1. First, thank you for spearheading the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economy initiative. This effort will be a valuable piece to Vermont's future. Second, I live in Williston and since there isn't a public forum nearby, I want to provide my input. Some of these ideas will require but some are low or no costs.
2. Create a joint marketing partnership with New York State and Quebec focused on Lake Champlain. Promote interstate and international biking, sailing, fishing events. Design a bike tour around the lake that becomes a "must do" for many recreational cyclists.
3. Improve Route 78 between Swanton and Alburgh. Right now this is a dangerous road to bike on, but if it could have good bike-able shoulders, then it would become a main biking corridor.
4. Work with towns to identify all Class IV roads and designate them as recreational assets. Work with groups to ensure that these roads are walk-able and can accommodate mountain bikes and snowmobiles.
5. Work with existing groups to make the Northeast Kingdom the mountain biking capital of New England. There are many natural assets there already. Mountain biking a growing sport. Promote the heck out of it.
6. Work with Northern University to have them create a competitive mountain biking team. Believe it or not, mountain biking is a now a college sport and some high schools have mountain biking teams as well. Northern University is already perfectly suited for mountain biking and having a team would create recruitment opportunities.
7. Work with the state highway department and towns to increase bike visibility. Build bike lanes where you can, but simply add more signs along the roads. In particular, signs such informing drivers to give 4 feet of space to vulnerable users (bikers) when passing. These signs tell everyone that Vermont respects cyclists and that cyclists are welcomed here.
8. Help sponsor "Meet Up" groups around the state for people interested in outdoor recreation. Different Meet Up groups could have different flavors. But if your organization promoted them and helped them, they would grow and connect a lot of people.
9. Encourage developers and towns to design walking and biking paths that connect neighborhoods now separated by busy main roads. Get people out of the silos we have made.
10. Support towns to designate and develop walking and hiking trails in their towns. Some towns do a great job of this while others do nothing. Work with VLTC.
11. Establish an "Outdoor Recreation Day" that gets whole families outside - make it bigger than Green Up Day was in the 1970's-80's.
12. My Husband and I live in the Champlain Islands. We are water monitors for LCC and members of LCI and Friends of Northern Lake Champlain. We are very concerned about water quality. We are both retired from our career jobs but keep busy with our small rental cottage, our kayak tour business and volunteering with our town recreation program. I saw on the WCAX news this morning that you and your department are holding meetings around the state to gather ideas for improving and increasing outdoor recreation in Vermont. We started up a kayak tour business 4 years ago, thinking the Islands would be the perfect area for a business like this. We are lifelong kayakers and ACA certified kayak instructors. We are committed to promoting safe and enjoyable kayaking. Our clients normally come from out of state, often are beginners and know almost nothing about the natural environment and unique history of the area. We love sharing stories, historical events, environmental issues and information about wildlife. These tours are a lot of fun for us and for our clients.  We love to teach safe kayaking practices and skills as well as a respect and love for this beautiful Lake. Here is our problem. As you know we have a short summer season. We do not take tours out until the water temp is 60 degrees with winds less than 8 mph. On a beautiful, calm day there is nothing better than being out on the water in a kayak. We carry liability insurance that costs us $1000 per year. We must pay for an entire year even though our season is at most 3 months long. The insurance comes through the ACA because we are ACA certified. I have shopped around locally for insurance but have only been offered the same thing..at the same amount. With our short season and no other alternative for a short term insurance policy, we are faced with having to close down our business. We do not look forward to having to do this but have no other choice at this point. My question/ suggestion: figure out a way to help small, outdoor recreation businesses by providing a way to get more cost effective, short term and affordable liability insurance.

13. Regarding guide services, tour operators, outdoor educators and recreation related businesses:

**1. Legally Binding Waiver Forms**

Many states that depend on recreation as an economic generator have passed legislation making waiver forms and releases legally binding. I have introduced legislation to that affect but the trial lawyers in the Statehouse have not been keen on supporting it. Protection from frivolous lawsuits would strengthen our industry and might even lower or at least stabilize the high cost of insurance for recreation providers.

We protect landowners who allow recreation activities on their land with no charge. Although, our sport programs, outdoor educators and recreation leaders are the link between the public and Vermont's natural resources, they are not protected by state law when participants sign a recreation waiver. Professionals  provide instruction in skill development, outdoor ethics and safety, yet while other states are making efforts to protect these valuable service providers by passing release form legislation, here in Vermont little progress has been made.

