

**DRAFT**  
**Kingdom Heritage Lands Hiking Corridor Management Renewal Proposal**

Submitted by:

**Green Mountain Club**

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**Introduction and History**

In the fall of 1998, Champion International Paper, Co announced the sale of 300,000 acres of land in Vermont, New Hampshire and New York of which approximately 130,000 acres were for sale in Vermont, primarily in rural Essex County. The Champion sale led to the eventual conservation of its properties through the combined efforts of the State of Vermont, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Timber Company (whose lands were sold to Plum Creek Timber Company in 2008), the Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Land Trust.

The complex arrangement protected the timber, wildlife and recreational values of the land while ensuring that the public would be able to continue, in perpetuity, such uses as hunting, fishing and dispersed recreation. The planning process for the newly conserved lands also required all 'corridor-based' recreation uses such as bicycling, snowmobiling, horseback riding and hiking be managed by designated Corridor Managers.

In February of 2001, the Green Mountain Club (GMC) formally announced its intention to become Corridor Manager for hiking trails in the former Champion Lands (now called the Kingdom Heritage Lands) following similar commitments by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) to manage snowmobile trails and the Vermont Horse Council to manage equestrian uses. GMC submitted their Corridor Management Proposal to the Agency of Natural Resources in 2005 for an important and lengthy public and agency review process.

In January of 2009, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources approved the GMC Corridor Management agreement for hiking trails in the former Champion Lands for a five-year term. We are requesting a renewal of our agreement for the Kingdom Heritage Lands.

**Qualifications**

The Green Mountain Club was founded in 1910 and is Vermont's premier hiking organization. Its mission is *'to make the Vermont mountains play a larger part in the life of the people by protecting and maintaining the Long Trail System and fostering, through education, the stewardship of Vermont's hiking trails and mountains'*. For over one hundred years, the Green Mountain Club has been dedicated to stewarding

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Vermont's Long Trail System, with its 270-mile footpath, 200-miles of side trails and nearly 70 backcountry overnight sites, including 44 miles of the Appalachian Trail, from the Maine Junction to the Connecticut River. The Green Mountain Club has accomplished its mission through an extensive volunteer base, by offering public educational seminars and recreational outings, providing trail information through publications such as the Long Trail Guide and the Day Hiker's Guide to Vermont, working with private landowners and State and Federal Agencies to steward trail resources, and advocating for land conservation and trail protection efforts in the State Legislature and in local communities.

The Green Mountain Club has nearly 10,000 members divided into 14 Sections. The GMC also maintains a staff of approximately 13 employees based out of its Waterbury headquarters. The Northeast Kingdom Section of the Green Mountain Club was established in 2000 and includes approximately 195 family and individual members. Unlike other GMC Sections that are responsible for maintaining designated portions of the Long Trail System, the Northeast Kingdom Section maintains hiking trails throughout the Northeast Kingdom. Currently the Northeast Kingdom Section has 18 trail 'adopters' that maintain some 22 miles of trail.

Through the volunteer efforts of its Sections and partnerships with the State of Vermont, Green Mountain National Forest, Northwoods Stewardship Center, Appalachian Trail Park Office, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, the Green Mountain Club has shown that it can responsibly manage hiking trails and their public uses - fostering a harmonious balance between the hiking public and the concerns of land management agencies, adjacent landowners and local residents.

### **Vision**

The Green Mountain Club's vision for the Kingdom Heritage Lands includes a variety of day and multi-day hiking trails that provide hikers with opportunities for a remote backcountry experience. The Green Mountain Club seeks to preserve the wild and remote nature of the Kingdom Heritage Lands, preferring narrow trails that are non-intrusive to the forest canopy and constructed to be both durable and protective of the landscape.

GMC recognizes the potential for developing hiking trails on or adjacent to existing and historic roads, trails and right-of-ways as well as the possibility to connect existing hiking trails on adjacent public lands through the development of new trail corridors. To strike a balance between keeping the lands as wild as possible and providing trail-based hiking opportunities, we believe the development of hiking trails should be slow and deliberate. Such trails will be developed in a manner consistent with the terms and conditions of all applicable policies and easements.

