

Date: 1/23/22

To: Town of Starksboro Selectboard

Re: Request for access to Starksboro town roads (addendum)

The following is additional information (as requested) for the Starksboro Selectboard in the consideration of VAST's request to use short sections of town roads to connect trails.

- ***A formal endorsement from VAST***

See attached copy of email.

- ***A description of the proposed trail/access to the roads that includes:***

- ***Maps indicating the requested access and what trails will be connected by the requested access; It is unclear what trails are being connected. It would be helpful to share an area map of the current snowmobile trails showing how your request will connect those trails.***
- ***Evidence that the state has granted snowmobile access to the Lewis Creek Wildlife Management Area***
- ***Proposed time of day access/curfew (What are normal VAST trail hours?)***
- ***Side of road of travel***

A map is attached showing how the proposed section of trail (utilizing town roads) connects VAST RT 30 (Lincoln, Ripton, Brandon, etc) to VAST RT 17 (Huntington, Bristol, Hinesburg, Fayston, etc).

Also attached is the Cooperative Agreement between the Agency of Natural Resources and its Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers from June 1999. This agreement still stands between the state and VAST. The ANR has been asked to specifically re-approve trail use at the LCWMA, and that approval is pending. The town will be given notification as soon as VAST receives it.

In regard to proposed time of day for VAST trail use, there currently are no official VAST trail hours or curfews. However, there are a few exceptions throughout the state where a curfew has been imposed on private land.

In regard to the side of the road of travel, snowmobiles would follow the flow of traffic and not be riding against traffic. Snowmobiles are directed to stay as far to the side of the road as possible.

***• A description of the efforts made to connect the trails without access to town roads. While you did mention being denied access by two land owners, we wonder if there are other alternatives.***

VAST greatly prefers to stay off public roads. Roads are not fun to ride and are hard on machines. Many minds have brainstormed and searched for ways to connect VAST Rt 30 to VAST Rt 17. Landowners have been spoken to, and maps have been studied. The connection would still be impossible if the Schmidt's had not recently granted permission to cross the Little Ireland Land Trust. Even if the town grants permission to use Conway and Ireland Road as connectors, VAST will search for an alternative route off town roads, and the club is certainly open to suggestions regarding a possible route. Dale and Dona Norton have granted permission that would allow access from the Little Ireland Land Trust to the top of the mountain, but permissions to cross lands beyond that point have not been secured. Therefore, we have not successfully obtained landowner permission that would eliminate road travel at this time.

***• A description of the efforts made to collaborate with community members regarding the requested access and the plan for ongoing collaboration with community members should the access be granted. We are also hoping to hear about your efforts to reconcile with the community members taken by surprise when signs were posted for snowmobile travel on town roads without permission and proactive communication.***

When permission to cross the Little Ireland Land Trust was granted, we were excited to reopen the trail connecting north and south trail networks. Snowmobile usage of the Conway and Ireland Roads had never been withdrawn, and we assumed usage was acceptable. We were wrong and apologize (and have apologized) for that assumption.

However, landowners were not "taken by surprise". Thinking that use of the road was acceptable, Bruce Curvoo went to each landowner on the proposed route and asked for permission to use their land to avoid road travel. Only Louis Dupont granted permission. When these landowners became upset about VAST using the road, we posted signs marking that section as a sensitive area and posted the speed limit. We did not know we had to ask permission to use the road until December, at which point we quickly approached the town.

Again, proactive attempts were made by asking landowners for permission to route the trail along the edge or across their land. When access was denied, signs were placed on the road with the false assumption that the permission for previous road travel was still granted. We do apologize for this error; however, we groom and maintain 56 miles of local trails and have never had to obtain permission from a town to use the road. We have used some roads in Starksboro (and four other towns) since the 60's without an issue. It is also important to note

that not all the residents along Conway Road and Ireland Road are opposed to snowmobile traffic; several families have expressed support for reopening the trail connection,

Members of VAST attended the December 7th, 2021, selectboard meeting to reassure residents along the road that we would use the road respectfully. We believe that members of the club were polite and “non-combative”. It did not feel as if those opposing the use of the road were equally considerate. Considering the old saying: “you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink”, we don’t know how to approach reconciliation. That takes two sides, and if these landowners would like to sit down and solve the problem constructively, members of the club would be happy to work with them.

Following the selectboard meeting on 12/7/21, Denny Casey approached Jeff Dunham to ask for permission to cross his upper border. He was turned down. We prefer not to use the road but, in this case, have no other route without landowners’ permission. Never-the-less, in an attempt to reconcile with landowner in opposition, we will continue to seek an alternate route to get this trail off the road as much as possible.

***• The plan to monitor usage/proper usage of the requested access; While the initial request does reiterate the connection with VSP and VF&W, we would like to see evidence that the group has reached out to these organizations to talk specifically about how/when these trails will be monitored and what the result of those conversations were.***

Attached is the contract between VAST and local law enforcement. Hopefully the contract is self-explanatory, and given the nature of law enforcement, one cannot predict where they will be at any given time.

***• A fully detailed request including map (as noted in our initial email and indicated above) for the request on Russell Young Road and Sam Stokes Road.***

As mentioned at the beginning of this addendum, a map has been attached showing where the trail would pass over Starksboro town roads. Again, we are requesting the former use of portions of Ireland Road, Conway Road, Sam Stokes Road, and Russell Young Road from Paul Porters land (603 Jerusalem Road) to the end which leads back to the VAST trail. We would travel the side of Russell Young Road, but are still working with landowners to get off the road as much as possible on all of the previously stated roads. There is no change where the trail has passed over Sam Stokes Road in the past: it is a short stretch from the end to where the trail crosses VT 17. (See attached map)