



## VOREC Steering Committee Recommendations December 5, 2017

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The VOREC Steering Committee offers the following recommendations intended to enhance business opportunities, improve participation in outdoor recreation, strengthen our recreational infrastructure and stewardship of natural resources, and grow Vermont's economy in a manner consistent with Vermont's strong outdoor culture of respect and sustainability. The recommendations are broad, balanced, and inclusive. Through a collaborative process, including considerable public input, we have developed recommendations we think are achievable and impactful, given sufficient public and private commitment and resources. Some key principles have guided our work:

Inclusiveness. Outdoor recreation is defined broadly to be inclusive of all forms of outdoor recreation, including on-road, off-road, non-motorized, motorized, trail-based, open space, and by land, water and air. We have solicited and received feedback from many groups and individuals involved in outdoor recreation. Our motto has been: "If you're outside, you're in."

Balance. We have considered all components of the Governor's executive order including economic growth, marketing, stewardship, and access. We've sought to develop recommendations that balance economic growth with limited resources, balance increased outdoor participation with stewardship and sustainable infrastructure, and balance the varied needs of stakeholders and user groups.

Interconnectedness. We understand there is participation interconnectedness among outdoor recreational enthusiasts with users engaging and appreciating a variety of recreational pursuits. User groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive, i.e. mountain bikers also hunt; snowmobile riders enjoy cross-country skiing. There is also a strong interconnectedness among the recommendations themselves.

The recommendations are organized in broad categories, and the ideas within each are not presented in priority ranking. We can further categorize and identify recommendations based on which require legislative action or additional funding, how they might impact state revenues, and what timeframe for execution is expected (short, mid, long-term).

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:** Support the Outdoor Recreation Business Sector in Vermont

- Create an Outdoor Business Alliance which will:
  - Support efforts to strengthen and expand existing outdoor recreation businesses in Vermont and attract new ventures and entrepreneurs to the state.
  - Create a Rec Tech Innovation Competition with venture capital and state funding that would stimulate development of tech ideas and businesses specific to outdoor recreation, and fund winning business with seed capital.
  - Explore ways to make doing business in Vermont easier for existing outdoor recreation businesses: tax credits, unemployment/worker's comp insurance relief.
  - Identify mentorships and internships for students and young professionals interested in outdoor recreation careers.
  - Create opportunities for year-round outdoor recreation employment for seasonal workers.
  - Assist smaller communities seeking to identify, formalize and fund growing outdoor recreation resources by providing expert advice, best practices, and assistance, and larger communities seeking to manage and mitigate the impacts of increased outdoor recreation by providing expert advice and assistance.
- Consider developing Governor's Strategic Reserve Fund as a discretionary tool to create new and retain existing outdoor recreation jobs in the state. Priority would be given to relocation of outdoor recreation businesses in rural communities with fewer than 5,000 residents. The funds could be used for incentives, workforce development, technical or planning assistance, environmental analysis, or relocation assistance.
- Position Vermont as a leader in the regional and national outdoor recreation economy by hosting a Governor's Outdoor Summit to discuss opportunities, challenges and shared concern. Create Governor's Outdoor Inspiration Awards to be presented at the Governor's Outdoor Summit. The awards will inspire development of community-focused outdoor recreation opportunities and creation of outdoor recreation businesses. The annual awards will be open to individuals, organizations and businesses, with a special emphasis on repurposing or rebuilding historic infrastructure. Goals and awards include:
  - Recreation: Cultivate at least one best-in-class outdoor recreation opportunity in five major geographic areas in the state (Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southeast, Southwest). Recreation winner receives a grant be used on local infrastructure, stewardship or related development as well as \$10,000 commitment for national marketing of winner (via national media hosting).

- Business: Cultivate at least one best-in-class outdoor business in five major geographic areas in the state (Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southeast, Southwest). Business winner receives seed money from state to put toward Kickstarter campaign to fund additional growth.
- Designate outdoor recreation business as a key industry within Vermont’s economic development strategy, and support the Agency of Commerce and Community Development in attracting outdoor recreation businesses and entrepreneurs to Vermont, pursuing national and regional outdoor industry meetings to be hosted in Vermont, and building brand awareness of Vermont as a premier outdoor recreation destination by hosting world-class athletes and events.
- Support the inclusion of outdoor recreation business development in Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) lending programs.

**DATA AND ASSET DEVELOPMENT:** Create High Quality and Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Asset and Opportunity Maps and Tools

- Fund and direct appropriate government agencies (ACCD, FPR, F+W) to collectively conduct an economic impact study of outdoor recreation in Vermont. Create an outdoor recreation user study to assess and inventory recreation infrastructure/activities, the amount of use, the profiles of users, activities of current participation, aspirational participation, age, economic status, gender, etc.
- Create an interactive map and database of the outdoor recreation industry and all outdoor recreation assets to include public lands, trail systems, trail heads, ski resorts, waterways, fish and wildlife access areas, open land, bike and recreation paths, state and town parks, backcountry accommodations, private lands that include guaranteed public access (e.g. [Forest Legacy](#) easements) etc., and identify appropriate uses. The outdoor recreation asset map will be used:
  - As a public recreation planning tool to assess expansion and maintenance for built infrastructure.
  - To support businesses and services including outdoor retailers, guides and ancillary service industries, i.e. restaurants, inns, coffee shops, bookstores, breweries, etc.
  - For users to plan comprehensive trips to and within Vermont.

