

## Section 4: Our Sense of Place

### Recreation, Working Lands, Water Resources, and Flood Resilience

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## Recreation: Strategy

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Recreation plays a central role in shaping the character and economy of Lamoille County. To residents, recreation is more than a hobby, it is a passion, the backbone of the economy, the way of life, and a primary reason many people choose to live in Lamoille County. To visitors, it is a way to explore the region and test the abilities of the body. To some, recreation is the key to improving the health and welfare of the population. The following key strategies must be recognized to balance these interests as recreation continues to evolve and shape Lamoille County:

***Ensure Lamoille County integrates recreation into the daily functions of the built environment.*** Nationally, Vermont has one of the lowest obesity rates in the United States, due in large part to a culture that encourages and values recreation. Incorporating recreation into daily life, such as providing sidewalks, footpaths, inter-municipal trails, and bike lanes as major travel corridors, is important to keeping Lamoille County healthy. With abundant access to recreation, the health and well-being of Vermont's population, including Lamoille County, will continue to ensure Vermont remains rated as one of the healthiest states in the country.

***Lamoille County's recreation network requires public landowners, private landowners, and user groups to thrive.*** Some towns have invested local resources to create Town Forests, build recreation paths, or provide parking for trailhead access. User groups need to work together to build a coordinated regional approach to recreation and marketing of resources. Recreation is a powerful way to connect communities to one another, such as the multi-town Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, and most require joint partnerships.

***Private property owners are the primary stewards of the County's recreational opportunities.*** Private property must be respected, and education is a more effective tool for encouraging sound stewardship of the environment than regulation. As new residents move to the region, it will be important to educate these residents about the Lamoille County land ethic and the importance of traditional activities, such as hunting and

fishing, and working with recreation groups to minimize conflicts over use of land. At the same time, new residents must also be educated on respectful use and appropriate etiquette for using private land for recreation.

*Recreation is pivotal to Lamoille County's economy.* The ski industry brings thousands of visitors to Lamoille County each year and employs a significant portion of the workforce. Wildlife based activities such as hunting, fishing, boating, and camping are an important component of the Region's culture and economy. Sound management of the working landscape can enhance and protect these resources while maintaining a diversity of year-round recreation and ensuring the County's economy can adapt to changing recreation trends and a warmer climate pattern. Cycling, especially mountain biking, has continued to increase in popularity in the region. Vermont Highways should incorporate wider road shoulders for both biking and walking. Municipalities should also continue to emphasize the importance of cycling in the community and economy, monitoring the social, economic, and ecological impacts where possible.

*The working landscape provides diverse outdoor recreational opportunities,* which also contribute to the regional economy. Recreation includes traditional activities such as hunting and fishing, as well as newer activities such as mountain biking, back country skiing, and dog sledding. With sound land management and cooperative planning, diverse recreational opportunities can coexist with each other and with agriculture and forestry operations while preserving these resources into the future.

Much of the recreation that is available in the region is the direct result of the geographic landscape—hiking, skiing, hunting, cycling, and snowmobiling on open spaces and in parks; fishing, boating, and swimming in the many lakes and rivers. The recreational opportunities in the region are available to and appreciated by residents and visitors of the region alike.

This section is focused on the link between recreation and the use of land, economic development, transportation, and natural resources, and looks at the provision and use of the region's recreational resources. The provision for recreation throughout the region varies depending on the size of the town.

Larger towns in the region depend on a combination of town owned and private recreation facilities. These towns often have populations concentrated in their village centers but serve nearby rural residents as well.

Partnerships between village "hubs" and surrounding rural towns help make facilities and programs available to more of the county's residents and visitors. Public recreational facilities are available at schoolyards as well as public parks and recreational areas. Trail systems are made possible through partnerships with private landowners. Private recreational opportunities such as guide services, equestrian stables, golf courses, ski resorts, and other activities are found throughout the region.

Because recreation is such an integral part of life for Lamoille County, many sections of the Regional Plan include a connection to recreation. More recreational information can be found in the Transportation, Working Lands, and Land Use Chapters of the Plan. A map of recreation resources is at the end of this section.

## **POLICIES & ACTION ITEMS**

**Policy:** *Support and strongly encourage creating and maintaining recreational facilities and opportunities for all community users – with special attention to the needs of people with disabilities, youth, elders, those with low incomes, and people from a variety of ethnic groups who may not be current users.*

### **Action Items:**

- Ensure coordinated efforts between LCPC, partner agencies, and member municipalities in planning for and managing outdoor recreational facilities and opportunities.
- Assist municipalities and interest groups in upgrading and

expanding existing community recreational facilities, especially those located at schools and community parks.

