

Trails Connect Forum
Hosted by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance



March 27th, 2017
Hypertherm, Lebanon

1. Trail Ethics/Conflicts Session

Moderators: Paul Coats, Lebanon Recreation Department

Recorder: Vic Henningsen, Upper Valley Trails Alliance Board secretary

Education for Ethics

[What follows is a summary of the discussion, rather than a point-by-point narrative.]

How do we educate others about particular use (or non-use)? For example, if we're on a non-motorized-use trail and we see snow machines, what do we do? How do we explain to users the correct etiquette for multiple-use trails only two feet wide?

Our first response tends to be negative – these people are deliberately flouting the rules – and our instinct is to be punitive – they should be punished or at least publicly embarrassed. But this is counterproductive in at least two ways. First, it assumes that abusers know what the expectations are and intentionally ignore them. That may be true in some cases, but it's more likely that they simply don't know any better; don't know what the expectations are. Second, responding to the behavior with self-righteous anger – however justified – evokes self-righteous anger in return and the opportunity to educate abusers about proper use is lost. Discouraging use by trying to keep the resource a secret doesn't work either.

Perhaps it's better to assume good will on the part of abusers (to assume that they'd follow rules if they knew them) and plan an inclusive/educational approach. On some high-use, popular areas, why not have a Spring "Opening Day" event for all users and explain proper trail behavior? So, don't punish users and don't try to prevent use -- educate users through a variety of mechanisms (events, signage, etc.) that highlight a personal touch. Adopt an "each one teach one" approach and try to create a ripple-effect.

Some participants raised concerns about the danger of mixed use that includes hunters. Doesn't mix with families out for a stroll. It's not illegal, but seems dangerous. But, said one land manager, we also hear from hunters about others – mountain bikers and hikers - harassing hunters who have a legal right to be where they are, doing what they're doing. Respect is a two-way street. After all, mountain bikers could take Opening Day of Deer Season off, couldn't they? This is a complicated issue for managers. It's probably important to post signs reminding people that hunting *is* allowed, but it's also important to get out in front of the issue to educate users about when hunting season occurs.

There was further discussion of the difficulties of communicating between/among different user groups. Many participants favored temporary signage for hunting season but, as one said, if you do that, how much do you put on the sign?

Listserves, newspaper, social media, organizational/club websites and emails, and signs at trailheads were all mentioned as resources for dispensing and receiving important information about trails, conditions, and about other important things like dates of hunting seasons. The Trail Finder database was also mentioned as a good clearinghouse for such information.

Still, we should be aware that such information isn't always welcome. One participant reposted to a local listserv a Green Mountain Club advisory about problems created by postholing and took flak from people who didn't want to be told what to do. Such resistance is probably inevitable and shouldn't prevent us from taking the action. After all, we have no way of knowing how many people read the post, realized that their behavior was causing problems, and changed it. In other words, negative consequences are often obvious; positive ones (which may be extensive) aren't always as immediately evident.

But, as one participant noted ruefully, there will be those who are cheerful about the fact that their use conflicts with yours, citing a postholer who admitted that his behavior ruined X-C ski tracks but said, "it's a better workout for me."

As users of an area, we have an obligation to educate ourselves about the place, about our readiness to engage with the place (physical condition, weather, time limitations, etc), and about things like hunting season. [This is Rule 1 of Leave No Trace – "Plan Ahead & Prepare"]. We need to expand our inventory-taking (what's the weather, etc) to include this stuff – and let's not forget about trapping season. State websites, for example, are useful. Talk to co-users and ask them, what happens here and are there things I should be aware of? It's really our responsibility to inform ourselves, but it's *also* our responsibility to share what we've learned with others, without being obnoxious. After all, because we're here at this meeting, we're interested, but the people we're worried about don't get involved to the degree that we do and therefore often don't know what we know. So how do we communicate with the ignorant? Again, we should assume that they're not *willfully* ignorant.

Although there was much discussion of signage and use of websites (TrailFinder, GMC, Vermont Trail Ethic), many seemed to agree that the single most effective means of changing behavior was person-to-person contact. But that clearly

carries risks. Sometimes telling people what they're doing wrong can be dangerous (it can certainly be uncomfortable). It can be risky to address a stranger – we don't know who that person is. People have been harassed and at times physically threatened “for trying to do the right thing.” On the other hand, people may react angrily in the moment, because they're embarrassed, but might well change their behavior afterward – we'll never know.

