

## Parks, Recreation, Trails & Open Space

~~Shaped by our stunning landscape—forested hillsides, meandering rivers, and open farmland—~~Stowe's natural beauty is complemented by an exceptional network of trails, parks, conserved lands, and recreational facilities. From summer hiking and biking to winter skiing, fat biking, and snowshoeing, both residents and visitors enjoy endless opportunities to engage with nature, stay active, and be part of a vibrant, outdoor-oriented community. These resources not only define Stowe as a four-season destination ~~for outdoor adventure~~ but also serve as a vital part of our community identity. Recreation fosters physical and mental well-being, strengthens our connection to the outdoors, supports our local economy, and brings people together. Recreation is more than just play—it's a shared value that enriches our lives and unites us as a community.

**Parks & Recreation Department** - *"Promoting healthy living and community vitality through public recreation."*

Stowe Parks and Recreation Department plays a vital role in maintaining our municipal recreational spaces and programs, ensuring residents and visitors have access to quality year-round facilities and services. Funded through a combination of tax dollars and user fees, the department oversees everything from park maintenance to community activities and recreational programming. Guiding the department's long-term vision is the seven-member Recreation Commission, appointed by the Selectboard. This dedicated group of volunteers help shape the future of Stowe's recreational opportunities by recommending facility improvements, new programs, and overall planning strategies to enhance the community's recreational and outdoor experiences.

With a dedicated team of eight full-time and twenty seasonal employees, the department oversees facility maintenance, program coordination, and cemetery care. In winter, efforts are centered on operating the Stowe Arena and plowing sidewalks, while summer tasks shift to managing and maintaining the Stowe Recreation Path, ballfields, and the Mayo Farm Special Events Field. During the growing season, the department mows between 100-150 acres weekly to keep our municipal parks, recreation fields, and cemeteries in top condition.

Beyond maintenance, the department also provides a range of recreational programs for youth and adults, including an eight-week summer camp that engages approximately 200 unique participants. With daily attendance ranging from 80-110, the department's summer camp provides affordable childcare for local families and engages children in games, arts, sports, and field activities.

### Parks & Recreation Facilities

Stowe's diverse parks and recreational facilities offer inviting spaces for walkers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts to unwind, recharge, and take in the town's scenic beauty. They

also offer important places to gather, connect with neighbors, and build community. The Town's primary recreational facilities include:

### **Memorial Park**

Nestled behind Stowe Elementary School, Memorial Park serves as a lively center for recreation and community activities. It hosts the department's summer recreation camp and is home to the Gale Recreation Center and Stowe Arena. The park offers a range of outdoor amenities, including basketball and pickleball courts, baseball and softball fields, and the Stowe Community Playground. Its athletic fields are essential for school baseball, softball, and soccer teams, supporting youth sports while providing a welcoming space for the entire community to gather and connect.

In November 2021, the Recreation Commission presented its vision for Memorial Park to the Selectboard, outlining key priorities for improvement. These included:

- A new 5,000 sq. ft. recreation center to replace the David Gale Recreation Center
- Reconstructed tennis, pickleball, and basketball courts
- A pavilion shelter for community gatherings
- Enhanced site circulation for better accessibility
- Additional site improvements to enhance usability

At Town Meeting in 2022, Stowe voters approved a capital project to update the Memorial Park Master Plan, ensuring the Recreation Commission's recommendations were incorporated while addressing site constraints and permit requirements. In 2023, the Town engaged Black River Design to lead the master planning process. Throughout 2023, the Recreation Commission, Parks & Recreation Department, and Department of Public Works collaborated to refine the plan, which was presented to the Selectboard in November 2023. The updated Memorial Park Master Plan proposes a phased redevelopment of Memorial Park, including:

- A new recreation center
- Improved site circulation for safer access
- Upgraded athletic fields for enhanced playability
- Modernized tennis and pickleball courts
- A redesigned basketball court
- An open-sided shelter for outdoor recreation and events
- Space for future recreation programming

While the Memorial Park Master Plan is not a final design, it serves as a guiding framework for potential future redevelopment. The FY26 budget includes \$320,000 for preliminary design and permitting, laying the groundwork for the next steps in bringing this vision to life.

