitive areas, no accessory facilities such as trailhead parking or restrooms.

- Interconnectedness holds tremendous economic opportunities for VT. Can be done in manner that conserves forests, protects open space, creates more access for people.
 - Trails should be exempt unless there is an adequate alternate structure in place to review and minimize the potential adverse impacts of trails.
 - Development and sub-division must be clearly defined, understood by all parties.
 - We believe most trails can be monitored in other ways and are very concerned that connecting longer trails could get heightened scrutiny. We would like trail and community connection to be encouraged rather than discouraged by increased scrutiny.
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- **Should trails be subject to a general permit?**
 - This question seemed to generate some confusion, and for this reason, interested persons should read the responses directly in order to ascertain the nuances of respondents.
 - **Other Comments:**
 - The VFP would benefit from seeing the scientific studies conducted on New England forests to be utilized more frequently in stakeholder engagements.

List of Respondents to the Act 250 and Trails Questions for Comment

1. Catamount Trails Association, Matt Williams mwilliams@catamounttrail.org
2. Cross Vermont Trail Association, Greg Western greg@crossvermont.org
3. Forest and Wildlife Program Director, Jamey Fidel jfidel@vnrc.org
4. The Green Mountain Club
5. Green Mountain Horse Association, Tracy Ostler Tracy@gmhainc.org
6. Kingdom Trail Association, Abby Long abby@kingdomtrails.org
7. The Green Mountain Club, Michael DeBonis mdebonis@greenmountainclub.org
8. The Nature Conservancy, Phil Huffman phuffman@tnc.org
9. New England Chapter Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Matthew Breton
10. Stowe Land Trust, Kristen Sharpless kristen@stowelandtrust.org
11. The Trust for Public Land, Shelby Semmes Shelby.semmes@tpl.org
12. Upper Valley Trails Alliance, Randy Richardson randy.richardson@uvtrails.org
13. Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Cindy Locke cindy@vtvast.org
14. Vermont Horse Council, Jean Audet jean.audet4@gmail.com
15. Vermont Huts Association, R.J. Thompson rj@vermonthuts.org
16. The Vermont Land Trust, Elise Annes elise@vlt.org
17. Vermont Mountain Bike Association, Tom Stuessy tom@vmba.org
18. Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association, Andrew Toepfer a.l.toepfer@gmail.com
James Silos Roberts jrsilos22@gmail.com

ACT 250 and TRAILS QUESTIONS FOR COMMENT

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please only fill out **one survey** for your organization.*

Act 250, Vermont's land Use and development law, was passed in 1970 to mitigate the effects of certain developments and subdivisions through a permitting process that addresses the environmental and community impacts of projects that exceed a certain threshold. Currently, recreational trails may be subject to Act 250 and a variety of permits issued by the Department of Environmental Conservation.

With respect to Act 250 only, the threshold for jurisdiction (meaning that a project will need an Act 250 permit) depends on certain factors:

- 1) If the proposed trail is part of the Vermont Trail System, the key question is how much ground disturbance will occur as part of the project (10 acres of disturbance or more is the threshold)*
- 2) If the proposed trail is not part of the Vermont Trails System, jurisdiction is triggered only if the trail is commercial, and depending on the size of the tract (or tracts) where the trail will be located*
- 3) Jurisdiction over trails may also be triggered if the proposed trail is considered to be a "material change" to an already existing Act 250 permitted project.*

The Vermont Natural Resources Board and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation are seeking input concerning state regulation of trails, and we hope you will take the time to complete this brief survey. Your answers will be collated into a report to [The Commission on Act 250: the Next 50 Years](#) for consideration.

PLEASE RETURN THIS SURVEY NO LATER THAN 5 PM ON SEPTEMBER 17TH, 2018

1. Please indicate your name, name of organization, and contact information (including email address).
2. Is your entity a member of the Vermont Trails System?
3. Have you experienced any challenges in obtaining Act 250 permits for trails (please explain)? Please limit your response to personal experiences that you or your organization have experienced.
4. If you or your organization has been through the Act 250 process with respect to trails, please recommend any changes including, but not limited to the following topics:
 - a. How to make the process more efficient
 - b. How to make the process a better fit for the unique development aspects of trails
5. Are Act 250 jurisdictional triggers with respect to trails clear?
 - a. If not, how should the jurisdictional triggers be clarified?
6. What are the strengths of Act 250's regulation of trails?

7. How is Act 250 beneficial to the environmental quality of the state with respect to the regulation of trails?
8. Which [Act 250 criteria](#) are most relevant with respect to the regulation of trails (please explain)?
9. Which [Act 250 criteria](#) are least relevant with respect to the regulation of trail projects (please explain)?
10. Should all trail projects be exempt from Act 250 review? If so, what makes development of recreational trail projects different from other development that is subject to Act 250?
11. Should some trail projects be exempt from Act 250 review?
 - a. If yes, please explain which types of trail projects should be exempt, and why.
12. Do you have any recommendations for an alternative regulatory scheme for trail projects in the State of Vermont? Please share your thoughts.
 - a. Should trails be subject to some sort of “general permit”?
 - b. If so, what criteria should the general permit cover and how should terms of the general permit be enforced?
 - c. Do you have any ideas about a possible trail development oversight program managed under the Agency of Natural Resources? Please explain.