



**THE GENERAL COURT
OF
NEW HAMPSHIRE
CONCORD 03301**

**CHARLES W. MORSE
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

**SHAWN N. JASPER
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE**

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 1, 2017

To: Honorable Christopher Sununu, Governor
Honorable Chuck Morse, President of the Senate
Honorable Shawn Jasper, Speaker of the House
Honorable Tammy Wright, Senate Clerk
Honorable Paul Smith, House Clerk
Michael York, State Librarian

From: Senator Jeb Bradley, Chairman

Subject: Final Report of SB 383, Chapter 268:1, Laws of 2016

Pursuant to SB 383, Chapter 268:1, Laws of 2016, enclosed please find the final report of the Commission to Study and Recommend Improvements to the New Hampshire Hiking Trails Network.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Enclosure

cc: Committee Members

**COMMISSION TO STUDY AND RECOMMEND
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE NEW
HAMPSHIRE HIKING TRAILS NETWORK
216-F:7 - Chapter 268:1 - Laws of 2016**

**Final Report
November 1st 2017**

Introduction

The Commission believes that a well maintained hiking trail network is vital to the State of New Hampshire, its residents and visitors. Hiking as a sport is increasing in popularity and increasingly occurring in all four seasons. Many trails are impacted by significant use which may lead to erosion and hikers walking around eroded areas. In many areas eroded trails are a safety concern. Maintaining and/or rebuilding trails is essential to meet the increasing use. The Commission believes that in an era of constrained resources it will be difficult to keep up with necessary maintenance by professional trail crews. It is increasingly important to build upon the volunteer efforts to encourage more individuals to either join trail maintenance organizations or to adopt a trail themselves under the auspices of the US Forest Service or the NH Division of Parks and Recreation. In addition to trail maintenance, parking and other trail head infrastructure capacity has also become a major challenge across the state. It is also important to continue to promote a general appreciation of the outdoors because securing new generations of people interested in supporting outdoor recreation is critical in preserving the hiking infrastructure and our state's wild places as a whole.

The recommendations below are intended to offer guidance to enhance and preserve New Hampshire's trail network.

Charge of Commission

III. The commission shall:

- (a) Evaluate and recommend how various groups might work together to maintain and repair New Hampshire's trail network.
- (b) Inventory the trail system in New Hampshire and the role of individual trail maintenance groups in various parts of the state.

- (c) Create a list of who maintains which trails and which trails are not maintained by any organized group.
- (d) Examine the historical management of trails in New Hampshire.
- (e) Create strategic recommendations for a more sustainable trail network in New Hampshire.
- (f) Examine the cost and volunteer efforts required in maintaining these trails as well as liability protections for trail maintainers.
- (g) Solicit the opinions of volunteer trail maintainers.
- (h) Study the economic impact of trails in the state of New Hampshire.
- (i) Research additional funding sources that could enhance trail maintenance in New Hampshire.
- (j) Solicit the advice of educational institutions which may want to be involved in trail maintenance and or trail maintenance research.
- (k) Make recommendations for creating a sustainable model for trail management while accommodating the growing use of the trails.

Meeting Summaries

September 21st 2016

The Commission organized and Senator Jeb Bradley was elected chair of the commission. Craig Sanborn was elected clerk. The commission spent the duration of the meeting identifying various stake holders that they would like to invite to the following meeting to add perspective and offer solutions on problems that the commission identified. The list of stakeholders that were identified are documented in the minutes.

The commission also touched on key issues that they believed the commission needed to focus on as the discussion continued. The issues were as followed.

- Funding for Trail Maintenance
- Exponential growth in the amount of hikers using the trail network.
- Maintaining and fostering relationship with private land owners and land trusts.
- Parking and crowd issues
- Hiker education

December 6th, 2016

The Committee began hearing for stakeholders that were identified during the organizational meeting. Matt Leahy from the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire's Forests testified that they are a large land owner in the state and they encourage the use of trails on their property. They maintain over 200 miles of trail including two major state parks, Mt. Major and Mt. Monadnock. A major problem

that the society faces in the lack of understanding from the public that the land they are using is private. Irresponsible uses of private lands are costly and often lead to land owners closing off their land to the public.

