



VERMONT MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOC.  
SINCE  1997

# 5-Year Strategic Plan

2023 – 2028



Advancing Community-Driven Stewardship Since 1997

Adopted by the VMBA  
Board of Directors  
January 2023

Photo: Bear Cieri



## VISION

Mountain biking at the center of healthy, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable communities throughout Vermont, with well-planned, accessible, and progressive trail systems statewide

## MISSION

To ensure the sustainability of mountain biking in Vermont and thoughtfully promote exceptional riding experiences for all through advocacy, education, and community-driven stewardship

## VMBA Values



Fostering the development of purpose-built, sustainably constructed, and open access trails



Preserving Vermont's landscape through an aware and connected riding community

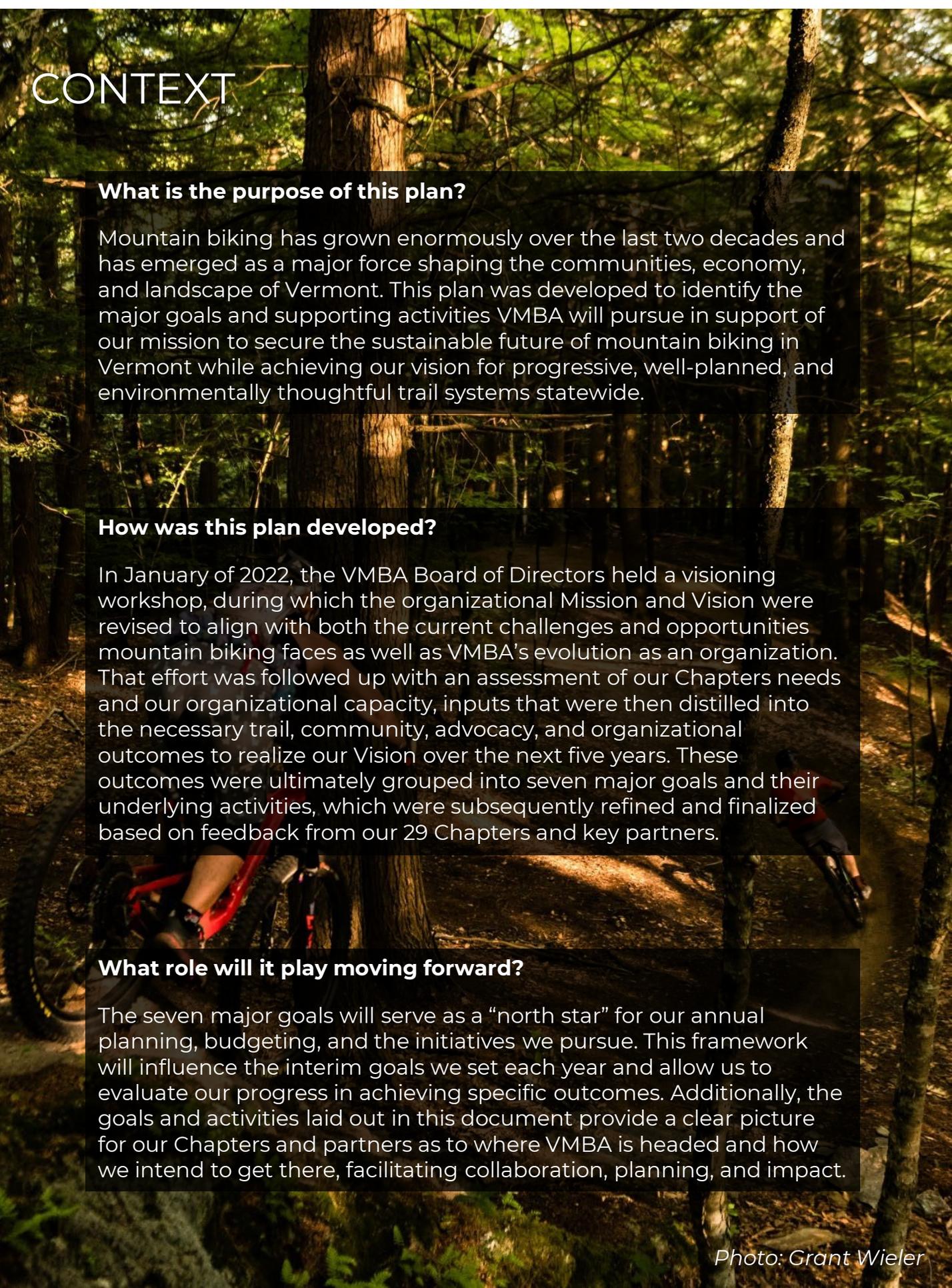


Maintaining excellent working relationships with land managers, communities, sponsors, and partners



