Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/13/2023 4:00:00 AM
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Title: Trails Administrator
Comments: As part of the Telephone Gap IRP the USDA Forest Service notes the following items as part of the plan:

"One of the most popular public activities on the Green Mountain National Forest is viewing scenery provided by established vistas. "

"Forest Plan Goal 12 is to provide a diverse range of high quality, sustainable recreation opportunities which complement those provided off NFS lands"

"There is a need to reduce encroaching vegetation to provide new vistas and maintain existing vistas especially along the Appalachian Trail/Long Trail. Forest Plan Goal 15 is to maintain or enhance visual resources such as viewsheds, vistas, overlooks, and special features."

"Provide sustainable recreation opportunities within the project area including trail use and developed recreation."

* 34.9 new miles of trail construction, relocation, or designation managed for mountain biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing

o 2.6 miles: Mendon Loop

o 26.1 miles: Velomont Trail

* 19.3 miles new construction
* 6.8 miles on existing road or trail

o 6.2 miles: Velomont Connector Trail

* 3.4 miles new construction
* 2.8 miles on existing road or trail

* 3.1 miles of the existing Long Trail added to the National Forest Trail System on the pending South Pond acquisition (includes the addition of the Rolston Rest Shelter as a developed recreation site)

* 2.4 miles of existing all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trail added to the National Forest Trail System on a newly acquired parcel

* 4.7 miles of existing snowmobile trail added to the National Forest Trail System on newly acquired parcels

o 2.0 miles: VAST Corridor 100 Trail (concurrent with ATV trail added to the National Forest Trail System on newly acquired parcel)

o 2.7 miles: relocated VAST trail on existing roads and trails in the South Pond parcel

* 1.5 miles changed trail design and management to add snowmobile use to the Catamount Trail - South Pond Connector

* 0.3 mile managed use addition to add mountain bike use to existing snowmobile trails (California Lot Trail)

* 0.6 miles of cross-country trail relocation/improvements

* 13.1 miles of trail decommission

o 4.0 miles mountain bike/hike trail

o 9.1 miles snowmobile trail

There is the impression here that snowmobile trails are being "added" to the National Forest Trail System, which technically they are, however it is important to note that these are pre-existing trails on parcels of land that are being transferred to USFS ownership.

In reality the USFS plans to decommission 13.1 miles of trails as part of this IRP. 9.1 of those miles are snowmobile trails. VAST and the local clubs are opposed to some of these trails being decommissioned.

VAST and the Tweed Valley Travelers and Chittenden Dammers (affiliated VAST snowmobile clubs) wish to continue to maintain the Darning Needle Trail trail, which is proposed to be decommissioned as part of this IRP. The Darning Needle trail has been in existence for more than 40 years and is located on a Town of Chittenden Legal Trail as it leaves Townsend Brook Road and heads to the Chittenden/Killington Town Line. VAST and the local clubs will continue working with the Town of Chittenden to maintain the use of the Legal Trail for snowmobile use. Once reaching the Chittenden/Killington town line, the Darning Needle trail meets Hadley Road, an unmaintained road during the winter months. In the past the trail has terminated at this location.

The clubs would like to utilize Hadley Road, an existing gravel roadway soon to be under USFS ownership as part of the South Pond Acquisition, to connect the Darning Needle Trail to the VAST/Catamount Trail being relocated to the east of South Pond. Hadley Road would connect these two trails easily with minimal if any work. The Tweed Valley Travelers are planning to GPS the current location of the Darning Needle Trail and provide this data to the USFS. The trail would be aligned to stay as far away as possible, from any camps located off Hadley Road.

The continuance and connection of the Darning Needle trail would enable riders to get away from the main corridor trails and experience a more primitive riding experience. There are also multiple scenic vistas from the Darning Needle trail. The scenic vistas and "back country" riding experience are desirable to many snowmobilers.

Additionally, the Chittenden Dammers have proposed a new trail connection to connect a trail from a section of the new relocation of the South Pond Trail referred to as "the elbow" to amenities along the Killington Mountain Road. This proposal was officially sent to the USFS on October 18th, 2022 and will be emailed to the USFS along with these comments. This proposal would increase the importance of connecting the Darning Needle Trail as well.

The Telephone GAP IRP also states that the USFS desires to decommission the Blue Ridge Trail. VAST and the Chittenden Dammers would also like to continue the maintenance and use of this trail as well. This is another secondary trail that provides riders with a "back country" experience. This trail does not see a significant amount of traffic but has been a trail for 40+ years, like the Darning Needle. The current section of VAST corridor trail 4, along the pipeline, crosses private property. If any of the landowners along this section of pipeline were to revoke permission, the Blue Ridge Trail would be a potential relocation on public land.

We realize that there are other environmental impacts associated with the Blue Ridge Trail, and barring a

landowner issue/trail closure on corridor trail 4, it may be more suitable to relocate in a more suitable location than where the Blue Ridge Trail is currently located. We would like to publicly note that a relocation in this area may be forthcoming and keep our options to relocate on USFS property open, with the understanding any proposed relocation would need to undergo the necessary NEPA processes along with others before a final decision could be made.

VAST is supportive of maintaining the existing trails, and of the new proposal to connect Darning Needle and to Killington Mountain Road. The snowmobiling community actively seeks services that are accessible via trail, and notably gas. This trail would provide this to our members, in an area that is otherwise deficient of gas stops. VAST is willing to put in the commitment necessary to support these trails as they are on publicly owned lands and are located in a high snow area. The VAST membership seeks out these sorts of trails and riding experiences.

VAST and the local clubs have a very good working relationship with the USFS, and we appreciate the significant amount of time and effort that has gone into this IRP. We have partnered on many projects and truly value this relationship. We are hopeful that our comments will be heard, and that we can work together to minimize the amount of snowmobile trails that are decommissioned as part of this project, and work to create recreation access improvements for all recreational uses, including snowmobiling.