

EVERETT TRAILS REPORT



PREPARED FOR:
SOUTHWESTERN VERMONT
HEALTH CARE REALTY

OCTOBER 2021

PREPARED BY THE BENNINGTON
COUNTY REGIONAL COMMISSION

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Introduction

Southwestern Vermont Health Care Realty (SVHCR) recently acquired the 371-acre Everett property (former Southern Vermont College campus) including an existing 10+ mile trail network with public access. Locally known as the BATS trails after the non-profit group [Bennington Area Trail System \(BATS\)](http://batsvt.org) (batsvt.org) that has stewarded and developed the trails, the system traverses much of the Everett property and extends to surrounding lands. A significant portion of the Everett property is covered by a conservation easement held by the Vermont Land Trust. The trails on the Everett lands lie at the heart of the BATS network. The trails have been developed for mountain biking, but also are popular with hikers, runners, birdwatchers, and winter sport enthusiasts.

This report was prepared as a preliminary assessment of the trail system to inform future planning for the Everett property. Information for this report was obtained from BATS leaders and trail users, and from interviews with trail managers throughout New England. Information about trail use was gathered through a public input survey that received more than 100 responses.

Key Takeaways from this Report

- The BATS network is a multi-use trail system of hand-built (as opposed to machine-built), single-track trails on Mount Anthony with numerous access points close to the center of Bennington.
- Trail users visit the area year-round for a range of recreational purposes including hiking, running, biking, birdwatching, and snowshoeing. The quality and diversity of the trails are outstanding, although some note that wayfinding signs, hiking/walking trails, and public communications about the trails could be improved.
- BATS members and mountain bikers are likely a minority of total trail users in number, but individual BATS members access the trails more frequently than other users. BATS members already pay annual membership dues to support their use of the trails.
- Although the BATS non-profit organization manages the trails well, the volunteer model and ad hoc nature of most volunteer work has limitations, particularly for trail system growth.
- The BATS management approach and decision-making process are strongly influenced by potential threats to the system.
- A range of stakeholder groups provide input on the trail system as well as on the question of future public access to Mount Anthony more broadly. Future development and expansion of the trail network will require direct support and investment from additional stakeholders.

- The potential for major expansion of the trail system on Mount Anthony is limited due to existing development, current landowner sentiments, and BATS volunteer capacity. The size of the trail system on the mountain is likely too small to attract the paying user groups that frequent larger mountain bike trail networks.
- However, there are several short and long-term options to further develop the trail system through a decentralized network approach that extends beyond immediate Mount Anthony surroundings. An example of this already exists on the SVMC campus. Other sites for potential expansion include Prospect Mountain and other conserved lands in the Town of Bennington.
- Development of a comprehensive trail plan to inform and guide future trail development is recommended to identify specific trail expansion opportunities and best management practices. A trail economic impact study could also be pursued to estimate the value of the trails to the local economy. Exploration of trail management support and expansion is recommended due to the value the trail system provides for attracting visitors and retaining residents in the Town of Bennington.
- Similar trails in the Northeast can shed light on best management practices for small trail systems.

Terminology: In this report, the term “BATS” refers to the non-profit group that manages the trail system. “BATS trails” or “BATS trail system” refers to the trails themselves.



Ruins along Everett Path

Trail Inventory

The BATS network is comprised of numerous interconnected, single-track trails with varying degrees of slope and technical difficulty. The system includes more than 10 miles of trails on and around the base of Mount Anthony. Many of the BATS trails traverse the centrally-located Everett property, with additional trails and access points located north, south, and east of the former college campus. The access points are largely available courtesy of adjacent landowners who are sensitive to their privacy. The BATS trails are hand-built and maintained by BATS volunteers. Mountain bikers tend to regard hand-built trails as more interesting, and appreciate the unique quality and riding experience of hand-built trails over machine-built ones. Most of the trails are blazed and marked at intersections.

Table 1: BATS Trail Descriptions

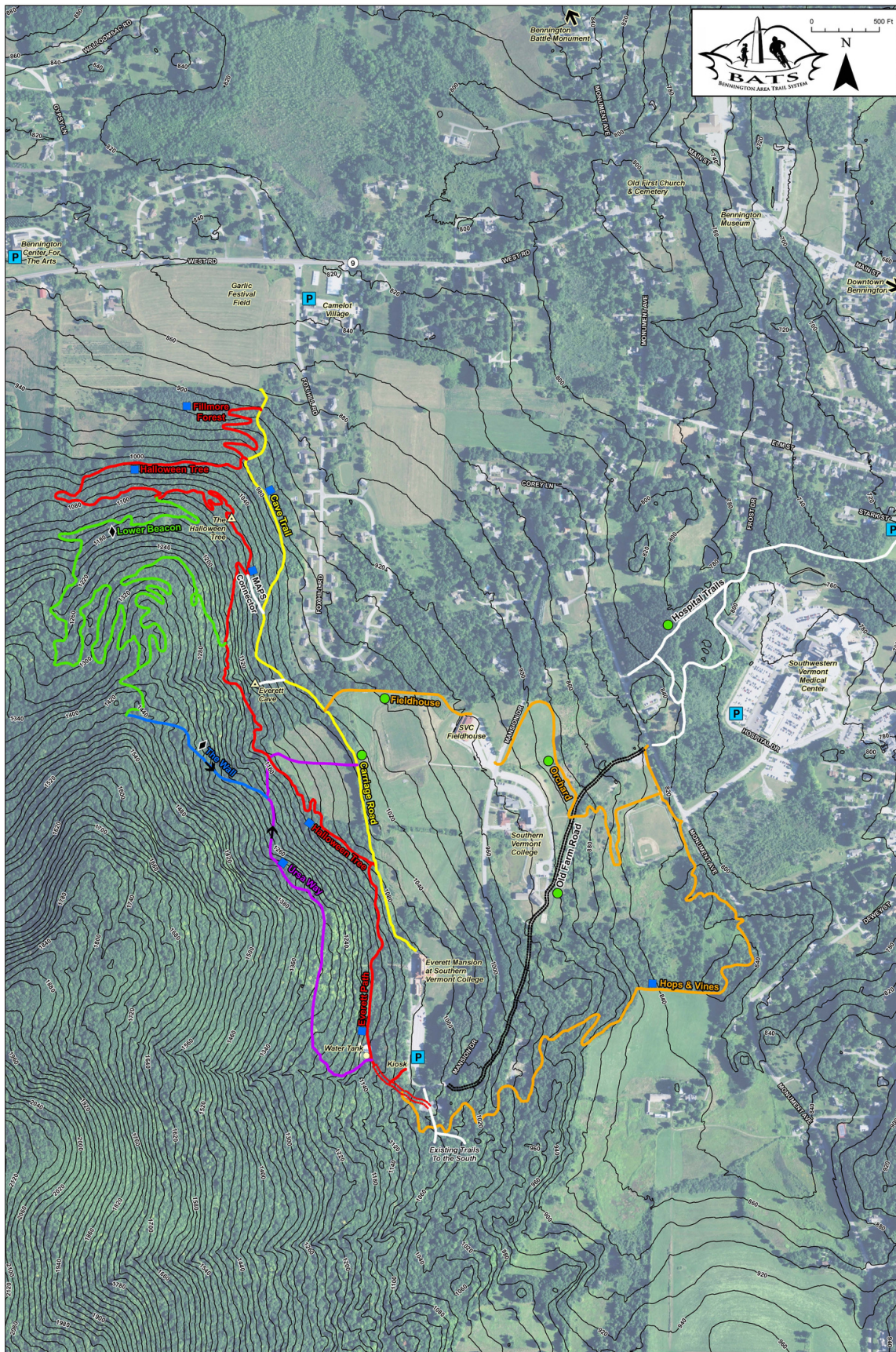
Trail Name	Length (mi)	Difficulty Level	Description
Carriage Road	0.4	Easy	Short, flat path that runs along an old road north of the Everett Mansion.
Cave Trail	0.6	Moderate	Hilly path that connects the Carriage Road to the Camelot Village parking area off Route 9/West Rd with a short spur to the Everett Cave.
Everett Path	0.3	Moderate	Short path that begins at the Everett Mansion parking lot, goes up to the water tower and connects to the Carriage Road.
Fieldhouse Trails	0.8	Easy	Various mowed paths through scenic open fields between the fieldhouse (campus gymnasium) parking area and the Carriage Road.
Fillmore Forest	0.2	Moderate	Short connector between the Camelot Village parking area and the Halloween Tree trail.
Halloween Tree	2	Moderate	Runs to the west and roughly parallel to the Cave Trail/Carriage Road and passes by the landmark "Halloween Tree."
Hops & Vines	1.2	Moderate	Connects trails on the SVMC property along the eastern and southern perimeter of the Everett property; access at Stark Street Park.
Lower Beacon	1.75	Moderate	Switchback trail running past a beacon on the lower slopes of Mount Anthony.
Snail Trail	0.4	Moderate	Connects trails above Halloween Tree with the Lower Beacon.
Old Farm Road	0.5	Easy	Connects Monument Ave and the Everett Mansion.
Orchard	0.5	Easy	Mowed path connecting Hops & Vines with the fieldhouse.
The Wall	Unknown	Difficult	Steep trail connecting Lower Beacon and Ursa Way.
Ursa Way	0.6	Difficult	Steep trail along an old logging road above the water tower.
SVMC/Hospital Trails	1.4	Easy	Short series of flat trails in the woods around the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center with connector to Everett property and Stark Street Playground.



View of Camelot Village and Rte. 9 from northern trailhead

Additional trails: There are additional, marked and unmarked trails in and around Mount Anthony. Trails that are official, public BATS trails are outlined in Table 1 above. BATS does maintain a number of trails not listed in that table, but those trails are open only to BATS members and not the general public in order to restrict the amount of traffic on the trails. The BATS organization determines in dialogue with property owners which existing trails are suitable for public mapping and access. See the management section of the report for more details.

BATS takes great care to discourage access to properties whose owners who are not open to public recreational use of their land. The trail maps published by BATS exclude many existing trails for this reason, but publicly-available trails data from the [Vermont Geographic Information Center \(VCGI\)](http://geodata.vermont.gov) (geodata.vermont.gov) shows that trails extend beyond the mapped footprint of the BATS network. To fully appreciate the constraints on future growth of the trail system, it is important to recognize that landowner sentiments are a major barrier to trail access and expansion on surrounding lands.



Official trail map generated by BATS. The map can be viewed online at batsvt.org/trails.