- Assist in identifying new recreational opportunities on preserved, conserved, or otherwise protected lands.
- Work with local communities to conserve outdoor space and natural areas for outdoor recreation in or near areas of population concentrations.
- Support recreational infrastructure projects that are designed for multiple types of users.
- Increase the number of trails and other outdoor recreational facilities meeting ADA standards.

**Policy:** *Encourage new residential and mixed-use developments to include sidewalks, walking and biking paths or trails, outdoor open space, recreational facilities, and community gardens.*

**Action Items:**

- Work with municipalities, developers, and state and regional partners to incorporate outdoor recreational facilities and amenities into future plans, including sidewalks and connections to existing recreational facilities or trails.
- Work with municipalities, developers, and state and regional partners to ensure continued public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, and identify, provide, and protect these opportunities wherever appropriate.

**Policy:** *Support efforts to incorporate shared-use trails and bike lanes in development planning to connect communities, schools, and other facilities, and to increase residents' options for physical activity.*

**Action Items:**

- Continue to support efforts that will lead to regional year-round, multi-use trails that link municipalities within Lamoille County and to neighboring municipalities, such as the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and Stowe-Morristown Path.
- Create regional plans that address recreation, such as open space,

bicycling, or other recreation plans.

- Assist interested municipalities in identifying locations of future recreation areas in land use plans and regulatory documents, such as zoning bylaws.

**Policy:** *This Plan recognizes that much of Lamoille County's recreation is the result of private property owners acting as stewards of the land. LCPC supports State and local efforts to ensure recreation is available to all residents and visitors of the region.*

**Action Items:**

- As Lamoille County's population increases, work to educate new residents who may not be accustomed to Vermont etiquette or Vermont's unique recreational culture, such as laws allowing public access on private land for hunting, swimming, hiking, and other activities, and about the economic, cultural, and ecological benefits these activities provide. Educate new residents about respectful use and appropriate etiquette for using private land for recreation.
- Continue efforts to plan for and construct multi-use trails with willing landowner involvement, such as the Stowe- Morrystown Path.
- Recognizing that land is being conserved and recreation is an important economic driver, explore how best to responsibly incorporate appropriate public access into publicly funded conserved land.

**Policy:** *LCPC supports locally initiated and led efforts to maintain, improve, and ensure access to the region's recreational activities, facilities, resources, and amenities.*

**Policy:** *Encourage regional and inter-municipal cooperation and coordination on planning for new or expanding recreational offerings.*

**Action Items:**

- Support local efforts to create and manage town forests.

- Support local efforts to expand recreational opportunities through new and improved facilities or amenities such as playgrounds, municipal parks, athletic fields, trailheads, kiosks, and signage.
- Encourage recreation user groups to form associations, organizations, or advocacy groups to pool resources, construct and maintain facilities, and encourage growth of new activities.
- Facilitate interested municipalities and regional partners in developing recreational projects that cross municipal or regional boundaries, such as the Stowe- Morristown Path or Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.
- Upon request, provide technical assistance to municipalities in creating recreation committees.
- Assist with creative funding mechanisms to ensure recreational activities, facilities, and amenities are financially feasible and sustainable for the long-term.

**Policy:** *The economy of Lamoille County should continue to encourage and enhance recreation and related recreational activities, organizations, and industries to ensure the vitality of the Region's tourism industry and quality of life.*

**Action Items:**

- Work with local recreation groups to increase understanding of recreation's benefits to community economic development.
- Ensure regional growth does not diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.
- Use recreation as a tool to preserve land and promote land stewardship while encouraging economic development opportunities that consider impacts to natural resources.
- Encourage new businesses and entrepreneurial activity in recreation sectors.

**Policy:** *Lamoille County's recreation network is disjointed. In order to remain competitive and robust, encourage collaboration and coordination of recreation assets.*

### Action Items:

- Working with strategic public and private partners, assist in developing a regional marketing plan that unifies the Region's diverse recreational offerings.
- Encourage the publication of local and regional recreation guides to highlight the Region's recreational offerings and provide funding opportunities to user groups to create guides or maps.
- Encourage a coordinated trail system and network that connects similar uses to one another throughout the County, building on the strengths that each facility provides.
- Foster communication and cooperation between schools, municipalities, and sporting organizations to build a coalition of recreation enthusiasts in small communities.
- LCPC should assist and support community led organizations as needed to build a strong recreation network of user groups.

**Policy:** *This plan recognizes that climate change may impact the tourism industry, particularly winter recreational activities. LCPC is committed to providing year-round economic and recreational opportunities in order to sustain economic vitality.*

### Action Items:

- Assist municipalities in planning for recreation facilities that provide ample opportunities to meet future climate change needs, such as year-round recreation opportunities or making recreation an active part of daily life.
- Work closely with municipalities and business owners to diversify recreational opportunities through emerging trends and new investments or re-investments in existing recreation infrastructure.



