

Successful Outdoor Recreation Projects in the Northern Forest

Case Studies and Key Takeaways

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Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary3
- II. How to Use this Document4
- III. Introduction & Background5
- V. Case Studies.....8
 - Map.....8
 - a. Maine9
 - i. Katahdin Gear Library: Municipal model gear lending.....9
 - ii. Western Maine Recovery Outings: Outdoor recreation as a healing tool.....14
 - iii. Buck’s Ledge Community Forest: Protecting community landscape 19
 - b. New Hampshire27
 - i. Coös Cycling Club: Grassroots trail building.....27
 - ii. Mill City Park at Franklin Falls: Recreation alongside economic revitalization33
 - c. Vermont.....39
 - i. Ascutney Ski Area: Saving a ski town identity39
 - ii. CRAG-VT: Reclaiming the famous Bolton Dome.....45
 - d. New York50
 - i. Elizabethtown Trail Center: Connecting grassroots trails to a community hub50
 - ii. Dewey Mountain: Sustaining long-term community outdoor recreation55
- VI. Summary Findings & Key Takeaways61
- VII. Resources Guide64
- VIII. Conclusion69
- IX. References.....69

Executive Summary

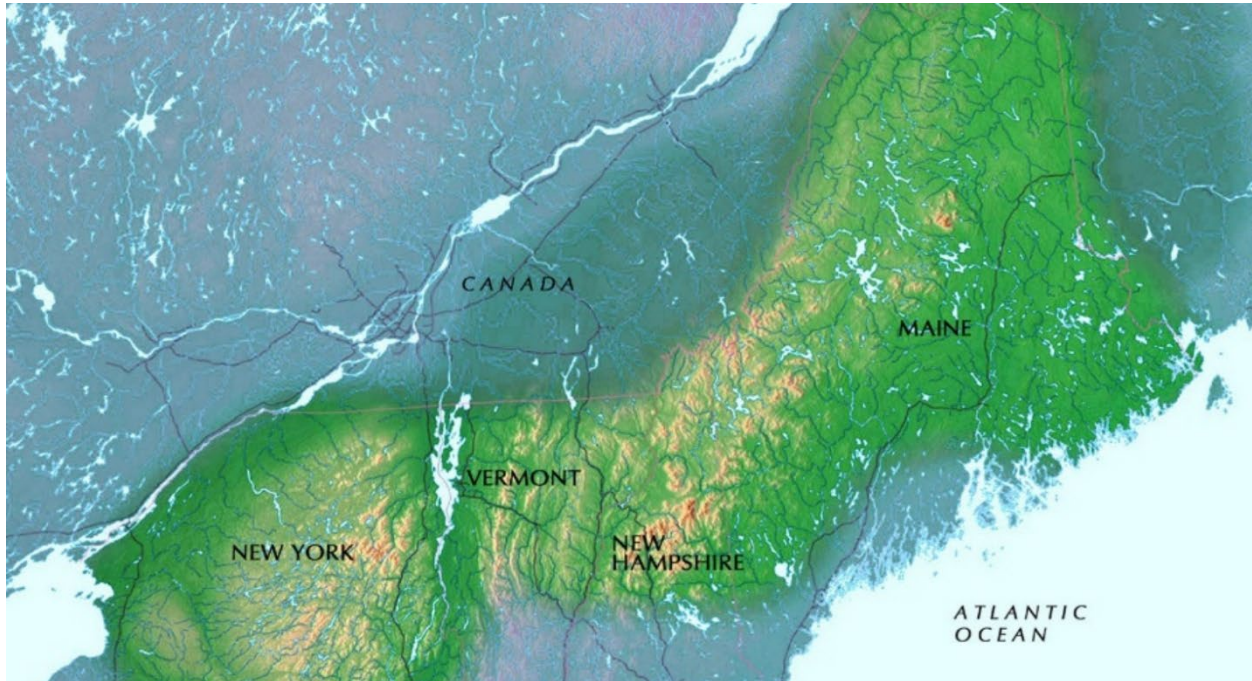


Figure 1. Image of the Northern Forest region.

Outdoor recreation is an expanding and critical tool for enhancing health and wellness, promoting economic development, and fostering environmental stewardship throughout the Northern Forest region. Recognizing the need for more inspiring storytelling of outdoor recreation in this region, this report compiles nine case studies from across Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Each case study tells a unique story, from lending gear alongside a local library in Maine to building a whitewater park as part of broader city revitalization in New Hampshire.

This report highlights the catalyst, planning process, funding approaches, and impact behind these projects. It also identifies common themes and challenges faced across initiatives, from trust-building to youth engagement and challenges like capacity limitations and weather delays. The aim is to not only inform but also inspire, paving the way for more recreation initiatives. Next steps include receiving feedback on what would be most useful and necessary in a step-by-step guide for creating an outdoor recreation project, to inform the development of a potential future toolkit.

As the field of outdoor recreation grows, these stories serve as valuable examples of how communities can activate local assets, build meaningful partnerships, and create long-term value through recreation.


We hope these stories inspire new ideas and promote engagement with existing assets.

^ How to Use this Document

This report is designed to highlight real examples of outdoor recreation projects across the Northern Forest region and showcase how rural communities are planning, funding, and implementing these projects to strengthen local economies, improve quality of life, and foster a sense of place.

Navigate to... 

- **Introduction & Background** to learn more about the Northern Forest Center and the *Outdoor Recreation Symposium* it co-hosted with the Northern Border Regional Commission in 2024.
 - **Case Studies** to explore project examples from a state, region, or topic of interest.
 - **Summary Findings & Key Takeaways** to understand some of the deeper values that made these projects successful, or how common challenges were overcome.
 - **Resources Guide** to access consolidated tools and materials to aid in starting an outdoor recreation project.
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What's Inside... 

- **Nine Case Studies** that tell the stories of successful outdoor recreation initiatives.
 - **Project Details** of origin and catalyst, community context and vision, planning and implementation process, partnerships, funding strategies, challenges, and overall outcomes.
 - **Key Takeaways** and lessons from across the region.
 - **Resources** to guide further research or information regarding outdoor recreation implementation.
-

Ways to Use... 

- **Inspiration:** See what communities like yours have been able to implement.
- **Replication:** Identify key approaches, models, or lessons learned that could be used in your community.
- **Advocacy:** Share stories with decision-makers to build support.
- **Planning:** Use resources as a starting point for grant applications, funding approaches, or partnerships.

Introduction & Background

The **Northern Forest Center** is an innovation and investment partner working across Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. The Center contributes ideas, support, and expertise to communities strengthening economic opportunity and environmental resiliency across the 30-million-acre Northern Forest. Founded in 1997 to address persistent challenges facing the forest economy and forest-dependent communities, the Center has evolved into a rural development hub partnering with businesses, communities, and non-profits to increase the vitality of the region's communities and diversification of its economy. The Center's work is guided by three primary strategies:

1. Strengthen Rural Communities
2. Diversify and Grow Forest-Based Businesses
3. Deepen Forest Stewardship

Since 2005, the Center has helped create 7,900 jobs, secure or leverage \$244,000,000 into the region, and conserve 258,773 acres for community benefit, establishing itself as a regional partner of choice for communities seeking to co-develop economic revitalization strategies.

In line with its mission, the Center co-hosted the *Northern Forest Outdoor Recreation Symposium* with the Northern Border Regional Commission in May 2024, bringing together more than 150 people from the region actively involved in creating a sustainable outdoor recreation economy. The event agenda was guided by a steering committee that included members of state outdoor recreation offices, the outdoor recreation industry, and others to ensure that it would speak to the current and pressing issues facing the sector today.

- Kelly Ault, [Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance](#)
- Stephanie Bertaina, [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)
- Marina Bowie, [Northern Border Regional Commission](#)
- Jackie Dagger, [Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economy Collaborative](#)
- Laura DiBetta, [NYS Department of Environmental Conservation](#)
- Rich Grogan, former Executive Director, [Northern Border Regional Commission](#)
- Jenny Kordick, [Maine Outdoor Brands](#)

- Janel Lawton, [NH Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry Development](#)
- Carolann Ouellette, [Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation](#)
- Tyler Ray, [Granite Outdoor Alliance](#)
- Denise Vallee, former Town Manager of [Gorham, NH](#)

In one of the event's breakout sessions, a sub-group focused on Community Action hatched the idea of a "scalable community outdoor recreation design and planning guide" (among other initiatives) that would include specific steps for delivering projects, regional success stories, and one-on-one training. The Center hosted a student from the *UNH Sustainability Institute* Sustainability Fellowship for the summer of 2025 to focus on highlighting success stories and laying the foundation for said guide. In May, Caleigh Mullins, a UNH student studying Environmental Engineering, joined the Center to work on bringing this project to life.

The deliverables identified for the Fellow's project included in-depth case studies of successful outdoor recreation projects in the region, including information such as, but not limited to:

- The catalyst that led the organization or municipality to pursue the project
- The planning and public input process
- How the project was financed
- How partnerships may have helped advance the project
- Any data on economic and/or health benefits to the community since project inception
- A summary report of key findings identified in the case studies

Methodology

To begin the process, we interviewed Center staff involved in outdoor recreation projects across the Northern Forest to note projects that stood out as models. Projects were selected to check as many of the following boxes as possible:

- At least two stories per Northern Forest state
- Community-driven
- Involving community input
- Includes physical recreation assets
- Utilized some outside capacity or partnerships
- Involves elements of forest stewardship
- Finished product serves residents and visitors
- Generates economic activity
- Involves an aspect to limit barriers and increase participation

After further researching noted projects, we conducted interviews with stakeholders to learn more about the project and guide case study development. We then analyzed commonalities and trends within the case studies to form a list of key takeaways and resources for others to use.

Case Studies

Map

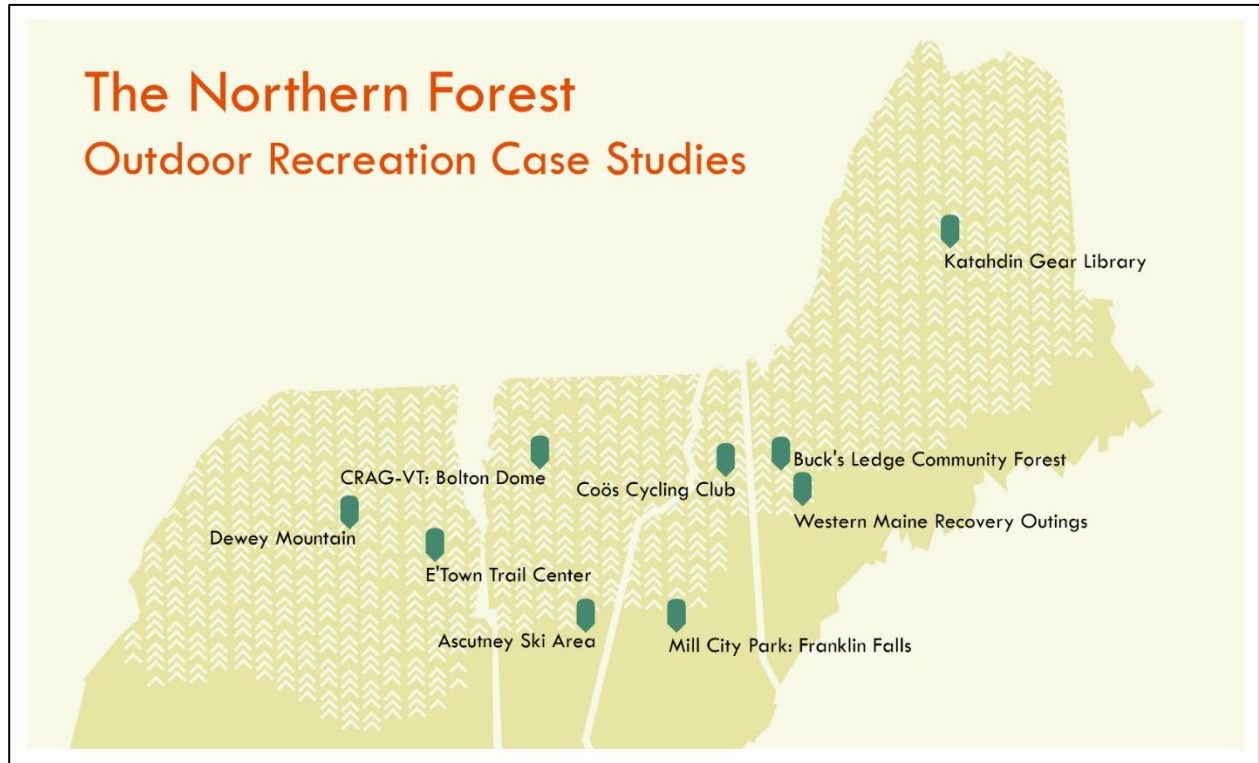


Figure 2. Map of the nine case studies selected in this report.