Carriage Road looking north



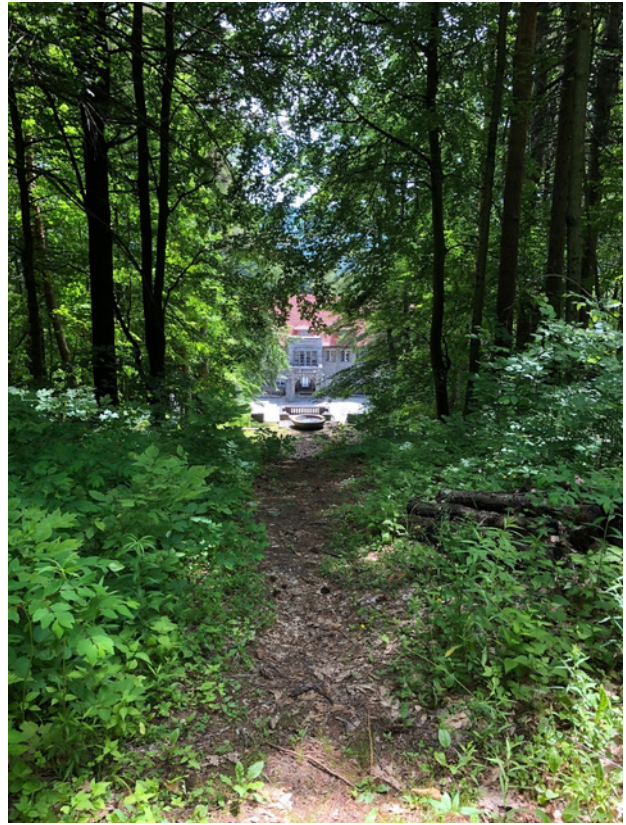
Wayfinding signs along Cave Trail



Cave Trail



Halloween Tree



Mansion view over the fountain from Everett Path

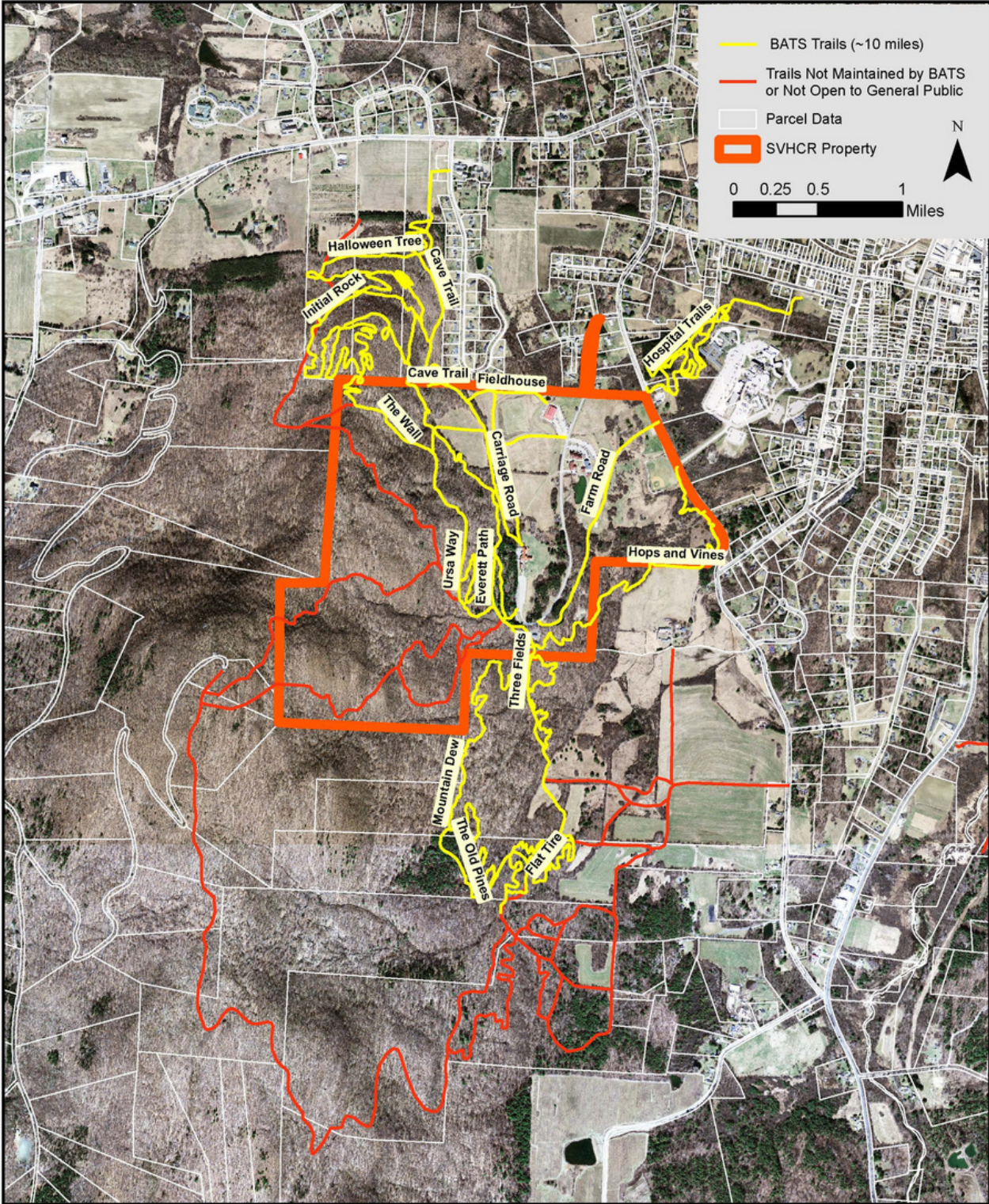


Trailhead sign for Snail Trail spur



Water tower view from Ursa Way

Mapped Trails On and Around Mount Anthony



Boundaries are estimates. Map produced by BCRC on 09/14/2021 for planning purposes only.

Public Access Points & Wayfinding

The network's proximity to Bennington's downtown, and its variety of access points and parking options make it a highly accessible public resource. The northern end of the network off Route 9/West Road has been accessible from a small parking lot at Camelot Village on the east side of Fox Hill Road. It would be preferable to establish a small parking area dedicated to trail use on the west side of the road so that users would not have to cross Fox Hill road. Establishing a dedicated parking lot would also address uncertainty about parking availability as the future use of the Camelot Village property may change when the property changes ownership. The business closed in 2020, and the property is currently for sale. There is a wayfinding sign where the trail enters the wooded area at the upper end of the field that formerly hosted the annual Garlic Festival.



Sign near the Camelot Village trailhead parking lot off Rte. 9



Camelot Village parking lot

Users can access the trail network from the east via the SVMC trails , where trailhead parking is located at the Stark Street Park. Alternatively, parking is available at the SVMC campus in designated lots. From the SVMC trails, users can cross Monument Avenue to access the BATS trails via the Hops and Vines Trail.



Stark Street parking lot



SVMC Trailhead at Stark Street



SVMC parking lot

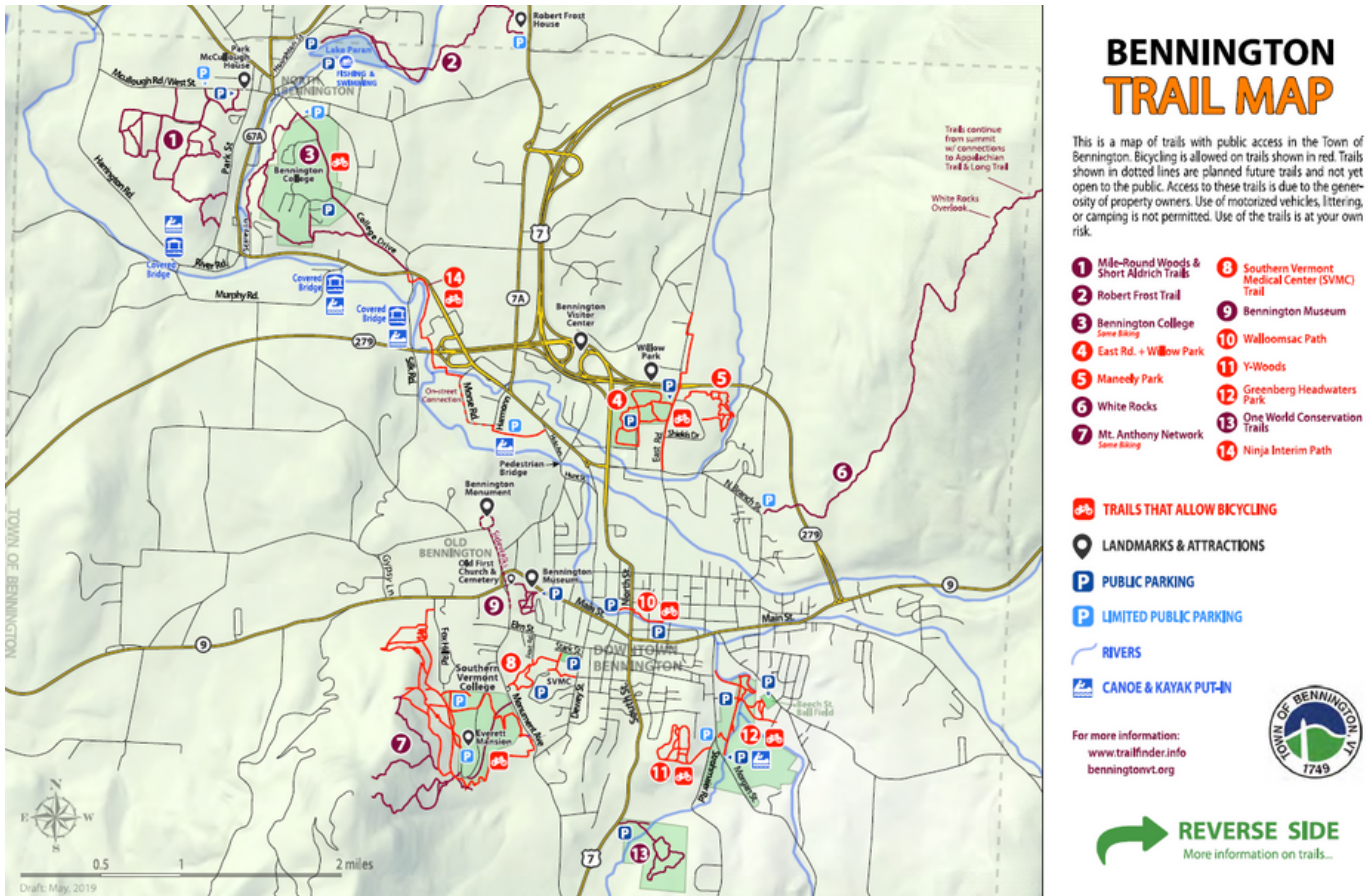


Parking had previously been available at a trailhead located at the south end of the Mansion parking lot on the Everett property. While that parking area is not currently available, the trails still can be accessed from the primary trailhead at the parking area by the campus field house/gymnasium.

Information kiosk at Everett Mansion parking lot. Parking is not currently available.

Other Nearby Trails

The Bennington Area Trail System is one of several recreational trail networks in Bennington. The trails connect to other trails on Mount Anthony and are close to the Walloomsac Path, Y-Woods trails, and trails in the Greenburg Headwaters Park. The Bennington Rail Trail and Ninja Path to Bennington College are scheduled for construction by the end of 2022. An extensive trail network is maintained on conserved land at Mile Around Woods, Lake Paran, and the Frost House in the North Bennington – South Shaftsbury area.



Official Bennington Trail Map showing locations of recreational trails in town

BATS Trail User Survey

Background

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) partnered with the Bennington Area Trails System (BATS) to publish a trail user survey designed to identify characteristics of trail users and how they use the trails, and to solicit input on the current state and future development needs of the trail system. Survey findings are summarized below.

Key Survey Takeaways

1. The survey shows that the Bennington Area Trail System is highly valued as a community resource by both local Bennington residents, residents of neighboring towns, and residents of neighboring states and beyond.
2. Nearly one in five respondents reported being very frequent trail users (visit the trails several times per week).
3. Most survey respondents generally agreed that the trails are safe, well-maintained, and accessible, but that community awareness of the trails is not as high as it could be.
4. Some of the most valuable attributes of the trails that respondents noted were scenic beauty, accessibility, and proximity to residential neighborhoods and Downtown Bennington.
5. Some of the most common recommendations for improvement of the trails were the addition of more wayfinding signage, improvement of existing signage, and development of a summit trail.
6. A number of respondents requested more regular trail updates, information about volunteer opportunities, and other ways to support the trails.

