



Report to the Governor

September 2019

Introduction

In signing Executive Order No. 11-17, Governor Scott established the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative. The effort is guided by the VOREC steering committee, made up of Vermont businesses and non-profits including outdoor manufacturers, retailers, brand representatives, trail and user groups and conservation organizations, as well as state government.

The VOREC steering committee's purpose is to engage with businesses, government, the nonprofit sector and the public to identify specific outcomes that promote business opportunities, increase participation opportunities, and strengthen the quality and stewardship of our recreational resources, and provide recommendations to the Governor based on that purpose.

The Executive Order requires an annual written report to be submitted by September 15. This report is intended to fulfill that requirement, and reflects the activities toward accomplishing the stated VOREC purpose to date.

Activities

Since submitting last September's report, the VOREC steering committee has now completed its second full year of service, and it has been a busy, productive, and exciting year. Activities include:

1. Steering Committee Meetings and Membership:

Steering committee meetings continue to be held almost monthly. Meetings have been dynamic and highly productive, with topics that range from action planning and general business to discussing collaboration opportunities with important public and private partners in areas like public health and economic development, to community visits to meet with local and regional partners to hear about their ideas, projects, and needs. The steering committee vice chair, Department of Tourism and Marketing Commissioner Wendy Knight, departed her position in July, and was replaced with Commissioner of Housing and Community Development Josh Hanford. Amy Kelsey and Tom Stuessy left the steering

committee and were replaced with two new members, Karrie Thomas, the Executive Director of the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and Abby Long, Executive Director of Kingdom Trails. The addition of fresh eyes has been very productive for the group. At the two-year mark in June, members were asked if they wished to continue to serve (per the VOREC bylaws) and all members did, and the Governor accepted them for an additional two-year term.

Every meeting agenda includes time for public comment, and updates from our representatives: the Chair (and FPR staff), the Vice-Chair, the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, the Vermont Trails Alliance, and the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance, and all agendas and meeting notes and related materials are posted on the VOREC website at FPR. Members of the public are attending every meeting, and interest appears to remain high in our work.

This year the steering committee meetings have focused heavily on stewardship, as well as how to continue to be effective in our work.

2. Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance (VOBA):

VOBA forms as a Vermont nonprofit corporation with 501(c)3 status and establishes mission.

In November 2018, after a series of outdoor recreation business focus groups, the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance (VOBA) was registered as a Vermont non-profit organization. A Board of Directors was formed and established a mission to strengthen, expand, attract and retain outdoor recreation economy businesses in Vermont

In August of 2019, VOBA became a 501(c) non-profit organization with a charitable purpose to educate Vermonters on outdoor recreation and Vermont outdoor recreation businesses on business development, collaboration opportunities and outdoor recreation economy policy.

Throughout 2019, over 150 outdoor recreation industry leaders attended three VOBA Roundtables to network, exchange information and explore ways to support and grow the sector.

VOBA engaged in a collaborative planning process with VOREC to co-host the first annual Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economy Summit scheduled for October of 2019. The event will bring together 100 business and nonprofit leaders and policymakers to discuss building Vermont's future outdoor recreation economy culture. Work sessions will explore needs for the workforce and financing as well as develop strategies for marketing, conservation and stewardship.

Feedback from VOBA's Roundtables and a business survey led to the identification of four priorities, including access to capital, workforce development, infrastructure, and sector branding.

In the spring of 2019, VOBA employed its *Collective Impact* structure by launching work groups in workforce and sector branding. Participating outdoor recreation businesses have designed initiatives and executed tactics in collaboration with state government agencies and non-profit partners.

Specific work group accomplishments:

- Developed a multi-year project with Vermont Talent Pipeline Management to attract and retain workers by creating a needs assessment of critical jobs and skill sets and establishing career pathways with educational institutions.
- Matched up outdoor recreation employers that are hiring with worker recruitment efforts such as the state's Stay to Stay program and remote worker incentive.
- Organized and participated in meetings between businesses and the Department of Labor, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and VOREC to facilitate connections around needs and resources.
- Supported the ThinkVermont booth at the Summer Outdoor Retailer Show by facilitating the participation of 6 outdoor recreation entrepreneurs.
- Provided visual assets to the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing to promote outdoor recreation.
- Launched a membership program in July with an initial 25 entities.
- Published advertisements, press releases, monthly email newsletters and maintained a website to share information and resources on Vermont's outdoor recreation economy.

