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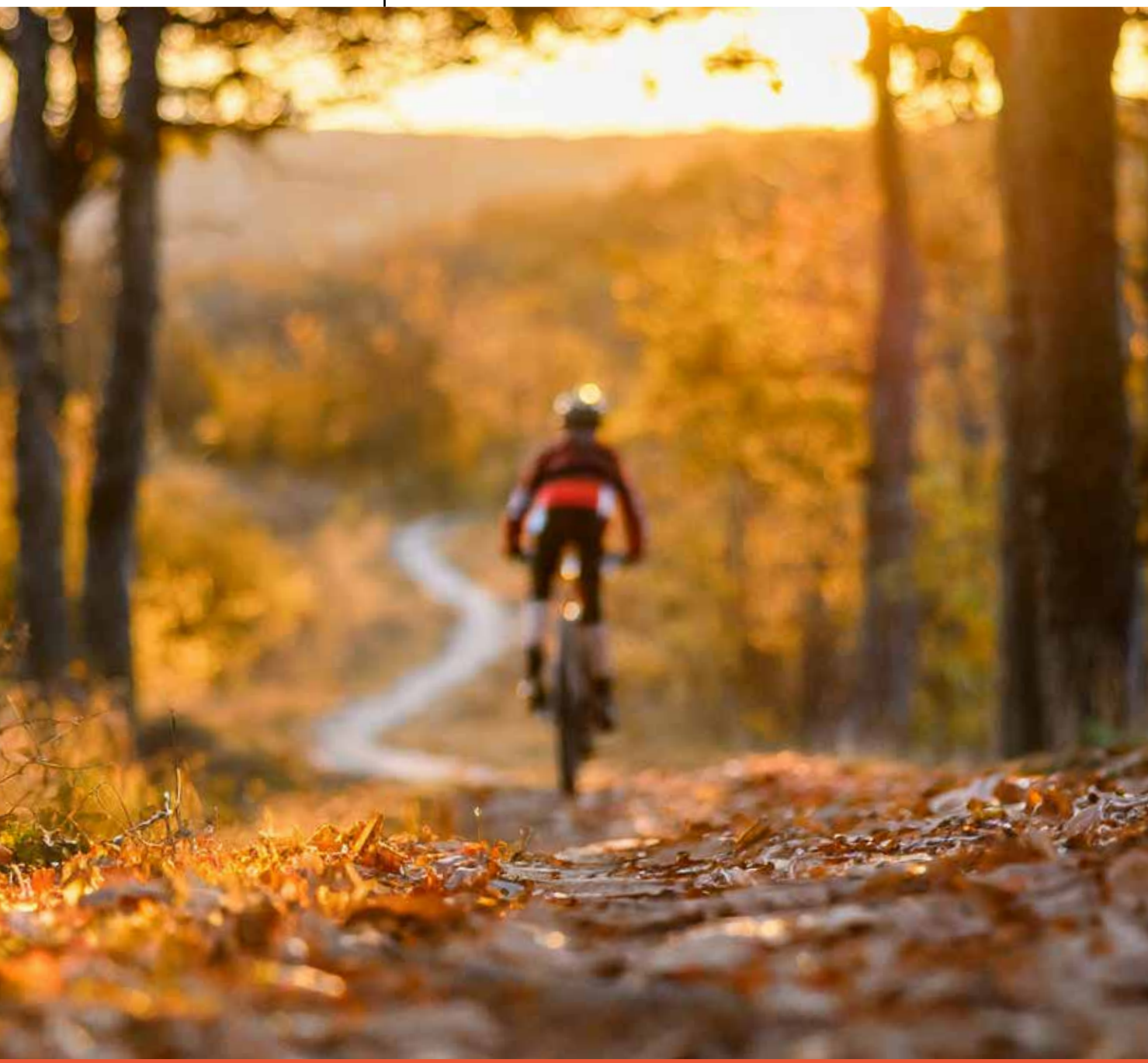
NEW ENGLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOCIATION

Singletracks.

ISSUE 170 > FALL EDITION



TRAILS
Vietnam
Turns 20

ADVOCACY
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NEW ENGLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOCIATION

Singletracks.

ISSUE 170 > FALL EDITION

A Letter from the Executive Director

As we all know, out on the trails, the best way to go where you want is by looking ahead. With this edition of Single Tracks, we tap into that ethos to give you a taste of where we see our organization, and mountain biking, are going in the future. At the same time, we are celebrating a piece of history - the 20th anniversary since NEMBA “broke ground” on the Vietnam trail system.

Looking forward, we are excited about expanding the mountain biking community, both by the numbers and the faces we see on the trails. As we do this important work, we are thrilled to recognize a major milestone: NEMBA surpassed 10,000 members for the first time this year.

As you’ll see in this issue, this year we focused on encouraging women to gear up, learn skills, and get comfortable out on the trails through numerous events. You’ll also read about other flavors of riding - we hope our downhill story inspires you to shift gears and broaden your trail experiences.

For our chapters, it’s been an outstanding year. First, we saw the formation of a new chapter in the Williamstown, MA area. Welcome, Purple Valley NEMBA! To get the wheels spinning, Purple Valley NEMBA is focused on launching the area’s first public mountain bike trail network. Meanwhile, our existing chapters continue building and maintaining trails, sponsoring a variety of rides, and hosting skills clinics. As you’ll read, many chapters are using skills clinics to inspire new riders and build community.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Singletracks.

See you all on the trails.