Survey Respondents

126 respondents participated in the trail user survey; significantly more than the number of registered BATS members (75) and most survey respondents (68%) were not BATS members. Survey results suggest that most users of the trails are Bennington residents, although 25% of respondents lived outside of Bennington and adjacent towns, with many of them residing in towns in northern Bennington County. More than one in ten respondents reported residing in Massachusetts or New York state, while a few residents of New Jersey, North Carolina, and Florida also responded to the trail user survey.

Demographic data from the survey shows that most BATS trail users are white (96% of respondents), with more male (61% of respondents) than female users. The trails are used by people of all ages, with the 40-49 age group being the largest group represented by survey respondents. More than one in ten respondents reported being age 70 and older. Comparatively few survey respondents were under the age of eighteen; however, 23% of respondents reported that someone in their household younger than age 18 uses the trail network. Trail users reported a range of occupations, with more than half of the respondents (62%) working full-time and 20% being retired.

Although 68% of respondents were not BATS members, and 88% had not volunteered with BATS before, 36% responded that they would like more information about volunteer opportunities and/or becoming a member of BATS. Forty percent of respondents said they already had access to information about membership and volunteering and 24% said they were not interested in these opportunities.

Trail Usage and User Experience

The survey reveals that the BATS trail network accommodates a wide range of recreational activities throughout the year. Hiking was the most popular activity among survey respondents (66%), followed by mountain biking, snowshoeing, and running. Twelve percent of respondents identified “other” activities including dog-walking, birdwatching, and foraging. The trails are used year-round, although reported usage dips to 44% of users in the winter and is slightly down in spring (perhaps because of trail conditions).

The frequency of use varies considerably, with about 5% of survey respondents being only occasional users (one visit per year on average) and nearly one in five respondents being very frequent users (visit the trails several times per week). Most trail users (54%) reported spending 1-2 hours on the trails when they visit.

Access to the trails is available at several public trailheads, although a significant number (20%) report connecting to the trails through abutting properties. The most popular access point for the trails is the Everett (SVC) fieldhouse parking area (36%), followed closely by the SVMC parking area (33%), and the Camelot Village parking area (31%). Other access points include the Stark Street Park and the SVMC trails. Trail users most often rely on a motor vehicle to reach the BATS network (70%), but walking (29%) and biking (23%) also are popular ways to reach the trailheads.

Trail users visit the network both as a group activity with family and friends and, just as often, alone. The trail system is regarded as very safe to use, with 93% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “I feel safe using the trails alone.”

Interestingly, 30% of trail users stated that they use the trails with visitors to the area, indicating that the BATS trails are an asset of interest to tourists and out-of-towners.

Trail System Quality

Accessibility, management, and overall quality of the trails were all rated highly. The survey asked respondents to rate four general aspects of the trail system on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent).

Table 2. User Ratings of Trail Quality

Trail Characteristic	Weighted Avg. Value
Accessibility of the trails	4.19
Management of the trails	4.18
Overall quality of the trails	4.1
Community awareness of the trails	3.01

Over 80% of respondents rated overall quality of the trails and management of the trails as “good” or “excellent”, and 84% ranked accessibility of the trails as “good” or “excellent.” However, less than 1% of respondents ranked community awareness of the trails as “excellent”, and 20% ranked it as “fair”.

Potential Improvements to the Trail System

In addition to rating general aspects of the trails, survey respondents were asked to suggest improvements on four specific aspects of the trail system: the trails themselves, access points/parking areas, wayfinding, and trail management and maintenance.

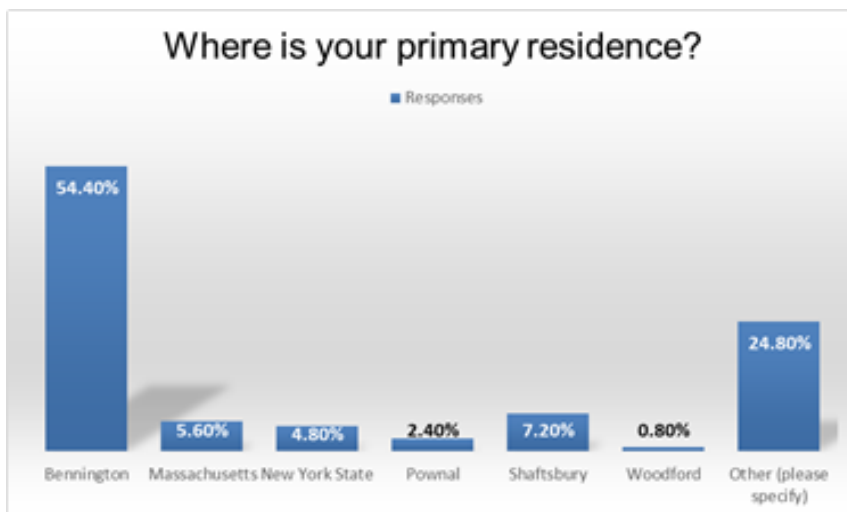
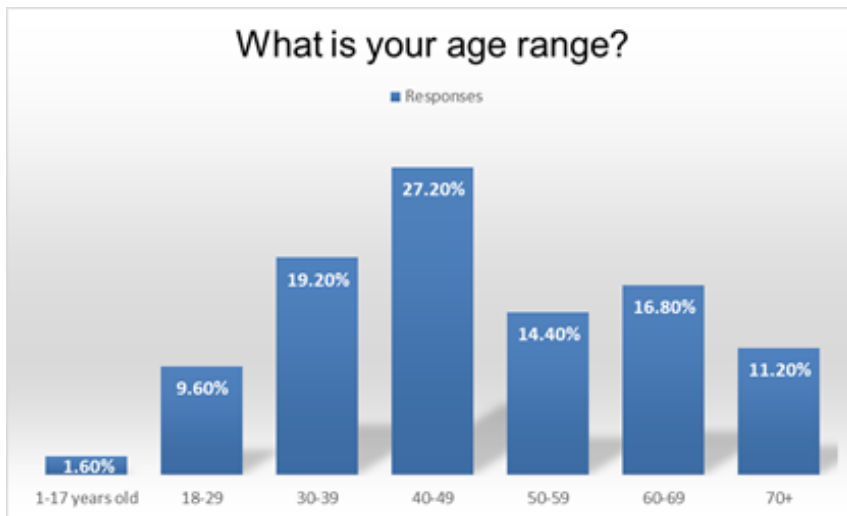
- Trail improvements: Respondents suggested increasing the variety of trails by skill level with an emphasis on more beginner-friendly trails and development of a trail to a lookout near the summit of Mount Anthony.
- Access points and parking areas: Common recommendations noted the need for additional signs to mark parking lots and direct people to parking areas. Respondents also wanted existing parking options to be expanded and/or secured for continued use.

- Wayfinding: Suggestions included more signs and trail markers throughout the trail system and improved/additional directional signs on the trail network.
- Management and maintenance: Respondents generally praised the hard work of BATS and expressed interest in participating in volunteer events and contributing to the maintenance of the trails.

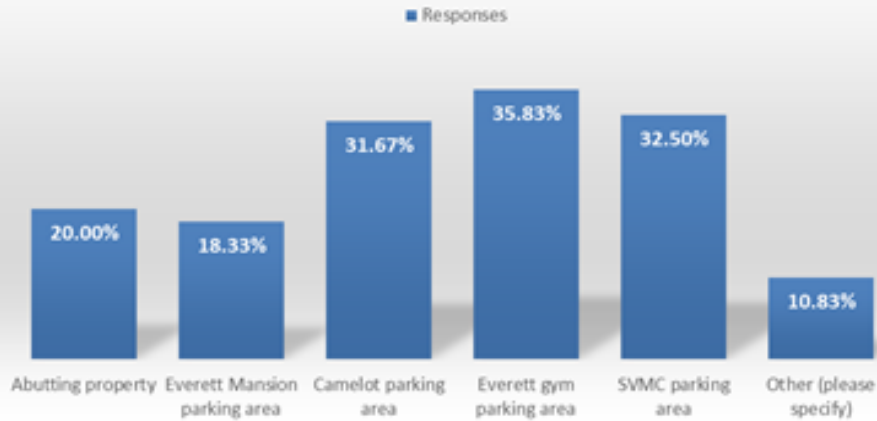
Closing Survey Questions

Respondents generally valued the proximity and accessibility of the trails as well their scenic beauty. People also appreciated that the trails are public and usable year-round. Trail users noted that the variety of trails relative to the size of the network is impressive and observed that current low use levels maintain a quiet and peaceful environment on the trails. Respondents also expressed gratitude to BATS for maintaining the trail network as well as appreciation and enthusiasm for the trails and their continuation as a community resource.

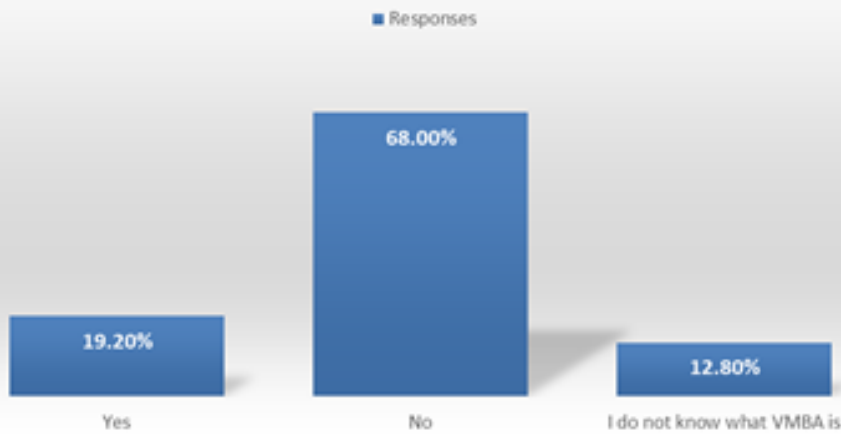
Selection of Graphed Results – full survey results are available from BATS or BCRC



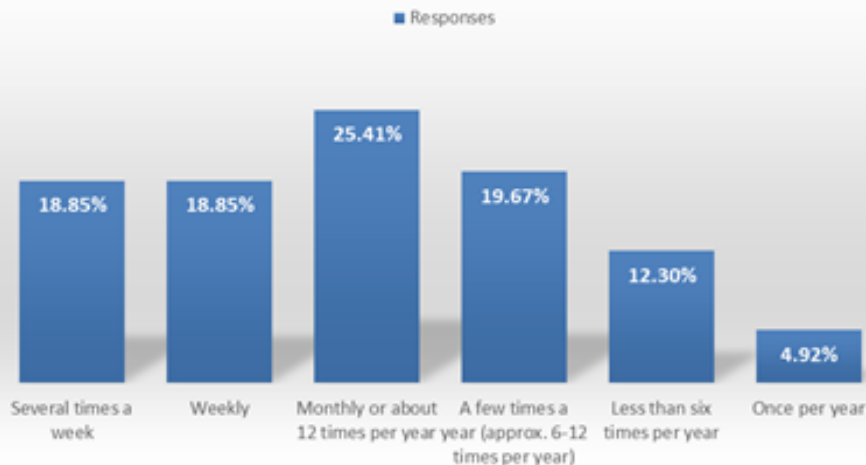
Where do you access the trails from? (Check all that apply)



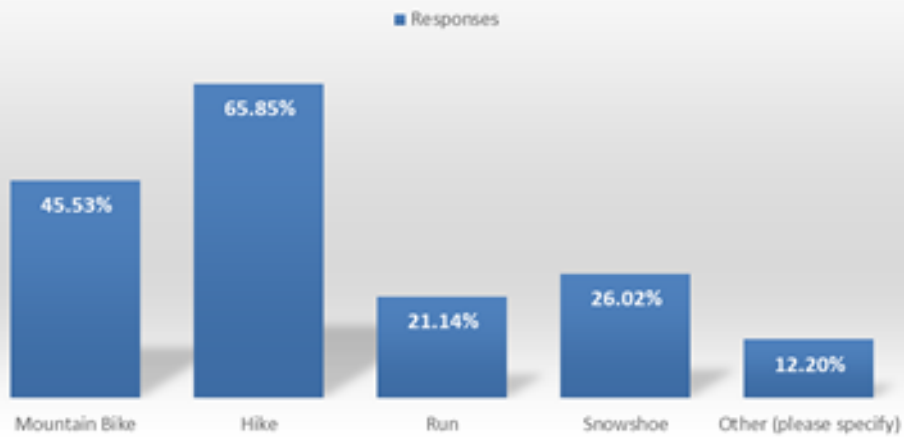
Are you a BATS member through VMBA registration?



