

AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES POLICY

ROCK CLIMBING, ICE CLIMBING AND BOULDERING ACTIVITIES ON AGENCY LANDS

Background and Philosophy:

Certain state lands in Vermont are important destinations for rock climbing and related climbing activities. Examples include Marshfield Ledge in Groton State Forest, Prospect Rock in Long Trail State Forest and Mt. Wheeler in Willoughby State Forest. Bouldering (climbing boulders with no ropes and minimal protection) is popular at Smugglers' Notch and other state lands. Smugglers' Notch in Mt. Mansfield State Forest and Mt. Pisgah at Willoughby State Forest are widely known for their ice climbing opportunities.

Rock climbing and associated climbing activities are growing in popularity and Vermont state lands are increasingly being used for such purposes - by individuals and groups, and by commercial outfitters that conduct guided climbs on state lands. This is largely a positive trend. These activities get people outdoors and physically connected to the natural environment and offer participants a healthy and rewarding outdoor recreation experience. On many ANR lands, such use does not pose any problems and may even complement state land management objectives. In other areas, however, climbing activities may impact important natural resources or may otherwise conflict with management goals and may not be appropriate.

Traditionally, rock climbing and related climbing activities have occurred on ANR lands with few guidelines or restrictions (an exception to this has been seasonal cliff closures to protect nesting peregrine falcons). Many federal and state land managing agencies across the country are now partnering with non-profit climbing organizations and have developed and implemented climbing management policies and guidelines which provide for climbing activities on public lands in a responsible manner while protecting important natural resources and minimizing conflicts. The State of Vermont has partnered with the Vermont Climbing Resource Access Group (CRAG-VT), an established organization dedicated to preserving access and conservation of Vermont's climbing resources. This non-profit organization has successfully collaborated with state natural resource professionals to convey important climbing information to its members. Future resource conservation will benefit from a positive, on-going relationship with CRAG-VT.

Policy:

The Agency believes if properly managed, rock climbing and related climbing activities are appropriate uses of many ANR lands. As a responsible steward of the lands under its jurisdiction, it is the policy of the Agency to manage this use in a manner that protects important natural resources, minimizes conflicts between users, and provides for the safety and security of climbers and the public. This stewardship includes appropriate assessments for rare, threatened or endangered species at established or proposed climbing sites.

Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation: Rock climbing, bouldering, and ice climbing are generally allowed uses on state forests and state parks except in areas where ecological, environmental, geological, archaeological, or historic resources will be significantly affected by such use. Certain Department lands have traditionally been used for rock climbing and have established climbing routes. These sites include Smugglers' Notch in Mt. Mansfield State Forest, Wheeler Mt. in Willoughby State Forest, and Marshfield Ledge in Groton State Forest. In accordance with the procedures outlined below, the Department may close certain areas within state parks and state forests to specific climbing uses on a seasonal or temporary basis, and additionally may

establish “cliff reserves” where climbing activities are prohibited or restricted on a long-term basis.

Department of Fish and Wildlife: As per regulation, rock climbing and related climbing activities are prohibited on all Department of Fish and Wildlife lands and may only be allowed in specific areas that have been approved and are designated for such use by the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife. Rock climbing and related activities will only be allowed if such use does not conflict with the primary purposes of these lands. All such requests for climbing on Fish and Wildlife lands will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the procedure and guidelines outlined in this policy.

Conservation Easements: For ANR-held conservation easements (such as Forest Legacy easements, mitigation easements, and Landowner Incentive Program easements) rock climbing may be allowed at the discretion of the landowner, provided such use is not in conflict with the purposes of the easement.

All rock climbing and related climbing activities on ANR lands shall be managed according to the following guidelines (see Appendix A for definitions and further information):

- Defacing rock faces by chipping, chiseling, sculpting, gluing/epoxying of holds, etc. is prohibited.
- Excessive scrubbing or cleaning of established climbing routes is prohibited. Cleaning of individual holds is permitted.
- Trees should be avoided as anchors. If a tree must be used as an anchor, padding shall be used to prevent the rope, sling or chain from damaging the tree.
- Climbers should use “leave no trace” practices and take care to minimize their impact on the environment. If you carry it in, then carry it out.
- Established trails should be used to access climbing areas. Do not create additional or new trails without authorization from the managing department.
- Do not climb in areas that are known to contain important nesting habitat and/or harbor rare, threatened, or endangered species. Obey posted climbing restrictions such as seasonal or temporary closures, or other similar restrictions.

Procedure for Implementation:

Climbing Sites on ANR Forest, Parks and Recreation Lands: Rock climbing and related activities are allowed on ANR lands under the management and jurisdiction of the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation unless otherwise restricted or prohibited. FPR sites that are designated as restricted or prohibited to climbing will be posted on the appropriate Agency and Department websites. Climbing sites will be managed by the district stewardship teams as appropriate and according to the level of use, resource impacts and/or other management considerations.

Climbing Sites on ANR Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands: Rock climbing and related activities are not allowed on Wildlife Management Areas (ANR lands purchased and managed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife) unless specifically designated for that use by the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife.

