

Winooski Valley Accessibility Assessments Report

Assessment #1, September 10th, 2024

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Project: Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Initiative

Objective: Assess accessibility of water access sites and develop recommendations for future improvements.

Introduction:

As part of our Accessibility Initiative, NFCT and VT Adaptive staff conducted a series of site visits to assess the current accessibility of seven different water access locations in the Winooski Valley. The goal of these visits was to evaluate the conditions, collect information, and develop recommendations for improving accessibility for people with disabilities. This report summarizes the approach taken during these assessments, key findings at each site, and our recommendations for future improvements.

Methodology

The site assessments followed a structured process designed to ensure thorough evaluations of accessibility features from parking to water access.

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.

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:

After each site assessment, the team gathered for a final discussion to compile recommendations for potential improvements. Below is a summary of our findings and suggestions:

Site 1: Shelburne Pond (44.376903, -73.162278)

Findings:

Parking Area — There is ample space in the parking lot, making it feasible to establish multiple official accessible parking spaces. However, the current parking area is approximately 160 feet from the water, and the path down to the water has a slope of 14% (Figure 2.), which poses a challenge for accessibility. While there is no accessible bathroom on site year-round, Fish & Wildlife reportedly places a seasonal accessible bathroom. There is also room to create an accessible parking spot near the water (Figure 2, middle-left), which would mitigate the issue of the steep slope.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Trail to Water — The trail leading to the water is wide, open, flat, and made of gravel, but the steepness of the slope makes it challenging for an accessible trail. A compliant accessible trail would need to be around 210 feet long, which might be difficult to achieve due to space constraints.



Figure 3.

Water Access Area — There is a 50-foot floating dock next to the boat ramp. Although there are bollards at the front, the 58-inch spacing between them is sufficient to accommodate a wheelchair (Figure 4.). However, there is currently a 24-inch gap between the top of the dock and the water, making it inaccessible for individuals with mobility challenges. The boat ramp itself has diagonal grooves in the concrete that could hinder wheelchair use, and there is a 6-inch lip from the boat ramp down to the gravel beach (Figure 5.). The site is well-developed, quiet, well-maintained, and located close to population centers, making it a strong candidate for improvement. It is managed by Vermont Fish & Wildlife, a long-term partner of our organization.



Figure 4.

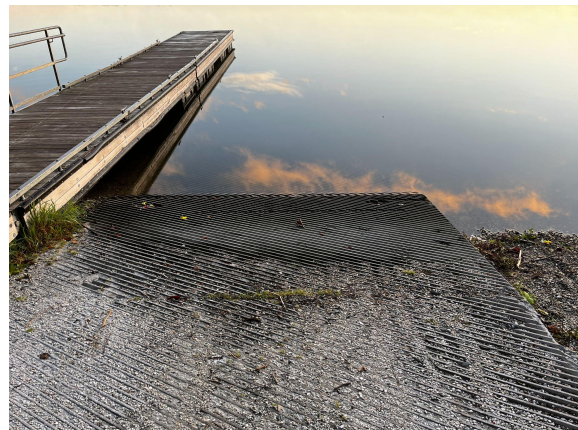


Figure 5.

Recommendations:

Restrooms — Ensure the presence of an accessible porta-potty year-round or seasonally, in coordination with Fish & Wildlife.

Parking — Build an accessible unloading/staging area or a dedicated parking space near the water in the grassy area to the left of the dock.

Trail Development — If feasible, develop an accessible trail from the current parking area down to the water. This would be challenging due to space limitations but could greatly improve accessibility.

Beach Access — Move the large rocks currently in the water to create a more accessible beach area. Adding fill or a seasonally removable beach mat could further enhance accessibility.

Dock & Water Access — Consider installing a lift on the dock or replacing the existing dock with an accessible one to bridge the gap between the dock and the water. Additionally, modifications to the boat ramp (e.g., smoothing out the diagonal grooves and eliminating the 6-inch lip) would facilitate easier water access for individuals using wheelchairs.

