**VOREC Steering Committee Meeting**

November 28, 2017 at National life, Montpelier

**Attendees:** Mike Snyder, Hal Ellms, Marc Sherman, Trey Martin, Jeanne Gervais, Josh Ryan, Amy Kelsey, Mike DeBonis, Tom Stuessy, Cindy Locke, Bill Supple, Frank Stanley, Sara Lang, Drew Simmons, Wendy Knight, Jessica Savage, Craig Whipple, Caroline Zeilenga, Tim Tierney, Dave Furman

**Members of Public:** Kelly Ault and Randy Richardson

**Mike S: Introductions/new FPR staff**

**Mike S: Meeting Process**

Thank you for coming. We’ve been given the task of making recommendations to the Governor, and we need to populate each category of the EO with recommendations, knowing each will need further discussion/scrutiny. The focus today is on agreeing about what we want to put forward to the Governor from the enormous volume of public input and your representative interests/input. The list will be created today by the committee; Wendy and I will be in charge of how this list is messaged to the Governor.

A couple other principles to guide us: Don’t hold back from offering any idea, even if it doesn’t seem practical or feasible. Let’s use majority rule today as a mechanism to move us along; we can add a minority opinion as a footnote. We’ve built this on being inclusive, but be aware that, while keeping the spirit of inclusivity, there may be “winners and losers” in some of these recommendations. We also operate in a spirit of equity—consider recommendations that reflect that one of our fundamental pillars is growing participation and recognizing we want to be equitable across all demographics. Finally, when vetting, characterizing, and voting on recommendations, I will take a lack of comment to mean that we have an agreement on our approach.

**August Meeting Minutes Approved**: Mike S. motion to approve; Wendy second

**Summary of Public Comment (with 15-Point Summary Document Jessica Created)**

Mike S: We’re trying to use these comments, and input from each of you, to make our list.

Bill: Can you explain how you reached the 15 points?

Jessica: I read through every comment and used “sifting through” activities for the four guiding principles. This is different from what we used with the public, but these are specific to the EO. Everything on this list fits into one of the four principles.

Amy: One thing I don’t see there but heard in public comments was whether we need to increase participation—concerns of impact.

Dave: A lot of people expressed idea of caution/overuse—not in built recreation, but in open space.

Mike S: If we’re going to up participation, it will be in both generic access and infrastructure.

Hal: Also heard a lot about access to state land specifically.

Mike S: We probably need to reflect why we can’t do some activities on wildlife lands that we can on forest lands (because of nature of federal funding).

Marc: We should create a ven diagram of public interest in different areas and what is allowed where.

Mike S: Agreed, it would be a helpful tool for public to see public lands landscape.

Trey: We heard a lot about this at meetings at local/regional level. State could lead on this on their lands, providing a template for towns to model.

Mike S: Another idea is balancing uses. Hunters and anglers asking for backcountry access. I want to secure that there are large chunks of land without trails for people to roam.

Marc: Do you have data on how many people hunt? Heard in meetings this population is declining.

Mike S: Yes, F&W does. How do we get more youth and women hunting and fishing?

Marc: But why? If mountain bike group is increasing and hunting is decreasing, does it make sense to build support in interests that are declining, at the risk of alienating other groups?

Mike S: True, but by that logic why get anyone outside, if the bigger group isn’t interested.

Sara: Maybe part of that decline is people hunting out of state because they don’t have what they want here.

Tim: You can have balance on large pieces of land—multiple recreation activities.

Cindy: We see wildlife, hunters, xc skiers on our trails on WMAs. They can all co-exist.

Bill: If our end goal is to tie this back to economic development, we need an inclusive approach.

Drew: We need an in-depth assessment and even metric for user groups, in order to compare apples to apples. I’d like to see resources committed to understand these user groups.

Tom: If hunting spaces were set aside the way land is set aside for mountain biking, I wonder whether that would improve access/participation.

Josh: What’s missing here but in the comments is a comprehensive evaluation of where we stand now.

Drew: We need to go off data rather than anecdotes.

Tim: We also need to connect rec assets to downtowns.

Craig: One response we heard a lot not yet on this list is water quality.