## Recreation: Background and Inventory

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To many residents and visitors, Lamoille County's sense of place and quality of life is defined by its recreational assets. Recreation is an important component of the lifestyle and livelihoods of many of the county's residents; it is the cultural and economic identity of the region, often transcending other aspects of life in the County. Recreation is undeniably a four-season industry in Lamoille County. In spring and summer, residents and tourists enjoy activities such as wildlife viewing, fishing, and photography along trails and in any of the area's ponds, lakes, and rivers where they can also participate in swimming, kayaking, canoeing, and boating. Summer seasonal homeowners populate areas such as Lake Eden and Lake Elmore, with public beaches and picnic areas. Hiking and bicycling are major activities throughout the county. Mountain biking is a trend gaining traction in northern Vermont as new trails are added to local parks. Local entrepreneurs gear new and expanded businesses towards adapting to the needs of recreationists. Municipal plans address recreation needs, goals, and recommendations for improved facilities.

Winter activities play a strong role in the County's economy, most notably around the ski resorts. Two of Vermont's biggest ski resorts are found in Lamoille County. Not only do the ski resorts and related services employ much of the region's workforce, the towns offer a variety of recreational assets utilized by residents and visitors, such as snowmobiling, mountain biking, and hiking trails. In addition to Alpine and Nordic skiing and snowboarding, Lamoille County hosts trails along the Vermont Association of Snow Traveler's (VAST) route between Elmore and Hyde Park. VAST trails allow for snowmobiles, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing across its extensive membership network. The Catamount Trail is Vermont's north-south cross-country ski trail, passing directly through Lamoille County on public and private land. Eden is home to the Eden Mountain Dog Sledding Club, which offers tours, lessons, and lodging. Winter biking is a new and rapidly growing trend in the County.

With increased demand for more diversified facilities like multi-use trails that support a variety of activities, public land managers are faced with the challenge of maintaining recreational trails and structures in light of the increased and diversified use. A variety of recreational opportunities may also have a positive impact on Vermont's adult obesity rate, which stands at 26.2%. The Centers for Disease Control and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported that 14% of Vermont's youth (ages 10-17) were also overweight or obese, putting them at risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases. While these numbers are low compared to other states, obesity rates continue to rise. As obesity rates continue to rise, the population ages, and trends and issues surrounding recreation evolve, so too will recreation. Adapting to new issues and expanding new opportunities will continue to be a challenge in the future.

### **Available Recreational Assets**

Much of the recreation available in rural towns in the Region occurs on privately owned lands, which showcases the Region's strong ties to recreation. Open space preservation and continued public access to these land and water resources can help counter the lack of town-owned, developed, recreational activities and facilities. In rural communities that are unable to provide developed recreational options, private landowners as well as state and federal agencies are critical recreation providers. Developed recreation facilities found in the region's rural towns are often indirect beneficiaries of other infrastructure projects, such as school ball fields and playgrounds, and Class 4 roads. See the Lamoille County Recreation Facilities map for locations of major recreation facilities.

### *State Forests, Parks, and Recreation Areas*

Lamoille County is home to three state parks: Elmore State Park, located in Elmore, the Green River Reservoir in Hyde Park and Eden, and Smugglers' Notch State Park, located between Stowe and Cambridge. There are five state forests in the region: Putnam, Long Trail, Mt. Mansfield, Morristown Bog, and the Cambridge State Forest. The State also has a number of nature areas in the County, including: Mt. Mansfield Nature Area, Daniel's Notch Nature Area, the Morristown Bog Nature Area, and Moss Glen Falls Nature Area.

The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation is responsible for overall management of state lands and administers the State Park and Forest System. State lands in Lamoille County provide day use access to important natural features and scenic areas. These forests and parks also host hiking trails, and some link together other important conserved lands. The region's State Parks offer camping and picnicking opportunities. Most notably, Stowe Mountain Resort and Smugglers' Notch Resort both have leases with the State of Vermont to use Mt. Mansfield for downhill skiing.

State fishing access areas can be found in Elmore, Lake Eden, Cambridge, Morristown, and Wolcott. Fishing access at Fischer Bridge in Wolcott was modified to be wheelchair accessible. Additionally, the Wild Branch Wildlife Management Area is located in Eden and the East Hill Wildlife Management Area is in Wolcott.

#### *Town Forests*

Most Town Forests, or forest land owned and managed by municipalities, were created in the early 1900s through legislation authorizing the establishment of "endowment forests" as part of a statewide effort to reforest the State and promote good forest management practices.

In a 1931 report from the Vermont Commission on Country Life, the value of these resources was described as "a source of public education. Schools as well as the general public can help secure firsthand information that often is obtainable in no other way. Such a forest area may well be the recreational center for the community, and when properly managed and administered, should become a source for revenue."

