

THE Deerfield Valley News

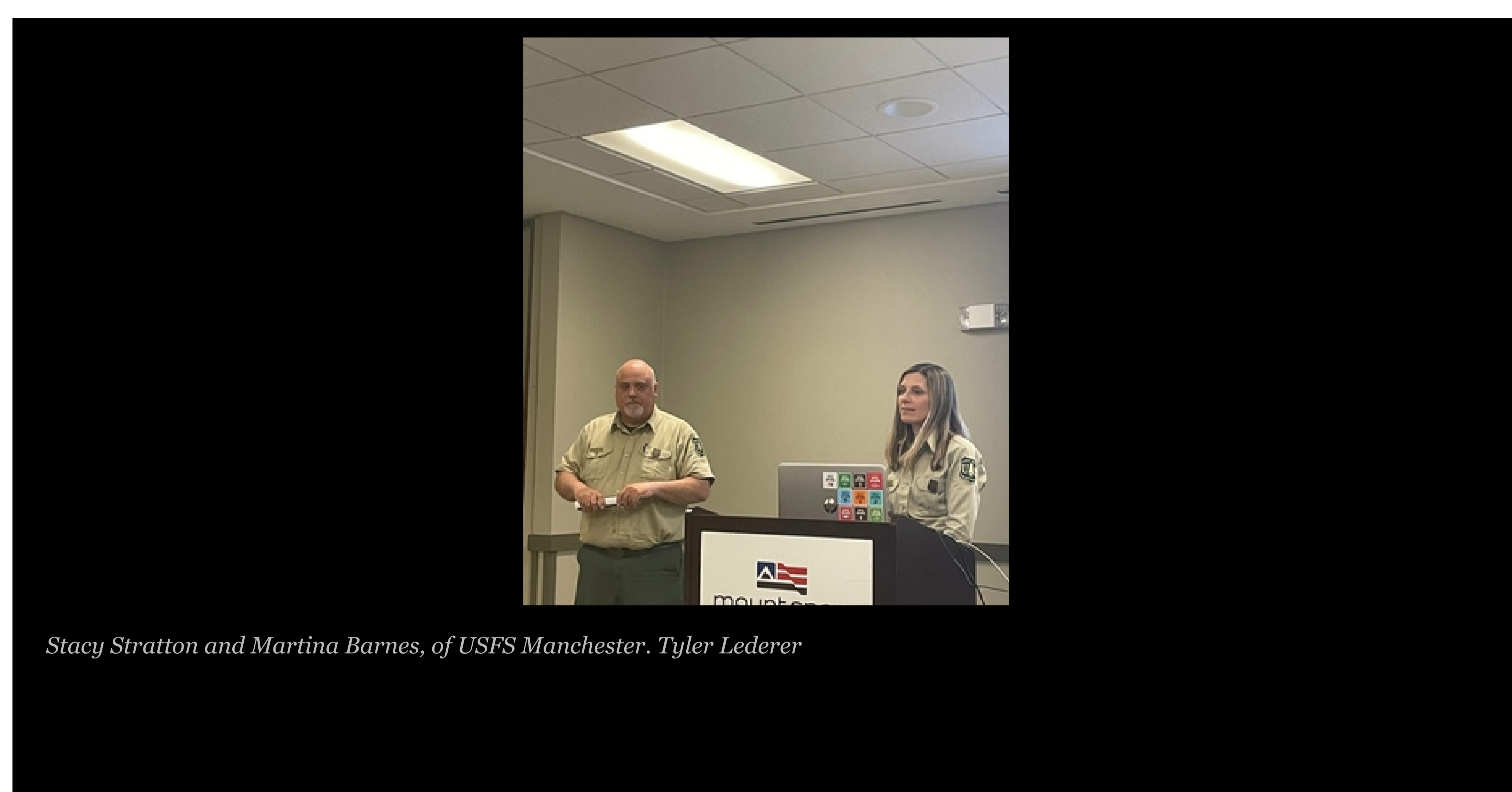
Southern VT's Independent Newspaper

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

HOME COVID-19 NEWS SPORTS OPINION BUSINESS LEISURE FEATURES OBITUARIES CLASSIFIEDS

US Forest Service plan includes new trails, refurbished campgrounds

Thu, 03/31/2022 - 3:24pm Mike Eldred



Stacy Stratton and Martina Barnes, of USFS Manchester. Tyler Lederer

By Tyler Lederer

DOVER - At an informational meeting on Thursday, March 24, at the Grand Summit Hotel at Mount Snow, a team from the US Forest Service presented and explained its Somerset Integrated Resource Project. Representatives from Mount Snow also gave an update on the Snow Lake dam removal and touted Vail Resort's commitment to the environment.

An integrated resource project is not one project but a comprehensive "landscape-scale approach to addressing resource issues," said Martina Barnes, district ranger for the USFS Manchester Ranger District. The Somerset project takes place in the Green Mountain National Forest and involves nine towns in Windham and Bennington counties: Dover, Glastenbury, Searsburg, Somerset, Stratton, Wilmington, Woodford, Sunderland, and Wardsboro.

While the COVID-19 pandemic slowed work initially, a final decision notice was signed in 2020 and implementation began in 2021. Barnes said the scale of the project means it will take anywhere from five to 10 years to complete. The project will oversee a number of changes to the trail networks in the Deerfield Valley and aims to improve both soil and water conditions as well as the outdoor experience in the area.

Casey Merritt, recreation program manager for the Manchester district, said that, as part of the project, several trails are slated for decommissioning due to issues with wetlands. These include the East Deerfield Loop Trail, Deerfield River Trail, and Sports Cabin Trail, all near Grout Pond. The Glastenbury Up-and-Down Trail, in a collaboration with VAST, is slated for improvements to its treading and in bringing it up to standard. A scenic vista will be installed just north of the trail.