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### Goals

The goals of the GMC Hiking Corridor Management Plan continue to be:

1. Provide corridor-based access for hikers on the Kingdom Heritage Lands through the development of single and multi-day hiking trails.
2. Provide trail facilities such as trailheads, signs, and informational kiosks that will facilitate public education, access to trail corridors and the protection of cultural and natural resources.
3. Where practical, work collaboratively with other trail managers such as the Vermont Horse Council, VAST and ANR to establish multi-use corridors that are suitable for hiking as well as the access and maintenance of remote hiking trail corridors.

### Trails

At the present time, GMC remains devoted to developing hiking trails on only a small portion of the Kingdom Heritage Lands – primarily in the northern and western regions of these land holdings. This emphasis achieves a number of the goals set forward in the initial formative review process as well as the long-range goals of the Green Mountain Club. The proposed trail network addresses these goals by 1) honoring the need for trail-less peaks in much of the region, 2) limiting trail development to areas that provide or lead to future linkages with existing trails and public lands, 3) providing a mix of remote backcountry and shorter ‘front country’ trail opportunities, 4) avoiding impacts on areas of ecological sensitivity, and 5) limiting conflicts with other recreational and land uses.

The overall vision of the proposed plan calls for the development, over a period of time, of a continuous long-distance backcountry trail with several additional side trails that provide day hiking opportunities, possible loop routes, and access for emergencies and maintenance work. The primary long-distance corridor would eventually stretch north from the Village of Island Pond to Norton Pond, Gore Mountain and, possibly, Monadnock Mountain. Long-range plans could connect this proposal with trail systems to the south in Willoughby State Forest and potentially to Groton State Forest.

To facilitate the continuing development of the Kingdom Heritage Lands Trail Network, this Corridor Management Plan has been broken into three (3) trail building phases and one additional section with potential future trails. This trail development proposal is a conceptual proposal where specific trail locations may need adjusting based on field review to minimize natural resource or forest management impacts. Trail impacts will be carefully evaluated before trail locations can be finalized. No timeframe has been identified for the individual phases; each phase’s implementation will span several years depending on project approval, funding availability and various challenges of terrain and construction.

**Phase I – Unknown Pond/ Middle Mountain, Sweet Tree LLC and Plum Creek Timber Co., landowners**

GMC will develop a trail from VT Route 114 (near the Hurricane Road) east to Unknown Pond to connect with new Middle Mountain Trail leading over the summit ridge to the lower portion of the established Gore Mountain Trail.

Construction progress through 2014 has been the completion of the trail from the Gore Mountain Trail across most of the summit ridge of Middle Mountain close to the proposed junction with the flagged Unknown Pond trail.

The development of the Unknown Pond Trail will include improving the existing route from VT Route 114 to reduce erosion and minimize impacts to forestry operations. Portions of this route will be relocated to a more stable corridor and provide an optimal connection to the Middle Mountain Trail. An existing spur to Unknown Pond will be improved to provide public access to the water - eliminating conflicts with lease camps and avoiding any new trail development within the 200-foot Special Treatment Buffer Zone around the Pond.

We plan to complete Phase I in 2015 with the assistance of NorthWoods Stewardship Center.

In addition, a trail from VT Route 114 leading southeast to the summit of Gore Mountain, built by Northwoods Stewardship Center, already exists on Sweet Tree and Plum Creek property.

Trails on the adjacent Sweet Tree property are subject to different legal circumstances from those of the Kingdom Heritage Lands, easements—however—to ensure the continuation of the existing trails across this property are in progress currently.

**Phase II – Bluff Mountain Ridge**

The Bluff Mountain Ridge Trail is the central component to the hiking network proposed for the northern portion of the Kingdom Heritage Lands. The Ridge Trail, combined with the Phase I trails associated with Unknown Pond and Middle Mountain, completes the link between the existing summit trails on Bluff and Gore Mountains.