How to have such a conversation? Could someone (UVTA? Some combination of interested parties?) put together a cheat-sheet that people willing to act as unofficial “stewards” might use in informal conversations with people they find making inappropriate use of the resource? It was noted that the Green Mountain Club pioneered a low-key person-to-person approach in its successful efforts to protect and preserve the alpine areas on Mount Mansfield and Camel's Hump, a strategy that has been widely adopted by other managers. One participant pointed to the “authority of the resource”, that is, centering the conversation not on behavior but on long-term concern for preserving the resource (presumably shared by the abusers, or why would they be in the area in the first place?). In other words, begin and center the conversation on a presumed shared concern for the resource everyone would like to enjoy long-term. This is education for the long haul; not necessarily the moment (that is, inviting abusers to be part of a larger communal effort to preserve a resource we know they care about indirectly summons them to reflect on the consequences of their current behavior. But – and we should be clear about this - it doesn't necessarily get them to stop what they're doing at that particular moment).

Participants generally agreed that Postholing is the emblem of poor behavior.

Animal Waste

In this segment, the following concerns were raised:

- People bring bags for dog waste, pick up the waste, and leave the bag hanging from a tree or sitting at the side of the trail. Is this because people used to public parks may assume that there's a trash pick-up somewhere and, when they can't find it, dispose of waste this way? Some suggested that people doing an out-and-back leave the bag to pick up on the way back.
- What about leashing dogs, particularly on trails crossing private property? Should managers be more aggressive about this? (Stewards in some places carry clothes line to hand out to owners without leashes).

- We should be sensitive to the fact that unruly dogs are not only negatively affecting other users, but wildlife as well. Again, education is useful.
- Note that animals do carry disease, so there are public health issues involved here – particularly in areas, like playgrounds, frequented by young children.
- Do users understand that their animals must be under control? Some sense that people understand that control is required, but their definitions of “control” vary. Some owners who know their animals seek to let their dogs run free at low-use times (not right, but it happens). Virtually every town has some kind of an ordinance that dogs must be under control (undefined), but people ignore it and, clearly, it’s also not enforced.

In response to these concerns, participants offered the following:

- Managers should be more intentional about considering animal presence on their trails and stewarding the resource with that in mind.
- Providing waste bags and a trash can at trailheads really helps. Towns and other managers should consider this.
- What about working with/through veterinarians and pet stores to provide an informational handout about proper etiquette?
- Again, knowing the area matters. Knowing what other kinds of uses are occurring helps dog owners decide where to take their pets.

How are we managing our users, knowing that many of our trails go through private property? How help mediate between users and owners?

This was addressed in the final three minutes of the session. The following points arose:

- People do create bootleg trails, which can lead to landowners posting property.
- Is this something to be addressed through education or does it require more aggressive management? The answer probably varies depending on the nature of the trail, its location, patterns of use, etc. No one-size-fits-all response.
- A number of landowners are new, or out-of-state, and think that posting solves the problem. It doesn’t. Person-to-person outreach to and education of landowners will be necessary here, in advance of the conflicts themselves.

2. Trail Protections Session

Moderators: Conrad Reining, UVTA Board Chair, and JT Horn, The Land of Public Trust

Recorder: Randy Richardson, UVTA Development Director

JT explains that there are 3 levels of protection

1. A handshake – can work well, but nothing written and can be easily revoked
2. A written agreement – usually a license between landowner and some entity. The downside in terms of protection is that this too can often be quite easily terminated, therefore leaving a trail vulnerable
3. A legally binding agreement, registered with another authority – this is the highest level of protection and will be recorded with town/government. This kind of agreement/protection will run with the land/goes with the real estate records – will outlast some owners, if not even permanent

The goal is to identify trail corridors to protect, but the challenge is that even one landowner can block a trail that passes through multiple properties. Great awareness and diplomacy is required because opening this conversation with landowners can embody the kind of change that they don't want: a move away from informal, neighborly, private, etc.

