

December 5, 2006

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Vermont Association of Snow Travelers
Attention: LVRTC
26 Vast Lane
Barre, Vermont 05641

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed management plan for the **Lamoille Valley Rail Trail**. I want to applaud VAST for taking on the management of this ambitious project – I think it is a positive step towards improving 4-season recreation in Vermont. I would caution, however, that the majority of use on this corridor will likely take place beyond the winter months and will involve a great deal of work on the part of VAST to work with non-snowmobile recreation groups to manage these uses and their corresponding needs. More detailed comments are listed below:

1. **Herbicides.** As a landowner adjacent to the LVRT, I am extremely concerned about the use of herbicides along the trail corridor. First, we have several natural springs (four in total) located within 500-feet of the trail. These are currently or in the future will be used for our private drinking water. Not only am I concerned about the contamination threats from herbicide use (and I believe the science confirms the negative impacts of chemicals on ground water sources), I believe the associated costs would be much better spent on trailside mowing and manual pulling. While this type of work is more time-consuming, it is equally as effective and can be accomplished at a fraction of the cost. Your figures show more than twice the money being spent on herbicides (\$30,000) than on mowing (\$15,000) during the same three-year period. I think it would be fairly easy to shift this expense towards mowing and limit herbicide use to areas where manual management is not practical.
2. **Non-winter parking and access.** While VAST has a well-established system of winter trails and access points, many areas on the LVRT are not accessible by open, well-marked public parking/access areas. While snowmobiles will be able to access the LVRT via established side trails, summer users will be compelled to find parking at trail crossings, road intersections and on private land. I fear that, without well-established non-winter trailheads, non-winter users of the trail will improvise parking and create a variety of management problems such as trespass issues, road blockage, and possibly property damage. I strongly encourage VAST to identify and publish a list of current non-winter access points (that are open and accessible to the average user) and in the future work with municipalities and landowners to create additional access areas in each town.
3. **Historic features.** The LVRT follows an exceptionally rich historic rail corridor that has high value to local communities. At the minimum, VAST should respect any historic overpasses, buildings, culverts and bridges, and avoid damaging these structures and, in the best case, work to highlight and protect these features in the future. These features make excellent educational/interpretive sites and help connect the LVRT to its respective communities through a common history.

In closing, I believe the LVRT has exceptional value to northern Vermont and will serve as an important economic and recreational stimulant – connecting communities, improving multi-use recreational opportunities, and enhancing local community and economic development.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the planning process.

Sincerely,

Luke O'Brien
Landowner, Walden, VT