Maine:



Katahdin Gear Library

Summary:

Katahdin Gear Library (KGL), based in Millinocket, Maine, is a community-driven outdoor gear lending library and community hub that launched in 2018. Starting from a partnership between the *Outdoor Sport Institute* (OSI) and the *Millinocket Memorial Library* (MML), the gear library aims to reduce barriers to outdoor recreation by offering free or low-cost access to gear. By building a culture of community vitality around outdoor adventure, KGL serves as a successful example of community-driven outdoor recreation efforts.

Background and Catalyst:

In 2016-2017, OSI operated a statewide gear rental program, loaning equipment fleets to organizations across Maine. While successful in reach, the model became logistically unsustainable at this scale. As OSI began concentrating efforts in Millinocket, an area transitioning from a paper mill economy to a more diverse and recreation-based economy, MML's then-director, Matt Delaney, approached OSI with the idea to loan equipment directly from the library, just like books. The goal was to eliminate financial and logistical barriers (like the cost, storage, or transportation of equipment) that prevent individuals from accessing the outdoors. In a town facing economic and population decline after mill closures, outdoor recreation became a tool for revitalization, which also brought an increase in seasonal and second-home ownership. By significantly reducing barriers to outdoor access for residents, the library encourages individuals to explore outdoor recreation, without the financial burden of purchasing and maintaining equipment, promoting resident vitality and encouraging the local community to engage with their public lands close to home.

Mobilization and Vision:

MML's vision was to be a vibrant community center of resources, creativity, and exploration, aiming to foster a healthy and connected Katahdin Region, which aligned well with OSI's mission to empower active, resilient outdoor communities. In 2016, the municipal library reestablished itself as a nonprofit distinct from the Town, in efforts to be

a more active community hub. OSI leaders acknowledged the library excelling as a community space, and rather than replicate efforts, the gear library developed as a part of MML's transformation. OSI began hosting 'pilot runs.' During this pilot phase, OSI used its existing gear fleets to loan equipment to the library for them to lend out seasonally.

Planning and Implementation:

KGL was officially launched in 2018 as a joint program of OSI and MML, operating out of the basement of MML. In 2019, OSI ended its statewide lending program, selling off excess gear and putting the remainder into the new gear library. MML and OSI staff ran the KGL, but there were no dedicated staff for the first several years.

KGL gradually expanded as community support grew, and in 2021, OSI interns helped draft a business plan to guide their operations more professionally. Also in 2021, a local businessman offered them space in a building he was renovating; they moved there in 2022 with future intentions to move into a larger space across the street. Since 2023, a full-time manager has overseen all KGL operations. Supported by teen interns and volunteers, the manager handles all organizational tasks and staff oversight.



Figure 3. Image of a group photo outside the KGL building. ([source](#))

The library-based lending model allows anyone with an MML library card to rent equipment, free for 24 hours, with discounted rates thereafter. Since its implementation, the program has evolved to include access to free gear rentals with the presence of other municipal library cards from the region, including East Millinocket Public Library, Veterans' Memorial Library, Sherman Public Library, and Katahdin Public Library. Non-residents and visitors can also access gear rentals for competitively low prices, with revenue helping

support organizational operations. Aside from gear renting, KGL also serves as a community meeting place for various outdoor recreation programs.

Financing and Partnerships:

KGL's operations are funded through a mix of sources, including:

- **Grants:** Early formation was made possible largely from seed grants acquired by MML. OSI now continues to directly acquire grant funding, which is its main form of funding to support ongoing efforts.
- **Community Donations:** Early on, KGL received a portion of its funding via donations to the library. Donations now go directly to OSI through fundraising or their *Donations* tab on the website, accounting for 10-15% of funding.
- **Operating Revenue:** The income from rental equipment or retail goes back into KGL's operating costs, making up less than 5% of funding.

Initial gear library funding was primarily through grants and donations to MML. Most of the gear came from OSI's previous statewide effort. Replacements and repairs, along with operating costs such as rent and software, are still largely covered by grants and community donations. A notable success includes replacing their bike fleet through a federal grant this past year.

While OSI's main partner in creating and running the gear library has consistently been MML, other partnerships include:

- **Local Schools:** Collaborate through youth programming and outdoor recreation education
- **Volunteers and Donors:** Contribute time, funding, and support
- **Katahdin Region Outdoor Collective:** A regional collaboration of nonprofits, schools, and government entities in the Katahdin Collaborative Network promoting youth outdoor engagement

👉 Economic and Social Impact:

KGL supports Millinocket's broader economic shift towards recreation by drawing attention to the Katahdin region and improving access for residents. By offering internships and volunteer experiences, the gear library supports local career development in outdoor recreation, benefiting long-term residents and economic sustainability.

KGL reflects OSI and MML's broader vision to be a vibrant community center, fostering a healthy and connected Katahdin Region. Over time, OSI director Mike Smith noted an observation of local engagement increasing significantly, with more kids hanging out after school or meeting for a bike ride, along with families and visitors renting gear and participating in programs that use KGL as a meeting place.

KGL empowers residents to explore nearby trails, lakes, and woods without needing to invest in expensive gear. For example, the mountain biking trails behind the local school became more accessible thanks to KGL, allowing those who don't own a bike to get out on the trails.

🌱 Sustainability and Stewardship:

KGL encourages responsible outdoor exploration through access to proper gear and educational programming. As outdoor recreation grows in a community, appreciation of these natural assets builds strong stewardship values. KGL also promotes social sustainability by fostering community connections.

Within the model, KGL maintains sustainability by understanding its scope limitations. When the statewide initiative wasn't proving successful for OSI, they shifted to a community-based model. Importantly, OSI leaders understand that sustainability is not a fixed endpoint, but a continuous and evolving process. Rather than declaring 'we've achieved sustainability,' they recognize it as a dynamic commitment, requiring continuous response to environmental, social, or financial changes. Beyond acquiring gear, a sustainable model must account for storage, repairs, replacements, and insurance, all of which can evolve. KGL's success stems from acknowledging these complexities and staying rooted in community needs.



Figure 4. Image of bike work at KGL.

([source](#))

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

While ultimately successful in its efforts, KGL has not been immune to challenges. With complex legal needs, insurance policies, and equipment management, logistics were initially more complicated than anticipated. Mike Smith, the executive director of OSI, reflected, “Getting the equipment is the easy part- it's everything else that takes a lot of planning.” KGL acknowledges that gear lending can prove difficult, since giving out gear leads to natural wear and tear. They remain reliant on community support and donations to fund upkeep of equipment, which is why fostering community pride and appreciation has been critical to success.

A piece of advice from Executive Director of OSI, Mike Smith:

“Sustainability or resilience of this type of initiative is not a place you arrive; it's a process you're constantly involved in.”

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

The Katahdin Gear Library showcases how outdoor access can be transformed, encouraging broad participation by reducing barriers. By demonstrating how public institutions like libraries can expand their roles to become hubs for community, opportunity, and well-being, KGL proves itself as a model for successful gear lending. Some of their *Keys to Success* include:

- **Leveraging existing community assets**
 - By launching in an already trusted and accessible community hub, the program was able to build momentum without needing a new facility or major capital investment.
- **Empowering community vitality**
 - By focusing efforts on a community level, KGL harnessed local connections and shared spirit to support the project, evident in one resident’s offer of a building for KGL to rent in downtown Millinocket.
- **Addressing outdoor recreation barriers**
 - By tackling the most common barriers to outdoor recreation, KGL expanded the local outdoor recreation base, potentially benefiting its operations. As more people are getting involved in recreation, more people might utilize gear lending.
- **Acknowledging sustainability as a process**
 - OSI acknowledged that sustainability isn’t an endpoint but an ongoing practice. Adaptability is their basis for long-term resilience.

- **Empowering youth engagement**
 - By including youth efforts such as teen internships, participants benefit from career experience, and the program maintains sustained capacity.
- **Building multiple partnerships**
 - By collaborating with the existing library, schools, donors, and regional collectives, KGL, as a program of OSI, was able to expand its reach and resources.



Western Maine Recovery Outings

 **Summary:**

Western Maine Recovery Outings, a program of the Western Maine Addiction Recovery Initiative (WMARI), connects individuals in recovery from substance use disorder with the outdoors. By removing barriers to participation and offering a supportive environment, the program harnesses the healing power of nature and community.

 **Background and Catalyst:**

WMARI was formed in 2015 in response to the growing crisis around substance use disorders. The coalition, comprised of social service providers, behavioral health professionals, law enforcement, legal resources, faith-based communities, and more, aimed to build a collaborative, non-judgmental environment to support addiction recovery. While initially reliant on volunteer-driven capacity, WMARI developed a strategic plan to guide growth. Deciding to apply for federal funding through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a key proposal was to open a Recovery Center to provide direct services with the idea of hosting weekend activities.

Many studies have shown that spending time in nature has many physical and mental health benefits ([learn more here](#)) and outdoor recreation can be an exciting and fun way to get into nature. WMARI Executive Director, Kari Taylor, brought a personal perspective to the idea of incorporating outdoor recreation into recovery. Drawing from personal experience, she recognized nature as a powerful healing tool and knew the many barriers that keep people from accessing the outdoors, including cost, transportation, limited social support, or lack of confidence and knowledge of the activity.

 **Mobilization and Vision:**

Following the successful award of the three-year HRSA grant, WMARI launched the Hills Recovery Center. Around the same time, Kari was invited to a meeting with *Maine West* – a partnership of local and regional organizations dedicated to supporting a vibrant western Maine. Recognizing the opportunity to combine WMARI’s recovery mission with western Maine’s outdoor potential, Kari pitched a program that would eliminate barriers by providing gear, transportation, and a supportive community during outdoor outings to support recovery. Maine West supported the vision and became a key partner, offering initial funding and capacity.

Planning and Implementation:

WMARI ran the first pilot outings in 2022 with minimal funding. Much of the early coordination was supported by Brendan Schauffler, Program Manager at Healthy Oxford Hills, and coordinator for the Maine West Active Communities Group. On one of these early outings, Brendan met Aaron Ryder, who soon became an employee at the Hills Recovery Center and now co-coordinates the outings program alongside Brendan and Kari.

Now entering its fourth year, the program offers monthly outings year-round with a break around December-January, ranging from fishing trips to cross-country skiing. Each outing is designed to remove any logistical barrier to participation, so all that's needed is to sign up:

- All gear is provided
- Food and drink may be included
- Transportation can be available
- Necessary licenses (e.g., fishing) are covered
- Clear scheduling, with rain dates planned ahead of time

The two main outing coordinator staff members manage the outings and logistics. Each season's outings are mapped in advance, and each trip includes an experienced guide and designated recovery lead- someone in recovery who supports peer connection and conversation. Gear is sourced through donations, sponsorships, and partnerships like Maine Gear Share, and may be given to participants for personal use or reused.



Figure 5. Image of a recovery outing promotional media post for a kayaking trip. ([source](#))

Promotion is largely organic. While social media and flyers play a role, the most powerful outreach comes through word of mouth; people who attend a trip often encourage friends or family to check it out.

