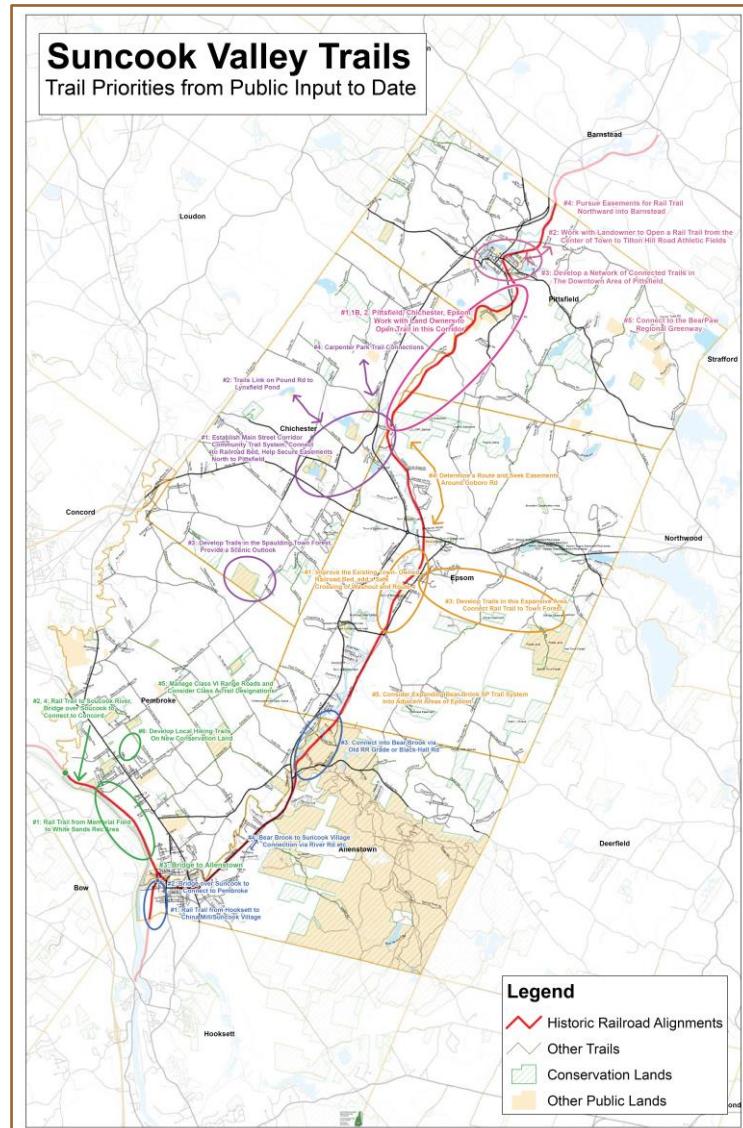




# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019



**Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC), June 2019**



A vision of multi-use trails within the former Suncook Valley Railroad corridor and beyond, this **PLAN** highlights existing trail segments in Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke, and Pittsfield, describes current planning efforts, and identifies potential future projects to communicate a vision for multi-use public trails that encourage recreation, economic development, historical appreciation, and area cohesiveness. This vision enables greater connectivity of communities and open lands within the Suncook Valley New Hampshire region to the benefit of each community.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

June 2019

**Developed by**  
**Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission**

[www.cnhrpc.org](http://www.cnhrpc.org)

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through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN, also known as the PLAN, documents a vision for a regional multi-use trail system along the former **Concord & Montreal Railroad** bed and the **Suncook Valley Railroad** bed in the five communities of Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield within the Central NH planning region. This PLAN identifies potential shared trails, which are transportation paths separated from roads and designated for use by pedestrians and bicyclists in a more urban setting, and identifies potential multi-use trails which offer recreational opportunities such as hiking, bicycling, horseback riding and snowmobiling. Both types of trails are found on the former railbeds and connect communities to each other and to open spaces. The PLAN'S vision provides opportunities to connect the known existing trails with potential multi-use or shared-use trails along or connecting to the former railroad beds to create a Suncook Valley regional trails network.

This PLAN was developed and assembled by the Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC) after research and consultation with local municipal groups and snowmobile clubs. The PLAN consists of narrative descriptions of identified rail trail segments and trail systems in the five Suncook Valley communities and includes maps for the identified areas of interest where it may be possible to develop new rail trails or connecting trails. As a planning document, the PLAN supports a variety of trails projects and lists local priorities for consideration to both begin a Suncook Valley Rail Trail and to collectively establish a regional multi-use trail system.

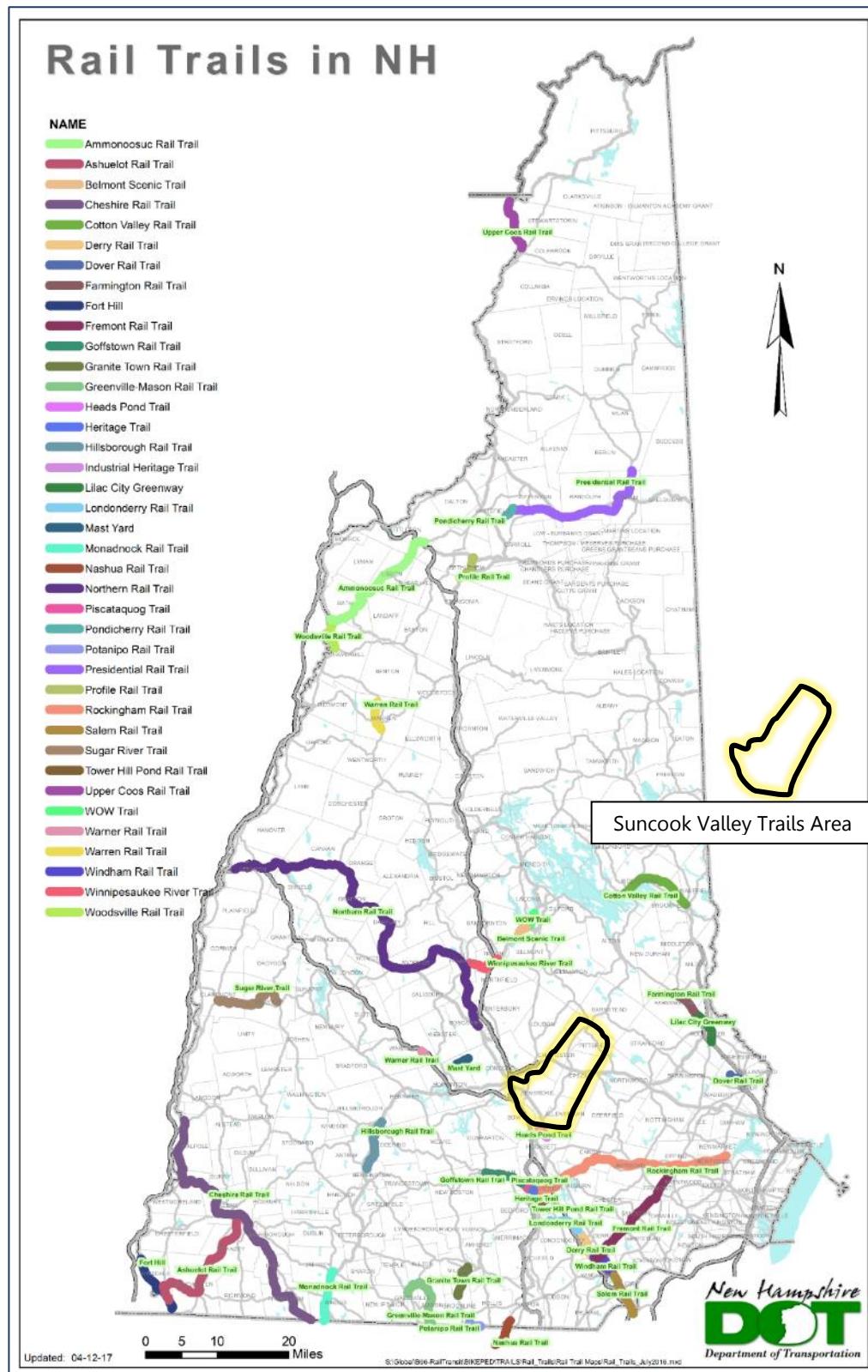
Displayed in **Figure 1** is the [NH Department of Transportation Rail Trails Map](#) as of 2017. The Suncook Valley NH Region is a clear missing element with possible connectivity to the existing formal rail trails. This area is indicated with a bold outline and displays the area of focus for the SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019.

### THIS PLAN:

- Describes the SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN'S purpose, vision, mission, and goals
- Displays and describes potential future community and regional rail trail sections and local trail connections
- Provides descriptions and generalized maps on existing trails and municipal areas of interest for future trails
- Identifies active trail groups in the CNHRPC region
- Recommends methods for continued coordination between trail groups and communities
- Provides future project recommendations to assist in implementation of the PLAN and to encourage development of a Suncook Valley Rail Trail
- Outlines trail funding opportunities to investigate
- Recommends strategies for community involvement and support

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Figure 1. Rail Trails in New Hampshire and Suncook Valley Trails Area



NH DOT Rail Trails in NH Map, April 2017

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Purpose of the Plan

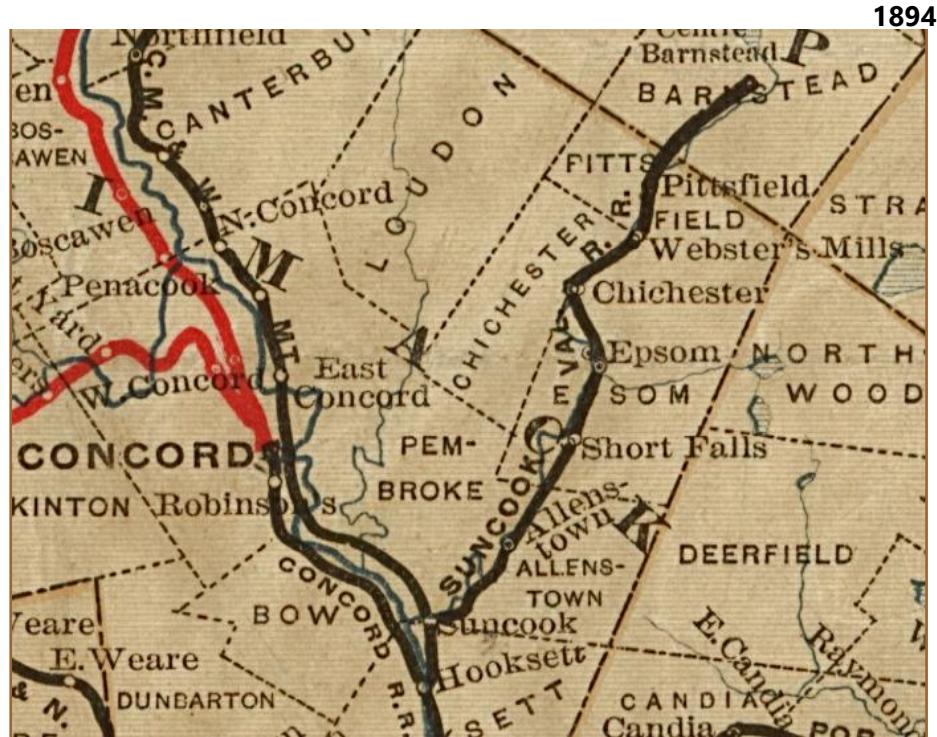
The primary purpose of this SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN is to document and formalize known trails of any usage type and to identify potential future multi-use trail or shared-use path projects along and connecting to two former railroad corridors in the eastern section of the Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC) planning region, the **Concord & Montreal Railroad** line and the **Suncook Valley Railroad** line. They are collectively referred to as the **Suncook Valley Railroad** for the purposes of this PLAN and are referred to as potential rail trail segments during discussion.

The PLAN respects the private property rights of landowners who may or may not choose to host public trails on their property, and also encourages community collaboration with property owners to establish a network of publicly accessible trails. While Off-Highway Recreational Vehicle (OHRV) use may currently be allowed on some trail sections mentioned in this PLAN, the primary intent of the SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN is to serve non-motorized users and snowmobiles.

The majority of the existing trails within Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield are not rail trails. This SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN offers a cooperative opportunity and public process for coordination of trails efforts going forward within the context of the **Suncook Valley Railroad** corridor.

Descriptions of current activities by municipal boards and trails groups to develop trails and to consideration of

**Figure 2. Historic Concord & Montreal and Suncook Valley Railroads**



Railroad Map of NH by Railroad Commissioners 1894, accessed by CNHRPC May 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

possible ways to connect the former rail lines through these five communities are provided. The intentions are to foster a public vision for a multi-use Suncook Valley Rail Trail and to encourage trail connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, snowmobilers and equestrians along these two former railroad lines.

A connected, formalized rail trail system in the eastern section of the Central NH planning region can link together these communities and open spaces, providing miles of recreational and active transportation opportunities. With organization, the rich collective history of the **Suncook Valley** municipalities of **Allenstown**, **Chichester**, **Epsom**, **Pembroke** and **Pittsfield** can enable the recognition of the cultural significance of this area, encourage economic development in these towns, provide outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and provide alternative transportation methods, through the expression of a multi-use trail system.

Each community has their own individual trail development and open space preferences and generally works independently. Multiple local trails groups have completed organized trails systems and infrastructure, but informal trails also are present. Volunteers and community leaders have collaborated to develop municipal trails and regional clubs have developed official snowmobile trails with landowner agreements. Although the **Suncook Valley Railroad** reverted to private property ownership or was utilized to construct NH 28 in many sections, the **SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN** support the beginning of a grassroots effort to develop the Suncook Valley Rail Trail consistent with local municipal master plan overall goals and with CNHRPC regional plans. The **PLAN** intends to support the municipal and club efforts while raising awareness of collaborative opportunities to help encourage trails development with willing property owners.

Currently, no single trails group leads the development of a Suncook Valley Rail Trail or coordinated regional trail system, although individual towns work to increase their recreational trails network to connect to existing trails. This **PLAN** will endeavor to inspire common goals and benefits in such a recreational trail system in Central New Hampshire that could eventually connect to existing rail trails in New Hampshire, such as the recently constructed Hooksett Rail Trail or the Town's Head's Pond Rail Trail in along the old **Concord & Montreal** rail line, and potential connection to the **Northern Rail Trail** and the **Merrimack River Greenway Trail**. Connection of each of these trails, including to the Salem to Manchester Rail Trail under development, and would be included in the vision of the Granite State Rail Trail, an ambitious 120-mile vision spanning from Lebanon to Salem.

Visual representation is often the first enabling factor for beginning community discussions. To this end, the **PLAN** has mapped the known *existing trails* (bicycle, pedestrian, and snowmobile trails) along with *areas of trails development interest* for each community within which trails projects could be pursued.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## Background

Over the last two decades, communities in the CNHRPC region have expressed interest in trails that connect people to the places they want to go. These trails are unique in that this interest in multi-use path type trails that can offer a wider range of possible uses than single-use hiking or snowmobile trails.

The CNHRPC assisted with the coordination of Suncook Valley communities in 2019 to ascertain interest in a potential Suncook Valley Rail Trail.

Because the **Suncook Valley Railroad** reverted to private property ownership and State of New Hampshire ownership in the 1950s, the corridor lost its value as a transportation system. NH 28 was constructed atop the railbed in much of Allenstown, River Road in Epsom used the railbed as its base, and homes were built upon the lots. Developing a connected and completed rail trail entirely on the railbed through Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield could be a difficult endeavor for the length of the former railroad. Yet, beginning with small sections, a trail system can grow and can encourage further development of additional sections, gaining more public support for each project, as a result of successful trails projects.

The approach is to begin with low-cost trails that have the highest visibility and greatest public support. The strategy for completion is to advance individual sections of the trail that have independent utility in each community, and over time, link the sections together to create a continuous trail. This strategy is successfully being implemented in other parts of the State. Using existing town-owned lands or obtaining landowner agreements for trail usage can form the basis for a trail system.