Representing the interests of riders through both our advocacy and the trail projects we pursue

# CONTEXT



## **What is the purpose of this plan?**

Mountain biking has grown enormously over the last two decades and has emerged as a major force shaping the communities, economy, and landscape of Vermont. This plan was developed to identify the major goals and supporting activities VMBA will pursue in support of our mission to secure the sustainable future of mountain biking in Vermont while achieving our vision for progressive, well-planned, and environmentally thoughtful trail systems statewide.

## **How was this plan developed?**

In January of 2022, the VMBA Board of Directors held a visioning workshop, during which the organizational Mission and Vision were revised to align with both the current challenges and opportunities mountain biking faces as well as VMBA's evolution as an organization. That effort was followed up with an assessment of our Chapters needs and our organizational capacity, inputs that were then distilled into the necessary trail, community, advocacy, and organizational outcomes to realize our Vision over the next five years. These outcomes were ultimately grouped into seven major goals and their underlying activities, which were subsequently refined and finalized based on feedback from our 29 Chapters and key partners.

## **What role will it play moving forward?**

The seven major goals will serve as a "north star" for our annual planning, budgeting, and the initiatives we pursue. This framework will influence the interim goals we set each year and allow us to evaluate our progress in achieving specific outcomes. Additionally, the goals and activities laid out in this document provide a clear picture for our Chapters and partners as to where VMBA is headed and how we intend to get there, facilitating collaboration, planning, and impact.

# CHALLENGES... AND OPPORTUNITIES

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



Trails have impacts, positive and negative. The art and science of trail building have come a long way in 25 years, and we now know how to minimize negative effects on soil, water, and wildlife. Many of our historical trails require upgrades and reroutes, and a more thoughtful approach to landscape-level design can reduce impact while improving user experience.

## TRAIL CONNECTIVITY



The regulation of trails in Vermont has incentivized our networks to remain disconnected to avoid onerous oversight and constraints on the private landowners who graciously host most of our trails. Linking networks creates experiential opportunities that greatly exceed the sum of their parts and reduces the need to build anew.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



Despite committed efforts over the past several years to welcome women, BIPOC, and other historically excluded groups, our riding community remains overwhelmingly white and majority male. Given the lack of diversity in Vermont, generally, greater investment in DEI work and a commitment to change is needed for us to build a truly vibrant, diverse ridership.

## PROGRESSION



The nature of our terrain and history of hand and volunteer-built trails has resulted in an abundance of technical, intermediate trails. We lack opportunities for new riders to acclimate to the sport, as well as more advanced trails that allow riders to test their abilities. Networks with a true spectrum of trail difficulty allow riders to progress more rapidly and safely.

# ABOUT VMBA

Founded in 1997 as 'Vermont Mountain Bike Advocates,' VMBA was originally created in response to threats to access to ride on private and public land. Over time, VMBA developed partnerships with land management agencies and ultimately grew beyond a pure advocacy group to the parent organization of local Chapters throughout Vermont.



## ORGANIZATION MODEL

VMBA operates as a 'hub and spoke' organization, with a small central office responsible for advocacy, education, and administrative support for our 29 (as of fall, 2022) Chapters. These Chapters, in turn, are responsible for local trail stewardship, community engagement, and program execution.

Over time, VMBA has increasingly centralized operational responsibilities that are common across Chapters, enabling Chapters to focus their time, energy, and volunteers on building and maintaining both trails and community.

VMBA

9,500+ Members...

...across **29 Chapters...**

...who steward **over 900 miles** of public-access singletrack

### OFFICE



Advocacy



Education



Membership



Chapter Support



Insurance



Grants & Fundraising

### CHAPTERS



Trail Stewardship



Community Engagement



Programs



Landowner Relationships



Volunteering



Events

# MAJOR GOALS FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

## TRAILS

- 1 Steward a statewide network of accessible, well-planned, progressive, and sustainable trails

## ADVOCACY

- 2 Move public-access recreational trails out of Act 250 and into an appropriate oversight model
- 3 Acknowledge landowners by incorporating public-access trails into the Current Use program

## COMMUNITY

- 4 Establish an informed ridership that knows where, when, and how to ride
- 5 Count the majority of those who regularly use our trails as active VMBA members
- 6 Significantly increase youth, female, nonbinary, BIPOC, and adaptive representation in MTB ridership

## ORGANIZATION

- 7 Run a thriving, sustainable organization that attracts and retains talent and develops our Chapters

## GOAL

## #1

Steward a statewide network of accessible, well-planned, progressive, and sustainable trails

## Why?

At the core of our mission is improving the quality of the singletrack experience in Vermont and continuously improving our Chapters' skills and capacity to build and maintain trail. Accessibility, network-level design, progression, and environmental sustainability are key drivers for exceptional riding experiences for all.

