

# **Green Mountain Club 2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT**





## From our Executive Director

Dear fellow hikers, volunteers, members, and supporters,

2024 was a banner year for the Green Mountain Club, and an exciting one for me personally as I celebrated ten years of serving as your Executive Director. Staff, volunteers, and partners came together to see many major initiatives over the finish line, some of which have been in the works for more than twenty years.



We completed the largest trail restoration project in GMC modern history: the top-to-bottom 2.1-mile reconstruction of the popular Burrows Trail on Camel's Hump. Even while crews continued to fix the heavily eroded and widened trail, the existing structures helped the trail survive two consecutive flood events. It's exciting proof that this large-scale trail restoration model may be the key to creating a climate resilient trail system.

Trail work is our bread and butter, but we cannot justify any major investment into trails if we do not have certainty of the trail's existence there in the future. Hence the ongoing critical importance of seeking permanent land protection status for the entire Long Trail System, a goal we made measurable progress towards in 2024 thanks to a trail right-of-way donated by Middlebury College that permanently protects a whopping 1.5 miles of trail. And, we did the background work to strategically and proactively pursue protection projects to continue edging us ever closer to the goal.

The Green Mountain Club was founded on a tradition of volunteerism and a fierce love of Vermont's wild spaces, values which remain top of mind today. As we manage the Long Trail System in an era of climate change and increased use, the requirements for annual upkeep have grown, and the role of individual trail and shelter adopters, service groups, GMC sections, and other volunteers remain vital. Thanks to the dedication of these volunteers and a newly standardized onboarding and training program, volunteers have the skills and resources needed to effectively maintain trails to a common standard, which can protect them from the worst impacts of severe weather going forward.

Please, if you are in the area, stop by and pay us a visit at the new Rothberg-Birdwhistell visitor center in Waterbury Center – it's filled with light, has views of Camel's Hump and Bolton Mountain, and still smells like freshly milled wood. I hope you join me in taking great pride in the Green Mountain Club's accomplishments from the past year, as they would not have been possible without your support.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mike DeBonis', written in a fluid, cursive style.

Mike DeBonis  
Executive Director





# 2024 Completed Projects



Map locations are approximate

## Connecting to the Long Trail

- 200,000+ hikers on the Long Trail System each year
- 50,000+ people visited Mount Mansfield
- 7,000+ visitors served at Barnes Camp Visitor Center
- 9,500 members
- 301 new End-to-Enders in 2024, more than 7,000 End-to-Enders of all time
- 821 active volunteers who contributed more than 15,000 hours in 2024
- 35+ staff-supported volunteer training and orientation sessions





## We rebuilt one of the most popular trails in Vermont

*Three-year top-to-bottom Burrows Trail restoration sets blueprint for future comprehensive trail maintenance projects.*

The Burrows Trail, as the shortest, steepest route to the top of Camel's Hump and its proximity to the state's population center in Burlington, had been extremely over-hiked in recent years. Large stretches of trail had widened to more than 20 feet and the intended path was all but unrecognizable. Together with the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, we developed a plan to **restore the entire 2.1 mile trail over the course of three seasons.**



To accomplish this, we utilized networks of youth corps crews, volunteers, and our professional trail crew to quarry, move, and **install hundreds of stones for staircases, checksteps, and waterbars.** The stone structures slow down the flow of water on the steep trail and newly fortified waterbars disperse the water into the surrounding hillside, slowing down erosion on the trail itself. The entire 2.1 miles is now clearly established footpath with manageable footing at the standard 3-4 foot width, which **gives hikers a clear and desirable route on the intended trail,** protecting the surrounding vegetation from further damage.

In two consecutive summer flood events, **new trail structures on the Burrows Trail held up to historic water amounts** and worked as intended, protecting the remaining downhill sections of trail from compounding water effects as well. Thanks to generous financial contributions and public support, the successful Burrows Trail project, led by Justin Towers, serves as a high-profile blueprint of effective trail management strategies in the climate change era. This project will inform our work as we move forward with a three-year sustainable trails audit of the entire Long Trail System.



Trail crews conducted sophisticated rock work using mostly hand tools.



Executive Director Mike DeBonis celebrates the Burrows Project completion and power of partnership.





## We permanently protected 1.5 more miles of the Long Trail

For years, GMC has been able to report that the Long Trail is “97 percent protected.” While we diligently closed on several critical land conservation deals over the last few years, they collectively totaled up to about one quarter mile of additional treadway. Well, in October 2024, we officially crossed the 98 percent threshold with the donation of a trail right-of-way for the Long Trail across the Middlebury Snowbowl from Middlebury College.

This project is one example of the newly adopted Strategic Conservation Plan in action. Developed and approved in 2023, and put into action in 2024, the plan lays out a prioritized approach to proactively seek conservation opportunities across the Long Trail System. With an anonymous \$250,000 grant awarded in late 2024, we are well positioned to make strategic advances towards total system protection in the coming years.



## We invested in our volunteers

*GMC volunteers are leveling up their skills to respond to evolving trail maintenance needs*

Historically, GMC’s cohort of trail volunteers commit to performing regular seasonal maintenance on an assigned section of trail. They clip back brush, clear out waterbars, and generally keep the trail in shape, working in partnership with GMC’s professional crews, who take on major reroutes or rehabilitations.