Historically, municipal forests were managed for timber harvesting. While this is still the case in many instances, recently there has also been a shift to management of these forests for recreational and educational uses as well. Many towns maintain signed hiking trails and wildlife viewing areas as well as other recreational opportunities, and encourage use of the forests by residents and school groups.

Town Forests in Lamoille County include:

Cady Hill Forest (320 acres): Stowe Land Trust, in partnership with the Town of Stowe, acquired Cady Hill Forest in 2011, raising nearly \$1.5 million to make the project a reality. Cady Hill Forest provides permanent, year-round public access for all forms of non-motorized recreation, and is specifically incorporated into a series of mountain bike trails in Stowe and Waterbury through the Vermont Ride Center. It also provides protection of prime deer wintering habitat, sustainable timber harvesting to enhance deer wintering habitat and providing revenue for ongoing maintenance of the property, and viewshed protection from the Route 100 corridor.

Gomo Farm Town Forest: The Gomo Forest is approximately 141 acres and is owned by the Town of Johnson. The Forest is located along the border between the Towns of Johnson and Waterville and is bounded by the Long Trail State Forest to the north and south; Butternut Mountain to the east; and the North Branch of the Lamoille River valley to the west. The property includes beaver ponds and associated wet meadows and scrub-shrub wetlands, riparian habitat along several small streams, upland forests, small openings with predominately herbaceous plants and some trees, and some formerly open field habitat that is reverting back to young forest. The Johnson Conservation Commission currently manages the Forest for some timber production, firewood, recreational uses, and habitat enhancement.

Morristown Municipal Forest: The municipal forest, over 300 acres in Mud City, is actively managed for timber, wildlife, and recreation. With the help of the State's Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, recent activities are intended to create a model for local forest management at this site.

Moss Woods: Located in the Village of Hyde Park, this six acre forested area provides a significant cultural contribution and substantial ecological resources to the Village. The Village considers it an irreplaceable natural area important to maintaining the character of the Village. As of the drafting of this plan, the Village is in the process of formalizing this as a Village Forest.

Sterling Forest (Stowe-1,500 +/- acres): Sterling Forest was acquired in 1994 and is subject to a forest management plan prepared by the Stowe Conservation Commission. This plan includes detailed information concerning the natural resources found on the property and prescribes ongoing management activities designed to balance timber harvesting with wildlife habitat protection, water quality, and recreation. The Town has recently completed two phases of a three-phase timber management plan for Sterling Forest. In 2007, lumber cut from Sterling Forest was milled on site and used to build nine bridges along the Catamount Trail in Sterling Forest.

Wolcott Town Forest (709 acres): In 2021, a vote was passed to establish the Wolcott Town Forest.

#### *Trail Networks*

Lamoille County also has a plethora of recreation trails. Trails include state trails, such as the Catamount, maintained by private organizations such as those by Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), and trails owned and maintained through partnerships, such as the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) which was completed in 2022, is a 93 mile long trail that crosses northern Vermont from East to West. This

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#### *Road Network*

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*Our state and local road networks are important for recreational uses, which are perhaps the most frequently used resource for routine recreational uses for residents. In the absence of sidewalk infrastructure, roads are used for a variety of recreational purposes, such as walking, jogging, bicycling, equestrian and other uses. Variable widths of the existing roadway shoulders may limit recreational uses. Additionally, many class 4 town highways are used for snowmobiling, snow shoeing, and cross country skiing; however, their use is subject to local rules and restrictions. In accordance with Vermont's Complete Streets Law (Act 34, 2011), accommodating all modes of travel (i.e. walking and bicycling) is to be considered in all state and municipally managed transportation projects.*

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trail is the longest single rail trail in New England and will connect to other trails spread throughout Vermont to add to the continued story of Vermont exploration. The LVRT provides year-round recreational opportunities for users from St. Johnsbury to Swanton, passing through Wolcott, Hyde Park, Morristown, Johnson, and Cambridge.

The Long Trail is known as Vermont's "footpath in the wilderness." Built by the Green Mountain Club between 1910 and 1930, the Long Trail is the oldest long-distance trail in the United States. The Long Trail follows the main ridge of the Green Mountains from the Massachusetts-Vermont line to the Canadian border as it crosses Vermont's highest peaks. The Long Trail passes through Belvidere, Johnson, Waterville, and through Smugglers' Notch State Forest in Stowe, Cambridge, and Morristown.

Open to the public in the winter, the 300-mile Catamount Trail is North America's longest cross-country ski trail. This winter-use only trail, which starts at the Vermont-Massachusetts border, winds its way for 300 miles through the heart of the Green Mountains to the Canadian border. The trail runs through Eden, Elmore, Morristown, Stowe, and Wolcott, generally following along the spine of the Green Mountains. Cross-country ski trails are also maintained by private businesses, and can be found in the Mt. Mansfield area.