Jeanie McIntire from the Upper Valley Land Trust testified that the maintenance of current trails needs to be a priority over building new trails. She has not seen as big of a growth in use as other more popular hiking trails but there is an increased cost to more traffic on the trails. She would like to see the commission address the emergency management network to better organize resources for when a hiker gets sick or hurt.

Chris Gamache from the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Trails Division was present and spoke about how his division mainly works with the OHRV trail groups and there is no one person in the state solely devoted to hiking trails.

Glenn Normandeau, Director of Fish and Game was present and spoke to some of the challenges his department faces. Fish and game does not work with hiking trails specifically but they are responsible for organizing search and rescue as well as maintaining trails for wildlife access. Fish and Game is funded from license and permit fees and is also having problems spreading resources all across the state. Hike Safe Card Program has been very successful in raising some funds for search and rescue costs.

Senator Bradley asked the group to come back in a few months with ideas and recommendations for the final report.

August 28th, 2017

Senator Bradley opened the meeting asking for discussion on what types of recommendations. Suggestions were made that there needs to be a bigger focus on awareness and education for hikers. Ray Jackson recommended engaging the UNH Stewardship program that is able to maintain lists of trail groups and communicate with large groups. Concerns about parking overflow onto Rt 93 were discussed.

The commission decided to take a position on the Thoreau Falls Bridge project and voted 6-1 with one member abstaining to support the replacement of the bridge once the damaged bridge was removed. The commission argued that the bridge has enough hiking volume and that proper hiking infrastructure needs to be supported. More specific recommendations were documented in the meeting minutes.

Ryan Harvey of the Waterman Fund was present and spoke to the Commission about the different types of work that the Waterman fund is doing. They offer small grants for projects that protect and preserve the alpine zone. They

plan on offering some smaller grants in the next year are so and would be happy to work with trail maintenance groups. One requirement for receiving a Waterman Fund grant is to include some time of education piece that works to educate hikers and land users on how to be more sustainable visitors to the alpine zone or wherever the project is located.

Senator Bradley told the commission he would compile the recommendations and begin preparing the final report for the commission.

Findings

1. Many New Hampshire hiking trails are eroding due to poor initial trail layout, increased use and increased storm severity. Trail maintenance and/or trail rebuilding is essential to preserve New Hampshire's hiking trail network.
2. Inadequate parking and parking management is a public safety concern and adversely impacts local communities.
3. Most trail maintenance is done by volunteers. Both volunteers and paid seasonal crews need reliable funding and resources to meet the demand for their services. Paid seasonal crews are needed where volunteers are unable to meet that demand.
4. The most realistic sources of new funding for improved hiking infrastructure are user fees which may include parking fees at hiker trailheads.
5. There is a general lack of understanding by the public of the need for trail maintenance, trail rebuilding, appropriate parking and the need for resources to accomplish that.
6. The Commission recognizes the value of trails to current and future generations, and NH's economy, and acknowledges that if efforts are not made to increase resources available for trail maintenance, parking, education and overall trail management the availability of trails in the future will be limited or lost.

Recommendations

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

1. **Support of Recreation Enhancement Act.** Draft and send a letter to Federal Delegation supporting the Recreation Enhancement Act and supporting the use of recreation fees being used for trail maintenance and hiker education. (Letter Attached)
2. **Consider deferral of new trails until we have adequate maintenance resources.** Given the difficulty maintaining the existing trail network, the Commission recommends that construction of new hiking trails be deferred. There are limited resources available and the priority needs to be on maintaining the current hiking trails we have before new hiking trails are designed and constructed.
3. **Develop a classification of less maintained trails.** The US Forest Service has a classifying system in place for trails in national forests and other land managers may be able to copy that system. The intent of this recommendation is to ensure the public understands that some trails are wilder and that hikers should be aware of that status. Basic maintenance, including but not limited to trail blazing and brush work, on lightly maintained trails would be performed once every three years. Obstructions occurring due to weather or other natural events should be removed from the trail corridor as soon as practical if safety concerns exist. Erosion control measures such as drain cleaning should continue to be done at intervals appropriate to the particular trail. This recommendation provides a somewhat more wild experience for hikers who prefer more of a sense of adventure.
4. **Recreational Trails Programs (RTP) Grant Application.** The Division of Parks and Recreations should continue to work with the Department of Transportation and other state and federal agencies to keep the RTP Grant Application as streamlined as possible.
5. **Increased severe storm impacts on New Hampshire hiking trails suggest we should; a) keep drains clean, b) site bridges high, c) encourage appropriate use of wet season trails.** Climate change presents a serious threat to New Hampshire's trails. Increased incidence of severe weather events cause massive erosion, degrading trails and natural resources associated with the outdoor experience – the past few years have seen several 100 and 500 year-level storm events. Increasingly erratic freeze-thaw cycles soften trail surfaces and increase damage by users. The long term harm to all of the state's

