

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



OVERALL PROJECT QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

What are the project goals and why do we want to change the park?

The goal of this project is to provide a quality day-use recreational experience for visitors while responsibly managing the land, including reducing our ecological footprint on the area. This project intends to meet those goals by transitioning the park to meet day-use standards, reducing impervious surfaces in compliance with stormwater regulations, improving recreational accessibility throughout the park, and improving wetland connectivity.

What is the project cost? How are people working on the project being paid?

The engineering estimate for this project is \$382k. It is broken down as follows:

Item	Estimate	Item	Estimate
Mobilization/Demobilization	\$33,000	Spoils Trucking	\$5,500
Erosion Control	\$10,000	Reinforcement Fabric	\$1,500
Tree Removal, Clearing, and Grubbing	\$8,000	Asphalt Reclaim and Make-Up Gravel	\$71,000
Common Excavation	\$5,000	Entrance Area Parking/Path Sub-base Prep, Gate	\$15,000
Grading	\$5,000	Structure Demolition and Disposal	\$140,000
Sur Pak Gravel	\$21,000	Culvert Removal	\$6,000
Topsoil	\$46,000	Turf Establishment	\$15,000

This project is engineered by ANR Facilities Engineering section of the DEC Water Investment Division. The parks division is funded primarily by gate fees, with additional funding coming from ski leases and a small portion from the general fund.

Why is Vermont State Parks timing the project for Winter/Spring 2025? Why the current timeline?

This project is ARPA-funded, with a deadline for funds to be encumbered by the end of the 2024 calendar year. Act 64 requires stormwater projects to be undertaken within five years of stormwater program approval of the initial NOI submission, which details plans for stormwater compliance.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



Why can't you reopen the campground? What was the wastewater system failure? Why can't it be replaced? Why not have camping be self-contained RVs only with no toilet facilities? Why can't the campground just have port-o-lets or composting toilets?

As an operating campground, North Hero State Park had steadily low camping visitation numbers that made financial justification challenging. The ecological impact of filling in the wetland to build the park manifested in various problems, specifically the abnormally high level of mosquitos that negatively impacted the camping experience, as well as the challenges of maintaining underground infrastructure that was seasonally inundated. The wastewater system failure required Vermont State Parks to truck wastewater to Swanton for the last 3-5 years of the campground operation at significant expense. The failure of existing wastewater infrastructure forced the decision of best value use of the property for residents and visitors of the State.

Due to limited wastewater capacity at the site, an operable wastewater system that would meet wastewater regulations would require a substantially large mound system that could only serve a limited number of campsites (approximately 30). This is financially infeasible. Furthermore, wastewater regulations require toilet facilities in developed campgrounds, regardless of the type of camping equipment (including self-contained RVs). Portable toilets are not permissible toilet facilities according to Vermont wastewater regulations. Composting toilets require a vertical separation between waste and groundwater that is not obtainable anywhere at North Hero State Park without significant alteration of ground level.

Can the state remove the berm from the lagoon access road to better drain water from adjoining properties where it is currently dammed? Why make cuts rather than remove the entire road?

The berm is the fill used to construct the maintenance road to the lagoon. After the first meeting, FPR conducted a site visit with wetland program personnel. They advised making multiple "cuts" or dips across that pathway to improve wetland connectivity, assist in water flow, and reduce any dam-like effects from occurring. This would still make the pathway traversable on foot, as this path is used primarily by deer hunters to access the undeveloped northwest portion of the parcel.

Following the second meeting, FPR further investigated the access road to evaluate full removal versus connectivity cuts. Based on mapped contours, there are a few limited locations where water flow is impeded by the service road and lagoon. Bringing those locations down to the surrounding grade should allow free flow of water through the area. Full removal appears unnecessary for flow and would cause heavy disturbance in an already highly revegetated area. The lagoon path contributes 0.08 acres to the total impervious surface calculation, so removal has little impact on the overall impervious surface quantity.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



How many grants has the state applied for to fund the rebuilding of North Hero State Park? Why can't we get more funding and keep the road?