Keep smiling,

Nicole Freedman

COMMUNITY

Elevate Festival

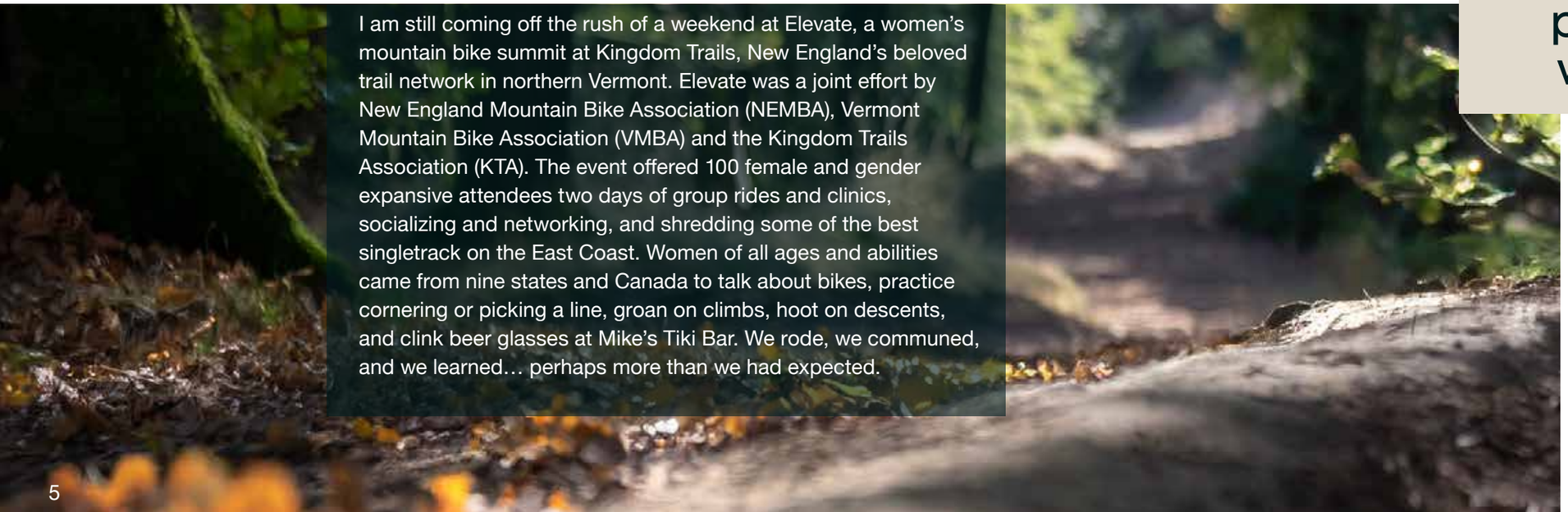
Photo: Katie Lothrop

Women Mountain Bikers Climb Higher at Kingdom Trails Elevate Festival

Female mountain bikers of all backgrounds came together for a weekend of learning at the Elevate festival in Vermont.

By Cris Cadiz
Reprinted from Singletracks Mountain Bike News, July 7, 2023

I am still coming off the rush of a weekend at Elevate, a women's mountain bike summit at Kingdom Trails, New England's beloved trail network in northern Vermont. Elevate was a joint effort by New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA), Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) and the Kingdom Trails Association (KTA). The event offered 100 female and gender expansive attendees two days of group rides and clinics, socializing and networking, and shredding some of the best singletrack on the East Coast. Women of all ages and abilities came from nine states and Canada to talk about bikes, practice cornering or picking a line, groan on climbs, hoot on descents, and clink beer glasses at Mike's Tiki Bar. We rode, we communed, and we learned… perhaps more than we had expected.



NEMBA

The Burke Mountain Hotel conference room was quiet as a forest glade as our keynote speaker's voice trembled a little telling her story. Brooke Goudy is a Black, female, totally badass mountain biker and cycling advocate from Denver. She is breaking stereotypes, seeking adventure and speaking inspirationally around the world. In her speech and interactions with attendees all weekend, Goudy offered a message that expressed perfectly why we were at Elevate: to build a strong, diverse mountain bike community.

"If I learn to ride bikes, he'll love me as much as he loves that bike!" Goudy confessed, laughing. We cackled along with her as she described getting into mountain biking while dating a pro racer. "I LOVE to ride bikes. But I didn't see many women and definitely not many Black women," she said. "So, what do I do? I want to share this incredible thing with my people. I want to build a community that I want to see. It wasn't easy as I thought it would be."

Her story was one that we, as women in mountain biking, all recognized. Goudy described the challenge of often being the only one, the "other," and relying on her strength and courage to represent and motivate change.

Photo: Katie Lothrop

> "I put myself out there to let people know that bikes were built for everyone."

"I want to show that someone like me—a woman, a woman of color, a little bit 'thicker' woman—can go out and have extraordinary adventures and be successful. I put myself out there to let people know that bikes were built for everyone. We just have to be brave. All the things we do off of the trail—a lot of hard shit!

Elevate Festival

The resilience and courage of being a mom, a partner, a working professional—it makes climbing a hill easy.”

As Goudy talked about the benefits of a diverse community, she asked us to look around—a sea of white faces—and notice who was not in the room. She reminded us how it felt to be the only one, the courage it took just to be present, and what it felt like to be welcomed. Her message resonated deeply with us, a group of women sharing our passion for what is still a very pale, very bro sport.

Kenzie Fuqua is DEI Coordinator for the almost 10,000-member VMBA. “We have a DEI committee that drives a boatload of initiatives, not only having to do with women, but all user groups,” she said. “We’re putting a lot of time, energy, and money into changing the landscape of what mountain biking looks like in our region and hope to see this catch on elsewhere.” According to Fuqua, about 25% of VMBA members identify as cisgender females. “This has grown a lot in the last five years, but we want to get it to 50/50.”

“I met more courageous riders then I could have dreamed of,” said Mary McCarthy of her experience at Elevate. McCarthy started riding seven years ago at age 42 on a $400 Craigslist hardtail. Today, she is Chapter President of Greater Boston NEMBA. Her takeaway from Goudy was that it takes more than just an invitation to nurture diversity.

“There’s welcoming and there’s belonging,” says McCarthy. “You need to pat the chair


Photo: Katie Lothrop

beside you and say, ‘You belong here. I’ve saved a seat for you.’” This feeling of inclusion was a gift McCarthy received on her very first NEMBA ride. “I was told I was an exceptional rider. I had exceptional skill and a unique gift for this sport.” She laughs. “I believed them! Now that I have led beginner rides for eight years and heard ride leaders welcome people in the exact same way, I understand that sense of belonging can ignite someone’s confidence, hope, and trust to try very difficult physical, emotional and mental things.”

Many women who love mountain biking enjoy co-ed rides and have learned a lot from male mentors. “I’m lucky to belong to a chapter of enlightened humans, where I don’t feel genderized or mansplained,” says McCarthy. “But I know this is not the experience of all people introduced to mountain biking. I have witnessed something very special happen when folks are able to relax and feel safe enough to take risks.” For the attendees, Elevate was our safe space to belong, to enjoy and learn more about mountain biking, to take risks while not feeling intimidated or uncomfortable, and even allow ourselves to step up and be leaders in situations where we would normally defer to men.