plant and animal species' from changing climate represents a threat to the natural tourism industry.

6. **Streamline wetland and shoreline protection applications.** The Commission encourages the Department of Environmental Services to continue through its Rulemaking Process to ensure that wetlands permitting for recreational trail projects remains streamlined and timely for applicants, and that the permitting process supports increased impacts up front to help mitigate impacts from severe weather events in the future.
7. **Increase Public Awareness.** The commission recommends beginning a strong public awareness effort on how to be a more sustainable hiker. For instance, promoting "Leave No Trace", "Hike Safe" and alternative times and places to hike.

TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

8. **Replace the Thoreau Falls Bridge.** The committee voted 6-1 with the member from the White Mountain National Forest abstaining from the vote to submit a letter to the White Mountain National Forest to support the replacement of the Thoreau Falls Bridge.
9. **Restrooms at high use trailheads.** Recommends that State and federal agencies make available restroom facilities at more high use trailheads. The environmental impact of large amounts of human waste being deposited regularly around popular trailheads needs to be addressed.
10. **Broadening support for trails.** While a national excise tax was proposed in the 1994 report of the Northern Forest Lands Council to support outdoor recreation, the Commission recommends that manufacturers and distributors of recreation equipment be approached to voluntarily support trail maintenance work.
11. **Relocate trail segments now for less maintenance needs later.** The Commission recommends that trail groups explore reroutes whenever possible to bring trails into more sustainable trail layouts.

VOLUNTEERS

12. **Recruit new volunteers.** Organizations that oversee trails (for example the US Forest Service and State of NH) are encouraged to find new ways of reaching the next generation of volunteers. At a minimum, organizations should consider posting information at trail kiosks about how hikers can perform trail maintenance. State agencies and trail maintaining organizations should continue to encourage the utilization of the University of New Hampshire's Stewardship Network to help provide training in the skills required to maintain our statewide existing trails and ecological restoration as needed.
 - a. More information on the UNH Stewardship Program can be found at Newengland.stewardshipnetwork.org
13. **Recognize and honor outstanding volunteers and groups.** Trail groups should be encouraged collaborate with the US Forest Service and NH Division of Parks and Recreation to create a Trail Maintainer of the Year award for both organization and individuals to recognize the efforts of trail maintainers and publicize the awards to increase recognition of the importance of trail maintenance.
14. **Continue New Hampshire Trails Day Projects.** Recommends that the Division of Parks and Recreation works with other agencies, land management organizations and municipalities to organize a statewide outdoors program which would include volunteers working with professional staff to accomplish all levels of trail maintenance.
15. **Legal Liability Protections.** The Commission acknowledges the strength and importance of existing liability laws protecting volunteers while conducting trail work and recommends their effectiveness be monitored and that the legislature continue to protect these statutes.
16. **Liability Insurance.** The Commission recommends that the Division of Parks and Recreation continue to offer liability insurance to trails organizations while working on department lands.
17. **Encourage the Spirit of the Volunteer.** Recommends that partners, volunteers and government entities work to bridge cultural, administrative and historic boundaries in order to accomplish more together. As an example, American Trails recent publication article by Kellie Flowers - Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), wrote about the initiatives of the Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition. They found that in 2014, volunteers contributed over a million hours to outdoor stewardship in Colorado alone-a labor value of nearly \$35 million. The (VOC) accomplishes this through the Outdoor Stewardship

Institute (OSI), a training program where each year about 300 people are trained in skills such as crew leadership, trail design, ecological restoration and technical work including rock wall and drainage structure construction. In New Hampshire, we would use our existing resources as an “outdoor Stewardship Group” to help train future volunteers to achieve the skills required to maintain our trails. These would be classes including but not limited to, tool safety, conservation, volunteer leadership, routine maintenance and erosion control, crew teamwork and managing trail projects.