Last, something like a puncheon or boardwalk will be placed on wet areas of the Deerfield Ridge Trail, which runs from Wilmington to Somerset. "Whatever it requires so that people can traverse that without damaging the soil and the plants and also getting soaked," said Merritt.

There are two main recreational projects in the Somerset IRP. One of them is the Deerfield Ridge Backcountry Ski and Multi-Use trail system, a collaboration with the Southern Vermont Trails Association and the town of Dover, which will connect to the Dover Town trail system and national forest trails.

The multi-year project is still in the planning stage but will occur in multiple phases. The first phase will involve construction of a 2-mile, multi-use trail segment for mountain biking, which will connect a new parking lot on Handle Road to Mount Snow. It will be built to the standards of mountain biking but will also be able to be used for hiking, and cross-country skiing. A loop trail will also be built for walking and beginner-level skiing.

The second phase will create another two-mile trail segment from the end of the mountain biking trail to the Deerfield Ridge Trail. This portion will function as a hiking trail and skin track for backcountry skiers, who can take it uphill. They will then have three glades to ski down. A skid road at the bottom will be repurposed into a half-mile collector trail, which can help skiers get back to the skin track. The trail will be wide enough to accommodate rescue equipment.

The second main project is to improve the Grout Pond campgrounds. This year, the Forest Service plans to restore the back half of the Grout Pond trail and rehabilitate walk-in campsites. In particular, they will harden the ground of campsites and shelter and drive-in areas with 25-foot-by-25-foot gravel pads. Merritt said it will prevent the ground from being muddy and soil from eroding into the lake, which will improve the water's quality. The pads will be large enough for a picnic table, fire ring, and tents or shelters.

"With ongoing climate change, we're expecting to continue with potentially wet summers," she said, showing attendees pictures of soil erosion at shelter sites. "It's just not a very pleasant camping experience to be wallowing around in the mud."

The Forest Service will also remove old tent platforms, which will be replaced with a material that does not rot as quickly in the region's climate. "We're constantly going down there replacing boards there," she said. "They're safety hazards."

Other plans include enlarging the parking lot and converting it to a one-way loop, which the Forest Service believes will make it easier to enter and exit. There are plans to build a dock for people to fish off and to tie up boats, and to expand the picnic area. At the walk-in area, a cabin will be built that can be rented in all seasons. Three privies will be installed for the 10 campsites there.

Also of note, John McCann, watershed program manager for the GMNF, said in his presentation on fisheries, wildlife, and watersheds that the Forest Service is planning to create an "aquatic organism passage" on Castle Meadow Trail at Castle Brook in Somerset. This will involve replacing the existing pipe culvert with a bottomless arch culvert or a bridge, which McCann said will improve aquatic connectivity and flood resilience.

Also on the agenda is a plan to add barriers on 11 miles of 11 road segments damaged by unauthorized vehicle use. Boulders have already been placed on Kelly Stand Road, which runs from Arlington to Wardsboro. "We would install some barriers to try to take that unauthorized use off and allow the soil and hydrologic function to recover," said McCann.

Toward the end of the meeting, Mount Snow general manager Tracy Bartels and director of mountain operations David Moulton spoke about Vail Resort's "commitment to zero," a pledge to have zero net emissions by 2030, zero waste to landfills, and zero net operating impact on forests and habitats.

Bartels said the company spends a lot of time and effort on environmental projects compared to previous owners. "There's a lot of things we do differently now," she said. "We've learned a lot from those standards that were done way back then, that we're all working on correcting."

Moulton said Mount Snow is currently working to devise a plan for the Snow Lake dam removal. He hopes to have a plan under review in the near future. He also said Mount Snow is working with the town of Dover and recently applied for a Flood Resiliency Program grant. This would allow them to make a design for a replacement to Snow Lake dam that could be bid out, whether that's a bridge or a bottomless culvert.

Responding to questions from the audience, Bartels said that the Snow Lake dam removal won't affect the normal ski season as they now use West Lake for snowmaking. It also won't take away from parking or lodging near the lake.

On a question about fly fishing at Mount Snow, Moulton said that Bartels won't be in place to make a decision on it since she has been promoted to a position in Colorado. "She has put us, meaning those of us interested in the health of the Deerfield River, on the agenda for the new CEO (Brian Suhadolc) here at Mount Snow," he said.

The full details of the Somerset IRP can be found at www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=53706. The Forest Service encourages members of the public to contact forest planner and environmental coordinator Jay Strand at (802) 767-4261, ext. 5522, or at jay.strand@usda.gov. Members of the public can also visit the Manchester Ranger Station at 2538 Depot Street, Manchester Center.

Recent Posts

FEBRUARY 2, 2023
Bankruptcy punctuates Barnes' mixed...

FEBRUARY 2, 2023
At last, Chinese food in the Deerfield...

FEBRUARY 2, 2023
Protect your pet's teeth

FEBRUARY 2, 2023
Thank you for making our raffle a...

FEBRUARY 2, 2023
There is no voice of the people in VT...

Section: NEWS

Tags: US FOREST SERVICE

SOMERSET

INTEGRATED RESOURCE PROJECT

GREEN MOUNTAIN

NATIONAL FOREST

The Deerfield Valley News

797 VT Route 100 North

Wilmington, VT 05363

Phone: 802-464-3388

Fax: 802-464-7255

Site Links

- Home
- COVID-19
- News
- Sports
- Opinion
- Business
- Leisure
- Features
- Obituaries
- Classifieds