Nicole Freedman, Executive Director of 10,000-member NEMBA and former Olympic cyclist, was impressed by the impact Elevate had on attendees. “For many it was a powerful experience to connect with like-minded people. Women and gender expansive mountain bikers are still a significant minority in the sport, so carving out a weekend just for them was incredibly special.”

In Freedman’s nearly 30 years in cycling, she is struck by the many women who feel discouraged by early experiences.

“It’s typical to find themselves on a group ride that is too fast, mostly men, and they struggle to keep up. It can lead to long-lasting negative feelings, a sense of not belonging and of not being a real mountain biker.” She adds that when we introduce children to the sport, we carefully find the right group and level to ensure an encouraging start.

“Elevate was a chance for attendees to reset and know that they are mountain bikers. They got to own the sport for the weekend.” Freedman hopes many return to their communities and duplicate the experience by leading rides for women and gender expansive cyclists, so more people have a positive introduction to mountain biking.

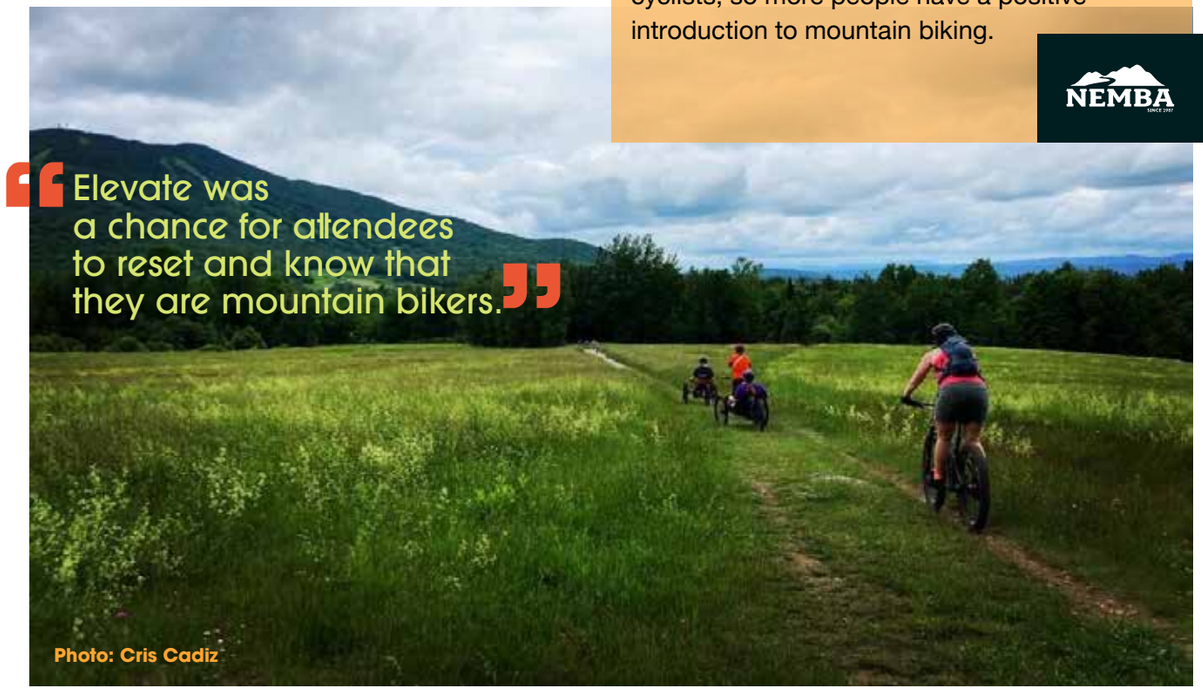


Photo: Cris Cadiz

TRENDING:

Skills Parks

By Cris Cadiz

Remember skate parks? They are still a thing. But the new thing is bike skills parks.

It seems like every time you turn around, there's a new bike park opening, being built, or being funded. For this article, the term "bike park" includes pump tracks, skills areas and bicycle playgrounds. No matter what they are called or how they are designed, a bike park's main goal is to be a fun, active, healthy recreational resource.

Building a bike skills park is a way to attract and develop new riders and to showcase a riding area. A successful one will benefit not only local riders, but families, youth groups, recreation programs, visitors from other regions, and the local economy. A skills park can be a powerful and positive community-building project, uniting stakeholders from various organizations to work together for the common good.

Breaking Ground

Mike Davern, President of Brattleboro-Keene NEMBA (BK-NEMBA), recognizes that not every project will go as smoothly as theirs. All the stars aligned in New Hampshire to make Keene Bike Park a huge success. The idea of a pump track had been kicking around Keene even before the area's NEMBA chapter formed in 2009 but never got off the ground. In 2019,

Mike went to Kingdom Trails, where his eight-year-old had a blast on their pump track. An enthusiastic, “This is awesome! Why don’t we have one?!?,” from his son prompted Mike to reach out the City of Keene Parks & Recreation, where the idea received a warm reception.

“We’ve had a fantastic experience,” says Mike. “We met with the City. We all decided Wheelock Park was a great spot. We didn’t have to file permits or go through an approval process.”

BK-NEMBA lucked out because a master plan created a decade ago included a pump track as a recommended park feature. They started fundraising, met with several builders, chose one, held informative public meetings, and then Covid hit, which ironically streamlined the construction process. The pandemic meant their builder was immediately available, lots of volunteers had time on their hands, and there were few to no people in the park to get in the way. It took a little over a year and around $80,000 initially to open the Keene Bike Park in August 2020.

Building Community

According to Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities Director for the City of Keene, the new bike park hosted a ride series that averaged 44 riders per event, drawing from MA, RI, CT, VT and NH. “It was mostly local kids, but about a dozen each week from out of town. It was a highlight of the summer.”

He says the bike park is a testament to a successful collaboration with BK-NEMBA. “On a regular basis, we see kids riding there, and when I say kids, I use the term loosely…a wide range of riders aged 4 to 50+. It is really incredible how they support, motivate and teach one another.”

Mike Davern acknowledges that most of the riders at Keene Bike Park are not NEMBA members, but families, kids, and BMX riders. The Keene Park is so popular with the community, it is maintained by volunteers, including “a bunch of 14-year-olds that take care of it all summer.”

He also says people are thankful for the bike park. “It’s become a gathering place and something for kids to do to get them off their phone or computer. There’s even more support now that people have seen the value. If I had to raise another $30,000, I could get it by month’s end just from local people because they love it so much.”