The funding for this project is specifically targeted federal ARPA funding, functionally similar to a grant. FPR continues to lobby for recreation funds, though the current funding model of Vermont State Parks limits capacity beyond fee-based areas. The management of North Hero State Park as a campground has always been a struggle to justify financially, so the acquisition of funding to “rebuild” the park in any capacity would have been premature without a solid plan in place for long-term sustainable management.

Why would the lean-tos be demolished and not saved? Can the state keep the lean-tos or auction the lean-tos to fund park improvements?

The lean-tos at North Hero State Park have not been maintained in over a decade and are in fair to poor condition. Nearby State Parks do not currently have any use for additional used lean-tos that would justify the expense involved in relocating these structures. Auctioning individual lean-tos would be administratively and logistically a significant challenge that likely could not be justified by cost recovery.

STORMWATER-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

What does impervious mean and what are the requirements regarding impervious surfaces? Where did the stormwater regulations come from? Can State Parks get an exemption from the legislature?

The three-acre permitting rule is part of Act 64, the Vermont Clean Water Act. The rule defines impervious surfaces and there is little to no flexibility in determining what is and is not impervious. We do not anticipate a legislative exemption for Vermont State Parks, especially as there is a tight timeline of five years for stormwater compliance.

How wide is the current road? Is the new material itself pervious, or is the benefit coming from the increased width of the shoulders? Why not use a pervious paver surface, like at Alburgh Dunes State Park?

The current road is approximately 18 feet wide. The new fine gravel surface would still be impervious, with the impervious surface reduction coming from the grassy road shoulders. Based on the path length, width, and depth requirements, the cost of pervious pavers is financially infeasible at this location.

Could the current parcel be split between F&W and FPR to avoid the 3-acre rule?

The Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife is not interested in pursuing ownership of this parcel, but is supportive of the project.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



Do we have specific research that points to the role of the road in pollution in the lake? What about the impact on phosphorous? Why was North Hero State Park prioritized for phosphorous reduction?
We do not have specific research or numbers we are aware of. FPR is continuing to investigate whether a phosphorous reduction estimate can be made for this project, and any estimates received will be communicated at a later date. Regardless of phosphorous reduction amounts, all properties three acres or greater must conform to Act 64. Separately, Vermont State Parks is working with partners within the Lake Champlain basin on projects specifically targeted at phosphorous reduction.

Why is this one of the first projects, why aren't we doing more park stormwater projects throughout the state? Why is Vermont State Parks timing the project for Winter/Spring 2025? Why the current timeline?

FPR is currently working with Agency Facilities to meet stormwater regulations for all properties impacted by the 3-Acre Rule within the permitted five-year timeframe. Act 64 requires stormwater projects to be undertaken within five years of stormwater program approval of the initial NOI submission, which details plans for stormwater compliance. This is just one of the first group of projects that is "shovel-ready" with ARPA funding. The current ARPA funding deadline for funds to be encumbered by the end of the 2024 calendar year. This project is targeted for the winter season to reduce environmental disturbance to soils, vegetation, and wildlife.

Why is the state removing impervious surfaces from the road to meet stormwater regulations and not from other areas in the park? Why is the state focusing on the road and not the campsite loops?

The main road contributes a substantial portion of impervious surface to the overall amount of impervious surface in the park. The loop roads are also being considered and narrowed down to a walking trail width as part of this project. Maintaining a walking path around these loops tells an important story about the cultural history and historical significance of the park, as the loop configuration is a defining feature of the National Park Service's mid-century modern-era campground design. The remaining impervious surface, including the main parking area, staff housing, and equipment garage, is critical to the operation of North Hero State Park. The only other way to meet the full 25% reduction while keeping the road width intact would be to till and import soil for each of the tent sites. As these are currently already naturally revegetating, this would cause heavy disturbance in sensitive areas that are already revegetating, but just don't yet meet the requirements to be considered altered from impervious to pervious. Impervious surface calculations can be found in the North Hero Site Redevelopment Plan, linked at: <https://vtstateparks.blogspot.com/2024/07/second-planning-meeting-north-hero.html>

If the park is unstaffed, why is the staff housing remaining as impervious surface?