The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) is responsible for the maintenance and grooming of an extensive snowmobile network across the state. One of the oldest snowmobiling groups in the U.S., VAST is a non-profit, private group that includes over 24,000 members. Eighty percent of VAST's trail system is on private land and permitted by agreement with each landowner. During winter months, the VAST snowmobile network connects Eden to virtually anywhere in the state. VAST trails also pass through Johnson and Wolcott.

Many local hiking trail networks are used extensively for day hikes and wildlife viewing and can be found in most municipalities. Extensive trail networks specifically designed for mountain biking exist countywide and are continuing to expand as popularity in the sport grows.

### Water Access

The region also boasts a variety of water based recreational opportunities. The Lamoille River and its tributaries bisect the entire county with ample river based activities such as canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and swimming. The Lamoille is not the only source of water based recreation in the region, with the Wild Branch, Gihon, North Branch, and Little Rivers also providing significant river activity. It is important to note the many lakes throughout the County, particularly in the northern and eastern areas. Streams and ponds throughout the region provide recreational opportunities. Many informal swimming holes exist along the network of streams and rivers in the region.

Many sections of the Lamoille are currently under-realized for potential recreation and economic development. In order to encourage diverse recreational users to begin or end their journeys in Lamoille County, and hopefully frequent Lamoille County based businesses, municipalities can consider boat launch points along rivers or incorporate portages with recreational trails. Safe access points to rivers and streams lessen the risk of degrading stream banks and encourage more use.



A 2009 survey of Vermont residents found that the protection of fish and wildlife resources, habitats, and lands as well as the opportunity to participate in wildlife-related recreation was important to 97 percent of Vermont residents surveyed. In Lamoille County, there will continue to be the need to balance the protection of fish and wildlife resources with wildlife-related recreation.

## Unmet Needs

As important as recreation is to Lamoille County's residents, tourism industry, and quality of life, there are still unmet needs in the recreation system. Many of these are common to the entire state, as evidenced in Vermont's 2019 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Some of the regional recreational issues and unmet needs include:

- More funding
- Overreliance on volunteers
- Expanded recreational opportunities
- Better access to existing recreational activities
- Better regional and inter-municipal coordination
- Increased recreation organization through community clubs and organizations, e.g. VAST and Vermont Mountain Bike Association (and other local mountain bike clubs)
- Improved communication between private landowners and recreation users to mitigate conflict.

### *Expanded recreational capacity, resources, and facility needs*

Low or non-existent recreation budgets in most towns limit the ability of municipalities to adequately plan and provide recreational options. Few municipalities in the Region have a recreation commission or recreation department. The cost of expanding or developing a town forest is often not in a municipal budget, neither is the creation of athletic fields or other facilities.

The capacity of many groups to identify recreational needs, organize sports leagues, conduct feasibility studies for proposed recreational facilities and plan for facility maintenance and enhancement, on top of seeking out new recreational opportunities, is often insufficient. Towns with no recreation director or commission are at an even greater disadvantage and often depend on neighboring towns' recreational facilities and programs.

More recreation lands have been cited as a need for many municipalities. Connecting municipalities through trail networks, for example, is desired but the costly price tag and lengthy planning time slow down the process.

While municipalities may have trouble maintaining existing facilities, there is a recognized need for additional basic facilities such as ball fields and trail networks to meet recreational needs at the local level. Related infrastructure, such as better informational signs, updated equipment for school playgrounds, and extensive budgeting, are also needed in order to meet facility needs.

#### *Access to recreational opportunities*

Access to recreational opportunities is inhibited by transportation, conflicting uses, and cost. The distribution of recreational areas and facilities is concentrated in larger population centers, making access difficult for residents of the region without transportation. Because of the nature of recreation, trailheads, lake access points, and other opportunities are often outside of any public transportation system and generally inaccessible to residents who do not have their own transportation. Automobile dependence could be decreased by better access to facilities by bike or foot travel. Currently, there are few bike/pedestrian connections that link recreational facilities between municipalities.

Loss of access to water resources is also a concern, and towns with important water resources recognize the need to maintain public access points to these resources for those not owning shoreline property. Conflicts between types of recreation and the desired characteristics of the experience can also affect the enjoyment of recreation in the region. Recreation takes many forms in the region, ranging from motorized ATV and snowmobile touring to activities requiring greater solitude, such as wildlife viewing and backcountry hiking and camping.

Lastly, it is important to consider who has access to recreation. As the population ages and the health benefits of recreating become more evident, there is a need to provide a diverse array of recreational opportunities, including free and fee-based activities, for all types of users, including those with disabilities. Winter ski programs, biking, and exposure to new athletic trends, such as yoga, at area schools offer youth opportunities to try new activities through traditional physical education

classes in the school system. These activities are critical so that children develop an early interest in physical activity.