PARKING CONCERNS

18. **Support parking taskforce and department survey.** The Commission recommends that the Alternative Transportation Working Group, an informal assemblage of representatives from public, private and non-governmental entities, continue to explore and implement alternatives to illegal parking on the interstate highway in Franconia Notch and to address the pressures on parking availability throughout the White Mountain region.
19. **Overflow parking continues to be an issue in the most popular trail heads.** Continued work will need to be done to alleviate this problem. Some possible solutions for further consideration could include.
 - a. Expanding parking lots in certain strategic locations where appropriate.
 - b. Shuttle Service from large parking areas close to trail heads.
 - c. Public information campaign informing hikers about where it is illegal to park.
 - d. Enforcement of parking regulation including ticketing vehicles parked on the interstate or other no parking zones.

Major trailheads with parking problems that have been identified by the commission are as follows:

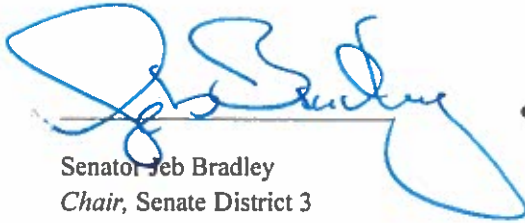
- a. Ferncroft
- b. Appalachia
- c. Champney Falls
- d. Franconia Notch
- e. Kancamagus Hwy
- f. Monadnock State Park
- g. Mt. Major
- h. Rattlesnake/Squam
- i. Lafayette Place
- j. Cardigan Mountain State Park
- k. Dianas Baths
- l. Lincoln Woods

- m. Northern Entrance to the Crawford Notch State Park
- n. Welch-Dickey

20. Parking fees to fund trail work and hiker education. The NH Division of Parks and Recreation should explore charging fees at parking lots and trailheads to help fund trail maintenance, hiker education and providing information to hikers on the cost of maintenance.

Addendum: Andy Welsh of the White Mountain National Forest participated in the commission and compiling of this report but due to federal regulations cannot be a signatory member on the final report.


Respectfully submitted,




Senator Jeb Bradley
Chair, Senate District 3




Representative Chris Christensen
Hillsborough 21



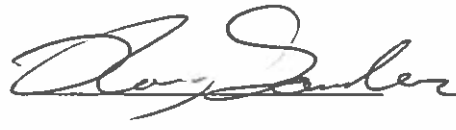
Philip Bryte
Div. Parks and Recreation



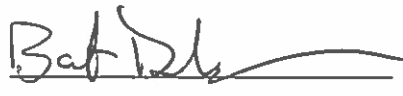
Bill Warren
AMC New Hampshire



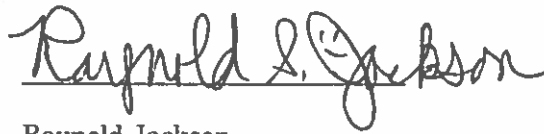
Jack Waldron
Wonalancet Outdoor Club




Rory Gawler
Dartmouth Outdoor Program



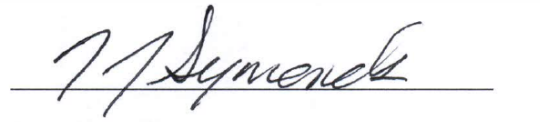
Bob Drescher
Randolph Mountain Club



Raynold Jackson
Trailwrights of New Hampshire



Craig Sanborn
Cardigan Highlanders
Volunteer Trail Crew



Tim Symonds
Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway Trail Club