The Bluff Mountain Ridge Trail would follow the Bluff Mountain ridgeline north from the southern summit of Bluff Mountain to Unknown Pond at the base of Middle Mountain. The trail would follow along upper eastern slope of the ridge and cross

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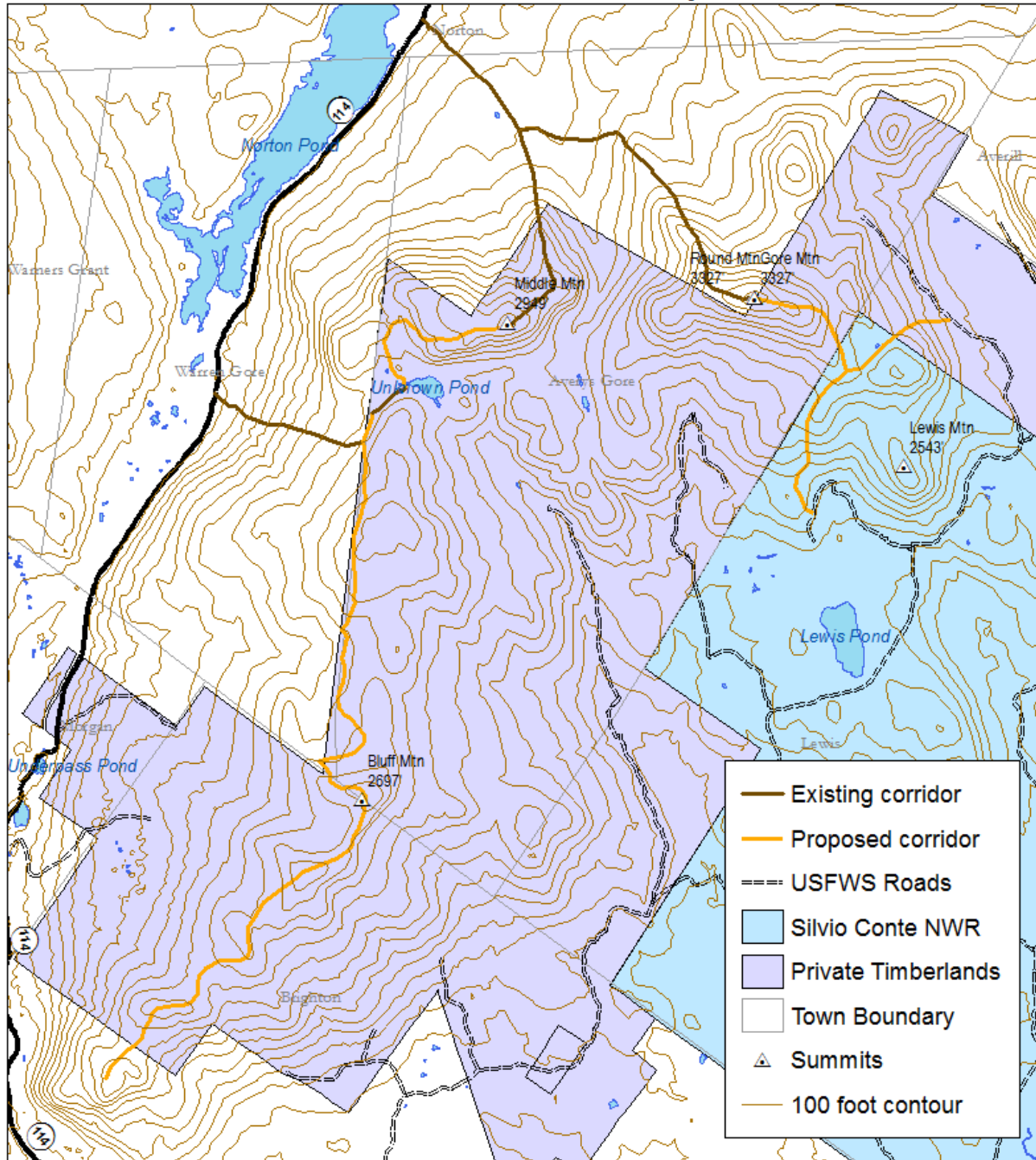
near a number of low knolls before reaching the true summit of Bluff Mountain and a proposed short spur trail to the potential campsite to the northwest. From the summit knob, approximately halfway along the ridge, the trail would turn north and pass over a number of additional knolls before dropping down to Unknown Pond and the junction with the Middle Mountain Trails. Approximate length: 8 miles.

### **Phase III – West Mountain and Gore Mountain East**

West Mountain GMC wishes to develop new hiking trails on West Mountain consistent with its location in the center of the West Mountain Ecological Core Area. GMC would need to renew scouting work and evaluation of potential routes to the summit and a southern lookout over Ferdinand Bog. Should the lease on the summit tower come under public ownership, GMC would consider maintaining the existing summit access trail.