Relationships Matter

Another skills park – at West Hill Dam – is the successful partnership of Blackstone Valley NEMBA (BV-NEMBA) and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Army Corps provided land in Uxbridge, MA, and over-the-top support from Park Ranger Ron Woodall and his team. Ron says West Hill Dam skills park has boosted visitation and biking opportunities in the community and region.

“It is a unique place for all ages and skill levels,” he says. “Parents that might be serious mountain bikers can bring their kids along and work on bike skills. It is also a non-threatening, non-intimidating area for the least-skilled riders to get more comfortable navigating obstacles and building their bike skills.

TRENDING:

Skills Parks

Skills Parks

Yet, it's stimulating enough for veteran riders to have fun and challenge themselves."

Ron has worked with BV-NEMBA since 2017 and praises the chapter's hard work and dedication. "It is why I advocate for the expansion of singletrack trails and projects like the skills park." This positive partnership also led the Army Corps to supply labor, equipment, and building materials to the skills park project – a contribution that BV-NEMBA Chapter President Brian Belfer estimates to be worth many thousands of dollars.

It's well worth it to Ranger Ron. "Multiple Army Corps sites in New England have asked what I do to make our bike program so successful. It is the combination of full buy-in from the ranger staff along with the leadership and volunteers from NEMBA. We would not have so many amazing trails or this fantastic bike skills park without the relationship we've cultivated with BV-NEMBA."

"On a regular basis, we see kids riding there, and when I say kids, I use the term loosely... a wide range of riders aged 4 to 50+"

Brian agrees that his chapter's long-term trail work at West Hill Dam was key to their skills park project success. "It's all about that good relationship with the land manager," he says.

In Newtown, CT, construction on a bicycle playground began this spring and officially opened this summer. The project was suggested to the Town's Parks & Rec Department by Housatonic Valley NEMBA Chapter Treasurer Brad Accettella and former Chapter President Paula Burton. "Our town is like many in Connecticut, with narrow roads that people drive too fast on," says Brad. "Since it's tough for kids to ride bikes and learn to ride bikes safely, our town decided to create a bicycle park for kids up to age 11."

Paula says Newtown wanted the project be low maintenance and professionally built. Since the Town is not a non-profit and could not fundraise, Housatonic Valley NEMBA was happy to help. The pandemic again offered an unlikely advantage, as the town voted to use $75,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to get started. With HV-NEMBA's help, they crowdsourced the rest, raising about $15,000 in mere weeks.

Amy Mangold, Director of Newtown Parks and Recreation, says the chapter's "knowledge and love of biking and of the importance of it for our youth and community was invaluable to the approval process of town agencies and funding sources. We would not have this playground without their dedication, help and support."

Unite Around Teamwork

Every chapter leader interviewed for this article said building a strong core team was essential to a successful bike park project. It is not

something one person can do without help. The process will require skills from fundraising and project management to construction expertise, publicity, marketing and more. “It takes a lot of work,” Mike Davern acknowledges. “Leverage any skills your chapter members have.”

Fortunately, most NEMBA members are not pro riders but work in a wide variety of professions. Find out who does graphic design, PowerPoint presentations, public speaking, capital campaigns, grant writing, construction, etc. Find committed people that you trust to perform tasks and who won’t disappear if progress gets challenging.

Brad Accettella says, “Create a group of good people. Meet often and talk to as many local resources as you can to secure as much initial approval as possible.” To gain support, explain exactly what you are doing. The Newtown Bicycle Park’s PowerPoint presentation is clear and simple. It lays out what the project will look like, who and what it is for, and the benefits to children and the town, including economic benefits.

TRENDING:

Skills Parks

Process: Pro or No?

Keene’s Bike Park includes a traditional pump track on one side and jump lines and bigger features on the other. “Everything was built with progression in mind,” says Mike Davern. “The first jump has no consequences and you build up to the others. It was built for everyone to have a good time, from young kids to adults.”

“We chose a professional build company because we didn’t want it to fail,” Mike acknowledges. “There are many challenges to building it yourself. If you don’t do it well, it doesn’t flow, people don’t use it, and it grows up to a grassy mound in the middle of the park. Plus, wrangling volunteers for a large project is a challenge. For the scale of our park, we needed a pro.” After meeting on the site with three local companies, BK-NEMBA chose Powder Horn Trail Company from Belmont, NH (powderhorn.bike/).

On the other hand, Blackstone Valley NEMBA proved at West Hill Dam that you can do something DIY. Brian Belfer says they had actually budgeted for a professional consult from Highland Mountain Bike Park. “I slightly regret not getting the pro consult, but the timing just didn’t work. In retrospect, there are few things we would have changed. Overall, we think it’s pretty good without professional involvement.”

BV NEMBA was able to use talents from their chapter, including a professional land surveyor, skilled carpenters, and people with trail design experience. “The key is finding those people and keeping them interested in working for days and days,” says Brian. “We worked every Wednesday and Saturday for four months. That doesn’t include ongoing maintenance.”

When the Going Gets Tough

Every skills park project is unique. Some will proceed as fast and smooth as an amazing flow trail. Others will stumble through obstacles gnarly as an old-school rock garden. Either way, knowing what to expect by doing your research – and using available resources – are key to success.

Like skate parks, bike parks can be found in urban settings as well as near or within mountain bike trail systems. Berkshire NEMBA Chapter President Alison McGee chose Springside Park in Pittsfield, MA because of its location abutting a low-income neighborhood and one of the middle schools. “I wanted kids to be able to ride their bikes to the park and not rely on adult transportation.”

“Developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and fundraising are still in the works and have been challenging,” says Alison. “My city is just starting to embrace outdoor recreation in general, so I knew it would be a big step. The Parks Commission’s unfamiliarity with this type of project – in addition to a small but vocal group opposed to it – has made the process much longer and harder.” Alison has spent a lot of time communicating, educating and clarifying misinformation. She feels that excitement and momentum for the project in her chapter languished because of how long it’s taken to get approval.

“This is my passion project; I really want to see it through,” says Alison. “We struggle with a lot of unauthorized trail building in our area. I want this project to show that doing it right will result in many benefits.”