## RAILROADS AND RAIL TRAILS REFERENCED IN THIS PLAN

### Historic Railroads:

Boston & Maine Railroad (B&M)  
Boston, Concord & Montreal (BC&M)  
Concord Railroad  
Concord & Montreal Railroad (C&M)  
Northern Railroad  
Suncook Valley Railroad “Blueberry Express”

### Existing and Potential Rail Trails:

Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail\*  
China Mill Rail Trail (potential)  
Epsom Rail Trail (potential)  
Granite State Rail Trail (potential)  
Head’s Pond Rail Trail (Hooksett)  
Hooksett Rail Trail  
Merrimack River Greenway Trail\*  
Northern Rail Trail  
Pembroke Rail Trail (potential)  
Pittsfield Rail Trail (potential)  
Salem to Manchester Rail Trail\*  
Suncook Valley Rail Trail (potential)

\*under development

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## Project Participants

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This **PLAN** describes the efforts of volunteers in the Suncook Valley communities to develop trails in their communities and to consider the benefits of collaboration with neighboring towns to expand trails. The CNHRPC held a Visioning Session in January 2019 to ascertain interest in potential Suncook Valley Rail Trails and commenced discussions of coordination among the five communities. In April and May 2019, CNHRPC helped the towns organize local trails meetings. Invitations were sent to Boards of Selectmen, Conservation Commissions, Parks and Recreation Commissions, Historical Societies, Economic Development Committees, known trails enthusiasts, and to trail user groups such as snowmobile clubs in the area for the purpose of discussing existing trails, identifying current trails projects and areas of interest to develop trails, as well as recognizing potential rail trail opportunities. A wide variety of public input was received and has been used in the production of the **PLAN**. A wrap-up Reconvening Session, which included an optional pre-meeting walk on the Epsom Rail Trail, was held in June 2019 to present the findings to communities.

Moving forward, the CNHRPC offers assistance to Allenstown, Pembroke, Epsom, Chichester, and Pittsfield, including trails committee meeting organization, Recreational Trails Grant application aid, map production, or providing general resources, to support a potential Suncook Valley trail network.

## Definitions of Rail Trail, Shared-Use Trail and Multi-Use Trail

---

A rail trail is typically constructed on the former railroad bed or within the former railroad corridor or the railroad right of way, often using compacted stone dust to accommodate a range of users. They are relatively flat and often offer a wide, smooth travel surface.

Trails of this character offer a unique experience and purpose because of their accessibility and shared, year-round uses of walking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and potentially other uses as deemed appropriate by landowners and the community. A rail trail could be considered regional in nature when it extends beyond town boundaries and connects communities to each other and the open spaces between them. The majority of the trails discussed within this **PLAN** are considered multi-use trails, whether or not they are rail trails, although the precise uses are at the discretion of the property owners and communities.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Shared-use trails are physically separated from motor vehicle traffic by open space or barriers and provide pedestrian and bicycling transportation as well as recreation and health benefits for users. These trails are often developed from former railroad beds into rail trails. Shared-use trails are often constructed in a standardized fashion for bicycling and walking purposes, often universally acceptable and constructed in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Potential shared-use trails include those in Pembroke and Allenstown through Suncook Village and also downtown Pittsfield.

**Figure 3. Typical Non-Road Shared-Use Path or Rail Trail Cross Section**

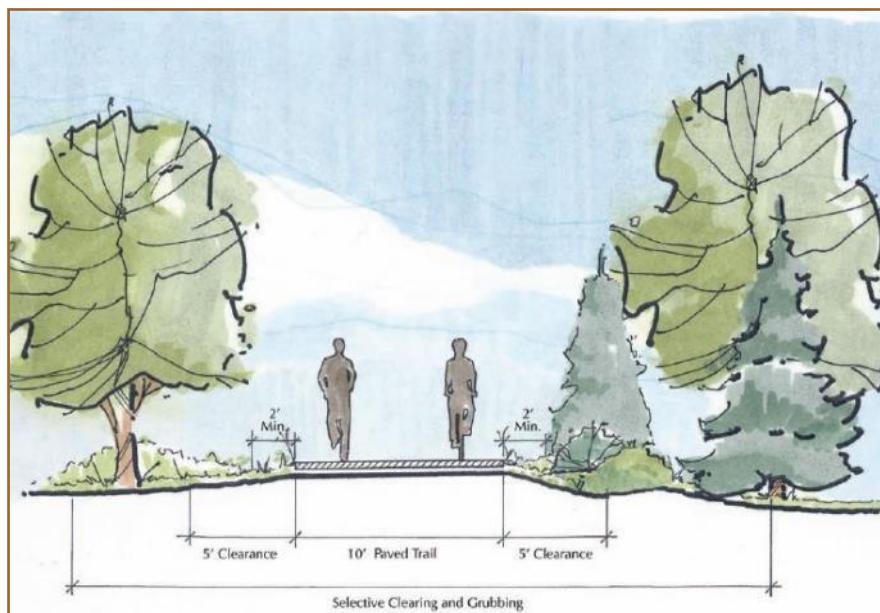


Image from m-bike.org, accessed by CNHRC March 2019

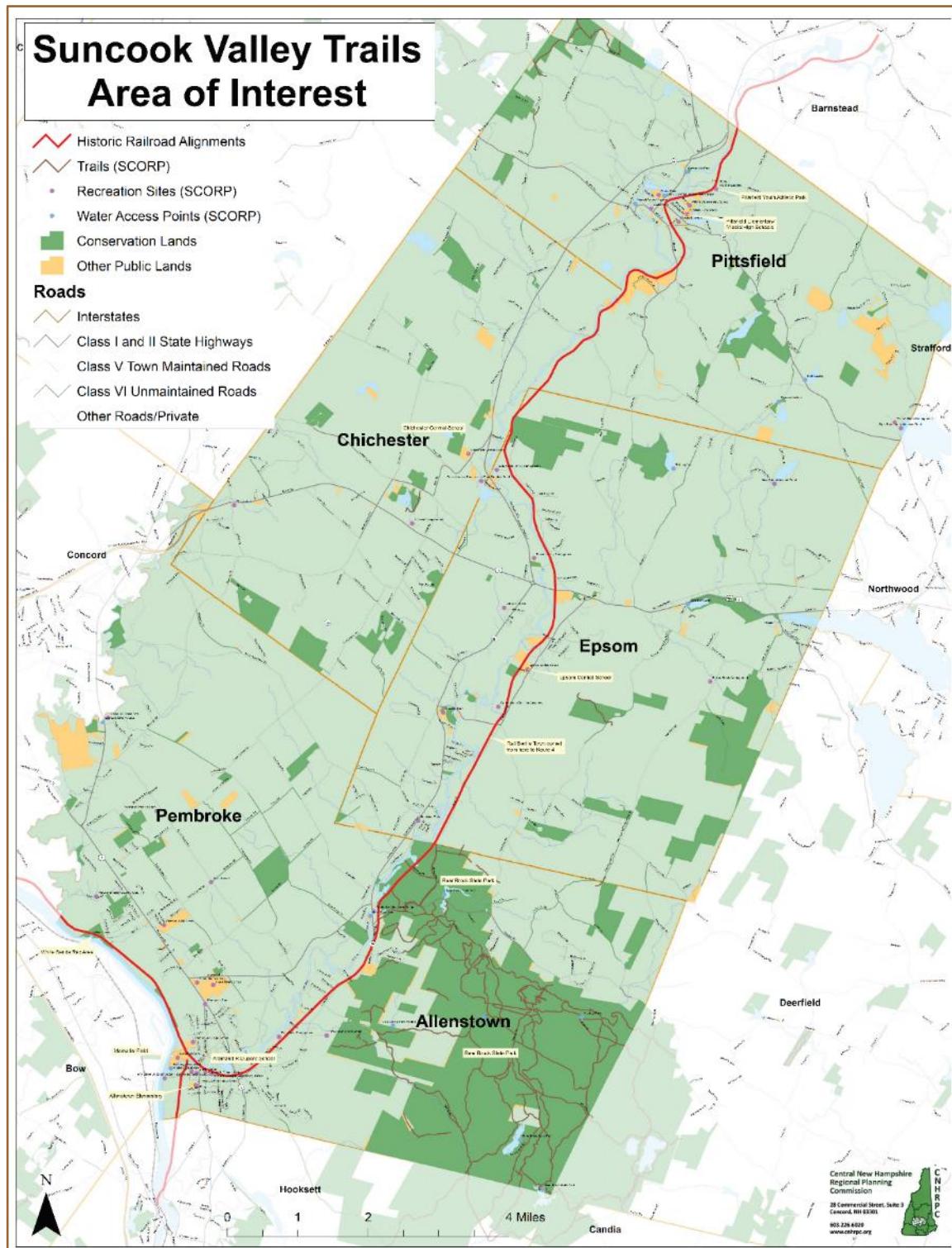
Multi-use trails are defined by the use of a specific trail, and permit more than two types of trail usage. Multi-use trails could offer walking, hiking, bicycling, horses, motor bikes, snowmobiles, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and OHV usage. While an individual property owner or public trail may permit one or more of these uses, trails should not be presumed to include all of these uses.

## Study Area: Suncook Valley Area of Interest Map

**Figure 4** displays the **Suncook Valley Trails Area of Interest** which is examined town by town within the **SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN**. The former railroad corridor forms the basis for discussion of trails along and connecting to the railbed. Should the ultimate goal of a Suncook Valley Rail Trail be realized, it will enable connection to existing formal rail trails such as the Northern Rail Trail, Hooksett Rail Trail and the Salem to Manchester Rail Trail as well as to the Merrimack River Greenway Rail Trail efforts underway.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Figure 4. Suncook Valley Trails Area of Interest Map



Map produced by CNHRPC, 2019

## Public Input

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The basis for much of the **SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN** consists of valuable contributions from the municipal Conservation Commissions, Parks and Recreation Commissions, snowmobile clubs, equestrian groups, trails enthusiasts, and other users within the Central NH region. CNHRPC staff provided organizational support, GIS mapping, municipal data resources, and online research of existing trails located and potentially planned in each community to develop the **PLAN**. Since the beginning of the project, CNHRPC has hosted a project webpage for interested people to learn more about the Plan's development and process and to keep abreast of the meetings held. Notices of meetings, agendas, meeting summaries and more have been posted to <http://cnhrpc.org/suncook-valley-trails-plan/>.

### **Suncook Valley Trails Visioning Session (January 2019)**

After soliciting interest from town officials, CNHRPC organized a meeting at the Epsom Public Library to discuss a vision for potential trails in the Suncook Valley area of interest. The idea was embraced after concerns about improper trail usage, trail use conflicts, and respect for landowner agreements in place were aired. The publicity materials, agenda, meeting summary, attendance sheet and transcript are provided in the **APPENDICES**.

### **Town of Epsom Trails Meeting (April 2019)**

The Town of Epsom held the first municipal Suncook Valley Rail Trails meeting. The trails interests represented were the Economic Development Committee, Conservation Commission, resident equestrians, visiting equestrians from outside of the CNHRPC planning region, and a representative from the [NH Horse and Trail Association](#). The Town does not have a Trails Committee, but the group identified current trails and locations where connections made sense, including from the Town Forest to [Bear Brook State Park](#). The Town owns sections of the former railbed including the historic railroad depot building, and these were identified as good locations to consider developing into rail trails.

### **Town of Pittsfield Trails Meeting (April 2019)**

Pittsfield has an active Community Development Committee working on several community improvement projects, including downtown revitalization. Other groups attending the Pittsfield meeting included the Master Plan Steering Committee, motorized use representation from residents and visitors, and the [Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Club](#) (Epsom). The group identified key areas of the railbed, including sections owned by the Waste Water Treatment Plant and downtown sections, that have potential. The Historical Society developed an urban walking tour several years ago along local streets which could be incorporated. The group may revisit to consider whether an RTP grant application or a US Rural Development grant application could be submitted to coincide with the downtown revitalization.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## Town of Chichester Trails Meeting (May 2019)

The Chichester local meeting was attended by the Parks and Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission, [NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club](#) (Chichester/Pembroke), and residents who enjoy ATV and all-season trails use. The group developed a vision for a community trail system in and around the Main Street area. A recently completed municipal trails project around the perimeter of Carpenter Memorial Park is well used and the Town is looking to enhance the existing trail on Marsh Pond which is deteriorating. The NH Trail Dawgs look to partner on a grant application to develop an all-season use of this Town property. Numerous snowmobile trails cross the Town, and Chichester hosts the Depot Street Thunder Bridge, a national register of historic places bridge crossing the Suncook River. Using Thunder Bridge could provide access to the **Suncook Valley Railroad** bed which is privately owned and requires landowner permission. Many trails opportunities and collaboration exist in the community.

## Town of Allenstown Trails Meetings (May 2019)

Allenstown opted to incorporate trails discussions into their regularly scheduled Economic Development Committee and Board of Selectmen meetings. Several members of the public attended and participated in discussions. Pedestrians and bicycle usage of the railroad beds in Suncook Village were of most importance to participants. The attraction of a rail trail could encourage economic development in this area. The highest priority rail trail would span from China Mill to the existing rail trails in Hooksett. At the same location in the other direction, a bridge across the Suncook River to Pembroke (Suncook Village) would enable connection potential to the rail trail segments underway along the Merrimack River. Other trail options included extensions from Bear Brook State Park although NH 28 was constructed along the former **Suncook Valley Railroad**.

## Town of Pembroke Trails Meetings (May 2019)

Through the ongoing Master Plan update activities, CNHRPC has been assisting the Conservation Commission and Town to develop the Pembroke Rail Trail along the Merrimack River, connecting to the White Sands Conservation Area and Memorial Field. The Pembroke trails meeting was attended by Conservation Commissioners and a local snowmobile club representative. The focus of the meeting was the development of the Pembroke Rail Trail and its connections to Concord and Allenstown, as well as the need for bridges for these connections. A new Town conservation land offers possibility for multi-use trails, and discussions were held about managing Class VI road usage and potential designation to Class A trails.

## Area Snowmobile and Equestrian Clubs (Spring 2019)

Organized snowmobile clubs are already maintaining winter trails on sections of the former **Suncook Valley Railroad's** railbed network. They are volunteer experts at speaking with landowners

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

to obtain written agreements to utilize sections of private land for winter use. Snowmobilers maintain trails, build bridges, take care of problematic trail users, listen to landowner concerns, repair damages, fundraise, and have large membership bases to draw from. The [New Hampshire Snowmobile Association](#) is the state's independent association of incorporated clubs.

In the Central NH Region, four known snowmobile clubs are thought to be active in the railroad corridor vicinity within Allenstown, Pembroke, Epsom, Chichester, and Pittsfield. CNHRPC reached out to these clubs through invitations to the January Visioning Session 2019 and to the individual municipal meetings in Spring 2019. Further communication from several clubs continued during the course of the project. In addition, a strong equestrian representation and interest was noted at some of the meetings.

<a href="#">NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club</a>	▷ Allenstown, Pembroke, Chichester, Epsom
<a href="#">Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Club</a>	▷ Epsom, Bear Brook area (Corridors 360 & 361)
<a href="#">Suncook Valley Sno-Riders Snowmobile Club</a>	▷ Pittsfield, Barnstead
<a href="#">Bee Hole Beavers Snowmobile Club</a>	▷ Chichester, Loudon (inactive)
<a href="#">NH Horse and Trail Association</a>	▷ Statewide
<a href="#">NH Horse Council</a>	▷ Statewide

## CNHRPC Reconvening Session and Presentation of Draft Plan (June 2019)

The enthusiasm of the local meeting attendees was strong as related to the [PLAN](#) and potential trail projects to better the communities. These trails representatives requested the opportunity to review the completed draft [SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN](#). CNHRPC staff coordinated a Reconvening Session at the Epsom Central School, similar to the initial Visioning Session invitees and publicity postings, to present the [PLAN](#) for feedback from local trails enthusiasts, Boards, Commissions, and clubs. A component of the Reconvening Session was an optional pre-meeting "field trip" walk along the Epsom rail trail behind the School, led by those familiar with the area, to enable trail users to envision rail trail possibilities. Feedback received was incorporated into a revised Plan before the development of the final document.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SUNCOOK VALLEY TOWNS AND RAILROAD

### Regional Overview

The vision of a developing a multi-use shared rail trail along the former **Suncook Valley Railroad** utilizing the existing rail trail corridor is not only plausible, but several community groups actively support this goal of uniting history with economic development and recreational opportunities. Many segments of the former railbed in Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield have been used for years as snowmobile trails (Chichester), some are Town-owned lands yet not adopted by towns or publicized as trails (Epsom, Pittsfield), and some lengths are no longer in existence for this use, having been utilized by the State or Towns as roadways (Allenstown, Epsom), and some sections are being pursued as rail trails (Pembroke). There are many individual sections that could serve as a link in a regional trail system. Known existing rail trail segments and potential future rail trail segments and regional trails connections are described and mapped in this **PLAN**.

Each local rail trail segment and existing municipal trail is a component of a larger **Suncook Valley** trails network. For a community and its residents, their neighborhood trails are often considered local trails of independent utility. The **PLAN** attempts to bring a wider vision to the region, indicating possible locations where the trail segments could be connected to a larger system.

