

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/7/2023 5:00:00 AM

First name: Henry

Last name: Haefner

Organization: Tweed Valley Travelers

Title: Trail Master & Board of Directors

Comments: Tweed Valley Travelers objects to the decommissioning of the Darning Needle Trail. Specifically section 3.4, pages 27 through 31 of the Telephone Gap Integrated Resource Project referencing the decommissioning of the Darning Needle snowmobile trail.

This trail has been in existence for over 40 years, to lose this trail will be detrimental to the sport and reduce connectivity between the towns of Chittenden and Pittsfield. With all the resources within the USDA a way can be developed to share the trail/s and not lose this trail for the specific use of another. The sports are not in conflict with each other and occur at different times of year, snowmobile riding is a short season limited to the snowiest of months.

Bicycle trails contain many switch backs which in and of itself do not make good snowmobile trails but they could easily cross a snowmobile trail. As a benefit when someone becomes in the need of help the snowmobile trail will offer emergency vehicle access.

Please consider this request not to close the Darning Needle lets share!

Please see attached letter.

We are in a unique section of south-central Vermont in that we are located within a snow belt offering many scenic trails with unique vistas and valleys laced with ice[shy] and snow-covered rivers and streams. Travel through a beautiful natural tunnel made of smaller trees bowed with the weight of snow at 3,000 feet above sea level. The Darning Needle and the South Pond area have some of the most scenic views of our trail system, to lose these areas would be difficult blow to the club, it's members and all other riders.

The south-central area of Vermont is very accessible from several states in the northeast section of the US and as such this area draws many vacationers especially during the winter months.

We are requesting NOT to decommission the Darning Needle Trail. If this trail is to close critical connectivity between Chittenden and Pittsfield becomes more limited and difficult. Chittenden no longer offers fueling services thereby making the connection to Pittsfield more important. The Darning Needle-South Pond/Hadley Lane link will provide a safer and more direct route between Chittenden and Pittsfield. It also opens an additional corridor to Barnard making it more attractive to the public. This connection between the two towns provides both a shorter and more navigable route. Rt 74 Carmel is the route currently most used, but the route is long, narrow, and at times challenging to a novice rider. By opening the Darning Needle link the connection between the two towns will become more accessible and provide a shorter connection making it more inviting.

Another benefit is that this link can reduce a substantial amount of traffic along some of the "shared trails," making for a safer environment for the cross-country skier, hiker, and snowmobiler alike. The Darning Needle link will not affect the Long Trail, nor will it make any additional points of intersection along the Long Trail. Snowmobiles only operate in the winter, a time when hiking is more limited.

The snowmobile clubs maintain all trails in concert with VAST, the Forest Service and County requirements. All recreational groups be it hikers, bikers, cross country skiers, snowmobiles and on some trails the occasional snowboarder share our trail system through the Green Mountain Forest. It is understood that a grant has been awarded to build a 32-mile bicycle trail system, a portion of which intersects with and occupies some of the same area as the Darning Needle trail. Furthermore, the clubs subsidize VAST in their membership dues. We are

respectfully requesting that the Darning not be closed but rather shared as with all others, bikers, hikers and snowmachines alike.

Snow machines have little if any impact on the trails, when the snow is gone so is our footprint.

We urge you to consider the above, this is a win, win for the Forest Service, General Public and VAST.