Recipe for a successful bike park

KEY INGREDIENTS

1. Land/location

2. Leadership: project team & community partners

3. Stakeholders: outreach, education, permissions/ approvals/permits, MOU

4. Design & build: pro-budget or grassroots/shovel or machine/ sustainability & liability

5. Fundraising: grants, sponsors, community asks, events, PR/ marketing

6. Future: maintenance, insurance, ownership, etc.

PROJECT TIPS

"A bike park is a piece of land specifically designed for mountain biking. Bike parks can be built in small urban areas, public lands, or integrated with trail systems. A bike park may include skills courses, pump tracks, jumps, trails, and other features."
www.keenebikepark.org/faq.html

"Every Wednesday, BK-NEMBA has maintenance nights to get people involved in taking care of the space. They are building our future riders and volunteers. The economic impact is also great to see. On any given day, we see vehicles from all over New England coming to ride, and hopefully riding some of our other areas."

~ Andy Bohannon, Parks, Recreation & Facilities Director, Keene, NH

"Awareness of and normalization of bike parks should contribute to their growth. Most municipal recreation departments recognize the importance of baseball diamonds, football fields and gyms. They should also be aware of bike parks as a beneficial – even necessary – amenity. Show them the data!"

~ Mike O'Connor, Treasurer Greater Boston

NEMBA, proponent of a NEMBA "Bike Park Body of Knowledge/Best Practices"

"Bike parks are an excellent way to get residents (especially young people) outdoors, attract tourism, improve quality of life, and bring economic growth to your community." IMBA
https://www.imba.com/resource/why-cities-build-bike-parks-and-how-convince-yours

"Better than a Jungle Gym: Bicycle playgrounds are an excellent way to get young children outside and exploring their abilities on the bike."
https://www.imba.com/resource/what-bicycle-playground

Get a Pump Track in Your Town: Best Practices
https://www.imba.com/resource/get-pump-track-your-town

"The most important thing for long term success is planning & partnerships with community groups."

~ Anthony Duncan, IMBA, Head of Local Programs

"Start fundraising early: it costs money just to get started.

Hire a professional to design & build. It's easier to ask for money with a polished plan."

~ Mike Davern, BK-NEMBA, Keene Bike Park

"Have a maintenance plan. Our chapter hired a bike park builder in 2008 to construct a dirt pump track. I would have paved it if I had to do it again. It's a real challenge for volunteers to maintain.

Consider risk and liability in building features like drops and jumps. Signage and frequent inspections of structures go hand in hand with that."

~ John Anders, Midcoast Maine NEMBA & Trail Project Lead for Side Country Trails (www.sidecountrysports.com/sidecountry-trails/)

"For risk management/liability, consider a fenced entry/exit with prominent signage."

~ Mark Hayes, Highland President

"Design should have a clear flow, especially if there's an uphill/downhill element."

~Chris Chmielewski, Highland Training Director

"Location should be easily accessible or a warm up area, not in the middle of the trail system."

~Jordan Kemerling, Highland Trails Director

TRENDING:

Skills Parks

Let Gravity Take Over:
Give *A Mountain* Bike Park a Go

By Nicole Freedman

What goes up, must always come down! With the growth of the gravity mountain bike space and more of our New England ski areas turning to mountain bike playgrounds in their off-season… maybe it's time to try shifting your gears.

Perhaps you're equally happy riding uphill as down. Even if you are, downhill mountain biking – also known as lift-served or gravity-assisted mountain biking – is another way to enjoy mountain vistas…while letting gravity play its part as you descend.

Here are some basics to help you get started on what just might become your next favorite biking activity!

Get a lift going uphill.

This goes without saying – most downhill parks offer lift service. You take a chairlift or gondola up and just bike down. Some are non-lift served so you can still get your uphill workout.

Where to go

Here in New England, we're blessed with access to many fantastic downhill mountain biking destinations featuring lift-serviced trails. NEMBA's partnerships with the following two great mountain bike parks means you enjoy discounts there:

Highland Mountain Bike Park in Northfield, New Hampshire, which offers a range of trails for all skill levels, with well-maintained features and breathtaking views.

Loon Mountain's Bike Park has over 11 miles covering 1,000 vertical feet – ideal for beginners and seasoned riders alike. And its lift takes you

and your bike 1,065 vertical feet in less than 6 minutes. A quick internet search will get you to many more.

Gear up the right way

Don't be intimidated, those jumps may look big, but you've got this! Check your gear; maybe a full-face helmet, body armor, knee and elbow pads need to be part of the equation to stoke your confidence. As for your bike, your everyday full sus whip may be suitable for beginner and intermediate trails. But, if you're considering getting sendy on some of those blacks or larger features… talk to the experts in the shop – you may want to grab a proper downhill bike for the day.

Most downhill parks will rent bikes and gear. Some – including Highland Mountain Bike Park – even include safety equipment as part of their introductory "Find Your Ride" courses, which we recommend for your first time. Spending your first day with the pros will provide you the tools and confidence to find more fun and keep it safety first!

Gravity Glossary:

Berms: A banked turn or corner on a trail that is built up with soil or other material. Berms allow riders to maintain speed and control while navigating turns by leaning into the slope of the berm.

Drops: A feature on a downhill trail where the trail abruptly descends off a ledge or obstacle. Riders intentionally "drop" off the edge, using their bike's suspension and body position to control the descent.

Jumps: Jumps involve getting airborne, and are key to taking off and landing smoothly.

Tabletop: A jump feature with a flat, level "table" area between the takeoff and landing ramps. Riders can jump without having to clear a gap, making tabletops great for practicing jumping techniques.

Rock Garden: A section of the trail covered in rocks and obstacles that challenge a

rider's ability to navigate them smoothly.

Rollers: A hump or series of humps in the trail, usually found on fast sections, requiring the rider to absorb or 'pump' them to avoid getting bucked or sent airborne.

Step-Down: A jump where the landing is lower than the take-off point, requiring riders to control their speed and trajectory.

Technical Descents: Sections of trail that are particularly challenging due to the presence of obstacles, steep slopes, or rough terrain.

Flow: The sense of rhythm and smoothness achieved while riding a trail, maintaining speed and control through a combination of features.

Choose the right trails

You'll find beginner, intermediate, and advanced trails, color coded typically with green, blue and black, similar to that winter signage. You know what black and double-black diamonds mean!

If you're not on a downhill bike, best stick to beginner and intermediate trails. My first time at a downhill park on a cross-country bike, I did a front wheel lift down a tabletop…not because

of my mad skills but because, well, the bike matters.

Remember the 3 basics of body positioning

If you're a seasoned rider, you already know body positioning and bike control are key. Those skills are essential for your gravity journey, too. But you'll need to adapt and fine-tune your technique for steeper terrain and faster descents.