## **Stowe Arena**

At the 2011 Town Meeting, Stowe voters approved a \$6.5 million bond to replace the aging Jackson Arena with a state-of-the-art facility for hockey, ice skating, and indoor turf sports. By fall 2013, the new Stowe Arena was completed, ushering in a new era of recreation for our community. During the winter months, the arena is buzzing with activity- offering public skating, stick time, and team practices daily. By night, it transforms into home ice for the Stowe High School boys and girls hockey teams, Stowe Youth Hockey, [Stowe Slugs](#), and numerous local and regional teams. Each year, the arena hosts exciting tournaments such as:

- The Hyde Cup
- Stowe Winter Carnival
- Stowe Youth Hockey Tournament

When the ice melts in spring, the arena transitions to indoor turf, welcoming soccer, lacrosse, and baseball teams from March to May. Private rentals are also available through Stowe Parks & Recreation.

## **The Gale Recreational Center**

Built in 1969 and dedicated to David G. Gale for his exceptional contributions to the Stowe community, the Gale Recreation Center is a vibrant, multi-purpose facility that stays active year-round. During the summer, the Recreation Center is home to the Department's summer recreation camp program, creating a fun and engaging space for children. During the school year, it hosts a variety of adult and youth programs, keeping the community connected and active. The David Gale Center also houses the Parks & Recreation administrative offices. When the David Gale Center is not being used by Parks & Recreation, it can be rented for private functions like birthday parties, playgroups, small gatherings and meetings.

## **Village Pickleball and Basketball Courts**

In the spring of 2025, Memorial Park received an exciting upgrade. The two former tennis courts were repurposed and transformed into pickleball courts. Memorial Park now offers six pickleball courts and one basketball court, all open to the public. These lighted courts provide a great space for recreation and friendly competition and are available for use from May through the end of October.

## **Chase Park**

Chase Park, located near Stonybrook Condominiums on Luce Hill Road, serves as a great entry point to the Stowe Recreation Path. Visitors can take advantage of picnic tables and a bike maintenance station, equipped with tools for basic repairs like fixing a flat or adjusting brakes.

## **Thompson Park**

Thompson Park, nestled off VT Route 108/Mountain Road across from Percy Farm Corn Maze, is the perfect rest stop along the Stowe Recreation Path. With stunning views of

Mount Mansfield, picnic tables, and grills, it is an ideal spot to pause for a picnic and soak in our natural beauty.

### **Lintilhac Park**

Lintilhac Park, tucked behind the Stowe Community Church in the village, serves as a trailhead to the Stowe Recreation Path. Like Chase Park, it features picnic tables and a bike maintenance station, ensuring cyclists have the tools they need to fix minor bicycle needs.

## **Recreational Trails**

### **Stowe Recreation Path**

The Stowe Recreation Path, a beloved community greenway, has been a staple of outdoor activity since its completion in 1989. Stretching approximately ±5.3 miles from Stowe Village to Brook Road and Topnotch Meadow, the paved shared-use path winds its way through our scenic landscapes, crossing the West Branch of the Little River. Born from the efforts of passionate local residents and town officials, and funded through various sources, the award-winning Stowe Recreation Path has become a year-round haven for walkers, bikers, joggers, and even cross-country skiers in the winter.

For years, discussions have centered around expanding the path to further enhance recreational opportunities and improve connectivity within the community. Potential extensions include routes leading to the base of Mount Mansfield at Stowe Mountain Resort, crossing Mayo Farm to reach the Polo Fields, and connecting Luce Hill Road and Barrows Road to Stowe High School. These connections and extensions would not only offer more options for outdoor enthusiasts but also align with the town's land use and economic development goals, reinforcing the path's role as both a recreational and transportation corridor.