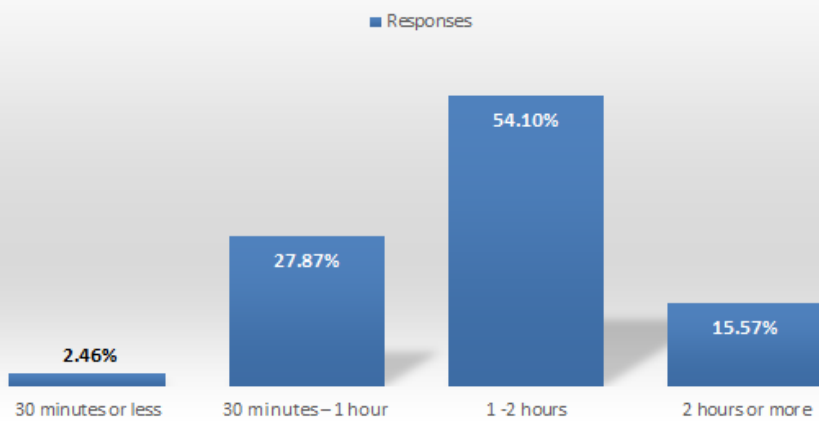
How often do you use the trails?



What activities do you do on the trails? (Check all that apply)



How much time do you spend on the trails when you visit, on average?



Management & Stakeholders

Overview

The Mount Anthony trail network is managed by the [Bennington Area Trail System \(BATS\)](#), an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization that is a chapter of the [Vermont Mountain Biking Association \(VMBA\)](#)([vmba.org](#)). BATS formed in 2015 to develop multi-use trails on and around Mount Anthony. In that same year, BATS volunteers constructed their first trail, Hops & Vines, and have since expanded the maintained trail system to include over 10 miles of trails at the base of Mount Anthony. Trails are supported by long-term land access agreements with private landowners.

BATS is managed by a nine-person Board of Directors and has approximately 75 members who pay yearly dues through VMBA. For the 2021 season, annual VMBA memberships are \$55 for individuals and \$110-140 for families, with 50% of the membership fee going directly to BATS. Maintenance and construction of the trails are done almost exclusively by a small core group of volunteers, although BATS was able to hire a part-time trail worker in the summers of 2020 and 2021 through a partnership with Prospect Mountain in Woodford.

To date, funding for BATS trail work has come from VMBA membership dues, independent donations, and annual VMBA trail development grants, which provide up to \$5,000 per project. Over the years, BATS has hosted many local events including annual “Trail Mix” season kick-offs involving local college students and town residents. BATS members also publicize group mountain bike rides throughout the warm months of the year.

SWOT Analysis

In May 2021, members of the BATS Board of Directors participated in a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis facilitated by BCRC staff to assess the current state of the BATS network. Discussion focused on the trail network itself and related management issues. The following tables and discussion summarize key findings from this assessment.

Table 3. BATS SWOT Analysis: Strengths & Weaknesses

BATS Trails SWOT Analysis – May 10, 2021	
Strengths	VMBA Partnership. BATS institutional partnership with VMBA provides basic membership and fee administration, annual grant fund access for trail work, and insurance coverage.
	Landowner Relations. Excellent relationships with landowners and neighbors. Current BATS board members react quickly to property owner concerns and mark trails that are not open to the general public.
	Trail Quality. Trails themselves are high quality and interesting on steep terrain. Size of network is sufficient to merit a day trip from Albany, NY area, though not beyond that.
	Trail Access. Good and varied access points to trails with multiple trailheads. Essentially unlimited vehicle parking and quick access to downtown Bennington. SVMC property connects downtown and Mount Anthony through Stark Street Playground.
	Leadership. Dedicated BATS Board of Directors. 9 members with varied skill sets.
	Pump Track Connector. Pump track installed at Stark Street Playground in 2019 is popular, attracts visitors to Bennington, and provides mountain bike beginners and youth with an introduction to riding at a halfway point between Mount Anthony and downtown Bennington.
Weaknesses	Volunteer-Based Endeavor. The volunteer base for trail maintenance is limited and currently at capacity. It can take several days to fix a downed tree or washout after a storm. Significant trail expansion is not possible with the existing BATS volunteer base. Core volunteers currently number 10 – 15 individuals. There is no funding to support volunteer coordination and messaging. Volunteers mainly operate individually these days and group workdays are not being organized. Public communications about the trails like general updates, volunteer opportunities, and events are sporadic. A paid trails coordinator or significantly expanded volunteer capacity is needed for trail development.
	Narrow Focus on Mountain Biking. Volunteer and leadership base is not diverse. Mostly comprised of enthusiastic mountain bikers. BATS identifies primarily as a biking organization.
	Trail Terrain. Trails lack beginner-friendly mountain bike areas due to steep terrain on Mount Anthony.
	Limited Potential for Trails Expansion. Landowner sentiments currently preclude further trail development on most northern, western, and southern areas of Mount Anthony.

Table 4. BATS SWOT Analysis: Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities	Expand Volunteer Base. There is potential to tap trail user groups beyond mountain bikers as volunteers and donors for the trail system. Mountain bike enthusiasts represent a minority of trail users. Hikers, runners, snowshoers, and wildlife interest groups can be invited to support the trails they already use. VMBA supports this approach.
	Youth Involvement. The summer youth intern partnership with Prospect Mountain has been successful for the past two seasons to pursue trail work. There may be an opportunity to expand youth involvement in trail stewardship through collaboration with schools and recreational sites including the YMCA and Lake Paran.
	Paid Position for Trail Development. If existing and potential partnerships with the Town and community organizations could be leveraged to support a paid trail coordinator position for the town/region, trail development could occur more quickly. People envision an extraordinary trail system with Mount Anthony as one hub in a town-wide or regional network. Could pursue more secure access through permanent easements.
	Beginner Trails. Room to build more beginner trails on flat SVMC land close to pump track.
	Expand Network to Nearby Sites. Additional trails could be developed at other sites, including Prospect Mountain and on Green Mountain National Forest lands on the east side of town near the White Rocks trail head and up Burgess Road.
	Public Land Ownership. BATS leadership has proposed that future public land ownership on Mount Anthony – such as for a town forest – could be part of a solution to secure public recreational access to the mountain. The Town of Bennington is not currently interested in this proposal.
Threats	Risk of Trail Access Being Revoked. The number one threat to the trails is the possibility that a landowner with trails could revoke access to their trails at any time. It is critical to prevent this with long-term land access agreements and permanent easements, proactive check-ins with and expressions of gratitude to landowners, quick response to concerns, good messaging on trail etiquette, and a cautious approach to trail development. BATS do not map existing trails where landowners are not open to public access. BATS posts where some trails are closed during hunting season. Trails are re-routed from time to time.
	Increased Trail Use as Threat. Increased popularity of the trail system is a potential threat. As trails are used more often, they require maintenance beyond what the current volunteer base can support. Also, increased trail traffic creates more opportunities for landowner conflicts.
	Landowner Changes and Future Trail Access. The Everett Estate and the Camelot Village commercial property off West Rd are facing potential changes in ownership and undefined reuse possibilities, which puts the future of trail access through these critical sites into question.
	Volunteer Burnout. Placing excessive demands or expectations on BATS volunteers could lead to burnout that would set back trail maintenance and development significantly.

The SWOT discussion revealed that BATS is functioning well, maintaining a high-quality, small-scale trail system supported by grants, donations, and institutional support through VMBA. The BATS organization benefits from having positive relationships with the private landowners. Several board members have personal relationships with landowners, which has helped the group secure user agreements; in fact, some volunteers are abutting landowners themselves.

Risk of growing trails too fast. It has been said that the most valuable asset a trail system can have is good relationships with property owners. This is especially true for mountain biking trails. Regular dialogue and quick problem resolution are critical to a successful trail system. Trail development and use are supported by **Land Use Agreements** that establish terms for public access to private properties. It takes years to develop relationships with property owners and care must be taken to avoid situations that would damage them.

At the end of 2020, Kingdom Trails lost mountain bike access to many miles of trails when three property owners, frustrated with overuse and misuse of trails on their properties by mountain bikers, revoked access permission to their lands. The affected trails were some of the most beloved in the network and provided important connections among trail nodes (see news coverage, "[Trouble in Paradise](#)" on bicycling.com). While the impact of this change at Kingdom Trails was significant, the trail network is large enough to offer alternative routes. On a smaller network, such a loss could compromise the entire trail system.

Inquiries into trail expansion and development should first assess the status of **landowner satisfaction** and concerns about existing trails. Resources must be continuously dedicated to working with property owners to anticipate and resolve areas of concern, minimize trail impacts to property owners, inform trail users of proper etiquette, and pursue land use agreements and permanent access easements where possible.

BATS also is concerned with the network becoming too popular, too fast. Heavy usage could upset landowners and stretch BATS volunteers past their capacity to effectively manage and maintain the trails. In particular, the prospect of the Everett Mansion being reused as a hospitality venue has implications for the future of the BATS network. There may be pressure to create a buffer between the Mansion and public trails, which would require developing a new north-south connector trail further west on the SVHCR property. Steep terrain west of the Mansion makes siting a new trail challenging, but the concept has support from BATS.

Although BATS is not looking to significantly expand the trail system at this time, the organization would like to enhance its management capacity to support future growth.

BATS is exploring new membership possibilities through VMBA and is interested in partnership possibilities with Prospect Mountain and the Green Mountain National Forest. BATS also would support development of a pedestrian summit trail in the future and would like to explore the potential for a funded trail management staff position in the town or region.

Three main priorities for ongoing success of trail management program emerged from the SWOT analysis:

1. Secure land access for trails and trailheads.
2. Continue to prioritize landowner relationships and communications.
3. Expand support for trail maintenance and development.

The section Development Potential provides more ideas for how to pursue these management priorities.



Intersection of Carriage Road and Everett Path

Stakeholder Groups and Abutting Interests

A number of community groups and stakeholders have a vested interest in the future of the Mount Anthony trail system. As described above, BATS has taken the lead in trail development on and around Mount Anthony. Other interested groups include the Vermont Land Trust, Southwestern Vermont Health Care Realty, Southwestern Vermont Medical Center, Mount Anthony Preservation Society, Mount Anthony Homeowners Association, and the Town of Bennington. These groups have some shared interests and some differing priorities on matters related to conservation, public access, and trail development on the mountain.