*Regional and inter-municipal coordination*

Recreational resources that are open to the public are not fully marketed to the Region's residents or its visitors. Resources that the Region does have should be meeting the needs of both populations, as well as identifying the recreational resources of the Region that make it a unique place to live and visit. Recreational resources could be more widely used if there was more publicity of opportunities, structured and informal, or better coordination of recreational offerings at a county level.

Municipalities that develop recreational opportunities do not always communicate with one another about proposed facilities. Improving coordination between municipalities would strengthen the recreational network and improve linkages between resources, fostering greater use of the facilities and inspiring new economic opportunities.

While a greater awareness of the recreational opportunities would satisfy users looking for new adventures, this could also increase the use of facilities that may already be overused or in need of maintenance – a separate, but related need.

*Increase recreational organization, e.g. VAST and Vermont Mountain Bike Association (and other local clubs)*

With limited funds and limited resources, recreational users, and the State of Vermont have found that user groups are vital to sustaining free or low-cost recreational activities. User based groups build a community around new recreational activities, such as mountain biking, and provide a forum for addressing statewide issues, such as the role of VAST in building a snowmobiling network. User groups are also active in supplementing State resources for new activities on State-



Trail networks well maintained by user groups are utilized most frequently.

owned land, such as the Vermont Mountain Bike Association cutting mountain biking trails or ice climbers in Smugglers' Notch State Park.

Strengthening these groups strengthens and encourages active participation in athletics and in maintaining a recreational network that caters to all current and future users. User groups that serve the local community can also help build relationships between the municipality and the users. One example is the idea of a backcountry ski organization; as this sport becomes increasingly popular, there may be conflicts between land access and skiers.

User groups have also demonstrated their role in providing materials, such as trail guides or maps that show recreational resources and paths. For example, the Cambridge Trails and Greenway Coalition published a local trails guide and the Stowe Conservation Commission has been instrumental in developing and funding various guides to activities in Stowe.

*Communication between private landowners and recreational users to mitigate conflict*

Undeveloped recreational areas — sledding hills, swimming holes, hunting lands, etc. — serve important recreational needs in almost every town in the Region. Private lands comprise roughly 85 percent of lands in Vermont. It has been a long-standing Vermont tradition for private landowners to allow the public access to their land for hunting, hiking, and fishing, as Vermont's constitution gives people the right to hunt, hike, and fish on unposted land throughout the state. Although landowners allow recreational uses on private property, users recreate at their own risk in these spaces.

Loss of access to private lands is increasing due to liability concerns and the reluctance of landowners to keep their land open to unknown users. Loss of these private lands threatens to eliminate many of the free recreational opportunities available across the Region, especially in smaller towns that do not have the resources to provide municipal recreational facilities. Many private landowners do not post their land,

allowing access for hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, snowmobiling, and other activities.

### **Current Trends**

- Continued loss of access to recreational opportunities on private land.
- Potential loss of recreational opportunities and related tourism associated with open space development and fragmentation.
- Changing trends in recreational activities, e.g. mountain biking, backcountry skiing, increase in community gardening.
- Nature-based recreational activities need increased planning attention as they are recognized as an important component of economic and community development.
- Increased demand for motorized recreation such as snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, leading to identification and creation of appropriate areas and support infrastructure.
- Increased management of recreational facilities for a variety of potentially conflicting uses to accommodate increased demand for motorized recreation as well as wildlife viewing and hiking opportunities.
- As the Region's population becomes more diverse it will be important to focus on health equity and allowing all people to enjoy the outdoors. Health equity can be incorporated into implementation projects and/or policies.
- Increased demand for non-competitive recreational infrastructure (biking/hiking/walking trails, dog parks, etc.) as recreation's role in quality of life and general health and well-being becomes more recognized. Lifestyle shifts and increasing obesity throughout the country emphasize the need for communities that support active lifestyles.
- As the Region's population continues to age, the need for well-maintained, thoughtfully-located sidewalks and walking paths, as well as recreational programs focused on meeting the needs of this population, will become an important component of recreational provisions.
- Provide recreational opportunities with health equity in mind.

## Meeting Current and Future Needs

Given that financial resources for recreation are limited throughout the county, communities and organizations should sustain and expand recreational resources. Sharing of resources at the local, State, and Federal level, and with the private sector, is equally important. Partnerships in this area are key when considering elements like the management of shared-use parking areas and traffic issues near Stowe Mountain Resort.

Statewide trends indicate the total number of recreational participants and days of participating are increasing. Increased demand will put additional pressure on a fixed public land and water base, especially for developed recreational sites and nature viewing activities, where Vermont may add over 100 million participants by 2060.

