

Trail Mix: CRV's First Community Learning Session

On Thursday, December 7th, the Mad River Valley Conservation and Recreation Visioning (CRV) Team will be hosting its first Community Learning Session at the Valley Players Theater in Waitsfield. The event runs from 6 - 8 pm and will include presentations from two regional experts, Gus Goodwin and Drew Pollak-Bruce (full speaker bios below). This session will serve as the first in a series aimed at building a shared foundation of knowledge around outdoor recreation and ecology in the Valley and beyond.

The overall goal of the CRV project is to develop, through an inclusive community process, a set of maps, shared goals, guiding principles, and best practices that together will provide a well-supported vision for balancing ecological integrity with recreation and trails across the Valley. The project's success depends on a community-wide understanding of the dynamics surrounding these issues.

During this first session, the speakers will be focused on overarching trends, ideas, and opportunities related to ecology and recreation in Vermont, the U.S., and globally. "We want to start with the big picture," says CRV Co-Chair Laura Arnesen. "Understanding these broad themes will help as we narrow down our goals for the Valley." The two presentations will be followed by a Q&A, so curiosity and reflection are encouraged.

Moving forward, the CRV Project intends to host a Community Learning Session every 2-3 months. Potential topics include wildlife corridors and habitat, forest ecology, recreation planning, trail standards, and more. CRV Co-Chair Phil Huffman shared, "We are committed to learning together as a community. We hope these sessions will help us develop a common language around issues related to the interplay between outdoor recreation and trails on the one hand, and ecological integrity and biodiversity on the other."

Beyond Community Learning Sessions, CRV has contracted with Arrowwood Environmental to compile research, data, and mapping connected to this work. The CRV Steering Committee plans to host a second Community Forum this winter to provide an update on Arrowwood's efforts and to get feedback from Valley residents and others. Please stay tuned for information on this and other future events!

Speaker Bios

Gus Goodwin, Senior Conservation Planner, The Nature Conservancy (VT Chapter)

Gus Goodwin is the Senior Conservation Planner for the Vermont Chapter of TNC. In this role, he shepherds conservation projects from start to finish, engaging in conservation science, land protection, and ecological management. In short, he does a little bit of everything. Driven by curiosity and an appreciation for the complexity of the natural world, Gus has developed a broad background that includes botany, wildlife tracking and road ecology, surficial geology, and conservation planning. Throughout all this runs a common thread of connecting science to conservation actions.

Drew Pollak-Bruce, Owner & Founder, CRO Planning and Design

Drew is the Owner & Founder of CRO Planning & Design where he helps municipalities, counties, state agencies, federal land managers, non-profits, and private sector clients navigate complex projects on public lands across North America. He has worked as a professional planner, advocate, and journalist—often focusing on the intersection of communities, recreation, and open space. In addition to publishing frequent nationally distributed articles on parks and recreation, Drew has led trails workshops throughout the US and spoken at numerous state and national conferences, including the National Outdoor Recreation Conference, the Creating Healthy Places Conference, the International Trails Symposium, and the National Ski Areas Association's Downhill Mountain Bike Summit. Drew is a Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP) and holds a Master of Regional Planning from Cornell University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is currently serving as the President of the National Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (SORP) and sits on the Executive Committee of the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association (VRPA) and the Vermont Community Development Association (VCDA).

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