

## HINESBURG TRAIL ASSESSMENT MEMORANDUM

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SE Group staff has visited the Hinesburg Town Forest on several occasions and traveled the trails on both foot and mountain bike to assess existing conditions for sustainability. While there are a few areas that could be improved upon or might benefit from additional maintenance—as there would be at any well-loved trail system—the trail system is designed, built, and maintained extremely well. The level of use is having some impacts on the trails but is not threatening the forest as a whole. The trees in the forest appear healthy and thriving. In the few areas where levels of use are having an impact, it is primarily on the character of the trails and the recreational experience they provide. Still recreational experiences and maintenance levels remain high and should be maintained into the future.

The following details the findings of our assessment.

### **NATURE OF THE TRAILS**

Many of the trails in Hinesburg Town Forest are very technical. They are well-built technical trails—which offer an important recreational experience for many users—but such technical trails often come with their own set of challenges. For example, many of these trails are quite steep—20%+ grade. Most of the steep sections are rocky or have been improved with trail armoring (very well-done trail work, by the way!), but there may be a few sections that could use additional armoring or re-routing to add climbing turns.

As with any technical trails, many riders will walk/ride around some of the most technical features, creating small side trails. While most of these are good, there may be an opportunity to clean up or formalize the side trails into alternative routes. There are also a few technical spots—ascents with 1' step ups or descents with 2' drops – where new ride-arounds should be considered.

### **EAGLE'S TRAIL**

Eagles Trail, the double track through the forest, has some trail sustainability issues. In one location the trail is heavily overgrown and in need of a side cut. In quite a few places, the trail follows the fall line and has drainage and erosion issues. Culverts, grade reversals and other drainage features should be considered in problem locations. More connections between other trails should also be considered so riders could avoid the somewhat less exciting Eagles Trail.

### **SIGNAGE**

The signage is a combination of wooden and plastic signs. While the wooden signs are very functional, the writing on many of the plastic signs has faded and has become largely illegible. An important factor to consider is that this assessment was completed at the very end of the

summer season when such signs are generally at their worst. As with any plastic/written signing system, annual maintenance is required.

There may also be an opportunity for additional vehicle signage on the surrounding roads to both direct visitors to the forest and also to remind them to drive slow in the residential neighborhood.

## **MAINTENANCE**

The forest does see a level of use that demands regular maintenance. Regular maintenance, monitoring the forest, and fixing/repairing issues as they arise ensures that the forest remains healthy. Thankfully, the Hinesburg Town Forest is blessed with the support of Fellowship of the Wheel, which performs regular maintenance and trail improvements on the site. While one could always find some additional maintenance that could be performed at any given time (it's like dishes in the sink; they always come back!), trail maintenance in the forest is excellent. A notable exception to this is Eagles Trail, which we don't believe is maintained by FOTW and it shows.

The trails in the forest are hand-built, which requires more maintenance. The hand-built nature of the trails is part of why they're so technical – a key element of the forest's character. FOTW is likely already doing this, but a best practice is to keep an annual summer to do list and have an annual maintenance crew to work on the repairs. At this point in the season, there is a fair bit of catch up that should happen in the spring.

## **BRIDGES**

One area of the forest that is notably worse shape are the bridges. Many of the bridges around the forest are in need of improvement or maintenance. Several of the older bridges in the forest are extremely narrow and slick. Going forward, consider installing bridges that are at least 24" wide and have horizontal, rather than vertical, slats. A few of the existing bridges have holes in the middle, some big enough to eat a tire. In some locations, the bridges could be replaced with armoring, reducing the need for future maintenance and replacement. This should be studied on a location by location basis, with bridges better for large, wet areas.

## **PARKING LOTS**

Much more so than on the trails, use of the forest exceeds the capacity of the parking lots at busy times, especially at Hayden Hill East. Exacerbating the issue, people do not always park in an organized, efficient manner at Hayden Hill East. The Economou Road parking lot is in poor condition and is difficult to find. The entrance does not necessarily look like a public roadway and signage should be considered or the trailhead should be removed from the maps. The Hayden Hill West trailhead also has poor/minimal signage leading towards it, and as a result, is in better condition and of appropriate size to match demand.

## **LEVEL OF USE**

The level of use is having some impacts on the trails but is not threatening the forest as a whole. The trees in the forest appear healthy and thriving. If anything, the use appears to be primarily impacting the rider and visitor experience, and possibly hunting in the forest. The biggest visible evidence of the level of use on the trail systems is that at many trail junctions, people are cutting the corners and are making the junction wider. This, however, is a simple maintenance fix.

## **LOCATIONS NOTED FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- Lost Trail
  - Replace bridge before Firebreather
  - Confusing junction with Firebreather
  - Consider single alignment to Firebreather
- International Trail
  - Bridge can be slick when wet, replace bridges and consider rock armoring for short sections
- Eagle's Trail
  - At the Hayden Hill East trailhead, wet area could use more armoring
  - At junction with Homestead/Passing the Horizon, lots of trail widening and optional lines
  - Just past the junction with International trail, the use of a culvert would help reduce steep grades/erosion on each side leading into the drainage
- Back Door Trail
  - Replace bog bridges with boardwalk/bridge at least 24" wide
  - Fix bridges and ramps
  - Limit where trail follows the fall line
- Missing Link
  - At the junction with Eagle's trail, the drainage crossing needs a bridge or rock armoring