



MAD RIVER VALLEY RECREATION DISTRICT

Selectboard Update: November 2021

During the first months of 2021, the Pandemic dictated much of our lives, but in the spring of 2021 outdoor youth soccer and lacrosse were able to proceed and MRVRD began hosting events again. During the summer we saw continued high demand for recreational resources. This increased recreational activity had a positive economic impact on local businesses as they reopened or increased capacity and also introduced new challenges for our community.

2021 Accomplishments:

- Awarded \$46,458 in recreation grant funds to 12 groups, supporting recreational initiatives serving youth and adult programs and sustaining vital recreation facilities used by the community and visitors. Funding requests from 13 applicants totaling more than \$80,000 were submitted (final spending report December 2021).
- Helped launch stewardMRV, a new collaborative initiative to increase the cleanliness and environmental quality of trailheads, swim holes and recreation sites in the MRV.
- Continued leadership of the MRV Trails Collaborative: conducted two Zoom meetings (March and July) and one in-person meeting (September) to share updates about activities and identify shared goals, with a continuing priority on linking existing trails and balancing environmental priorities.
- Convened a working group within the Trails Collaborative to research, plan and write the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Letter of Interest which culminated in an invitation to make a full grant application (Recreation Hub Project). We were one of 37 out of 104 applicants asked to continue.
- Managed Mad River Park using COVID protocols and included a volunteer day to line the fields and conducted a gear swap.
- Hosted three safety based events: reflective vest give away (175 vests), backcountry skiing workshop and a \$10 bike helmet event at the Farmer's Market (113 helmets distributed).
- Engaged a local website designer to produce a more helpful website (public launch will be December 2021).
- Designed and began conducting a Valley wide survey to assess recreational needs in the community.
- Promoted Laura Arnesen, MRVRD Coordinator to the position of Executive Director in recognition of a strong work ethic, creativity and leadership increasing capacity and the role of the MRVRD. As ED, she works closely with individual partners, the Trails Collaborative and stewardMRV. She is spearheading administration of the MRVRD Grant Program; helped implement a community wide survey on recreation needs and has increased public awareness of MRVRD.
- Navigated transition in Board of Directors. Thanked departing Board members Jeff Whittingham (Waitsfield); Chissy Bellmyer (Fayston); Whitney Phillips (Warren); Mike Nucci (Waitsfield); and Geordie Hall (Warren) for their service. Welcomed Bear Simmons (Waitsfield); Molly Bagnato (Fayston); Shevonne Travers (Waitsfield); and Peter Olliver (Warren) to the Board.

2022 Initiatives:

- Launch new MRVRD website to improve service to the community and provide comprehensive recreational information to local residents and visitors. Website updates will be done by staff/Board as needed.
- Sponsor grant application to the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) seeking up to \$400,00 in state funding for the MRV Recreation Hub Project, and advance economic development in the Mad River Valley by expanding and leveraging our outdoor recreation assets. If successful, administering this grant will be a main focus of our 2022 work.
- Operate MRVRD annual recreation grant program, consider grant requests from 15 organizations seeking more than \$80,000. Decisions to be announced in January 2022.
- Host \$10 Bike Helmet opportunity as an annual event.
- Establish an E-bike lending program for next summer.
- Work with Evergreen and Mad Meadows to get exercise equipment for Seniors.
- Open Mad River Park for winter sports in 2021/22 as a trial to determine future plans.
- Consider a community event to bring people together to celebrate recreation in the Valley.
- Work with the Trails Collaborative to address concerns of the towns, planning groups and conservation commissions regarding Valley-wide planning for trails and balancing environmental issues.
- Use results of the Recreation Survey to chart MRVRD future activities.

2021 Budget Request to MRVRD Member Towns: Many thanks to the towns of Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren for funding the MRVRD programs and our first part-time staff member. In 2022, we will seek \$40,000 from each town to support our increasing service to recreation in the Mad River Valley. This is a \$10,000 increase from last year and will enable MRVRD to fund additional grant requests, invest in Mad River Park and continue to leverage our .6FTE staff member's activities with concrete results.

It should be noted that having a part-time staff member has substantially increased our capacity to serve recreation needs in the Valley. For example, hosting the safety events and helping to launch stewardMRV would not have been possible without Laura. And, as per our promise, we have worked hard to tap other non-taxpayer funds and resources to support recreation. Most notably the VOREC grant, if awarded, has the potential to bring \$100,000 - \$400,000 into the Valley.

Benchmark: Waterbury and Bristol's recreation budgets are over \$300,000, with each town having multiple full-time staff members.