

Hinesburg – Understanding Use Survey

The Hinesburg Town Forest is a beloved community resource. In planning for the forest's future, understanding current use is essential. Trail counts have provided a quantitative understanding of use. This survey provides the qualitative understanding of forest use. The survey asked for ideas and views around use and future management of the Hinesburg Town Forest based on the US Forest Service's Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). ROS is a framework for managing recreation opportunities based on the natural settings, social interactions, and recreational experiences. Research has shown that people choose a specific setting to recreate based on a desired set of experiences. For example, hiking in a large, undeveloped setting with difficult access and few facilities offers a sense of solitude, challenge, and self-reliance. In contrast, hiking in a setting having easy access and highly developed facilities offers more comfort, security, and social opportunities.

The survey was available online and open from September 13, 2018 to October 31, 2018. In total, the survey received 321 completed responses plus an addition 38 partial responses. Survey respondents were from Hinesburg and surrounding towns.

Visitation

Survey respondents were asked have you visited the forest in the past year and 94% had.



Only 22 people had not visited and their reasons were a mix of too far, too crowded, unaware of the forest, and concern about getting injured.

Of those who had visited the forest, nearly all had visited more than once and over half had visited at least five times.





Survey respondents were asked what activities they participated in at the forest. For the most part, forest users visited the forest to mountain bike. Hiking, dog walking, trail running, and snowshoeing were also somewhat popular activities on the forest.





Survey respondents were asked to select their reasons for visiting the forest. Exercise, Sport, and Fun were the most common responses.



Write In responses are listed below:

- Would like to learn more about it and ways to visit that don't take more than an hour
- hunting
- Spring wildflowers (:
- Horseback to get off road and be on a woods trail, which is important. We need to map horse trails too.
- Hunting
- Not enough time
- MTB
- Mountain Biking
- Hunting
- Quality of trails, proximity
- Solitude; Peace/ Quiet Get to the woods
- Absolutely pinning it
- Exercise Dog
- absolutely pinning it
- Hunting
- Mentoring girls on mountain bikes through Little Bella's.
- outdoor time with my dogs



Experience

Survey respondents were asked to rate the quality of their most recent forest experience. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their experience, with 95% rating their experience as good or excellent. One person who rated their experience as poor listed "too many bikes" as the cause.



Survey respondents were asked if there was a time or place when/where they no longer visited the forest. For the most part, survey respondents did not avoid the forest at a particular time or in a particular spot. Based on the verbatim responses (see below), most of the yes responses were related to hunting season or weather. A few people mentioned overcrowding or poorly maintained mountain biking trails.





- Geprags. Too short of a trail
- I hate clean groomed paths that you must use. That is not natural anymore.
- Hunting season, when it's rained a lot, when it's buggy
- Some forested areas were logged and the trails are not as interesting with open spaces.
- Hunting season, deep snow
- Stopped bow hunting due to the extreme pressure put on the deer by the incessant mountain bikes. Now day and night.
- Afraid to get lost when I go by myself! Not enough clear signage
- Hunting season. I don't want to get shot.
- Summer when the deer and brown dog ticks are active. My property backs up to Gillespie pond so access is great for me. Ticks are a big problem for me and my dog. I stay away at that timr. Can't wait till the colder temps so I can walk ride the trails again. I am very careful not to ride my horse on trails when it is muddy or soft footing, wish other horse owners were as cognizant.
- I only go first thing in the morning too crowded otherwise
- Busy with hikers
- During big game seasons--primarily deer season (rifle).
- Trails near Economeou were storm damaged a few years ago
- Winter. Trails not conducive to winter biking.
- I stay away weekday afternoons after 3:00 and all afternoon on weekends- too many bicyclists who ride too fast - it's been unsafe at times - tired of jumping out of the way. Most bicyclists are friendly and respectful but sadly there's a growing minority who do not ride safely and are not courteous.
- Just during hunting season for safety reasons.
- I do not enter the forest during hunting season.
- Hunting Season
- I no longer ride many of the trails because with all the new choices out there, HTF is no longer the best within 30 mins drive. Sheep Thrills is great and all the new work was much needed. A better decent over to Lincoln hill would really improve the riding experience in the HTF. HTF needs at least one more REAL decent. Passing the Horizon and Fire breather or nice XC trails ;)
- Storm damage/blow downs made some sections of trail inaccessible
- Eagle trail is not maintained or marked well. Dragons Tail is just too difficult. Areas being logged.
- Downed trees prevent use
- Some of the MTB trails have become so rooty that they are not enjoyable.
- Some of the mountain bike trails have become too rough



