



To: GMC Sections and volunteer adopters
From: Keegan Tierney, Director of Field Programs
Howard VanBenthuisen, GMC Trail Management Committee Chair
CC: Trail Management Committee
Subject: Spring Trail Management Responsibilities
Date: April 22, 2020

The norms of world culture have been disrupted and derailed by the spread of the coronavirus and widespread infections of COVID 19. The state of GMC's early season trail maintenance work is no different. Staff and volunteer leadership have been working diligently to keep up with the rapidly changing situation in Vermont to ensure that staff, volunteers, and the trail-going public remain safe. We have worked to develop a field response plan that is flexible and disseminates necessary information to ensure that all associated with the GMC understand the guidelines of working on and using the Long Trail system (LT, side trails, Appalachian Trail in VT, and Kingdom Heritage Lands trails in the NEK).

Through Friday, April 17th, 2020 the work of developing and managing this response plan fell largely to staff who managed communication with volunteers and the public under the Governor's Stay Home Stay Safe order. Recent amendments to that order have triggered our release of this field response plan. The plan is provided to our volunteer-base so we are able to establish two-way communications about our work on the Long Trail system. GMC staff are working closely with land management partners and other trail management organizations (e.g. the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association, Catamount Trail Association, Kingdom Trails, etc) to coordinate clear trail maintenance guidelines for staff and volunteers who conduct these activities. The following is based on those communications, guidance from the Governor's executive order, and protocols established by the Agency for Commerce and Community Development. <https://accd.vermont.gov/news/update-new-work-safe-additions-stay-home-stay-safe-order>

GMC'S FIELD RESPONSE GUIDELINES FOR THE COMPLETION OF TRAIL MANAGEMENT WORK

When to begin your trail management in the time of COVID-19

- Are Trails dry enough? (start with lower elevation/south facing trails) and avoid work in mud season
- Defer scouting trips to areas you already know will require work later in the season
- If you adopt a high popularity trail, check it early since the trails are already seeing heavy use. If you have questions about trail closure or trailhead signage contact GMC staff

- Only focus on your adopted trails/section. If you can't get to your trail let GMC staff know and they will build a contingency plan
- This is not a time to travel long distances or from out-of-state to do your adopting work. If you live out of state or a long distance from your trail let GMC staff know that you will be delaying your spring walk-through
- When in doubt, do not stretch the State's authorization. Things that don't fit the *trail infrastructure protection* category below should not be done. Please do not chance it.
- Be more conservative than normal in your trip length and the skill level of the work you take on.
 - i. Blow-downs: only address those blowdowns that are well within your skill level. Now is not the time to test your skills or tackle scenarios that have higher risk.
 - ii. If conducting work that requires enough risk for someone else to be available for your safety, consider doing that work later in the summer.
 - iii. If your normal work takes you to stretches of increase risk (i.e. rugged trail monitoring sections, areas with more potential ankle turners) consider doing those sections later in the year.

Trail Maintenance Prioritization

1. *Human Health and Safety:*

Initial focus of trail maintenance should address issues of human health and safety. This work shall include ensuring privy functionality and addressing snags or hazard trees (defined as vegetation that poses a threat at an area where people congregate or stay for more than 15 minutes i.e. shelter, privies, parking lots, overlooks)

Responsibility – Staff with designated and trained volunteer support specifically trained and authorized to complete this work.

2. *Trail Infrastructure Protection:*

After human health and safety needs are addressed work to protect trail infrastructure should commence using the “work practice standards” outlined below. This work shall include removing obstructions from the trail, clearing waterbars, drainages, and ditches, boundary maintenance and easement monitoring, and regular maintenance at privies and shelters. Start with lower risk trails to reduce the potential for injury and need for back country first response.

Responsibility – Staff is the point for communications and questions. If you are wondering if you should go out, please call us and talk through your questions. All sections and volunteer adopters are approved to conduct their work using their best judgement of meeting these criteria and using the work practice standards described below.

3. *Trail Experience and Aesthetic*

Clipping/pruning, refreshing blazes, viewshed maintenance, and any other non-essential tasks.

Responsibility – Staff is the point for communication of when this work can commence. All sections and volunteer adopters should delay this work until further notice from GMC or a complete lifting of social distancing requirements.

COVID-19 Additional and Emphasized PPE and Work Practice Standards

1. Masks – cloth mask or face covering required when in visible contact with any people that are not members of your household. We have been advised specifically that “buffs” don't count.
2. Social distancing required. You must maintain minimum separation of 6 feet from any non-household member
3. Add sanitizer to standard first aid kit supplies if not already included, and include more than your normal allotment
4. Avoid carpooling
5. Avoid tool sharing

6. Limit group size to two people
7. Use the new check-in/check-out process (attached as a separate document).
8. Working with saws on wood in tension (blowdowns) requires specific knowledge of how wood acts and may be a work element to avoid until later in the season.

Communications

1. Adopter reports should be submitted online, as soon as possible, with specific requests for needed support highlighted to be added to a running list of tasks to be completed in due time.
2. Section reports should be conveyed to the Director of Field Programs including the following elements
 - a. Share general schedule of section workdays and locations
 - b. Section requests for additional assistance
 - c. Reports of work needed but to be addressed at a later date by the section so staff can manage and respond to reports from the hiking public
3. Staff will keep a running list of support needs on a shared online document that TMC representatives will be able to access.

Public Messaging and Interaction Guidance

Be prepared that we have had some people express frustration with the club and our land management partners for trail closures during this pandemic. If you are confronted by a member of the public about being out on a closed trail, please explain that you are a GMC trail volunteer:

- *Based on the Governors order GMC staff and volunteers are permitted to do essential trail work to prepare for the hiking season. Questions can be directed to: Director of Field Programs, Keegan Tierney. ktierney@greenmountainclub.org or (802) 241-8320 x120*
- *When you go out please take photos and relay stories to GMC's communication staff. Please make sure you have all your PPE on in photos*
- *Social media protocol in this time – please don't post on social media about your trail maintenance activities at this time as the trail system is still closed to the public and we don't want to encourage more use or promote that the trail is "ready".*
- *Keep work trips to active volunteers and don't advertise for new volunteers for this particular work*