### **Quiet Path**

Nestled within the scenic Mayo Farm, the Quiet Path offers a serene escape for walkers and joggers seeking a peaceful alternative to the more heavily traveled Stowe Recreation Path. Completed in 1996, this natural-surface trail stretches approximately ±1.2 miles, winding alongside the West Branch of the Little River. Designed to preserve its tranquil atmosphere, bicycles are not permitted, allowing visitors to fully immerse themselves in the beauty of our surroundings.

The Quiet Path is dotted with interpretive signs and offers breathtaking panoramic views, making it a favorite spot for plein air painters and nature enthusiasts alike. Convenient parking at Mayo Farm Road, Weeks Hill Road, and Cemetery Road ensures easy access for all. The Quiet Path has also become a cherished gathering place for dog owners, providing an open and inviting space to walk, run, and socialize with their companions. Whether seeking solitude, a scenic stroll, or a moment of artistic inspiration, the Quiet Path offers a restorative experience in the heart of Stowe's natural landscape.

## **Municipally Owned Conserved Lands & Open Spaces**

In Stowe, municipally owned open spaces and conserved lands tell the story of a community deeply connected to its landscape. These cherished places are more than just beautiful backdrops- they are living, breathing parts of our community identity. They protect the quiet forests where wildlife thrives, the clean waters that flow through our valleys, and the scenic vistas that draw people from near and far. But just as importantly, they offer spaces for people to connect- with nature, with each other, and with themselves. As stewards of these lands, we recognize that conserving and caring for these open spaces is not just about protecting what we have; it's about investing in who we are and what we want to leave behind for future generations.

The Town of Stowe owns five properties with conservation easements on them:

- Mayo Farm (±235 acres)
- Sterling Forest (±1,530 acres)
- Moscow Recreation Field (±5 acres)
- Sunset Rock (±23 acres)
- Cady Hill Forest (±320 acres)

In addition, the Town co-holds conservation easements with Stowe Land Trust and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) on four other conserved properties:

- Bingham Falls (±73 acres)
- Trapp's Adams Camp (±513 acres)
- Nichol's Field (±37 acres)
- Burnham Farm (±107 acres, public access easement)

By ensuring that these lands remain open and publicly accessible, we reinforce our commitment to sustainability, balancing growth with environmental stewardship. Through ongoing conservation efforts, partnerships with local organizations, and responsible land management, we continue to enhance our quality of life while preserving the natural resources that make Stowe a premier destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

### **Mayo Farm**

At the heart of Stowe lies Mayo Farm—a sprawling, 235-acre landscape that has been a cornerstone of the community since its purchase in 1989. More than just open land, Mayo Farm is a living reflection of Stowe's agricultural heritage, scenic beauty, and commitment to conservation and recreation. As stated in the deed, the town purchased the farm *“primarily as open green space and will continue to use it primarily for agricultural purposes.”* The deed also indicates the purchase was for *“conservation for public purposes”* and for *“recreation.”* Mayo Farm is managed by the municipality as open space and is currently used for agriculture, ball fields, dispersed recreation, and special events.

In 2002, Town voters agreed to subject Mayo Farm to a 25-year term conservation easement held by the Stowe Land Trust. The conservation easement establishes a hierarchy of purposes that guide management and use of the Farm. The primary purpose is to “*provide for and conserve open space values, non-commercial, dispersed recreational opportunities, and scenic resources*”. The secondary purpose is to “*conserve agriculture, soil productivity, wildlife habitat, and public open space*”. The tertiary purpose is to provide dedicated “zones” that permit ball field recreation, community events, cemetery purposes, and possible future new municipal building(s). The easement also calls for development of a Management Plan for the property, which was prepared by the Conservation Commission and adopted by the Selectboard in 2006, and most recently amended in March 2013.

A majority of Mayo Farm remains in active agricultural use. Currently a local farmer leases approximately 125 acres and uses the lands for agricultural purposes. Farm operations are subject to Accepted Agricultural Practices as established by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

The Community Events Field on Mayo Farm consists of a ±19-acre Main Events Field and two smaller adjacent fields for parking or other activities. The Events Fields are subject to a 1995 Act 250 Land Use Permit. The fields are adjacent to the West Branch of the Little River, and as such can be subject to wet conditions. In 2014 the events fields were regraded and filled to improve the drainage characteristics.