Some progress was made when the Vermont Supreme Court upheld the validity of liability waivers in a 2002 accident. In March, 2009 the high court upheld a summary judgment issued in Orleans Superior Court which said that the claimant waived his rights to sue when he signed a race day entry form the day before his accident.
While this ruling is important to the recreation industry, judges in these cases can still go either way with their judgment regarding validity of waivers. Without legislative direction regarding waivers, the threat of these drawn out lawsuits along with potential expenses involved continues to hang over Vermont's recreation industry.

**2. Landowner Liability**

It took 11 years for a wide ranging group of recreation organizations to get our legislature to pass one of the best landowner liability laws in the country. We thought that the job was done, it wasn't. This legislation is ineffective if landowners are not aware of it. I'd suggest that a new booklet be published with updated content and be distributed to town clerks across the state for distribution to new and current landowners. I'm sure that there are many organizations that would benefit from this product including recreation trail groups.

**3. Access to State Boat Launches**

Vermont is one of a very few states that does not allow guide services to launch and retrieve canoes, kayaks and other non motorized vessels from F & W access areas unless they are fishing, hunting or trapping. It is easier and less costly to take paddle sport customers to New York or New Hampshire than to find private landowners willing to grant access.

Our Department of Tourism and Marketing along with our Chambers of Commerce and many regional and statewide organizations spend large amounts of money promoting nature and paddle sports here in Vermont. The irony is that a person who has never stepped off pavement can come to Vermont, rent a canoe and launch at a state access area but professionals prepared to teach technique, safety, outdoor ethics and state law are banned.

Vermont boat builders and non motorized vessel retailers are also banned from launching and retrieving their products in order to show them to customers. I'm not talking about doing business, training or setting up a booth at access areas, just the ability to park, launch and retrieve.

If other states can allow this without losing Federal funding, which is the claim of some state employees, then Vermont needs to find a way.

**4. Licensing Guides**

I spoke with our Board of Directors and asked for feedback regarding the licensing of guides. They agree that credential based licensing could be a good thing. Maine, New Hampshire and New York all license guides but have their own testing process, not Vermont.

Creating tests for the multitude of activities that guides provide is complex, costly and time consuming. We suggest that by using national certifications in each field and establishing minimum standards for activities, Vermont would not be duplicating work that is already done and would be acknowledging the accomplishments of the individual. VOGA has been using this method for accepting new members for nearly 20 years.

Finally, if Vermont should license guides, we would ask that licensed guides have free and clear access to State lands. This would eliminate the permit process for VT licensed guides and open a large amount of underutilized public lands for outdoor programming. One stipulation would include proof of insurance.

**5. Entertainment Tax**

There is now an entertainment tax on companies that provide recreation based rides. This applies to dog sledding, snowmobiling, canoeing, kayaking, hay wagon rides and more. This is an extremely regressive tax that is detrimental to small business and it needs to be eliminated.

Here is a list provided to me by the Dept of Taxes:
Vermont regulations include a list of activities that are subject to the sales tax as an amusement or as entertainment. That list includes:
    Places where athletic events, exhibitions, dramatic and musical performances are held
    Athletic facilities or gyms including golf courses and ski areas
    Places where gaming or amusement machines, apparatus or devices are available
    The use of health clubs and athletic facilities
    Admission to observatories, zoos and museums
    Charges for sleigh or buggy rides, airplane, helicopter, boat and glider rides (where the purpose is amusement rather than transportation)
    Charges for the use of riding trails, tracks or similar facilities for skiing, horseback riding, bicycling, snowboarding, skating, canoeing, kayaking, or for using ATV’s, snowmobiles,  motorcycles, or other recreational equipment.

This is not a new law but rather a new interpretation of existing tax law in an effort to generate more income for the state without regard for the service providers.

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I'd be glad to discuss any of these topics should you be interested. Thanks for your time.

P.S. Some good news, Outdoors Woman Inc dba Vermont Outdoors Woman is now a public charity 501 (c) (3) and has just launched a new website at: [www.outdoorswoman.org](http://www.outdoorswoman.org)

Our mission is "to encourage and enhance the participation of women ​of all ages and abilities in outdoor activities through hands-on education."

My wife and I just returned from a vacation in Michigan and we’d like to share their strategy with you for bringing in some extra revenue.  Michigan’s DNR has a program called the [Recreational Passport](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-153-10365_55798---%2C00.html).  In order to park a vehicle at any state-run recreational facility (boat-launch, trailhead, state park, etc.) a sticker must be purchased from the State and displayed on the windshield/dashboard.  These parking passes don’t cost much for residents ($11/year), but are a bit more expensive for visitors ($32/year or $9 daily) and can be purchased at any campground, online, or DMV location. Failure to display a Recreational Passport in your vehicle could result in a fine.