Hal: And fisheries, related to water quality.

Craig: Also a lot of comments about on-road bicycling and working with VTrans on roads.

Bill: And that users are multi-discipline. They don’t just do one activity, they participate in many interests. We need to lift up all activities.

Mike D: Also significant regional differences. Make sure there is capacity to make decisions about recreation locally.

Cindy: What Island Pond sees is vehicles leaving to go to New Hampshire because motorized access is so much broader there. These regional considerations are important.

Mike S: Perhaps we can develop point #15 (enhancing/promoting motorized rec) to reflect comments we’ve received regarding ATVs on public lands and roads.

Sara: On point #2 (local economies), small towns would love to have businesses but infrastructure isn’t there. We need to think about regional economies—how a business in one town impacts the next town over.

Drew: Regionality should be acknowledged. Views and comments are very different by region.

Trey: On point #8 (business sector support), it was also suggested that State should make these investments, not just businesses.

Marc: How do we make recommendations without a study to produce data and demonstrate how those recommendations will pay off?

Tim: I heard a lot about connectivity—physically connecting recreational areas.

Craig: Focused attention on town access: town lands and Class 4 roads. Also comments about recognizing that trails are for multiple uses on same structures.

Dave: Connections comments included an information connection to allow networking and promotion. It’s not just about new resources, but also about connecting existing resources.

**Brainstorm**

Mike S: Moving on to a brainstorm session to produce recommendations. Go around the table, everyone will offer one idea at a time, draft a list. Brainstorm is only open to steering committee members.

Mike S: How do we reflect items that are outside of our domain but were commented on?

Marc: Yes—we can do all the work we want to attract people, but if there’s no broadband it doesn’t matter.

Wendy: Include a note in recommendations that these are separate issues that need to also be addressed.

Hal: How our youth fit into this conversation. Diversity is lacking in outdoor industry, especially youth. Make outdoor rec programs in schools, specifically tech programs: trail building, ATV mechanics, state parks management, etc. Also accomplishes goal of developing and retaining youth in our state. Maybe also a millennial advisor for this committee.

Cindy: The VT Business Roundtable is working on a 25-year plan that’s all about youth. Health and education can tie in to this, too.

Marc: Our need for a study. What are the primary constituencies we’re looking at (ATVs, bikers, snowmobilers, etc.), and what’s needed for each of these groups to gain the access they want. Also mapping interest levels by age, economic standing, etc.

Trey: Does that include a map of state public land assets?

Marc: Yes. Should be mapping and combining all of this.

Trey: Look at current use supporting recreational uses of land. Allow this new benefit to apply to lands that are opened up and used for recreation.

Jeanne: We need to be able to utilize public lands. State relies on private lands for certain rec activities it doesn’t allow on public lands. We just need a connector trail to provide access.

Josh: Formalize interconnectedness between rec agencies to create year-round employment. If I (trail building) partnered with a ski area, I could provide year-round work and pitch in to health insurance to provide steady jobs.

Amy: Need to identify mechanisms for creating revenue to make this all happen. User fees? Taxes? Consider user fees.

Mike D: Need more data to understand who has access and make sure we’re equitable. Relates to diversity and inclusiveness.

Tom: Use our high schools, tech schools, and four-year schools to teach youth to be outdoor entrepreneurs.

Cindy: Regional connectivity. People use the LVRT to commute; businesses open up because of it. Regional Marketing Organizations are a good example of regions coming together to promote their areas. So are scenic byways. Promote what we already do and what already exists to promote regions.

Bill: We need an economic opportunity with deliverables. Identify an area or two we could use as test cases/pilot projects. Ask for a small investment to show an actual economic result. Hone in on a specific project in a specific area to show the power of this initiative.

Frank: Put landowners at ease by making sure they understand liability laws.

Mike S: Make the law known and tweak/improve as appropriate?

Frank: Yes.

Sara: Create “recreation-friendly towns.” Have a town and its businesses understand what’s in the area and speak that language. Create a label for these businesses and towns.

Wendy: There is a formal downtowns designation in our department.

Mike S: A designation that says we’re friendly to this and we have information to share.

