



# Friends of the Mountain Division Trail Newsletter

## Who Benefits from a Rail Trail?

Multiple studies of existing multi-use trails have been completed, with the data showing a range of benefits from improved health of visitors to increased sense of community belonging and pride.



Off-road trails provide an all season, safe environment for walking, running, biking, hiking, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. These “active transportation” alternatives also have a positive impact on the environment, with fewer cars on the road when this other option is available.

Local economies experience direct benefits when trail visitors purchase goods and services from local businesses while using the trail. Studies done on Rail-Trails in New England reported trail visitor direct spending for local day visitors average \$11-13 per day, while non-local visitors spend an average of \$70. Trail visitors staying overnight spend an average of \$176 per visitor per night. Imagine what that could mean for our local businesses!

A very specific study conducted in 2022 of the 91-mile Lamoille Valley Trail in Vermont confirmed these figures. Even before the trail was completely connected, the three separate finished sections realized 123,590 visitors per year of which 71% were local day visitors, 23% were nonlocal day visitors, and 6% were overnight visitors. Local day visitors spent \$13.12 per day, nonlocal day visitors spent \$70.14 per day, and overnight visitors spent an average of \$160.23 per overnight. The length of the trail and number of visitors attracted to the trail resulted in total direct revenues of \$3.927 million per year. A new study is underway to update the count of visitors by type and the economic benefit now that all 91 miles of the trail are connected. It is easy to see how new jobs, and even new businesses could create a ripple effect that would help local economies to expand.



These Rail-Trail studies also found that home values increased by 3-5% when in close proximity to a rail trail. How fortunate we are that this amazing asset will soon be built with Federal and State funds – beginning with Brownfield and Hiram!



### Board of Directors

Doug Smith, President

Terry Egan, Vice President

Andrew Walton, Secretary

Dan Hester

Jon Kachmar

Dave McNutt

Karen McNutt

Friends of The Mountain Division Trail  
P.O. Box 532  
Standish, ME 04084-9998

[www.fotmdt.org](http://www.fotmdt.org)

## Next Step – Maintenance Agreement

At the March 17<sup>th</sup> Brownfield Select Board meeting, Dakota Hewlett, Active Transportation Planner for the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), provided an update on the progress of the Mountain Division Trail construction. Residents learned the Final Engineering and Design Study is expected to be completed by May of 2026, and construction contracts awarded by the fall of 2026. Construction may begin late 2026 with the majority of the work completed in spring/summer 2027.



Doug Smith, President of the Friends of the Mountain Division Trail, presented excerpts from maintenance agreements currently in effect for trails that have been in service for 10 years (Fryeburg) or 20 years (Standish, Windham, Gorham). He also shared some real-life situations experienced by the towns. This presentation enabled the residents, business owners and other stakeholders to better understand the tasks likely to be included in the maintenance agreement between the towns along the trail and MaineDOT. This maintenance agreement is expected to be entered into with the MaineDOT before the trail is completed.

Typical maintenance would include mowing the Trail twice a year, and snow plowing/trash collection where a trailhead is built. Importantly, the MaineDOT will partner with towns when catastrophic damage from major storms or other natural causes results in significant structural damage to bridges along the trail, conduits, or the paved Trail itself. Typically, towns have experienced only minor surface repairs (e.g., filling potholes) until 15-20 years after Trail construction. Some costs of vandalism were covered by towns when individuals damaged signs or defaced them with graffiti. Volunteers, such as the snowmobile clubs and regular users of the trail, frequently contributed to regular upkeep of the trail or minor problems such as a downed tree.

A similar meeting was held with the Select Board in the town of Hiram on March 19<sup>th</sup>. The Select Board and residents posed questions to Dakota Hewlett and Doug Smith, which resulted in an engaging discussion. Residents, particularly members of the Snowmobile Club, offered ideas and suggestions for trail issues specific to Hiram. Dakota met with members of the Club after the meeting to answer questions and get a better understanding of their recommendations.

An online public comment period for the final trail design is expected before the end of April. It will be publicized to town residents and other stakeholders so they may input their concerns and questions directly to the MaineDOT.