But a volunteer’s duties and responsibilities have gotten increasingly complex as impacts of climate change and increased hiker use have created more impacts for the trail. Twenty years ago, new adopters received trail or shelter assignments and a list of responsibilities, and were left to their own devices. A trail could survive with basic lopping of branches, removal of blowdowns, and blazing. Today, effectively managing surface water and erosion are the volunteer’s most important job, and doing these tasks properly makes all the difference between trails that wash away in intense storms or effectively drain water off the trail and keep hikers on them.



GMC’s volunteer liaisons, Lorne Currier and Kate Songer, have entirely revamped the trail adopter program to standardize onboarding and field training with both new and longtime volunteers. Kate joins adopters and sections in the field two or three times a week, offering hands-on instruction and helping volunteers develop “trail eyes” to see what problems are plaguing a trail and the best way to address them. Field training gives us the chance to work with each volunteer to determine which projects to prioritize and how to do them well.

With a stronger, more skilled, and engaged field volunteer group, GMC is in a better position to manage and maintain the trails in the face of two pressing challenges: a longer hiking season and more frequent intense storms.





## We opened the doors of the Rothberg-Birdwhistell Visitor Center

Funded by the Long Trail Legacy Campaign and a generous donation from David Rothberg and Nan Birdwhistell, the new Visitor Center on Route 100 in Waterbury Center offers a place for all to gain inspiration and connection to the mountains, the trail, and the hiking community. The light-filled, timber-framed building houses improved staff offices on the basement floor and space for exploring, learning, meeting, programming, and hike planning throughout. We look forward to expanding programming and welcoming more folks to experience hiking in Vermont in the future.



## We converted the last pit privy to a composting model



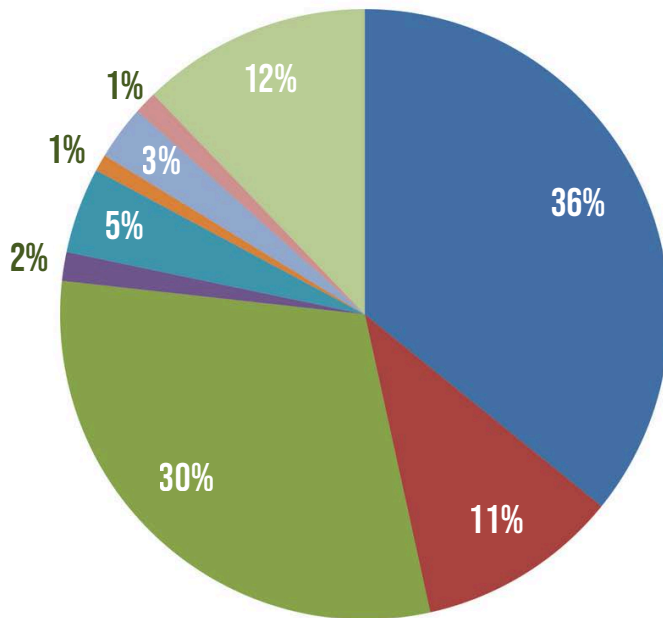
In October 2024, the last environmentally harmful pit privy on the Long Trail System, at Wintturi Shelter, was converted to a sustainable composting model. GMC installed the first composting privy in the 1970s, then the slower composting moldering variety in the 1990s. We have been working towards improving the bathroom experience on the trail ever since, with a major construction push in the last five years. There are 72 privies on the Long Trail System.





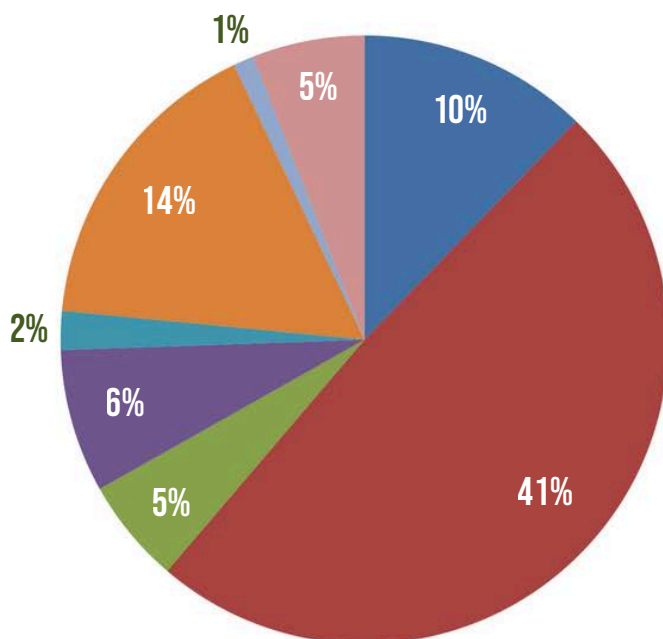
# Financials

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2025: MAY 1, 2024 - APRIL 30, 2025



## Revenue

- Fundraising
- Membership
- Trail Management
- Land Conservation
- Visitor Center and Publications
- Education Program
- Camps
- Other
- Endowment Distributions



## Expenses

- Membership
- Trail Management
- Land Conservation
- Visitor Center and Publications
- Education Program
- Fundraising
- Camps
- Facilities





# Thank You

To our donors and members who made our work possible this year!

## Corporate Sponsors



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The mission of the Green Mountain Club is to make the Vermont mountains play a larger part in the life of the people by protecting and maintaining the Long Trail System and fostering, through education, the stewardship of Vermont's hiking trails and mountains.