The potential or proposed trails described within this **PLAN** are intended to assist communities with discussion and implementation of a possible Suncook Valley Rail Trail system.

### TRAIL DEVELOPMENT STAGES

There are multiple stages of rail trail development over many years of effort discussed within this **PLAN**. This **PLAN** often refers to this progression of trail development.

#### VISION

A *potential* trail segment is one that is only at the visioning level and does not yet have funding determined, nor does it yet have the landowner or community support needed to move forward.



#### LEGWORK

A *proposed* or *envisioned* trail segment is one that a Trails Group is beginning to actively pursue behind the scenes with funding endeavors and landowner agreements. This stage is where a trail idea prospers or breaks down.



#### BUILD

A *planned* trail is ready for the public to assist with fundraising, mapping, promotion. A planned trail is far enough along to consider forthcoming success.



#### ENJOY

An *existing* trail is one that is constructed and known by the community, as they are referred to being built prior to the development of the **SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN**.

## SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

As mentioned previously, a shared history of the Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield region provides the opportunity to protect the historical aspects and promote them for shared economic development purposes.

The Suncook River, a tributary of the Merrimack River, originates at Crystal Lake in Gilmanton and flows south through the Barnstead, Pittsfield, Chichester, Epsom, and forms the municipal boundary between Pembroke and Allenstown. In the 18th century, settlers were drawn to the Suncook River Valley for its natural resources. Water-powered mills were established along the river and industrial villages such as Suncook Village prospered. Today, NH Route 28 parallels the course of the river to a large degree. Historically, the river provided transportation, recreation, and economic opportunities to people living in the vicinity.

The **Suncook Valley Railroad** connected the region for over eighty years. The railroad operated independently from 1924 to 1952 and was partially financed by local money. The rail connected the five communities with large commercial centers such as Concord and Boston.<sup>1</sup>

Recreation in the Suncook River Valley includes boating, fishing, swimming, snowmobiling, trails usage, and camping. Bear Brook State Park is over 10,000 acres and 6,740 of those acres are located in Allenstown. The remaining State Park area spreads across Epsom, Hooksett, Deerfield and Candia. Over 40 miles of trails, ponds, and facilities are located here for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, snowmobiling, and cross country skiing. The park itself is home to several historic sites such as the New Hampshire Snowmobile Museum, Old Allenstown Meeting House, and the Richard Diehl Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Museum. More recently, conservation and recreation efforts in Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke and Pittsfield and along the Suncook River have been supported by municipalities, land trusts, and non-profits.

The Suncook River Valley is significant for its historical associations with agriculture, industry, recreation, village development, and transportation in New Hampshire. State Route NH 28 travels in a north-south direction through each of the five Suncook communities. Industrial resources such as brick mills and dams remain today along the Suncook River. Although these traditional uses are less essential for prosperity, one of the aims of this Plan is to enable residents and visitors to reconnect to the past through a formalized, multi-use trails system that incorporates portions of the old railbed.

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<sup>1</sup> NH Division of Historical Resources Northern Pass Draft Project Area Form, Circa 2016

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## SUNCOOK VALLEY RAILROAD

The major railroad systems in the Merrimack Valley were the **Boston, Concord & Montreal (BC&M)**, the **Boston & Maine (B&M)**, the **Concord Railroad**, and the **Northern Railroad**. The B&M and the Concord Railroad were chartered in New Hampshire in 1835, and both the BC&M and the Northern Railroad were chartered in 1844. For many years these lines were competitors until 1895 when the B&M took over the **BC&M**, which had merged with the **Concord Railroad** in 1889 to form the **Concord & Montreal**. In 1890, the **B&M** took over control of the **Northern Railroad**, so that by the early twentieth century the **B&M** controlled most the lines in the region.

**Although the railroad had been leased and owned by different entities, for the purposes of this PLAN, it will be referenced as the Suncook Valley Railroad or simplicity.**

In addition to these main lines, short line railroads such as the **Suncook Valley Railroad** serviced towns located further from transportation hubs like Concord and Boston.

### BRIEF TIMELINE <sup>2 3</sup>

#### 1849

The **Suncook Valley Railroad**, was first chartered by the State of New Hampshire in 1849 to John Berry for construction of a railroad from the east of Concord to Pittsfield, and a second charter was granted the following year for the **Suncook Valley Railroad Extension** to Center Barnstead.

#### 1863

The plans were halted by the Civil War and construction did not commence until after a new set of charters was issued in 1863. Towns and businesses in the Suncook Valley helped to fund construction of the railroad.

#### 1869

The Suncook Valley Railroad was completed in 1869 from Concord to Pittsfield, with the extension to Center Barnstead completed in 1889. The industrial Suncook Village was connected with Concord and Pittsfield.

#### 1870-1890

The Suncook Valley Railroad was first leased to the **Concord Railroad** for 42 years and its successor, the

**Figure 5. Suncook Valley Railroad Historical Marker in Pittsfield**

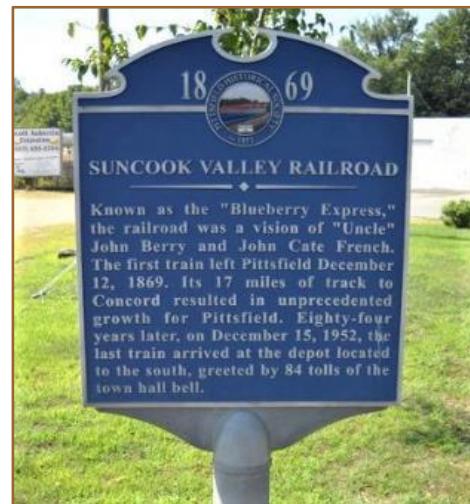


Image accessed by CNHRC May 2019

<sup>2</sup> Suncook Valley Railroad Wikipedia, accessed June 2019  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suncook\\_Valley\\_Railroad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suncook_Valley_Railroad)

<sup>3</sup> Boston and Maine Railroad Abandonment Notices <https://www.bmrrhs.org/abandonment-notices>

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**Concord & Montreal (C&M) Railroad** (1890). However, operation continued only until 1895 under these entities.

## 1895

Now operated by the Boston & Maine Railroad under lease with the Concord & Montreal Railroad, the Suncook Valley Railroad and the Railroad Extension operations continued under short term lease agreements.

## 1901-1919

The Suncook Valley Railroad Extension merged with the C&M Railroad. The C&M Railroad was merged with the B&M Railroad in 1919.

## 1921 - 1924

The B&M fully took over the C&M leases and made began attempts to abandon the Suncook Valley Railroad because of its operating expenses. In 1924, the B&M authorized the abandonment of the Suncook Valley Railroad (about 17.5 miles) and Railroad Extension to Center Barnstead (about 4.5 miles). Yet because no alternate, reliable mail or transportation service was available to Center Barnstead, the Suncook Valley Railroad became an independently operated short line railroad, the first in New Hampshire.

## 1942-1947

In 1942, B&M abandoned the "Suncook Loop" railbed from Allenstown to Hooksett, a loop of 1.3 miles. Service to Center Barnstead was halted from the Pittsfield Depot Station in 1947 since business had declined after World War II.

**Figure 6. Epsom Depot Station and Train, Last Year of Service 1952**



Nerail.org, accessed by CNHRPC May 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

1952

Railroad service ended and the railroad rights of way were claimed by the State of New Hampshire.

The **Suncook Valley Railroad** transported passengers and local goods such as lumber, granite, milk, and produce as well as the mail. Through connecting trains, passengers could leave from Epsom and arrive in Boston in less than four hours. Depot stations were built in Allenstown (Suncook Village and present day Verville Road), Epsom (Short Falls Road and Black Hall Road), Chichester (Depot Road, but actually just over Town line in Epsom), Pittsfield (off of Catamount Road), and Center Barnstead and Hooksett.<sup>4</sup>

In the twentieth century, the **Suncook Valley Railroad** short line became locally known as the “**Blueberry Express**” because of the shipment of wild blueberries to regional markets. Manufacturing declined in the region, but still constitutes a significant portion of the area’s economy. In the 1920s, the **B&M** sought to abandon the branch line because of increasing operating losses, but instead sold the rights to an independent operator, the **Suncook Valley Railroad**.<sup>5</sup>

After operating independently for almost three decades, the **Suncook Valley Railroad** was abandoned in 1952. Many features of the railroad including the ties have been removed, but where still existing, the railbed is mostly intact.

The abandoned railroad property reverted to the communities and landowners who today own much of the former railbed. Since it was easier to build on pre-constructed bases and grades, the State of New Hampshire Department of Transportation constructed highway NH 28 on top of the former railroad from US 3 in Allenstown to Bear Brook State Park.

The Suncook communities shared pride in the locomotives and depot stations. Some of these old Depots exist today as homes, businesses or vacant buildings. Along with the potential rail trails, some of the old depot stations offer similar opportunities for promotion and enrichment of community culture.

Following are brief descriptions and photographs of railroad history in Allenstown, Chichester, Epsom, Pembroke, and Pittsfield.

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<sup>4</sup> Boston & Maine Historical Society <https://www.bmrrhs.org/on-line-archives>, B&M Corporate History Addendum 2009

<sup>5</sup> NH Division of Historical Resources Northern Pass Draft Project Area Form, Circa 2016; multiple sources cited; John C. Hutchins: The Blueberry Express - A History of the Suncook Valley Railroad. Flying Yankee Enterprises.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## ALLENSTOWN

Allenstown was granted its charter in 1721 to the children of Samuel Allen, the Provincial Governor of New Hampshire. However, Allenstown was not incorporated until 1831, resulting in annexation of sections of adjoining Bow and Pembroke which constitute today's Allenstown. The Town's population was around 250 residents in 1790 and increased to 600 residents around 1850. The highest population density was found at Suncook Village in Allenstown and Pembroke. In the 1800s, more people, including large numbers of French-Canadians, settled in the Town for the industrial mill work. In the 1930s, much of the eastern portion of the Town was acquired by the federal government and later became Bear Brook State Park.<sup>6</sup>

The **Suncook Valley Railroad** is purported to have had its most unique feature located in Allenstown, a mainline switchback. The railroad traveled through Suncook Village in Allenstown, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, before heading north into Epsom. Another branch headed south towards Hooksett. The Allenstown switchback enabled the train to rise in elevation and exit the Merrimack Valley to proceed up to the Suncook Valley was in use daily for over 50 years. This information and more is available in "The Blueberry Express: A History of the Suncook Valley RR", edited by John Hutchins.

One railroad station was located in Suncook Village along what is now Canal Street. A stereoscopic image of this decorative old station can be found on the [NH Historical Society](#) website. Another track spur headed to an now abandoned rock quarry,<sup>7</sup> and the main **Suncook Valley Railroad** headed north parallel with the Suncook River into Epsom. Along the way, a second railroad station, the Allenstown Depot Station, was located on what is now Verville Road in the northern section of Town near Deerfield Road. A milk shed was located in front of the station until the 1940s when it was removed.

1924 Town Population: 1,213

<sup>6</sup> NH Division of Historical Resources Northern Pass Draft Project Area Form, Circa 2016; Allenstown Master Plan 2003

<sup>7</sup> <http://suncookvalleyrailroad.redmansefarm.com/CABaileyQuarry.htm>

## SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**Figure 7. Allenstown Suncook Valley Railroad Station on Verville Road, circa 1940**



"Suncook Valley Railroad Station," Allenstown Digital History, accessed June 11, 2019,  
<http://allenstownlibrary.org/history/items/show/5>.

## CHICHESTER

Chichester was granted in 1727 when New Hampshire, overseen by Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth, was a province of Massachusetts. The Town was named after an English politician, the Earl of Chichester, who coordinated relations between England and the American colonies. Originally a land grant of 64 square miles, Chichester now has 21.3 square miles in land and water area. Because other land grants had also been given and the land had never been previously surveyed, miscalculations were initially made on the size of New Hampshire territories. Because of multiple surveying operations that overlapped with other township surveying efforts, the first settler began his homestead over 30 years later in 1759 in the area of what is now known as Horsecorner. "A History of Chichester" is a wonderful reference that describes the Town's history.<sup>8</sup>

To serve a growing population and obtain access to the **Suncook Valley Railroad**, Thunder Bridge was constructed in 1887 and was used heavily as the main route to the Chichester Railroad Station and as a route into Epsom. Today, the bridge still spans across the Suncook River and is on the National Register of Historic Places, but is no longer used as a passenger bridge.

The **Suncook Valley Railroad's** construction was said to have brought prosperity to the Town after the Civil War, although only a short section of the railroad veered through Chichester and then back out again. The Town's population rose and fell concurrently with transportation opportunities. The Chichester Depot Station was erected just over the town line with Epsom in 1869 east of the Depot Road Bridge. Still, the station was known as the Chichester Depot.<sup>9</sup>

Residents relied on mail delivery from the Blueberry Express trains, where mail was picked up at the Depot twice a day and delivered to the Post Office via Thunder Bridge.<sup>10</sup> Young men would take the train into Massachusetts for industrial and factory work.

1924 Town Population: 507

**Figure 8. Chichester Depot Station, Date Unknown**



A History of Chichester, Chichester Historical Society 1977

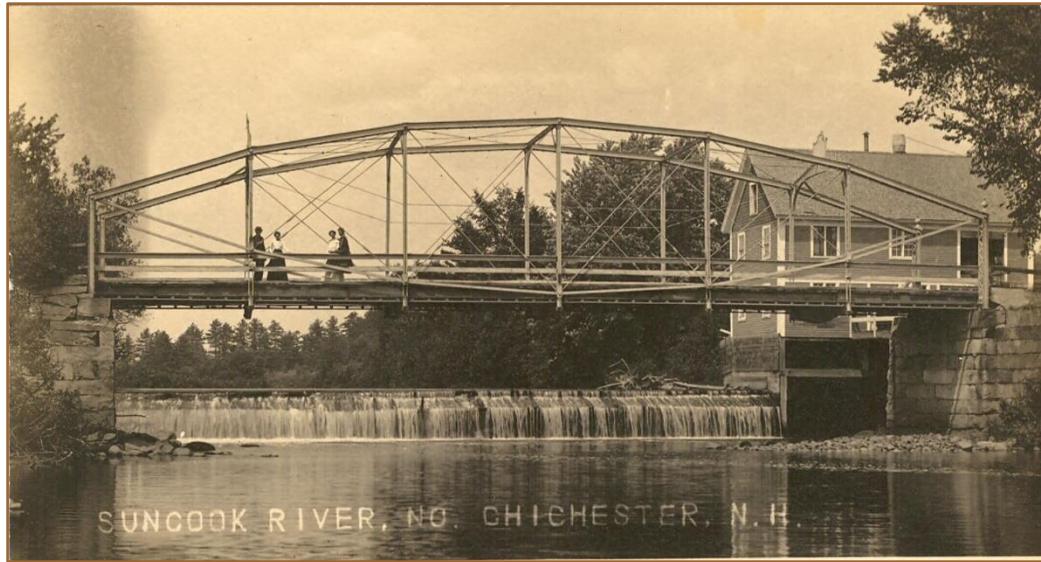
<sup>8</sup> A History of Chichester, Chichester Historical Society 1977

<sup>9</sup> Pineground (Thunder) Bridge National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nhmagazine.com/the-thundering-bridge/>

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**Figure 9. Chichester Thunder Bridge 1887**



CNHRPC File Photo from 2011

**Figure 10. Chichester Thunder Bridge 2011**



CNHRPC Field Work File Photo 2011

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## EPSOM

Epsom was chartered in 1727 to proprietors from coastal New Hampshire towns. In 1732, four ranges consisting of twenty lots each were granted under the condition that twenty houses with three acres of tilled land be settled within four years, that a church be built in six years, and that 300 acres be set aside for a parsonage for the town's first minister and school. During the nineteenth century, three post office villages, Short Falls, Epsom Center, and Gosserville, had emerged along the Suncook River along with a fourth smaller village called New Rye along Deer Brook near the Allenstown border. The First New Hampshire Turnpike passed through Epsom, encouraging growth in the town in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Epsom's two stops on the **Suncook Valley Railroad**, at Short Falls and Epsom Center, connected the Town to regional markets.<sup>11</sup>

The **Blueberry Express'** midway point was the Epsom Depot Station, Freight House, and outbuildings. The historic complex is considered the best preserved of the remaining, standing **Suncook Valley Railroad** depot buildings. The Depot building, surrounding land, and section of the former railroad is currently owned by the Town of Epsom. See also the "History Gosserville and Goboro Road" by the Epsom Historical Association for a detailed history of the area.

