

**Green Mountain Club
Former Champion Lands Hiking Corridor Management Proposal**

**Phase II Abstract
Bluff Mountain**

January, 2007

Green Mountain Club, working to become the designated Corridor Manager for hiking trails on the former Champion Lands, has developed a two phase proposal outlining a network of day and multi-day hiking trails. A complete summary of the proposed plan can be found in the Green Mountain Club Former Champion Lands Hiking Corridor Management Proposal (or, The Proposal). This document provides a description for the trails in Phase II of the proposed hiking corridor system.

The area accessed by trails in Phase II stretches from downtown Island Pond to Unknown Pond in Avery's Gore. The mountains of the region form the northwestern rim of the circular Nulhegan River basin and consist of Bluff Mountain (elevation 2789 feet), Middle Mountain (elevation 2947 feet) and Gore Mountain (elevation 3332 feet). For the purposes of this proposal Phase II applies only to those corridors (woods roads, skid trails and footpaths) that traverse the length of the Bluff Mountain ridge.

From The Proposal, Phase II seeks to develop:

"The Bluff Mountain Ridge Trail ..., combined with the Phase I trails proposed for Unknown Pond and Middle Mountain, would link the existing hiking trails on Bluff and Gore Mountains".

Bluff Mountain

Bluff Mountain is a mid-elevation ridge forming the northeastern boundary of the Nulhegan River basin. Portions of the ridge are located on private, municipal, and timber company lands (Brighton Town Forest and Town Water District, Essex Timber Company, and DeVost Brothers Contracting). The Bluff Mountain Ridge can be variously described as a long mid-elevation ridgeline or a series of short knolls trending north-northeast from the Village of Island Pond. Currently the **Bluff Mountain Community Trail** leaves the Village of Island Pond from its Mountain Street trailhead and climbs moderately and then more steeply to the southern-most summit of Bluff Mountain. The blue-blazed **Community Trail** forms a loop with the yellow-blazed **Lookout Trail** and provides a spectacular view of Island Pond from the cleared rocky lookout.

The proposed route for the Bluff Mountain Ridge Trail leaves the lower summit accessed by the existing trail and generally follows the ridgeline north-northeast and then north to Unknown Pond. After dropping off the lower summit, the trail passes through mixed hardwood forests over two lesser knolls and then climbs to the larger of Bluff's two higher

summits. The true summit knoll (elevation 2789 feet) rises slightly above the hardwoods that cover much of Bluff and into the denser spruce-fir forest. At this point the ridge narrows, descends slightly, and then climbs to the second high summit. Here the ridge turns north, broadens some and passes again through mixed hardwood, early regeneration, and conifer forests.

The ridgeline north of Bluff's true summit is crossed three times by trail corridors before dropping down to Unknown Pond – two cross near the headwaters of Pine Brook north of the true summit and the third crosses just south of the shore of Unknown Pond. Of the two crossings at Pine Brook, one is an abandoned logging trail and the second is a major VAST corridor. The crossing at Unknown Pond is also a VAST corridor. Both VAST trails leave Vermont Route 114 south of Norton Pond before forking and crossing the ridge at their respective locations.

After descending the second summit knoll on Bluff Mountain, a short spur trail (less than ½-mile) will lead northwest to a proposed campsite located on adjacent private lands. The campsite, suitable for small groups, will consist of several small clearings for tents and, possibly a primitive toilet facility. GMC has conducted preliminary site surveillance and has identified a potential site located in an open forest with limited views towards Norton Pond. The site is quite remote and would generally prohibit unauthorized use or vandalism.

Continuing north, the Ridge Trail follows an abandoned logging road and soon reaches the Pine Brook VAST trails. While additional field work is required for this section, it may be possible for the Ridge Trail to be co-located on the existing VAST trail for a short distance (approximately ¼-mile) before again turning towards the far northern extension of the Bluff Mountain Ridge and Unknown Pond.

The low, heavily-forested, and sometimes broad knolls in this area make cross-country travel difficult, however it may be possible to route this section of trail off to the east or west sides of the ridge. An east slabbing alignment places the trail closer to the Nulhegan Basin and firmly on Essex Timber Company Lands. A west alignment could possibly follow, more or less, along the Essex Timber/DeVost Lands boundary. Such a boundary alignment may be preferable as it would be located in an area less prone to logging and, through the maintenance of the trail corridor, would help define the transition between these two land ownerships. Further surveillance is necessary to determine the suitability of soils in this area and any boundary path would require approval of both landowners.

As proposed in Phase I of the Corridor Management Plan, the Bluff Mountain Ridge Trail would intersect the Unknown Pond Trail (ascending from VT Route 114 to the west) and descend to a VAST trail crossing as it nears Unknown Pond. The co-location of the Unknown Pond and Bluff Mountain Ridge Trails, even for a short distance, creates an optimal alignment that limits trail development in the Unknown Pond area, reduces user conflicts, consolidates hiker access, and reduces line-of-sight concerns by crossing the VAST trail perpendicularly.

Development and Maintenance

GMC will follow a 'go slow' approach to developing trails on the former Champion Lands. Currently GMC volunteers have invested hundreds of hours in the field, planning possible routes, collecting GPS data and surveying potential control points.

GMC will develop trails in consultation with FPR, Essex Timber and other landowners based on existing field resources (staff and volunteer time). GMC will notify both FPR and landowners in advance of planned trail building activities and will report annually on its efforts (per The Proposal).

Maintenance activities will be carried out by GMC volunteers. Trail construction, as funding permits, will be largely undertaken by the local Northeast Kingdom Conservation Service Corps with support from GMC Field Programs and volunteers. All trail building and maintenance activities, unless otherwise noted, will adhere to the standards described in the ATC Appalachian Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance, Second Edition 2000. Standards for placing signs and blazes, developing trailheads and parking, distributing maps, closing trails, and addressing management, maintenance and resource damage needs is further elaborated in The Proposal. This trail description was developed by GMC Northeast Kingdom President Luke O'Brien. GMC points of contact are Luke O'Brien and Director of Field Programs, Dave Hardy.