👉 Financing and Partnerships:

The Western Maine Recovery Outings are made possible by significant funding support from:

- **HRSA (Health Resources and Services Administration):** 3-year federal grant supporting the Recovery Center, outings program, and staffing
- **Maine West:** Provided a significant seed funding source
- **Maine Community Foundation**
- Other Donations and Small Grants

Some partners who are working to make the outings possible:

- Maine West
- Oxford County Wellness Collaborative
- Larry Labonte Recovery Center
- Maine Gear Share – recently, WMARI bought a gear library subscription
- Inland Woods & Trails – recent partnership supported discounted group instruction and trail passes

👉 Economic and Social Impact:

The outings have grown steadily, serving 20-40 individuals per outing compared to just 2-5 in their early days, and even getting participants driving in from surrounding areas. Even after just a few years, people engaged with the program have noted that they've seen firsthand how Recovery Outings can transform, inspire, and connect individuals in recovery. Unlike traditional support groups, these experiences allow for both quiet reflection and organic conversation, creating space for those who may find typical recovery settings intimidating or overwhelming.

The recovery lead position also builds leadership and empowerment. Participants who show interest may be invited to support WMARI in logistical efforts and to serve as a point of safe space, facilitating conversations with those who wish to discuss their recovery journey further.



Figure 6. Image of a kayak outing. ([source](#))

Sustainability and Stewardship:

The outings build personal growth within nature, which fosters an appreciation and understanding of the land and its healing properties, instilling a core ethic of stewardship. Participants note that the outings redefine their relationship with nature to be appreciative and understanding of nature as an outlet for self-growth and health. A recent outing proposed by a local National Honor Society student included an Earth Day Clean-Up, with a turnout of around 40 participants, encouraging environmental stewardship and building community.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Funding Sustainability

With initial operations supported by time-limited federal funding, the program is developing a diversified funding strategy, making use of smaller grants and donations.

Weather Constraints

The rural landscape and outdoor setting mean that the weather often changes, especially in the face of climate change and unreliable winters. Flexibility, such as planning rain dates for each trip or planning alternative activities, has been crucial to maintaining regular programming.

Program Development

As a young initiative, the team continues to assess which activities gain the most traction and are most impactful for recovery outcomes and participant connection. While the program grows, the team adapts to all outcomes and still has a blast even if a trip has limited participation.



Figure 7. Image of a hiking trip group stopping to admire the view. ([source](#))

A reflection from a co-coordinator of the outings:

“People want to see these kinds of initiatives – we’ve had individuals drive an hour or more to participate. It’s absolutely doable, especially in similar rural communities, if you find the right approach to get it started.”

– Brendan Schauffler, Program Manager, Healthy Oxford Hills

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

Western Maine Recovery Outings show how outdoor recreation can be a powerful wellness tool. By removing barriers and rooting programming in community, access is expanded and encouraged. By offering supportive, low-pressure experiences and removing barriers, the program fosters healing, connection, and personal growth. Its success reflects strong community understanding, meaningful partnerships, and a clear vision. Some of the Keys to Success are:

- **Reducing Barriers**
 - Outings are completely free, with all needs provided. Removing barriers encourages those who may not otherwise participate.
- **Meeting a Need**
 - The program responds directly to a regional and broader need for innovative and inclusive recovery support. Offering an alternative path to wellness, it fills a gap that traditional models might not meet.
- **Peer-Led Support**
 - Including a peer recovery lead, the structure builds trust, empowers participants, and allows organic, meaningful conversations to develop.
- **Strong Community Rooted Partnerships**
 - The Recovery Outings thrive through collaboration with organizations like those in Maine West as well as local businesses.
- **Flexible Planning**
 - Trips are planned with backup dates, seasonal considerations, and weather contingencies in mind. This adaptability has helped maintain consistent programming.
- **Word-of-Mouth Growth**
 - While flyers and social media help promote the outings, most new participants hear about the outing from someone who has attended. This organic promotion reflects community trust and the impact of the program.



Buck's Ledge Community Forest

Summary:

The 701-acre *Buck's Ledge Community Forest* (BLCF) in Woodstock, Maine, is a model of community-driven conservation that demonstrates how sustained local leadership, strong partnerships, and inclusive planning can protect beloved landscapes. Through the dedication of the *Woodstock Conservation Commission* (WCC) and community volunteers, the forest has become a forever-protected physical asset that serves visitors and residents.



Figure 8. “Buck’s Ledge Community Forest,” video slideshow uploaded by Mahosuc Land Trust, highlights the scenic beauty and community significance of Buck’s Ledge.

Background and Catalyst:

Buck’s Ledge, a prominent geological feature in Woodstock, ME that overlooks North Pond and has views stretching into the White Mountains, has been a beloved community destination for many years. While the public had long enjoyed access to the land for recreational activities such as hiking, hunting, snowmobiling, and nature viewing, that access was not formally protected, as it was privately owned by Bayroot LLC for timber management.

With hopes to officially protect the land, in 2008, the WCC applied for a Land for Maine's Future (LMF) grant to purchase the property, but could not agree with Bayroot on a purchase price. According to WCC member Marcel Polak, however, this ended up being a good thing, as it allowed deeper community connections and trust to be built. During this time, the WCC stayed focused on the possibility of someday acquiring Buck's Ledge. A wind project generated \$80,000 for the town in 2008, which was put into a conservation fund. This meant that when Buck's Ledge land was in a position for purchase, the WCC was in an excellent position to acquire it.

Over the years, the community continued to use informal trails on the property with landowner permission. As use increased in the 2010s, WCC became more engaged with the property and secured landowner permission to actively manage trails, with help from volunteers and school programs. The town worked with Gabe Perkins, Executive Director of Inland Woods + Trails to create and maintain new trails. It also built a parking area and trailhead in 2017.

Mobilization and Vision:

In early 2020, Julie Renaud Evans, Program Director of the Northern Forest Center and Kirk Seigel, Executive Director of the Mahoosuc Land Trust (MLT), met with the WCC and Town Manager, Vern Maxfield, to discuss the possibility of establishing a community forest, land owned, managed, and cared for by a community, at Buck's Ledge. [*Learn more about the Community Forest Model here!*](#) The Center and MLT became project managers to assist the Conservation Commission through an intensive planning process. At the annual town meeting in 2021, residents unanimously voted to approve spending conservation funds towards the purchase of the land containing Buck's Ledge. The Town used the funds from the wind project as seed money to match a grant from Land For Maine's Future (LMF), which awarded \$307,500 towards the estimated cost of \$868,000 for land acquisition.

Planning and Implementation:

The acquisition of the property was completed in August of 2022, and a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held that fall to celebrate the land's protection. Once the property was owned by the Town, professional foresters with New England Forestry Consultants were hired to develop a long-term forest management plan, and ecologist Rick Van de Poll was hired to do a rapid ecological assessment.

Since then, Buck's Ledge has continued to grow into a vibrant community asset. In 2023, students from Telstar Freshman Academy designed and built an alternative trail to Buck's Ledge, and the Woodstock Highway Department enhanced access with roadwork, ADA-compliant parking, and a scenic overlook. A 55-acre abutting parcel was also added to the

community forest to provide direct access from Woodstock Elementary School for additional habitats, recreational, and curricular use. The WCC is active in the management of the forest, most recently working on parking improvements and a new “Trail for All,” a gentler trail for people of all ages and physical abilities to access and take advantage of the amazing views visible from the forest.

Physical Assets:

Interest and investment in the community forest have grown rapidly and the town continues to add assets and infrastructure. Currently, the forest includes:

- The geological feature, Buck’s Ledge, with views over North Pond and the White Mountains, as well as Lapham Ledge and the summit of Moody Mountain.
- 701-acres of conserved land, providing invaluable habitat for a wide variety of species, as well as providing watershed protection.
- Six miles of trails.
- Access for hunting, hiking, snowmobiling, skiing, and other traditional uses.
- Scenic overlooks.
- Public space with benches and tables.
- Local artwork and trail kiosks.
- Parking and portable restroom.
- Accessible loop opened July 2025.
- Trail connections between Buck’s Ledge and the local school.



Figure 9. Image of Buck s Ledge Community Forest Trail Map. Source (Jane Chandler)



Figure 10. Image of students with their designed bench. Source (Jane Chandler)

Community Engagement:

The foundation of this project is WCC’s long-standing emphasis on listening to community voices, including hunters and snowmobilers. These groups often lose access when land

changes hands. At Buck's Ledge, these activities were retained and planned for, with signage and safety communications integrated into trail design.

Community involvement has remained central, with school engagement at its heart. Conservation member Ed Rosenberg led projects with students to create benches and gain their opinion on what they'd like to see in Buck's Ledge. The school also hosted a "Mountain Day" hike to the ledge and a reading day event, with the requirement that it be outside. Second graders climbed to the top of Buck's Ledge to sit on the log benches and read. "What a joy to see these young people outside and reading!" said WCC's Jane Chandler.

Similarly, understanding the nature of local taxpayers, WCC made a critical promise to the taxpayers, select board, and town manager: no taxpayer funds would be used to pay for the acquisition and management. To honor this, WCC continues to pay property taxes on the land. Each year, an amount equal to the property tax is transferred from a dedicated stewardship account, which is used to pay for management and maintenance, to the Town's general fund. In the short term, maintaining funds for this account consists of ongoing fundraising. In the longer term, when the forest is suitable for sustainable timber harvesting, that income will cover management costs.

🍌 Financing and Partnerships:

Major sources of funding for the project have included:

- \$80,000 seed money from the wind project
- \$307,500 grant from LMF for the land acquisition, alongside the seed money
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP):-Federal funds administered by Maine that paid for a professional designer for the Trail for All
- \$10,000 AARP grant for public space infrastructure
- Betterment Fund: Contributed to the overall cost for the Trail for All and the original purchase
- Volunteer efforts for community workdays



Figure 11. Image of students at the hotdog fundraiser. As the forest grew, local school kids wanted to give back, leading to the beloved: hotdog sledding fundraiser. By selling rides on an inflatable hotdog sled and hosting a BBQ, they raised more than \$1,300 to give back to the forest.

- Benches and signs created by school children
- Community Fundraising
- Fields Pond Foundation
- An anonymous donor

Collaboration and partnerships have led to the success of the project. These include:

- **Town of Woodstock** – Owns and helped purchase the land containing Buck’s Ledge
- **Woodstock Conservation Commission** – Managing partner and led the community forest acquisition effort
- **Land for Maine’s Future** – Integral grant funding for land acquisition
- **Mahoosuc Land Trust** – Project management, easement holder, and fundraising partner
- **Northern Forest Center** – Grant writing and project management
- **The Forest Society of Maine** – Fundraising and mapping support
- **National Park Service** – Working with an individual for technical support and help with obtaining funding for the ecological assessment
- **Appalachian Mountain Club** - Working with a member on community development, understanding the slow and comprehensive approach
- **Maine Adaptive Sports** – Provided expertise in accessible trail construction
- **Many more local partners and community contributions!**

Economic and Social Impact:

Located on Route 26, a key tourism connector, Buck’s Ledge supports local businesses by drawing visitors year-round. Developing a sustainable timber management program will provide logging revenue, promoting Maine’s forest industry. The community forest’s trails and programs foster engagement with nature, physical activity, and community-building.

Accessibility:

The newest “Trail for All” was inspired partly by local school children seeking to provide access to the forest to a blind classmate. Designed and constructed by Matt Coughlan with Recon Trail Design in partnership with Maine Adaptive Sports, and funded by the state RTP, The Betterment Fund and the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund, the trail includes:

- A roughly 0.3-mile loop trail with a 0.3-mile link to scenic viewing
- ADA-compliant expanded parking and porta-potties
- Two EV charging stations
- Additional seating and picnic areas funded by an AARP grant

Sustainability and Stewardship:

The forest is permanently protected with a conservation easement, held by the Mahoosuc Land Trust, with priority to place the newly added 55-acre abutting parcel under an easement as well, leaving the property a ‘Forever Forest For All.’ Sustainable forest management is guided by local stewardship, professional foresters, and ecological assessments, and managed by the WCC. The forest holds critical ecological importance, containing peregrine falcon nesting habitat, rare plants, bat species, old-growth trees, and a black ash swamp, which holds importance to local artisans.