Marc: Make an economic plan; an exchange between businesses and the state. Maybe a decrease in taxes if a business reinvests that money.

Drew: Designate outdoor businesses as a key industry within our economic development strategy.

Wendy: Support outdoor rec entrepreneurs/startups with a Vermont competition to fund innovative ideas. Support with an actual funding mechanism.

Mike S: Allow free day-use admission to VT State Parks through motor vehicle registration. You can opt out of it. That would recoup money we could then allocate to trail stewardship. Multiple benefits: we can promote free access, they will use that money instead on boat rentals, etc.

Craig: It’s money from the gate that we used to collect and wouldn’t have to anymore. And it would be more than we collect now.

Hal: In support of Bill’s pilot project idea, specifically focusing on motorized rec in Island Pond. Also, Bellows Falls is another specific area ready for a successful project.

Marc: State investment in business (not just private sector equity and investment). Tax credits, workers comp relief, unemployment insurance relief. Find ways to promote business by modifying existing system and structure of taxes and insurance—specifically for outdoor sector.

Trey: Add a statute tweak to landowner liability limitations to include municipalities (e.g., Class 4 roads)

Jeanne: Reach out to entrepreneurs to fill empty storefronts in towns.

Josh: Create a state position to oversee the data and asset management recommendations previously listed.

Amy: Evaluate how trails are regulated under Act 250 and make the process simpler for landowners.

Mike D: Related to closing the technical assistance gap, create a partnership where Greenways Council’s time/treasure is matched with state support to smooth development process.

Tom: Find a mechanism to encourage outdoor businesses to participate in a funding coalition, specifically for trail support. VOICe could be the platform for this.

Cindy: Act 250 isn’t needed at all for trails. Look at trail building permitting already in place and identify how much is duplicated by Act 250 process.

Frank: Get behind the LVRT: use this as a pilot project, support its completion, and see what it provides.

Bill: You could have three pilot projects of different scales: Bellows Falls, Island Pond, LVRT.

Sara: Our Fast Tracks to Success program takes high school students to Windham County businesses to show them career options. Bring outdoor rec businesses into this program to show kids rec careers available.

Drew: Attract outdoor businesses using the governor’s strategic reserve fund.

Wendy: Create a funding mechanism for tourism and marketing. Use rooms and meals tax to fund outdoor rec marketing. In many cases, people move here because they’ve visited here first.

Mike S: Work with Department of Fish & Wildlife so that no license is required to fish from shore in VT State Parks.

Hal: Bolster Think Vermont with more funding to create more interest in moving businesses to VT.

Marc: Use tax proceeds from regulated marijuana to fund outdoor rec.

Marc: Turn the LVRT into a national scenic trail.

Amy: Make it easier to access rec trails program grants through process improvements and increased cap.

Mike D: Make a Vermont EZ-Pass for park and access trails.

Tom: Loaner/transportation programs: subsidize bike repair, gear replacement, etc. for low-income participants.

Cindy: Expand the Trails and Greenways Council work with FPR and F&W. Strengthen this council as part of VOREC’s work.

Frank: Make it easier for guides and outdoor educators to do business here.

Sara: Outdoor Business Alliance could offer a mentorship program for start-up businesses.

Drew: Encourage entrepreneurship by VT youth by giving free health insurance to Vermonters under 25 who start an outdoor business.

Wendy: Streamline permit process for marinas and other outdoor rec facilities.

Mike: Alter the ANR statue so the Secretary can designate ATV connector trails on ANR land.

Marc: Gear garage loaner idea has already been funded for a few state parks as a trial. Test for a year in five parks, then go to legislature for funding in every park. Maybe create a grant for park admission fees.

Trey: Fully fund VT Housing and Conservation Board statutory funding and explore how to better protect that appropriation.

Jeanne: Put a section for outdoor rec on state income tax fund.

Josh: Have off-road gasoline like there’s off-road diesel. Obtain a recreation tax on fuel.

Mike D: Collect data on the value of a piece of infrastructure (bridge, lean-to, etc.). This should be in assets value.