1924 Town Population: 655

**Figure 11. Epsom Short Falls Depot Station, Circa 1906**

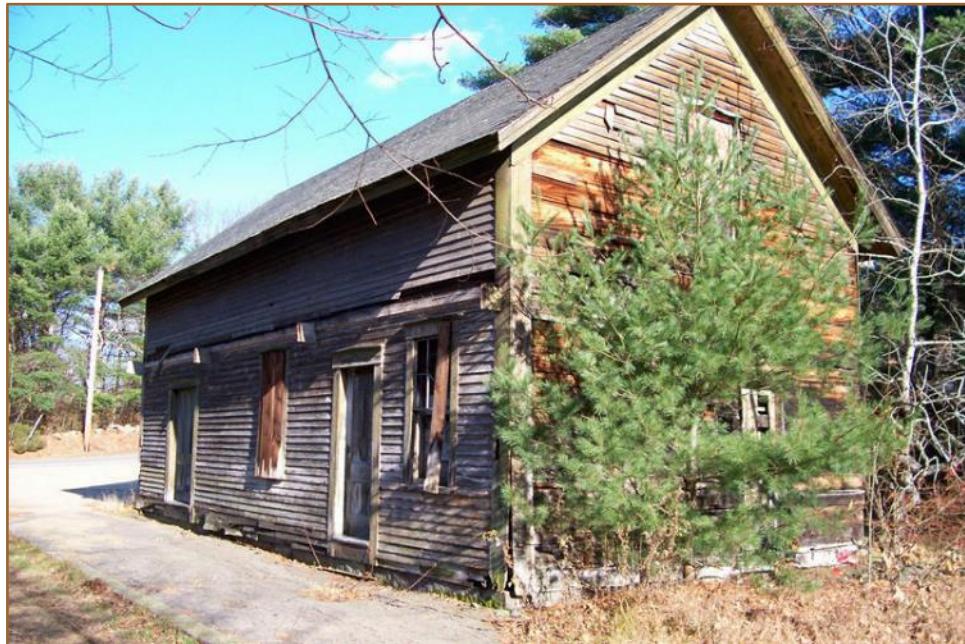


<http://www.epsomhistory.com/epsom/scrapbooks/rrindex.htm/>

<sup>11</sup> NH Division of Historical Resources Northern Pass Draft Project Area Form, Circa 2016; Epsom Historical Society [www.epsomhistory.com](http://www.epsomhistory.com); NERAIL New England Railroad Photo Archive (Suncook Valley)

## SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**Figure 12. Epsom Short Falls Historic Depot Station 2006**



NERAIL M.Menzi, photo accessed by CNHRPC Feb 2019

## PEMBROKE

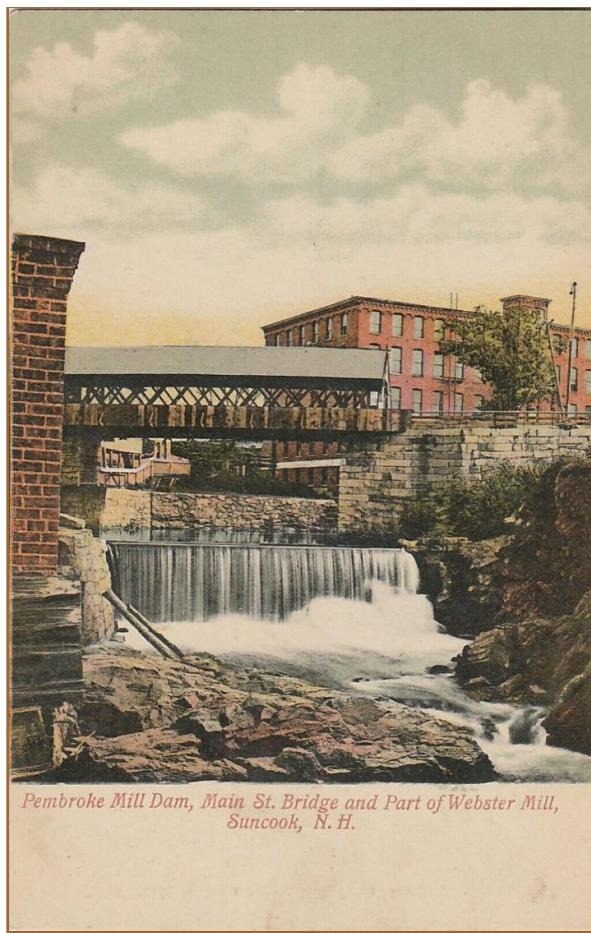
Pembroke is uniquely bordered by three rivers, the Merrimack, Suncook, and Soucook Rivers. The town was granted by Massachusetts in 1728 as the town of Suncook and settlement began along the Merrimack River soon after. After a conflicting land claim to consider Suncook as part of the Bow township was denied, the town was incorporated as Pembroke in 1759. By the end of the 1700s, a industry was developing in the southern section of the town at Suncook Village, with the rivers used for the manufacture and export of textiles, paper products, and bricks. Suncook Village remained the industrial and transportation center of Pembroke over the next 150 years. Other historic residential clusters in Pembroke were located at North Pembroke, East Pembroke, and along Pembroke Street.<sup>12</sup>

There was no railroad Depot Station in Pembroke, as the **Concord & Montreal Railroad** (later merging into the **Boston & Main Railroad in 1919**) traveled from Concord into the Suncook Depot Station in Allenstown across the Suncook River.<sup>13</sup>

The arrival of the railroad enabled the brick manufacturing trade to flourish along the Suncook River, including the construction of Suncook Village itself whose buildings were comprised of millions of bricks. The elevation grade difference between Suncook Village and quarries in Allenstown permitted the construction of a special railroad spur heading to this mining operation in Allenstown.<sup>14</sup>

1924 Town Population: ~2,000

**Figure 13. Pembroke Railroad Bridge over Suncook River, Suncook Village**



Ebay.com postcard image accessed by CNHRPC May 2019

<sup>12</sup> NH Division of Historical Resources Northern Pass Draft Project Area Form, Circa 2016, Pembroke Master Plan 2004

<sup>13</sup> B&M Corporate History Addendum 2009

<sup>14</sup> Pembroke Master Plan 2004 Historic and Cultural Resources Chapter

## PITTSFIELD

The Pittsfield Historical Society reports the founding of several clusters of agricultural centers in 1768. Each center contained homes, stores, churches, schools, and mills. Located on the Suncook River, the "Lower City" became known as the most prominent center, and the Town of Pittsfield was founded in 1782. Mills and industry were essential for the Town. As new factories for the manufacturing of shoes and scythes were built and mills for cotton, saw and grist production were constructed, Pittsfield's population began to grow. A population boom was reported between 1830-1840 just before the Civil War, and many new homes were constructed to accommodate demand.<sup>15</sup>

The **Suncook Valley Railroad** also factored highly in Pittsfield's industrial development in 1869. The Town became a commercial center for the entire Suncook Valley with the availability of freight transport. The Pittsfield Depot Station at Depot Square was constructed off of modern day Catamount Street, and shortly thereafter was joined by another large shoe factory. Today, the building is used as the [Blueberry Express Daycare Center](#). A second stop on the railroad in Pittsfield was the Webster Mills Station, then known as "Webster's Mill." The rebuilt Webster Mills bridge over the Suncook River remains today and is used for vehicular traffic. The [Nashua City Station](#) website contains several marvelous historical photographs of the railroad in Pittsfield.

1924 Town Population: 1,914

**Figure 14. Pittsfield Depot Station, circa 1900-1909**

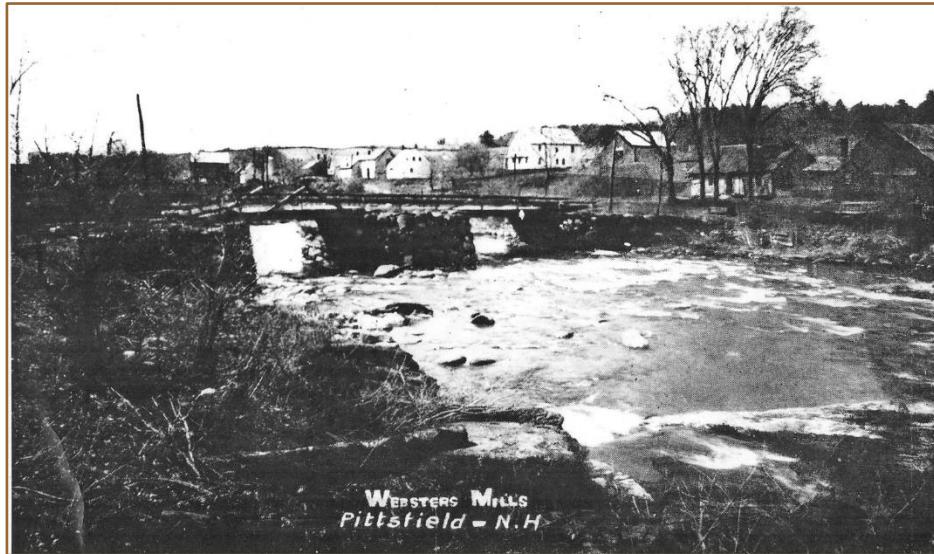


Image accessed via Google Images, CNHRPC June 2019

<sup>15</sup> <https://pittsfieldhistory.com/info/history-of-pittsfield>

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**Figure 15. Pittsfield Webster Mills Bridge**



CNHRPC File Photo 2011

**Figure 16. Pittsfield Webster Mills Bridge 2011**



CNHRPC Field Work File Photo 2011

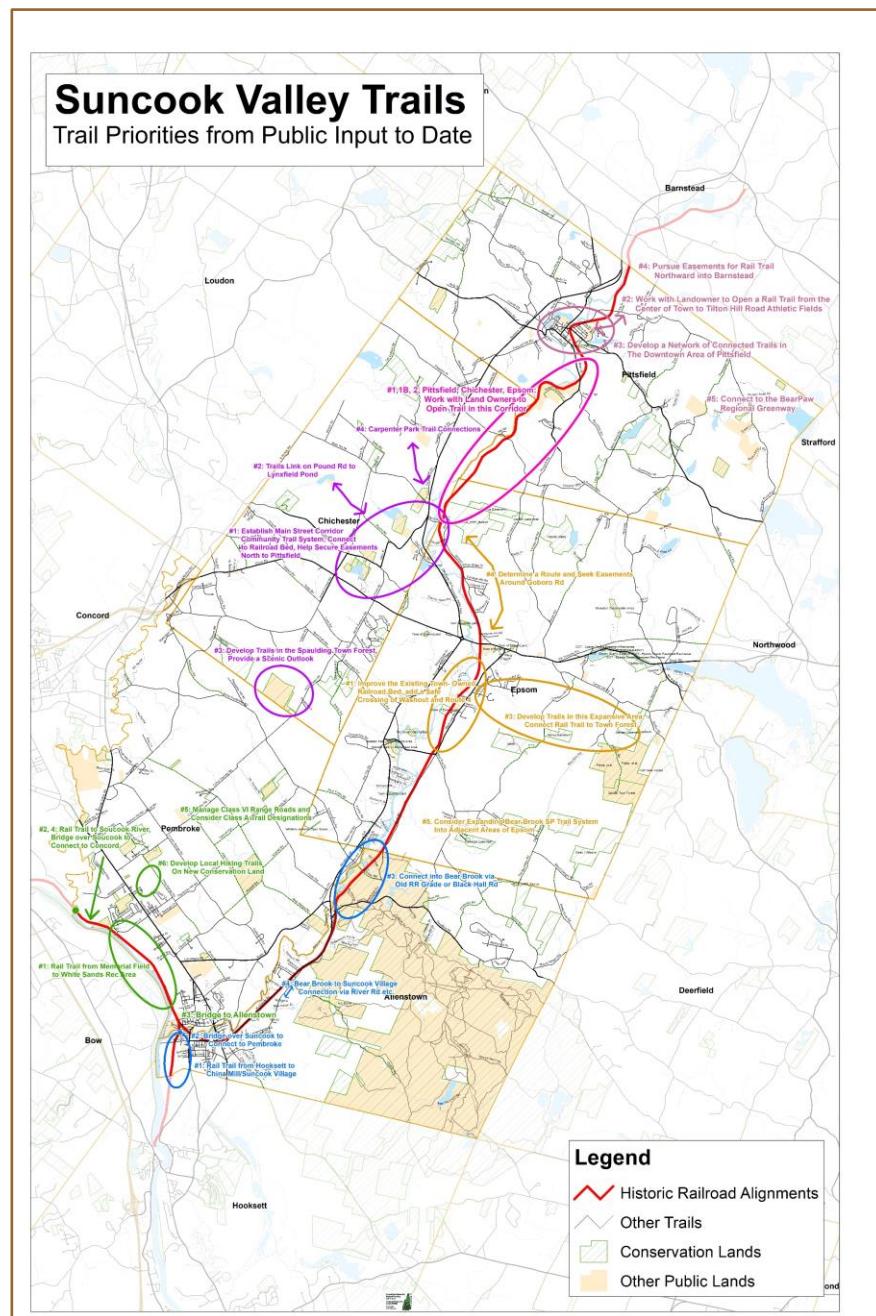
# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## 3. COMMUNITY TRAIL ACTIVITIES AND PRIORITIES

The Suncook Valley Rail Trail is an envisioned, off-street multi-use rail trail for pedestrians and bicycles, horses, and snowmobiles through Pembroke and Allenstown along the Merrimack River, and north from Suncook Village to Pittsfield and beyond the Central NH Region into Barnstead. Most of the existing trails in the region are designated as single or dual use during one season. They include snowmobile trails, walking and bicycling trails, hiking trails, equestrian trails, and informal trails. The collaborative vision encourages a regional multi-use rail trails network with connections to municipal, state, and private trails. The ideas are beginning to take shape using the existing patchwork of local rail trail segments and municipal holdings of former railbed as its basis.

Descriptions of current community trails activities, existing trails, and future trail projects and collaborative trails opportunities follow. Small maps of Town trail priorities gathered from public input sessions and the combined future vision for the Suncook Valley Rail Trail sections are provided in this section while the larger maps are located in the APPENDIX.

**Figure 17. Suncook Valley Priority Projects from Public Input Overview Map**



CNHRPC, June 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

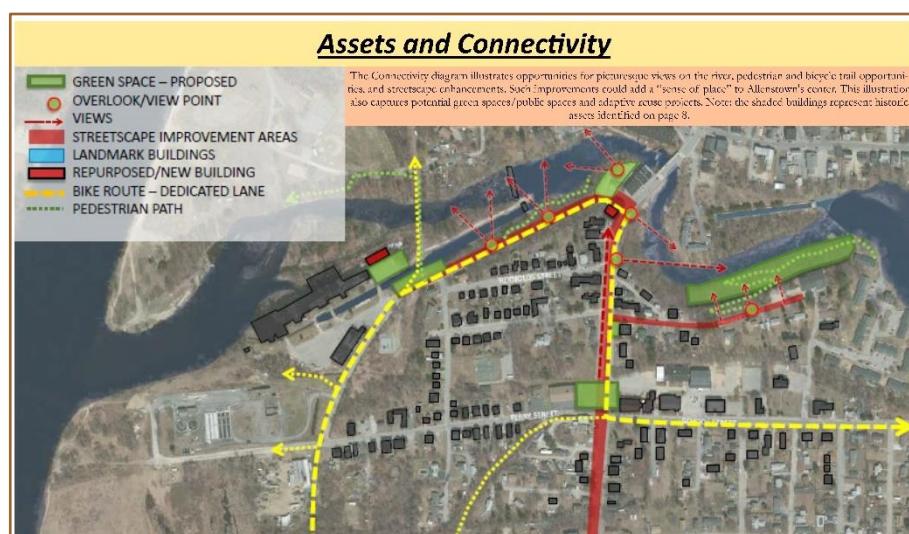
## ALLENSTOWN

### Current Activities

The "Allenstown Master Plan 2014" supports the promotion of the **Suncook Valley Railroad** as an economic development tool and for recreational infrastructure for the community. Other ideas from the Master Plan include expanding a municipal trail network using conservation lands, Class VI roads, and agricultural lands; designating certain Class VI roads as Class A trails; supporting the development of the Concord to Manchester Rail Trail along the Merrimack River; and promoting and increasing recreational trails for residents and visitors alike. The Economic Development Committee supports Suncook Village Trails and connections to Bear Brook State Park to increase economic revitalization. The joint Meet Me in Suncook Committee comprised of Allenstown and Pembroke volunteers aims to foster appreciation for the historic Suncook Village District which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Bear Brook State Park's extensive acreage in Allenstown offers economic development opportunities for attracting extended stays of park and trail users.