Figure 12. Image of stewardship work in BLCF.

Educational collaborations with Dartmouth College students promote the study of climate change and carbon sequestration, along with Telstar High School students measuring tree growth annually.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Like many volunteer-led efforts, sustaining leadership is an ongoing concern. The WCC is addressing this through community outreach, school partnerships, and a formal volunteer engagement strategy. Another unexpected challenge was the concern of managing leash laws. While dogs are welcome, off-leash pets create conflicts on trails. WCC has now posted clear leash policies to protect people and their pets, even offering leashes at a trail kiosk.

Over the years, Buck's Ledge Community Forest proponents have learned the importance of trust-building; staying apolitical and building a broad coalition; securing seed funding for future grant match; and the value of inclusivity, vision, and long-term stewardship.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

Buck's Ledge Community Forest is an excellent example of what a small community can do with thoughtful planning and engaging many voices, demonstrating that conservation and recreation can coexist. Some of the *Keys to Success* were:

- **Leveraging existing interest**
 - Buck's Ledge was already a beloved community asset, making the land acquisition and protection already in the public's interest.
- **Building community trust**
 - Over a 15-year local effort, WCC consistently worked to maintain public interest and transparent stakeholder relationships.
- **Protecting long-term access**
 - Placing a conservation easement ensures that the land will be protected from development, allowing long-term access and ecological health.
- **Making strong connections**
 - The project succeeded thanks to collaboration with multiple partners, such as Mahoosuc Land Trust (holding the conservation easement), Northern Forest Center (regional support and capacity building), and Forest Society of Maine (fundraising support), along with community members and the state.
- **Securing early seed funding**
 - By saving money from the wind energy project, the town and WCC had the matching funds needed to secure a grant from LMF.
- **Proactive volunteer recruiting**
 - A volunteer base can be unsteady, so it's important to proactively engage the community, increase youth opportunities, and form a volunteer engagement strategy.

New Hampshire:

Coös Cycling Club

Summary:

Coös Cycling Club (CCC) showcases how grassroots efforts, community partnerships, and volunteer commitment can not only turn underused trails into a thriving network for mountain biking and outdoor recreation but also help revitalize a community. With a network “built and maintained by riders who just had a need for having trails in their backyards,” CCC began in Gorham, NH, with local passion and grew into a nonprofit that supports youth programs, group rides, and stewardship ethics. CCC maintains over 25 miles of purpose-built trails and collaborates with regional organizations to promote access, equity, and a community around mountain biking. Its success reflects the power of doing things purposefully and keeping community at heart.



Figure 13. “Bike Borderlands Episode 3: Coos Trails,” uploaded by Bike Borderlands, highlights the Coös trail network giving insight into how they started and where they’re going.

Background and Catalyst:

In the early 2000s, Jason and Kara Hunter moved to the Gorham-Berlin area and saw untapped potential in partially developed trails at Moose Brook State Park. Jason approached the park manager to request permission to redevelop and manage these trails for mountain biking and was granted approval. With help from local friends, Jason began refurbishing the trails. As use and popularity grew, he returned to the park manager and was granted permission to build new trails.

In the summer of 2004, the first official trail workday took place with Jason and some friends. The group discovered a 1930s blueprint of planned park features, which became a literal treasure map for finding and reviving old, abandoned trails and features.

Mobilization and Vision:

The CCC story began organically, with word-of-mouth rides, Facebook outreach, casual group rides, and eventually local events that built a loyal base of volunteers. These grassroots efforts brought the trail system to life, as made evident by the early hand-built trails.

Over time, it became clear that there was enough interest and momentum to create something more substantial. Today, CCC's mission is to build a vibrant cycling community – for riders of all ages and ability levels – through trail network development in greater Gorham, NH, and community engagement across Coös County.

Planning and Implementation:

In 2015, an early funder encouraged the group to form a nonprofit to strengthen fundraising and capacity. With the help of a friend in the legal sector, they formalized Coös Cycling Club in 2016 as a nonprofit and recruited a board of dedicated friends, riders, and volunteers.

Shortly thereafter, the Club became a founding member of *Bike Borderlands*, a regional initiative designed to strengthen and promote a group of mountain bike trail networks in and around northern NH. The club continued its grassroots engagement, hosting volunteer workdays and growing informal rides into official weekly events open to all skill levels.

In 2019, the Club recognized that it needed outside guidance to develop a strategic plan. The club contracted with the Northern Forest Center, as coordinator of the Bike Borderlands initiative, to facilitate development of a five-year strategic plan. The plan helped articulate the Club's vision and mission and create a framework for future fundraising and partnership development.

Today, CCC maintains more than 25 miles of purpose-built single track within Moose Brook State Park and through the woods across Gorham. Trails extend over private land with carefully curated landowner permissions, supporting mountain biking, trail running, snowshoeing, and fat biking. The Club also hosts events, started a youth mountain biking team, and runs a youth biking access program via Pete's Bikes and Shred Camp.



Figure 14. Image of CCC Trail Map. ([source](#))

👏 Financing and Partnerships:

CCC sustains its work through a diverse mix of revenue sources. Alongside traditional grants provided by important partners such as the Northern Forest Center and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.

Key funding includes:

- **Membership revenue:** Optional annual dues paid by community members and visitors.
- **Event revenue:** Fees from races help fund the event and future initiatives.
- **Community fundraising:** Creative events like a food truck-themed dinner featuring cardboard food trucks, local beer donations, silent auctions, and raffles.
- **Business sponsorships:** Local businesses support funding and event donations.
- **Individual donations:** Funding projects and materials for bridges, signage, maintenance, and Shred Camp staffing.
- **Volunteer efforts:** Volunteer labor, such as trail workdays, remains a cornerstone of CCC's operations and identity.



Figure 15. Image of Coos Cycling Club tabling at an event.

Key partners include:

- **Moose Brook State Park:** Provided land access and approval for trail work
- **Northern Forest Center:** Supported grant writing, strategic planning, and funding for “Pete’s Bikes,” a popular youth mountain biking program
- **Bike Borderlands:** Offered regional promotion, peer learning, and funding support
- **Berlin and Gorham Schools:** Partnered with CCC on the youth mountain bike team
- **Gorham Recreation Department:** Offering a series of guided rides for the local summer program and a day of riding for Gorham High School’s Mountain Day event
- **Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund at NH Charitable Foundation:** Supporting trail building and infrastructure through direct funding of discrete projects
- **Local Businesses:** Offered up sponsorships and informal support after learning about CCC’s impact

👉 Economic and Social Impact:

CCC’s trail development has successfully promoted outdoor recreation in an area with limited existing trails. Their expanded trail network has fostered:

- **Health and Participation:** Increasing physical activity and offering weekly group rides split by ability to encourage participation.
- **Equity:** Pete’s Bikes, Shred Camp, and free group rides reduce cost barriers.
- **Community:** The trails foster local pride, volunteerism, and gathering.
- **Economy:** Visitors and tourists come to ride, then dine or drink at nearby businesses, or stay at local lodging, boosting the local economy.
- **Stewardship:** Youth trail maintenance days and education programming instill a culture of care for public lands.



Figure 16. Image of Big Day Brewing, a popular spot to grab local food or drink after a day of riding.

([source](#))

Importantly, CCC helped restore balance to Gorham’s outdoor recreation scene, which had leaned towards motorized recreation. The Club positioned mountain biking as a popular non-motorized alternative that benefits residents and the environment, and now both peacefully coexist.

Youth Engagement, Pete's Bikes, and Shred Camp:

Youth programming plays a central role in CCC's mission. After the sudden passing of Club member Peter Brockett, the community donated in his honor. Alongside funding from the Gorham Recreation Department and the Northern Forest Center, these donations seeded *Pete's Bikes*, a program that purchased a fleet of mountain bikes for local youth to reduce barriers to biking.

Additional funds supported a trailer for storage and transportation and expanded the fleet to 12 bikes. CCC also partnered with Berlin and Gorham schools to launch the Berlin-Gorham Mountain Bike Team. With support from a CCC board member who taught in the district, they gained school buy-in after years of discussion. Though the schools don't provide transportation, CCC pays mileage for a coach to tow the bike trailer, and parents help drive students to practices and races.

In addition, CCC puts on Shred Camp each summer, giving 25 area youth (ages 10 to 14) the opportunity to spend 5 contiguous days learning riding skills, trail stewardship practices, and bike mechanic skills while enjoying the trail network. The fee for area youth is nominal, allowing access for those who are less economically advantaged, and 6 coaches are employed full-time in service of the Camp - often graduates of the Berlin-Gorham Mountain Bike Team.



Figure 17. Image of the Berlin-Gorham Mountain Biking Team in front of the CCC bike trailer. ([source](#))

Sustainability and Stewardship:

CCC designs trails with long-term sustainability in mind. Volunteers lead maintenance through regular workdays, supported by a part-time trail steward provided with a \$5,000 annual maintenance budget.

The club promotes stewardship further through Bike Borderlands' *Ride With Gratitude* campaign and youth programs that teach trail ethics, mechanics, and conservation. During summer bike camps and the bike team's season, a day is devoted to safety, repair, and trail maintenance to build a stewardship ethic from a young age.

🚧 Challenges and Lessons Learned:

While CCC has been a successful story, it doesn't come without challenges or lessons learned.

- School partnerships were hesitant at first
 - Years of relationship-building, persistence, and community connections allowed this partnership to become a reality.
- Having a volunteer start
 - Built strong local relationships, which became critical when formalizing operations.
- Forming nonprofit status
 - Proved essential to secure funding and credibility.

One takeaway tip:

“Always secure landowner permission and follow official processes. Doing things by the book, from the start, ensures long-term success and greater partner and funder support.” - Jason Hunter, founder of CCC.

🔑 Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

The story of Coös Cycling Club emphasizes grassroots passion turned into regional impact. What began as a small group of friends wanting to ride mountain bike trails has grown into a formal nonprofit with a strong volunteer base, strategic partnerships, and a thriving trail network that benefits health, economy, and community spirit. CCC's work demonstrates how local initiative, supported by thoughtful planning and collaboration, can transform outdoor recreation access in rural areas.

Some of their *Keys to Success* include:

- **Do things 'by the book'**
 - By starting with landowner permission and maintaining a clear process, they weren't bogged down by legal concerns and were able to build strong trust with funders and partners.
- **Utilize grassroots spirit**
 - CCC built trust and visibility through consistent volunteer engagement by creating an asset that the community wanted to see.
- **Develop a nonprofit**
 - By formalizing as a nonprofit, they streamlined funding and capacity.
- **Develop strategic partnerships**
 - By partnering with schools, businesses, and regional initiatives like Bike Borderlands, they grew their capacity and reach.



Mill City Park at Franklin Falls

Summary:

Mill City Park at Franklin Falls is the first whitewater park of its kind in New England, and a model of outdoor recreation fueling community revitalization. Driven by local leadership and Franklin, NH's long-term economic recovery strategy, the project transformed post-industrial riverfront land into a dynamic recreation and conservation space. Through public-private partnerships and strategic planning, the park was built efficiently and sustainably, with more phases underway. The park now offers a variety of features and events to bolster the local economy and community vitality.

Background and Catalyst:

Once a thriving mill town centered around the Winnepesaukee River, Franklin suffered economically after its last mills closed in the 70's. For about a decade, ambitious revitalization plans have been underway. City officials knew they couldn't 'tax [their] way out of [their] problems' as residents were already struggling. They began turning their focus on increasing new revenue, particularly interested in growing tourism and outdoor recreation.

In 2015, whitewater guide Marty Parichand had a vision for opening the first whitewater park in New England. Originally setting his sights on Concord, he immediately saw potential for Franklin, aligning his vision with the town's revitalization plans. He began by starting a nonprofit, Mill City Park (MCP), with the vision of using a tract of city-owned land along the Winni River for a launching spot. A feasibility study with the State Department of Resources and Economic Development projected \$6.8 million of direct spending in the area as an impact of the project, jumpstarting local support.