Gore Mountain A new trail from the summit of Gore Mountain would lead east and south to a trailhead on Lewis Pond Road and provide a connection to the Averill Lakes Trail corridor to the north. Approximate length (Headwaters Trail): 2.2 miles.

# GMC Corridor Proposal



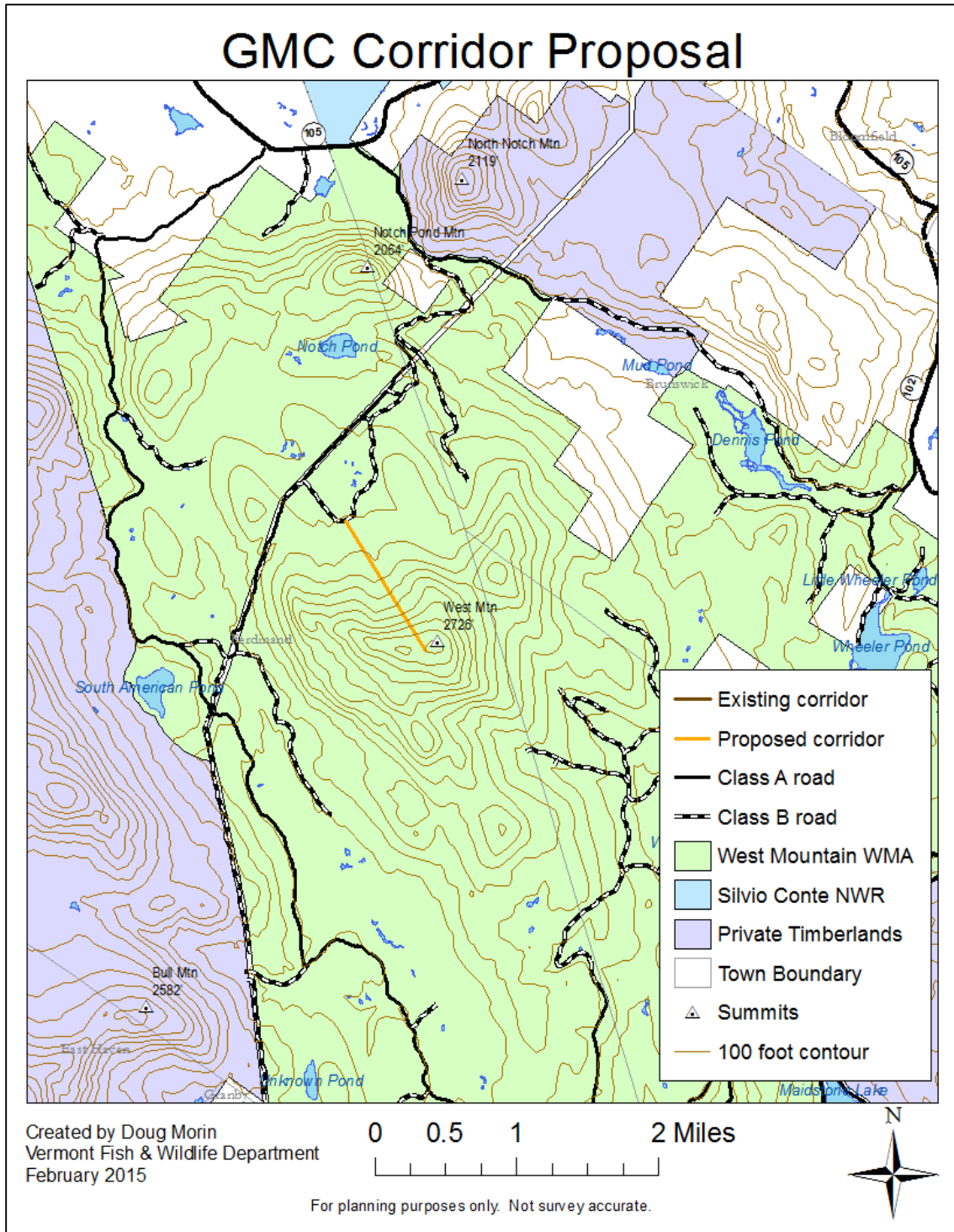
Created by Doug Morin  
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department  
February 2015

0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles



For planning purposes only. Not survey accurate.

