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Comments: Somerset Integrated Resource Project Comments

Catamount Trail and Grout Pond Ski Trails Access

I learned new information at the Somerset Integrated Resource Project Open House in Manchester on 4/11/19 during a conversation I had with the Stratton road foreman who is in charge of plowing Grout Pond Road. From my conversation with him, I believe he may continue to plow Grout Pond Road even after the private logging operation is complete. This poses a few problems for winter recreation at Grout Pond and Section 4 of The Catamount Trail; a long road walk for skiers, insufficient parking at the southern end of the now plowed Grout Pond Road, and a significant increase in people postholing the ski trails.

Road Walk

First of all, the continued plowing of Grout Pond Road means that there will be a significant road walk for skiers from the already established Grout Pond Winter Parking Lot located on Stratton-Arlington Road to access the Catamount Trail. I recently parked in the Grout Pond Winter Parking Lot and walked in with my skis over my shoulder. It was long, annoying and uncomfortable in ski boots. It was equally irritating on the way back uphill to the car.

In order to solve this problem, I propose a new trail connecting the Catamount trail, where it comes out onto Grout Pond Road, across the clearing and through the forest northwest to the AT/LT parking lot on Stratton-Arlington Road (see attached map with proposed trail). The AT/LT parking lot allows for more cars than the southern end of Grout Pond Road which has space for approximately four cars. Including this new trail in the Somerset Project would also increase opportunities for bigger xcountryside ski loops from the AT/LT parking lot. It would also eliminate the unpleasant road walk on Grout Pond Road for skiers wishing to access the Catamount Trail. The Catamount Trail continues north from the AT/LT parking lot so it would also eliminate the long road walk along Stratton-Arlington Road for through-skiers.

Lack of Winter Parking at Grout Pond

In addition, there is not enough parking at the end of Grout Pond Road if they continue to plow the road which restricts access to the Grout Pond Ski trails. The town currently plows so that there is enough parking for about four cars at the end of Grout Pond Road. For the past few winters I have avoided going out to Grout Pond on weekends because I assumed there would be insufficient parking. There are also minimal opportunities to pass another vehicle on Grout Pond Road in the winter. The road is a tunnel between the snowbanks wide enough for one car which has also deterred me from going down there on a busy weekend day. In contrast, I skied several times at Grout Pond this winter after work in the dark with a headlamp and always found a parking spot at the southern end of Grout Pond Road. I would like to return to skiing out there any day, like I always have in the past, when the Grout Pond Road was not plowed and I was able to park at the designated Grout Pond Winter Parking Lot on Stratton-Arlington Road and ski down the road.

In order to solve the problem of insufficient parking at the end of Grout Pond Road during winter (if it continues to be plowed) parking needs to be increased at the southern end of Grout Pond Road. I support the proposed parking lots and one-way loop traffic pattern at the boat launch picnic area at Grout Pond. Possibly these parking lots could be plowed and used for winter use in the future. In addition, a new parking lot with enough spaces for 10-15 cars could also be created where the Catamount Trail hits Grout Pond Road at the clearing on Grout Pond Road. One problem is that the clearing creates a snow drifting mess so the parking lot may drift in if it is not sited correctly.

Winter Recreation Information for the Public

Furthermore, I am concerned about the increase of postholing of the trails during the winter. This may seem trivial to those who do not xcountry ski, but it is absolutely awful to drive all the way out there, suit up, and head out only to find that a party of two or more walked side by side with nothing but their winter boots on postholing their way around the pond. I don't understand how that can be fun, but people do it. It makes for bumpy and possibly dangerous ski conditions. To help mitigate this problem, I propose some increased signage at the winter parking lot at the end of Grout Pond Road if it continues to be plowed. It will be important to have a winter information kiosk with a map for people to reference since the current kiosk with maps is down at the summer parking lot and most postholers walk directly down to the pond and around the trail bypassing the summer map kiosk.

The increased use at Grout Pond in the winter due to Grout Pond Road being plowed may be exciting to some because more people are getting outside in the winter and enjoying public lands. I agree that getting more people outside in winter is exciting, but the plowing of Grout Pond Road is causing issues that need solving; a long road walk for skiers accessing the Catamount Trail, insufficient parking at the end of Grout Pond Road if it continues to be plowed, and a significant increase in the postholing of ski trails. Please consider, as part of the Somerset Integrated Resource Project, creating the new trail to connect the Catamount Trail to the AT/LT parking lot across the clearing and northwest through the forest. Please consider larger winter parking lots at Grout Pond and another parking lot where the Catamount Trail hits Grout Pond Road if the road continues to be plowed. And lastly, please consider creating a winter kiosk to educate the public with maps of ski trails and proper winter recreation etiquette.

Other Concerns:

I am concerned with the proposed logging along the Catamount Trail in stands 9, 10, 11 and 27. This section is one of the most remote sections of the Catamount Trail and I believe it should not be disturbed. Skiing south from Grout Pond to Somerset Reservoir (through proposed stand 10 and 11) has magical qualities, making you feel as if you have really escaped it all, that logging this area would take away. Please consider leaving this area in its remote beauty.

I'm also commenting in support of:

- Decommissioning of the Forest Road 383 as a snowmobile trail and keeping it open as a ski trail.
- The construction of a four-season hut off the Camp Loop Trail at Grout Pond
- Improving water quality and sanitation at the Grout Pond Campground
- Rebuilding the lean-to shelters at Grout Pond
- Moving existing campsites away from the shore of Grout Pond and improving drainage around campsites
- Creating and maintaining a ski trail at the end of Old Forrester Road as suggested by DHASH, "should this road be used as a haul road, construction and stabilization work should be done with winter recreation in mind. We would like to be able to do minimal maintenance on this road (removing blowdown, minor trimming of brush), to keep it open for informal recreation. If formal establishment as a cross country ski trail would be a desired route for making this happen, we would support this. This non-system road continues onto Great River Hydro land nearly to the Catamount Trail, and so it could serve as another access point."
- Creating and maintaining a ski/bike trail at Vose Brook as suggested by DHASH. This ski/bike trail would be accessed off of Lind Lane, off Route 9.
- Creating gladed ski runs on the east slope of the Deerfield Ridge (as proposed by Dover skiers).