## How we will get there:

## Advocacy



- Work with VT-FPR to modernize the guidelines and process for building, maintaining, and managing trails on State land
- Collaborate with conservation-focused orgs, public land managers on a landscape-level view to identify the most appropriate areas for trails
- Maintain an emphasis on and culture of community-based recreation, developing and maintaining strong working relationships with towns

## Education



- Better measure the environmental, social impacts of trails in Vermont
- Publish a *Trails Guide for Communities*, explaining impacts (positive and negative), where and why to build trails, and how to work with a Chapter
- Broadcast public messaging on our Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Actively solicit feedback as to where and how the riding experience can be improved, especially from underrepresented populations

## Chapter Support



- Codify MTB- and VT-specific trail building, maintenance, and mgmt. BMPs, Chapter-driven and grounded in continuous improvement
- Publish a Technical Resource Manual for Chapters
- Launch a Trail Counter lending program
- Establish a credentials-based *Preferred Trail Builders program*
- Provide centralized permitting and project management support
- Develop community engagement guidelines and resources
- Develop Volunteer recruitment and management resources

## Funding



- Grow the Trail Grant program and shift to a rolling application process
- Grow the Naming Grant program
- Increase operational funding for Chapter staff
- Create a sponsorship-based funding model for a VMBA Trail Crew
- Work with FPR to make the RTP program more accessible to Chapters

## Operations



- Hire a central Trail Stewardship Lead, responsible for BMP oversight, resource development, project and volunteer engagement support
- Establish a Chapter-directed VMBA Trail Crew

## Key partners:



**GOAL #2** Move public-access recreational trails out of Act 250 and into an appropriate oversight model

**Why?**

The one-size-fits-all, onerous, and expensive Act 250 permitting process does not match up with the actual development impacts trails can have, a misalignment that has led to confusion, inconsistency, and many stalled or abandoned trail projects.

**How we will get there:**

Advocacy



Working through the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council and with FPR:

- Codify a set of general trail stewardship BMPs, officially endorsed by the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council
- Integrate BMPs into the Vermont Trail System (VTS) qualifications
- Adopt a self-assessment and certification program for trail groups
- Pursue 3<sup>rd</sup> party accreditation of BMP adherence if and as needed

Education



- Provide regular updates to the membership as to what we are doing, why, and the overall roadmap to change
- Host recurring 'Coffee chats' with the Executive Director for members to ask questions, learn more, and make suggestions about our work
- Activate the membership to engage their representatives as needed

Chapter Support



- Codify MTB-, VT-specific trail building, maintenance, and mgmt BMPs
- Publish a Technical Resource Manual, including support for adaptive trails, signage, seasonal management, and supporting infrastructure
- Work with Chapters to develop self-assessment and certification tools

Funding



- Advocate to have the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council sufficiently and sustainably funded through the legislature
- Secure and allocate funding to Chapters to cover the costs of BMP adoption and certification

Operations



- Strengthen partnerships with conservation-focused organizations, including recurring meetings to hone BMPs over time
- Play an active role in leading the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council
- Establish a relationship with lobbying firm to engage if and as needed

**Key partners:**



Potential future partners

**GOAL #3** Incorporate public-access trails into the Use Value Appraisal (Current Use) Program

**Why?**

Including recreational trails in the tax reduction program that already includes forest management, conservation, and agriculture would help secure public-access trails on private land and acknowledge the critical role they play as a public good.