The conservation easement also provides for a ±35-acre Recreation Zone on the fields north and east of Weeks Hill Road, where organized ball field activities are permitted. This is also the ~~former~~ location of the ~~Stowe Bike Park, a mountain bike skills park developed by the Stowe Trails Partnership (formerly Stowe Mountain Bike Club), and the Stowe~~ community gardens.

As specified in the easement, a two-acre zone surrounding the Mayo Farm homestead can be used for construction of municipal buildings, subject to approval of Town voters.

Beginning in 2026, the Conservation Commission will lead a public hearing process to review the conservation easement and gather input from the community and user groups such as farmers, recreation advocates and event organizers, with regard to whether the terms of the conservation easement should remain intact for an additional twenty-five years or if it needs to be revised or terminated. If the community feedback during this process indicates a need for revision, the Town will undertake a process of planning and public input whose end result is a formal amendment to the easement. Any amendment would need to be warned and considered for Town Meeting 2028. If the Selectboard, either on its own initiative or in response to a signed petition, proposes to terminate the easement, the decision would require approval by the majority of the voters. If no actions are taken during this time, the conservation easement will be renewed in its entirety for an additional twenty-five years.

### **Moscow Recreation Field**

The Town acquired the Moscow Recreation Field in 1998 with support from the VHCB, the Freeman Foundation, private donations, and town funding. The property is protected under a conservation easement co-held by the Stowe Land Trust and VHCB, ensuring its use remains dedicated to recreation, river access, and open space for public enjoyment.

Spanning approximately ±4.7 acres, the field is primarily maintained as open, mowed space and serves as a valuable community resource. It provides access to the Little River for canoeing, hosts the Stowe Volleyball Club, and features a picnic area, offering a scenic and versatile setting for outdoor activities. Presently, the Recreation Commission and Conservation Commission are collectively evaluating the potential installation of a community playground at Moscow Recreation Field to attract additional users and enhance this community gathering space.

### **Sunset Rock**

At Town Meeting in March 1999, voters approved a \$350,000 bond to go towards the purchase of the Sunset Rock property. Stowe Land Trust raised \$129,000 and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board contributed \$29,000 to make up a total purchase price of \$500,000. Named for its striking bedrock outcrop, Sunset Rock is a ±23-acre scenic property overlooking Stowe Village. As one of the most prominent and visible hillside properties in Stowe village, it can be seen from Main Street, the Lower Village, Mountain Road, Mayo Farm, and beyond. The property was purchased to protect and preserve its scenic beauty, maintain public access, and prevent land development that could adversely impact the village's scenic and historic character. The property features two scenic viewpoints—Sunset Rock and the Upper Overlook—offering breathtaking views of the village, Little River Valley, Sterling Range, and Mt. Mansfield. With its short, accessible trails directly from Stowe Village, Sunset Rock remains a cherished outdoor destination for both residents and visitors.

### **Sterling Forest**

Sterling Forest, located in Sterling Valley, encompasses approximately ±1,530 acres. The Town acquired the original ±1,500-acre parcel in 1995 as part of the Tricentennial Conservation Project, celebrating the Town's 200th anniversary. An additional ±30-acre parcel along Maple Run Lane was donated to the Town by the Stowe Land Trust in 2008. The forest offers a network of multi-use trails suitable for hiking, mountain biking, backcountry skiing, and snowshoeing. Notably, trails like Callagy's Trail provide technical challenges for mountain bikers, while the Catamount Trail and the VAST Trail traverse the forest, offering diverse experiences for outdoor enthusiasts. The area also holds historical significance, with remnants of the abandoned town of Sterling, including former homesteads, farms, a schoolhouse, and a sawmill, marked along the trails. In 2025, the Sterling Forest Management Plan was updated to reflect changes since its last adoption in 2013. These updates included new trails, completed forest management projects, and recent cooperative agreements.