The park also hosts a large seasonal campground, archery ranges, and a museum complex. A Community Design Charrette in 2016, "Where Rivers & Neighbors Meet", transmits the need for trail connectivity while maintaining the Town's sense of place and history.

**Figure 18. Connectivity, Improvements and Pedestrian Bridge over Suncook River Charrette Design, 2016**



Allenstown Community Design Charrette for Suncook Village, Where Rivers & Neighbors Meet, 2016

### Existing Trails Identified

- Suncook Village Walking Tour Urban Trail
- Bear Brook State Forest Trails
- NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club Trails

### Known Trail Uses (Formal or Informal)

- Walking, Bicycling
- Hiking, Mountain Biking, Horses, Snowmobile
- Snowmobile

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

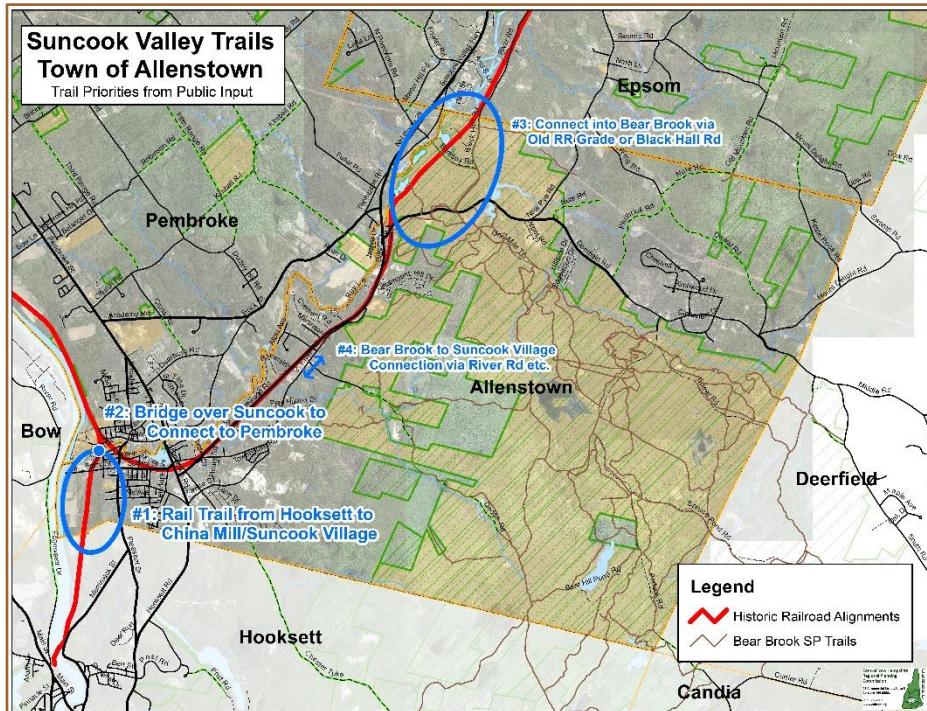
## Future Trail Projects and Opportunities

These potential trails projects and opportunities were described by the Allenstown Economic Development Committee and its attendees during a Trails Meeting discussion. The establishment of a Town Trails Committee comprised of the Economic Development Committee, NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club, Bear Brook State Park representatives, Meet Me in Suncook, Pembroke and Hooksett trail committees, and local trails users could bring the multiple trails interests together to begin working on the higher priority projects, which are **1)** and **2)**. See the accompanying **Allenstown Trail Priorities from Public Input Map**.

**1) Develop a Rail Trail from the China Mill to Hooksett.** As the primary trails opportunity in Town, there appears to be only one private property owner along this route. Along the former **Concord & Montreal Railroad** bed, a potential shared-use China Mill Rail Trail for walking and bicycling could connect to the completed Hooksett Rail Trail that terminates at the Allenstown town line. An Allenstown Trails Committee could seek to partner with the Hooksett trail groups on various aspects of trail building, and if appropriate, local snowmobile clubs such as the NH Trail Dawgs.

**2) Bridge to Pembroke across Canal and Suncook River.** To capitalize on a successful China Mill Rail Trail described above, a rail trail bridge could connect over the canal and Suncook River into Pembroke. It was noted this project would require coordination between the two communities. The old railroad bridge piers appear intact and a structure exists there presently that carries utility pipes, possibly owned by the Sewer Commission, across the river. The Commission would be a partner in any rail trail project that sought to use the existing sewer line

**Figure 19. Allenstown Trail Priorities from Public Input Map, 2019**



CNHRPC, June 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

easements. Until a bridge can be built across the Suncook River, an on-street connector should be identified.

- 3) Epsom to Deerfield Road/Bear Brook State Park.** The group felt the railroad bed from Epsom could be used as a trail down to Deerfield Road, but a washed out bridge and private property would be a consideration. An alternative route would be to use Black Hall Road or an unmaintained State Park road as a trail route. This potential project would be a lower priority than the Suncook Village area rail trail and would likely remain on hold until a trail at the Epsom side of the town line is ready to advance.
- 4) Bear Brook State Park to Suncook Village.** Although it would be desirable to have an off-street trail connecting Bear Brook State Park to Suncook Village, a project of this magnitude appeared unrealistic at this time. Erecting signage on existing streets, perhaps using River Road and a short section of NH 28, seemed the reasonable way to enhance a connection. River Road is pleasant for walking and bicycling under existing conditions.

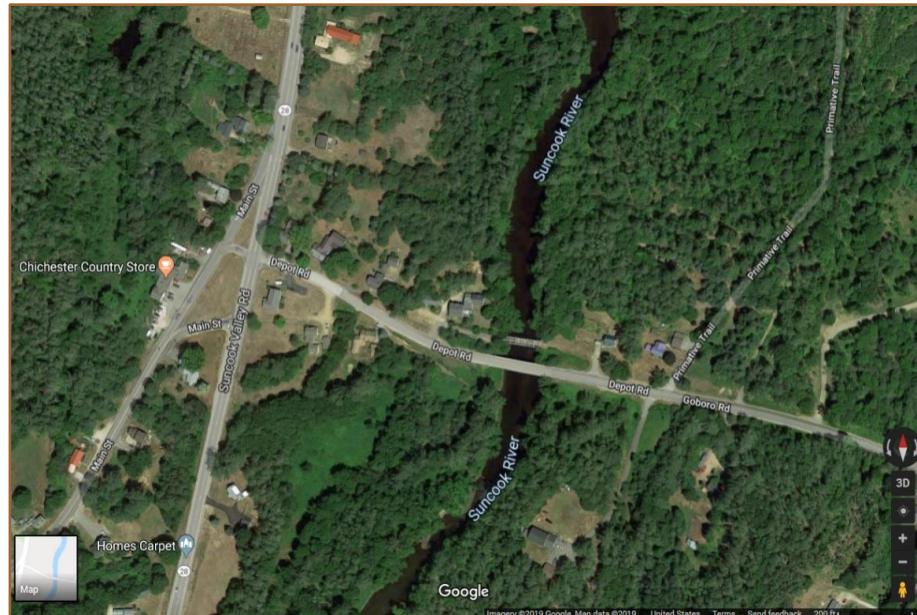
# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## CHICHESTER

### Current Activities

The 2019 Chichester Master Plan update is currently underway. The 2005 Master Plan noted that Chichester residents strongly support maintaining the Town's rural character by preserving and expanding the network of public trails. The Conservation Commission goals include recreational trails planning. The Parks and Recreation Commission and Conservation Commission actively work on trails development for the Town. The community has an active snowmobile club, the NH Trail Dawgs, which holds agreements with landowners for the winter use of trails on private land. The 2014 Community Design Charette, "A Village Center, Again," identified goals that included improvements at Parade Corner, which is Main Street's intersection with NH 28. This location is adjacent to Depot Street, Thunder Bridge, Goboro Road (Epsom) and the former Suncook Valley railbed. Several potential projects are still under discussion for Chichester's Main Street, and a reconfiguration of the Main Street and NH 28 intersection are contained within the NHDOT "State Ten Year Plan 2019-2028," with projected completion in 2025.

**Figure 20. Chichester Main Street, Depot Street, Thunder Bridge, and Suncook Valley Railbed Google Map**



Google Map image accessed by CNHRPC, June 2019

### Existing Trails Identified

- Carpenter Park Perimeter Trail
- NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Trails
- Spaulding Town Forest Trails
- Marsh Pond Loop Trail (trail work needed)
- Chichester Elementary School to Town Library

### Known Trail Uses (Formal or Informal)

- Walking, Bicycling
- Snowmobile
- Hiking, Horses
- Walking, Snowmobilers, Horses
- Walking, Bicycling

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## **Future Trail Projects and Opportunities**

These potential trails projects and opportunities were described by the Chichester Trails Meeting attendees. The establishment of a Town Trails Committee comprised of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Conservation Commission, NH Trail Dawgs, the Epsom and Pittsfield Trails Committees, and local trails users could bring the multiple trails interests together to begin working on the priority projects. Only one of the projects relates directly to the Suncook Valley Railroad Rail Trail since little of the track runs through Chichester. See the accompanying **Chichester Trail Priorities from Public Input Map**.

**1) Establish a Main Street Corridor Community Trail System.** Snowmobile trails cross the private lands and through some Town of Chichester properties within this area, and multiple local Town trails offer hiking located on Town land in isolated loops. There is a potential for a connected, coordinated four-season trail system in the Main Street area for summer hiking and bicycling use and winter snowmobile and cross country skiing use. The vicinity includes Horse Corner Road/Center Road, to Bear Hill Road and NH 28, south to Main Street and Cross Road, then from Lane Road back to Horse Corner. The location of kiosks and parking areas should also be considered while developing and upgrading trails.

**1A) Rehabilitate the Marsh Pond Loop Trail behind the Fire Station.** The existing Town hiking and biking trail around Marsh Pond was as swampy, having Beaver Dap problems, and in need of maintenance and additional trail work. The Parks and Recreation Department and the NH Trail Dawgs could work together to raise and improve the trail surface, repair the bridges across a stream crossing to enable snowmobile for winter use and hiking and bicycling for summer use. Multiple trail connections could be constructed to reach the existing snowmobile trails, the Grange, and other parts of Main Street. A Recreational Trails Grant could support for of some these trail ideas. Trail interests should continue to engage Hillcrest Campground to ascertain their interest in a trail connection through their property, which could also benefit their business.

**1B) Pursue a Depot Street connection to Thunder Bridge and the Suncook Valley Railbed for multi-use.** A potential rail trail connection exists from Depot Road and the historic Thunder Bridge across the Suncook River, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The bridge could be crossed to access the railroad bed in Epsom at Goboro Road, which is an Epsom Town-owned property, connecting to the Epsom town-owned railroad section. Heading north, the Epsom railbed travels into Pittsfield. This section of the former railbed is desirable for a compact stone dust surface suitable for winter and summer use. The Chichester Main Street/ NH 28 intersection improvement is programmed to be underway in the early to mid-2020s, so developing a plan now for potential trails usage of this area may enable the Depot Street area to be included in the improvement. A Chichester

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Trails Committee could talk with landowners to seek a long term trails use agreement. (See *Pittsfield Project 1*)

## 1C) South of Carpenter Park to the Chichester Elementary School

**South of Carpenter Park to the Chichester Elementary School** is a prime location to construct a trail connection. A collaborative effort may be possible among the Town, School, and NH Trail Dawgs. A paved trail surface was discussed for this location only to accommodate walkers and bicyclers from the school.

An additional trail to connect the Elementary School through the Main Street area to the Grange/Fire Station/Marsh Pond loop would complete a Main Street Community Trail connection.

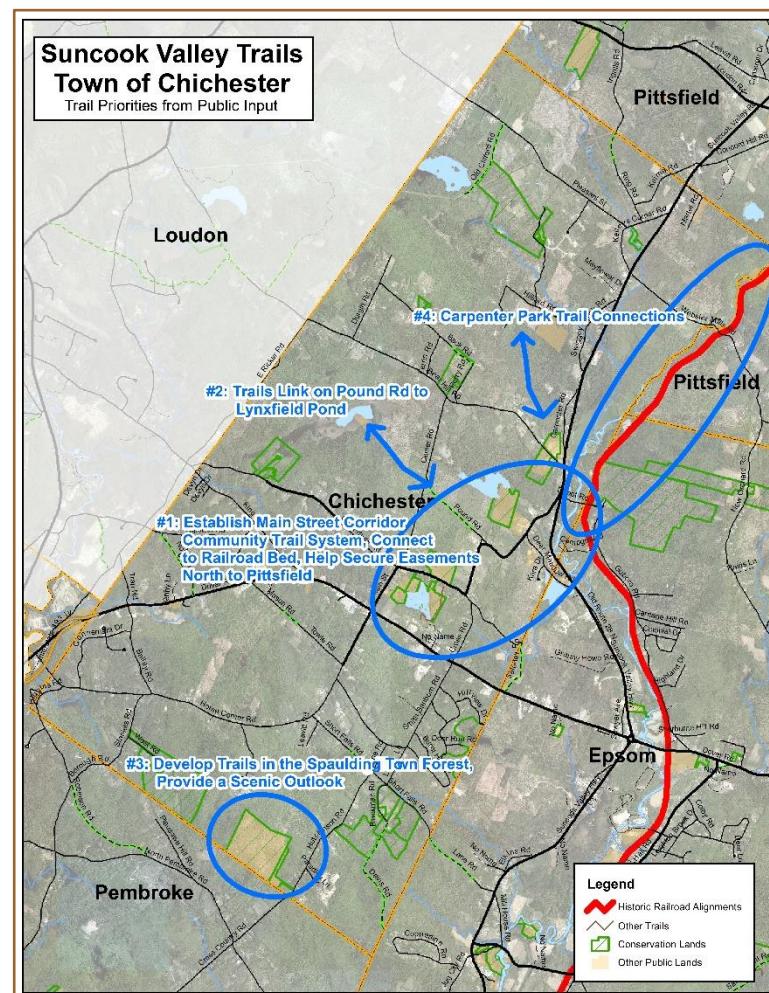
## 2) Investigate converting Class VI Pound Road to a Class A trail, and developing a trail across Center Road toward the Town-owned property on Lynxfield Pond.

This potential trail would be a side trail from the Main Street Community Trail System. Class VI Pound Road stretches from Main Street at the Library to the Bee Hole Beavers Snowmobile Club corridor trail, which is closed in some areas and needs to be rerouted through the Suncook River area to Corridor 15. From the Town Class VI road, agreements could be made with owners for summer hiking and bicycling use. A Town Trails Committee could approach jointly to request winter snowmobile/cross country skiing use using a simple landowner agreement. A Class A trail enables the community to designate specific uses for the trail, which is closed to most non-motorized access, and is enforceable by law enforcement. See RSA 231-A for more details.

## 3) Develop Spaulding Town Forest Trails, scenic outlooks, and connect to the Main Street Corridor Community Trail System.

A section of trail from Lane Road to the Spaulding Town Forest was under development a few years ago, but not completed. The Town Forest was

**Figure 21. Chichester Trail Priorities from Public Input Map 2019**



CNHRPC, June 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

identified as having the potential for trail connection using nearby Class VI roads such as Leavitt Road and provides for possible snowmobile trail connection north to the Marsh Pond Trails. The Spaulding Forest contains interesting destinations, such as caves and a possible hilltop observation point with a viewing platform. The location of a parking area with kiosks and a trailhead may have to be considered further because of current adjacent landowner preferences.

- 4) Investigate a possible snowmobile trail connection from Carpenter Park to Hilliard Road, an extension trail from the Main Street Community Trail System.** The northern end of Carpenter Park to the Town-owned land off south of Hilliard Road could enable the development of a snowmobile/cross-country skiing and hiking trail connection. Talk with landowners to obtain agreements and ensure a system is in place for trails maintenance.

## EPSOM

### Current Activities

The Town's Conservation Commission has worked to develop a trail system on the Tarleton Town Forest, which has become a popular destination for many types of trails users. The Town of Epsom owns several sections of the former railbed, and these sections are currently being used for walking, bicycling or horseback riding, although illicit motorized use has been reported.

Snowmobilers utilize sections of the rail trails in the winter. The Town is currently working on the "Epsom Master Plan" update to be completed in 2019 and the connections among transportation, recreation, and economic development are being explored, including trails. The Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Club is very active in their home-base of Epsom and seeks to make trail improvements where possible.