**How we will get there:**

Advocacy



- Working with the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council (VTGC) and other partners, develop a model for how public-access trails could be integrated into the Use Value Appraisal (Current Use) program
- Through the VTGC, commission an analysis of related budget impacts
- Commission an economic impact study on the benefits MTB trails, the majority of which are on private land, bring to the Vermont economy

Education



- Develop a Landowner Guide to navigating Current Use today, focused on how to take advantage of the program and host public-access trails
- Publish economic impact study findings
- Communicate potential impacts to landowners and methods to take advantage of the proposed future program

Chapter Support



- Facilitate dialogues between Chapters and landowners to help develop the specific features of the proposed program – thresholds, calculations, and validation – and understand any pitfalls

Funding



- Advocate to have the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council sufficiently and sustainably funded through the legislature

Operations



- Strengthen partnerships with conservation-focused organizations, including recurring meetings to hone BMPs over time
- Play an active role in leading the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council
- Establish a relationship with Lobbying firm to engage if and as needed

**Key partners:**



*Potential future partners*

## GOAL

## #4

Establish an informed ridership that knows where, when, and how to ride

## Why?

More information about trails, conditions, and etiquette leads to better ride experiences for everyone. Treating other trail users, nature, landowners, and the trail itself with respect also helps preserve and expand access for the MTB community.

## How we will get there:

## Advocacy



- Continue pro-active position on pedal-assist Mountain bikes, focusing on advancing knowledge on environmental, safety, and social impacts
- Provide Americans with Disabilities Act guidance for pedal-assist bikes
- Work with VT-FPR to clarify, communicate current pedal-assist policy
- Develop case studies on the outcomes of different pedal-assist policies

## Education



- Focus on an 'etiquette, not equipment' mentality to guiding riders
- Reduce 'e-Bike' confusion by switching to pedal-assist (Class 1) language
- Develop an educational campaign on the rationale to avoid, and the consequences of, bad behavior (muddy trails, etiquette, etc...), and solicit timely input from the ridership to highlight examples as they occur
- Strengthen and simplify the Rider Responsibility Code w/ iconography
- Enhance the Plan Your Ride tool to better inform riders where they can and should ride, e.g. with pedal-assist bikes, after a rain, etc...
- Pursue a range of channels to ensure our messaging reaches everyone

## Chapter Support



- Develop guidance for trail signage
- Provide common, consistent trail signage at no cost to Chapters
- Create a digital library for Chapter signage customization
- Develop a pedal-assist one-pager for Chapters to use with landowners, land managers, and riders

## Operations



- Create a mobile application that provides riders with up-to-date information on trails, closures, and use guidelines
- Cultivate and grow the role of VMBA Ambassadors in rider education
- Work with conservation-focused organizations to promote natural points of interest and respect for nature

## Key partners:



## GOAL

**#5** Count the majority of those who regularly use our trails as active VMBA members**Why?**

Riders who enjoy using trails in Vermont should support the organizations that make those trails possible. In addition to generating more income for stewardship, capturing a greater share of existing riders also increases our reach and advocacy voice.

**How we will get there:**

## Advocacy



- Establish accurate total ridership estimate as part of proposed economic impact study

## Education



- Continue to develop the “One VMBA” narrative, emphasizing the combined and complementary role the Office and Chapters play
- Actively engage Quebec trail managers and orgs to better inform their riders about VMBA, including French-language marketing
- Create and promote a 30th Anniversary photobook
- Produce a visual and intuitive ‘how it works’ video for VMBA
- Expand focus on recruiting under-25 members
- Evaluate membership discounts linked to active volunteerism
- Seek to inform and ultimately recruit non-MTB trail users
- Identify hubs for out-of-state riders and direct messaging accordingly

## Chapter Support



- Provide more event support, with a focus on membership sign-ups and trail sits
- Produce a “Meet the Chapters” video series

## Operations



- Develop a VMBA App that allows for instant membership fulfillment and focused on providing Member Benefits
- Hire a dedicated, part-time events support staff to focus on in-person membership recruitment
- Use the Annual Member Survey to identify ways to increase renewals
- Grow our collaboration with the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) and other regional MTB associations in the US and Canada to capture more of their members who ride in VT
- Continue to develop merchandise that strengthens VMBA brand awareness while supporting VT-based businesses

**Key partners:**

GOAL

# #6 Significantly increase youth, female, nonbinary, BIPOC, and adaptive representation in MTB ridership

## Why?

Removing barriers to historically under-represented groups in mountain biking both ensures that everyone has a fair chance to fall in love with singletrack and helps us create a more vibrant, diverse, and thriving trail community.

