

Missisquoi River Accessibility Assessments Report

Assessment #4, December 16th, 2024

Participants: VT Adaptive Assessments Team

Project: Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Initiative

Objective: Assess accessibility of water access sites along the Missisquoi River and develop recommendations for future improvements.

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Introduction:

As part of the Accessibility Initiative, we conducted site visits to evaluate the accessibility of five water access locations along the Missisquoi River. The assessments aimed to identify existing barriers, note features supporting individuals with disabilities, and propose actionable recommendations to improve inclusivity. This report outlines the methodology, findings for each site, and suggested improvements for accessible recreation opportunities.

Methodology:

1. Parking Area

Upon arriving at each site, the assessment began by evaluating the parking situation. We looked specifically at:

- Terrain: Was the parking lot flat and easy to navigate for those with mobility impairments?
- Designated Spaces: Were there handicapped parking spaces, and if so, how many? How close were these spaces to the water access area?
- Accessibility Features: Were accessible restrooms or porta-potties available on-site?

2. Pathway to Water Access

From the parking area, we assessed the pathway leading down to the water access point. Key elements included:

- Distance & Surface: The distance from the parking lot to the water was measured, and the type of surface (pavement, dirt, gravel, etc.) was evaluated for its accessibility.

- Obstacles: We identified potential obstacles, such as steps, uneven terrain, or narrow pathways, that could hinder access for individuals with disabilities.
- Slope Analysis: Using tools like an inclinometer and measuring tape, we measured the slope of the trail to determine if it exceeded 5%. Steep slopes can present a significant challenge for people with mobility issues.

3. Water Access Area Evaluation

Once at the water access area, we examined the landing and put-in points:

- Flatness and Space: We assessed whether the area was spacious enough to allow easy movement and how flat it was, which is important for safe water entry.
- Material and Infrastructure: The composition of the put-in area (concrete, sand, gravel, etc.) was noted, as was the presence of any pre-existing infrastructure, such as docks or ramps. We discussed the possibility of adding or adapting infrastructure to improve accessibility.
- Adaptability: For sites with existing infrastructure that was not fully accessible, we workshopped ideas for modifications, such as installing an accessible dock, lift, or ramp.

4. Environmental and Sensory Factors

Additional considerations included environmental factors that might affect the accessibility experience, such as:

- Sensory Stimuli: The level of noise, brightness, or shade, which can affect those with sensory sensitivities.
- Site Popularity: How crowded or busy the site typically is, as this can influence usability for people with disabilities.
- Visitor Services & Safety: We evaluated the availability of visitor services (such as benches or informational signage) and identified any safety concerns.
- River Conditions: Presence of potential obstacles or hazards, such as: rapids, rocks/boulders, currents, water depth, etc.

5. Documentation

Throughout the assessments, we used a structured form created by Norm Staunton to take notes. This form guided our evaluations, ensuring that we captured data on all relevant aspects of

accessibility. We also took photographs to document the sites and any features or obstacles that might require modification.

Findings and Recommendations:

Site 1. Louie's Landing (44.958362, -73.166263)

Parking – Parking area is flat and wide, half pavement and half gravel. Two designated accessible parking spaces, at least one on both sections (Figures 1 & 2). Room for parking and turning around a trailer.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Bathroom – There is no bathroom at Louie's Landing, but there is one a short walk away at Mac's Bend (~400-500' down a trail/road that starts as grass then transitions to gravel). There's a gate at Louie's Landing that is only open from September to December. When that gate is closed, there's a 46" wide gap to get through and access the trail. Restrooms also available at visitor's center down the road.



Figure 3.

Trail to Water – ~85 feet from parking area to water’s edge with reasonable grades. Not really a “trail”, just a flat, paved parking lot. Some informal trails leading down to the water as well with steep with loose gravel and dirt (Figure 4.)