Local, regional, state, and federal agencies in Vermont should coordinate growth management planning and policies to determine the best places for growth to occur. Public agencies should work with private businesses to ensure that recreational services complement, and do not compete, with each other. A variety of public, private, and non-profit funding sources are available to support expanding recreational opportunities to incorporate healthy activities into daily functions, such as sidewalks, bike paths, municipal parks, and community gardens.



On a nice day, parking lots to popular recreation spots can be tight.

Agencies, businesses, and organizations providing recreation should work to share feedback from users with each other so that services can be adjusted and coordinated to most effectively meet user needs. The tourism and ski industries are seeking to expand four-season offerings in order to meet user demand and adapt to changing weather conditions. In some cases, this may mean shifting currently managed forest land to recreational use. Ensuring compatibility between existing and future land uses will create new opportunities and challenges.

Additional continued funding for public facilities upgrades and maintenance will be necessary. Smaller, more rural towns may consider grouping resources when applying for recreation related grants and when forming recreation commissions. Community endowments and other private support are also important components to municipal recreational programs.

Changes to the tax code at the State level providing tax relief to landowners who allow recreational use of their property could also help keep access to privately owned recreational opportunities open.

### **Recreation, Tourism, and Economic Opportunity**

Tourism is a critical component of Lamoille County's economic development. Many consider Lamoille County "The Heart of Recreational Vermont." Recreational elements are an integral part of Lamoille County's tourism economy and, as such, should continue to be considered in tandem with economic development efforts.

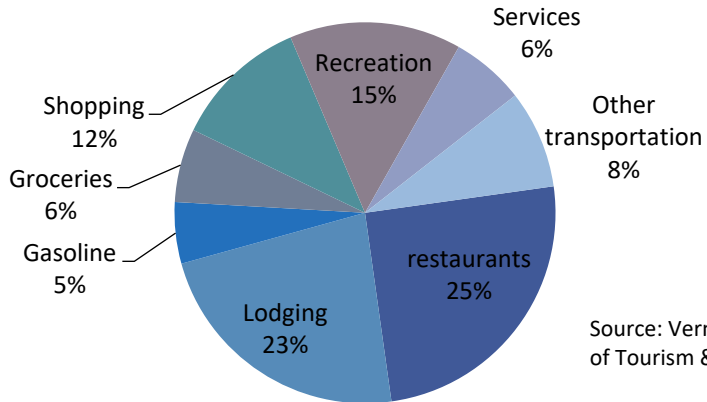
There is no denying the importance of tourism for Vermont's economy. A 2017 report from the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing found:

- Visitors made an estimated 13 million trips to Vermont for leisure, business, or personal travel;
- Direct spending by visitors for goods and services totaled \$3 billion (see Figure 4-1 below);
- Visitor spending supports an estimated 30,000 jobs for Vermonters (approximately 10% of all Vermont jobs); and
- Visitor spending contributed \$347 million in tax and fee revenues to the State of Vermont.

Lamoille County’s two major ski resorts make it a destination location in the winter, but abundant natural resources make it a destination location year-round. It is estimated that \$700 million is spent in Vermont during the ski season. In low snowfall years, that drops to \$46 million. As the climate changes and the northeast warms, the ski industry has found ways to adapt. Smugglers’ Notch and Stowe Mountain Resort, for example, have invested in snow-making equipment and expanded their services and amenities.

Smugglers’ Notch spent over \$1 million in snow-making equipment in 2012 alone. Stowe Mountain Resort has a performing arts center, golf course, and a fleet of summer activities. The Trapp Family Lodge has a large disc golf course, farm operations, and a micro-brewery and has expanded its services to become home to Nordic ski tournaments. Many resorts are adding mountain biking trails as part of local, state, and international networks.

Figure 4-1. Vermont visitor spending patterns, 2017



Source: Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing, 2017

One of the more recently identified challenges to the tourism industry is the growing importance of Vermont’s northern neighbors – appealing to Canadian visitors. When Canadians come to the United States, they see a need for improvements at the border. Border crossings can be intimidating, lengthy, or otherwise cumbersome. When they arrive in Lamoille County, there are few resources translated into French. Bike maps, for example, printed in English and French, could broaden the appeal for cycling tours throughout Lamoille County’s rural communities, as would roads, shoulders, and trails that provide adequate room for safe multi-modal transportation.

