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Organization: Dutch Hill Alliance of Skiers and Hikers

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the Somerset Integrated Resource Project. As a member of the executive committee of the Dutch Hill Alliance of Skiers and Hikers (DHASH), a chapter of the Catamount Trail Association, I submit these comments on behalf of DHASH.

Backcountry Recreation Area:

We are of course supportive of the Backcountry Recreation Area and cross country ski trails proposed for Dover.

FT 377:

A section of the East Deerfield Loop Trail on private land and Great River Hydro land is proposed for decommissioning. Nearly all this section of trail, up to the wet area, coincides with Forest Road 383. This trail would make an excellent cross country ski trail for the following reasons:

- *It has great access, starting at an existing plowed trailhead, the AT/LT parking area. The Catamount Trail is also accessed from this parking area.

- *It provides access to the popular Grout Pond trail system via the West Loop.

- *It is exceptionally scenic, paralleling the Deerfield River and passing wetlands.

- *It is almost entirely smooth, nearly level, and, in contrast to many of the Grout Pond trails, not plagued by drainage issues. Thus it would be particularly attractive to beginner skiers, and also makes it attractive to skiing early in the season or when snow depths are shallow. Many other trails, with roots and rocks and wet areas, require deeper snow and frozen water.

- *It is wide enough that skiers and snowshoers could easily establish separate tracks.

We propose that this section of the East Deerfield Loop Trail, instead of being decommissioned, be managed as a cross country ski trail. Maintenance could be done by DHASH. The wet area on Great River Hydro land could be bypassed to the east by following an existing unofficial trail, or by the construction of a short bypass trail.

This section of the East Deerfield Loop could be incorporated into the existing Grout Pond trail system (though managed only for non-motorized winter use). It could also function as a side trail or alternate route of the Catamount Trail. It would provide alternate access to the Catamount and Grout Pond trails, which are normally accessed by the unplowed Grout Pond Road, a Class 3 town highway maintained by the Town of Stratton

Grout Pond Road has been plowed for the past couple years, disrupting access to Grout Pond and the Catamount Trail by skiers. While visitors can drive this road into the Grout Pond picnic area for more direct access, parking here is limited to perhaps 4 vehicles. If plowing continues, limited access will remain an issue.

The Forest Service is proposing to expand the permanent upland opening along the west side of Grout Pond Road. While the current opening is certainly a scenic feature and great wildlife habitat, its hilltop location exposes the area to wind, making winter use when the road is unplowed unpleasant at times, and in places blowing the road free of snow. While this is a minor issue, expanding the opening to over one-half mile of roadside will only exacerbate the problem. In addition, being a town highway, snowmobile use is not under the control of the US Forest Service and could continue. While snowmobile use is not a major issue for skiers on this road, it is not necessarily desirable either. Having access via FT 377 would provide an alternative to avoid these issues.

The trail chief for the Catamount Trail in the Grout Pond area may be proposing a connecting trail between FT 377 and Grout Pond Road across Forest Service land. We would support this as it would offer more skiing and

loop options in this area.

Vose Brook:

We would like to propose a new cross country ski trail in the Vose Brook area. See attached map. This new trail would utilize an existing informal trail off the Catamount Trail on Great River Hydro land to where it ends. From the end, it is 0.1 miles to National Forest land. From here, approximately 0.45 miles of new trail would be required to connect to an existing non-system road. The route on GMNF land is through relatively open woods and could be created with very minimal disturbance; it could be designed so that very few if any trees would need to be removed, and only branches, shrubs, and small saplings would need to be cut. The new trail would then follow the non-system road 0.2 miles to FR 268 (Heather Brook Road). From there, one can ski up this road for over a mile.

This proposed trail would be accessed via the Catamount Trail from an existing plowed trailhead on Lind Lane, off Route 9. The route would be an easy intermediate ski, and would provide a one-way tour of over three miles if the upper portion of FR 268 is followed. While FR 268 wouldn't need to be officially part of the trail, we like to be able to carry out occasional maintenance, such as clear blowdown or brush. The potential logging by the Forest Service in this area could provide more terrain for exploration by skiers.

This trail could be a side trail of the Catamount Trail, and DHASH could be responsible for its maintenance.

Haul Roads Utilizing System and Non-System Roads:

Several system trails (mainly snowmobile trails) are proposed to be used for hauling. We assume that after harvesting, when these trails are restored to their original condition, work will be done so that recreation can continue unimpaired. Similarly, when post-harvesting work on certain non-system roads and OML 1 roads is done, we ask that you consider the recreation value of these roads as well so that non-motorized use by foot, bike, or ski is not overly impacted by large berms and water bars, and by drainage structure removal. Non-system roads that offer good opportunities for informal recreation and access include the ones off the end of Old Forrester Rd, FR 328 (Short Stretch), and FR 268 (Heather Brook). OML 1 roads in this category include FR 268 (Heather Brook) and FR 326 (Rake Branch). In addition, please retain the culverts in FR 326. The area is flat, the flows are low, and disruption to the hydrology by and chance of failure of these culverts are low. This road is popular with skiers, snowshoers, and hunters.

Old Forrester Road:

The non-system road at the end of Old Forrester Road provides access to National Forest and Great River Hydro land with many ski opportunities. It starts at a plowed turnaround. As stated above, 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 the 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/side trail to the Catamount.