## *A timeline of the Mountain Division Trail (MDT)*

1875 - Portland, ME to Ogdensburg, NY railroad completed

1958 - Last passenger train on the railroad

1983 - Last freight train on the railroad

1997 - State of Maine purchases rights to 40 miles of railroad between Windham and Fryeburg

2003 to 2009 – Asphalt, multi-use recreation trail for Windham/Gorham/Standish section opened

2012 – Asphalt, multi-use recreation trail for Fryeburg section opened

2022 – Rail Use Advisory Council (RUAC) process to assess alternate use for railroad line rights completed, and recommendation (11 to 1) made to MaineDOT commissioner to remove rails and ties and build 10 foot wide paved multi-use trail until rail on 31 miles of Mountain Division in western Maine.

2023 – LD404, law authorizing rail removal and building of trail until rail on 31 miles of the railbed signed into law by Gov. Mills (7/7/23)

2024 to 2026 – Studies of trail feasibility (with cost estimates) and additional study to generate final design

2026 - 2027 – Contractor selected (by RFP) and trail construction gets underway for Brownfield to Hiram section

### *Thank You to Our Generous Supporters*

The Friends of the Mountain Division Trail extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to last year's matching donation campaign. Thanks to your incredible generosity—and the added impact of a matching gift—we raised over **\$10,000** to support the continued growth and care of the Mountain Division Trail.

Your support directly fuels trail improvements, community events like Chalk the Trail, and ongoing maintenance that keeps the corridor safe, accessible, and enjoyable for all. This achievement is a testament to the strength of our community and the shared belief in the value of this trail.

Because of you, the Mountain Division Trail continues to thrive. Thank you for being a vital part of this work.

- Andrew Walton - FOTMDT Secretary

*This newsletter is being distributed to our patrons and Town Managers, Select Boards, Recreation Directors, Departments of Public Works, Legislators and the Maine Department of Transportation.*

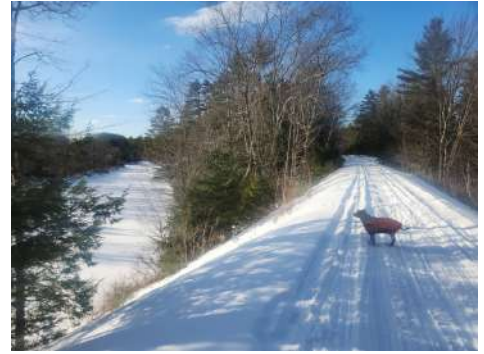
*If you know of others who would be interested, please direct them to our website to sign up:*

[www.fotmdt.org](http://www.fotmdt.org)

# Along the Trail . . .

## Who uses the trail in winter?

Some folks think that the Mountain Division Rail Trail goes silent in the winter months, but that could not be further from the truth. Walkers, snowshoers, cross country skiers and snowmobilers all make daily use of the trail – particularly once those flakes start to pile up. The flat terrain and safe environment make an attractive and exhilarating opportunity for fun and exercise.



Lynn Knowlton and Julia Hall take a break while snowshoeing the trail – and taking in the spectacular scenery.

Burnt Meadow Sno Club members travel the Mountain Division Trail and connect to the network of snowmobile trails throughout Western Maine. Along the way, they stop in for a bite to eat at a local restaurant conveniently located near the Trail.



# Conserved land in Maine has growing economic power

- By Jon Kachmar and Erin Witham

(An excerpt from NATURE CONNECTS, a monthly column showcasing conservation stories from people and organizations across Maine.)

Jon Kachmar is the executive director of Portland Trails. Erin Witham is the regional conservation partnership coordinator for the Downeast Conservation Network.

Across Maine, conservation is often considered in the context of its environmental and social benefits: protecting wildlife, safeguarding clean air and water, preserving working lands and waterfronts and providing access to outdoor recreation, to name a few. Increasingly, however, conservation is also being evaluated through an economic lens.



Recent studies have helped put numbers to these benefits, offering a clearer picture of how conserving land supports communities in both urban and rural Maine.

Greater Portland is home to 100 miles of interconnected trails maintained by Portland Trails, a nonprofit urban trails trust. These trails function as greenways, commuter routes, recreational spaces, wildlife corridors and social gathering places. They connect neighborhoods to schools, jobs and waterfronts, while preserving pockets of nature within a growing city.