- Hunting season
- Hunting season. There are many hunters that are "annoyed" at people using the forest for recreation and I have felt threatened.
- the trail enchanted forest is closed. I also avoid HTF during hunting season.
- I do not visit in the winter. I use the forest for mountain biking.
- I avoid hunting season and mud season. I've gone for some walks there in the winter but I most commonly bike and trail run there.
- I no longer go down to the ravine area below Eagles Trail. There used to be a trail, "Boneyard", that is now gone.
- Eagle trail area is severely eroded for biking.
- I do not visit the forest during deer hunting season. Hunters deserve to have full use of the forest when deer season is open.
- Hunting season ish
- Hunting season
- Overly crowded. I used to live on Texas Hill Rd. Added biking traffic at certain times is noticeable.
- I generally avoid the Forest in the early spring as it is really wet and needs time to dry out.
- I tend to not visit during deer hunting season. I feel that MT. biking or trail running during this time would have a negative impact on other users (hunters) fun. Everyone should work to share this wonderful resource and respect each other's use.
- I find some of the trails to be mostly roots and rocks. Dragons tail, Enchanted forest and parts of the Backdoor are worn out down to ledge. It appears that some trails suffer from over use.
- Some of the mountain bike trails that I used to ride are no longer maintained. But there are many great ones that are!
- Hunting Season in the Fall
- The Economou Rd entrance.
- The trail was too challenging for me
- I don't ride Enchanted Forest or Passing the Horizon anymore because the trails are too eroded and rooty.
- hunting season--not safe
- Trails have eroded badly and are no longer fun to ride.
- Mtb specific trails are getting better at other locations. Therefore, HTF is moving down the list. However, the potential for improvement here is good.
- time restraints
- Some trails are closed
- Hunters



- Passing the Horizon trail is very rooty and needs maintenance to make it more enjoyable for mountain biking or hiking.
- The windstorm a few years ago destroyed a few great trails
- Trails (Nature boy & Bone yard) have been abandoned
- Hunting season for safety of self and dog as well as to avoid disturbing wildlife or hunters.

Survey respondents were asked about the quality of their forest interactions. Nearly all described their experience as pleasant. Of the four respondents who described their interactions as unpleasant, three attributed that to bikers, two to runners, and one each to horseback riders, ATVs, and snowmobiles.



Assessment of the Forest

Survey respondents were asked to assess the existing trails, parking, signs, and visitation levels in the forest.





Most survey respondents felt that the forest trail mileage was about right. For the most part, the rest of the survey respondents felt that the trail mileage was too little or in need of redistribution. Very few survey respondents felt the existing trail mileage was too much.



Nearly all survey respondents did not feel they saw too many people in the forest. 96% of respondents felt they saw few or a manageable amount of people in the forest while only 4% felt they saw a lot of people.





Most respondents felt that the available parking for the forest was in line with the appropriate number of forest users. Approximately 20% felt that the parking lots were insufficient for the demand for the forest and only 1% felt there was too much parking that fostered overcrowding in the forest.



When asked if it was difficult to find their way in the forest, most survey respondents (84%) felt it was not difficult. Of the remaining respondents, 8% felt it was difficult and 7% wrote in a response. The write-in responses are listed below:

- Sometimes
- Fotw trails could use an update on the plastic markers as the sharpie wears off but generally the maps to trails are excellent and the markers easily followed



- Sometimes, I have a FOTW map (I am a walker)
- In same place it is confusing! Got lost, glad I had my GPS
- Trails are well marked, almost too much so.
- No because I've been going there for 30 years. new visitors may find it difficult.
- I don't but I know other people have had trouble
- The mountain biking is quite steep. I did get a little lost, but it was OK
- Mostly not, but yes in a few areas
- A little further than some of the places I ride but well worth it
- No because I am experienced, but Yes because I feel trail signs are inadequate.
- Initially yes as signage is not awesome. I've used the trails enough now that I'm comfortable finding my way through.
- Takes some practice
- No, but I know it very well.
- They have maps
- Some of the handwritten FOTW signs have faded or nonexistent trail names. Consider putting up more permanent signs? Might be a good volunteer project to make new signs...
- some of the signs are misleading it would be nice to have a map of the forest at every intersection and a star that says you are here. just my 2 cents

Those who expressed difficulty in finding their way were asked if they viewed the difficulty as a challenge or a problem.