Mobilization and Vision:

Parichand presented the proposal and feasibility report to the city leadership, and an 11-acre city-owned parcel in downtown Franklin was identified as an ideal location, harboring bike traffic from the Winni River Trail and pedestrian traffic from the historic downtown.



Figure 18. Image of the site for the future park outlining the existing Winni River. Source (Mill City Park Master Plan)

The vision was clear: "connect the community to the river," through recreation, education, tourism, and stewardship. From the start, sustainability guided all plans, including the use of low-impact design (LID) and permaculture principles.

Planning and Implementation:

The planning process was rich with collaboration and strategic purpose. Colby-Swayer College students helped develop early concept plans as MCP secured funding to hire McLaughlin Whitewater Design Group for a feasibility study and further design. MCP also joined the *Safe Routes to Parks* program to inform park-to-community design.

In 2017, MCP and the City of Franklin hired engineers to develop whitewater plans, along with environmental and cultural assessments, completed by the firm, VHB. Following this, phase 1 of the land-based park was launched and developed. At this time, MCP worked with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, US Army Corps of Engineers, Federal Emergency Management Agency, NH Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Marine Fisheries to secure wetland permits for in-river construction in only nine months.

Resilience Planning & Design and FitzDesign developed a master plan, detailing design goals from permaculture principles, highlighting the site in an urban, natural, and historic context, to including details of access and circulation for each feature. A strategic plan highlighting MCP goals, vision, and mission, and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, complemented this.

The land-based park plan was completed in 2019, including a parking lot, serpentine trail, multipurpose trail, graffiti wall, site work, and engineering for future expansion, with construction beginning in 2020 and finishing in 2021. With the opening of the land-based park, MCP started community workdays and placed a conservation easement on additional parcels with help from Lakes Region Conservation Trust.

Whitewater construction began in 2021 and in 2022, after a five-month weather delay, was completed and officially opened on the first-ever Winni River Days festival.



Figure 19. WMUR clip about the 2023 Winni River Days Festival

In 2024, programming amped up as MCP hosted a polar plunge, Festival del Taco, a Haunted Walk, and hired a second employee.

Physical Assets:

- In-river whitewater wave
- ADA accessible fishing
- Multi-use trails
- Graffiti park
- 18 acres of conserved land with forest management plans
- Historic mill ruins, with plans to reuse the trestle and sulfite bridges
- Planned additions: A bike pump track, trail expansion, climbing wall, river pool inlets, and two additional whitewater features



Figure 20. Image of a paddler on the whitewater wave feature. ([source](#))

👉 **Financing and Partnerships:**

The nonprofit Mill City Park helped to provide a basis for diverse funding obtainments ranging from grants and tax credits to local contributions and multiple partnerships.

Key funding sources included:

- **Grants:** USDA Rural Business Development, BFA, EDA, LWCF, TAP
- **State Funding:** NH CDFA Tax Credits
- **City Funding:** TIF funding
- **Congressional Support:** Directed spending with the support of Senator Jean Shaheen
- **Community Support:** Fundraising, individual donations, in-kind contributions, sponsorships

These funds supported everything from feasibility studies and engineering to construction, programming, and staffing.

Key partners included:

- **Nonprofits:** PermaCityLife (planning, fundraising, and property access)
- **Local, Regional, & Federal Partners:** City of Franklin, NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs, USDA Rural Development, Lakes Region Conservation Trust
- **Educational Partners:** University of New Hampshire, Colby-Sawyer College
- **Business Partners:** Franklin Savings Bank, Chinburg Properties, Watts, and other businesses that have moved in to support downtown revitalization

🌱 **Sustainability and Stewardship:**

In 2021, MCP and Lakes Region Conservation Trust placed 18 acres, four parcels of undeveloped city-owned land, under permanent protection and implemented a forest management plan. The land, once deforested by mill activity, has naturally regrown and now supports conservation goals.

MCP also prioritizes river remediation of pollution left by the mills, and bank stabilization to improve water quality and restore fish habitat. Throughout the park's development, low-impact development strategies and permaculture guided every decision to reduce environmental impact.



Figure 21. Image of the historic Sulfite Bridge. Source (Sarah Kadel)

👉 Economic and Social Benefit:

At the heart of this effort was Franklin's economic and community revitalization ambitions. As community members and visitors alike enjoy the new space, data points to successful economic and social benefits, including:

- 149% increase in assessed value in downtown since 2015
- 68% increase in tax revenue
- \$6.8 million in projected new visitor spending
- New luxury loft-style apartments in Stevens Mill, which have all been filled

Community and social benefits can also be seen through:

- Free public access to outdoor spaces and recreation
- Affordable housing efforts alongside new development
- Year-round event programming, including access to free meals from the local church
- Equitable access and ADA accessible fishing
- Cultural and Historic preservation through annual community events, public art, music, and preservation of mill foundations, and *Trestle and Sulfite bridges*

🚧 Challenges and Lessons Learned:

While successful in hitting goals for economic and social revitalization, the project is not without challenges. Like any open and public space, the park has been prone to vandalism. The graffiti park gives an outlet for respectful expression.

The project has also faced some skepticism. To counteract this, MCP maintains transparent communication to the community, publishing all costs and processes completed. MCP pays property taxes back to the city, even with city-owned parcels, to maintain the base of taxable property on the city's tax rolls.



Figure 22. Image of the Graffiti Park.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

Mill City Park demonstrates how outdoor recreation, when built with intention, can catalyze sustainable economic and social revival. Its blend of conservation, tourism, and community connection offers a replicable model for other post-industrial towns. Some of their *Keys to Success* include:

- **Strong local leadership**
 - Marty Parichand and city leaders shared a clear, ambitious vision.
- **Public-private partnerships**
 - MCP, as a nonprofit, was able to secure grant funding and support while also partnering with the city to utilize public assets.
- **Diverse funding**
 - Grants, tax credits, and community support reduced financial risk, ensuring multiple streams to pull from.
- **Layering outdoor recreation with conservation, community, and economy**
 - **Conservation:** By ensuring ecological health through protected land, there is clean water for rafting and stewarded trails for hiking.
 - **Community:** By prioritizing social involvement, assets are developed to encourage meaningful use.
 - **Economy:** Recreation activities and tourism help generate town revenue that enables reinvestment in infrastructure and expanded sustainable initiatives.
- **Strategic planning**
 - Strategic planning allowed the project to move forward with more support, funding, and timeliness.
- **Knowing when to utilize volunteer efforts**
 - An implementation plan outlined which projects would require major capital investment and which could be guided by volunteer efforts, saving costs.

Vermont:



Ascutney Ski Area

Summary:

When Mount Ascutney, a ski area in West Windsor, VT, closed in 2010, after multiple bankruptcies, it had far-reaching negative economic and emotional impacts on the local community. In response, residents launched a bold, volunteer-led effort to transform the defunct ski area into a sustainable, year-round, multi-use outdoor recreation hub. The story of Mount Ascutney is now one of community resilience, innovation, and grassroots-driven recreation. Through strategic planning, partnerships, and tireless volunteerism, the town and the nonprofit *Ascutney Outdoors* (AO) have revitalized a beloved community asset, expanding access, protecting natural resources, and reigniting community pride.



Figure 23. “A Vermont town takes matters—and a mountain—into its own hands,” uploaded by the Trust for Public Land, showcases the revitalization of the Ascutney Ski Area and its connection to the community.

Background and Catalyst:

Mount Ascutney (3,144 ft), anchored West Windsor’s identity as a ski town since the 1930s. Opened in 1946, the ski area cycled through new owners and bankruptcies. Despite major investments, up to \$65 million between the 80s –90s to transform the ski area, construct 100 condos, and expand into the Village, the operation struggled due to erratic snowfall and poor management. After a major liquidation event in the 90s and one last

ownership transfer, it closed for the last time in 2010, with lifts sold off, leaving only the lodge, which was later destroyed in a fire. The economic impact was felt immediately as property values halved, taxes rose, and the local store and village area struggled. More importantly, residents feared losing their town's identity. In response, local leaders initiated a conversation about protecting the mountain.

Mobilization and Vision:

In 2014, West Windsor held its best-attended town meetings. Leading up to the vote, the Select Board conducted outreach through info meetings, FAQs, flyers, an updated website, and mailings to explain the Ascutney opportunity. The result was an overwhelming 3-to-1 vote in favor of contributing \$105,000 toward the \$640,000 acquisition.

Before the land deal closed in December 2015, community members gathered at Jim Lyall's home to establish *Ascutney Outdoors*, a nonprofit tasked with restoring and managing year-round recreation. From the start, the vision included multi-use recreation and community events, all made possible by volunteer effort.

Planning and Implementation:

With TPL's help, the town purchased the 470-acre ski area, merging it with the town's 1,100-acre forest, and placed a conservation easement, co-held by the Upper Valley Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. A detailed management plan, created with the West Windsor Conservation Commission, ensured a balance between recreation and environmental protection.

Focusing on quick, visible wins to show credibility, within the first year, AO:

- Installed a **volunteer-built rope tow**, reviving lift-served skiing in a nod to the mountain's beginnings.
- Resurrected the **local school ski program**, offering youth access to equipment and lessons.
- Converted an old cross-country ski hut into a **warming shelter**.

“We didn't want to be a town that people just drove through.”

- Shelley Seward, local resident and Treasurer and Executive Director of AO



Figure 24. Image of the Ascutney Outdoors School Ski Program. Supported by The Boot Pro Ski & Sports Shop, whose co-owner previously worked as an AO ski instructor, sends their crew to help fit kids with gear.
Source (Shelley Seward)

Realizing that the burned-down lodge remained an eyesore and safety hazard, AO negotiated to purchase and remove the structure (not part of the original land deal). The process proved challenging with demolition and asbestos remediation but was made possible by support from individual donors and local businesses, notably the local Holiday Inn. The Ascutney Outdoors Center was constructed on the original foundation, serving as a lodge for warming, school programs, and summer events.



Figure 25. Image of Ascutney Outdoors Grand Opening with the newly built lodge. Source (Shelley Seward)

AO broadened access by building a tubing park (2017–2018) to offer winter access to non-skiers. As demand grew, a local family donated a T-bar lift, installed over nine months by a hired contractor, and opened it in 2020, providing access to 10 groomed trails and 435 vertical feet of skiing. AO was later able to secure a trail groomer at a competitive price from Stratton Mountain. An AO volunteer was working on a welding project at Stratton Mountain when they heard management talking about what to do with their old groomer.

Fueled by over 145 volunteers, AO completed what was originally a ten-year capital plan in just five.

Financing and Partnerships:

AO's success relied on multiple financing streams and strong partnerships.

The \$905,000 acquisition and redevelopment effort drew funding from:

- The Town of West Windsor (\$105,000 community-approved contribution)
- The Trust for Public Land
- The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- The Community Forest Program
- Individual donors and local fundraising

AO secured in-kind contributions and volunteer labor, business partnerships, and equipment donations for subsequent projects: volunteer-built rope tow, donated T-bar, discounted trail groomer, and school ski gear help from a local business.

Along with obtaining diverse funding, AO also worked to collaborate with a diverse number of partners to facilitate the rebirth of Ascutney Mountain. See **Table 1** for details.

Table 1. List and description of major partnerships with AO and the rebirth of Ascutney Mountain.

Partner	Role/Contribution
Town of West Windsor	Purchased and owns the land; planning support
Trust for Public Land	Land acquisition and conservation
Upper Valley Land Trust	Co-holder of easement and management planning
Ascutney Trails Association	Mountain bike trail maintenance
The Boot Pro Ski & Bike Shop	Supports ski school program with gear
Brownsville Butcher and Pantry	Local business that “grew up” with AO, caters AO events, and is an example of the community revitalization that happened as a result of this project
Event Organizers	Visibility and revenue via hosted events (e.g., Vermont 50, Flow Fest)

Economic and Social Impact:

At the heart of the mountain is the goal to promote year-round multi-use recreation for all community members. Economic and community benefits include:

- Property values doubled; population rose by over 20% (2010-2020)
- The *Brownsville Butcher & Pantry*, a community-centric general store, reopened and thrives, even catering AO events
- Lift tickets remain affordable (\$20/day, \$100/season)



Figure 26. Image of Brownsville Butcher & Pantry’s Pizza Mountain event held at Mount Ascutney.