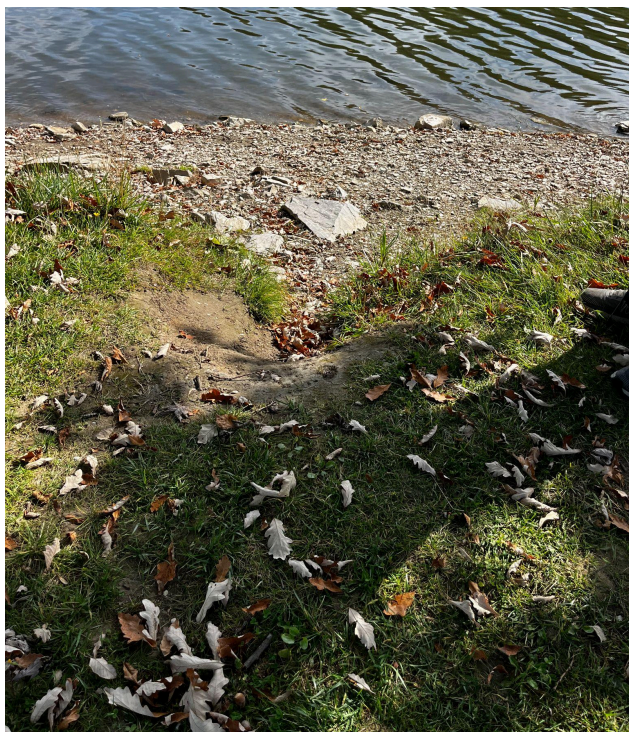


Figure 4.

Water Access – A 53-foot concrete boat ramp with a slope of less than 5% provides a generally accessible entry point. There are a handful of other informal access points leading down to the water that were established by people scrambling down the bank. They are somewhat steep, with loose rock and dirt so not very safe.



Figure 5.

Site Conditions – Popular and often crowded. Limited shade with potential for wind exposure.

Water Conditions – Flat water with a slight current. No rapids present. Some potential for water-borne pollution (algae and runoff).

Amenities – There's a Visitors Center two miles down the road. Pretty close to Swanton, connects to Lake Champlain.

Overview:

Beautiful site with significant accessibility-friendly infrastructure already in place. Good parking situation with designated handicapped spaces, room to load and unload, concrete ramp with gradual slope leading down to water. Good candidate for a fully accessible site, would just need to make a handful of small improvements.

Recommendations:

- Install benches along the main trail and near the water's edge.
- Add an accessible restroom at this access area so paddlers don't need to leave to find one.
- Secure unsafe areas near the water with railings or signage to prevent falls.
- Explore adding a small shelter or shaded seating for increased comfort.

Site 2. Mac's Bend (44.972463, -73.168117)

Parking – Gravel lot with some potholes. No designated accessible spaces and no parking signage. There's room to park/turn around a trailer, and an area that's blocked off for loading/unloading boats. Plenty of space in the lot, could establish designated accessible spaces.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

Bathroom – No restrooms on-site. There is one accessible porta potty a little ways down the trail connecting Mac's Bend to Louie's Landing. Sign pointing down the trail towards the restroom at the beginning of the trail next to the big Mac's Bend refuge sign.



Figure 8.

Signage – There's some refuge signage present.

Trail to Water – No defined trail; parking area connects directly to two concrete ramps. A nearby area for storing mobility devices exists.

Water Access – There are two concrete ramps present. Plenty wide (~15') and roughly 30' from start to water's edge. Continues 8 feet into the water. Steeper slope than Louie's Landing, greater than 5% grade. Room to launch multiple boats at once. Launch enters moving water. There's a place nearby to store mobility devices.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

Site Conditions – Site Conditions – Site is quiet and pleasant, subject to some strong sunlight but has shade in places. Not too busy, although weekend traffic can cause some congestion. Other recreationists use the site as well, including hunting, fishing, dog walking, and power boats. Site well maintained by the refuge. There's a "kissing gate" at the start of the gravel road leading to Louie's Landing, open from September to December.

Water Conditions – Flat water with some current.

Amenities – Visitor's Center just down the road. Benches present that are suitable for people in wheelchairs.

Overview:

Popular, well-established access area utilized heavily by a variety of recreationists. Decent option for an accessible water access. Some infrastructure already in place, would just need to make a few improvements to bring it up to standard. Would take an investment, but could be worth it. One consideration is that this site is right up the road from Louie's Landing, which is probably a better candidate for accessibility, and it might be redundant to make both accessible.

Recommendations:

- Establish designated accessible parking spaces with clear signage.
- Add an accessible restroom at the site so paddlers don't have to travel to get to one.
- Determine if the ramp's grade is too steep; if so, come up with a solution to reduce it for improved accessibility.
- Add a wayfinding signage for clarity.

Site 3. Sandy Point/Larry Green Access (44.970524, -73.211101)

Parking – Paved parking lot with one signed accessible parking spot. Tons of space in the lot, sufficient for turning around and parking trailers. There is a signed “Accessible Aisle” next to the spaces for loading and unloading.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

Bathrooms – Three total restrooms, one of which is accessible. They are located in the parking area, roughly ~200' from the water's edge.