The 28 respondents to this question were fairly evenly split between seeing difficulty wayfinding as a problem or a challenge. The two write in responses described the difficulty as "both" and "frustrating."

Survey respondents were asked how forest use has changed in the time they've been visiting the forest. Their verbatim answers are included in Appendix A at the end of this document. For the most part, answers revolved around an increased number of mountain bikers and visitors and improved maintenance. Some mentioned overuse or overcrowding by mountain bikers while others felt the forest was still not very crowded.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The U.S. Forest Service uses Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) as a framework for understanding the desired qualities for a forest in terms of remoteness, naturalness, social encounters, and visitor management. The following questions were asked to understand people's desires for the Hinesburg Town Forest.



Most respondents were somewhere in between "want to be out of sight and sound of all human activity" and "remoteness is of little relevance." The respondents leaned slightly towards "out of sight and sound."





Again, most respondents were in the middle on level of human of modification. The responses leaned slightly towards "develop more trails and amenities to meet community needs" than "as little as possible given what already exists." That difference can be attributed to several respondents who were very interested in expanding the forest's facilities.



On facilities, respondents leaned towards "a few rustic and rudimentary facilities." Few respondents were interested in many facilities designed for user comfort and convenience.





On signage, respondents were largely in the middle. They did lean strongly towards "no on-site controls or information facilities" and away from "obvious and numerous with sophisticated information exhibits."





UNDERSTANDING USE SURVEY HINESBURG

Verbatim Responses to "How has forest use changed in the time you've been visiting the forest?"

- Much more popular in the past 5-7 years
- Big blowdown!
- more bike paths- harder to locate walking trails....
- A lot more bikes
- Much more bicycle use.
- more people using the trails than in the past
- Too urban now.
- too many Mt bikes
- Busier
- More trails (good), I wish the Eagle Trail was still maintained.
- More mountain bikers
- The signage has improved. I got lost with a friend and ended up in a yard, an acquaintance coincidentally, and he gave us a ride back to my car. Signs are extremely important as well as maps of the area.
- Trees have grown to obscure the few views. The Economou Road entrance has become worse and worse for vehicle access to the parking area.
- More mountain bikers than there used to be. Sometimes makes hiking difficult
- Used to be lots of wildlife. The trails now have significant erosion. Mountain bikers do not stay on the marked trails and leave no place for the wildlife to avoid the unrelenting harassment from the bikers.
- Did not change much
- There are more mountain bikers.
- Many more trails. Better maintained trails, No mountain bikes when I first used the forest. Many bikers now, but I don't see very many on the trails per visit.
- The trails committee has worked too hard to make the trails homogenized. Some parts have unnecessarily been closed off with the idea people can't manage to stay upright on their own two feet. I still walk those portions anyway.
- too many trails are horse prohibited
- More people, more trails, more impact.
- I live next to it so we started walking/hiking in it when it was just the town's Eagle trail. There were more ATVs and hunters (at times) Now there are mountain bikers and it is much busier. I enjoy the variety of trails, the people are friendly and I feel safe when alone.. I



wonder about the slow erosion of the trails as the roots seem more pronounced. like the soil might be wearing away. I think it is a good thing that it is enjoyed by so many.

