



## Stowe Trails Partnership 5-Year Strategic Plan

### Purpose

We strive to help people experience all the benefits of recreating on trails.

### Mission

Partnering with the community, we build, maintain, and promote access to a diverse trail network that brings joy to all users. Through partnerships with landowners and organizations, we work to create a sustainable and fun experience for all outdoor enthusiasts.

### Vision

To create and expand an interconnected network that:

- Connects mountain bikers and other users of all abilities and backgrounds to diverse recreational opportunities and a shared sense of community
- Reduces barriers associated with trail access, and supports a welcoming and safe environment
- Through partnerships, provides links within the community that wouldn't otherwise be available
- Stimulates the development of bonds between all user groups
- Creates pathways for residents and visitors to experience Stowe in a natural and immersive way
- Enhances economic vibrancy

# Goals and Strategies

## Goal 1 - Maintenance for Existing Trails

Stowe Trails Partnership maintains 38 miles of trails across three networks: Cady Hill Forest, Adams Camp, and Sterling Forest (in addition to several connector trails, including Alex's Trail in Dumont Meadow). Outdoor recreation, including mountain biking, has exploded in popularity in the last five years. Using infrared trail counters, STP documented over 100,000 uses in 2022 across our three networks, with over 37,000 uses on the trail, Florence, alone. We are honored to offer trails for so many to enjoy, but this greater use has led to an increased need for trail maintenance. STP is committed to the highest standard of trail maintenance to ensure the trails remain in the best condition possible for all users.

### Goal 1 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Continue employing a Trail Manager and Trail Crew. The Trail Manager will be full-time in the spring, summer, and fall, and part-time in the winter. The Trail Crew will be part-time in the spring, summer, and fall.
- **Strategy 2:** Continue working with the Town to secure community appropriations to help fund maintenance costs.
  - Action items:
    - Submit Community Development Appropriations requests to Town every December
    - Submit Maintenance Request
- **Strategy 3:** Maintain a library of high-quality trail tools.
  - Action items:
    - Keep tool inventory up to date and replace anything that is broken.
- **Strategy 4:** Continue offering professional development opportunities to the Trail Manager and Crew, Trail Committee, and Board to ensure we are up to date with best trail maintenance practices.

### Goal 1 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- The Trail Manager and Crew remain gainfully employed.
- The trails are maintained to a high standard throughout the year.
- STP adapts its maintenance practices according to evolving best practices.

## Goal 2 - Trail Network Connectivity

As mountain biking and other trail-based outdoor recreation continue to grow in popularity, so does the desire for uninterrupted rides or walks on trails. We are committed to sustainably linking our networks to provide connectivity and the associated experiences of long days enjoying the outdoors.

Increased connectivity and the associated recreation opportunities it offers will result in economic benefits as well. Tourism is a major revenue driver for Vermont, including the Town of Stowe. With more outdoor recreation opportunities more tourists arrive, improving the economic vitality of Stowe and the surrounding communities.

## Goal 2 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Continue cultivating relationships with community stakeholders that will aid us in achieving connectivity including:
  - Town of Stowe
  - State of Vermont Forest, Parks, and Recreation Department
  - Stowe Land Trust
  - Private Landowners
  - Velomont Trail Collective / Vermont Huts Association
  - Vermont Mountain Bike Association
- **Strategy 2:** Protect access to existing mapped and unmapped trails.
  - Action items:
    - Maintain rapport and enhance connections with landowners, including the Town of Stowe, and Stowe Land Trust.
      - Frequent communication with landowners
    - Continue educating members about trail etiquette and remaining respectful to one another, the landowners, and the land itself.
    - Work with landowners to secure Landowner Access Agreements if we don't have them already.
- **Strategy 3:** Work with the community and stakeholders to secure trail access on parcels of land that exist between our trail networks.
  - Action items:
    - Identify parcels that trails can be built through to connect existing networks.
    - Build relationships with the owners and/or managers of the identified parcels.
    - Sign Landowner Access Agreements with new landowners.