Figure 13.

Signage – This is a Fish & Wildlife site, so they have their standard signage present. Good signage.

Trail to Water – The main water access is a concrete boat ramp leading directly from the parking lot, but there's also another informal trail leading through the woods over to the water. Gravel trail leading to a stone-filled beach.



Figure 14.

Water Access – The concrete boat ramp is 30' long and very wide, with room for launching multiple boats at once. It has a ~11% grade and the concrete is grooved. There's a dock next to it, which is 40' long and wobbly. There's a large gravel beach to the left of the ramp with some scattered debris.

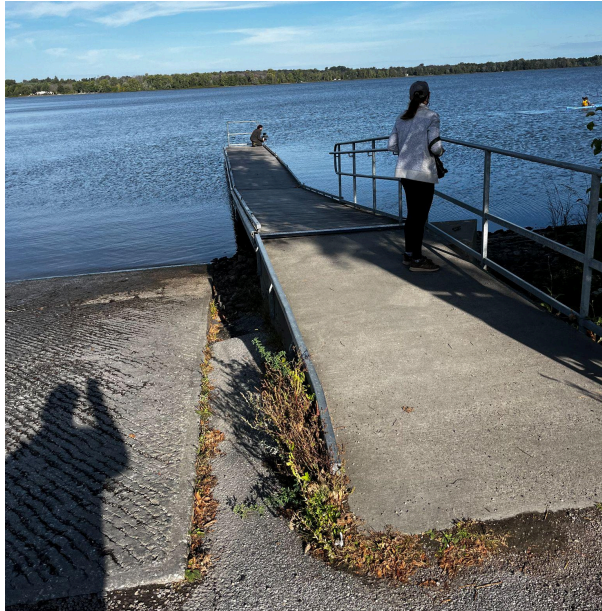


Figure 15.

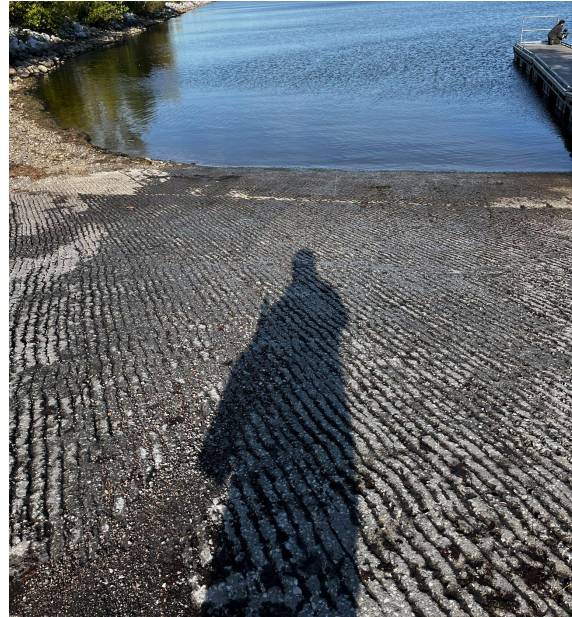


Figure 16.

Site Conditions – Road noise, sunny site without much access to shade. Near train tracks, so infrequent noise from passing trains, and a working dairy farm so occasionally smelly. Site is heavily used by fishermen, hunters and power boaters. Is basically on the border, so there's a Border Patrol presence. Site maintained by Fish & Wildlife.

Water Conditions – Flat, open water. This is a lake access.

Amenities – None, really, aside from the boating facilities.

Overview:

This is a good candidate for accessibility. The parking situation is good, with designated handicapped spaces and even an “Accessibility Aisle” for loading and unloading. Nearby restrooms, including one accessible portapotty. Long, flat concrete boat ramp leading down to the water with plenty of space on the side to stage boats and load people into them. Would just need to make a couple of minor improvements to bring this up to a high standard.

Recommendations:

- Stabilize the dock to ensure safe use.
- Improve the informal gravel trail with firm surfacing.
- Consider adding shaded areas and debris cleanup at the beach.

Site 4. Babbie Access (44.910189, -73.105749)

Parking – Gravel parking lot with some potholes. No designated accessible spaces. Room to park and turn around a trailer.

Bathrooms – No restrooms.

Signage – There's the standard Fish & Wildlife signage present.

Trail to Water – 23' from the parking lot to the water's edge. Not a great access, basically a gravel washout. Steep grade, somewhat slippery footing, loose/protruding rocks and other debris, narrow (Figure 17.). Not suitable for anyone with a disability.



