



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
DEPARTMENT of RESOURCES and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
**OFFICE of the COMMISSIONER**  
172 Pembroke Road Concord, New Hampshire 03301

May 23, 2016

603-271-2411  
FAX: 603-271-2629

Ms. Robin L. Frost, Town Manager  
And Gorham Board of Selectmen  
20 Park Street  
Gorham, New Hampshire 03581

Dear Ms. Frost and Gorham Selectmen,

Thank you for the invitation to join the Board of Selectmen for a meeting on April 25, 2016 to discuss opening the section of the Presidential Rail Trail from the Route 2 parking lot/trailhead to Jimtown Road. I appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from town officials, as well as dozens of residents on both sides of the issue that night. I have also continued to receive a steady stream of letters, emails, and phone calls from diverse perspectives on this section of trail.

It is clear that the passion on this issue is high and that there is a range of thoughts and opinions on the request. It is also clear that there is no simple solution to a fairly complex and dynamic situation. As I stated in my April 13, 2016 letter, and reiterated during the public meeting, the management of state public lands needs to be done in a thoughtful and holistic fashion that takes into consideration all stakeholders. The land needs to be managed as part of a balanced statewide system that provides a quality experience for a wide variety of recreational users. Also, in this particular situation, the impact on dozens of local residences is significant and something that must be taken into consideration.

As such, I will not extend the OHRV portion of the Presidential Rail Trail at this time. I certainly understand its appeal to local OHRV enthusiasts, but there needs to be additional work and cooperation by the stakeholders before expansion is considered for this section of trail.

I heard many interesting ideas and comments during the public meeting, as well as in letters and emails following that night. Ideas included suggestions about locations of parking lots, maintenance of the trails, and hours of operations for OHRV users. Comments emphasized the need for increased/proper enforcement resources, addressing safety issues, and the need for a long term vision for the state's trails system. I agree these are matters that need to be addressed in a public, inclusive, and thoughtful fashion. To that end, I intend to embark upon a comprehensive strategic trails study, with a particular focus on Coos County, in the months ahead. This study will not be about just one particular user group, but about how we can ensure the state is providing quality experiences for all recreation enthusiasts in the greater Coos County region. The Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) supports adding new recreational experiences, while maintaining a balanced statewide system that respects all traditional users.

DRED is currently working to secure the funding resources for the study. We anticipate rolling out the process and details in the weeks ahead. This document will provide clarity and guidance for how the state manages its resources to best meet the needs of our recreational trails in Coos County in a sustainable, safe, and equitable way. The question of the state's long term plan for the trails systems is a fair one, and something we need to address with all stakeholders, residents, and communities.

While the agency may continue to consider specific trail requests on a case by case basis, I believe now is an appropriate time to pause and evaluate the status of our trails system – particularly within the OHRV network – and the overall impacts, trends, benefits and challenges. Five or six years ago, the outcome of our OHRV expansion efforts was uncertain. Today, through the engagement and support of many, we've seen many successes and many benefits. Our collective efforts to start this economic engine have been fast and largely positive. We are now at a juncture where we need to evaluate the impacts, from many perspectives, and build our long term plan.

I am also pleased DRED can play such a leadership role in the successful development of the OHRV trail network. Providing opportunities to expand outdoor recreation in a fashion that's respectful of the natural resources, enhances economic opportunities, and markets the state/region to others is at the heart of the mission of our agency. DRED continues to have some very exciting developments to support the OHRV community this summer. In fact, for the first time, we will feature OHRVs as a key component of our summer travel and tourism marketing campaign. We'll be running TV, print and digital advertising in Boston, New York City, Montreal, and Toronto. We're also adding an OHRV feature to VisitNH.gov and promoting it within our popular visitors' guide.

Our parks and trails bureau team will continue to provide additional infrastructure and amenities to the OHRV network. We are making additional investments into Jericho Mountain State Park, working to address safety measures, and capitalizing on the growing popularity of the Jericho ATV Festival. We are also excited to host the nationally recognized Polaris Camp RZR event in Berlin this fall, which will attract approximately 10,000 OHRV riders to the region. DRED continues to promote New Hampshire as the OHRV destination of choice in the northeast.

Again, thank you for the invitation to join you for a public meeting on the Presidential Rail Trail OHRV expansion. I appreciated hearing your perspective, and the dozens of people who came out to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. I've listened to the many comments with an open mind, and I am confident this is the right approach at this time. Collectively, we can continue to work to promote New Hampshire as an OHRV destination even as we develop a long term vision and plan for our trails network system. I will be able to share more details of the study in the weeks ahead. Your continued engagement, as well as the residents of Gorham and the region, will be a valuable piece to the success of the study.

Thank you for your commitment to this issue and here's hoping for a successful 2016 trails season.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey J. Rose  
Commissioner