## Goal 2 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- It is possible to mountain bike or walk between the three primary networks, Cady Hill, Adams Camp, and Sterling Forest without getting into a car. This could be done by using a combination of singletrack trails and the paved Stowe Recreation Path.
- Stowe's visitation grows, bringing more business to local establishments (hotels, bike shops, restaurants, etc.).
- Traffic on trails is more spread out, resulting in less crowding in parking areas and fewer cars on the road.

## Goal 3 - Community and Diversified Trail User Engagement

Stowe Trails Partnership offers trail experiences to many user groups including mountain bikers, trail runners, dog walkers, bird watchers, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, and more. STP began as a mountain bike club and folks consequently associate it primarily with that one sport. Our goal is to further solidify our role to provide *every* trail user with joy, whether they bike, run, walk, or enjoy the trails in another way.

### Goal 3 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Strategic recruitment of board and committee members who engage in other trail activities beyond mountain biking.
  - Action items:
    - Incorporate recruitment language into our communication efforts.
    - Ask current board members to think about who in their networks would be a good fit to join STP's work.
- **Strategy 2:** Promote and host events centered around trail sports other than mountain biking.
  - Action items:
    - Partner with companies and organizations to host events (e.g. host a trail running clinic with a pro athlete sponsored by a footwear company that is carried by a local outdoor retailer).
- **Strategy 3:** Create staff position or internship program to aid in engagement efforts (e.g. hosting trail sits)
  - Action items:
    - Hire a part-time community engagement coordinator.
    - Work with high school and university internship programs to recruit interns/employees for outreach and engagement purposes.
- **Strategy 4:** Develop a database of non-bike trail users and members for engagement purposes.
  - Action items:
    - Create membership materials for non-mountain bikers. This could be developing a membership packet similar to that of VMBA's for those that sign up for other membership options (community, trail runner, etc.).
- **Strategy 5:** Identify opportunities and feasibility of stewarding more non-mountain bike trails in and around Stowe (hiking and walking trails).

### Goal 3 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- More memberships from users other than mountain bikers.
- Increased observation of other users on the trails.
- Community engagement staff hired and/or interns onboarded.

## Goal 4 - Sustainable Growth

Over the last five years, human-powered outdoor recreation, including mountain biking and other trail sports, has exploded in popularity. STP recognizes the effect this has had on our networks, including increased traffic on the trails, parking areas, and roads. We strive to be prepared to accommodate this growth that will impact the trails and community at large.

### Goal 4 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Work with the Town of Stowe and Stowe Land Trust to develop a Stowe Master Recreation Plan.
  - Action items:
    - Communicate with Stowe Land Trust as they complete their trail inventory through 2023
    - Meet with the Town of Stowe Planning & Zoning Department to illustrate the importance of a high-level plan to avoid future problems
- **Strategy 2:** Work with the Town of Stowe to better educate locals and visitors about public parking areas (not just directly at the trailhead).
  - Action items:
    - Develop signage with ToS for kiosks and trailhead parking lots
- **Strategy 4:** Continue monitoring trail use and parking area/road congestion.
  - Action items:
    - Ongoing use of infrared trail counters to monitor trail use.
    - Work with staff and volunteers to hold frequent trail sits to gauge trail user opinion about congestion.
- **Strategy 5:** Maintain and upgrade current trails as needed, build connecting trails between existing networks, build new trails in existing networks, and consider building out new areas to offer more places for a broad range of trail users to recreate.
  - Action items:
    - Continue pursuing Sterling Connector landowner access agreements.
- **Strategy 6:** Work with the town and local businesses located near the trailheads to brainstorm solutions for trailhead parking.
  - Action items:
    - Work with the Town to help advertise where public trailhead parking is currently allowed.
    - Reach out to nearby businesses to see if they would allow trailhead parking.
      - Explore building connector trails as needed from businesses.