JT emphasizes that it is very important to talk to landowners about the potential to give and the opportunity to create a legacy rather than focusing on an obligation/expectation. Having the full power of the federal government and the threat of eminent domain behind the AT didn't necessarily make the process with easier or the timeline faster. The best negotiations involve local people who are truly invested in the trail/land and the process. He says that Trust for Public Land almost always needs to have someone in the community to ensure the success of a project.

It is important to try to offer something that is helpful/valuable to the landowner as it can feel like a loss or even somewhat scary in the face of all of potential legal/other

issues. It may be a very good idea to emphasize the ability of a land trust or other entity to take the responsibility for the process, maintenance, etc. JT praises the work of UVLT as they have been able to work as an experienced, trusted and local organization to do this work.

Jeannie of UVLT agrees about the importance of supporting landowners. She points out that there has been an increase in users who are not always aware of landowner sensitivities. The diversity and increase in outsiders often requires higher levels of protection and maintenance of trails with knowledge of the different ways to help.

Craig agrees and speaks to his experience as a trail maintainer. The protection of any trail requires a strong Trail Tripod:

1. Willing and supportive landowners
2. Active and capable trail maintainers – need to have knowledge and expertise
3. Another vital organization like a land trust is a very important third leg, partly for all of the reasons JT has mentioned

Question: Has the Upper Valley lost any trails? Is the problem significant?

Russ Hirschler, Jeannie and others talk about threats that have been averted and some trails that have been lost, including some important regional Snowmobile trails, and, recently, the loss of part of the network in Ascutney.

Question: Who is holding trail easements and trail rights of way?

JT Explains:

1. It could be a town, but many do not have the expertise/desire to get involved with conservation easements.
2. Nonprofits like UVLT, Trust for Public Land, etc. UVLT has been able to work on big/small parcels, including sometimes just a narrow trail corridor.

3. Conrad explains that UVTA has just started the process to be able to hold easement for trails if and when a trail needs protecting and it does not fit as a project for another area land trust. Jeannie praises this effort as it is good to have organizations that can fill various conservation needs and gaps.

Jeannie points out that it can often be a very challenging process when a trail runs through multiple properties –complex trail protection projects will often require multiple organizations, and good communication/teamwork. JT says there are some helpful options in these kinds of multiple property trail situations. For example, it may be possible to put “springs” in place, then agree to help tie together opportunities – vital to have a combination of expertise, resources and ability. Jeannie also warns that she has found that adding too much complexity can work against a project.

Question- How we can work together to set priorities and have a more strategic approach? It would be helpful for the wider trail community to try to identify some of the top regional priorities, possibly based on the degree of vulnerability, opportunity for connecting other trails, etc so that we can combine resources and work together

Jeannie points out that the consequences of having a property kicked out of current use can be expensive because the taxes can apply as if it were a building site. This kind of issue should be very carefully considered as it can have big impact on our ability to present a project as an opportunity rather than a burden for landowners.

Craig explained that when the New England National Scenic Trail came to be identified as a national scenic trail, it changed the game for many landowners who had been more than willing to support the trail with a more informal and local focus.

A suggestion is made that different organizations share their own map systems and trails that are unprotected. Another suggestion is made to go town by town to discover which trails are most important to those towns. It would be good to have a central online resource to identify priorities and work on strategy – possibly available through the UVTA website.

3. Hot Topics in Trail Maintenance Session

Moderators: John Taylor, UVTA Trail Programs Director, Jim Lyall, Ascutney Trails

1. Get water off of trails!
 - a. Sheet flow (less damage)
 - b. Less polluting
2. Avoid channelized concentrated water flow
 - a. If water moves fast, nutrients don't get picked up by plants
 - b. Creates gullies, washed out trails
3. Avoid flat areas for trails- too muddy. Re-route trail out if necessary
4. Don't have average trail grade over 10%
 - a. Max of 8% is best for mountain bike trails
5. User grade reversals to drop water off trails
6. Rocks or "armoring" needed to harden steep trail sections
7. ½ Rule- avoid channelizing and eroding
8. Trail Outslope to push water to outside edge and off trails
9. Beware of berm
10. Knicks allow you to make cuts in berm and allow water to run out
11. Building a trail
 - a. Start with raking to remove leaves, removes rocks with pick mattocks, then remove duff layer with hazel hoe or rogue hoe.
 - b. Then shape mineral soil with rogue hoe or mcleod; re-use mineral soil
12. Trail Clearing
 - a. No 'hat-hangers'
 - b. Clear in the shape of a doorway- wider for horse trails (8 ft); tread way (3 ft); hiking and bike (4-6 ft wide)
 - c. Cut to branch collar, not into trunk
13. Cutting your clearing on uphill side of treadway will help to keep trail users off lower edge of trail.