The purchaser of a Recreation Passport also receives discounts at participating local businesses (which I think could tie into the Governor’s VOREC initiative quite well).

Planning and Development Corporation Comments:

1. I cannot think of anything specific that FCIDC is focused on in the Recreation Sector but here are some things on the peripheral.

         Local nature area (Aldis Hill) is working with TrailHub.com to promote their trail system on a free app.

         Local small ski area, Hard'ack is contructing a new lodge for public use.   Hard'ack has cross-county trails, snow shoe trails, a sliding hill, snowmaking and a 500 foot rope tow.  The area is great for learn to ski, youth intermediate trails and snow boarding apparatus i.e. jumps, rails etc

         The Hard'ack Recreation Area is also looking at the possibility of constructing a new hockey facility to allow for more teams, tournaments and public skating.

         A new 154 slip marina is being built in St. Albans Bay, all permits in place and will be ready for Spring rentals.

         Town of St. Albans Town Forest is creating a trail network and beginning to promote it.

         Town of Richford is focused on river access and a river park along the Missisquoi River

         Focus is now on the Swanton to Sheldon section of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, fundraising, bridge contruction and trail repairs are being made as part of completing the 93 mile trail.

FUNDING IS THE BIGGEST HURDLE!!     These projects have public support, plans, permits, volunteers etc etc

1. Three of the top priorities that NVDA is working on in the area of outdoor recreation are:
* We are working independently with the City of Newport and the VT Land Trust to **establish a recreation trail network in the City of Newport** (at/near Lake Memphremagog) that will connect with existing trails in/near the city that will link to Quebec. Newport has an established bike path in the city that connects to a rail trail with a terminus near Beebe, VT.  A private landowner, supported by grant funds procured by the City of Newport, has developed a walking path along the lake behind a waterfront shopping plaza.  The VT Land Trust has procured a large parcel (formerly the Scott Farm) in Newport that borders the lake, as well. VLT is proposing the development of a walking/multi-use path to connect with the City's public beach and the existing bike path to enhance the trails network in Newport.

Challenges:  Aside from funding, challenges with the VLT portion of the project are long-term ownership (VLT is intending to sell their entire property after conservation easements are set in place) and maintenance (at present, the City doesn't want to take on maintenance of any more trails).

* Working toward the **completion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail**.  NVDA has been supportive of the LVRT since its inception.  Portions of the LVRT that have been completed in the Northeast Kingdom are proving to be very popular - e.g. the section from West Danville to St. Johnsbury.  NVDA is interested in helping to establish local trailheads so that people can access the trail.

Challenges:  Aside from the funding that VAST needs to complete the LVRT in its entirety, another challenge is timing of the trail's completion.  The Town of Hardwick is very interested in seeing their section of the LVRT completed as soon as possible.  There is a lot of development occurring in Hardwick and some of that development would be enhanced with a completed LVRT that brings more visitors to the community.  If the state could help to accelerate the completion of the LVRT, all of VT would certainly benefit.

* **Establishing a formal sub-regional bike trail network in Essex County, VT**.  The community of Island Pond (Town of Brighton) is surrounded by thousands of acres of public lands with existing dirt road networks that would be very appealing to cyclists.  Utilizing roads in the Silvio Conte US Fish & Wildlife Refuge, the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area (State of VT), and other parcels from the former Champion lands, a network of cycling trails that use existing roads would provide a different type of cycling experience than what visitors get at Kingdom Trails in Lyndon/Burke.  This network would be more focused on leisurely cycling to enjoy the natural flora/fauna in these large forested areas.

Challenges:  Coordination between state, federal, and private landowners would be important.  Also, finding a group or an organization to act as a 'corridor manager' would also be needed.

* **Lake usage at Great Hosmer Pond**.  NVDA has been involved in discussions about a proposed rule-making pertaining to the use of Great Hosmer Pond in Craftsbury/Albany.  There have been observed conflicts between existing motorized and non-motorized uses at the lake. Also, a proposed draft rule that limits non-motorized uses on the lake seems to be very unusual for VT.
Challenge: It is the belief of many in the community that these issues would be resolved if enforcement of existing rules/laws was improved.  Creating new rules without changing enforcement practices has no guarantee of improving the situation.
1. Given a staff of 1.75 people, we have not focused on the recreation economy as a sector. Over the years we have worked with individual entities on specific issues, but it is not a focus or a priority. While we are vocally supportive of projects that expand recreational activities, we neither have the resources or funding to be deeply involved in community development projects. We are working with Sugarbush Resort as a major employer and economic driver for the Mad River Valley.