

Protect Vermont's Trails During Mud Season

Montpelier, VT – Mud season is here! While receding snow can feel like an invitation to hit the trails, it is actually one of the most fragile times of year for Vermont's natural landscapes. The combined effects of snow melt, thawing ground, and seasonal rain leave trails vulnerable to erosion and lasting damage. The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation is asking the public to stay off soft, muddy trails this spring, so they'll be in great shape when hiking and biking season arrives.

"Enjoy the spring sunshine on dry, open trails, like the Burlington bike path, the D&H Rail Trail, and the Newport boardwalk, and save the higher elevation destinations for summer," said Becca Washburn, FPR's Director of Lands Administration and Recreation. "Absolutely get outside—on paved and gravel surfaces."

The "turn around if you see mud" rule applies to more than just trails. The rural dirt roads that lead to many trailheads are equally at risk. Avoiding ruts and damage this time of year makes a real difference for the municipal road crews working to keep our roads passable.

"We're grateful to the Vermont hiking community and all the steps they take to be good stewards of our trails and fragile mountain environments. During mud season, we remind all hikers to do their part in protecting Vermont's natural landscapes and rare alpine vegetation by avoiding high elevation muddy trails and exploring low-elevation durable surface alternatives," said Keegan Tierney, Director of Field Programs for the Green Mountain Club.

"Mountain bike trails are extremely susceptible to damage during mud season," said Nick Bennette, Executive Director at the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA). "If your tires leave a noticeable rut in the trail, turn around and find a durable surface to ride elsewhere. If you encounter a puddle, ride on the dry area of the trail or straight through if there is none. Mountain bikers can show our commitment to being a community of responsible trail users by using these simple guidelines and some common sense to protect our trails."

FPR asks the public to follow these guidelines this spring:

- **Check trail status.** Official closures and trail conditions vary widely throughout the state. Before heading out, consult resources like [Trailfinder.info](https://www.trailfinder.info), [Green Mountain Club Visitor Center](https://www.greengmountainclub.com/visitor-center) (802-244-7037), and [VMBA Trail Conditions](https://www.vmba.org/trail-conditions). Spring weather is unpredictable; even if a trail is marked as open, proceed with caution.
- **Turn around in muddy conditions.** If you encounter mud, head back—even on an open trail. It keeps you and the trails safe and reduces the work needed to get the roads and trails in shape for the summer.
- **Seek out durable surfaces.** There are plenty of ways you can get outside. Dry gravel roads, paved paths, rail trails, and bike paths all hold up well in spring conditions. This is also a great time to try something new: paddling, gravel biking, birdwatching, fishing, or turkey hunting.

- **Stay out of the alpine zone.** Rare and fragile alpine vegetation is especially vulnerable right now. Foot traffic through the mud causes soil compaction and erosion, making it harder for these plants to take root and survive. Give them a wide berth until conditions improve.
- **Respect trail signage.** Local trail managers post closures for good reason. Even without a posted closure, your footprints or bike tires are leaving impressions deeper than half an inch, turn around. Trail conditions can change fast; the absence of a sign is not a green light.
- **Check the weather at elevation.** Conditions at higher elevations can be dramatically different from what you're seeing in town—think wind, snow, ice, and cold. Check forecasts for your specific destination and always be prepared with extra layers, traction, and a backup plan, including turning around or seeking an alternative place to hike.

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation and partners thank trail users for helping protect our natural resources for everyone.

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