



Skowhegan AmeriCorps Outdoor Recreation Program

Community Transformation through Outdoor Recreation

In the spring of 2016 residents of Skowhegan came together to share ideas for the future of our town. As a result of these discussions, Main Street Skowhegan drafted the Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation, which was adopted by voters at the June 2016 town meeting.

The ultimate goal of the strategic plan is for Skowhegan to become a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents are active, healthy, and they enjoy a high quality of life. In order to achieve this goal, several objectives and strategies were developed, including a strategy specifically devoted to enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities and promoting natural resources. In 2017, the importance of recreation to our region was reemphasized by residents during the Somerset County Rural Cultural Plan process.

To that end, the Town of Skowhegan, Main Street Skowhegan, and several other groups in town, are focused on outdoor recreation as a tool for community development. Planning and fundraising is underway for the proposed downtown Skowhegan Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area that will include a whitewater park for paddling, surfing, tubing, bodyboarding, stand-up paddle boarding, and more, as well as 300 acres of trails for use year-round.

But merely building a whitewater park and miles of trails is not enough to transform the culture of our community—we need to get our residents actively involved. By providing programming for outdoor recreation and engagement with nature, we will improve health outcomes, enhance quality of life, and cultivate an active lifestyle culture in Skowhegan and the region. We will also build a base of local users for the Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area.

Main Street Skowhegan, in partnership with the Outdoor Sport Institute and other community stakeholders, developed this program to catalyze a cultural shift toward a more active lifestyle in Skowhegan—for the benefit of our residents. It provides a roadmap for promoting our current outdoor recreation facilities, encouraging walking and low-impact activities, providing skill-building and regular outdoor recreation programming, ensuring access to these activities, energizing volunteers to build capacity, and enhancing current trails and creating new ones.

Three full-time AmeriCorps members—under the guidance of Main Street Skowhegan and the team of community stakeholders—will implement this plan over the next three years (April 2019 to December 2021), assessing outcomes, tweaking strategies and action steps as needed to achieve our goal, and building a base of volunteers to sustain programming for years to come.

Goal

Facilitate changes in behavior that will increase outdoor recreation participation within the Skowhegan community by 20% in five years.

We will achieve this goal by growing awareness, knowledge, skills, and capacity in the first two years and by facilitating changes in behavior, systems, and practices in subsequent years.



Objectives

DRIVE USE: Drive utilization of current recreation facilities and outdoor spaces in Skowhegan.

ENGAGE COMMUNITY: Engage adults and youth via ongoing outdoor activities and programming.

ENERGIZE VOLUNTEERS: Recruit and grow a core group of outdoor recreation leaders who can facilitate community programming.

IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY: Make recreation facilities, gear, and programming accessible to community members regardless of socioeconomic status.

ENHANCE FACILITIES: Draft a comprehensive plan for enhancing current trails, creating new trails, and maintaining recreation facilities.

Strategies and Action Steps

DRIVE USE: Drive utilization of current local recreation facilities and outdoor spaces.		
STRATEGY A	STRATEGY B	STRATEGY C
A. Gather baseline data of recreation facilities users.	B. Improve trailheads and wayfinding via a signage plan.	C. Develop marketing plan to promote recreation facilities, walking routes, recreation programming, etc.
ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY A	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY B	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY C
A1. Develop system/process for tracking use of facilities and outdoor spaces to provide baseline data and information to monitor progress and effectiveness of plan implementation over time.	B1. Assess all local trails, taking photos of trailheads and any wayfinding signage.	C1. Determine online location for trail information, maps, etc.
A2. Implement plan (seek funding if needed).	B2. Create comprehensive (and on-brand) plan for improving wayfinding and trailheads that will enable people to find current trails.	C2. Determine strategies for reaching target audience (consider community outreach via businesses and orgs)
A3. Continue to gather data annually.	B3. Seek funding/apply for grant funding to implement plan.	C4. Determine communication vehicles
		C5. Implement marketing plan



ENGAGE COMMUNITY: Engage adults and youth via ongoing outdoor activities and programming.		
STRATEGY A	STRATEGY B	STRATEGY C
A. Use low-barrier and low-intensity activities—walking, birdwatching, flatwater paddling, bicycling—as entry point for non-active residents.	B. Plan ongoing sport-specific education and programming for community members.	C. Create youth-specific programming and education opportunities.
ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY A	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY B	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY C
A1. Formally assess and document current activities and opportunities (including walking routes).	B1. Plan and promote mountain biking community education event and activities.	C1. Plan and promote youth mountain biking education program and activities.
A2. Meet with fitness group to discuss potential walking group in Skowhegan and possible leader(s).	B2. Plan and promote whitewater paddling community education event and activities.	C2. Plan and promote OSI Model Youth Program in whitewater paddling.
A3. Promote (via communications plan) opportunities for walking, birdwatching, and engaging with nature.	B3. Plan and promote flatwater paddling community education event and activities.	C3. Plan and promote youth flatwater paddling education program and activities.
A4. Plan FUN activities, including step competitions, ride bike to work days, etc.	B4. Plan and promote cross-country skiing community education event and activities.	C4. Plan and promote youth cross-country skiing education program and activities.
A5. Plan FUN activities in the river and/or gorge (including swimming, tubing, body boarding) to encourage familiarity with water.	B5. Plan and promote snowshoeing community education event and activities.	C5. Plan and promote youth snowshoeing education program and activities.
A6. Plan and promote OSI Model Youth Program in on-foot trail-based recreation.	B6. Plan and promote fat biking community education event and activities.	C6. Plan and promote youth fat-biking education program and activities.
A7. Plan and promote on-foot trail-based recreation community education events.	B7. Plan in-gorge training and events (rolling competitions, river clean-ups, paddles).	
A8. Incorporate other low-intensity activities where possible: geocaching, disc golf, art walks, ropes course.	B7. Plan in-gorge training and events (rolling competitions, river clean-ups, support paddles).	
A9. Determine possible incentives for participation.		
A10. Promote trail stewardship (don't ride on closed trails, education about trail use) in all programming.		