Vermont Land Trust (VLT)

In 2005, the VLT worked with Southern Vermont College (SVC) to preserve 214 acres for conservation and public recreational use. At that time the college community and members of the public used abandoned logging roads above the developed portion of the college campus as low-maintenance hiking trails. VLT now holds a perpetual conservation easement and is responsible for enforcing its terms. VLT also holds additional conservation easements on several other properties around the mountain (see Map: Land Conservation and Ownership). A number of these conserved properties have existing trails that are part of the BATS network, but many other conserved lands in the vicinity do not have trails.

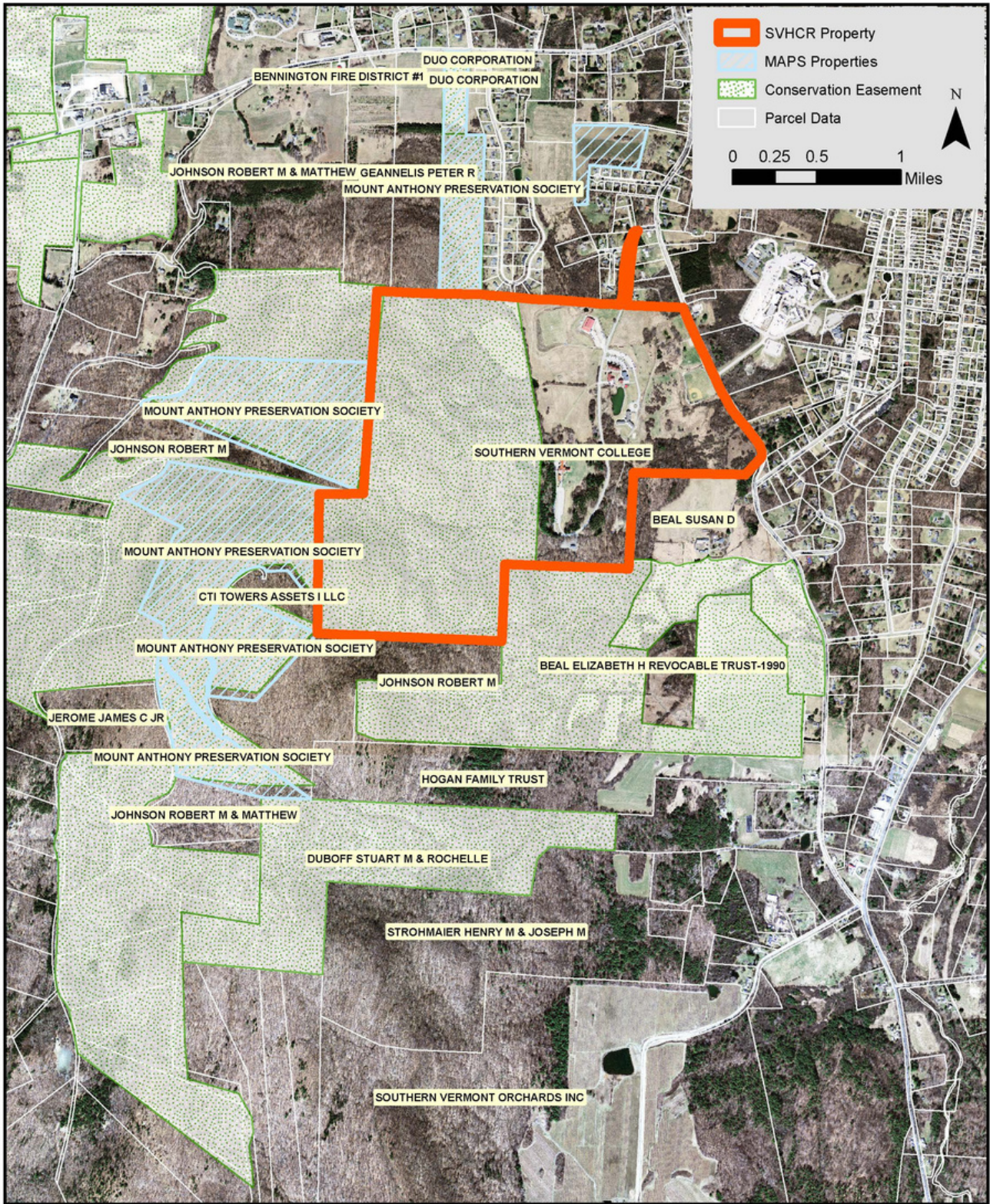
Southwestern Vermont Health Care Realty (SVHCR)

In 2020, SVHCR acquired the former SVC campus, occupying 371 acres on the eastern side of Mount Anthony. Much of the property is conserved and traversed by BATS trails and former logging roads. SVHC is exploring potential reuse of the former college campus for a mix of hospitality, institutional, and residential uses, and is committed to preserving the trail system as a local asset for the community and the regional economy.

Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC)

SVMC is a regional hospital, primary care, and specialty care facility located east of Mount Anthony across Monument Avenue from the Everett Estate property. Several trails are located on the western, wooded portion of its hospital campus, with a trailhead at the adjacent Stark Street Park. These trails provide a connection between downtown and the trails at the base of Mount Anthony. SVMC views these trails as a resource for their employees, patients, and has partnered with BATS to maintain the trails on the SVMC campus.

Mount Anthony Land Conservation and Select Ownership



Boundaries are estimates. Map produced by BCRC on 09/14/2021 for planning purposes only.

Mount Anthony Preservation Society (MAPS)

MAPS is a non-profit conservation group that owns several conserved parcels on Mount Anthony. In the early 1980s, a developer purchased and subdivided 1,535 on the mountain, intending to sell them for residential development. Concerned neighbors and citizens interested in preserving these areas as open space opposed the development plans and formed MAPS to conserve lands on the mountain. Subsequent changes to municipal land use regulations and new state environmental rules precluded residential development on upper elevations of Mount Anthony. MAPS acquired several of the subdivided properties on the mountain over the years and worked with VLT to place conservation and public access easements on them (see Map: Land Conservation and Ownership for properties owned by MAPS).

MAPS has supported some trail development for non-motorized uses and public recreation and has partnered with BATS on land access agreements to allow for trail development, maintenance, and public access to certain parcels owned by the group. However, MAPS' focus is conservation rather than public recreation. Some members of MAPS also are residents on Mount Anthony and part of the Mount Anthony Homeowners Association (see more detail below), which has opposed public access to private roads on Mount Anthony.

Mount Anthony Homeowners Association (HOA)

Several homeowners on Mount Anthony are members of an HOA that maintains Bluestone Rd, Quarry Rd, and Camp Rd as private roads. The HOA historically has objected to mountain bike use on these roads. While the HOA may be open to a small number of hikers walking on the roads, there is skepticism regarding new trail development that would provide connections to the private roads since those trails could ultimately encourage access by greater numbers of users, including mountain bikers. General wariness of trail development by this group currently limits prospects for expanding the trail network on the northern and western sides of Mount Anthony.

Town of Bennington

The Town has supported open space conservation, recreational use, and trail development around Mount Anthony for many years through land use planning and support for VLT, BATS, SVHCR, and other organizations. Bennington recently invested in improved access to outdoor recreation assets, including the BATS trails. A grant from the Vermont Community Foundation in 2021 supported installation of wayfinding signs from the downtown to key recreation access sites as well as redesign of the town's recreation webpage and the

development of photography that reflects the diversity of the Bennington community and visitors. Bennington also has been recognized by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy as a designated Appalachian Trail Community.

Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)

The BCRC is the regional planning commission for 17 member municipalities in southwestern Vermont. The organization provides technical assistance in municipal planning, environmental planning, transportation planning, and economic development. The BCRC has long supported open space and recreational development in Bennington through mapping assistance, grant writing, and municipal and special planning studies. Specifically, the BCRC has included the BATS network in its trail mapping projects and has taken the lead on preparing grant applications for trail planning and expansion at Mount Anthony. BCRC prepared this trails report as well as an associated reuse assessment for the entire Everett property.

Prospect Mountain Ski Area

Prospect Mountain is a former small alpine ski area that currently operates as a winter trail system for cross-country skiing, snow skating, and snowshoeing in Woodford, VT just 7 miles east of Bennington. More than 18 miles of trails range from beginner to expert difficulty level. The site requires visitors to purchase day and seasonal passes for access. A small Base Lodge and Ski Shop offer equipment rentals, refreshments, wood heat, and views of adjacent trails. In the summer, the lodge is available to rent for weddings and other events. The Prospect Mountain Association (PMA) non-profit that manages the site has explored the potential for additional warm weather uses of the site. In 2020 and 2021, Prospect Mountain and BATS shared a paid intern to do trail maintenance work at both networks.

Other Landowners

In addition to the SVHCR, MAPS, and other lands described above, connecting trails are found on residential and agricultural properties along West Road and Monument Avenue. A residential subdivision north of the SVHCR property also adjoins the trail system. The summit of Mount Anthony is owned by CTI Towers Assets LLC, and hosts a telecommunications tower on a 10+ acre parcel.

Development Constraints, Needs, & Potential

Future development of the trail system at Mount Anthony is limited by a number of constraints. At the same time, there is a compelling community interest in expanding public recreational use of the mountain.

Additional trail development has the potential to improve residents' quality of life and to support economic development in the region. Development of these recreational assets may occur on and around Mount Anthony, but should include other areas of the town and region as well. While some small trail systems remain compact over time and still make important contributions to the social, physical, and economic health of their communities, others expand strategically by creating connections to other trails and trail hubs. Two examples of the latter approach are described in detail under *Case Studies*.

Additional on-the-ground work is needed to fully understand the potential for expanding the trail system at Mount Anthony. Specific limitations and challenges to expansion will be discussed at this time.



Halloween Tree Trail

Constraints

The following points comprise the primary barriers to trail expansion on and around Mount Anthony.

1. **Lack of undeveloped open space.** Mount Anthony is located near the center of Bennington, the largest town in southern Vermont. With this proximity comes the fact that much of the land around the base and lower elevations of the mountain are already developed for residential, institutional, and agricultural purposes. Some large trail systems exist in remote locations characterized by undeveloped open land. In those locations it is relatively easy to develop new trails with minimal impact to existing residences, roads, or businesses. While expansion of the trail system on Mount Anthony is possible, the presence of existing development means that new trails must be sited with particular care.
2. **Landowner skepticism of public access.** Many landowners on Mount Anthony either wish to restrict public access to the mountain or are concerned about how increased access and specific uses like mountain biking or ATV use would impact their land and homes. These owners tend to perceive conservation and recreation as conflicting goals, while others view them as complementary.
3. **Management model for a small trail system.** Even with its 10+ miles of trails, the network is quite small relative to some other trail systems. This small size has implications for how the trail system should be managed. Small systems can be successfully administered by volunteers, as BATS currently operates, although volunteer-run endeavors struggle with capacity limitations and burnout. Some larger networks reach a scale where paid management positions are possible, but typically this occurs where the social and economic impacts of the trails are sufficient to support payment to access trails or through institutional or public sponsorships. The prospect for the BATS network to independently support year-round paid maintenance at any level is unlikely, according to BATS leadership.



In contrast to the BATS network, Kingdom Trails in northeast VT has more than 100 miles of trails and with year-round and seasonal employees supported by membership dues/user fees. Slate Valley Trails in Poultney has nearly 65 miles of public trails and one year-round, part-time employee supported by community sponsorships. The BATS trails operate at a scale where expansion would require additional resources beyond volunteer capacity, but requiring payment for access is not likely to be successful due to limited size of the existing network. A 10-mile trail system is generally considered too small for significant travel or paid access by mountain bike enthusiasts who are a growing tourist group sometimes willing to pay for access to large and outstanding trails.