Source (Lauren Stevens)

- Over 140 students participate in school ski programs
- Events like the Vermont 50 bring the community together and create revenue and visibility

Sustainability and Stewardship:

AO's model prioritizes sustainability, particularly through a conservation easement that ensures long-term protection, and a flexible, multi-season recreation model that adapts to climate uncertainty.

“When there’s snow, we ski, and when there’s not, we do other things... That’s a pretty easy model to sustain” - Glenn Seward from NYT’s, *A Town that Saved a Mountain and a Mountain that Saved a Town*.

To sustain management, AO recognizes capacity limits and avoids overextension. For example, rather than organizing events, AO decided to provide a dependable venue and infrastructure, knowing its strengths. As Shelley Seward explains, “We know what we’re good at, and we know what we can’t do. That’s what pushed out the old ski areas.”

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

While successful, AO navigates challenges:

- Volunteer capacity concerns
 - Mitigated by working with schools to promote volunteer engagement, offering service hour opportunities, and reaching out to newcomers.
- Trail conflicts (e.g., among hikers, bikers, equestrians)
 - Addressed through annual public meetings, education materials, and signage like those promoting the *Ride with Gratitude* campaign.
- Non-revenue projects
 - Events and venue rentals supplement income.

AO's clarity of purpose, community ties, and strategic planning enable its success and offers a model for other rural communities reclaiming outdoor spaces.

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

Mount Ascutney's revival shows how grassroots leadership and smart planning can turn decline into an opportunity. In the face of economic struggles and climate uncertainty, West Windsor transformed a failing resort into a vibrant, inclusive public resource, preserving not just a mountain, but a way of life. Some of Ascutney's *Keys to Success* were:

- **Build on community identity**
 - Strong local ties fueled buy-in.
- **Protect long-term access**
 - Investing in a conservation easement allowed the Town of West Windsor to secure permanent protection of the landscape.
- **Plan for management**
 - From the beginning, it was known that the town would need another entity to take over management, catalyzing AO.
- **Quick wins**
 - Quick, visible wins built trust and legitimized AO.
- **Leverage local connections**
 - AO leveraged local connections to build trust, partner with TPL, secure discounted gear, and receive support from local businesses.
- **Reuse existing infrastructure**
 - Reusing the old lodge foundation for the new center and refurbishing existing trails allowed for cost and material efficiency, as well as minimizing forest impact and labor time.
- **Utilize volunteer efforts**
 - AO is made possible by 145+ volunteers, with 50+ volunteers working to run the ski area on an open weekend.
- **Plan for sustainability**
 - Prioritizing diverse use, youth involvement, and planning for climate uncertainty and long-term management.



CRAG-VT: Bolton Dome

Summary:

The acquisition and reopening of Bolton Dome stands as one of Vermont's most important climbing conservation successes and the largest project to date led by the *Climbing Resource Access Group-Vermont* (CRAG-VT).

Once inaccessible for decades, this iconic site was permanently protected and transformed into the face it is today through sustained landowner relationship building, community engagement, strategic funding, and stewardship planning.

Background and Catalyst:

Bolton Dome, once Vermont's most popular climbing site in the 1970s-80s, closed to public access in 1990 due to landowner conflict. This and other closures spurred local climbers to form CRAG-VT, a nonprofit dedicated to securing permanent climbing access.

Board member Richard Katzman became a key advocate, maintaining contact with the landowners for years. In 2017, after decades of persistent outreach, the owners invited CRAG-VT to submit an offer before listing the land publicly.



Figure 27. Image of the Bolton Dome landscape. (82 crag on the left and Bone Mountain in the background). Photo Credits (Jeremy Gilchrist). Source (Mischa Tourin)

Mobilization and Vision:

CRAG-VT quickly mobilized, securing the entire 48-acre parcel with support from the Access Fund, a national advocacy organization focused on climbing access. They subdivided and resold the 2-acre residential lot to recover costs. The vision extended beyond reopening the cliff and aimed to secure permanent access and conservation.

🗺️ Planning and Implementation:

Following the acquisition, CRAG-VT launched ambitious development efforts.

- Volunteers and board members bolted new routes and restored trails.
- A 70+ person trail workday in spring 2019 built steps, cleared graffiti, and created new paths.
- That fall, the first annual Vermont Climbing Festival drew climbers for clinics, guest speakers, and a celebration of the newly reopened site.

In 2020, CRAG-VT and the Access Fund established a conservation and recreation easement. They also collaborated with the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation to guarantee Indigenous access to traditional activities.



Figure 28. Image of Mischa Tourin climbing Bolton Dome. Photo Credits (Travis Peckham). Source (Mischa Tourin)

🤝 Financing and Partnerships:

The land purchase and subsequent improvements required an ambitious and multi-stream funding approach. Key sources included:

- **\$356,000 loan** from the *Access Fund*'s Climbing Conservation Loan Program (CCLP)
- **\$10,000 personal contribution** from Katzman to support the conservation easement
- **Fundraising and grassroots donations** to cover assessments, attorney fees, legal filings, and establishment of the conservation easement
- **Grants** from
 - *The Conservation Alliance*
 - *Outdoor Gear Exchange*
 - *Grassroots Outdoor Alliance*
- **Resale revenue** from the residential parcel

Route development and maintenance were completed by volunteer efforts except for two major access trail improvements in 2021, which were funded in large part by:

- \$30,732 from Vermont Forest, Parks, and Recreation ERSA Grant

- \$12,700 from Athletic Brewing Two for the Trails Grant

CRAG-VT's ongoing operations are sustained through:

- Membership dues & individual donors
- Corporate partners, educational partners, & Fest sponsors
- Event income
- Additional grant funding

Strategic partnerships have also been essential to CRAG-VT's success:

- **Access Fund:** Funding partner and Bolton Dome easement holder.
- **Leaders of the Nulheagan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation:** Ensure traditional uses remain accessible.
- **State of Vermont, Agency of Natural Resources:** Formal cooperative agreement that ensures climbing is an accepted form of recreation on state lands.
- **Local organizations and partners** for specific projects such as events, cleanup, and adaptive climbing programs.

Economic and Social Impact:

Reopening Bolton Dome reignited a huge piece of the local climbing community and contributed to the broader outdoor recreation economy in Vermont, drawing in climbers statewide and beyond, benefiting local businesses and tourism. Beyond access to climbing land, CRAG-VT emphasizes equity and inclusion. The organization's Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (JDEI) Committee plays a vital role in expanding access with a 2024 project in Bolton Quarry:

- Hosted affinity group clinics at the Vermont Climbing Festival
- Developed two adaptive climbing routes
- Constructed wheelchair-accessible land zones and parking lot ramps
- Launched a community accessibility needs survey

Sustainability and Stewardship:

CRAG-VT's stewardship model across all acquisitions ensures Bolton Dome's longevity as both a climbing site and conserved natural space, as the 48-acre parcel, including Bolton Dome, is under a conservation easement held by Access Fund. In 2021, the organization launched a dedicated Stewardship Committee to address ongoing trail maintenance, erosion control, and site monitoring. A two-phase trail stabilization project was contracted out to address two of the highest priorities for trail improvements, at Bolton Dome, the Railroad Gully, and the Doctor Slabs, as needs exceeded volunteer capacities:

- Phase 1 (2022): Hermit Woods Trail Builders constructed steps and belay terraces up to Railroad Gully.
- Phase 2 (2023): Hermit Woods Trail Builders returned to teach CRAG-VT Volunteer Crew Leaders how to build stone walls. CRAG-VT hosted six workdays involving 47+ volunteers to build retaining walls, belay terraces, and stone steps.

By coupling professional expertise when needed with volunteer efforts, CRAG-VT built a model that is sustainable and cost-effective. Long-term plans include continuous property boundary monitoring, trail tuning, and cairn maintenance to ensure ongoing access and compliance.



Figure 29. Image of Kerry Wilson and Andie Gemme doing trail work. Photo Credit (Ted Shiele). Source (Mischa Tourin)

🚧 Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Land Access:

Regaining privately owned land took years of respectful persistence and trust-building.

Funding Large Projects:

Raising funds for a \$350,000 + purchase was daunting for a young, grassroots nonprofit. Success came from leveraging loans, grants, and private donations, creating revenue.

Stewardship Capacity:

Some efforts exceeded volunteer capabilities; combining professional services with trained volunteers proved effective and affordable.

Equitable Access Requires Intentionality:

Ensuring inclusive use of climbing spaces requires planning, design, and outreach. The JDEI Committee has shown that meaningful access can be built when inclusion is prioritized. Similarly, ensuring Indigenous inclusivity meant working with Indigenous leaders to include specific language in the easement to allow for traditional practices.

Conclusion and Keys for Success:

The Bolton Dome acquisition shows how grassroots efforts, advocacy, and persistent relationship building can transform inaccessible private land into a permanently protected public climbing resource. Some of CRAG-VT and Bolton Dome's *Keys to Success* were:

- **Long-term relationship building:**
 - Years of respectful engagement positioned CRAG-VT as a trusted buyer when the land went to market.
- **Having a strong vision and clear community mission:**
 - CRAG-VT has a clear purpose to secure and permanently protect climbing access while preserving natural resources.
 - A shared vision among climbers, conservationists, and local leaders made the acquisition smoother by unifying stakeholders.
- **Obtaining diverse and creative financing:**
 - Leveraging the Access Fund's largest-ever climbing conservation loan, personal donations, and grant funding enabled the land deal to happen quickly.
 - Maintaining revenue from various streams allows for long-term economic sustainability.
- **Utilizing volunteer efforts – Know when to bring in professionals:**
 - CRAG-VT actively restored, maintained, and improved the site through trail days and stewardship events (local work fosters appreciation and care for the trails they use).
 - Some projects may be out of the technical scope of volunteers- supplementing professional work with volunteer efforts can create cost-effective solutions.
- **Investing in equitable access:**
 - For CRAG-VT, equity isn't an afterthought. By directly involving groups that are underrepresented, CRAG-VT ensures climbing resources are accessible to the entire community.
- **Investing in stewardship to ensure longevity:**
 - Through trail stabilization, conservation easements, and year-round monitoring, CRAG-VT is ensuring the long-term health of Bolton Dome for generations to come.

New York:

Elizabethtown Trail Center

Summary:

The Elizabethtown Trail Center stands out as a model of community-led recreation. Spearheaded by long-term resident Jeff Allott, the Trail Center was built with hopes to revitalize the town spirit, strengthen local connections, and support a growing trail network. Inspired by a 2018 Northern Forest Center symposium, Allott combined his entrepreneurial background with grassroots energy to create a trail hub that now anchors community and invites long-term investment in the town.

Background and Catalyst:

Like many Adirondack towns, Elizabethtown faced population and economic decline. Jeff Allott, an Elizabethtown native immersed in outdoor recreation since childhood, wanted to engage with the community more deeply after selling his business, General Composites Inc. Based on his previous recreation efforts in the community, Allott had developed a large group of vested individuals with strong emotional ties across generations to support this idea. Becoming a town councilmember, Allott leveraged opportunities within town-owned property to expand efforts and formalize a cohesive, community-centered trail system.

Mobilization and Vision:

At the 2018 Northern Forest Center symposium, Allott learned of various grant opportunities and began collaborating with the Center, inspiring the idea for a trail center. Trail development and trail work in the community relied primarily on volunteers and a grassroots approach, and the notion never occurred that they could do something like this. The group just knew they had a lot of great trails that no one knew about. By creating this community gathering space as a trail connector, trail advocates in the community could make the network a central part of Elizabethtown, fostering community pride and encouraging new residents to see Elizabethtown as a place to call home.

Planning and Implementation:

Allott pitched the trail center idea to the town because he wanted to locate the center on town land and ensure it would be community owned. After gradually building trust by highlighting community benefits and balancing tradition with innovation, the approval process grew easier. The selected site, town land on the edge of a golf course within the Hamlet, allowed compliance with Adirondack Park’s “Forever Wild” protections while connecting informal trails to the official town network.