VOBA's next steps for 2020

VOBA is pursuing a number of initiatives in 2020 that will build on the success of the 2019 efforts listed above in order to advance the following goals:

Financing: Outdoor recreation businesses will have greater access to the right match of capital to meet their financing needs at their stage of growth and for their scale of business.

Workforce Development: Outdoor recreation businesses will have greater ability to attract and retain employees for different types of positions and employment cycles.

Infrastructure: Outdoor recreation businesses will have greater ability to support the structural and operational systems to advance their business goals.

Sector Branding: Vermont's outdoor recreation industry will have strengthened brand recognition and outdoor recreation businesses will have a greater ability for collaboration, business support, and expanded marketing opportunities to customers.

Recommendation for the Governor:

VOBA recommends that the Governor and his Administration build on the progress made by new and existing state programs that have led to outcomes on the goals listed above. Specifically, VOBA recommends that:

- Outdoor recreation businesses continue to be prioritized as a key industry within Vermont's economic development strategy;
- Increased state budget investments are made in programs advancing workforce development, economic development marketing and business/innovation financing and support;
- Support for VOREC's capacity to engage Vermont's outdoor recreation stakeholders around its four goals and facilitate funding for community projects that advance Vermont's outdoor recreation economy.

3. Support of the VOBA/VOREC Outdoor Recreation Economy Summit:

VOREC Steering committee members and FPR staff have joined members of the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance to plan the first **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economy Summit** which will take place on October 18th at Bolton Valley Resort. The planning committee has set the main theme as the *Outdoor Recreation Economy Culture*. Breakout session topics include Conservation, Workforce, Infrastructure/Stewardship, and Financing and Creative Funding. This event is poised to become an annual gathering of influencers in growing Vermont's outdoor recreation economy.

4. National Governor's Association and the OREC Offices:

In partnership with state outdoor recreation directors, the National Governors Association developed and launched a new Outdoor Recreation Learning Network (ORLN) to help governors and their staffs explore strategies to leverage their unique natural, cultural, and historical resources and help promote economic, social and environmental benefits. The Confluence Accords, a common set of guiding principles for states looking to expand their outdoor economies, developed by the eight original states with offices of outdoor recreation—including significant participation and contributions from VOREC—is now housed in the ORLN. The ORLN launch took place at the NGA summer meeting in Salt Lake City, UT. Governor Scott and Commissioner Snyder attended the event, representing the state and speaking to Vermont's role and interests in the outdoor recreation economy.

5. Launch of the VOREC Community Grant Program:

In October of 2018, Governor Scott announced the launch of the VOREC Community Grant Program. The interest was immediate and intense, a clear indication that this VOREC priority was responding to the right signals we had heard in last year's listening sessions. A diverse and highly skilled grant application review team was assembled.

6. VOREC Representation at Conferences and Workshops:

In addition to the important work the steering committee members participate in in the activities above, many members have accepted invitations to participate as speakers at state and national-level conferences and workshops that involve elements of outdoor recreation. Members have been very generous with their time, and often their own resources, to attend these events and speak to the objectives and work of VOREC with other interested parties.

Accomplishments

The activities outlined above demonstrate VOREC's commitment to its mission and the important work it takes to implement this mission, and many significant accomplishments have already been achieved. The steering committee spent the early months of this year developing a prioritized action plan of further recommendations to focus on from the report to the Governor, and the steps and strategies necessary to meet them. Notable progress has already been made in each of the categories from the report (and in some cases, an accomplishment falls within multiple categories), while additional achievements have come out of related work and activities. Such accomplishments include:

1. Economic Development:

- Successful launch of the VOREC Community Grant Program with 29 applications and over \$1.2 million in requests. Randolph and Newport were selected as the pilot communities and have since made major strides in their project goals.
- Increased support for the VOREC Community Grant Program, which will provide up to \$200,000 to communities and their partners this upcoming grant round
- Progress for the Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance (VOBA)
- Collaboration with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to understand the economic impacts of outdoor recreation at both state and national levels
- Participation in a community visit to Saint Johnsbury, a top applicant for the VOREC grants, to discuss outdoor recreation economy impacts and initiatives with town and regional partners