Bridging the identified funding gap for trail expansion through community and institutional support is the mostly likely option to enable BATS to expand and handle increased maintenance needs. Community and institutional support might take the form of foundation support, annual municipal appropriations, or SVHCR sponsorship.

Needs

Based on the SWOT analysis with BATS leadership and follow-up conversations with key stakeholders, the following aspects of trail maintenance must be addressed as part of future development planning. All existing and potential stakeholders in the trail system may take a lead or offer support on the suggested actions below. SVHCR is well positioned to initiate or facilitate the proposed actions below.

1. **Secure land access and access points.** It is crucial to secure perpetual access easements for the trail system whenever possible. Additionally, it is important to review existing easements and revise them to make sure that desired uses are permitted expressly and that existing trail infrastructure may not be altered without permission.
 - a. **Recommended Action:** Review existing access easements to identify opportunities to strengthen protections for the trail system. Work with VLT to revise easements.
 - b. **Recommended Action:** An alternate trailhead parking area for the Camelot Village access point off West Road should be identified and secured.
 - c. **Recommended Action:** Develop access easements to protect the trailhead and trails at the SVHCR Field House and other trail connections on the SVHCR property (specifically the Field House trail and additional mowed paths, Carriage Rd, Hops and Vines, Farm Rd, and Three Fields).
2. **Continue to prioritize landowner relationships and communications.** BATS leadership already does an excellent job of engaging with property owners. This focus should continue and community partners should recognize this critical contribution to the trail system.
 - a. **Recommended Action:** Assist BATS in their efforts to assess the needs and concerns of landowners. Recognize the need to restrict public access to certain trails at certain times and educate the public on trail etiquette. Ensure that appreciation is extended to cooperating landowners.
3. **Expand support for trail maintenance and development.** The BATS organization has accomplished a lot in a few years with a small group of volunteers and minimal financial resources. To maintain the quality of the trails and prevent volunteer burnout, development proposals must be accompanied by ideas for expanding organizational support for BATS.

- a. **Recommended Action:** Support BATS' efforts to recruit new volunteers for both the administrative and hands-on trail work needed to sustain the trail system. Assist with fundraising and grant writing efforts.
- b. **Recommended Action:** Work with BATS to strengthen and formalize existing institutional partnerships with trail stakeholders (see discussion on *Stakeholder Groups and Abutting Interests* for more details) and to identify opportunities for new community collaborations. New opportunities might include working with the Green Mountain Club, local recreation centers, or a local running or birdwatching club.

Potential

To the extent that future development possibilities can be assessed at this time, the suggestions below list specific trail improvement ideas that may be realized within the next five years. These projects would address existing needs and threats to the trail system. Further discussion identifies broader planning and trail development that may be implemented over a 10+ year timeframe.

Possible Short-Term Trail Improvements

There are three main short-term prospects for new trail development around Mount Anthony. These ideas have general support from BATS and a number of community partners, but details for any project would need to involve negotiation with landowners.

1. **New north-south connector trail.** The possibility of new hospitality uses at the Everett Mansion raises questions about public access to a key portion of the BATS network. Public recreational trail use may be seen as inconsistent with high-end hospitality uses being considered for the Mansion. A new trail at a higher elevation than the existing trails in this area would place some topographical and vegetative buffer between recreational users and the Mansion and would preserve the critical connection between the northern and southern sections of the BATS network. This investment would fortify the critical connection that the Mansion-adjacent trails currently provide between northern and southern hubs of the BATS network. The steep topography immediately west of the Mansion complicates trail construction and might discourage use for some users, but some resolution of trail use tensions in proximity to the Mansion is considered a high priority (see Map: Potential Trail Improvements – Detail for a conceptual depiction of where this trail could be located).

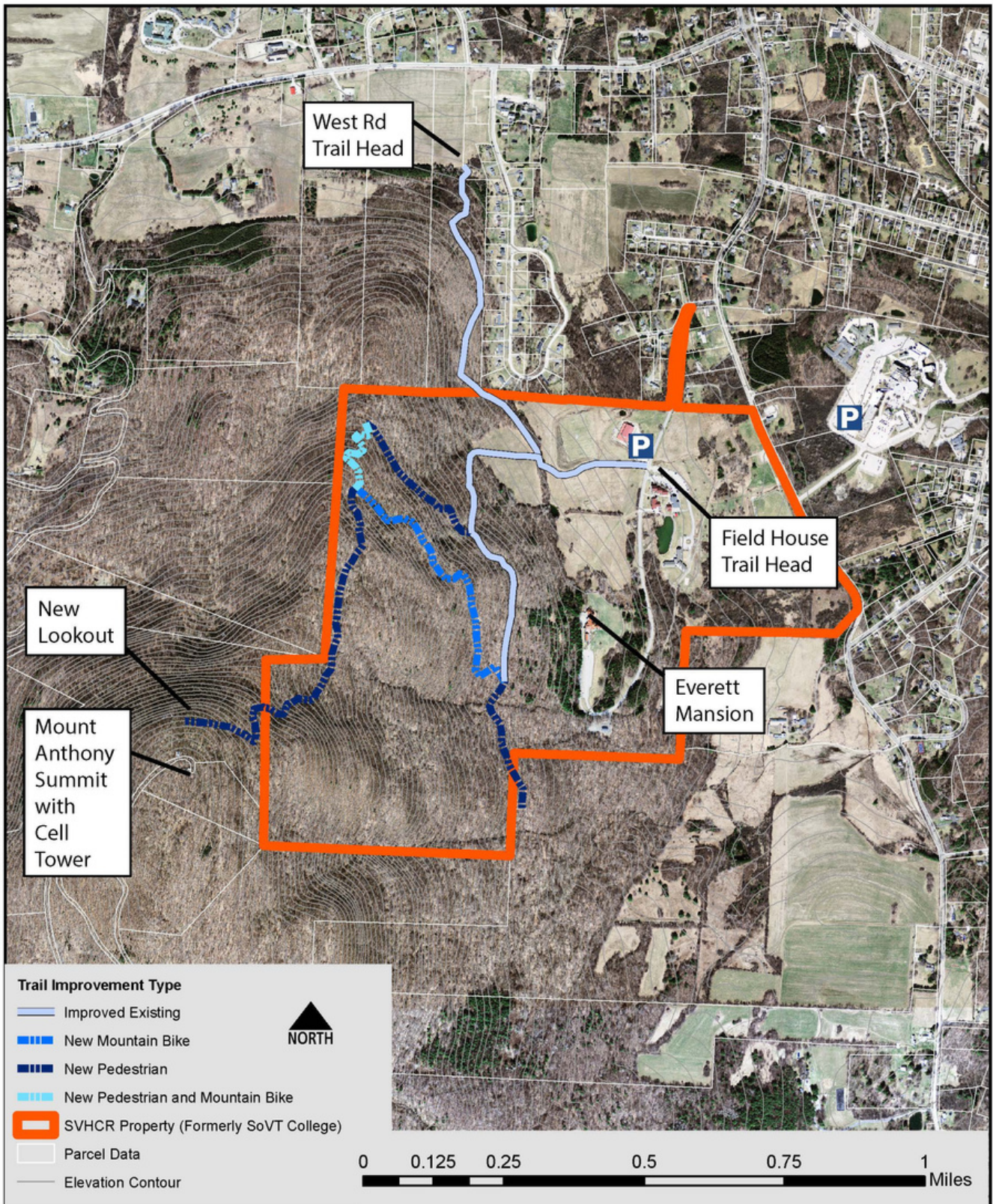
2. **Summit hike with lookout north of Valley of Vermont.** There has been discussion for some years about developing a high-quality pedestrian summit path to a lookout on the northern side of Mount Anthony. The trail would offer a route to a destination with breathtaking views of Bennington and the Valley of Vermont bordered by the Taconic and the Green Mountain Ranges. A potential challenge for this project would be reaching an agreement with MAPS, which owns land on the northern side of Mount Anthony where a path and lookout would best be located. If this proposal were to advance, it would be wise to pair construction of a new summit hike with improvements to existing trails between the West Road and Fieldhouse trailheads. For a conceptual sketch of what this option would entail, see Map: Potential Trail Improvements – Context.

3. **Create a dedicated beginner trails area.** Mount Anthony's steep terrain makes it difficult for new and young mountain bikers just learning the sport. A dedicated beginner trails close to Mount Anthony would serve the mountain bike community well by diversifying the network as a whole and welcoming future volunteers and enthusiasts to the BATS network. A potential location for these trails is on the SVMC campus southwest of the Stark Street Park pump track. Some beginner trail expansion in this area is underway and should be continued.



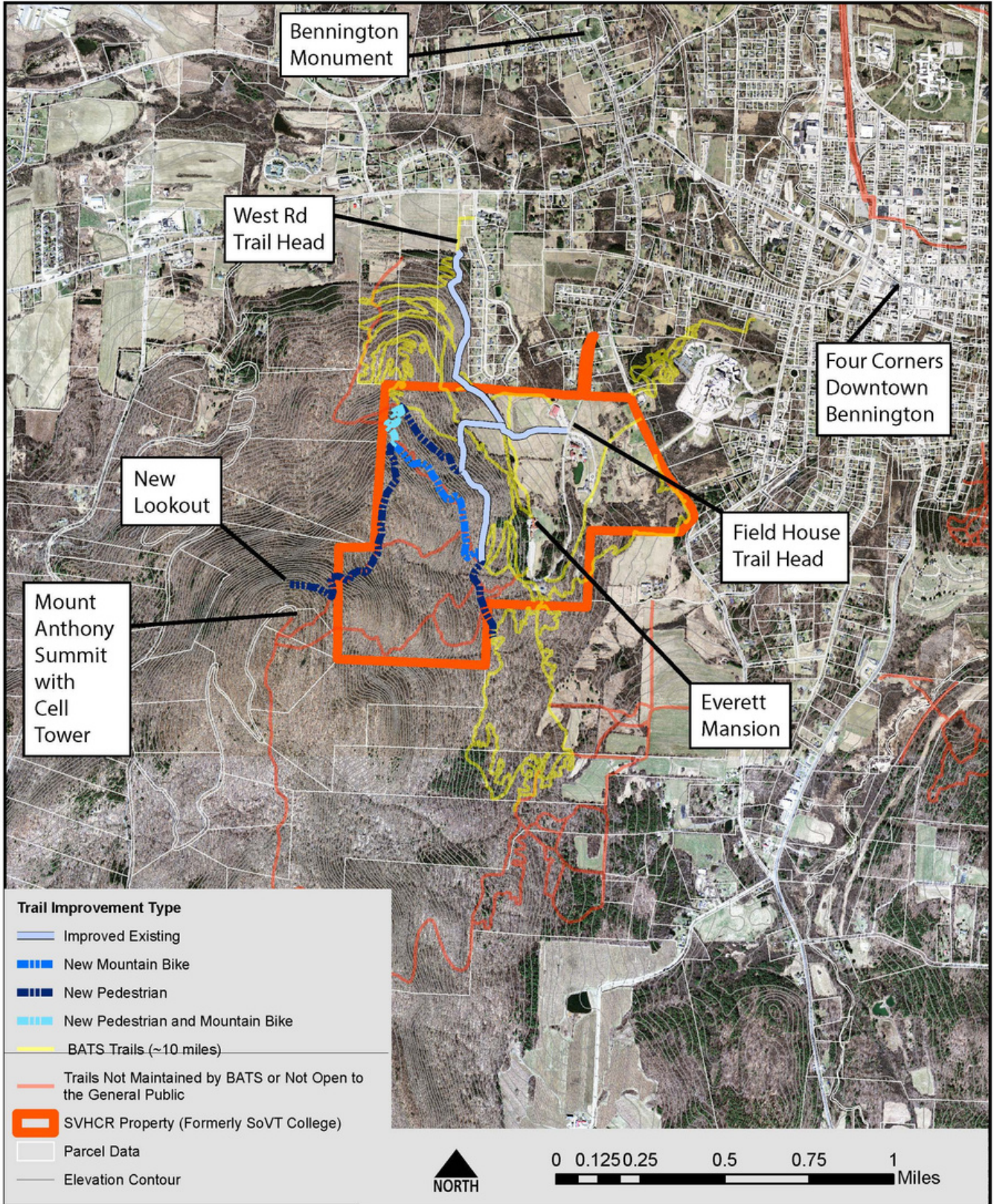
BATS Pump Track on Stark Street

Potential BATS Trail Improvements - Detail



Boundaries are estimates. Map produced by BCRC on 09/14/2021. All depictions are conceptual for planning purposes only.