## **Cady Hill Forest**

The lands comprising what is now the municipally owned Cady Hill Forest were long identified as one of the highest priority areas for conservation in the Stowe. The combination of wildlife habitat, scenic view shed and recreation trails within walking distance of Stowe Village has made this area immensely popular with the community for its ease of accessibility and wilderness-like experience.

Stowe Land Trust, in partnership with the Town of Stowe, began an intensive year-long process in 2011 to acquire Cady Hill Forest, raising nearly \$1.5 million to make the project a reality. The project garnered huge support from the Town of Stowe, the Town of Waterbury, VHCB, the Open Space Institute and the local community. The property was purchased by Stowe Land Trust in 2012 and deeded to the Town of Stowe. Combined with the adjacent ±60-acre town-owned Macutchan Forest, Cady Hill Forest now consists of ±320 acres. Upon acquisition, the Town began the process of increasing public access to the property and making it easier for residents and visitors to navigate the trail system. By the end of the summer of 2012 the following projects had been completed:

- The construction of a 20-car parking lot;
- The construction of a new access trail from the parking lot (Cady Hill Climb);
- The installation of a property sign and trailhead kiosk;
- The installation of over 60 trail signs;
- The installation of 11 permanent maps at key intersections.

Cady Hill Forest has become extremely popular with mountain bikers and walkers drawing an estimated 100,000 users a year<sup>1</sup>. The parking area located off from Mountain Road is typically at or near capacity during peak times. To accommodate growing use and ensure long-term sustainability, the Stowe Trails Partnership created a two-phase trail development plan for the property. Phase 2 of the plan was substantially completed in 2014. In April 2019, the Town of Stowe entered into a cooperative agreement with Stowe Trails Partnership (STP) naming the organization as the official corridor manager for all mountain bike trails in Cady Hill Forest (and Sterling Forest) granting them permission to build and maintain the trail system. The Department of Planning & Zoning and Conservation Commission works closely with Stowe Trails Partnership to ensure the trail system in Cady Hill Forest complies with the cooperative agreement, management plan, and underlying conservation easement.

## **Cemeteries**

The Cemetery Commission oversees the management of the Town's cemeteries, while the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the maintenance. There are seven cemeteries in the Town of Stowe:

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<sup>1</sup> In 2023, trail counters in Cady Hill Forest counted 88,159 users.



- Riverbank
- Old Yard
- West Branch
- Sterling Valley
- Luce Hill Road (2)
- Topnotch field

A small shed located at the Old Yard Cemetery is used to store cemetery equipment. Two antique hearses are stored and on view at the Riverbank Cemetery. The Commission acquired an additional five acres of land to expand the Riverbank Cemetery into the Mayo Farm. A cremation garden was installed in the Riverbank Cemetery in 2000. The Commission also has a landscaping plan and an old monument restoration plan. Finally, a Cemetery Book project was completed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the interment of Willie Utley, the first person buried in the Old Yard Cemetery. This book lists everyone buried in a Stowe cemetery and those whose remains are outside of cemeteries but in Stowe.

## Recreation

Goal: Ensure year-round, diverse, and inclusive recreational opportunities that are accessible, affordable, and environmentally sustainable - promoting healthy lifestyles, strengthening community connections, and deepening our appreciation for Stowe's natural beauty.