ENERGIZE VOLUNTEERS: <u>Recruit and grow a core group of outdoor recreation leaders who can facilitate community programming.</u>	
STRATEGY A	STRATEGY B
A. Engage local recreation leaders who are skilled in outdoor sports.	B. Train potential outdoor recreation leaders to increase skill-level and knowledge.
ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY A	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY B
A1. Identify local leaders with skills in identified priority outdoor sports.	B1. Identify gaps in outdoor recreation/sport leadership (where do we lack skills?).
A2. Plan meeting/event to engage group in this process.	B2. Identify and contact community members who would be interested in community leadership training opportunities.
A3. Recruit leaders to run community programming.	B3. Plan and host OSI Community Leader Workshops to fill gaps.
A4. Maintain relationship to ensure engagement.	B4. Plan Skowhegan-led community leader workshops to train other leaders (local leaders training future local leaders)
A5. Determine possible incentives for leaders and volunteers.	B5. Train local leaders to run the climbing wall (check on insurance requirements).
	B6. Engage regional interest/advocacy groups (Teens to Trails, Bicycle Coalition, etc.) to leverage expertise and time.

IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY: <u>Make recreation facilities, gear, and programming accessible to community members regardless of socioeconomic status.</u>	
STRATEGY A	STRATEGY B
A. Establish a community gear hub that will provide free access to gear needed to participate in outdoor sports.	B. Make transportation, access, and affordability priorities when planning trainings, workshops, and events.
ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY A	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY B
A1. Determine gear needed and where it will come from	B1. Make trainings, workshops, and events free to residents.
A2. Create a business plan for gear hub to ensure long-term sustainability.	B2. Utilize (and promote) Move More Kids Fun Run Bus as public transportation option for programming at Lake George and other venues outside of downtown.
A3. Incorporate maintenance programming and trainings into business plan (workshops etc.).	B3. Encourage active transport (biking, walking, etc.) to trainings, workshops, events.
A4. Identify and assess possible locations.	B4. Solicit youth sponsorships from local businesses.
A5. Apply for grants to ensure gear can be borrowed free of charge to residents and to cover associated costs (insurance, etc.).	B5. Fundraise and apply for grants to cover associated costs.



ENHANCE FACILITIES: Draft a comprehensive plan for enhancing current trails, creating new trails, and maintaining recreation facilities.

STRATEGY A	STRATEGY B	STRATEGY C
A. Plan for new multi-use and single-track trails in the downtown recreation area, in Coburn Woods, at Lake George, and in other accessible locations.	B. Identify desired current trail enhancements.	C. Develop a sustainable, long-term plan for maintaining facilities.
ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY A	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY B	ACTION STEPS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGY C
A1. Identify locations for new trail development.	B1. Assess current trails for usability and access.	C1. Identify priorities and timeline.
A2. Determine priority/order and timeline for trail development.	B2. Determine which trails need improvements.	C2. Determine budget for intended short-term and long-term maintenance.
A3. Continue work with Central Maine NEMBA to develop single-track trail system.	B3. Establish priorities and timeline for implementation.	C3. Draft section of trail plan accordingly.
A4. Determine budget for each new trail.	B4. Determine budget for each enhancement.	C4. Recruit volunteers to build dedicated maintenance team.
A5. Draft section of trail plan accordingly.	B5. Draft section of trail plan accordingly.	C5. Engage existing volunteer networks and groups with community service requirements.
A6. Plan community trail days.	B6. Plan community trail days.	C6. Plan community clean-up events.
A7. Apply for grants.	B7. Apply for grants.	C7. Apply for grants.

Community Stakeholders and Contributors

- Kate Bartley, New Balance Foundation
- Margi Browne, Lakewood Golf Course & Trails
- Kristina Cannon, Main Street Skowhegan
- Jason Cook, community member
- Carolyn Courtney, Somerset Public Health
- Joshua Firmin, Outdoor Sports Institute
- Kristie LeBlanc, Somerset Public Health
- Denise LeBlanc, Skowhegan Recreation Department
- Matt L'Italien, Somerset Public Health
- Soren Siren, Skowhegan Area High School
- Nanook Tuefferd, Skowhegan Savings Bank
- Darryll White, Lake George Regional Park
- Nancy Williams, Somerset Woods Trustees
- Anna Staehli Wiser, community member