Cindy: Establish a volunteer trail day/trail weekend to encourage and grow volunteerism. Pick one day in spring and one in fall. Incorporate youth to teach them about trail building.

Mike: Create and fund recreational assets protection.

Frank: Modest general fund increase to F&W and FPR to implement VOREC initiatives.

Drew: Support phase one Lake Champlain cleanup efforts. And create an outdoor stamp sold to retailers with revenue going to lake cleanup.

Marc: For any outdoor gear sold over $500, businesses need to kick in $5 to this cleanup fund.

Drew: Create a VT logo that could go on any VT-based company’s goods to generate cleanup funds.

Mike S: Direct appropriate agencies of government to conduct and fund as necessary a comprehensive economic analysis of outdoor recreation.

Wendy: Part of our recommendations should focus specifically on rural areas of need.

Hal: Two categories for projects: 1) areas of need, 2) momentum already building

Trey: Have a funding source to create a grant for regions to make regional rec plans.

Frank: Connect with a large employer to start a rec program for their employees.

Drew: Create governor’s inspiration awards: Best in class and outdoor rec. Have a cash prize and media attention. Business winner would receive funding for a project.

Mike S: Do we cover transportation to get underserved communities to our parks, etc.?

Trey: Yes, let’s tie in with existing transportation.

Cindy: Tax incentives for businesses that give employees matching trail associations.

Frank: Incorporate outdoor skills into school systems.

Drew: Invite New England governors to a summit on outdoor rec.

Wendy: Work with health department for prescriptions to get outside and do trail work.

Mike S: A doctor can already write an Rx for a free day pass to a state park.

Drew: Make sure trail work can count towards volunteer hours for high school graduation requirements.

Mike S: Look into expanding VEDA’s purview to include outdoor rec businesses.

**Combine Public Comments and Steering Committee & Filter According to EO**

Process:

Mike: Let’s filter these items according to the EO. Given volume of ideas and favorability, it’s ok to move on without voting individually on each.

Wendy: Filter into categories and then prioritize.

Marc: Which ideas are working from existing resources, which need funding, which are huge ideas.

Mike S: I agree and amend. We’ll present the total list, and an added piece proposing implementing these ideas in three specific pilot projects.

Jessica: We’ll go through each category, read each item assigned to that category, and decide if it’s existing or new. Then we’ll vote to accept all ideas in a category.

Filtering/Voting:

Drew: I’m not in favor of the EZ-Pass idea.

Mike D: I withdraw the idea from consideration.

Frank: Can I offer another idea? What about using state income tax for a write-off/credit in insurance benefits for membership in certified trail organizations.

Cindy: State could offer an incentive to businesses that offer outdoor rec membership to their employees.

Jessica: Any other items to add?

Frank: Most of what we’ve discussed reflects trail-based recommendations. Let’s make sure our comments reflect non-trail users too.

Cindy: What about a VT outdoor leadership day in schools? Students spend a day outside doing outdoor skills activities.

Wendy: I see categories emerging: Workforce development, economic development, etc.

Mike S: We’ve reached consensus. State team will move ahead and put together a document for committee to review. You can then give us insights into the draft.

Mike S: The action plan/measurable outcome item is being removed from the agenda and will be revisited at a later meeting. We’ll now open the meeting up for public comment.

Kelly Ault (public): Today’s discussion covered most themes I heard in the public process. I saw this as a three-legged stool: state, private sector, and land/town-scape. I like that the Outdoor Alliance focuses on business, but there are also non-profits, individuals, and municipalities who want to contribute. Create an asset map that isn’t just resources but also projects—find the existing success stories first and have them share their knowledge as part of the pilot projects. And in terms of trail investment: Can we make a modern-day CCC and incubate businesses as a public-private project that addresses economic and rec infrastructure needs? Public health can also be addressed and brought in more in these recommendations.

Mike S: I agree. I’d ask you all to allow state team to include a public health component to our recommendations.

Cindy: I agree.

Randy Richardson (public): New chair of Vermont Greenways Council. Thanks for your work, excited to hear more about it.

Mike S: New business, next steps—we’ll get recommendations back to committee and be in touch about next meeting. Meeting adjourned.