



Subject: Pine Hill Park - A Community Trails Story worth Sharing

Hi Jason!

I went out to Rutland's Pine Hill Park Tuesday with Adrienne to check out work that has been done with \$33,000 of RTP funds (four RTP grants since 2003). What a visit! And what a great park!

We met Cindi Wight, Recreation Director & President of VRPA (VT Recreation & Parks Assoc), Michael Smith, Pine Hill Park's key trail crew leader and trail design coordinator/volunteer (a true trail guru and currently VMBA's Vice President) and a young man Matt from Green Mountain College and recently hired as Pine Hill Park's trail crew leader/trainer to work with and help train the youth crews from Youth Works and help provide project oversight with Michael all summer long. We met up with lots of kids and adults from the Youth Works program, they came from North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

Michael Smith leads the Pine Hill Park Partnership (a 501-c-3 volunteer organization) and Pine Hill Park's trail system development effort; He will be on Ride Guide this month (a mountain trail T.V. series/see web site below). He is an exceptional trail professional: He mentors others and he is an outstanding volunteer, donating much of his time to trails in this park, where he himself grew up. Thanks to Michael and his passion for trails, he has provided trail training to **hundreds** of youth in just the past couple of years who come just to volunteer at Pine Hill Park to help develop and maintain Pine Hill Park's trails. He and the Youth Works folks he was working with on Tuesday thanked FPR for the RTP funding while we were out on the trails. We thanked them for all their work and dedication in making Pine Hill Park what it is. You may want to contact Michael Smith at some point (cell ph: 802-683-9807): you would just love his passion of getting outdoors on the trails (building them, maintaining them, mountain biking and hiking them and having fun every single moment).

Pine Hill Park is a Community Build/No Child Left Inside RTP project model for local parks!

Hundreds of youth from YouthWorks have been involved in trail development and maintenance of these trails, also: high school students, Green Mountain College students, and students from neighboring communities, community sports teams, recreation programs and trail groups, etc.

Trail users at this park consist of mountain bikers, hikers, runners, walkers, GPS geocachers, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, and dog walkers!

Kids and adults get out and run or ride their bikes to train for their athletic events, upcoming races, regular outdoor physical activity and simple fun! We saw and talked with a bunch of trail users while we hiked in to see the trail crews; All the users were friendly and took time to talk about their experiences; to mention a few, we met mountain bikers, runners, and hikers; a couple men who run every day on their lunch break from a nearby workplace; teenage kids running (individuals and groups or pairs) for either just fun and fitness or some out their training for their other sports teams; young guys mountain biking and talking about how much they like the Pine Hill trails more than other places they've been to)

The youth crews who have worked on the trails here have been taught trailbuilding skills, land ethics, self-confidence, and personal environmental responsibility/stewardship, as well as are given an opportunity to get out and enjoy the trails.

A few aspects I'd like to mention are:

1. Rutland demographics and some statistical information.
2. The tremendous volunteerism from harnessing YouthWorks.
3. Private business contributions/social responsibility efforts.

Pine Hill Park is located within the City of Rutland, one of Rutland's lower income areas in the state. In years past, this park struggled with crime and drug issues. The park today through the development of the Pine Hill trails allows neighbors a safe place to get out to exercise and a place for their children to easily have exposure to the outdoors. The park is also within walking distance to two primary (K-2) schools, the Intermediate School (grades 3 – 6) and the middle school (grades 7 -8). And, according to Cindi Wight, all the schools have taken advantage of the ability to walk to the parks for a field trip in a time when their bus transportation funds have been cut. RAPAC (The Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition) uses the trails for regularly guided walks for all ages of people to offer a way to increase physical activity and lose weight. Several area private businesses formally use the trails to promote health and fitness among their employees. A great prevention model!

Annual user day benefits have been found in trail counter data: the park acquired a light beam trail counter from VMBA which has been used to collect solid trail data: Rutland tracked data for two years (2007 and 2008). In 2007, Rutland estimated annual park user days at 20,000 visits. For 2008, the usage went up substantially averaging 600 park visits per week in the spring and nearly 700 park visits each week across the summer. Calculating conservatively in both winter and fall usage, Rutland conservatively puts usage at 30,000 visits/year.

Rutland Parks Department sees that the increase in usage is in large part due to the amazing improvements that YouthWorks and its massive volunteer workforce has brought over the last few years, which has been the glue that has strengthened the public/private partnership efforts. (more about YouthWorks in the websites/articles listed below)

The Rutland Area Physical Activities Coalition uses the trail system to promote physical activity and work toward obesity and disease prevention. Businesses are contributing as part of their own social responsibility (GE donates staff time to help build and maintain trails within Pine Hill Park's trail system); Other businesses (VELCO, GE, Mac Steel, Prescott Tower Service, Kalow Technologies, Carris Reels, the Vermont Country Store, R.K. Miles and UPS) helped build the suspension bridge and provided community support to build the bridge (including the guy wires and recycled metal posts donated for bridge components; and, on one particular day the Rutland cross country running team, the Fair Haven Odyssey of the Mind students, UPS, Green Mountain College showed up to carry and mix 14,000 lbs of cement!). The master gardener program sends volunteers every year to plant and maintain a garden at the trailhead.

This park serves as social capital model, where just over the past few years lots of people have come together volunteering and participating in activities in this park creating and developing social connections and bonds to make a difference for an entire community which will last for years to come: An investment now that we can't afford not to make.

Check out their web site below to see some excellent trail work being done at Pine Hill Park!
(NOTE: The suspension bridge was not funded by RTP, but the super hourglass Stegosaurus Serpentine bridge was!

<http://www.pinehillpark.org>

And check this out, here's a news article that has come out today! I met Alex on Tuesday! (He's the one closest to the camera in the photo! Alex just loved being out on the trails working, Alex was working on drainage ditches when I arrived and then helped with the others carrying buckets and buckets of dirt to fill in sections of trail being worked on! ... the boy behind Alex in the photo told us once he was done with this trail work he didn't want to lift another bucket of dirt again in his life! Funny thing this is, ... as you notice, he is right behind eager Alex! Who knows! ...he could be the next Micheal Smith in years to come!

<http://www.rutlandherald.com/article/20090723/NEWS04/907230358/0/features17>

And here's a past article:

<http://www.rutlandherald.com/article/20090515/FEATURES08/905150329/1017/FEATURES08>

I'm copying a few others as I thought some of the information is worthwhile to write in depth about and might be interesting and fun to read. It's a glimpse of what can be accomplished through trails, and an amazing increase in use in just a few short years.

Food for thought,

And TRAILS be with you ;),

~ sherry.

Sherry Smecker Winnie

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation

103 South Main Street, Building # 9 South

Waterbury, VT 05676-0601

Tel: 802-241-3690

Fax: 802-244-1481