



# CATAMOUNT TRAIL ASSOCIATION



## A LANDOWNER'S GUIDE TO TRAIL ACCESS EASEMENTS

### **What is the Catamount**

**Trail?** The Catamount Trail is a 300-mile cross-country ski trail that runs the length of Vermont. Starting in Readsboro on the Massachusetts border, it winds its way through the heart of the Green Mountains to North Troy on the Canadian border. Along the way it connects many of Vermont's finest cross-country ski centers and countless country inns and lodges. It is one of Vermont's officially recognized trails of statewide significance.

### **What is the Catamount**

**Trail Association?** The Catamount Trail Association (CTA) is a member-supported, non-profit organization dedicated to developing, maintaining and protecting the Catamount Trail, and furthering cross-country skiing in the state.

CTA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and employs a full-time Executive Director and three part-time staff. The organization was founded in 1984 by three avid Vermont outdoor enthusiasts. These three researched and skied the original trail route in 1984. Today CTA has more than 1,500 members, 60% of whom live in Vermont while 40% live out of state.

### **How is the CTA Funded?**

The CTA is funded primarily through donations from its members and other friends.

The remaining income is from the sales of our guidebook and grants from foundations. Grant support has increased significantly since we began our Trail Protection Program.

### **Who uses the Trail and how often?**

The Trail is open to the public for skiing and snowshoeing. It is used by skiers and snowshoers of all ages and abilities who reside within and outside of Vermont.

The Trail is used from December through April, or as long as there is enough snow for skiing. Day trips are most popular although some people do multiple-day inn-to-inn trips involving overnight lodging. Still others ski the entire trail from Massachusetts to Canada staying at local inns along the way.

### **What kind of land does the Trail cross?**

The Trail goes through many different types of lands: forests, mountainous areas, wetlands that freeze over in winter, and farm fields, remote forest land uses and pre-existing trails along old logging roads wherever possible. Especially near busy alpine ski centers, the Trail crosses many smaller residential properties. The Catamount Trail also connects 11 cross-country ski centers using touring center trails.

### **Who maintains the Trail?**

Local volunteers maintain the Catamount Trail. The CTA has a key volunteer in charge of

maintenance along each of the 26 sections of the Trail. These key volunteers, or "Trail Chiefs," recruit other CTA members and volunteer groups to help them maintain their sections each year. Maintenance is generally done in the fall before hunting season.

### **Is the Trail open during the non-snow season?**

No. It is a winter-use-only trail. However, because the Trail uses so many other trails, like bike paths and Forest Service Roads, some parts may be used in the summer if they are part of another, summer-use trail system – or if the landowner allows it.

### **Does the Catamount Trail Association own the land the Trail crosses?**

No, not at this time, although it may opt to own land in the future in order to accomplish its goal of protecting the entire trail. 170 miles of the trail cross land that is privately owned and the remaining 130 miles of the Trail cross land owned by municipalities, the State of Vermont, or the US Forest Service. Now that the Trail is nearly complete, the CTA has begun a trail protection program to obtain permanent trail access through trail easements.

### **What is a Trail Access Easement?**

A trail access easement is much like a right-of-way, except that CTA's

easements are seasonal only - from November through April. Our easement usually consists of a linear corridor 25- to 50-feet wide. The actual trail is cleared of brush and is just 4- to 8-feet wide depending on terrain. The easement assures connectivity for the Trail from one side of your property to the other as it passes onto neighboring properties.

The easement contains a provision for the re-location of the Trail, either permanently or temporarily, at the landowner's request. In this case, the CTA will work with the landowner to relocate in a way that maintains connectivity and accommodates both a quality skiing experience and your land-management needs.

At this time about 60 miles of the Catamount Trail are protected by easements.

The easements are recorded in the town land records.

### **What about liability?**

Liability for accidents on the Trail is not affected by the presence of an easement. Vermont has strong laws that protect private landowners who open their lands to public recreation from being liable in the event that someone gets hurt while recreating on private land. In addition, because the Catamount Trail is a part of the Vermont Trails System, there is even greater protection for landowners along the Catamount Trail. To be liable for a person's injury on the Catamount Trail, landowners would need to intentionally inflict harm. In addition, CTA also maintains a liability insurance policy that covers landowners on all sections of the Trail.

**Will the Trail affect my privacy?** No. We encourage you to be involved in planning the Trail and to let us know when changes are needed to accommodate your changing land uses. We plan the Trail so that people won't ski by your house or farm building. We are conscientious about maintaining adequate signage, and have found that most skiers naturally stay on the trail as long as they are pointed in the right direction with clear signs.

**Who deals with problems on the Trail?** We do. It is inevitable that a mid-winter storm may cause a tree to blow down, or that a trail marker will come loose from its nail. The CTA Trail Chiefs, who usually live locally, fix these problems. If you learn of a problem on the Trail, you can help us by notifying the CTA office at 864-5794 or your local Trail Chief.

### **If I grant a Trail Access Easement to CTA do I give up any of my property rights?**

You can still do whatever you want with your land except build a structure or place other developments within the protected trail corridor. You are free to sell, log, farm and subdivide your land as you see fit as long as steps are taken to ensure skiers can cross the land on a safe, high quality trail. CTA works with landowners to design easements that are compatible with individual land management goals.

The easement "runs with the land" so subsequent landowners will also need to abide by these restrictions.

### **Gift of Land**

Another method for protecting the Trail is to donate land along the Trail to the Catamount Trail Association or another land conservation organization. In addition to the easement area, a landowner and CTA may agree that additional protection is necessary in some locations to protect scenic views, or the wilderness character of a particular section of the Trail. In addition to the personal satisfaction gained from the gift, a tax deduction may be taken based on the appraised value of the gifted land.

### **Further Information**

For more information on the Catamount Trail Association's Trail Protection Program, please contact our Director of Trail Protection, Tara Hamilton, at the CTA office in Burlington, (802) 864-5794 or by e-mail at [thamilton@catamounttrail.org](mailto:thamilton@catamounttrail.org).