Potential BATS Trail Improvements - Context



Boundaries are estimates. Map produced by BCRC on 09/14/2021. All depictions are conceptual for planning purposes only.

Longer-Term Trails Planning and Development

Comprehensive planning for trail interconnection and expansion could provide a foundation for community collaboration and action in coming years. A planning process could focus development efforts and identify concrete steps for improving connections to the trails and building more trails through a decentralized regional network.

1. **Develop safe and direct connections to existing and planned trails.** There is an extensive and growing network of trails throughout Bennington and the region. Two planned bike paths, the Bennington Rail Trail, between the downtown area and Northside Drive, and the adjacent Ninja Path that will continue to Bennington College, are scheduled for construction in 2022. A potential “Trolley Line Path” would connect Bennington to Pownal and Williamstown, MA. A statewide Velomont Trail (velomonttrail.org) is being studied to provide a north-south mountain bike trail comparable to the AT/LT. The Velomont Trail, as currently imagined, would pass along the eastern edge of southern Bennington County, but a trail to access this network from Bennington through the Green Mountains could be possible.
 - a. **Recommended Action:** Develop consistent wayfinding signs to more clearly indicate on-road connections between trails and trail networks.
 - b. **Recommended Action:** Over time, develop additional infrastructure to make on-road and off-road connections safe and inviting for a wide range of users. On-road “sharrows” and bike lanes are good options. New off-road paths and trails are possible as well to divert bicycle traffic from high-speed, heavy use roads.
2. **Identify and develop additional trails in the region to complement and relieve future pressure on the Mount Anthony trails.** Although the BATS trails are not heavily used at this time, visitation appeared to increase in 2020, and recent attention on the trails resulting from SVHCR acquisition of the former SVC campus may lead to increased use. To prevent future maintenance burdens or landowner conflicts, BATS and community partners should take steps to expand the capacity of other trails in the Bennington area to complement the BATS trails. Prospect Mountain, which already partners with BATS, has the potential to host more mountain bike trails. Additional regional trail networks such the Merck Forest trails in Rupert, the Equinox Preservation Trust Trails in Manchester, and the Northshire Area Trail System (NATS) in Dorset could be promoted along with the Bennington trails as a draw to Bennington County.
 - a. **Recommended Action:** Develop a comprehensive trail plan with BATS and community partners to identify existing and new trail areas that can absorb additional trail users and accommodate more trail infrastructure. This plan would identify possible connections between these trail areas. In addition, a comprehensive plan would study feasibility of various future funding scenarios, including research into how much physical trail infrastructure is necessary for a trail system to solicit payment for access. Grant funds are likely available for this planning work.

Case Studies of Small Trail Systems

Many New England communities have successfully developed small-scale trail networks, comparable to the BATS network at Mount Anthony, that provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Several of these trail networks have management goals, strategies, and challenges similar to those of the BATS network. The experience of two small trail systems, Pine Hill Park in Rutland, VT and the Oak Hill and Trescott Water Supply Land Trails in Hanover, New Hampshire were studied to help inform future planning for the BATS trail system. These trail systems have prioritized maintenance of existing trail infrastructure on their lands and have encouraged development of trails on nearby or abutting areas of land that create distinct hubs of trail activity in each area.

Pine Hill Park - Rutland, Vermont

Pine Hill Park (pinehillpark.org) is a 325-acre, municipally-owned recreation park in Rutland, Vermont that has a 17-mile network of trails. Many of the trails were created for mountain biking, but the Park sees multiple recreational uses in all four seasons. Pine Hill Park also is the entry point for two other small trail networks on private lands, the Carriage Trails and the Redfield Trails. An economic impact study completed in 2018 estimated that use of the Park contributed \$1.3 million annually to the local economy.

Pine Hill Park has many characteristics in common with the Bennington Area Trail, making it a good case study of the management of a small, regional trail network. The trails at Pine Hill Park are hand-built with many of them designed specifically for mountain biking. The City of Rutland owns the land, but a nonprofit organization, Pine Hill Partnership (PHP), is responsible for the maintenance and management of the trail system. Like BATS, PHP is an all-volunteer organization with a Board of Directors that is funded primarily through membership dues and donations. PHP does not receive any money from the City of Rutland, but occasionally receives grants—most recently a VT FPR Recreation Trail Program grant—with support from the City. PHP is not a chapter of the Vermont Mountain Biking Association (VMBA), but has its own membership system comprised of about 90 members that pay dues. Like BATS, PHP has a very small group of dedicated core volunteers who perform most of the upkeep of the trails. To handle large maintenance projects, PHP also has organized community volunteer workdays along the trails and worked with groups including Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) and Rutland High School's Year-End Studies Program.

PHP and BATS also have similar management challenges and concerns. In 2020, use of Pine Hill Park increased significantly, and PHP volunteers observed more trail erosion as a result. Management challenges were further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which forced postponement or cancellation of many of the group volunteer events typically relied on for large maintenance projects. In a typical year, approximately 2,200-2,700 volunteer hours are contributed to the maintenance of the Park, but during the pandemic year of 2020 that number was closer to 500. With such a small group of core volunteers, PHP is not looking to expand the trail system and is instead focused on maintaining existing trails. One expansion effort that PHP is tangentially involved with is the Velomont Trail Project which aims to connect nineteen existing trail networks throughout the state into a continuous end-to-end mountain biking trail. The Redfield and Carriage Trails (5 miles) are on private property adjacent to the Park, so PHP must also manage property owner concerns and maintain good relationships to preserve access to these trails.

Although popular with mountain bikers, Pine Hill Park is not exclusively a mountain biking park, and actually sees slightly more foot traffic than biking use throughout the year. The Park has three trails that are exclusively for pedestrians, and plenty of hikers and runners use the mountain biking trails as well. Although many of the one-time volunteers that participate in workdays are mountain bikers, PHP was founded by a mix of bikers, hikers, and runners, and the board of directors has strived to maintain a balance.



Official PHP Trail Map

Oak Hill and Trescott Water Supply Lands - Hanover, New Hampshire

Oak Hill Trails

The Oak Hill Trails and Trescott Water Supply Lands are two distinct but connected networks of trails located next to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. The two networks share a northwestern border that includes several connector trails between the two.

Oak Hill (outdoors.dartmouth.edu/activities/mtn_biking) includes 10-12 miles of trails owned by Dartmouth College and managed by the Dartmouth Outdoor Programs Office. The Oak Hill trails were initially constructed and managed as a downhill skiing area and are now used as the Division I cross-country skiing course for the College during the winter months.

In the warmer months, the trails are primarily used by mountain bikers and local residents as a community recreational resource. Some of the trails are unofficial, having been created by mountain bikers several years ago without authorization from the College.

Although the trails are officially managed by the Outdoor Programs Office, the staff have recently begun using local volunteers and students for small trail maintenance projects. Funding for the trails, as well as other campus lands comes from the College, endowed funding, and revenue from the Dartmouth Cross Country Ski Center. Similar to BATS and Pine Hill Park, the Oak Hill management strategy is focused on maintaining and improving existing trails rather than expansion because of the limited amount of funds available and the small volunteer labor force. Like many trails throughout the country, the Oak Hill trails saw increased use during 2020 which has contributed to erosion exacerbated by persistent use of the trails during the muddy season.

The Oak Hill trails benefit from widespread community appreciation and a culture of valuing outdoor recreation in Hanover. The Outdoor Programs Office also has a good relationship with adjacent property owners, which include the Trescott Water Supply Lands and the Storrs Pond Recreation Area, an outdoor recreation nonprofit organization.

Trescott Water Supply Lands

The Trescott Water Supply trail network (hanoverconservancy.org/lands/trescott) exists on a 1400-acre semi-public property that serves as the watershed for two reservoirs. The land is an active logging operation managed by the Trescott Company which is owned jointly by the Town of Hanover and Dartmouth College. A water filtration plant constructed in 2009 led to the land being opened to the public for recreation in 2016. When the property was opened to the public, several new trails were built to connect the logging roads; however, the land still is actively logged and there are several roads that are not publicly accessible. Most of the trails are mixed-use; the Flow Trail is exclusively for mountain biking, but the rest of the trails also are used for hiking, running, and cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. The trails are overseen by the Trescott Committee, which is made up of representatives from the Town, the College, the Hanover Conservancy, and residents of surrounding neighborhoods.

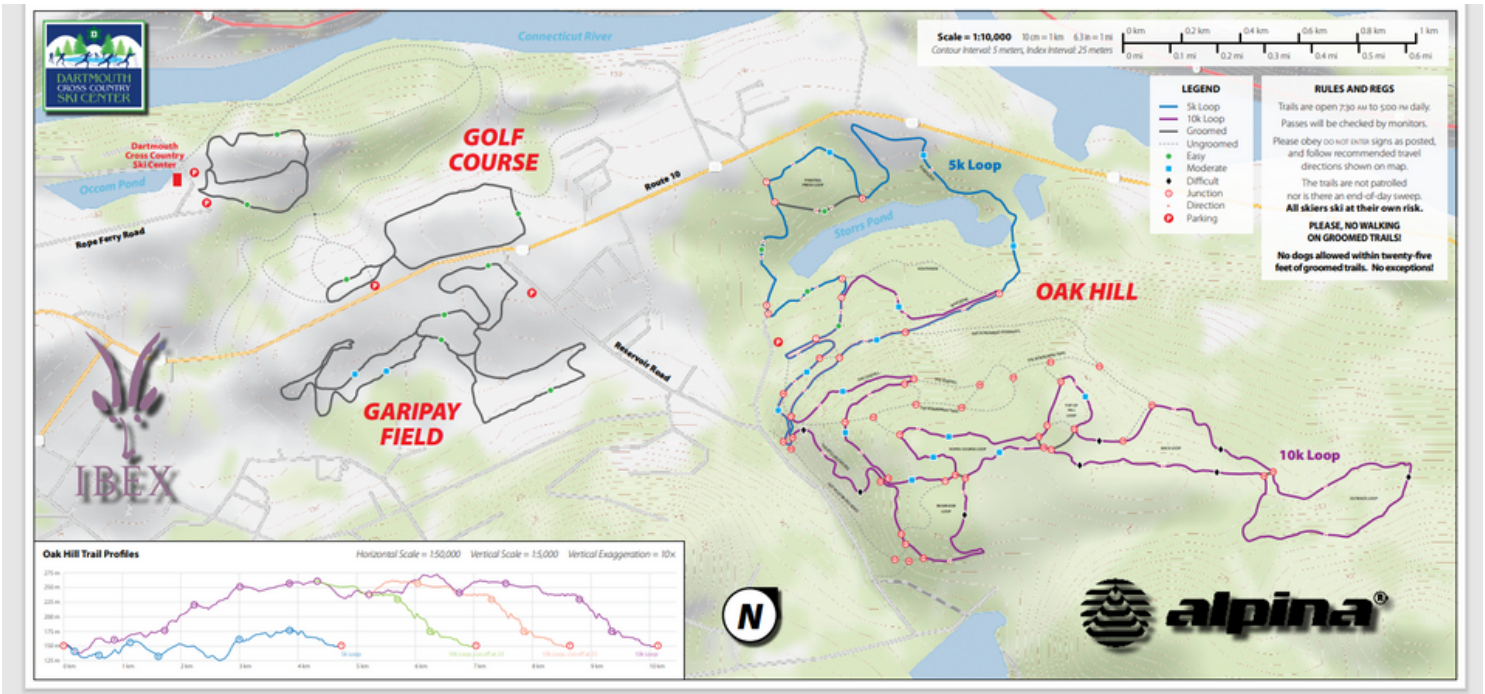
The nine miles of trails that existed when the land first opened to the public in 2016 has expanded to 16 miles, with an end goal of a network of 20-25 miles of trails. The Trescott trails have steadily increased in popularity since opening, largely due to improved signs and maps throughout the network, the prevalence of ride tracking/recording applications, and the listing of the Trescott Trails on various trail finding websites.