Read more here.



Figure 30. Image of Jeff Allott showing Adirondack Community Recreation Alliance steering committee members the pavilion and hut under construction as part of NBRC project.

Photo Credit (Leslie Karasin)

Construction began in 2020, driven entirely by volunteer labor, just as the trails were built. Today, the completed Trail Center offers heated indoor space, restrooms, a trail work utility shed, a large pavilion, a kiosk with trail maps, and plans for Wi-Fi installation, serving as a year-round gathering space.



Figure 31. Image of the constructed warming hut, pavilion, and kiosk, complete with a trail map. Source (Jeffery Allott)

👉 Financing and Partnerships:

The financing of the trail network and center in Elizabethtown was made possible largely by:

- Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) Grant
 - With help from Center staff, Allott submitted a proposal. The town matched the awarded funds to cover building materials.
- In-kind contributions from volunteer efforts
 - Along with the trails, community members built the Trail Center, reinforcing a shared sense of ownership and pride.

Along with the community, Jeff built partnerships with different organizations to expand capacity:

- The Northern Forest Center – helped with grant writing and inspiration
- Town of Elizabethtown – owns the land that the trail network and center reside on
- Barkeater Trails Alliance (BETA) – added Elizabethtown to its trail network, providing visibility and operational support

Many of the local trails were built by volunteers, however BETA constructed a connector trail to integrate Elizabethtown after being added to the BETA network.

👉 Economic and Social Impact:

Focused on community investment, the Trail Center effort has added to the vibrancy of the community. In recent years, six new families have moved in, a sharp contrast to past stagnation. This reversal signifies a renewed sense of possibility for the town's future, driven by growing outdoor recreation opportunities and an enhanced sense of community. Group rides on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings have provided community infrastructure, activated trails, and built connections.



Figure 32. Image of the E'Town Trail Center Open House, including BETA tabling at the event. Photo Credit (Rebecca Hession)

The Trail Center now serves as a vital third space, an informal yet consistent place for people to connect outside of home or work.



Figure 33. Image of the interior gathering space of the Trail Center, featuring a fireplace, décor, and a printed trail map. Photo credit (Tyler Kepes). Source (Jeffery Allott)

Simultaneously, a downtown redevelopment project, led by Aaron Woolf, is transforming an old pharmacy building into a commercial hub housing a bike shop, bakery, and bistro, complementing the community's recreational revival and adding another third space to serve this user group.

Sustainability and Stewardship:

Now in the maintenance phase, Elizabethtown relies on volunteer-driven stewardship:

- **Adopt-a-Trail Program:** Volunteers take responsibility for light upkeep like raking and leaf blowing.
- **Chainsaw Gang:** Equipped volunteers handle more technical tasks.
- **Seasonal Trail Days:** Coordinated by a formal Trail Committee to maintain and improve infrastructure.

Allott emphasizes the understanding that the town will eventually need to take over the Trail Center maintenance, underscoring that the benefits outweigh the minimal long-term cost.



Figure 34. Image of Jeff Allott showing the trail conditions board at the kiosk.

Photo Credit (Leslie Karasin)

🚧 **Challenges and Lessons Learned:**

Initial skepticism centered on the long-term upkeep of free, public-use infrastructure. Allott addressed concerns by cultivating community stewardship, organizing volunteers, and formalizing a trail committee.

Balancing regulatory realities with local vision proved to be key. Concentrating new development on town land avoided state land management processes while ensuring accessibility and respecting Elizabethtown's small-town character. Careful planning— with one foot always on the brakes— ensured the town grew in ways that served residents first, not tourism.

🔑 **Conclusion and Key Takeaways:**

Elizabethtown shows how rural communities can lead their own revitalization by investing in people and place. With strong local leadership and volunteer-driven efforts, the town built meaningful infrastructure that enhances quality of life and encourages future growth. Their *Keys to Success* include:

- **Local Champion Leadership**
 - Allott's vision and persistence rallied support and kept momentum alive.
- **Community Stewardship**
 - Leveraging volunteer programs like "Adopt-a-Trail", trail workdays, and a trail committee helped ensure sustainability without straining town budgets.
- **Harnessing Partnerships**
 - Collaborating with the town, nonprofits, and trail alliances brought resources, visibility, and support.
- **Putting Residents First**
 - Prioritizing livability over tourism fosters deeper local investment and attracts new residents organically.
- **Respecting Environmental Context**
 - Adhering to regional regulations and minimizing impact allowed the project to grow responsibly and protect resources.

A local Champion's piece of advice:

“Develop grassroots efforts and rally the community. Many towns will say ‘Oh we don’t have that kind of support,’ but most of the time they do, they just need to find the right strings — for us, that was the love for Otis Mountain.” – Jeff Allott



Dewey Mountain

Summary:

Dewey Mountain Recreation Center is a year-round beloved community recreation hub offering Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, disc golf, and more. Originally developed in the 1970s-80s as an official cross-country ski area, Dewey has steadily grown through strong community support into a multi-use, multi-season community and recreation hub.

Background and Catalyst:

Dewey Mountain's history dates back to alpine skiing in the 1930s and 1940s. In the late 1970s, the Town of Harriestown owned unused forested land on Dewey's northwest slope. Sue Dyer, then head of the Saranac Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, and other local people suggested using the land for a cross-country skiing area. The town, partnering with the Chamber of Commerce, invested \$10,000 and \$25,000, respectively, to develop trails, which was later partially reimbursed by a state Bureau of Outdoor Recreation grant.

Mobilization and Vision:

Craig Ward, U.S. Olympic ski team captain, designed the trail system, but volunteers carried out trail work, cutting trails, clearing logging roads, building bridges, and managing drainage. Phil Feinberg, a Chamber member, secured easements from private landowners to ensure public access. The trails officially opened in 1980-81.

Dewey's growth was gradual and relied heavily on volunteerism. Volunteers and local inmates, led by carpenter Tom Seymour, built the original 30x24 ft warming hut and later a second lodge with restrooms and office space. A professional designer was brought in alongside apprentices from North Country Community College to aid in early construction.



Figure 35. Image of skiers at Dewey Mountain. Photo Credit (Leslie Karasin)

Planning and Implementation:

In 2005, the citizens group, Dewey Mountain Friends, formed to support capital improvements and youth programming, in partnership with the Saranac Lake Rotary Foundation (acting as a fiscal sponsor) and the Town of Harrietstown (as landowner). After offering only winter use for many years, two teens built the first mountain biking trails as a school project, paving the way for Barkeater Trails Alliance (BETA) to enhance trails for year-round use and build new connectors, signage, kiosks, and maps.

Dewey Mountain Friends led efforts for a new lodge, working with the Town to identify needs, develop conceptual designs, and prioritize features for affordability and function. Scheefer's Adirondack Builders constructed the facility, made possible by in-kind services, community donations, and volunteer labor.

Today, Dewey includes:

- Several miles of groomed and ungroomed cross-country ski trails
- 5.5 miles of singletrack mountain bike trails
- An 18-hole disc golf course
- Lit lower trails for night skiing
- 2 miles of snowshoe trails to the summit

Winter trail access costs \$5/day or \$55/season for an individual or \$75 for a family.

Equipment rentals and lessons are available for modest fees. Summer trails and disc golf remain free and open to the public.

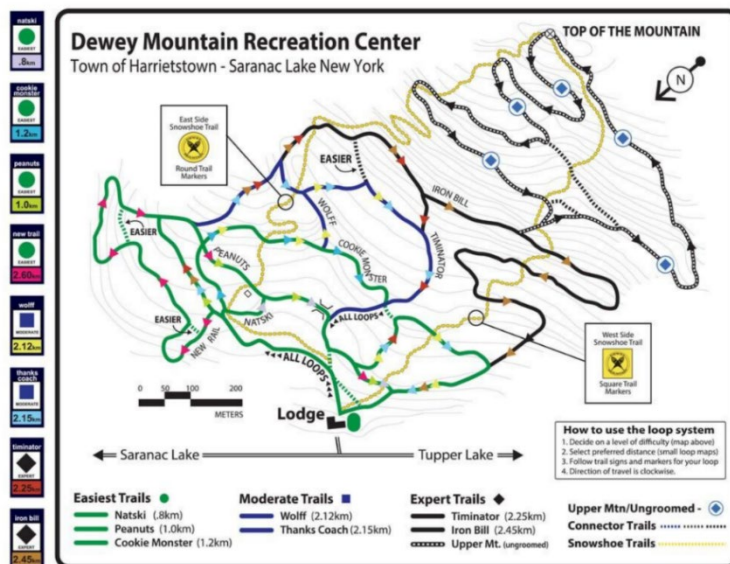


Figure 36. Image of Dewey Mountain winter trails map. (source)

Financing and Partnerships:

Financing the original investment and continued capital campaigns rely heavily on community and volunteer contributions but pulls from many sources. See **Table 2** for details.

Table 2. The following table outlines examples of funding, though it is not an exhaustive list, that have supported the efforts of Dewey Mountain Recreation Center.

Type of Funding:	Contributor(s):	Led to:
In-Kind contributions	Beyond regular assistance from volunteers, several businesses contributed in-kind services and labor such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schematic designs and site plans • Mechanical and electrical design • Various supplies Additionally, the highway department plows the parking area and assists with mechanical needs and trail maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Original trail building and maintenance - Development of the new 2015 lodge - Maintaining parking and trailhead
Community Donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Over 550 households and businesses contributed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding for the new lodge
Municipal Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$10,000 from the Town of Harriestown - \$25,000 from the Saranac Lake Chamber of Commerce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Original investment in trail networks
Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - \$12,600 from State Bureau of Outdoor Recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reimbursement for original trail development

Dewey Mountain is structured around multiple partnerships. Since the original trail opening, the land has been owned by the Town and contracted with a separate private entity, primarily a local business, to manage the area. Since 2005, the managing business of Dewey has been *Adirondack Lakes & Trails Outfitters*. The site managers take

responsibility for trail maintenance and grooming, keeping the lodge open, and managing day-to-day activities such as equipment rentals.

During its tenure as manager at the site, Adirondack Lakes and Trails Outfitters has also worked hard to provide programming that increases the accessibility and use of the facility, including organizing weekly ski races, a youth ski league, a 'Lil Shufflers program for the youngest skiers, and guided activities to support adults in getting out and using the trails.

Alongside the primary town-business partnership, other Dewey partnerships include:

- **Dewey Mountain Friends:** an unincorporated association to support capital projects and youth programs.
- **Saranac Lake Rotary Foundation:** a nonprofit working in partnership with Dewey Mountain Friends as the fiscal agent.
- **Harrietstown Highway Department:** provides in-kind contributions for projects like snow plowing, new street signs and lights, or operating heavy machinery for trail work.
- **Barkeater Trails Alliance (BETA):** maintain and build mountain biking trails.
- **Barkeater Disc:** built and maintains the Disc Golf course.

👉 Economic and Social Impact:

Dewey strengthens local pride, public health, and tourism:

- Consistent season pass sales reflect local demand.
- Schools work closely with Dewey for outdoor education access.
- Hosts community events, ski races and training, and Special Olympics snowshoe training.
- Youth programming and free summer and fall access limit recreation barriers.



Figure 37. Image of a group photo with the Youth Ski Team. Photo Credit (Leslie Karasin)

Sustainability and Stewardship:

Dewey’s growth model is gradual and rooted in collaborative stewardship. Municipal-private partnerships ensure funding and maintenance capacity. Establishing trail easements early on avoided long-term landowner conflicts. Trail upgrades, led by volunteers and partners, improve drainage and durability under low snow conditions.

In the coming years, current managing partner, *Adirondack Lakes & Trails Outfitters*, has plans to form a standardized operating procedure to further ensure the long-term sustainability of efforts when future businesses come in to manage the Mountain.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Dewey Mountain’s history has shown that the most powerful strategies were grounded in simplicity: start small, seek partners early, and prioritize flexibility.

