



April 2017

Friends of the Mad River has been facilitating a taskforce called [Ridge to River](#) since March 2015. Formed in response to a growing awareness of the role that runoff during rain and melt events plays in exacerbating flooding and reducing water quality, the Ridge to River taskforce is working together across the Mad River watershed to figure out how our community can reduce its flood vulnerabilities and keep our water clean. Our Taskforce includes a representative from each of the five watershed town selectboards and planning commissions as well as interested community members. We've been investigating actions we can take as individuals and as a watershed community to slow down rainwater and snowmelt and help it sink into the ground before it runs off so quickly into streams (becoming "stormwater runoff"). If we can do this, we reduce the flashes of water that take out roads and culverts. We enjoy cleaner swimholes and better fishing. We also reduce costs by needing less frequent and less expensive repair work.

Recreation on trails is central to residents' quality of life here in the Mad River Valley, as evidenced by the recent MRV Moves Community Survey. Furthermore, a comprehensive, varied trail network offering opportunities for a range of abilities is key for attracting visitors to our area and supporting our tourism-based economy. Unfortunately, poorly sited, poorly constructed, or poorly maintained and eroding trails are bad for our community and our economy. Poorly constructed trails contribute pollutants and sediments to streams and funnel water directly into them. This causes streams to swell and experience small flash flooding or exacerbate Valley bottom flooding. Poorly sited, constructed and maintained trails also cause maintenance burdens and safety hazards over time. On the other hand, when trails are built so that they cause less damaging and dirty runoff into streams (by considering proximity to streams, terrain, slope, soils, and wildlife habitat), they last longer, need less maintenance into the future, and are safer. For this reason, responsible trail building and proper trail maintenance have been identified by Ridge to River as priority strategies for reducing the Mad River Valley's vulnerability to flooding and the economic impacts of dirty waterways.

Friends of the Mad River proposes to carry out three closely-linked projects:

[Sustainable Trails Roundtables](#)

We would bring together Mad River Valley recreation stakeholders (such as trail-building groups/businesses, recreational organizations, conservation groups, and others) to share knowledge and ideas about resilience risks and trail building for trail and environmental sustainability.

[MRV Trails Suitability Analysis](#)

We would analyze the Mad River Valley's geologic, topographic, ecologic, and hydrologic "constraints," the existing trail network, and the new trail opportunities the MRV Moves steering committee identified to determine which types of trails are sustainable in which geographic locations.

The Mad River Valley Moves project identified environmental constraints (wetlands and waterbodies, Mad River and floodplain, wildlife and habitat corridors, and terrain and slope) but stopped short of overlaying the data layers and making recommendations for trails constructed in "constrained" areas. We envision creating a map to support strategic planning for trail building in the Mad River Valley. The map will identify areas most (and least) suitable for different suites of trail types, such as hiking, biking, equestrian,

snowmobiling, or snowshoeing/skiing. We would start where the MRV Moves plan leaves off and particularly consider the geographies identified in the plan as “future opportunities connections.” This project enables us to strategically focus future trail building in locations that would support sustainable trails while discouraging new trails where the underlying geographic characteristics would cause flooding, erosion, and maintenance and cost challenges down the line.

MRV Trail Construction and Maintenance Standards

We would bring together Mad River Valley stakeholders (such as trail-building and recreational organizations) to draft trail construction and maintenance standards that allow us to enjoy trails throughout the Mad River Valley while conserving the longevity of those trails and the Valley’s valued ecological resources.

With some existing trails in disrepair, multiple plans for new trails at various stages of consideration and development, and no additional capacity for trail maintenance in the Mad River Valley, we envision bringing together trail and recreation stakeholders to produce a MRV-specific trail construction and maintenance standards document. The standards document would build off standards that many of the trail groups are using now. It would link specific sets of standards to the different geographic locations identified in the MRV Trails Suitability Analysis. It would focus on building and maintaining trails in such a way to minimize trail erosion and stormwater runoff into streams. Once created, this suite of standards would serve as an assurance to stakeholders and possible funders that trails in the Mad River Valley are created in such a way that protects both the long-term sustainability of the trails as well as the shared community resources in which our trails are located.