**MARKETING:** Enhance and Expand Marketing of Vermont’s Outdoor Recreation Assets

- Bolster state marketing efforts for outdoor recreation by allocating a portion of the rooms and meals tax revenue to Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing for marketing.
- Increase financial support for [ThinkVermont](#) economic development marketing efforts.
- Promote our Vermont outdoor industry on state platforms such as ThinkVermont.com.
- Create accurate and clear public information materials for outdoor recreation users including online mapping tools ([TrailFinder](#)), consistent and clear signage, and coordinated online materials for visitors, residents, and non-profit recreation groups.

**REGIONAL NETWORKS:** Foster Regional Collaboration and Co-Marketing of Recreation Assets

- Encourage regional networks of recreation assets and support recreation infrastructure projects that connect communities such as the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.
- Create/rebrand an “Outdoor Recreation Friendly Town” designation program building off existing downtown designation and community development programs for downtowns and villages to include environmental and social sustainability.
  - Provide high-quality information and marketing materials such as maps, signage, wayfinding etc.
  - Educate business owners and employees via an ambassador program about the economic benefits of outdoor recreation.
  - Give towns incentives to become outdoor recreation “Friendly Towns” with grant funding to build and market outdoor recreation opportunities, or to manage the impacts of increased outdoor recreation.
  - Provide resources for local and regional recreation planning efforts, such as grants or further support of existing programs like the Town Forest Recreation Planning Program, recognizing that the needs, public sentiment and opportunities are unique to each location and what is appropriate to each piece of land.
- Create a state position for recreation/economic data collection and dissemination and to provide support for community and regional efforts.
- Cultivate community support for outdoor recreation through communication and events including a Vermont Town Summit on Outdoor Recreation.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Support a Pathway for Outdoor Recreation Careers and Entrepreneurship

- Create outdoor recreation programs at regional and high school technical centers and at technical colleges as feeders to university programs. Examples of program areas of instruction include: hard goods and textile manufacturing, trail building, bike, ski, ATV and boat mechanics, park management, retail, and hospitality.
- Offer incentives and support for start-ups, i.e. starter kits, loans, tech incubator space, insurance, etc.
- Provide internships and mentorships for students and young professionals interested in outdoor recreation careers through the Outdoor Business Alliance.

**PRIVATE/PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS:** Strengthen Incentives for Private Landowners to Allow Public Access

- Consider mechanisms to encourage landowners to keep lands open to recreation, including incentives for lands enrolled in current use.
- Strengthening Landowner Liability protections:
  - Provide thorough outreach to new and existing landowners
  - Include municipally owned land in protection
  - Ensure that any incentives (tax relief or others) does not impact liability protection
- Revise Act 250 review process for public trails on private lands to make it easier to develop trails and to adequately address environmental impacts.

**ACCESS and PARTICIPATION:** Increase Appropriate Outdoor Recreation Access Opportunities and Participation:

- Improve access to public lands and waterways. Explore changes to rules governing the types of uses allowed on public lands and state access areas. Simplify and streamline approval process for new uses on public lands.
- Undertake comprehensive review of ATV policy, including revising the statute that governs ATV connector trails on ANR lands to clarify the authority of the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources. Support efforts to maintain access to public trails including protecting the last five unprotected miles of the Long Trail.
- Consider implementing a mechanism through motor vehicle registrations (with an opt-out opportunity) to fund and allow Vermonters free day use at Vermont State Parks.

- Implement a camping gear loan program in Vermont State Parks which provides all needed gear for new campers to foster greater participation among underserved populations. (A pilot program will launch next summer in five state parks).
- Create and/or adopt outdoor recreation programming in K-12 and post-secondary schools. Integrate outdoor skills as part of required curricula in schools. Support existing outdoor recreation programming already in place in and outside of schools and ensure equity for all students.
- Support other creative efforts to ensure lifelong participation in outdoor activities including beginning activity programs for all ages and families, e.g. loaner program for gear, community bike or kayak programs, etc.
- Identify and promote access across all types of outdoor recreation and all seasons – including both more intensive trail-based, as well as dispersed non-trail based; land-based and water-based recreation.
- Identify and support equitable access to outdoor recreation for youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, veterans, New Americans, racial and ethnic minorities, women and other special populations. This could include marketing, promotion, access to equipment, programs and other opportunities.