- The sustainability of the multi-use trails has vastly improved.
- I've seen a tremendous growth in the number of mountain bikers, likely due to info and maps available on FOTW website. Many bikers are from out of town and out of state.
- Roots in the trails have become quite exposed as a result of use. This is typical with most trail systems in our region with the same soil types.
- Not in any noticeable way, but I have only lived in town 1 year
- Over the past ten years it seems steady with more biking leading to noticeable trail erosion
- Not particularly. I'm very thankful, the bike organizations keep the trail system in such great shape.
- Many more bicyclists. As noted above, most are courteous and friendly but a growing minority of riders ride too fast, are unsafe and treat hikers as annoying obstructions..
- The storm damage that closed some of the trails took away more moderate trails that are needed for less extreme riders and beginners.
- lots more trails and mountain bike usage
- It is becoming known as a destination spot in Chittenden County. The mountain biking isn't easy which limits the crowds. and helps. Weekends are busier.
- It has become a busier place with all of the trail work that has been done over the years.
- The trails are wonderful improvement and get better all the time
- The trails have improved... I enjoy mountain biking on them more than I used to!
- I have seen more mountain bikers enjoying the forest and trails.
- better signs
- No
- Overall the forest has not changed too much. I think the trail management has been outstanding. Some of the trails like the Lost Trail and Back door could be marked a little bit better.
- A few more mountain bikers, as the sport in general has become more popular.
- Not too much, but not to happy about the horse poop on the trails
- Mountain bike trails continue to get better and better!
- hasn't that I noticed
- Maybe more people use it but hard to tell
- More biking and more people.
- Trails have been used a lot and there's erosion



- Increased mountain biking due to trail creation and improvement. This is a GREAT thing. I live nearby and LOVE to see cars drive by with bikes on 'em, or better yet, cyclists riding by.
- Ive only been mountain biking in the forest. The trails are great, and are well made and maintained. I don't see much change other than improvements to trails
- Parking has changed with what is or is not allowed. Some logging caused reroutes. Nothing major.
- Much more bike , less hunting
- It seems there is an increased amount of erosion on certain trails.
- Mtb trails have improved. More people are using it. I see more trail runners using the Mtb trails.
- It has not.
- More visitors than previous
- It is definitely seeing more use, from all types of users, but it does not seem overused due to the overall large size of the forest.
- Maybe slightly more bikers but not much change
- More mountain bike trails which are fantastic.
- Seems to be up. Mountain biking has gotten very popular in the past few years.
- Trail erosion. Need more trails so they do get ridden to much,
- I appreciate the additions of trails, maps and signage. I appreciate a mix of easy and challenging trails. My use fell off this year due to an accident, but I'm excited to get back to it.
- More people (4-5 years)
- More users, but certainly not too many. Nice to see folks enjoying the HTF
- I've been visiting the forest for about 4 years and over that time it seems that the use has stayed about the same. I mostly see mountain bikers during the summer and fall, which is wonderful because that's why I am there. During the winter and spring I am generally there hiking and walking my dog and occasionally see others doing the same.
- It hasn't changed much. The mountain bike trails have seen some good improvements
- I would say the trail marking has improved, and my own biking skills!
- It's great to see more people enjoying this wonderful area. More Trails have been built and the mountain bike riding is absolutely wonderful. At times the parking area has gotten crowded.
- Trail network and conditions have only improved since my first visit to the HTF many years ago when only the Eagle Trail existed.
- Thanks for all the great and well maintained biking trails!
- hasn't changed in the 5 years I've been visiting



- Much improved! Trails are great for biking, hiking and dog walking. The trail crew has done amazing work in the forest hopefully a few worn out trails will be rerouted in the future.
- more MT Bike participation
- A few more runners, hikers, But primary trail users are mountain bikers, which is appropriate since they built and maintain most of the trails
- traffic has increased at certain times
- It seems to be more recreationally-focused.
- It has seemed pretty constant.
- A few more people are present, but it do s not feel crowded. Trails are in much better condition.
- it seems a bit more crowded from HHE lot.
- In general the mountain bike trails have become better in terms of water drainage which is great. I would also say the trails have become a little easier to ride. I miss the Boneyard trail section that used to be available to ride.
- Definitely increased usage, but the development of the trail system is top notch,
- Nope, only been in VT for 2 years.
- The trails have become more popular and I see more visitors, but it is still relatively quiet and I rarely see anyone once I get deeper into the woods
- There of been a lot of blow downs over the years, mount bike trails have been built and then seen a fair amount of a Rosian. Overall I think it's improved over the years.
- More people are using it for mountain biking.
- trails dramatically improved and maintained.
- Erosion in places, but generally trails well maintained by FOW. Definitely better with them than without them
- Not at all
- I primarily mountain bike in HTF. As of late, I have witnessed more signs of equestrian use on trails that are NOT designated for horse use. (hoof prints and horse droppings mainly) These are sometimes difficult to avoid and very unpleasant to encounter.
- More trails allowing more adventure and discovery of the forest
- Use has not changed from my perception.
- I think the trails have been really well-maintained considering the amount of use. There is some wear but far less than in other FOTW areas.
- I've only been accessing for the last year, so none.
- I love it for mountain biking and appreciate the mileage of trials and maintenance of those trails. Occasionally we do see horse manure on the trails and would aks that these visitors



be reminded of cleaning up after their horse so that we do not have to ride or walk through it.