2. Data and Asset Development:

- The scoping and assessment portion of the statewide outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) is under way with over 5,000 public survey responses so far
- Contractor selected (TPL AIM Lab) and data library begun for a GIS gap analysis for outdoor recreation as part of the SCORP

3. Marketing:

- Collaborated with ACCD and several Vermont outdoor recreation businesses to present a Vermont booth at the Outdoor Retailer winter show in Denver, Colorado

4. Regional Networks:

- Continuing to foster and provide technical assistance to regionally significant VOREC Community Grant applicants, pilot communities and projects

5. Workforce Development:

- Collaboration with VOBA to understand challenges and opportunities for outdoor recreation industry workforce development
- Ongoing dialog with outdoor businesses and technical education leaders to encourage training and certification programs, etc. for high-school and non-traditional student engagement in outdoor retail, service, and events.

6. Private/Public Partnerships:

- Continuing to work with partners to collaborate regarding Act 250 regulation of recreational trails, specifically to modernize how trails are planned and regulated to lower costs, increase clarity and certainty, and eliminate barriers to installation, management, and use of world-class recreational trails in Vermont.

7. Access and Participation:

- Continuing success of the First-Time Happy Campers Program (the camping gear loaner program) with Vermont State Parks, including Parks Interpretive staff support
- Expanding Vermont State Parks outdoor recreation marketing efforts with more images of diversity

- Collaboration with the Vermont Department of Health to discuss the public health and wellness components of outdoor recreation and the outdoor recreation economy
- Collaboration with the Vermont Opioid Coordination Council to discuss addiction and recovery and connections to outdoor recreation
- Creating connections to ANR's newly formed committee on equity, diversity and inclusion through FPR staff participation

8. Stewardship:

- Conducted several steering committee meetings devoted to stewardship and resources action planning
- Development of database of existing resources available for stewardship of outdoor recreation assets

9. Funding:

- Expansion of the VOREC community grant program (\$200,000)

10. Related Accomplishments:

- Advocacy in the legislative session, and ongoing with the Act 47 Commission on Act 250, in support of the outdoor recreation economy through reform of recreational trail regulation
- Development of a national perception of VOREC as a leader in promoting the outdoor recreation economy, reflected through many state leaders reaching out to the VOREC chair and steering committee members for advice on creating similar initiatives in their home states
- Formed recommendation to adapt the ratified national Confluence Accords for Vermont, to reflect our state's outdoor recreation economy priorities and ethics
- Formed recommendation to incorporate a public health and wellness component into VOREC's work
- Began to explore and evaluate the current FPR e-bike policy to consider including some form of e-bikes on state lands as appropriate

Next Steps

There is still much work ahead building on what has been achieved so far. The steering committee revisits progress, goals, and priorities as part of each meeting, and in addition to continuing work on unfinished pieces of the accomplishments listed above, other next steps include:

1. Continue implementing the current VOREC Community Grant Program, with another application period coming this fall
2. Increase support for the VOREC Community Grant Program in the future, with a goal of sufficient funding and obtaining a program position within the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation to support all aspects of this program including technical assistance for communities

3. Continue to modernize and update Act 250 or an alternative to regulate recreational trails and modernize the Vermont Trail System
4. Provide support to regionally and statewide significant outdoor recreation projects such as completion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and Velomont through community visits, technical assistance and funding when possible.
5. Consider the next phase for the First Time Happy Campers gear loaner program including performance measures and possible rebate program for equipment purchase.
6. Continue to focus on increasing stewardship opportunities and funding mechanisms
7. Continue to monitor emerging outdoor recreation trends and policies
8. Continue Vermont's leadership position in OREC efforts in national and regional platforms and consider expanding leadership roles.
9. Continue to investigate and employ revenue sources for funding VOREC initiatives, especially stewardship activities
10. Continue to research and develop data sources and other concrete measurements of outcomes
11. Form VOREC sub-committees to continue progress and maximize work efficiency
12. As part of VOREC's collective impact model, consider more private-public partnerships to utilize the partners and members of the public who would like to be more involved in VOREC
13. Continue to explore e-bike use on state lands and other lands as appropriate