Figure 17.

Water Access – No established access, basically just a washout leading down to a dropoff into the water. Not very suitable for launching boats for anyone, let alone people with mobility issues or disabilities. Not much space on the river's edge to maneuver (Figure 18.).



Figure 18.

Site Conditions – No shade. Minimally developed site, pretty rugged. Presence of dead animal and some trash dumped in woods nearby. Not busy at all. Noise from adjacent road. Site is maintained by Fish & Wildlife. Seems to have been used as a homeless encampment at some point in the recent past (Figure 19.).



Figure 19.

Water Conditions – Flat water with minor current.

Amenities – No amenities.

Overview:

Not a good candidate for this project. Currently inaccessible to anyone with physical disabilities or even mobility challenges, would take significant investment to even bring it up to a baseline of accessibility. In addition, not a very pleasant site. Trash and debris strewn around site, evidence of homeless activity, and limited room to maneuver down at the water's edge.

Recommendations:

- No further investment; the site is not suitable for accessibility improvements.

Site 5. Swanton Public Boat Launch (44.922826, -73.124096)

Parking – Parking area is a mix of gravel and pavement. Currently under construction and being rebuilt (Figure 20.). Unsure of what improvements will be made but is currently closed.



Figure 20.

Bathrooms – No restrooms

Signage – There's a kiosk at the parking area, but it's kind of old and only has a few scattered signs (Figure 21.). Should be refreshed/updated with new signage.



Figure 21.

Trail to Water – The trail to the water is basically just the asphalt boat ramp. 72' from start to water's edge and ~15' wide. Slope is greater than 5% but not too steep. Patches of asphalt that are also under construction and being fixed.



Figure 22.

Water Access – Water access comes at the end of the asphalt boat ramp. Plenty of space for multiple boats for launch at once. Steps would be beneficial on either side of the ramp. Second

put-in area as well that has some cracked asphalt, seems to have been damaged during flooding (Figure 24.). Could be rehabilitated and has potential to be a good accessible access.



Figure 23.



Figure 24.

Site Conditions – Site is currently under construction so there's construction noise. In absence of that, would be a pretty nice, peaceful site. Maintained by Town of Swanton. Some shaded areas. Difficult to determine how busy the site is as it's currently closed for construction. Likely also used by fishermen, walkers, power boaters

Water Conditions – River is flat and slow-moving, not much of a current.

Amenities – Nothing really

Overview:

Some accessibility potential but, at present, I'd say that it's limited – probably not the best investment. That being said, there's construction presently underway to repair flood damage and the site may be more suitable for accessibility after the work is completed. Could be a good idea to keep an eye on the site as the project progresses, but for the time being, does not stand out among the sites we visited.

Recommendations:

- Add steps or a low-grade alternative to assist mobility-impaired users.
- Improve overall signage and create accessible parking zones.

- Reevaluate the site post-construction to incorporate accessible design elements.
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Conclusion:

The Missisquoi River accessibility assessments highlighted both challenges and opportunities for improvement across the five evaluated sites. Notably, Louie's Landing, Mac's Bend and Larry Green Accesses show the highest potential for developing accessible recreation infrastructure. Babbie Access is not a good candidate for our accessibility initiative, due to its steep, inaccessible water access and the overall quality-of-use of the site. Swanton Public Boat Launch has some potential, but will require further evaluation pending reconstruction efforts. By prioritizing the recommended enhancements, these sites can become more inclusive for individuals with disabilities while maintaining the natural beauty and recreation value of the Missisquoi River.

Recommended Accessibility Projects:

The following sites have the greatest potential for accessibility projects along the Missisquoi River:

1. Louie's Landing

Proposed workplan:

- Install benches along the main trail and near the water's edge.
- Add an accessible restroom at this access area so paddlers don't need to leave to find one.
- Secure unsafe areas near the water with railings or signage to prevent falls.
- Explore adding a small shelter or shaded seating for increased comfort.

2. Mac's Bend

Proposed workplan:

- Establish designated accessible parking spaces with clear signage.
- Add an accessible restroom at the site so paddlers don't have to travel to get to one.
- Determine if the ramp's grade is too steep; if so, come up with a solution to reduce it for improved accessibility.
- Add a wayfinding signage for clarity.

3. Sandy Point/Larry Green

Proposed workplan:

- Stabilize the dock to ensure safe use.
- Improve the informal gravel trail with firm surfacing.
- Consider adding shaded areas and debris cleanup at the beach.