- about the same.
- Trail improvements over the years, and noticed slightly more traffic. Mostly on weekends
- seeing a tad bit more people but not enough to call it "crowded"
- It seems more traffic is n the forest and the wear and tear on the trails shows at times
- There have been great trail upgrade from Mt biking and work done to build sustainable trails that don't require any maintenance,
- More mtn. biking has lead to better trail maintenance and more use.
- I haven't noticed any changes in terms of use. I mountain bike there and enjoy it quite a bit. The trails are a little beat up and could probably use some rerouting to allow for some recovery on the current trails.
- no
- Have only been visiting in the last year
- Some FOTW trail work happened, just made the experience better!
- Trails have gotten much better. Excellent work by Fellowship of the Wheel!
- Much better signage and excellent trail management
- I have seen more mountain bikers, hunters, dog walkers and birders.
- Not much but we live where we do to have easy access to the HTF!
- More users. More obvious user footprint. Moving away from natural unchanged forest to
 more of a public recreation park type of use. Ok by most users I would think. I see
 recreational and fitness uses (dog walking, mountain biking, skiing, hiking...) replacing more
 traditional hunting, atv, snowmobile and timber harvesting activities over time as demands
 evolve. Hopefully the two can coexist and bring a broader spectrum of users to the table
- More awareness since I first started accessing these trails years ago
- Seems to be more popular...linked to the increased popularity of mountain biking and back country skiing in our region
- I feel that there is a perception the town forest is intended for biking and that the need of bicyclists is paramount. I do not like this perception. I feel the town forest was interned to be a mixed use area for folks of all ages, abilities and interests. I also view the town forest as a timber resource which is under-utilized.
- I feel like it's only gotten better!!!
- I have seen in increase in use as biking has become more popular
- More users have put greater strain on the trails, but generally still in good shape
- Some mountain bike trails are pretty rough.



- Trails have improved with less erosion and better markings.
- It just keeps getting better
- I lived on Texas Hill and used to run existing trails before they were developed and discovered. Now it's almost like a superhighway with competing pressures of too many uses vs. the enjoyment of the sport.
- Hard to say.
- It has gotten incredibly busy with mountain bikers. I used to go regularly and not run into a single person and now I have at least three bikers pass me. Would be nice if folks had a little trail etiquette and just let you know with a few kind words when they were coming in hot
- The trails have improved dramatically in recent years with the help of the Fellowship of the Wheel Trail Crew and volunteers. The forest itself hasn't really changed and is a beautiful and peaceful as ever.
- The huge blowdown that closed some of the trails off Economou road.. I feel as though the number of users has increased but I can't say that this isn't just my perception.
- Usage has increased (mtn bikers specifically which is my primary reason to use the HTF) as the trails have gotten fixed/better maintained.
- More mountain biking for sure, and better-maintained trails. When I started riding there years ago, there were only atv trails and the boyscout trail. What an improvement! The Fellowship of the Wheel has really added a lot of value and quality to the trails. They are on top of things like erosion, etc.
- There are way more roots to navigate
- Storms have really changed the forest by making some trails inaccessible and forcing traffic onto remaining trails. We've also seen the diversity of activities increase.
- Storms have changed the landscape, and therefore the trails, but VMBA (and others, I'm sure) always put in lots of hours to remake the trails. Always a wonderful experience being there!
- More bike trails
- I use to go when it was only the Eagle trail and a few logging roads. I would always get lost. I got involved helping build the first mountain bike trails and that helped me to understand the lay of the land and made it easier for me to hike there and take my girls there to build fairy houses by the brooks
- The fellowship has built trails that allow more people to get out and enjoy the forest and nature. This was not the case 15 years ago
- The bike trails have been ridden off in the past few years. Since the loss of nature boy way back, there has been no beginner level trails added which is unfortunate.
- It sure.
- It hasn't to my knowledge