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### **Potential Future Recreation Trail Opportunities**

Additional opportunities exist for the development of a broader hiking trail network in the Nulhegan region. These projects are presented in this proposal to solicit public comment for future reference; these projects are conceptual and are not proposals at this time. These trails, where possible, would utilize existing corridors and provide both long-distance links and short distance destination hikes to some of the cultural, historical, and natural sites in the Nulhegan Basin and on surrounding public land. The development of these potential future trails is dependent on progress in Phases I, II, and III of this plan as well as public demand and support. These potential opportunities may be subject to change. A brief description of possible trail corridors is listed below.

Averill Lakes. The Averill Lakes route could utilize an existing VAST trail near the Averill town line and connect with the Little Averill Lake Road. This corridor would provide a potential northern trailhead and could connect with the East Branch Road and trails on Sable, Brousseau and Averill Mountains. Approximate length: 3.5 miles.

Black Mountain. Create a small trail corridor on the south shore of Averill Lake that would bypass the long Averill Lake road walk and connect the Gore Mountain East Trail to the East Branch Road and Sable Mountain.

Madison Falls. GMC will work with the Agency of Natural Resources to monitor pedestrian use at the Madison Falls site. Should public use increase or lead to significant resource damage at the site, GMC will consider developing and maintaining an access trail that will provide optimal access while protecting natural resources.

Monadnock. The existing route currently used by VAST between the Sable Mountain Road and Willard Stream provides a potential multi-use corridor connecting Sable and Monadnock Mountains. It may be possible to incorporate Monadnock into the Kingdom Heritage Lands Hiking Trail network via multi-use trails or a western approach to the summit.

Notch Pond. GMC will work with the Agency of Natural Resources to maintain and improve existing pedestrian access to Notch Pond.

Sable Mountain. GMC may develop a Sable Mountain Trail on the north slope of Sable Mountain, including and a western lookout near the summit. Approximate length: 1.2 miles. (Note: both northern and southern routes have been explored



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on Sable and the southern route was deemed inappropriate due to drainage, terrain and environmental considerations).

Westmore. A proposed route southwest from Island Pond to Job's Pond and Job's Mountain provides an ideal link to the extensive trails network in Willoughby State Forest. The proposed route (approximately 6-8 miles) would leave Island Pond near Pleasant Street and cross municipal and private lands before reaching Route 114 near McKinley Brook. Again crossing private lands, the trail would reach Newark and follow public roads for a short distance to Job's Pond and conservation timberlands adjacent to Willoughby State Forest.

GMC will work with the Agency of Natural Resources and its partners to identify other potential trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands.

### **Signs and Blazes**

A well-designed and well-maintained trail should be clear and easy to follow. Signs and blazes will be minimized, especially in order to preserve a primitive footpath.

Signs should be made of milled lumber with routed lettering, stained but not painted, and will be only as follows:

1. Trailhead sign with name of trail and length to end destination. The property owner(s) name should also be on the sign.
2. Indication of private property as needed.
3. Trails that intersect should be marked with a small trail crossing sign that shows which routes are which trails, by name.
4. Trail length and distances may also be included on signs

Blazes should be minimized and used as necessary to make the trail easily followed by hikers. A well-defined trail – clear of brush and debris with a well-worn treadway – will require fewer blazes to direct hikers. Blazes shall be rectangular, two inches by six inches in size and placed no less than four feet high (approximately eye level). Generally no more than one blaze shall be visible from any point (except in areas where the tread is difficult to follow). Blazes will be painted with water-soluble exterior latex paint in a color to be decided by ANR and GMC.

### **Trailheads and Parking**

Trailheads and parking areas provide controlled access points to day and multi-day hiking corridors. GMC envisions parking and trailhead facilities - located at strategic points - that will provide optimal access to hiking trails, maximize the use of existing log landings, pull-offs and open areas, and, where possible, allow for shared access by other recreation users (i.e. snowmobiles in the winter). All trailheads will be well marked and located in areas with adequate parking for a small number of vehicles (6-12 cars). These will be large enough for vehicles to turn around in and safely park off of roadways. GMC will work with ANR to arrange for the maintenance of selected trailheads during the winter months.

### **Campsites**

GMC hopes to develop a limited number of overnight campsites as part of its efforts to establish multi-day hiking opportunities on the Kingdom Heritage Lands. Based on easement and policy restrictions, primitive camping on State lands is permitted subject to ANR's statewide rules and is permitted on Plum Creek Timber Company Lands ONLY with prior consent from Plum Creek Timber Company or pursuant to written agreement between Plum Creek and ANR. At this time Plum Creek does not anticipate giving permission for overnight camping facilities.

