

Stefanie Krug, Greenfield, MA.
NORTHFIELD MOUNTAIN PUMPED STORAGE PROJECT
(FERC NO. 2485-063)

Northfield Mountain, site of the pumped storage hydroelectric facility owned and operated by FirstLight Hydro Generating Company, is an integral part of Franklin County. It currently boasts over 26 miles of shared-use trails that are loved by many for summertime activities ranging from hiking, trail running and mountain biking to rock climbing and horseback riding. In the winter, the cross country skiing is some of the best in New England (if there's snow). Beautiful scenery, impressive lookouts and a combination of green meadows, deep forests, bubbling streams, ledges and rock features give this park its unique character that attracts visitors from near and far.

The 26 miles of trail consist of a combination of unpaved roads, double track and single track shared-use trails. At the time the last license was issued for Northfield Mountain, mountain biking was still a fairly young sport but it has gained popularity ever since and now represents 20% of all outdoor recreation in the US [1]. A 2006 survey revealed that more than 1 million Massachusetts residents mountain bike [2]. While Northfield Mountain allows mountain biking, the trails were designed for activities like hiking, horseback riding and snowshoeing, and strategic addition or alteration of some of the existing trails would greatly improve the riding. In addition, the science of sustainable, low-impact, low-maintenance trail design has come a long way over the past forty years. Given the importance of mountain biking to the Franklin County community, it should be integrated into the new license, and a study evaluating the trail system at Northfield Mountain should be conducted as part of the pre-license proceedings.

The variety of terrain, pitch and naturally occurring features at Northfield Mountain make it a perfect candidate for an exciting, well-balanced trail system of beginner, intermediate and expert shared-use trails. The National Scenic Trail crosses Northfield Mountain, connecting Northfield to other area trail networks. Northfield Mountain's proximity to major highways, the spacious lodge and abundance of parking add to its appeal, and with all these pieces in place Northfield Mountain could be developed into a supreme outdoor recreation destination. Outdoor recreation in the United States is an almost \$700 billion industry, and despite the economic recession has grown about 5% annually between 2005 and 2011 [3]. The US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Report found that recreation and tourism development contributes to rural well-being, increasing local employment, wage levels, and income, reducing poverty, and improving education and health [4]. If Northfield Mountain was developed into an outdoor recreation destination it could bring a substantial, sustainable inflow of cash to the Pioneer Valley. The area surrounding Kingdom Trails in East Burke, VT has greatly benefitted from visiting mountain bikers, with approximately \$5 million spent by Kingdom Trail visitors in 2011 [5]. The impact tourism could have on the socioeconomic state of the region makes this project a high priority of public concern.

Thank you for your time and for taking our comments into consideration. Please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Krug
President, New England Mountain Biking Association (NEMBA), Pioneer Valley
Chapter
pvnemba@gmail.com

References:

[1] Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2004. The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy. Boulder, CO.

[2] Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. Outdoor Recreation Participation & Spending Survey. A State-by-State Perspective.

[3] Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2012. The Outdoor Recreation Economy. Boulder, CO.

[4] US Department of Agriculture. 2005. Economic Research Report ERR-7.

[5] boston.com:

http://www.boston.com/news/local/vermont/articles/2012/06/10/mountain_bikers_flow_to_northeast_vermont/

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