The gradual growth of Dewey has allowed the project to remain financially and logistically feasible with long-term stewardship made possible by networks of committed stakeholders.

A piece of advice from the current managing partner:

“Avoid over-engineering, just find a few willing partners that can each give 10%” – Jason Smith, owner of Adirondack Lakes and Trails Outfitters

Conclusion and Key Takeaways:

Dewey Mountain exemplifies how strategic partnerships, community leadership, and steady investment can transform unused municipal land into a thriving recreation hub. Dewey’s *Keys to Success* include:

- **Leveraging existing assets**
 - Dewey utilized existing town land.
- **Utilizing volunteer efforts – know when to supplement with professional efforts**
 - Community contributions supplemented by professionals allow for cost-effective, high-quality results.
- **Developing multi-sector partnerships**
 - Municipal ownership with private management and nonprofit fundraising provides the basis for an adaptive and sustainable structure.

- **Getting community input for long-term infrastructure**
 - By assessing community needs for the new lodge, it was purposely built for the user base.
- **Prioritizing multi-season and multi-use access**
 - Non-snow season trails expanded use and brought new partners to the table.
- **Growing slowly and intentionally**
 - Incremental infrastructure and programming matched to capacity and needs allowed Dewey to sustainably grow without burnout.
- **Securing landowner relations early**
 - Establishing early trail easements minimized landowner and liability concerns.
- **Taking advantage of in-kind contributions**
 - In-kind contributions allowed for cost-effective construction and materials.
- **Leveraging community pride**
 - By having a shared history, pride, and personal connections to the mountain, momentum has been kept alive.

Summary Findings & Key Takeaways

This section distills key themes that have emerged from across the nine outdoor recreation case studies across the Northern Forest region. Each project is distinct in geography, scale, focus, and core goals, but all have several recurring trends.

Key Trends

Reducing Barriers

Many projects prioritized inclusive participation by proactively addressing common barriers to outdoor recreation. Projects such as the Katahdin Gear Library in Millinocket and the Western Maine Recovery Outings in western Maine removed financial and logistical obstacles. By offering free or low-cost rental gear through a public library or providing gear, transportation, and scheduling for individuals in recovery, these projects highlight how reducing barriers allows for broader community engagement.

Diverse Funding & Partnerships

Successful initiatives leverage a broad mix of funding sources, alongside a network of partners. At Mill City Park in Franklin, efficient implementation of a significant project was enabled through funding from multiple federal grants, state tax credits, and TIF funding, all the way to local fundraising. Similarly, CRAG-VT's acquisition of Bolton Dome as a young organization was made possible by a mix of personal donations, a national conservation loan, and grassroots fundraising, demonstrating the strength of diverse financial and organizational support, increasing reach, and providing a safety net of redundancy. Like Jason Smith with ADK Lakes & Trails Outfitters stated, it's easier to find many partners willing to give 10% than to find one partner willing to give 100%.

Building Trust

Trust-building emerged as a critical foundation for project success. For example, at Buck's Ledge Community Forest, years of transparent communication and inclusive engagement fostered broad public support, allowing for quick community approval when the opportunity for land acquisition arose. Similarly, CRAG-VT secured the Bolton Dome land after decades of respectful and transparent communication with the landowners, positioning themselves as trustworthy buyers when the land went to market. Long-term

trust and transparent communication can unlock anything from land access to a driving force for public momentum.

Community & Social Infrastructure

Recreation assets often doubled as social infrastructure, building community engagement and vitality. The Elizabethtown Trail Center in New York functions both as a trail hub and year-round gathering place, while Ascutney Outdoors revived community identity by transforming a failed ski resort into a vibrant public venue. At Mill City Park and Coös Cycling Club, programming from festivals to group rides and volunteer days contributes to local identity and social cohesion, increasing the reach of the projects and improving local quality of life. Promoting local use alongside visitors carefully balances the economic benefits of tourism while maintaining local identity and vitality.

Youth Engagement

Youth involvement across many projects has strengthened both community connections and long-term sustainability. Coös Cycling Club's Pete's Bikes and a high school mountain biking team provide opportunities for skill-building, community connections, and instilling a stewardship ethic in the next generation of riders. Buck's Ledge Community Forest involved students in trail design, events, and fundraising, ensuring young residents have access to nature and promoting a future generation of volunteers and forest stewards.

Conservation

Many projects integrated conservation directly into planning through conservation easements, ecological assessments, or forest management plans. Buck's Ledge Community Forest directly hired ecologists and foresters to ensure sustainable management of the forest while maintaining and supporting critical habitats. Mill City Park planned for environmental remediation to clean up pollution left from the mills, not only limiting their land impact through low-impact design but actively reversing past impact. By coupling recreation access with stewardship education and environmental protection, these efforts build long-term land access and resilience.

Revitalization

Positioning outdoor recreation as a driver for economic and social revitalization increases the chances of a successful pitch and contributes to long-term buy-in to the project. In Franklin, NH, Mill City Park was positioned alongside the city's broader revitalization efforts, presenting a feasibility study showing projected \$6.8 million in direct spending as a result of the project. This streamlined the city partnership but also, after proving

successful in boosting economic and social vitality, drew in long-term residents, providing a growing user and volunteer base for recreation assets.

Utilizing Existing Assets

Rather than building from scratch, many communities succeeded by repurposing or complementing existing infrastructure. KGL launched from a public library; AO reused old trails and building foundations; Coös Cycling Club refurbished existing trails. These examples showcase thoughtful reuse, which can stretch resources, accelerate implementation, and, more importantly, limit land impact by constructing where impact has already occurred rather than impacting previously undeveloped land.

Common Challenges & Solutions

Capacity & Staffing

Many projects are entirely volunteer led, which can lead to a lack of long-term management.

→ Creating a nonprofit or Friends group, actively recruiting, or promoting volunteer opportunities through local school curriculum can build a long-term volunteer base.

Permitting & Bureaucracy

Projects like Mill City Park, with extensive permitting requirements, or the Elizabethtown Trail Center, with strict Adirondack Park land regulations, face additional hurdles.

→ Careful consideration of logistics such as existing resources (environmental, cultural, or social), landscapes (wetlands or other critical habitats), and landownership early on in partnership with experts can help streamline the implementation process.

Logistical Constraints

Weather delays, insurance and liability requirements, and maintenance needs emerged as common logistical hurdles often not initially planned for. Mill City Park's whitewater construction was delayed by five months due to rain levels, while Western Maine Recovery Outings had to frequently reschedule trips due to unpredictable weather conditions.

→ Implementing projects with adaptability and resilience in mind is critical. Accounting for hiccups within planning schedules can help reduce discouragement due to potential delays or new requirements.

Resources Guide

Throughout the research process, multiple existing resources to help with various stages of outdoor recreation implementation have surfaced. This guide compiles examples of tools, preexisting guides, funding opportunities, and partnerships to support groups in planning, funding, implementing, and sustaining outdoor recreation across the Northern Forest. This is not an all-encompassing database, but a starting point of existing resources compiled into one place.

Contents:

1. [How-To Guides and Toolkits](#)
 2. [Grant Opportunities and Financial Tools](#)
 3. [Partnerships and Support](#)
 4. [State Parks and Recreation Agencies](#)
 5. [Conservation Easements](#)
 6. [Liability and Land-Use Easements](#)
 7. [Trail Building Resources](#)
-



How-To Guides and Toolkits

- ORR Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Toolkit

[Check out ORR's Toolkit](#)

- Vermont Town Forest Toolkit

Resources and materials for planning steps, such as mapping existing conditions, meeting facilitation documents, and much more.

[Explore the Vermont Town Forest Toolkit](#)

Grant Opportunities and Financial Tools

- Purdue OWL Grant Writing Guide
[Visit: Purdue OWL Grant Writing](#)
- University of Illinois Grant Resources Guide
[View the guide here!](#)
- Grants.gov
Searchable list of federal grants
[Search for nationwide grants](#)
- National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)
Offers ongoing grant opportunities and fundraising best practices
[NRPA Funding Resources](#)
- Land and Water Conservation Fund
Federal funding for public outdoor recreation
[LWCF info](#)
- Northern Border Regional Commission Catalyst Grant
Funds infrastructure, recreation, and economic development projects in the Northern Forest region
[NBRC Catalyst Grant](#)
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
Funding for trail construction and maintenance efforts
[RTP info](#)
- Maine Trails Bond
Significant investment in trail infrastructure and development across Maine
[Maine Trails Bond](#)

Partnerships and Support

Organizations and regional initiatives known to give support to recreation projects:

- The Northern Forest Center

Contributes ideas, support, and expertise to people, strengthening economic opportunity and environmental resiliency across the rural, Northern Forest region.

[Northern Forest Center](#)

- Appalachian Mountain Club

Regional conservation and recreation organization supporting the Appalachian Mountain Region, offering recreational guides and resources.

[AMC info](#)

Federal Support:

- EPA's Recreation Economy for Rural Communities

A federal agency that provides technical support and planning assistance for communities growing their recreation economy.

[RERC info](#)

MTB Support:

- Vermont Mountain Bike Association

Vermont initiative supporting mountain biking by offering support, grant opportunities, and resources.

[VMBA info](#)

- New England Mountain Bike Association

Community of mountain bikers creating trails, preserving open space, and guiding the future of mountain biking in New England.

[NEMBA info](#)

- International Mountain Bike Association

International initiative to support mountain biking.

[IMBA info](#)

Volunteer Support:

- Nature Groupie
A UNH extension program promoting outdoor volunteering across New England.

[Visit site](#)

- Hosting a workday? [Check out this guide](#)

State Parks and Recreation Agencies

- Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands: [visit website](#)
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation: [visit website](#)
- New Hampshire Division of State Parks: [visit website](#)
- New York State Parks and Recreation: [visit website](#)

Conservation Easements

Considering establishing a conservation easement?

- [US Fish and Wildlife's Conservation Easement Handbook](#)
- [UNH's Conservation Easements: A Step-by-Step Guide](#)

Search for a certified land trust: [Search for accredited land trusts nationwide](#)

State-based:

Maine: [Find Certified Land Trusts in Maine Here!](#)

New Hampshire: [Browse Land Trusts in New Hampshire Here!](#)

Vermont: [Vermont Land Trust & Access Fund](#)

New York: [Central New York Land Trust & The Nature Conservancy - New York](#)

Liability & Land-Use Easements

When opening land to public recreation use, liability and legal concerns can be a big factor. Many states have Recreational Use Statutes that protect landowners from legal concerns. Public trails that cross over private land must be accounted for as well by formal permission, such as from a land-use easement. See below for more information and details on these topics.

- American Trails Report on trail-related liability management.

[Check it out here](#)

- Headwaters Economics report on legal concerns associated with trails provides resources on relevant laws and limitations, types of risks, and risk management tools.

[Check it out here](#)

Trail Building Resources

- American Trails 'Basic Elements of Trail Design and Trail Layout'

[Basics of Trail Building](#)

- AMC's Paid Guide to Trail Building

[AMC's Trail Building Guide](#)

- IMBA's Single-Track Trail Building

[IMBA's Trail Solutions](#)

- VMBA's Trail Management & Construction Best Practices

[View here](#)

Conclusion

Outdoor recreation is an impactful tool for revitalizing rural communities and advancing stewardship ethics across the Northern Forest region. From a gear library in Maine to a cross-country ski area in New York, each of the nine case studies highlighted in this report underline the core value that meaningful outdoor recreation begins at the community level. When projects are rooted in local identity, spearheaded by dedicated champions, and supported by collaborative partnerships, they create shared benefits for recreation, economic development, community connectivity, and environmental health. Each project came with challenges, such as volunteer fatigue, funding hurdles, landowner concerns, and weather delays, but in each instance, dedicated project leaders and contributors persisted. These stories showcase how outdoor recreation can bring people from many walks of life together to create positive changes for their communities.

There is no one-size-fits-all method to seeing a recreation project through from idea to completion, but the lessons distilled in this report can provide a solid foundation and source of inspiration for communities looking to advance outdoor recreation projects.

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