4. Trail Finder Demonstration Session

Moderators: Emma Tutein, UNH Cooperative, and Lelia Mellen, NPS

What is Trail Finder?

Trail Finder is a free, interactive mapping site designed to help VT and NH residents and visitors find hiking, snowshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the region; there is also information on motorized trails. Our goal is to help people get out, be active, and explore our outdoor treasures.

Why trail maps on the internet? I like paper maps

Trail Finder brings together extensive and up-to-date information about trails in one location. Search tools help users quickly find the right trail. Administrators can quickly edit online trails data when notified by trail managers so that they show up on the website instantaneously. The ability of trail managers/Trail Finder account holders to post announcements and trip reports helps users know what to expect. You can print out Trail Finder postings, or contact the trail manager for a paper map.

Why isn't 'X trail' on Trail Finder?

Posting high quality information takes time. All posted trails are closely reviewed by Trail Finder administrators and trail managers to ensure the maps and content are accurate and current. If you don't see a trail you think we should include, let us know!

Who administers Trail Finder?

Trail Finder is overseen by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance in collaboration with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, UNH Cooperative Extension, and NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

Is there a way to show trails as open or closed at certain sensitive times of year?

Yes! Trail managers can edit their trail posting page at any time to indicate trail conditions and closures.

5. Trails Connect Meeting: Community Needs Session

Moderators: Jonathan Fristick, GIS/GPS Mapping, and Dan Nelson, DOC

Ideas

- non-motorized CT River crossing/bridge
- think about gaps between mixed-use and restricted use
- trails for Lebanon HS Cross-Country runners and skiers
 - townsend farm area?
- rail trail to a landmark to the AT
 - intervening parcel owned by Dartmouth
- signs/kiosk/notice of trail heads
 - consistent signage
- connecting Lebanon, West Lebanon, and Hanover along RT 10
 - power line easement?
- trail from Stateline Sports along River to Riverpark Development to Wilder Dam to Boston Lot to Hanover
- connect West Lebanon parks to Hanover, north along river to Wilson Landing
- connect Clifford Park in West Hartford with Appalachian Trail and Hartford Town Forest
- Downer St Forest connection to Gile Mountain
- connect Ottauquechee Trail to VINS
- access to AT in winter in Woodstock area- plowed parking
- in progress: connect Billings Park to AT
- connector from Lebanon Middle School to Rail Trail (Rt 4 crossing).

6. Trail Organization and Manager Needs Session

Moderators: Matt Stevens, Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and Courtney Dragiff, Hanover Conservancy

Volunteer Management Issues

- liability issues (trail tools)
- how do we find out about potential volunteers? Can we consolidate the lists?
- staffing issues for supervising projects, especially new groups
- can we have trainings to have volunteers lead basic projects?

Volunteer Management Ideas/ Suggestions

- know what your needs are and aren't
- need appropriate leaders for group size
- what to do volunteers get from us? Create relationships
- plan projects with visible short-term effects
- team building activities can be incorporated
- internally develop list of potential projects
- UVTA mentioned that the Stewardship Network New England has a great Volunteer Trail Building Day Guide that is useful to send to volunteers

Training Workshops/ Community Education

- leave no trace/trail etiquette
- signage in UV with similarly reinforced rules
 - err on the side of over-signage for user safety
- The Stewardship Network New England resources/ Building Guide
- Trail Finder has the ability for users to post comments on conditions, and managers to post trail closures
- AT Conference Handbook
- NE Trail Conditions

User conflicts

- do similar user types need separate trails?
- landowners decide allowed uses and open seasons
- Code of Conduct: NH State Parks Department of Trails has example for multi-use inclusivity