Here are the three things to burn into your memory when it comes to body position: stay low, stay back, stay loose.

Stay low: You'll stay a bit lower in the neutral body position going downhill.

Stay back: Keeping your weight shifted toward the back of the bike keeps the front wheel light so the front suspension works to your advantage. It also helps you handle obstacles and drops without flying over the handlebars!

Stay loose: Hang on firmly but loosely to your handlebars for better maneuverability and responsiveness.

Plus 2 riding tips

Keep your gaze further down the trail than you would with cross-country to anticipate obstacles, line choices, and turns. This forward-looking approach helps you prepare for upcoming challenges and get around turns faster.

And, brake before the turn. Modulate your front brakes… and use both front and rear brakes simultaneously.

Final words of wisdom from a downhill expert. Mark Hayes, president of Highland Mountain Bike Park, offers these words of wisdom: "Avoid going too big, too fast. It's easy to have fun on a downhill run right at the start of the trailhead. A good trail system or bike park will offer progression throughout, first-timer lesson programs, and trails for all riders. Even advanced riders should always take it easy out of the gate. And when riding a new trail for the first time, all riders should be thinking 'Pre-ride, Re-ride, Free-ride': Get to know the trail before stepping things up."

Even a seasoned cross-country rider can benefit from an introductory downhill class, offered at most downhill parks. And NEMBA members enjoy a 20% discount off Highland's Find Your Ride intro program. These classes are also a great way to meet others who are giving downhill a go for the first time.

Ready to shift gears and explore the world of gravity mountain biking? Go Find Your Ride… a day on the bike is waiting for you!

Pushing Limits: Q&A with a World Champ Downhiller

When we saw our long-time sponsor Bent Water Brewing also sponsors Nicholi Rogatkin, we knew we had to pick the brain of this Massachusetts native and professional bike rider currently ranked #2 in the world.

Q. What advice would you give to a seasoned cross-country riding NEMBA member who wants to try downhill for the first time?

A. Go for it! Stay strong on the bike, use the bike skills you have built through cross country, and ride with confidence. It will be gnarly, but it will feel insane.

Q. Do you think you could beat our NEMBA cross-country friend going uphill?

A. Absolutely not, ha ha. Big respect to all the riders that put in the training to power uphill! I will stick to high-velocity riding and jumps!

Q. Downhill mountain bikers aren't actually fit, are they?

A. Every good rider is fit in their own way. Fitness is not the TOP priority in biking in my opinion, but it obviously is a large factor in a lot of difficult riding situations.

Q. Was there ever a time you got scared?

A. All the time, ha ha! As a rider, I understand the danger and risk of every situation. Even if I still go for it, that scared feeling and those nerves will always be present!

Q. If we show up at a downhill park wearing lycra, will people laugh at us?

A. Ha ha – maybe. But I'm sure you will see some first-time bike park people wearing even more questionable things for riding downhill!

Happy Birthday, Vietnam!

20 Years of NEMBA Ownership

By Cris Cadiz

Twenty years ago in October, NEMBA made history in Massachusetts. “NEMBA become(s) the first cycling organization in the world to buy land for open space protection and recreation.” A 2003 press release announced this unprecedented purchase of 47 acres, part of the popular trail system known as Vietnam or ‘Nam.

The historic purchase was part of a partnership of organizations and municipalities intending to protect hundreds of acres known as the Upper Charles River Headwaters from development. At the time, it was “the largest single investment undertaken by mountain bikers to preserve open space.” Today – thanks to NEMBA; the Towns of Holliston, Milford, and Hopkinton; and private landowners – almost 1,000 acres and 35 miles of trails are open to mountain biking and other passive recreation.

Anne Shephard of Blackstone Valley NEMBA was Regional Board Treasurer in late 2001 (and still is!), when it became clear that land known as the Liner Trust Parcel (along with several other large parcels) was under threat of development. Under the leadership of Executive Director Philip Keyes and Board President Krisztina Holly, NEMBA decided to buy the Liner Trust Parcel – a key piece of land that connected trails to other parts of the Vietnam system.

“It was a heavy lift but not completely out of the realm of possibility,” recalls Anne, who said the asking price of $210,000 was twice the gross annual revenue for NEMBA at the time. “Fortunately, the parcel was landlocked with no public access; otherwise, it would have been five times the cost. That’s what saved it for us. It

was undevelopable without getting access and a big right-of-way from abutters.”

Anne says both Krisztina and Philip saw the purchase as an opportunity for NEMBA to show its value as an advocacy group – and a potential negative if they made no effort to save the land. “The other incentive was that we would be the landowners,” says Anne. “We wouldn’t need permission to build trails the way they should be built. It was a transformative event for us.”

After a board meeting revealed significant member interest in saving this parcel of land, NEMBA organized a fund-raising team and started a capital campaign. Krisztina’s personal connections with people in fundraising and with generous donors helped facilitate a successful

“silent stage.” Then Philip took the lead on “hard core” fundraising and promotion for one-and-a-half years. “He really lit a fire under NEMBA,” says Anne. “The board said this is a big challenge, but we can, we should, and we have to do this.”

Even without social media or Kickstarter, NEMBA’s grassroots campaign became a national fundraising effort, with 549 donations coming from 23 states. “We all shook the treetops. It was pretty amazing,” recalls Anne, who says almost 7,000 unique donors

stepped forward. Donations came from the cycling industry, other corporations, and local businesses. Area bike shops helped raise over $50,000. And lots and lots of mountain bikers chipped in.

NEMBA met its fundraising goal two months ahead of schedule. Anne laughs, remembering how truly grassroots NEMBA was at the time. “I was so cheap, I didn’t even buy a rubber endorsement stamp. Every single check I deposited, I signed by hand – it made for a lot of writer’s cramp, but I didn’t mind.”

The donors listed on the plaque gave $1,000 or more, with some individuals contributing $15,000 toward the purchase.

The restricted NEMBA fund created for the purchase was called the New England Land Preservation Fund. It still exists, paying for taxes, liability insurance and maintenance of NEMBA's Vietnam parcel and is available for any future land purchases.

According to Blackstone Valley NEMBA member John Goeller – an OG Vietnam mountain biker who's been riding, mapping and building trails in Vietnam since 1998 – the area's name came from the motorcyclists who first started cutting trails there in the '80s. Irreverently named Fah-Q (yeah, say it fast), the motorcycle club included many members who were Vietnam Vets. They cut the trailside brush just enough to get their handlebars over. Some said the sharp, stubby ends looked like punji sticks from the war. John also recalls a trailhead sign, long since disappeared, that said "Welcome to Vietnam."

