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MRV Unified Trailhead Kiosk & Mapping Project Completed - 47 New Trail Signs

The Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) is excited to announce that the installation of the Lower Woods Trail Network kiosk in October 2021 officially completes the MRV Unified Trailhead Kiosk & Mapping Project. The project, which launched in July 2018 with the first kiosk installation at Scrag Mountain Town Forest, features 47 total trailhead signs—21 major and 32 minor signs installed at recreation fields, parks, village path segments, conserved forest land, multi-use paths, and more—each with a site map, trail information, and user guidelines that together identify, unify, and celebrate the Mad River Valley’s expansive trail network.

In addition to the kiosks, the project also included the creation, production, and distribution of 2,000 trail network maps that were dispersed for free throughout the MRV at community health facilities, elderly housing, schools, visitor centers, local service providers, grocers, and other gathering sites. The map utilizes the latest trail data and descriptions to detail activities for hikers, bikers, skiers, snowshoers, swimmers, and more, showcasing the vast, multi-use trail resources for recreationists in the Valley in one cohesive place. The 2019 edition of the *Mad River Valley Trail Map* was produced in partnership with Maine-based cartographers Map Adventures and is currently available from local retailers and online.

Altogether, the kiosk and mapping project marks an important milestone in creating a unified Valley identity around shared core values of outdoor activity, community health and wellbeing, and environmental stewardship, as well as being “active at any age and any stage.” Prior to the kiosk project, the MRV’s existing network of trails and active transportation corridors were managed through numerous entities; few access points featured signage, and those that did told disparate messages. Through the completion of the kiosk project, the current conglomeration of trails is now an integrated network with consistent wayfinding signage and mapping.

The new trailhead kiosks’ enhanced infrastructure and visibility removes barriers to recreation by promoting the wealth of open-access opportunities for all, including youth, elderly, those with limited mobility or who may feel uncomfortable in traditional gym settings, people who want to be active with their children and/or pets, those seeking recreational pursuits free of obstacles such as user fees, students who may prefer individual active journeys to formal sports teams, and recreation enthusiasts alike.

The Mad River Valley Trailhead Kiosk & Mapping Project is an initiative of the Mad River Valley Trails Collaborative, representing 13 stakeholder organizations who convene to coordinate and improve trail-based recreation in the Valley. This work culminated in the 2016 MRV Moves Active Transportation Plan, which provides the framework for a consistent, cohesive and connected regional system of trails, roads and sidewalks that provide a range of transportation options and recreational experiences for all. In September 2017, the Collaborative identified trail signage as a key priority to enhance the economic and community benefits associated with recreation. In terms of economic benefits, the 2015 MRV Moves Community Survey found that visitors coming to engage in recreation in the Valley spent an average of \$174.87 per person, per day. A well-developed trail network with improved accessibility is a crucial part of attracting and maintaining tourism year-round, and reducing the MRV’s dependence on the ski season as its primary economic driver.

The MRV Trails Collaborative launched the trail identification effort with project management provided by the MRVPD, \$25,500 in municipal funding, \$33,000 in grants from VT Department of Buildings & General Services and the VT Department of Health, and extensive participation from local partners including the Mad River Path Association, Mad River Riders, MRV Chamber, Mad River Ridge Runners, Friends of the Mad River, Sugarbush, Waitsfield, Warren & Fayston Conservation Commissions, VT Land Trust, VT Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation, the US Forest Service, and more.

"Many hands and minds have touched this project," said Joshua Schwartz, Executive Director of the MRVPD. "The culmination of this effort is a truly special signage system that celebrates the unique character of many different recreational sites, while also reflecting our unity as a Mad River Valley community. We hope the beauty and rustic character of these signs convey a clear message: enjoy the Valley, and help us care for this place."

The kiosks consist of a sign panel designed by Wood & Wood, map development provided by Brian Voigt, and local hemlock fabricated through the generosity of Fayston resident Seth Henry with support of many volunteers; cartography services for the MRV Trail Maps were provided by Map Adventures. The Planning District extends its gratitude to these contributors as well the 78 community trail stakeholders, including private landowners, who contributed time, ideas, and resources to realize this transformative community initiative.

Please visit mrvpd.org and mrvmoves.wordpress.com for more information and to access the studies referenced here.

The Mad River Valley Planning District was created in 1985 by the Towns of Fayston, Waitsfield, and Warren. The Purpose of the Planning District is to "carry out a program of planning for the future of the Mad River Valley. The planning program shall be directed toward the physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic wellbeing of the member Towns and its inhabitants."

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