**Figure 22. Epsom-Owned Railbed Trail Past the Odd Fellows Home (Old Short Falls Road Depot Station)**



CNHRPC, June 2019

### Existing Trails Identified

Tarleton Town Forest Trails  
Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Trails  
Epsom Rail Trail (Town-owned sections of railbed)  
Class VI Roads

### Known Trail Uses (Formal or Informal)

Hiking, Non-motorized  
Snowmobile  
Hiking, Bicycling, Horses, Snowmobile  
Hiking, Bicycling, Horses

### Future Trail Projects and Opportunities

These potential trails projects and opportunities were described by the Epsom Trails Meeting attendees. The establishment of a Town Trails Committee comprised of representatives from the Conservation Commission, Economic Development Committee, Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Trails, and local trails users could bring multiple trails interests together to begin working on the priority projects in conjunction with the Chichester and Pittsfield Trails Committees. See the accompanying **Epsom Trail Priorities from Public Input Map**.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**1) Improve the existing Town-owned railroad bed along Black Hall Road from south of Webster Park to US 4/202 and pursue trails connections.** Continue to use the Epsom Bible Church as a trailhead and parking area and consider a formal agreement for long-term trail parking. Investigate the use of compact stone dust along the trail to accommodate a range of users. Construct kiosks at trailheads and parking areas. Construct a walking and biking connection trail to Webster Park to take advantage of its parking area and recreational facilities. Consider equestrian use of the rail trail (Epsom Rail Trail) when improving the railbed to accommodate the high interest in horseback riding.

**1A) Construct a bridge or other crossing over the Little Suncook River** At the northern end of the Town owned railbed just south of US4/202, a culvert over the Little Suncook River created a large wash-out which effectively eliminated any connectivity to the north. Re-establishing a crossing would enable additional trail connections for a range of users.

**1B) Establish a safe crossing over or under US 4/202 for snowmobiles, horses, bicyclists, and pedestrians.** There is currently no designated trail crossing or crossing location over or under the busy US 4/202 roadway.

**2) Pursue a connection from the Town-owned railbed (Epsom Rail Trail) near the Lazy River Campground to Goboro Road (Depot Road in Chichester) to the privately owned Webster Mills railbed in Pittsfield.** Determine if there are to be financial investments, such as trail hardpack, fences or bridges necessary along the stretch, and work with property owners to obtain permanent trail easements for the rail trail.

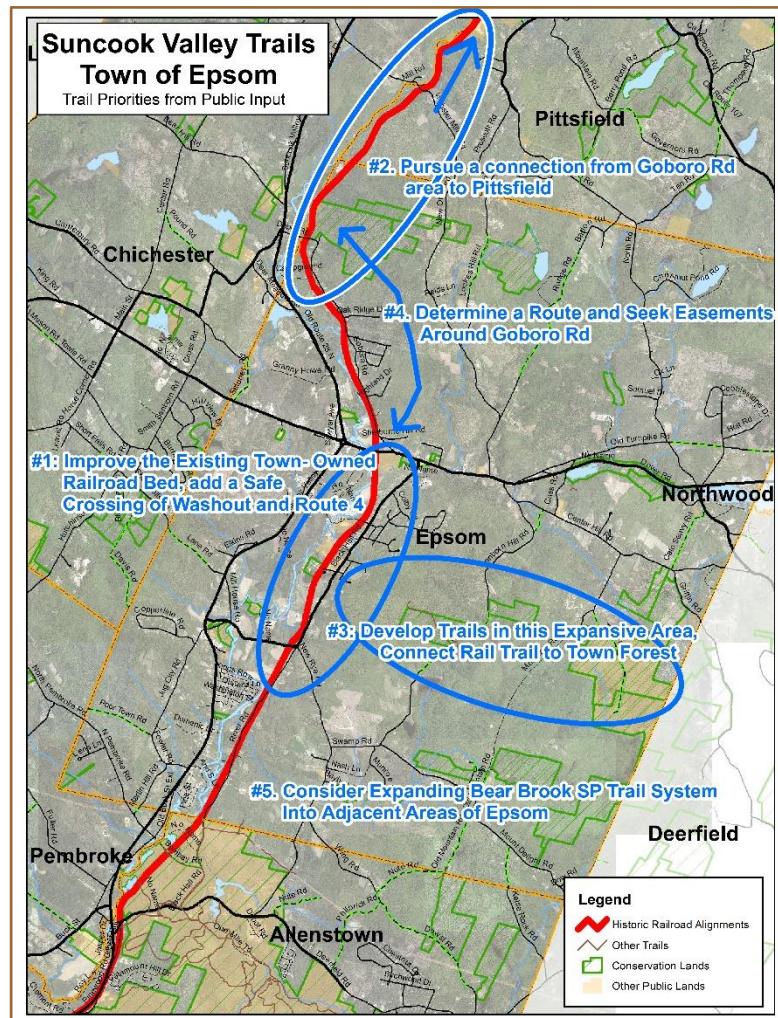
**3) Connect from the Town-owned railroad bed (Epsom Rail Trail) along Black Hall Road to the Epsom Town Forest on Tarleton Road.** The large blocks of forest land between the Epsom Rail Trail and the Town Forest is ready for trail development. The Epsom Trails Committee should identify the potential connection corridors for multi-use, then obtain support from user groups and landowners to move forward. The next steps are establishing kiosks and trailheads, obtaining property owner agreements for trails building and usage on the private land, and considering additional trails connections to nearby conservation lands, including Fort Mountain.

**4) Determine a rerouting of a multi-use trail from US 4/202 around Goboro Road where homes are located within the former railroad right of way.** With landowner agreements and a formal Trails Committee or trails user club commitment, this large block of forest land to the east of Goboro Road could serve as the connector between the two sections of Epsom-owned railroad bed (Epsom Rail Trail). This area was noted as hilly and most suitable for hiking, horses, and snowmobiling. Existing trails on private land are known to be located in this area and may serve as the first location of a circumventing trail. Trails use agreements and landowners support would be necessary.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

**5) Consider working with NH Forests and Lands, Bear Brook State Park, private landowners, and conservation land holders to expand the Bear Brook multi-use trails (including equestrian and snowmobile) into Epsom.** Such an expansion could reach the Tarleton Town Forest and other areas discussed, and would include trails construction, signage, parking areas for trailers, and landowner agreements.

**Figure 23. Epsom Trail Priorities from Public Input Map  
2019**



CNHRPC, June 2019

## PEMBROKE

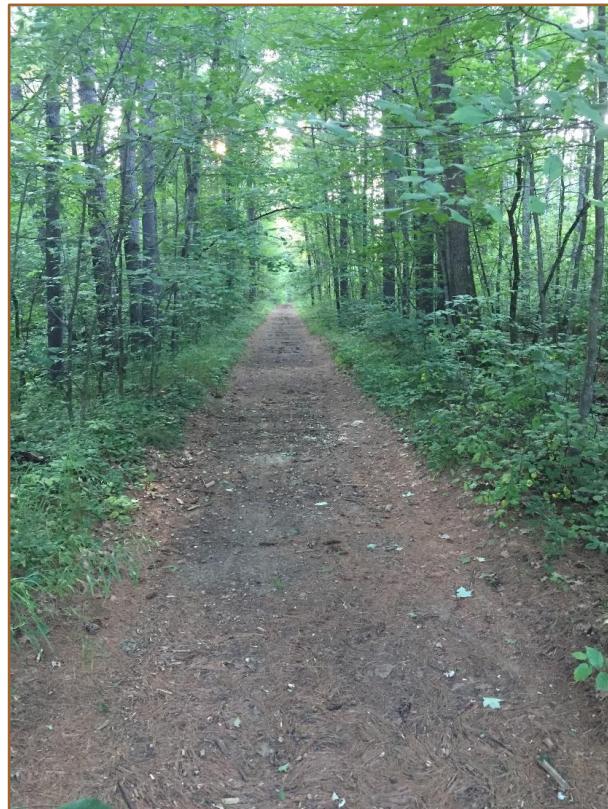
### **Current Activities**

The Planning Board is developing the "Pembroke Master Plan 2019" update, considering rail trails options in several chapters. The Conservation Commission seeks to obtain easements to protect priority conservation lands with easements, some of which may be suitable for trails. Members of the Meet Me in Suncook nonprofit group, a collective of Allenstown and Pembroke residents focused on redevelopment and revitalization of downtown Suncook, have historically supported an urban rail trail to increase economic development and encourage people to visit the Village. Advocates in Town have been investigating how to implement a Pembroke Rail Trail along the Merrimack River, including alignment options and securing trail easements. The Town-owned White Sands Conservation Area along the Merrimack River hosts trails for walking and biking with riverfront access for swimming. The Town has wonderfully preserved sections of Class VI range roads, from Third Range Road to Sixth Range Road. The Town has sought to protect them from development and extraneous vehicle use and many of them are used as trails, although there is strong concern over the condition of some of these Range Roads. The "Pembroke Open Space Trail System Plan 2001" describes many of the existing and potential trail opportunities in Town.

### **Existing Trails Identified**

Suncook Village Walking Tour Urban Trail  
NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Trails  
Whittemore Town Forest Trails  
Pembroke Rail Trail (Brittany/Gamelin) Town-Owned  
White Sands Conservation Area Trails  
Class VI Range Roads

**Figure 24. Pembroke-Owned Railbed Along the Merrimack River**



CNHRPC Field Work Photo 2018

### **Known Trail Uses (Formal or Informal)**

Walking, Bicycling  
Snowmobile  
Walking, Bicycling  
Walking, Bicycling  
Walking, Bicycling  
Walking, Bicycling, Horses, OHV, Snowmobile

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## **Future Trail Projects and Opportunities**

These potential trails projects and opportunities were described by the Pembroke Trails Meeting attendees and refined were possible by CNHRPC. The Pembroke Master Plan update has further identified opportunities for developing trails in Town, including rail trail segments and connections along the Merrimack River. See the accompanying **Pembroke Trail Priorities from Public Input Map**.

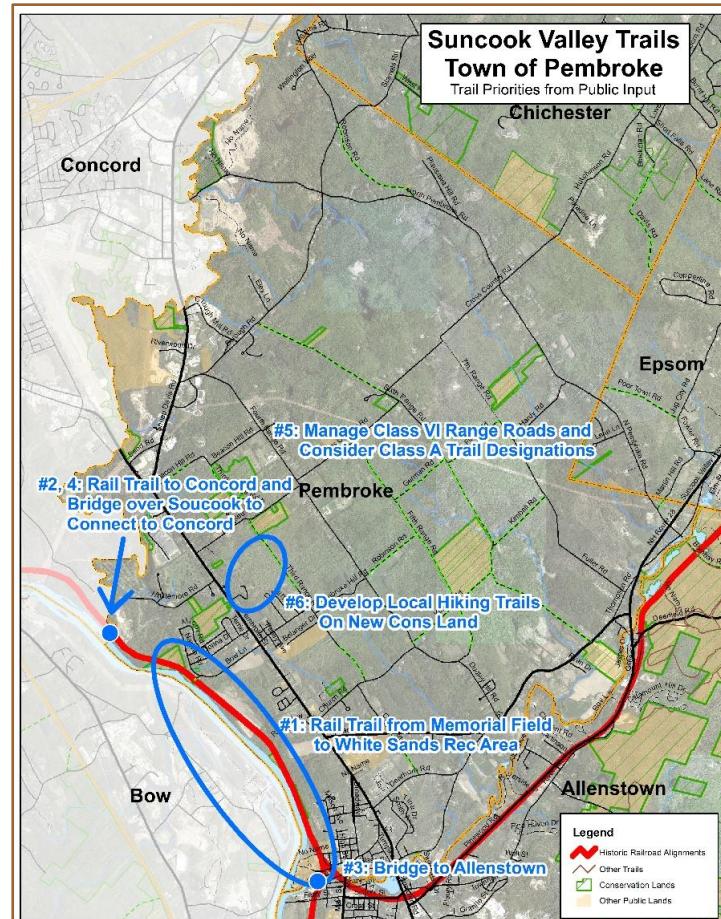
- 1) Develop the Pembroke Rail Trail (or Merrimack River Trail) along the Merrimack River, focusing on the area from Memorial Field to White Sands.** This trail would have independent utility even if it is not connected to a larger regional trail network. It serve as an alternative to bicycling or walking on US Route 3/ Pembroke Street, and would connect Suncook Village, residential neighborhoods, Memorial Field, and White Sands Recreation Area.
- 2) Extend the Pembroke Rail Trail north of White Sands to the Concord town line at the Soucook River.** There have been positive talks with landowners about this project and it may be possible to have a park-like setting with benches etc. overlooking the Soucook River until such time as a bridge can be built to connect to future trails on the Concord side.
- 3) Construct a bridge over the Suncook River to connect the Pembroke Rail Trail Extension to future Allenstown trails.** Working in conjunction with the Town of Allenstown, this project would require public access from the Allenstown side of the Suncook River, such as a pedestrian bridge.
- 4) Construct a bridge over the Soucook River to Concord.** A new bridge would be highly dependent on the progress on the trail on the Concord side of the Soucook River. The City of Concord and Friends of the Merrimack River Greenway Trail have long-term plans for their Merrimack River Greenway Rail Trail to cross the Garvin's Falls property and connect with the Pembroke Rail Trail at this location.
- 5) Ensure the Town's historic Class VI Range Roads are utilized recreationally in a sustainable manner.** Connectivity to the Range Roads would be of major importance for a local trail system. Trails to other Range Roads could connect into the new Third Range Road conservation land. At this time, most of the Range Roads were considered by the Conservation Commission as impassible by hikers, bicyclists and horses because of the large ruts, exposed roots and rocks, and significant erosion caused by users of wheeled motorized vehicles. Winter recreational use of the Range Roads was not believed possible for cross country skiers or snowshoers because of deep mudholes. Snowmobilers are welcomed on the Range Roads, yet after they repair damages, the problems re-emerge because of improper use. Ideas for responsible, sustainable recreational Range Road use include consideration of conversion of some Range Roads to Class A trails, where trail use can be specified and subject to additional enforcement under state law.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## 6) Develop Trails on New Conservation Land between Third Range Road and Center Road.

It has been observed that trails and open spaces in proximity to the population centers near Route 3 and Suncook Village are particularly loved and popular, so this parcel, in close proximity to population centers, appears to be a good location for trails.

**Figure 25. Pembroke Trail Priorities from Public Input Map 2019**



CNHRPC, June 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

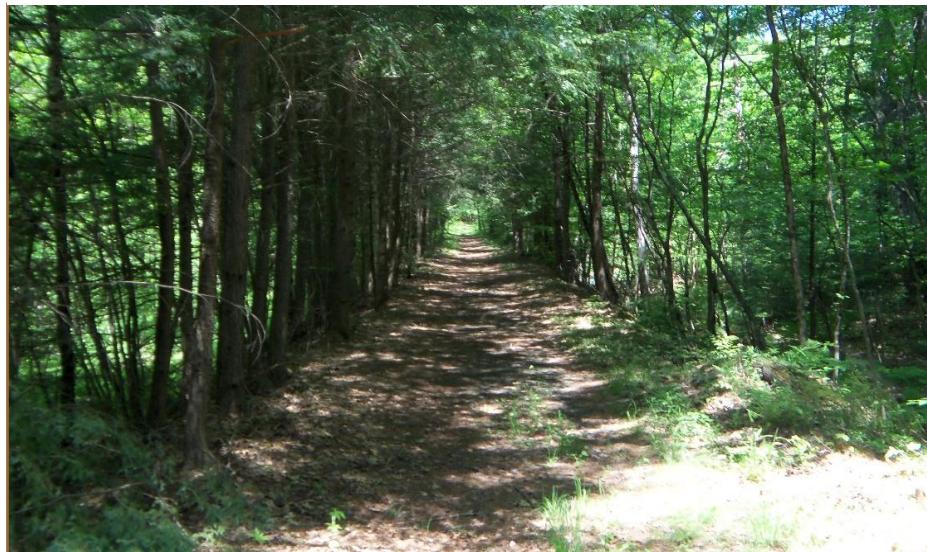
## PITTSFIELD

### **Current Activities**

The "Town of Pittsfield Master Plan 2010" identified the necessity for a multi-use recreational trail spanning the community and suggested the Suncook River lands could be utilized for multi-use trails and parks, including a boat launch. The "Pittsfield Open Space Trail System Plan 1999" developed by CNHRPC and the Conservation Commission inventoried powerline corridors, the location of the old **Suncook Valley Railroad** bed, known snowmobile trails, and proposed ideas for future trails. Many ideas proposed have merit and should be further investigated. In late 2000s, the Pittsfield Historical Society developed a 1.5 mile, "Walk Back in Time" downtown urban Historic Trail along many of the Village downtown roads, identifying the locations of historic markers and buildings.