### Goal 4 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- Trail traffic is more dispersed across the networks.

- People are biking to and between the networks rather than driving and parking.
- More people are parking at the public parking lots when trail parking is full (and not at neighboring businesses or residences).
- Nearby businesses allow trailhead parking and recognize the economic and community benefits associated with allowing trailhead parking (e.g. Ranch Camp sells more food since they allow people to park there to access Cady Hill).
- Bike lanes have been installed on the roads in town.

## Goal 5 - Fundraising

Fiscal sustainability is crucial to the operational success of STP and our ability to achieve our goals. We aim to continue growing and maintaining our financial health through new and current fundraising efforts.

### Goal 5 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Increase engagement with current and new businesses in Stowe and the surrounding areas, tourists, second-homeowners, and landowners.
  - Action items:
    - Grow the number of e-newsletter subscribers.
    - Attend community events and host trail sits.
    - Work with Stowe Area Association to communicate our mission and work with member businesses and visitors.
- **Strategy 2:** Strengthen relationships with major donors.
  - Action items:
    - Continue building existing relationships within the community (businesses, landowners, homeowners, etc.).
    - Seek opportunities to connect with new potential donors.
- **Strategy 3:** Launch capital campaigns to support specific projects.
- **Strategy 4:** Host separate sponsor and donor appreciation/networking events.
- **Strategy 5:** Consider establishing an endowment fund.

### Goal 5 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- STP's fundraising efforts are diversified.
- More members
- More (or larger gifts from) Community Supporters and private donors.
- More (or larger gifts from) business Sponsors.

## Goal 6 - Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The outdoor industry, STP included, has a long way to go to be just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive. We want to do our part to change this narrative by working with and supporting organizations that are lowering existing barriers to outdoor recreation. This includes JEDI work to address exclusions for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, youth, lower socioeconomic status, and more.

## Goal 6 Strategies

- **Strategy 1:** Maintain seat(s) on the Vermont Mountain Bike Association Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and sub-committees.
- **Strategy 2:** Conduct research to learn how best to be allies in this space. This could include seminars, training, written and audio materials, etc.
- **Strategy 3:** Increase the representation of historically excluded groups in our photo assets by working with local photographers. This includes our website, social media channels, email newsletters, printed materials, and more.
- **Strategy 4:** Collaborate with community partners rooted in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) work to develop and support programs, events, and initiatives.
  - Action items:
    - Identify groups that engage with and represent BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, youth, low socioeconomic status, and more. Consider partnering with schools.
- **Strategy 5:** Recruit new members for our Board and Committees to build diversity of skills, opinions, backgrounds, and personalities.

## Goal 6 Measurements of Success

What does success look like?

- STP has consistent representation and performs tangible work on the VMBA DEI Committee.
- STP's Board of Directors has increased representation.
- Photo and video assets also have increased representation.
- An increased number of folks from historically excluded groups are enjoying the trails.
- Meaningful partnerships are being established with groups that engage with those who have been historically excluded.

## Challenges (and Opportunities)

Over the last few years, STP has faced challenges when trying to achieve our goals, the biggest being diversity and land access.

### Diversity

Mountain biking and outdoor recreation overall in Vermont are not known for their diverse representation. Despite ongoing efforts to welcome women, the LGBTQ+ community, BIPOC, and others onto the trails, the overwhelming majority of trail users remain cis, white, and male. With Vermont being statistically one of the whitest states in America (93.6% of the population), more JEDI work and a commitment to change both in Stowe and at the state level are needed for us to welcome historically excluded groups onto the trails. See Goal 5 for action items about how we hope to address this.

## **Land Access**

Two of STP's priorities are to increase the connectivity between our existing networks and to build new trails in Stowe and the surrounding areas. A consistent obstacle to accomplishing this is a lack of landowner access. Without landowner permission, we are unable to build new trails to connect our networks and disperse trail traffic.

To address this, we will:

- Continue to identify old and new landowners in the area.
- Cultivate relationships with all landowners by supporting and communicating with them in their preferred ways.
- Follow the Landowner Relation Plan.
- Educate our membership about the importance of respect and sustainable recreation with the theme that access to trails is a privilege that we need to be grateful for (see Ride With Gratitude).