If approved, campsites would be rustic in nature and may include a small clearing for tents, access to water supplies and an outhouse facility in an appropriate location at least 200 feet from open water. Sites will be located on durable surfaces in areas of minimal impact to wildlife, water, scenic and historic resources.

### **Shelters**

GMC would consider establishing overnight shelters where allowed by partners to address future needs on its long-distance hiking trail corridors. Currently, no plans exist to construct permanent shelters (including 3-sided lean-tos or 4-sided cabins) anywhere on the Kingdom Heritage Lands. GMC will, however, consider maintaining existing structures where available within its trail network (e.g. the Gore Mountain summit cabin) to provide overnight facilities for backpackers.

GMC is currently pursuing the purchase of a camp on Unknown Pond and may elect to make it available to the public, within the legal framework setup by the easements and Public Access Plan for the Private Timberlands.

### **Maps**

Maps of the Kingdom Heritage Lands Trail network (and adjacent areas) will be made available locally to help hikers locate trails and know what to expect.

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### **Management**

The Green Mountain Club retains responsibility for coordinating the management and construction of hiking trails on the Kingdom Heritage Lands. GMC may work with local organizations such as the NorthWoods Stewardship Center to develop and maintain trail corridors according to accepted trail building standards. Unless otherwise noted, all trail management and maintenance activities shall be in accordance with the guidelines demonstrated in the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Appalachian Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance, second edition (2000).

The GMC seeks to provide optimal routes for all proposed trails that will reduce environmental damage, minimize landowner and trail user conflicts, and maximize the efficiency of its trail management efforts. To this end, trails on private timberlands will be located in a manner that, where possible, avoids active forestry areas and provides maximum protection of sensitive soils, plants and wildlife habitats.

Trails that are in conflict with forestry operations will be evaluated for alternate routes and relocated accordingly to avoid conflicts.

### **Maintenance**

Maintenance will involve hand tools whenever possible, such as shovels, hoes, rakes, handsaws, loppers, rock bars, and axes.

The purpose of trail maintenance is to keep the trail in good condition in the location chosen. This should also result in a trail that is clear, well defined and easily followed by hikers. GMC suggests spring and fall trimming of branches and clearing away of fallen trees from the trail, as well as regular inspection of wet areas and drainage to see where waterbars and dips are needed to protect resources. Maintenance will also encourage regrowth of brush to keep trails narrow. Ideally trails will be under a forest canopy to minimize encroachment by brambles.

### **Resource Damage: Prevention and Repair**

Principle forms of resource damage include water-induced erosion on slopes and the impact of feet on the trail. A well-designed trail should resist wear from feet, because the trail should be narrow, often relatively dry or with stepping stones or bridges. GMC will observe usage and make recommendations accordingly each year.

Waterbars and drainage dips may need to be installed on hiking trails. These will reduce erosion.

### **Trail Closure (Mud Season)**

Hiking on trails during the spring and fall mud seasons produces resource damage and should be discouraged. GMC recommends minimizing use of hiking trails during the

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spring mud season. This season should be defined as the period when the partnered landowners have woods roads gated shut for mud season, roughly from April to Memorial Day weekend (usually the last weekend in May). As soon as trailheads are designated, GMC will provide educational signage indicating timing and reasons for trail closure during mud seasons.

### **Outreach and Education**

The Green Mountain Club provides education and outreach information to hikers on a statewide and local level through a variety of workshops, publications and events. Information pertaining to the Kingdom Heritage Lands hiking trail system such as trail information, user expectations, and backcountry etiquette will be available through the GMC website, its guidebooks, maps and publications.

### **Reporting**

GMC will provide annual reports to ANR, which will distribute them to each of the Kingdom Heritage Lands landowners and partners to describe trail conditions and maintenance efforts. Owners should also notify FPR immediately of trail changes as needed (especially planned forestry operations), trail damage observed, and other concerns. Reports should be sent to the St Johnsbury District Stewardship Forester (presently, Louis Bushey).

GMC field staff will meet in person with ANR at least once a year, to plan, discuss and evaluate hiking trail corridors on the Kingdom Heritage Lands, and will notify ANR of each planned maintenance operation or trail crew on the lands.