December 20, 2002, PinkBike article urges mountain bikers to dig deep:

"Help preserve the land at the headwaters of the Upper Charles, a.k.a. Vietnam…. This parcel contains miles of technical trails that have made 'Nam a favorite riding location for mountain bikers throughout New England. If you've ridden 'Nam, you've ridden this parcel, and we want to make sure you can ride it tomorrow and forever."

Vietnam is literally in John's backyard. He has ridden every rock and root of this trail system. While not involved in the acquisition of the NEMBA parcel, he served for many years on the Vietnam Land Management Committee (VLMC), created to help oversee trail maintenance and work with other landowners and municipalities to manage the entire trail network.

Although everything in Vietnam is on Trailforks and updated regularly, Kevin invites other chapters to reach out to him for a guided tour. "Every NEMBA member pays to own and maintain Vietnam. It's our resource to use and to be proud of."

Milford resident Kevin Keenan of Blackstone Valley NEMBA has headed up the VLMC the last four years. "We want to make sure everyone feels comfortable riding the trails," he says. Despite Vietnam's intimidating reputation as a "big-hit" riding area, both Kevin and John say trails are "all-skill-level friendly." In addition to many cross-country style trails, every feature has a go-around. There are lots of fun challenges but "no mandatory drops," claims John.

Besides building new trails and updating and maintaining old ones in Vietnam, one of Kevin's goals with the VLMC is to raise community awareness of NEMBA's involvement and benefit to the community. This includes preserving open space, helping provide free passive recreation for all, plus making a positive economic impact. "The towns don't realize or are surprised that people travel from all over to ride the trails here," Kevin says.

Chapter Updates

Wachusett NEMBA would like to highlight three big accomplishments this season thanks to its community of awesome volunteers. First, the Monday evening and Ladies group

ride series have been a huge hit thanks to its ride leaders, social media and marketing ninja, and all the riders who showed up week after week. This year's Barre Awesome Ride had over 250 riders, amazing weather, local bike fest vibe, and gracious hosts/landowners. Last but not least, the Ware River Watershed was finally opened to bicycles for the first time after over nine years of advocacy!

Southeast CT NEMBA received a NEMBA signature trail grant for Playground Trails, hosted more than 20 group rides, and produced NEMBA Mountain Bike Adventure Series

Central NH NEMBA rolled out a new ride series this past summer with Trek Bicycles in Concord: the "Mellow Thursday" rides at Broken Ground. The new vibe attracted all ages and abilities. The trail system development at Veterans Memorial Recreation area in Franklin is picking up steam. Pivot hosted a Demo day in partnership with S&W Sports there this summer.

In 2023 the **Central CT NEMBA** chapter committed itself to growing the mountain bike community through a variety of weekly led rides. The chapter has been leading a beginner ride Saturdays, an intermediate ride Sundays, and the weekday Ride Instead of Work (RIW) series, which offers a multitude of opportunities for those with experience or new to the sport to explore the trails of Central Connecticut and beyond.

It's been a great year for **SE Mass NEMBA** with a full program of 3-5 social rides every week, trail and bridge projects all over, special events like the Adams Farm Season Opener, and racing, and everyone's favorites the Carolina Hills MTB and Landmine MTB Classics. The best is still to come, please join SE Mass NEMBA for the Turkey Afterburner MBAS November 26 (always the Sunday after Thanksgiving) at Hale Education in Westwood! They've upped their social media game too, so give them a follow on IG and Facebook @ semass_nemba.

Northwest CT NEMBA wants to highlight all chapter members working behind the scenes building and maintaining the 80+ miles of sanctioned single-track trail here in

Northwest CT. It takes a small army to keep the trails riding great and many times the efforts go unnoticed and are under appreciated. From

Northfield Brook to Neag and in between, many thanks for all the hard work maintaining the existing trails and building for the future.

The **Berkshire NEMBA** chapter was happy to partner with Shimano and Berkshire Bike & Board for some work and celebration in Pittsfield State Forest this spring. It's looking forward to more collaboration and partnerships around maintaining and improving our local forests as they continue work bringing the

Berkshire Bike Skills Park to the city of Pittsfield. Now that it has secured an MOU with the city, its main focus will be fundraising and events to promote/fundraise for the park.

While The **Purple Valley NEMBA** chapter has been involved in countless projects this year, Berkshire NEMBA wants to highlight the work done by the Friends of Earl's group in Hadley. It rolled out this new concept as a way to engage more people in the process of maintaining trail systems. Each of the people in this great group commit to one or two trails but collectively work to fix up and identify the needs of the entire trails system. This has been a great boon to the trail system and is something Berkshire NEMBA plans to keep rolling out across its chapter!

In 2023, **Rhode Island NEMBA** achieved great milestones, including dedicating an impressive 400+ volunteer hours to trails and events, running product raffles to reward those who volunteered, organizing four major ride events bringing members closer together, donating over $3,000 to related charities, and conducting a successful women's skills clinics to enhance members' expertise. The chapter also led an impressive 133

weekly group rides throughout the state, and hosted the regional NEMBA Trail School. An improved relationship with the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has paved the way for even more impactful initiatives in the future.

Cape Cod NEMBA launched Monday Mellow/Beginner Rides from Sea Sports Cyclery & Outdoor. After starting with a handful of new riders, the rides swelled to a record 30 riders by season's end. The Mellow Ride drew both seasoned riders and those new to the sport.

Brattleboro-Keene NEMBA is excited with the success of the Pump It Up race series, its fall Trail Boss Appreciation BBQ, and all the great trail work and rides that have happened so far this year.

Pump It Up race series. Photo by Joshua Foote

Franconia NEMBA brought the stoke in 2023 with more group rides, events, and volunteer hours than ever before! Lots of trail maintenance and new dirt down, making trails more adaptive, athlete friendly, and easier for their new Rokon to groom. With an eye on the future, it has begun a planning and development strategy process, all while working with dozens of awesome landowners to ensure the sustainability of its trail network.

Southcoast NEMBA kept busy building bridges in Weetamoo Woods and organizing its first major race event, the 2023 Freetown 50. As the chapter celebrates its one-year anniversary, it is enjoying opportunities to improve local trails – and has already completed trail work in Dartmouth Town Forest, Village Park and the Freetown State Forest. Southcoast is still hoping to pursue additional projects in Dartmouth Town Forest and Village Park.