The recently formed Pittsfield Community Development Committee has undertaken projects for village revitalization which include attraction of economic development and using the old railbed for walking and bicycling. The Suncook Valley Sno-Riders Snowmobile Club has a network of trails in Pittsfield and Barnstead with landowner agreements for winter snowmobile usage. The Town has a solid basis and support system for rail trails development and connection.

**Figure 26. Pittsfield-Owned Railroad Bed Behind the Highway Department**



CNHRPC Field Work Photo 2011

### **Existing Trails Identified**

- Historic Urban Downtown Trail
- Suncook Valley Sno-Riders Snowmobile Club Trails
- Pittsfield Rail Trail (Town-owned railbed)
- White Brook Apartments Rail Trail

### **Known Trail Uses (Formal or Informal)**

- Walking, Bicycling
- Snowmobile
- Gated at Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Informal Walking, Bicycling

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## **Future Trail Projects and Opportunities**

These potential trails projects and opportunities were described by the Pittsfield Trails Meeting attendees. The establishment of a Town Trails Committee comprised of representatives from the Community Development Committee, Parks and Recreation Commission, Historical Society, Barnstead Parks and Recreation Commission, NH Trail Dawgs, Suncook Valley Sno-Riders, Blueberry Express owners, Pittsfield School District, Whites Brook Apartment owners, and local trails users can bring the multiple trails interests together to begin working on the priority projects. See the accompanying **Pittsfield Trail Priorities from Public Input Map**.

- 1) Connect from Town-Owned railbed (Pittsfield Rail Trail) at the Wastewater Treatment Plant south to Pittsfield Webster Mills Road, then south to Chichester Depot Street/Epsom Goboro Road.** In Pittsfield, this section of the railbed begins near the beautiful historic Webster Mills bridge over the Suncook River. The former railbed was noted as usable, including the bridges, from Depot Street in Chichester / Goboro Road in Epsom to Pittsfield's Webster Mills Road, except for brush clearing. The rail ties are mostly gone. The area would be good for snowmobile usage as well as hiking, bicycling, and horses. The Town should talk to property owners between the Wastewater Treatment Plan and Webster Mills Road to obtain trails use agreements and locate alternate routes around closed sections of trails. Options for parking trailhead locations and the number of spots needed should be studied. Possible areas noted for included the Town property near the Public Works garage and the gravel excavation areas on both sides of the trail. A separate discussion with these landowners would be necessary to obtain an easement for parking and trailhead.

Such a trail connection would require approval from property owners. It is noted that the rail bed passes in close proximity to some residences. The Trail Committee(s) would need to work closely with property owners to address any concerns the land owners may have to foster a positive relationship. If owners decline to offer public trail easements, that wish must be respected; however, in light of the significance of the trail to the communities, the project should be respectfully pursued again in the future.

- 2) Connect from the Downtown railbed to the Tilton Hill Ballfields.** This potential Downtown to Ballfields rail trail segment was first noted in the Safe Routes to School Plan in 2011. Children and families should be able to walk or bike safely and quickly from Downtown to the Elementary School and Ballfields. The trail here would bypass a section of Tilton Hill Road with curves, hills, narrow shoulders, and no sidewalk. This section of the railbed begins at the former "Blueberry Express" Depot Station (now Blueberry Express Daycare Center) at 8 Catamount Road and runs parallel to the Suncook River and Tilton Hill Road before crossing Tilton Hill and traveling through pastureland to connect with the Ballfields. Partners in this endeavor could be the Town, School

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

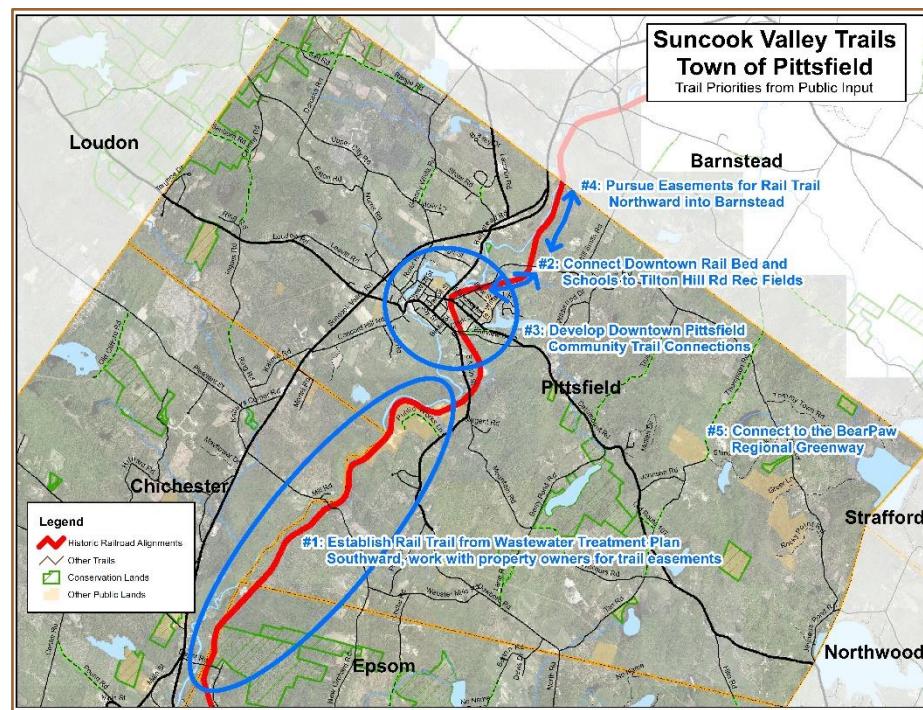
District, and Blueberry Express Daycare which might be used to host a kiosk. Compact stone dust may be an appropriate surface for uses such as walking or bicycling.

**3) Develop Downtown Pittsfield urban trail loops and connections to other trail systems.** The former railbed passes right through downtown, enabling trails to become part of an economic redevelopment strategy to attract new businesses and promote the Downtown. The Community Development Committee is reviewing urban rail trail ideas to pursue. The former railbed is located along private property in the downtown and some sections are actively used for trail purposes. For instance, the Whites Brook Apartments residents use the building's access to the railbed for walking or biking into the Town Center. Along this section of railbed, the Town is believed to hold sewer line easement right-of-way, which could be further explored for public access potential. At Fairview Drive, the railbed crosses Clark Street through an industrial cluster and the Pittsfield Fire Station to reach Catamount Road and the Blueberry Express buildings. The Historical Society may want to assist and connect an urban connection with its existing Downtown Historic Trail. A collaboration of multiple partners could be sought to obtain landowner agreements for appropriate trails usage Downtown along the existing pavement or gravel surfaces, and a partnership could jointly promote any new rail trail project.

**4) Pursue easements for a trail on the railroad bed from the Tilton Ballfield to the Town of Barnstead's railbed.** The former railbed from the Tilton ballfields stretches north along the Suncook River along what is described to be a fairly clear former railbed. There are no homes along this stretch to Barnstead. The

Town of Barnstead Parks and Recreation Commission had expressed an interest in pursuing an improved rail trail from their community south to Pittsfield. A Pittsfield Trails Committee could talk with landowners to secure trails use agreements and could partner with Barnstead to obtain

**Figure 27. Pittsfield Trail Priorities from Public Input Map 2019**



CNHRPC, June 2019

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

assistance with owner discussion, trail development, and trail promotion. A compacted stone dust may be most appropriate in this section.

- 5) Connect to the Bear-Paw Regional Greenways and Town conservation lands at Wild Goose Pond in the northeastern section of Pittsfield, beginning with the existing snowmobile trail system.** Snowmobile trails in the Clough Road vicinity are active on the hilly, difficult to access scenic vista areas. Between Wild Goose Pond at the Strafford town line and Tilton Hill Road, the conservation lands and easements of BearPaw Regional Greenways (Crooked Run) and the Town (Rocky Ridge Town Forest, others) could offer hiking and bicycling opportunities with places to park if the snowmobile trails could be opened for four-season use. Check the Bear-Paw property usage deeds and seek a partnership with BPRG if feasible. A Pittsfield Trails Committee could work with the Suncook Valley Sno-Shakers Club to determine whether the club and owners may be amenable for trails to be opened for limited summer use.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION

### Strategy and Approach for Developing a Trail System

The Suncook Valley Trails planning area is comprised of the communities of Allenstown, Pembroke, Epsom, Chichester and Pittsfield. Within this area are existing trail user groups such as the NH Trail Dawgs, Suncook Valley Sno-Riders, Fort Mountain Trail Winders, Bee Hole Beavers, NH Horse and Trail Association, and likely other groups not known to this planning process. The State of New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands holds Bear Brook State Park and on the furthest ends of the Suncook Valley, the Towns of Barnstead and Hooksett may have interest. The goal of developing a regional rail trail system will require organization to reach this shared goal. The Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC) could provide this service if desired by the communities, in the form of establishing a regional Suncook Valley Trails Committee or in a less official collaboration among local trail groups.

The formation of individual municipal Trails Committees as described in this [PLAN](#) would be an effective way to begin preparation for developing individual segments of the potential future Suncook Valley Rail Trail within their own communities. The inclusion of neighboring communities, the established clubs, CNHRPC, and the State would ensure all areas of expertise and interest are assembled for the greatest possible success. CNHRPC could continue to help coordinate efforts with individual Trails Committees with the goal of encouraging a primary organization or regional Trails Committee,

#### OBTAI LOCAL SUPPORT

Without community support, trail development will not be successful. The more local groups talking about trails, the greater chance of success for establishing trails people will use. Trails groups endeavoring to develop trails or trail systems should see to the following local commitments to ensure successful stages to trail development.

Get the rail trail ideas into the Master Plan. Place trail funding needs into the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).

Obtain letters of support from:

- ⇒ Board of Selectmen
- ⇒ Planning Board
- ⇒ Conservation Commission
- ⇒ Parks and Recreation Commission
- ⇒ Economic Development Committee
- ⇒ Energy Committee
- ⇒ Police and Fire Departments
- ⇒ Roads Committee
- ⇒ Historical Society
- ⇒ Schools
- ⇒ Neighborhood Groups
- ⇒ Existing local trail user groups like Snowmobile Clubs
- ⇒ Abutting Communities
- ⇒ and more!

Set up tables and tents at community events such as Farmer's Market, Old Home Day, Library Sales, Town Meeting, etc. to raise awareness and support.

Tips Courtesy of the [Friends of the Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail \(FCLSRT\)](#)

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

in addition to providing technical assistance to the Towns.

Effective trails groups will engage and inform community organizations about existing and future potential trails efforts. Even if they are not considered members of a municipal Trails Committee, obtaining support of the other Central NH region communities is essential for any group attempting to establish a trail system in the Suncook Valley. Consultation with the known existing trails clubs and organizations as mentioned in this SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN will be necessary to ensure existing landowner agreements remain undisturbed. Potential collaborative efforts may be possible once the information sharing commences.

## Activities for Trails Groups and Trails Committees include:

- ⇒ Reach out to a landowner and hold a public walk.
- ⇒ Seek to construct one easy, low cost trail section in a highly visible area and publicize it. One success will support future projects.
- ⇒ Give talks to community organizations.
- ⇒ Hand out flyers and post on bulletin boards.
- ⇒ Get into a school classroom and present to students.
- ⇒ Recruit the Boys & Girls Scouts for assistance, or students for community service credit.
- ⇒ Determine the best types of trail uses for different trails. Think multi-use.
- ⇒ Promote trails and ideas. Set up an online internet and social media presence.
- ⇒ Hold publicized nature walks on potential trail sections.
- ⇒ Listen to the success stories of rail trail organizations throughout the State - invite them to be a guest speaker.
- ⇒ Develop long range plans to identify priority trail efforts.
- ⇒ Consider how a trails project falls within the existing town forests and conservation lands boundaries.
- ⇒ Research trail building priorities and ongoing projects of other Commissions and Boards in Town.
- ⇒ Obtain landowner agreements and/or landowner trail easements.
- ⇒ Apply for grants to construct trails, kiosks, parking areas, and trailheads.
- ⇒ Consider the benefits of becoming a nonprofit group.
- ⇒ Partner with or involve as many interested groups and communities as possible to have the greatest chance for success.
- ⇒ Consider converting appropriate Class VI unmaintained roads to Class A municipal trails by vote of Town Meeting.

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## Recreational Trails Landowner Agreements or Trails Easements

Agreements with landowners to use their property on which trails are situated are necessary unless a recreation land is publicly owned or an easement has been granted. Snowmobile clubs are good examples of how positive working relationships between trail user groups and landowners can enable the public's enjoyment of a trail.

Obtaining permission from landowners can take many forms. The most casual is the verbal "handshake agreement" where a representative of the trails group and the landowner discuss what uses are allowed, which are disallowed, and when the trail is open. Informal agreements on paper can be completed that clearly indicate the issues of trails usage, seasonal usage, maintenance responsibilities, and when a trail stops being made public.

When investments in trails infrastructure are made, such as compact stone dust, bridges, culverts, in large collaborative projects, a more formal agreement or easement that is recorded at the Registry of Deeds should be secured. Examples of these types of agreements are provided in the PLAN's APPENDICES.

## Trail Surfaces for Which Use and Where

No matter what surface a trail may have, trails groups need to check local trail usage requirements to ensure the proper fit for intended use, especially prior to publicly announcing trails availability.

Paved Surface Trail – Most suitable for developed or urban areas with a strong transportation need. Get heavier use than unpaved trails and host wider variety of users, more suitable as transportation corridor. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Not suitable for motorized vehicle use. More expensive initial cost, but less frequent maintenance is required.

*Example:* Urban downtown trail/rail trail (Pittsfield, Allenstown), Carpenter Memorial Park (Chichester)

Compact, Hard Packed Unpaved Surface Path Trail – Found in lower density rural areas and along rural rail trails. Unpaved trails should be developed and maintained to have a fairly smooth and dense surface to enable a wider variety of use than unimproved trails. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Lower initial cost, with some maintenance of the surface required. This type of surface appears most suitable for a majority of the Suncook Valley NH Rail Trail sections as it will enable bicycle and pedestrian use for all abilities, and in some cases, winter snowmobile and cross country skiing use.

*Example:* Pembroke River Rail Trail, Downtown connections to rural rail trails, Local Railroad Beds used as trails (Pittsfield, Allenstown, Epsom, Chichester)

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Unimproved Railbed – The surface of the railbed is unimproved, consisting of whatever material had been placed under the railroad ties. The surface is suitable for hiking, is often either too soft or rough for casual bicycling, but may be suitable for mountain biking. It is not Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Easy trail to maintain. This trail surface may be suitable for areas where OHV use is currently established and desired by a community, or for areas where trail improvement is not practical or permissible. Unimproved railbed could be an adequate surface applicable to certain sections of the Suncook Valley Rail Trail.

*Example:* Depot Road/Goboro Road railbed connections (Epsom, Chichester)

Unimproved Trail – In Forests, Parks, Mountainous Areas, or on Forest Management Roads. Natural rocky, root-filled paths offer hiking and mountain biking experiences. Easy trail to maintain.

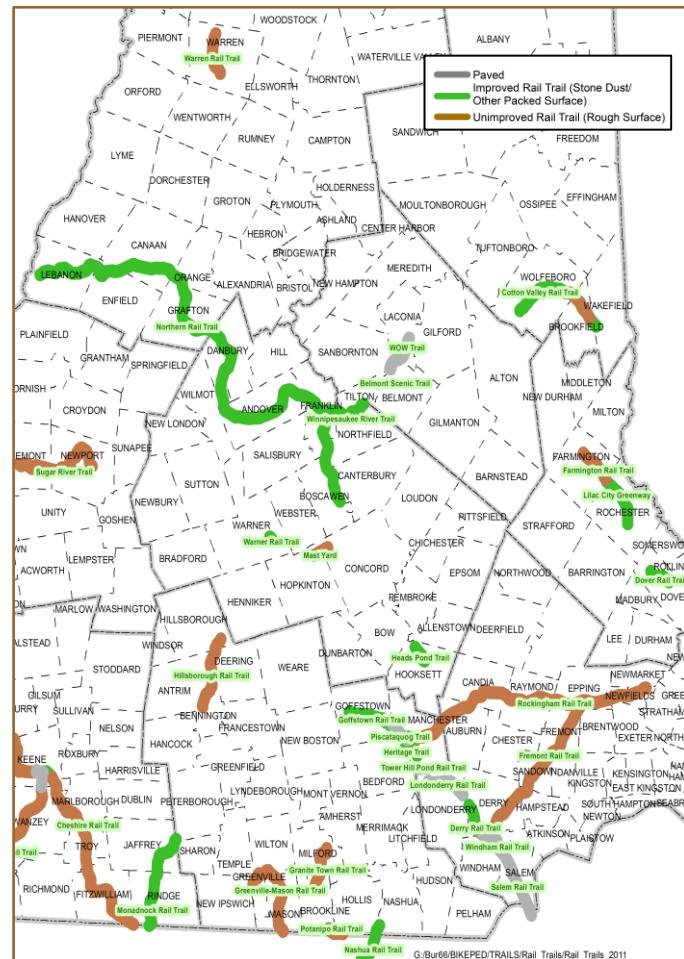
*Example:* Town Forest and park trails such as Bear Brook State Park (Allenstown), Tarleton Town Forest (Epsom)

Class VI Road – Town owned but not maintained by the Town. Usually gravel, rutty roads which are privately maintained by the property owners who live along the road. Often used by equestrians and motorized trail vehicles, snowmobiles. Heavy motorized use often not appropriate because of costs to landowners. They could be converted to Class A trails by vote of Town Meeting.