A recent economic and community contribution analysis, conducted by Camoin Associates and commissioned by Portland Trails, reveals just how much value this trail network delivers. Each year, trail-related activity supports over 900 jobs and generates over \$42 million in worker earnings, as well as nearly \$113 million in sales in Greater Portland alone. When accounting for ripple effects across the state, these numbers increase to over 1,200 jobs, \$54 million in worker earnings and nearly \$142 million in total sales in Maine annually.

The benefits extend even further. Economists estimate that the ecosystem services provided by land along the Portland Trails network, such as stormwater absorption, carbon sequestration and air filtration, may be worth between \$2 million and \$5 million annually.

While those figures are approximate, they underscore a simple truth: Natural systems provide services that would be expensive, if not impossible, to replace with built infrastructure.



Putting an economic value on nature will never capture everything these places mean to people in Maine. But as Maine faces growing pressures from development, climate change and infrastructure needs, understanding the economic benefits of conservation helps inform smart, forward-looking decisions.

Maine's economy has always been tied to its water and landscapes. The best investments we can make are those that keep the landscapes, and the communities they support, thriving for the long term.

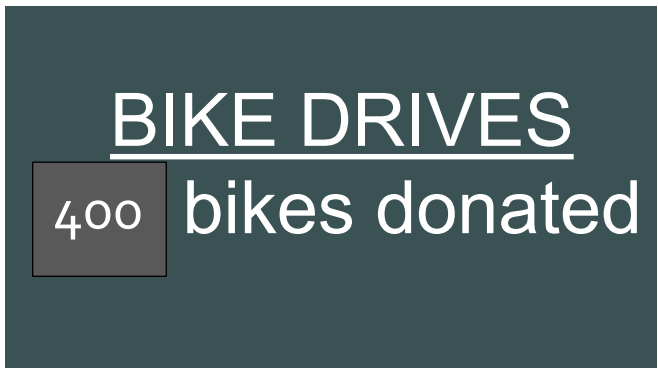
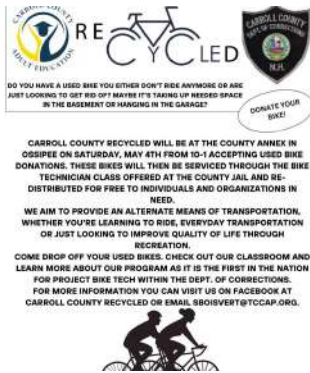
# Bicycle Recycling – A Win-Win Opportunity

Sometimes, we limit ourselves to issues and concerns that are strictly local, and spend less energy on expanding beyond our town, our county and our state. It is worthwhile to step back and consider how we most certainly have much in common as we make connections across these various levels and discover opportunities that present themselves as we broaden our perspective to a regional level – sometimes resulting in novel solutions to old problems.

I had a great opportunity to experience this recently when I met with Crystal Sawyer, Executive Director of Carroll County Adult Education, and Scott Boisvert, Economic Supports Department Head and Mobility Manager for TCCAP (Tri-County Community Action Program) of New Hampshire: <https://tccap.org/about-us/history/>. I quickly realized that Crystal and Scott were individuals who recognized a need, and turned that need into a win-win opportunity.

The need was for a simple and inexpensive mode of transportation for people who needed it for employment or for other purposes – namely bicycles. Their ideas blossomed into a bike recycling program that has been so successful that it serves as a model on a local, state and national level.

The basic premise is to organize “bike drives” where people can donate bikes that are not in use, refurbish the bikes, then donate them to individuals in need of transportation. To date, 400 bikes have been donated, and 295 bikes have been re-distributed back to the community - to every age group from local daycare centers and schools to seniors at the Gibson Center in North Conway – where 40 bikes were recently given away.



# Bicycle Recycling (continued)

Another successful aspect of the bike recycling program addressed an additional need (the refurbishing of the donated bikes) in a way that created even more value for the program. By securing grant funding, these partners were able to establish a Master Bike Technician course at the Carroll County House of Corrections – Project Bike Tech.