- I don't perceive much change over 10 years
- More roots on the mountain bike trails
- The trails are in better condition and more fun to ride
- A few more trail users. Some trails are more eroded.
- Better maintained now
- Better and more trails than before.
- The number and quality of trails has increased. The bisecting road has been greatly improved.
- Some of the trails have been getting worn.
- Unnoticed
- In the last 5 years I fee the trails have been greatly improved!
- I have only been visiting for about 6 years, but have not noticed a significant change in that time. Maybe a few more people, but certainly not many.
- increased traffic, parked cars, better quality of trails
- More people, but not unacceptably so.
- erosion is greater (or in other words, roots are more exposed)
- More people
- More visitors increasing footprint on mountain bike trail network
- I still think it's a pretty quiet place. I rarely encounter more than 1 or 2 other groups when visit. I often encounter no one.
- No
- Hasn't changed too much, in my opinion.
- More mtn bikers. But that's okay.
- The trails for mountain biking have become more extensive and better maintained over the last few years
- no change
- I haven't been visiting the forest long enough to notice any changes.
- The mtb terrain used to be more challenging but they made it easier. I would prefer some more technical terrain with more features..
- Pretty much the same
- As the trails are cared for, more people are coming to play
- Not sure don't visit frequently enough
- The trails for mountain biking have greatly improved over the years!
- More bikers and trail runners



- I've only used it for mountain biking. And it does not appear to have changed much in the few years I've been riding there.
- More MTB trails.
- I try to come at low use times
- haven't noticed much change in use
- Way more mountain bikers at all times of the year.
- Not much sometimes I see larger groups (maybe for Fellowship group rides or events) which can be a bit of a pain to navigate when trail running and for parking, but overall it hasn't changed much.
- Nature Boy is no longer a maintained trail. Though not a challenging trail I though this worth keeping around for beginners and it was fun trail.
- I have visited for last 5 years for mountain biking only. I have not noticed any changes except good trail work by FOTW crew making trails better drained and reduce erosion. I visit in winter also for fat biking on snow/ice. I rarely see more than 3 people each time I visit. I perceive very few users of the property based on that. Everyone is very nice, hikers, trail runners, bikers.
- Besides the loss of some trails due to the wind storm several years ago, perhaps there are a few more visitors...
- Wind storms have eliminated some of the mountain biking trails.
- Better signage. A few more users but still lightly used.
- Bike trail maintenance has improved which is nice!
- Improved
- trails are getting wider because mt bikers are going around roots and rocks, which impacts vegetations people need stay on trails/ trail drainage has greatly improved thanks to fellowship also forest use has become year around which is great
- I've noticed more dog walkers
- definitely more erosion and wind damage
- It has increased slightly
- Figured out how not to get stuck on the road when biking
- Trail maintenance has improved greatly, allowing the trails to dry & drain quickly. This allows for more daily & long term use.
- More mountain biking... a good thing.
- mtb trails
- Trails have improved greatly.
- LOGGING HAS BEEN DONE IN AREAS



- It used to be much more friendly for all types of activities. Now it seems that mountain biking has taken over. Dogs off leash and disrespect of no parking signs for area residents. Also lack of respect for trails during mud season. Bikes with big fat tires for mud and snow riding. Use is still continued even when communication goes out about staying off trails due to weather conditions of the trails or during hunting season.
- Increased human impact.
- Logging and fallen trees from storms have opened up parts of the forest to more light and changed the feel of some trails. Some bike trail maintenance has been appreciated for general upkeep and sustainability, while other changes to the flow of the trail were not appreciated and cause abrupt awkward turns to climb uphill where the trail used to continue descending.
- With more use, some trails are much more rooty and rocky, not lending to beginner or intermediate mountain biking. Kudos to the FOTW trail crew for their numerous improvements and dedication
- Slight increase in trail users and atvs.
- Increased usage and more awareness in general to the resource it provides
- Some of the old trails that were damaged in the blow down many yrs ago seem to still be unavailable.
- Only visited once heard about historical timber harvests here and one to come this winter FOW has built and maintained trails here for as long as I've known of the forest (5 years)
- N/A
- Improved trails
- More crowded