### Policies

1. Prioritize the enhancement and improvement of athletic facilities and the support of recreational programs to attract families and foster a healthy and engaged residential community.
2. ~~The Town will~~ Proactively plan for future recreational needs to serve a growing resident population and increasing visitor use.
3. ~~The Town will~~ Enhance and improve existing recreational facilities, including: trails and trail-related amenities; athletic facilities and ballfields; recreation programs; and explore potential extensions of the Stowe Recreation Path.
4. Town-owned conserved properties will be maintained and stewarded in accordance with their adopted management plans (e.g. Mayo Farm Management Plan; Moscow Recreation Field Management Plan, Sterling Forest Management Plan, Cady Hill Forest Management Plan, Sunset Rock Management Plan) as prepared by the Conservation Commission and/or Recreation Commission.
5. ~~The~~ Maintain, and improve when necessary, the Mayo Farm Community Events Field ~~will be maintained, and upgraded as necessary, for special events and will be used for recreation~~ al use during non-event periods.
6. ~~The Town will~~ Continue to allow snowmobile access to town-owned properties and town roads in appropriate locations.
7. Memorial Park and its associated facilities will serve as the focus of recreational activities in Stowe Village. The Town will continue to advance the Memorial Park Master Plan.
8. ~~The Town will~~ Promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of its recreational resources while enhancing Stowe's reputation as the region's premier four-season outdoor recreation destination.
9. ~~The Town will~~ Retain ownership of its Class 4 roads and legal trails as important recreational resources.

10. ~~The Town designates the~~ Stowe Trails Partnership is the designated as the trail corridor manager for mountain biking trails in Cady Hill Forest and Sterling Forest. ~~and The Town~~ will continue to support, maintain, and enhance these trails to strengthen the Town's reputation as a premier mountain biking destination.
11. ~~The Town will~~ Continue to provide and protect access to public lands, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background or ability, have equitable access to recreational activities and spaces.

## Tasks

1. Develop an outdoor recreation and trails master plan that documents existing recreational resources, programs, and facility needs.
2. Integrate recreational needs into the Capital Improvement Program by planning and budgeting for new facilities and improvements to existing facilities.
3. Conduct a comprehensive existing conditions assessment of the Stowe Recreation Path to identify infrastructure and bridge conditions and develop a prioritized improvement and/or replacement plan.
4. In partnership with local organizations, expand and implement monitoring tools—such as trail and vehicle counters—to collect data on usage patterns. Use this data to inform and implement management strategies that enhance visitor experience and protect natural resources.
5. Explore long-term options for developing a future recreational field house and community recreation center to support year-round recreational programming and accommodate multi-generational needs.
6. Explore options to enhance existing municipal parks including the following:
  - a. Provide public restroom facilities in municipal parks.
  - b. Installation of fencing, gates, and vehicle barriers with uniform design.
  - c. Construct new picnic shelters and other accessory structures.
7. Evaluate existing recreation facilities and any environmental or site constraints. If current facilities are found to be inadequate, develop a plan to acquire or repurpose land to better support community recreation programs and facilities.
8. Evaluate and consider amending the Mayo Farm Management Plan and conservation easement to potentially allow:

- a. Expand or relocate the designated recreation zone to better meet future community needs;
  - b. Transition portions of land currently used for agriculture or special events to dedicated recreational use, with clear separation between athletic fields and event spaces;
  - c. Optimize the use of the existing Recreation Zone, including Field K and Polo Fields, for activities and/or amenities such as volleyball courts, additional parking, or other recreational facilities based on community demand.
9. Explore options for improving existing athletic fields and the creation of future additional fields.
10. Enhance and expand recreation programs to serve all age groups—teens, seniors, adults, preschoolers, and elementary-aged children—by providing both structured and non-programmed activities, increasing public outreach, and organizing seasonal community events.
11. Enhance the Recreation Path for year-round use including the following:
- a. Continuing to groom the Path for cross country skiing;
  - b. Maintaining adequate signage to delineate use and directions; and
  - c. Exploring the installation of low impact subtle ground lighting for evening usage.
12. Support the efforts of local public and private organizations working to enhance the recreational assets within the community, including:
- a. Working with VAST and the Stowe Snowmobile Club; and
  - b. Supporting the Stowe Trails Partnership in their efforts regarding maintaining and building recreational trails.
13. Amend the zoning and/or subdivision regulations to require recreation facilities, including but not limited to trails, pathways, playgrounds, conservation areas, water access, etc., to be incorporated as features of new multi-family development and subdivision projects. Such facilities should remain open to the public.