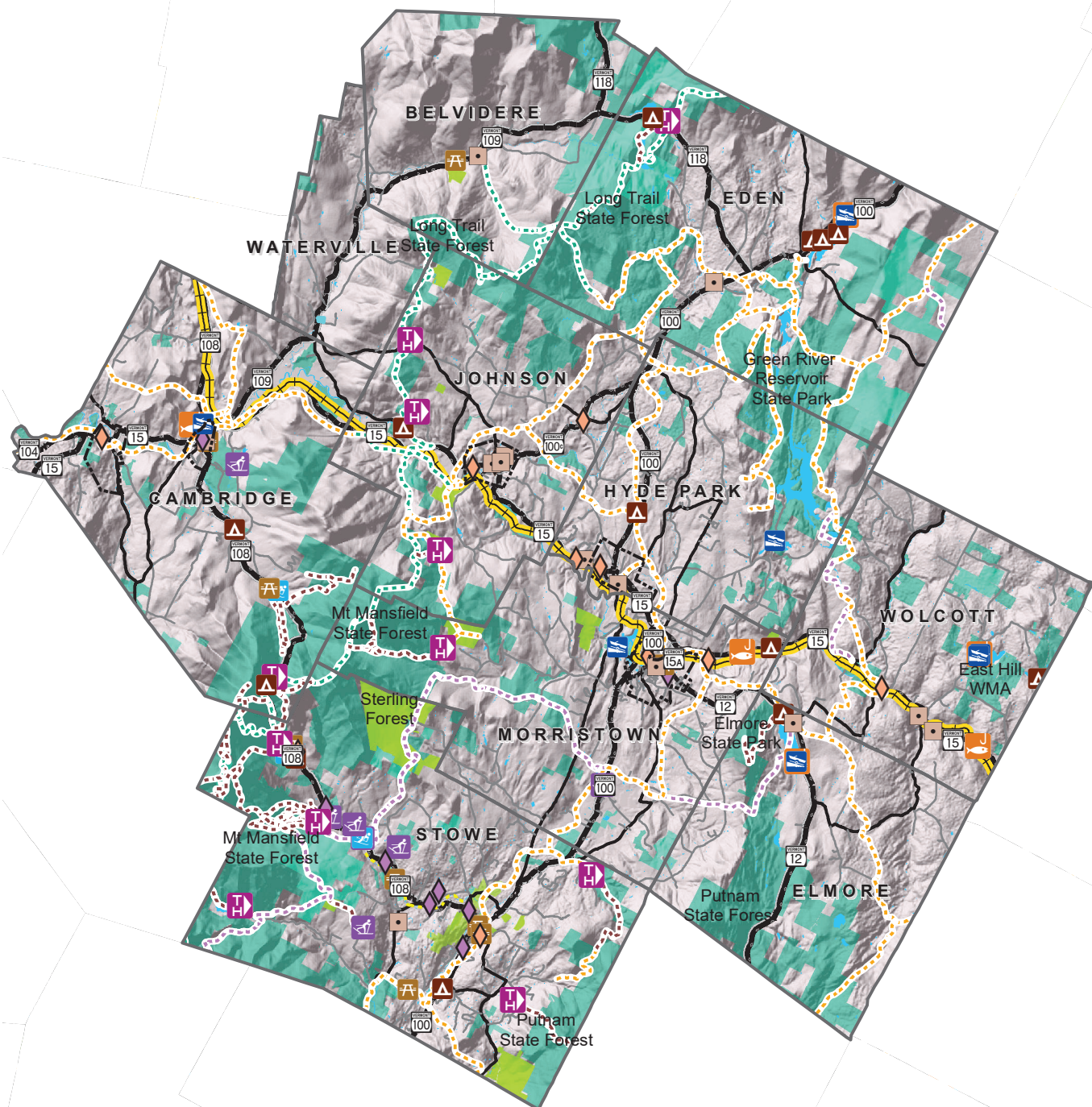
When Canadians leave the United States, they face problems taking certain foods across the border, such as wine and cheese. This leaves

opportunities for Lamoille County to be part of larger discussions to work with Canadians, particularly the province of Quebec. For visitors to Lamoille County, there is a need to show where recreational activities are located, where to park, and how to use the facilities. As demand grows for recreational facilities and new trails, paths, and trailheads are added, the lack of updated guides, maps, and brochures showing connections between recreational facilities is difficult for both residents and visitors alike.

DRAFT

# Recreation Facilities

## Lamoille County



### Recreational Sites

- Campground
- Trailhead
- Cross-Country Ski Area
- Downhill Ski Area
- Picnic area
- Private Commercial Recreation area
- Public Recreational area
- School Athletic Fields
- Lake or River Access
- Fishing Access

### Regional Trails

- VAST
- Long Trail
- Catamount Trail
- Local Recreational Path
- Other Trails
- Lamoille Valley Rail Trail

### Public Conserved Lands

- State
- Municipal
- Other Non-Profit/ Private Orgs

### Data Sources:

Political Boundaries: VCGI, 1991.  
 Roads: 1:5000 E-911 Road Data, 2021.  
 Surface Water: VCGI for VHD-USGS, 2001.  
 Regional Trails: ANR 1993, VAST 2011, Catamount Trail Association 2003.  
 Recreation Sites: Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, 2022.

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