

Bulletin & Legislative Update

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ENERGY

BUILDING ON PAST EFFORTS

Vermont seems lost in the dark, trying to find a path towards a coherent, responsible energy future.

How will Vermont replace power from Hydro-Quebec and Vermont Yankee — about 70 percent of Vermont's current energy portfolio — when both sources go off line within the next decade? How much power can Vermont feasibly tap from renewable energy sources? Where is it appropriate to site large wind power installations?

One would think that the state would shed a little light to help us find our way. But one would be wrong.

Under the Douglas Administration, the Vermont Department of Public Service (DPS) has taken three shots at

crafting a comprehensive 20 year electric plan, and missed the mark each time. No iteration of the draft energy plan has provided meaningful guidance, foresight, or planning for that matter. If the DPS proposal stands as Vermont's only vision for a responsible energy future, we're going to need some help.

The 2005 General Assembly may hold the key to filling the leadership void.

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VNRC STAFF

Elizabeth Courtney

Executive Director

Patrick Berry

Policy Director

Jamey Fidel

*Forest & Biodiversity
Program Director*

Jimmy Fordham

*Office Manager &
Administrative Assistant*

Jon Groveman

*Water Program Director &
General Counsel*

Stephen Holmes

*Sustainable Communities
Program Director*

Kim Kendall

Staff Scientist

Johanna Miller

Outreach Director

Lucy Morini

Financial Coordinator

Stephanie Mueller

Development Director

Erin Lee Tittel

Membership Coordinator

PUBLICATIONS

Patrick Berry

Editor

Tim Newcomb

Design

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ATV USE IN VERMONT

At the beginning of the year, Governor Douglas convened an ATV Collaborative to address the growing problems with ATVs. VNRC actively participated in the Collaborative, advocating recommendations to help protect natural resources.

Overall, VNRC supports many of the draft recommendations and believes that the Governor and Legislature should strive to change the current, untenable situation regarding illegal ATV activity in Vermont. VNRC supports recommendations that call for mandatory registration of ATVs (with a minimal fee for farming and forestry uses), higher penalties for violations, and increased funding for law enforcement.

VNRC also recognizes there is a demand for increased riding opportunities for ATV clubs and riders. VNRC believes increased trail funding should be used to promote regionally based, high quality trails on private lands with willing landowners after completing environmental review through Act 250. VNRC strongly supports the recommendation that Act 250 jurisdiction should not be relaxed for ATV trail development.

VNRC issued a dissenting opinion regarding the opening of public lands to ATV use. VNRC agrees with a significant majority of the public comment submitted to the Collaborative that public lands should not be opened for ATV use. VNRC also supports the Agency of Natural Resource's ATV Committee, which found that "it would be prudent to not legislatively or administratively relax existing public lands regulations on ATV use until there is a sufficient knowledge base to assess whether Vermont's public land base can accommodate environmental protection demands and existing non-motorized and snowmobile usage before accommodating more."

VNRC also believes that a landowner reparation fund or illegal trespass fund is needed to help compensate all landowners whose property has been damaged from illegal ATV activity. The Legislature should study options for appropriate administrative bodies to oversee this fund in an objective manner.

Finally, VNRC supports an annual review process by the Legislature as part of any comprehensive ATV program. Increased funding for trail construction must be correlated with success in curbing landowner harassment, landowner and municipal property damage, and ongoing resource damage to public lands.



Vermont Needs to Be Careful:

- Access to public land is not the appropriate solution for ATV use. The solution is to focus ATV trail development on private land with willing landowners.
- ATVs can levy significant environmental damage, so environmental review must be required under Act 250.
- Funds collected to reimburse landowners for ATV damage should also be used for lands that are not part of the VASA network.
- New trail development should be planned with a commitment that illegal ATV use will be curtailed.
- Enforcement measures and penalties must be adequate to discourage illegal riding, including higher penalties for flagrant violations.
- A review mechanism must be established to determine whether or not ATV policies are working.