NEMBA SINCE 1987

Chapter Updates

Southern NH NEMBA chapter volunteers stayed productive and accomplished much in spite of 2023 being one of the wettest summers in years. The team hosted two Women's Beginner Skills Clinics, rebuilt and opened the old Piper trail at Musquash as Piper Rising, logged many hours mitigating water at multiple trail systems and pulled off another successful Bear Brook Boogie MBAS event in the face of less than ideal weather conditions. No matter the challenge, Southern NH NEMBA's amazing members were up for it, and all look forward to what the future holds for SNH mountain biking! Photo Caption: The first SNH NEMBA Women's Beginner Skills Clinic held at Yudicky Park in Nashua, NH on Sunday June 11, 2023

Purple Valley NEMBA is a new chapter formed in the Williamstown, MA region. The new organization is in discussions with local landowners for permission to build the area's first public mountain bike trail network.

North Shore MA NEMBA saw group rides at Willowdale, Georgetown-Rowley and Harold Parker back in full force! Riding with friends is motivating and more fun! Members built camaraderie and friendships at weekly rides, a basic-bike mechanics clinic, and a beginner-rider clinic for women and everyone, regardless of gender expression.

Carrabassett Region NEMBA, in conjunction with Maine Adaptive and Bike Borderlands, hosted about 200 riders from throughout New England for its inaugural Ride The Region Festival. This grassroots event showcased trails in Carrabassett Valley, Freeman Ridge Bike Park in Kingfield, the Maine Huts and Trails backcountry trails, and the Enduro trails at Sugarloaf Mountain. The chapter offered group rides from gravel to Enduro and everything in between, along with a women's skill clinic and an adaptive bike demo clinic.

White Mountains NEMBA completed its signature grant-funded climbing trail for the Pine Hill Community Forest project in partnership with the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. Part of a larger community trail system that is adjacent to the Kennett High School, this trail supports the high school's MTB team as a race venue and serves as part of their growing outdoor ed and vocational curriculum. Many thanks to all the volunteers for making this project a success!

White Mountains NEMBA group ride at the White Mountains Fat Tire Festival.

Merrimack Valley NEMBA had a fantastic summer riding season with its Advanced Tuesday night rides at Lowell- Dracut State Forest. These rides have consistently attracted new riders and challenged them with technical features and an advanced pace. Tuesdays also marked the Women's Skills Ride at Russell Mill, led by Way Poo, where many riders underwent skill progression and honed their techniques. This is the way! The chapter's Thursday InterMELLO rides at Lowell Dracut also saw impressive turnouts. Merrimack Valley NEMBA wants to extend a big shout-out to its dedicated members who went the extra mile to clear the trails after the recent storms. While many of the Merrimack Valley leadership team were in Fruita, CO when these storms hit the Merrimack Valley area, its members quickly identified and assisted in clearing fallen trees, ensuring the trails were ready for riding.

Pemi Valley NEMBA held a Grand Opening of the Whitten Woods trail network in May, a project funded by a NEMBA Signature Trail Grant and co-sponsored by the Squam Lakes Association (SLA), a regional conservation organization. This project represents SLA's first initiative in support of mountain biking! This Spring, the chapter held ad-hoc trail work parties at its Fox Park and Gyro networks, and to prepare Whitten Woods for riding. It continues to sponsor a youth MTB program at the Campton, NH elementary school organized and run by Paul Yelle, a chapter member. This afterschool program features scheduled rides between the start of school and ski season. Pemi Valley NEMBA hopes to complete at least five rides, as it did last year. The chapter continues to direct energy toward partnerships with local organizations and landowners. Beyond working with the SLA at Whitten Woods, this includes the Green Woodlands foundation in Dorchester, and participating in multi-use trail initiatives of the Pemi-Baker Trails Subcommittee of the Plymouth Conservation Commission.

Greater Portland NEMBA kicked off its first ambassador program this summer. Ambassadors assisted in rides, build days, collecting feedback from trail users, and spreading the word on all things NEMBA. The chapter has been working hard to expand the

Hamblen trails in Gorham this year. Some flowy additions include Comet, Nugget, and Galaxy.

Midcoast Maine NEMBA has been busy with trail work and group rides this summer! The chapter hosted its first monthly Women's Group Ride and partnered with Sidecountry Sports to alternate hosting weekly Wednesday night group rides. Much time was put into new trail development this year, and the chapter was awarded the Future Trail Stewards Award as part of Maine Trails Coalition's second annual Love Maine Trails Month in June. All are working hard at making sure members and other mountain bike enthusiasts have an outstanding ride in Midcoast Maine!

New bridging as part of the trail development in Jack Baker Woods.

Women of all skill levels came out to enjoy the Women's Group Ride on the last Tuesday of each month this summer.

Piscataquis County NEMBA up in Northern Maine hit a milestone of 50 primary and add-on NEMBA members this year, up 28% in the last 12 months. The chapter is excited to have completed Phase 1 of Moosehead Junction Trails in Greenville – beginner and intermediate trails – this spring. Partners at Moosehead Outdoor Alliance broke ground on Phase 2 this summer, which will bring another 8 miles of intermediate and advanced trails and a pump track to the network by the middle of 2024. Trail network creation is in full swing in the region with community meetings and feedback having been collected for the Elliotsville Foundation project in Monson supporting Phase 1 of the 7 Ponds Trails. Ground breaking for that project is planned for 2024. The chapter can't wait to share these new gems with the greater NEMBA community!

Welcome **South Central MA**, NEMBA's newest, and 35th) chapter! The chapter is off to a great start led by seasoned mountain bikers from across the area including: Nate Lane (President, Sturbridge), Tim Cormier (VP, Dudley), Phoebe Lehman (Secretary, West Brookfield), Christopher Nikopoulos (Treasurer, Sturbridge), and Nick Sokol (Trail Project Manager, Sturbridge). South Central leaders invested nearly four years working with local trail builders, land owners, and town committees to create a vision of bringing value and contribution to existing and new trail system. The chapter is centered in Sturbridge, MA and closing the gap between abutting chapters, Western MA, Blackstone Valley, Wachusett, and Quiet Corner CT. Go to scmanemba.org for group ride schedules, events, local sponsors and partnerships, and chapter merchandise.

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Chapter Updates


NEW ENGLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOCIATION
Singletracks.
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