**STEWARDSHIP: Support Stewardship of Outdoor Recreation Assets and Infrastructure**

- Ensure high-quality waterways, including funding for Lake Champlain clean-up efforts.
- Actively encourage all outdoor-minded businesses participating in [VOICe](#) and build a funding coalition in support of Vermont's trail-based nonprofit organizations which will:
  - Strengthen the capacity of organizations to plan, design, build and maintain Vermont's world class trail/waterways infrastructure
  - Meaningfully fuel trail-based nonprofits' outreach programs with the goal of increasing participation and volunteerism
  - Embolden a "Vermont Outdoor" ethos among all types of outdoor-minded businesses to broaden enthusiasm and investment in trails/waterways
  - Create connections among VT businesses providing a platform to develop reciprocal benefits/services to help open more space for trail investment
- Enhance the existing [Vermont Recreation Trail \(grant\) Program \(RTP\)](#) funds and streamline the grant process.

- Create a Vermont Outdoor Ethic which captures the stewardship principles necessary for world-class outdoor recreation assets.
- Increase stewardship volunteer opportunities for youth: allow stewardship activities to be counted as part of any volunteer requirement for high school students.
- Include stewardship activities for outdoor recreation in wellness programs in communities, businesses and schools.
- Strengthen stewardship and management of public lands to provide “open space” recreational opportunities for hunters, backcountry enthusiasts, and others that seek solitude and quiet for their recreational pursuits.

**FUNDING:** Create or Enhance Funds for Outdoor Recreation Stewardship Initiatives

We heard overwhelmingly from the public, the for- and non-profit sectors, as well as land managers that there needs to be increased and consistent funding available to take care of the recreational resources we have, to be ready to build more and to support increased demand.

- Consider a check-off box on Vermont State Income Tax return.
- Support a modest increase in general fund for FPR to create capacity to support VOREC initiatives.
- Continue support for Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to promote land conservation and public recreational access, recreation planning, economic development, and affordable workforce housing.
- Create a mechanism for voluntary contributions to stewardship. For example, at check out, retailers could voluntarily collect 1% of outdoor recreation equipment sales of \$1K or more to allocate to stewardship, including Lake Champlain clean-up efforts, and support other efforts to dedicate statewide funding to Vermont’s clean water initiatives. Partner with [1% For The Planet](#), a Vermont-based non-profit, to market and implement the program.
- Create and sell VOREC or Outdoor Recreation merchandise (stickers, decals, hats, water bottles, etc.) and allocate 100% of profits for stewardship including Lake Champlain clean-up efforts.

**SUMMARY: Regional Pilot Programs**

To show measurable and short-term results, we suggest implementing three distinct pilot programs across the state that incorporate several of the recommendations. Many of our recommendations are interdependent. To be most effective they should be adopted

simultaneously as part of a larger strategy to achieve maximum and near-term impact. We recommend using an investment of VOREC steering committee members' time and expertise, appropriate assistance from private and public-sector stakeholders, and a state-funded budget to launch these pilot programs. Elements and criteria of the pilot programs would include:

- Geographic distribution
- Community and regional support
- Demonstrated economic need
- Evidence of existing recreation assets and potential for enhancement and growth
- High potential measurable return on investment

Finally, our recommendations do not directly address several broad and critical themes that the VOREC Steering Committee has heard in public input, and in consensus discussions, and are deemed critical to economic growth, not just within the outdoor recreation sector, but across all industries and communities. These include broadband and cellular connectivity, health care costs, affordable housing, and climate change. While these issues all relate to and have implications for Vermont's outdoor economy they are all outside the direct purview of VOREC and are all addressed by other entities and agencies such as the Climate Commission, Agency of Human Services, Public Service Department and others.

The VOREC Steering Committee is committed to ensuring the success of these recommendations, working with partners to strengthen our valuable outdoor recreation assets, helping to stimulate economic growth, and improving the economic and recreation opportunities for Vermonters.

**Respectfully submitted,**

Michael Snyder, Chair (Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation) Stowe, VT

Wendy Knight (Agency of Commerce and Community Development: Department of Tourism and Marketing), Panton, VT

Mike DeBonis (Green Mountain Club) Moretown, VT

Hal Ellms (Pinnacle Outdoor Group), Middlesex, VT

Amy Kelsey (Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, Catamount Trail Association/Vermont Backcountry Alliance), Underhill, VT

Josh Ryan (Timber and Stone, LLC), East Montpelier, VT

Trey Martin (Trust for Public Land), Adamant, VT

Cindy Locke (Vermont Trails and Greenways Council/Vermont Association of Snow Travelers), Barre, VT

Marc Sherman (Outdoor Gear Exchange), Burlington, VT

Drew Simmons (Pale Morning Media), Waitsfield, VT

Tom Stuessy (Vermont Mountain Bike Association/Vermont Outdoor Innovation Coalition), South Burlington, VT

Bill Supple (Mammut), Richmond, VT

Frank Stanley (VT Traditions Coalition/Traditional Hunting and Fishing interests), Monkton, VT

Sarah Lang (Southern Vermont Economy Project Manager, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation), Brattleboro, VT

Jeanne Gervais (Island Pond Chamber of Commerce), Island Pond, VT