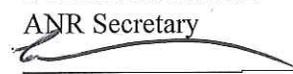
Designating New Climbing Sites on Department of Fish and Wildlife ANR Lands: Proposals for new designated climbing sites on ANR lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of Fish and Wildlife shall be established through the Agency's long range management planning process. Proposals for new designated climbing sites on Wildlife Management Areas shall initially be reviewed by the Department's WMA Lands Team. If the WMA Lands Team agrees the proposal meets all use and natural resource impact standards set forth by the WMA use rule (10 VSA App. Ss15) it will be forwarded to the pertinent District Stewardship Team for review for consistency with other state land uses and management goals. If such proposals are determined to be acceptable they will be incorporated into the respective long-range management plan, or draft plan, as the case may be. The draft plan or plan amendment then must be reviewed and approved by the ANR Lands Stewardship Team, and ultimately the Department Commissioner(s) and/or ANR Secretary. Designated climbing sites on DFW lands will be posted on the Department's website.

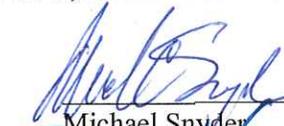
Seasonal and other Temporary Cliff Closures on ANR Lands: Upon the recommendation of the District Stewardship Team and the approval of the ANR Lands Stewardship Team, the Agency may prohibit climbing in certain areas on a seasonal or other temporary basis. Reasons for temporary or seasonal closure include but are not limited to protection of nesting raptors and other birds, protection of rare, threatened or endangered species and important natural communities, safety concerns, conflicts between other recreational uses or management objectives, and other considerations. Signs shall be installed on site informing the public of all such temporary closures. All temporary cliff closures shall also be posted on the appropriate Department websites.

Cliff Reserves on ANR Lands: Cliff reserves may be established on ANR lands in areas with high value ecological characteristics. Climbing is prohibited or limited in cliff reserves to protect important natural resources. In any cliff reserve where climbing would be considered an allowed use, appropriate ecological surveys will be conducted to assess the presence of roosting bats, birds or other sensitive wildlife and plants. Cliff reserves are intended to protect cliff areas that are not currently being actively climbed but may have the potential for such use, as well as cliffs with existing climbing use where no new routes will be considered or established. By default, all cliff areas on Department of Fish and Wildlife lands are considered cliff reserves where no climbing is allowed unless specifically designated by the Commissioner of Fish and Wildlife. Additional cliff reserves on ANR lands may only be established through the Agency's long-range management planning process described above. All established cliff reserves will be posted on the appropriate Agency and Department websites.

Public Outreach and Education Regarding Climbing Activities on ANR Lands: ANR will work closely with CRAG-VT to inform and educate the climbing public about the various climbing opportunities and restrictions on ANR lands.

Guided Rock Climbing Activities on ANR Lands: District offices will work with CRAG-VT in the review and development of licenses and special use permits for proposed climbing activities on ANR lands. Such licenses and SUPs will be developed in accord with the Agency of Natural Resources' Uses of State Lands policy and will be appropriately conditioned to protect important natural resources, minimize conflicts, and to provide for the safety of the users and the public.

 15-4-5
 Deborah Markowitz Date
 ANR Secretary
 15/4/15
 Louis Porter Date
 FW Commissioner

 5/4/15
 Michael Snyder Date
 FPR Commissioner
 5/4/15
 David Mears Date
 DEC Commissioner

Appendix A: Climbing and Related Terminology

Source: *Climbing Management: A Guide to Climbing Issues and the Development of a Climbing Management Plan, The Access Fund.* Available at <http://www.accessfund.org/atf/cf/%7B1F5726D5-6646-4050-AA6E-C275DF6CA8E3%7D/CM-web.pdf>

Anchor: Any piece of protection used to secure climbers to a cliff face for belaying or rappelling. Most are removable. “Fixed anchors” are left in place permanently for all climbers to use.

Bolt: Bolts are small anchoring devices (usually 3/8” diameter by about 3” length) used to protect climbers where there are no cracks for other types of protection. They are placed by drilling a hole, using either a hand-turned or battery-powered drill and then driving in the device, which is designed to hold through mechanical expansion, forced compression, or (rarely) an epoxy adhesive. The placement of bolts allows climbers to attempt extremely difficult and previously unprotected rock faces, and to place fixed anchors for descent via rappel. The term “fixed” means they are permanently placed in the rock, although deterioration will occur over time, depending on the bolt specification and local weathering processes.

Bouldering: Bouldering is the practice of climbing on small rock formations or boulders that are short enough in height that ropes and gear are not necessary. A route up a boulder is typically referred to as a “boulder problem” or “problem,” and rarely exceeds 15 to 20 feet in height.

Climb (or “Route”): As a noun, this is any independent line of ascent on a rock face. A climb may follow a crack system or other natural features, or it may strike out across a “blank” face. A climb is considered to be created when it is first ascended, and is usually given a name by the first ascensionist. The climb is typically recorded and described in a guidebook so that other climbers can identify and climb the route.

Ice Climbing: Ice climbing takes place on frozen water ice or very hard snow, using ice axes and crampons. For protection, climbers screw metal tubes into the ice. This activity can occur in a variety of environments, from relatively small frozen waterfalls with easy access, to mountaineering situations with long approaches and involving multiple pitches of climbing.