Shortly after opening the land, the Committee released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a comprehensive trail plan that would help guide the management and future development of the network. The Committee hired Sinuosity, a Vermont-based trail design and construction company to complete the plan. Since 2018, the Committee has been working to build out the trail network and implement the trail plan.

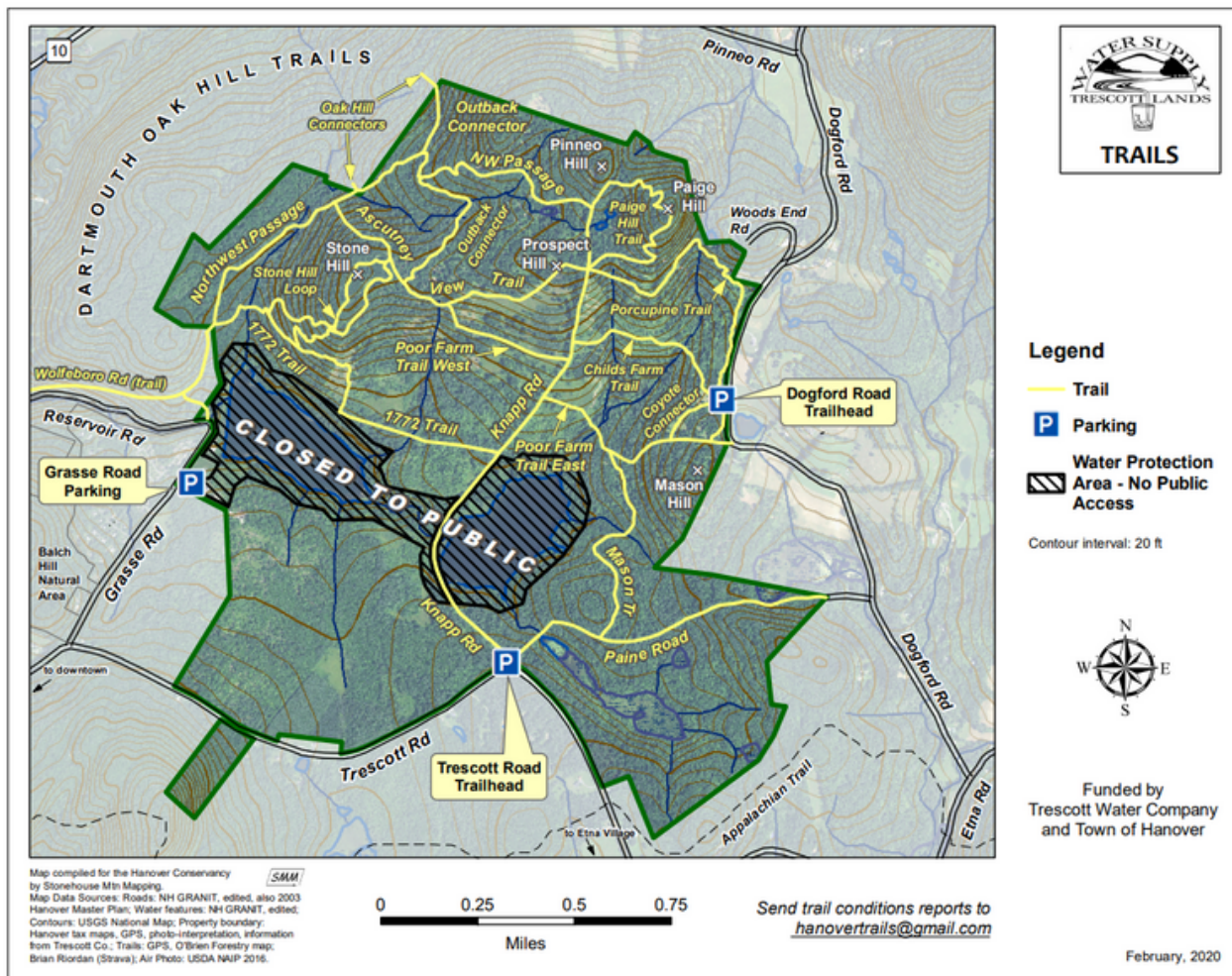
Most of the trail planning and build-out work was funded by the Trescott Company which generates revenue from its logging operation, but the Committee also recently received a Recreation Trail Program (RTP) Grant that will fund the construction of an additional three miles of trails that will be a mix of hand-built and machine-built trails. The Committee has an estimated \$3000 annual budget for regular trail management, and they frequently collaborate with the Upper Valley Trail Alliance on sharing volunteer labor and materials.

Like BATS, the Trescott Committee has a very small group of core volunteers, with two people on the Committee being responsible for trail maintenance. When a significant project needs to be completed, the Committee will occasionally put out a call for public assistance, which may generate as many as ten volunteers. The Committee also relies on volunteers for mowing the trails. Like BATS, the Trescott trails have several areas of open fields that need to be mowed during the warm months, especially during tick season. Reliance on volunteers to mow the fields is not an ideal long-term solution for the Committee, but currently neither the Town nor the College is willing to take on the task.

Like BATS, the Trescott Committee has had to cooperate with nearby landowners and establish positive relationships to successfully manage the trails. As previously mentioned, Oak Hill is one of the adjacent properties; others include the Appalachian Trail Corridor (ATC) and various residences. The Committee has established a relationship with the ATC but that organization has resisted development of connector trails between the two, citing concerns about through-hiker confusion. The Committee has a positive relationship with private landowners and recently received permission from one of the landowners to build a portion of a trail on their property.



Official Oak Hill Trails Map



Official Trescott Water Supply Lands Trail Map

Key Takeaways

Pine Hill Park, Oak Hill, and Trescott are small trail networks that have significant recreational value for their surrounding communities. They are managed by small, dedicated groups of volunteers, although not without some challenges. Crucial elements for successful management include maintaining good relationships with landowners, strategic utilization of available funding resources, volunteers, and institutional partners, and a focus on realistic trail development goals that take the limited management capacity of the organization into account.

Table 5: Other Similar Trail Networks in the Northeast

Trail Name	Location	Uses	Comments
Camden Snow Bowl	Camden, ME	Mountain biking, skiing, hiking	Large ski area and event venue that offers many types of outdoor recreation.
Gurney Lane	Queensbury, NY	Mountain biking, hiking	150-acre recreation area in the Adirondacks that includes a trail system, pool, basketball court, pond, picnic area, and concession stand.
Bethel Village Trails	Bethel, ME	Biking, hiking	Series of short walking and biking trails in and around Bethel, ME.
Stonewall Farm	Keane, NH	Biking, hiking	Series of hiking and biking trails on a 120+ acre educational farm.
Kennedy Park	Lenox, MA	Mountain biking, hiking, cross-country skiing	500-acre park owned and managed by the Town of Lenox, MA.

Conclusion

The BATS trail network is an outstanding asset for the Bennington community and region, consisting of over 10 miles of high quality and diverse single-track trails and mowed pathways through fields that offer spectacular views of southern Vermont. Interestingly, some of the network's most compelling qualities – its proximity to population centers and downtown Bennington, successful volunteer management structure, and attractiveness to residents and visitors – also present limitations to trail use and expansion. As public interest in developing the trail network and leveraging it for economic growth and tourism rises, caution must be exercised to balance these interests with the constraints presented by private landownership, existing development on Mount Anthony, and the limitations of the current volunteer trail management model.

This preliminary trails report has outlined insights about the trail system and specific actions that can strengthen and develop the trails. As the major and most central property owner in the BATS network, SVHCR is well positioned to lead or facilitate the proposed actions below in consultation with BATS and other trail stakeholders. Identified priorities are as follows:

1. **Secure existing trails and access points.**

- Secure a new parking area and trailhead near Camelot Village off Route 9/West Rd and improve the Fieldhouse trailhead on SVHCR campus.
- Develop easements to protect existing trails on the SVHCR property, namely the various mowed path trails north of the Mansion (Fieldhouse trail, Carriage Road, and more unnamed), and critical connecting trails on southern and eastern portions of the campus (Hops and Vines, Farm Road, and Three Fields).
- Review existing conservation easement for the western portion of the SVHCR property to strengthen protections for desired recreational uses and existing trails.

2. **Improve the financial and managerial sustainability of the trails system.**

- Volunteer capacity at the BATS organization is limited and additional support for managing and investing in the trail system is required. Options to expand financial support may include increasing BATS memberships or soliciting more donations to the organization. For significant development of the trail system, a paid trail coordinator position is likely needed through sponsorship from local institutions, businesses, or the municipality, as is done at Slate Valley Trails in Poultney. Sharing a paid coordinator with another organization (ex: Prospect Mountain) would make this option more feasible.
- Consult with BATS to identify the best ways to support their administrative and trail maintenance work.

3. **Strategically expand trails.**

- A new north-south connector trail west of the Mansion on the SVHCR property could help alleviate concerns about reuse of the Mansion.
- A pedestrian summit trail leading to a north-facing lookout site is highly desired by the community and BATS supports its development. Siting is complicated by fractured land ownership on the northern portion of Mount Anthony, but discussions are underway with a key property owner, MAPS, to identify a viable location for a lookout and hike.
- Support SVMC and BATS in their efforts to develop a relatively flat dedicated beginner trails area for mountain bikers on SVMC lands.
- Over a longer period of time, new connections and improved connections between the BATS trails to downtown Bennington and critical access points in the community should be further developed.

4. **Pursue studies to support trail development.**

- A comprehensive plan would build on the findings of this preliminary report by working more closely with a range of stakeholders, identifying specific areas for new trail development and linkages, and exploring the feasibility of various future funding, maintenance structures, and trail expansion scenarios. Grant funding can likely support such plan development.
- An economic impact study can estimate local spending generated by the trails. Studies of trail use levels involving trail counters, parking lot counts, and user surveys can show the level and range of use of the trails, which indicates their value and where trail investments can be made most strategically. Grant funding can support these efforts.



View from Everett Path