Staff from other nearby parks are still seasonally housed at North Hero State Park. Park housing is critical for seasonal staff recruitment in the current hiring environment.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



Will invasive species management be considered in the revegetation plan?

Invasive species management is outside of the scope of this project. However, FPR will work with the ANR District Stewardship Team to identify funding opportunities for invasive species management at North Hero State Park as appropriate into the future.

ACCESSIBILITY QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Questions regarding accessibility and the current plan not meeting the needs of elderly people and people with accessibility issues.

The main beach walking path will be constructed to ADA standards with accessible surfacing. The loop paths will be constructed to trail-based accessibility standards. There will be natural rest points with benches along the trails. Additionally, the main path will remain an Other Power-Driven Mobility Device (OPDMD) trail, allowing folks with mobility issues to obtain a permit to use a vehicle, golf cart, or other means to access the trail. The full OPDMD policy can be found here:

[https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/About the Department/Rules and Regulations/Library/ANR%20Lands%20Policy%20OPDMD.pdf](https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/About%20the%20Department/Rules%20and%20Regulations/Library/ANR%20Lands%20Policy%20OPDMD.pdf)

How will people from out-of-state know about OPDMD access?

The State of Vermont has information about OPDMD passes and policies online, and information will also be located on the North Hero State Park website after the conclusion of the project, as well as posted on a sign directly at the park.

How will the gate be opened? Will the gate mechanisms be accessible?

The gate will be locked with a padlock, and OPDMD pass holders will be provided the key information. FPR will be evaluating the gate mechanisms for ADA compliance.

Could there be golf cart rides for people with mobility issues?

People with mobility issues can apply for an OPDMD permit to utilize their golf cart or other vehicle on pathways and trails. It is not feasible operationally for Vermont State Parks to provide golf cart shuttle services to visitors.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



BOAT ACCESS QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Why can't the state provide funding to restore boat access? This plan wouldn't allow people to launch kayaks/canoes/boats.

The boat launch at North Hero State Park has not been a functioning boat launch for over a decade. The concrete ramp has been displaced and is no longer functional, and there is mapped evidence of erosion in that area, which has silted in significantly since camping operations ceased. Additionally, the boat launch is FPR-owned, not F&W-owned, and is therefore not a designated Access Area.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife maintains multiple nearby access areas. Stephensen Point Access Area is only 1.3 miles from the North Hero State Park entrance, and Kings Bay, North Hero Causeway, and Dillenbeck Bay are all within a 3-mile radius of North Hero State Park. Dillenbeck Bay is the furthest driving distance from North Hero State Park at 10 minutes. Additionally, kayaks and canoes could be carted or carried by visitors to the beach area at North Hero State Park if they desire.

Will North Hero State Park still be on the paddlers' trail?

Yes, North Hero State Park will remain a stop on the Paddlers Trail.

PROCESS QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

Concern that North Hero residents were not involved in the initial decisions.

Public involvement meetings regarding the future of North Hero State Park date back over a decade. Feedback from previous public involvement meetings, as well as visitor feedback, visitation data, and financial information, were all incorporated into the planning process. This planning process also included review and feedback by the Essex District Stewardship Team, as well as site visits from the wetlands program, Department of Historic Preservation, and an RTE assessment by F&W's State Lands Ecologist.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



FUTURE OPERATIONS QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

In converting the existing road into paths, is there funding to maintain that infrastructure? What will keep it from falling into similar disrepair? Who is going to be maintaining the park? How will the park be funded moving forward?