*Example:* Class VI Davis Road or Leavitt Road (Chichester), Range Roads (Pembroke)

The NH Department of Transportation mapped rail trail surface treatments as of 2017, as either paved, improved (stone dust or other packed surface), or unimproved surface as shown in the **Figure**. This can provide perspective when planning rail trails construction.

**Figure 28. Excerpt of NHDOT Rail Trail Surface Treatments Map 2017**



NHDOT, 2017

## Trail Funding Opportunities

A variety of funding sources exist at the local, regional, state, and federal levels. Most potential trail projects described in the [SUNCOOK VALLEY RAIL TRAIL PLAN](#) will require significant funds from a variety of sources. Most existing trails have used and trails to be constructed will likely use federal transportation program dollars. In the past, this has taken the form of Transportation Enhancements (TE), Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) or Recreational Trails Program (RTP), all of which required a 20% local match. While federal funding programs are the largest component, many other sources exist to help fund rail trails.

**However, to receive most grants, a trails group must be affiliated with a municipality or an organized trails non-profit group (snowmobile club), or must become a non-profit itself.**

### Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

A major funding source for trail development could be the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Association (FHWA) [Transportation Alternatives Program \(TAP\)](#) funding. These federal funds, administered by the NHDOT, are intended to foster safe, accessible, non-motorized transportation infrastructure which is in good physical condition.

Eligible activities include the construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized uses, including the conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors.

### INVENTIVE TRAILS FUNDING

The traditional funding programs mentioned in the Plan are solid and competitive. How about looking into these potential funding sources for Trails Groups projects:

- Add a Donation button to the 501-C3 Trails Group website
- Take a look at the sponsors on the pages of similar trails groups
- Sign up for the [NH Center for Non-Profits](#) grants newsletter
- Review [NH Charitable Foundation](#) grants
- Apply for [Rails to Trails Conservancy](#) funding
- Apply for [New England Grass Roots Environmental Fund](#) grants
- Apply for [Clif Bar Family Foundation](#) funding
- Take a look at the grant spreadsheet of [Healthy Eating Active Living \(HEAL\) NH](#)
- Hold fundraisers with local businesses, especially those near the trailhead or along the corridor
- Especially organized trails groups can look into [Volunteer NH](#) for AmeriCorps volunteer funding

Tips Courtesy of the FCLSRT

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

TAP is currently authorized under the [Fixing America's Surface Transportation System Act \(FAST\)](#), signed into law in December 2015 and effective through 2020.

New Hampshire's annual allocation for TAP is approximately \$3.2M (\$2.6M federal). Funding is awarded in highly competitive application rounds every two years.

Reimbursement for up to 80% of a project Individual awards range from \$320,000 - \$800,000, plus a 20% local match is necessary. Minimum (\$400,000) and maximum (\$1,000,000) total project limits may vary if other funding sources are provided by the applicant. These grants are considered more challenging to administer because of their strict requirements. Refer to the [NHDOT TAP](#) information website for more information.

## Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

Trails organizations often prefer to apply for the [Recreational Trails Program \(RTP\)](#) administered by the NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NHDNCR)'s Bureau of Trails (NHBOT), a reliable source of limited grant funding for motorized (30%), non-motorized (30%) and "diversified" or multi-use (40%) trails. Eligible projects include maintenance and restoration of existing trails, purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment, construction of new trails, and the development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages. Projects utilizing these funds must adhere to a series of state and federal requirements, including landowner permissions, best management practices, matching contributions, [NH Natural Heritage Bureau](#) review for sensitive species, grant administration, and more.

While the maximum award has varied over the years, awards are currently provided between \$8,000 to \$80,000 (or 80% of the total project value) for most approved projects, with a required 20% match

## CREATIVE GRANT CALENDAR TRACKING

Assemble an online **Grant Calendar** to organize various grants' details! This technique enables Trails Groups to record deadlines, application rounds, and other important information about each potential grant to seek for trails. Try adding the following to an online Calendar:

- Information for each Grant's qualifications and funding \$ amount available
- When applications become available
- Letter of interest deadlines
- Application deadlines
- Grant process benchmark dates
- When funding announcements will be made
- When funding will become available to recipients
- When to solicit match \$ funds
- And more!

This **Grant Calendar** can help Trails Groups plan out during the year when to talk to landowners, when to obtain community support, when to fundraise and when to plan construction.

Tips Courtesy of the FCLSRT

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

for the entire value of the project. Education projects may apply for \$3,000 to \$10,000. Competitive grant rounds are held annually.

## Rails to Trails Conservancy

The [Rails to Trails Conservancy](#) (RTC) is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to connect former railroads by developing a trails network to connect people and places. Beyond trail amenities, RTC trails create opportunities for active transportation and physical activity by connecting trails to businesses, schools, parks, employers, and neighborhoods using the existing railroad beds. The 2018 grant round awarded \$140,000 to 10 trails projects throughout the United States.

The RTC has an extensive list of grant opportunities and technical assistance for converting former rail corridors to multi-use trails on their [Trail-Building Toolbox resource website](#).

## Other Trails Funding and Assistance – Regional and Local Level

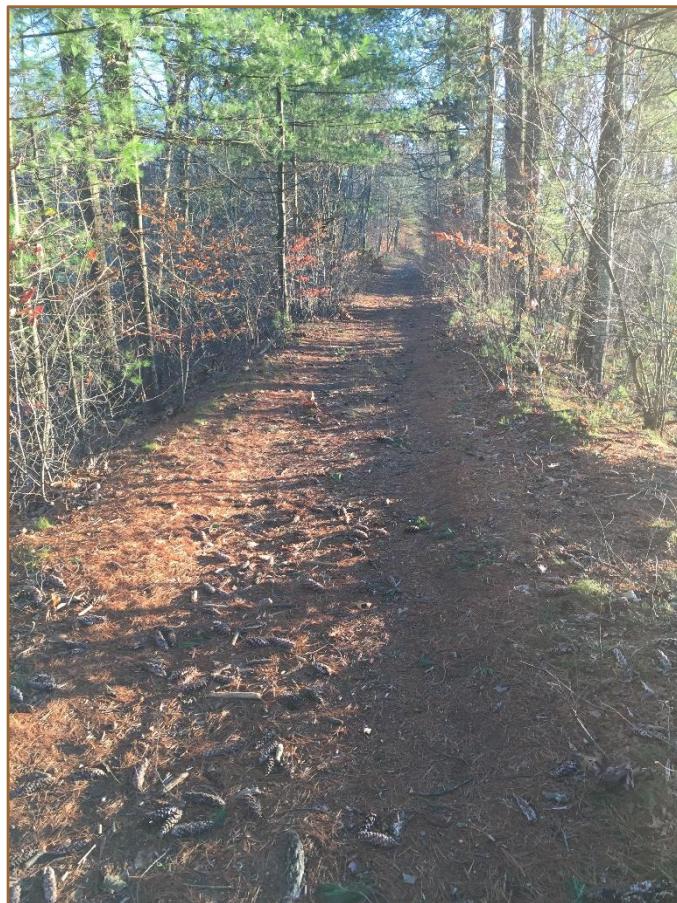
Not only grants can fund trail projects. Local businesses may be willing to sponsor a section of trail for publicity. Organized non-profit trails groups can hold special events and fundraisers to accept donations towards rail trail activities. Community volunteers such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or college students on break can be resources for improving in their hometowns. For trails maintainers, municipal equipment and employee time on loan from Departments could be available instead of renting vehicles and operators. For more funding sources and assistance ideas, view the [National Trails Training Partnership funding tips](#) for trails and greenways. Local sand and gravel businesses may be willing to donate stone dust and deliver it to the site. Local equipment operators could be asked to help construct the trail. Rotary Clubs and other civic organizations could provide small grants or labor assistance if the trail is beneficial to its members.

Trails groups can ask local trails clubs – snowmobile, equestrian, mountain biking, and others- about how they can help with rail trail efforts. Some of these groups may have already established relationships with landowners to use land along these corridors for certain uses or during the winter months. Municipal Committees and Boards, such as the Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Historical Society, or Trails Committee should be informed of rail trail efforts and request letters of support from each Board to leverage credibility with other groups. Trails groups should work with these Committees to get any trails projects incorporated into the Master Plan, Capital Improvements Programs, or Conservation Commission Natural Resources Inventory, Economic Development Plan, Village Plan, and more to raise awareness and support. The School District might support a group's rail trail project presentation to inform children and teachers, and after, there may be volunteers willing to help out. More discussions held at the municipal level and incorporation into planning documents should yield greater support for successful rail trails. The more local parties to available support a trails project, the higher its chance of advancement.

## SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

Additional avenues to be pursued are not always financial. The local regional planning commission to the **Suncook Valley** towns is the [Central NH Regional Planning Commission \(CNHRPC\)](#), which can often provide technical assistance to trails groups or may be able to provide in-kind match or other services at no cost. The CNHRPC is often able to develop a map or fact sheet, assist with a grant application, coordinate introductions to interested people and groups, host meetings, provide data, and more.

**Figure 29. Epsom Rail Trail Segment**



CNHRPC Field Work Photo 2017

## 5. APPENDICES

A. List of Internet Hyperlinks Used within this Document

B. Maps of Suncook Valley Trails Town Priorities from Public Input  
(see attached)

C. Examples of Trail Agreements and Recreational Trail Easements  
(see attached)

D. NH Statutes Relating to Recreational Trails and Landowner Liability w/Fact Sheets  
(see attached)

E. Local Trails Meeting Agendas and Meeting Summaries  
(see attached)

F. Trails Usage Experiences Questionnaires by Town  
(see attached)

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## A. List of Internet Hyperlinks Used within this Document

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These hyperlinks are referenced within the SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN and are collected here as reference material for further information.

- Allenstown Digital History <http://allenstownlibrary.org/history/items/show/5>
- Bear Brook State Park <https://www.nhstateparks.org/visit/state-parks/bear-brook-state-park>
- Bear-Paw Regional Greenways <http://www.bear-paw.org/>
- Bee Hole Beavers Snowmobile Club <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-Organization/Bee-Hole-Beavers-Snowmobile-Club-202524729758434/>
- Blueberry Express Daycare Center <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Blueberry-Express-Day-Care-Ctr/168662289815015>
- Boston & Maine Historical Society <https://www.bmrrhs.org/on-line-archives>
- Central NH Regional Planning Commission <http://www.cnhrpc.org/>
- Clif Bar Family Foundation <http://www.clifbarfamilyfoundation.org/>
- Ebay, various historical postcard images <https://www.ebay.com/>
- Epsom Historical Society [www.epsomhistory.com;](http://www.epsomhistory.com;)  
<http://www.epsomhistory.com/epsom/scrapbooks/rrindex.html>
- Fort Mountain Trail Winders Snowmobile Club  
<http://www.fortmountaintrailwinders.snowclubs.com/>
- Friends of the Concord to Lake Sunapee Rail Trail (FCLSR) <http://concordlakesunapeerailtrail.com/>
- Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) NH <https://www.healnh.org/>
- League of Michigan Bicyclists <https://www.lmb.org/> (formerly m-bike.org)
- Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT) <https://www.merrimackrivergreenwaytrail.org/>
- Nashua City Station <http://www.nashuacitystation.org/collection/new-hampshire/merrimack/pittsfield/>
- National Trails Training Partnership Funding Tips  
<https://www.americantrails.org/resources/funding/TipsFund.html>
- New England Grass Roots Environmental Fund <https://grassrootsfund.org/>
- New England Rail New England Railroad Photo Archive  
<http://photos.nerail.org/show/?order=byrail&page=1&key=803>
- NH Bureau of Trails (NHBOT) <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/Trails/default.aspx>
- NH Center for Non-Profits <https://www.nhnonprofits.org/>
- NH Charitable Foundation <https://www.nhcf.org/how-can-we-help-you/apply-for-a-grant>

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

- NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Bicycle and Pedestrian Program  
[www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped](http://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped)
- NH Department of Transportation Rail Trails Map  
[https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/.../Rail\\_Trails\\_April2017.pdf](https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/.../Rail_Trails_April2017.pdf)
- NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)  
<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/tap/index.htm>
- NH Historical Society <https://www.nhhistory.org/object/301740/suncook-nh>
- NH Horse Council <http://www.nhhorsecouncil.org/index.html>
- NH Horse and Trail Association <http://www.nhhta.org/>
- NH Magazine 2018 The Thundering Bridge <https://www.nhmagazine.com/the-thundering-bridge/>
- NH Natural Heritage Bureau <https://www.nhdfl.org/Land-Conservation/Natural-Heritage-Bureau>
- New Hampshire Snowmobile Association (NHSA) <https://nhsa.com/>
- NH Trail Dawgs Snowmobile Club <http://www.nhtraildawgs.com/>
- Northern Rail Trail <http://northernrailtrail.org/>
- Pittsfield Historical Society <https://pittsfieldhistory.com/info/history-of-pittsfield>
- Rails to Trails Conservancy <https://www.railstotrails.org/>
- Rails to Trails Conservancy Trail-Building Toolbox <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/>
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP) <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/Trails/grants/recreational-trails-program.aspx>
- Suncook Valley Sno-Riders Snowmobile Club <https://suncookvalleysnoriders.com/>
- Town of Allenstown <https://www.allenstownnh.gov/>
- Town of Chichester <https://www.chichesternh.org/>
- Town of Epsom <https://www.epsomnh.org/>
- Town of Pembroke <https://www.pembroke-nh.com/>
- Town of Pittsfield <https://www.pittsfieldnh.gov/>
- US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Association (FHWA) Fixing America's Surface Transportation System Act (FAST) <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/fastact>
- US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Association (FHWA) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)  
[https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation\\_alternatives](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/transportation_alternatives)
- Volunteer NH <http://volunteernh.org/>

# SUNCOOK VALLEY TRAILS PLAN 2019

## Other Links of Interest

- Abandoned Rails Suncook Valley Railroad  
[http://www.abandonedsrails.com/Suncook\\_Valley\\_Railroad](http://www.abandonedsrails.com/Suncook_Valley_Railroad)
- Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society Archives <https://www.bmrrhs.org/on-line-archives>
- NH Bureau of Trails (NHBOT) <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/Trails/default.aspx>
- NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) <https://www.des.nh.gov/>
- NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NHDNRC) <http://dnrc.nh.gov/>
- NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) <https://www.nh.gov/dot/index.htm>
- NH Department of Transportation Laws, Policies, Procedures and Rules relating to Municipalities and Trails, and more <https://www.nh.gov/dot/laws/index.htm>
- NHDOT NH State Trails Plan 2005  
<https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/documents/StateTrailsPlanFullReport.pdf>
- NHDOT NH Rail Trail Surface Treatments Map 2017  
[https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/documents/Rail\\_Trails\\_2017\\_paved.pdf](https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/maps/documents/Rail_Trails_2017_paved.pdf)
- NH Fish and Game <https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/index.html>
- NH OHRV Trail System <http://www.nhstateparks.org/Activities/atving/trail-information.aspx>
- NH State Parks Division <http://www.nhstateparks.org/>
- NH State Parks Recreational Rail Trails (State owned and operated)  
<https://www.nhstateparks.org/visit/recreational-rail-trails>
- Red Manse Farm Suncook Valley Railroad <http://suncookvalleyrailroad.redmansefarm.com/>
- US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)  
<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/>
- Two Foot Artist: Suncook Valley Railroad <https://twofootartist.com/suncook-valley-railroad/>
- Wikipedia Suncook Valley Railroad [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suncook\\_Valley\\_Railroad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suncook_Valley_Railroad)