## How we will get there:

### Advocacy



- Actively listen for where, how, and when we can activate our membership to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice
- Support efforts to see mountain biking recognized as a varsity sport

### Education



- Develop and distribute signage for schools that encourages participation and provides access points to those without families who ride
- Continue and grow inclusive marketing efforts, including an extension of the What a Rider Looks Like video campaign

### Chapter Support



- Develop ready-to-deploy youth programming for Chapters, schools, and communities
- Provide 'micro-grants' (<\$1000) with minimal application requirements for individuals to start up diversity-based programs
- Create in-school curriculum, paired with equipment loan program developed in conjunction with local shop(s) and national brands

### Funding



- Create a 'sponsorship fund' that would allow donors to give directly to a program that provides grants for gear
- Establish a 'sponsor a member' program and allow individuals from unrepresented groups to apply for a sponsored VMBA membership

### Operations



- Host a statewide 'Kid's bike swap' each spring, virtual or in person
- Launch an official Youth Ambassador program
- Increase support for and the operational integration of Vermont Youth Cycling, form partnerships with other youth-oriented outdoor groups
- Form partnerships with BIPOC-oriented outdoor groups

## Key partners:



Potential future partners

**GOAL**

**#7** Run a thriving, sustainable organization that attracts and retains talent and develops our Chapters

**Why?**

A sustainable, resilient organization led by highly capable people will be essential to establishing mountain biking at the center of healthy, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable communities throughout Vermont. Essential to that outcome is the growth of sustainable funding streams, with VMBA increasingly able to funnel more direct and indirect support to our Chapters.

**How we will get there:**

Education



- Continue to develop the “One VMBA” narrative, emphasizing the combined and complimentary role the Office and Chapters play

Chapter Support



- Communicate available tax-free resources
- Provide startup funding for new Chapters
- Develop easy-to-follow New Chapter Playbook
- Provide guidance and best practices for Chapter development
- Overhaul and relaunch the Chapter Resource Library
- Offer training and PD resources to staff and Chapter Boards
- Facilitate inter-Chapter collaboration through tools and meetings
- Continually evaluate the opportunity to adopt and integrate resources from other stewardship organizations, including IMBA and the VTGC
- Provide loaner equipment (e.g. a mini-excavator)
- Provide grant identification, writing, and additional mgmt. support

Funding



- Increase Chapter funding for operations
- Increase and diversify Office funding
- Grow and deepen relationships with Major Donors
- Establish an endowment
- Strengthen engagement with regional and national brands
- Explore hosting a major fundraising event

Operations



- Pursue a ‘single staff’ model across the organization
- Build a more diverse staff representative of our entire community
- Provide competitive benefits and compensation
- Hire an Office Manager and Membership Coordinator
- Hire a Development Director
- Achieve 100% of membership income to Chapters (direct + indirect)
- Explore a more progressive revenue share that helps Chapters grow
- Develop an Ops Manual, Emergency Response, and Succession Plan

**Key partners:**



# ROADMAP

Target accomplishments en route to our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2027

2023

- Launch Chapter Trail Counter Program
- Launch VMBA Mobile App
- Codify & Adopt Best Management Practices
- Update *Preferred Trail Builders* Program
- Publish *Landowner Guide to Current Use*

2024

- Complete economic impact study
- Draft Landscape-level view for trails
- Publish *Trails Guide for Communities*
- Chapter Technical Resource Manual
- New process for building on State Land

2025

- Launch VMBA Trail Crew
- Adopt new VTS guidelines
- *Meet the Chapters* video series
- In-school curriculum & grants
- Loaner equipment for Chapters

2026

- BMP assessment/certification in place
- Statewide kids bike swap
- Endowment established
- Majority of VT ridership are members

2027

- Publish 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Photo Book
- Adopt Act 250 Alternative for trails
- Prepare Recreation & Current Use proposal

# WAYS YOU CAN HELP

What trail riding and our mountain community will look like when we succeed.

## GROW THE MEMBERSHIP

Help us remain the largest state-level MTB advocacy group in the country and [join or renew](#) your membership today. And encourage those you ride with to join as well!

We rely on 30,000+ hours of volunteer time annually to build and maintain trail, work with communities, and run our Chapters and Board. Reach out to [your local Chapter](#) today.

## VOLUNTEER

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Feedback from the riding community helps us understand what's working, what's not, and how to move forward. [Contact us](#) today if you have questions or suggestions.

With 90% of membership revenue going to our Chapters, we depend on the generosity of our Supporters to keep our Office running smoothly. Please [donate](#) what and when you can.

## DONATE

# VMBA