General funding for all park maintenance activities and staffing comes from the parks special fund, comprised primarily of revenue from gate fees. This project will result in less infrastructure to maintain, as it removes defunct structures, more clearly delineates mowed areas, and converts asphalt to packed gravel, which is significantly easier for staff to maintain, both operationally and financially. Internally, a new operations manual will be created for future staff at North Hero State Park laying out roles and responsibilities regarding grounds maintenance. Knight Point State Park staff will be actively taking over management of North Hero State Park going forward.

Concerns were raised regarding bus parking at the park and the influx of kids in the park. Comment that we are closing the park to locals and opening it to outsiders. Request for a “beach access” sticker that would allow North Hero residents or other visitors who pay a special fee to drive on the path and everyone else to walk.

A wide, accessible walking path will provide school groups, families, and people of all ages a safer land-based recreational experience at North Hero State Park. It is our goal to encourage outdoor recreation, especially as a way for young people to reap the social and health benefits associated with getting outside and being active. North Hero State Park is federally encumbered public land, and is open to all, regardless of town of residence. For this reason, as well as logistical challenges and safety concerns, we do not support a resident or fee-based driving pass to access the beach area.

Will the previously existing nature trails be maintained? A general request for more walking trails.

The nature trails are now functionally operating as social trails. Additional maintained trails are outside of the scope of this project but are a future consideration for the parcel and properly sited trails are consistent with land management goals.

How will you keep people from driving down the path? Why not keep the path open to vehicle traffic but put up speed limit signs?

This plan involves a gate located beyond the parking area to limit vehicle traffic to only emergency vehicles, spiny softshell turtle monitoring vehicles, park maintenance vehicles, and visitors with OPDMD permits. Speed limit signs are largely ineffective at controlling behavior in Vermont State Parks, especially in unstaffed areas.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC INPUT RECEIVED REGARDING NORTH HERO STATE PARK



Concern over access to the park by emergency services.

We are not limiting emergency vehicle access to the park. There will be a Knox Box located on the gate for emergency vehicles to gain access. The road width will now be 9 feet wide with an additional 4.5 feet of maintained grassed shoulders on each side. Ambulances are approximately seven feet wide, so the current plan provides a wide enough path for an ambulance to traverse, if necessary, as medical emergencies are far and away the most common emergencies seen in similar parks. The width is similar to or exceeds service roads in other parks that have been utilized by emergency vehicles. The removal of all camping-associated structures removes the possibility of a structure fire beyond the gated area. The likelihood and potential severity of a forest fire in this location are low due to the standing water and saturated soils that persist most of the year.

What if someone gets hurt on the new path with no vehicle access? What is the best course of action if it's not life-threatening?

Injuries should be handled just as they are on all other trails in Vermont State Parks. Emergency services should be contacted if an injury is severe enough that someone cannot make it off the trail safely.

Concern over flooding on the road and how the water will pool in the spring.

FPR cannot control the lake level, and this has always been an issue at North Hero State Park due to the low elevation. The new walking path would be constructed of reclaimed asphalt topped with surpack, which should add approximately 1" of elevation to the path. The pathway surfacing is compactable enough that it should withstand occasional seasonal flooding. The grade dips incorporated into this plan will better allow for wetland connectivity and flow of water as well.

Could primitive camping be an option?

North Hero State Park is not currently designated for primitive camping. Due to the low elevation of the park and the significant wetland communities, it is unlikely that primitive camping, by its current FPR definition, would be a compatible use. Additionally, wastewater regulations require toilet facilities in any developed campground. Many Vermont State Parks, including nearby Grand Isle State Park, retain campsites for off-the-road bicyclists. FPR recognizes the high camping demand in the area and continues to explore opportunities as they arise, such as the acquisition of the Alburgh Bluffs parcel.

Why doesn't the state just sell off individual parcels of North Hero State Park?

North Hero State Park is encumbered under LWCF funding. Because of the funding requirements, the land is required to stay in recreational use in perpetuity. Additionally, this would require legislative action, limit public recreational access, and subdivision likely would not be granted due to lack of wastewater capacity.