Students who complete the training can graduate with a Master Bike Technician certification that is recognized nationally. So far, these individuals have repaired and donated 100 bikes, and are gaining skills that will help them with future employment.

As we look toward the expansion of the Mountain Division Trail, it is exciting to think of how this trail will offer an opportunity for safe travel for employment opportunities as well as recreation. We can envision a not-too-distant future when our trail, which currently ends at the New Hampshire border in Fryeburg, might continue all the way to North Conway – opening up more opportunities and connections across the Mount Washington Valley.

Representatives from the Bike Tech Project and Recycling Program will be joining us in Fryeburg for the Chalk the Trail Event on June 21<sup>st</sup> between 9-11 at the Fryeburg Visitors' Center. If you have a bike you are no longer using, please consider donating it to this worthwhile program. There will also be some recycled bikes to be given away to some lucky attendees. Please come out to learn more about the program, to donate a bike if you can, or to possibly walk away with one of the recycled bikes.

**All are welcome!**

# Mark Your Calendars!

## Upcoming events for Spring and Summer

Opening Day on the Mountain Division Trail  
Fryeburg Visitor Center  
April 11, 2026  
8:00am-5:00pm

Celebrate Trails Day - Presumpscot River  
Cleanup  
Westbrook Riverbank Park  
April 25, 2026  
8:00am-Noon

Brownfield Public Library Fair  
Brownfield Public Library  
May 2, 2026  
10:00am - 1:00pm

Chalk the Trail - Windham  
Gambo Soccer Fields, Windham  
May 17, 2026  
10:00am-1:00pm

Chalk the Trail - Fryeburg  
Maine State Visitor Information Center,  
Fryeburg  
June 21, 2026  
9:00am -11:00am



Windham Summerfest  
Windham High School  
June 20, 2026  
Time TBD

Steep Falls Village Turns 200 - Founders Day  
Steep Falls Village Gazebo Park  
June 27, 2026  
9:00am-3:00pm

Standish Spectacular  
Standish Memorial Park  
August 1, 2026  
Noon - 9:00pm

Brownfield Day  
Brownfield Community Center  
August 8, 2026  
9:00am-4:00pm

### *Another note of thanks . . .*

Thank you to everyone who supported the Friends of the Mountain Division Trail through Clynk bottle and can redemptions in 2025. Thanks to your efforts, we raised over **\$250**—a simple but impactful way to support the trail while recycling!

#### **How It Works:**

Supporting FOTMDT through Clynk is easy:

- Contact us for Clynk Bags and Tags ([FOTMDT@gmail.com](mailto:FOTMDT@gmail.com))
- Place your returnable bottles and cans in a Clynk bag
- Attach the FOTMDT tag to the bag
- Drop it off at any participating Clynk redemption location

Your bag is processed, and the funds are automatically credited to Friends of the Mountain Division Trail.

Every bottle and can adds up. Thank you for turning everyday recycling into meaningful support for the trail!



# Trail Opening Day

Celebrate the Snow Melting and Enjoy a Spring Walk or Bike on the MDT



Learn about the trail expansion

Tell us how you use the trail

T-Shirts and Hats available for purchase



**Join Us!**  
8 AM — 5 PM  
Sat, April 11 2026



Maine State Visitor Information Center in Fryeburg



# Chalk the Trail

Sunday,  
**May 17, 2026**  
10 AM - 1 PM

**Gambo Fields**  
Soccer Drive, Windham, Maine

**Come Chalk the Trail!**

- Free Chalk!**
- Fun for All Ages!**
- Art, Games & Music!**
- Kid Art Welcome!**



# FREE COMMUNITY EVENT

The Town of Fryeburg &  
The Friends of The Mountain Division Trail

## Chalk the Trail 2026

June 21st 9am - 11am

Location:

Mountain Division Rail Trail at the Maine State Visitor Information Center



Donate or pick up a bike with the  
Bike Recycling Project. Free helmets and  
swag available from the Mt. Washington  
Valley Bike Club and Fryeburg Police  
Department.



Chalk will be  
provided,  
just bring  
your  
creativity



Free face  
painting!

Ed, the  
pretzel guy,  
will be there!

Sponsored by  
Fryeburg Rec & Fryeburg Bicycle, Walkways & Trail  
Committee