Site 2: Indian Brook (44.532353, -73.095505)

Findings:

Parking Area — The parking lot is spacious, with one signed handicapped parking space (Figure 7.). However, this space could be better positioned for accessibility. The distance from the parking area to the water is about 70 feet. Currently, there is a non-accessible porta-potty on-site, which would need to be replaced for full accessibility (Figure 6.).



Figure 6. Existing portapotty



Figure 7. Designates accessible parking space

Put-in Areas — There are two put-in points at this site. The main boat launch has a slope that is too steep for accessible paddlers. However, the second put-in area is more suitable, as it features a relatively flat trail (5% grade) that leads 85 feet from the parking lot to a sandy water access

point (Figure 8.). This trail, however, has some small dips that need to be filled in or bridged, and there is a water seep from a small stream that needs to be diverted to prevent water from running into the put-in area (Figure 9.). Additionally, some branches and brush are encroaching into the trail corridor, which would need to be cleared. The area is quiet and shaded, which adds to the overall accessibility experience.



Figure 8. Widen & harden trail leading to water Figure 9. Divert flowing water, harden put-in

Signage — While there is some existing signage, it is somewhat confusing and could benefit from improvements, both along the road leading to the site and at the trail itself.

Recommendations:

Parking & Wayfinding — Move the accessible parking space five feet to the left to provide more room for unloading and add a “No Parking” sign next to it to ensure the space remains clear for those with disabilities. Improve wayfinding signage on the road leading to the site to make it easier for visitors to locate the accessible parking area.

Restrooms — Replace the existing porta-potty with an accessible version, and ensure it is located near the accessible parking space for convenience.

Trail Improvements — Pave the trail leading to the accessible put-in area with compacted gravel, filling in the small dips and creating a smooth, level surface. Clear branches and brush from the trail corridor to ensure a wide, unobstructed path.

Put-in Modifications — Remove rocks from both the beach and the water at the put-in area to create a more accessible water entry point. Install a water bar to divert the small stream that

currently seeps into the put-in. Consider adding a bit of sand to the put-in area to further level the surface and improve the ease of access.

Signage Enhancements — Add signage to clearly indicate the trail is accessible, and generally improve the clarity and visibility of signage around the site to enhance the overall accessibility experience.

Site 3: Colchester Pond (44.550668, -73.125002)

Findings:

Parking Area — The parking area is small and in poor condition, with several potholes. There is one designated accessible parking space, but currently, it is obstructed by a pile of gravel, rendering it unusable. There is one accessible porta-potty on-site. An informational kiosk is present, but it is outdated and in need of an update.

Water Access Trails — Two trails lead from the parking area to the water. The main trail is 450 feet long but has several issues that limit accessibility (Figure 10.). It is narrow, with widths as small as 24 inches, has a 12% grade, and includes 10 timber check steps, which create barriers for individuals with mobility challenges. The alternative trail is more accessible, with a gentler 6% grade and no steps. There is also room at the site to reroute trails to improve accessibility.



Figure 10.

Bollards — At the start of the trail, there is a set of bollards with gaps of 32 and 37 inches, which are too narrow for many wheelchair users.



Figure 11.

Bog Bridge — A 50-foot bog bridge is present at the end of the trail, but it is in poor condition. The bridge has become twisted, and the boards have begun to rot, particularly toward the last section. The dock connected to the bog bridge is currently underwater, and the entire structure needs attention to make it safe and usable.



Figure 12.

Site Usage & Amenities — The site appears to be well-used and maintained by the Winooski Valley Parks District. There is a picnic table at the top of the trail near the parking area, as well as some boat carts available for use.

Recommendations:

Parking Area — Clear the gravel pile from the designated accessible parking space and consider repaving the parking area to eliminate potholes and improve accessibility for vehicles and pedestrians.

Restrooms & Kiosk — Update the informational kiosk with current and relevant information about the site. Ensure the accessible porta-potty is well-maintained and positioned conveniently.

Trail Enhancements — Add 8-10 more timber steps to the existing trail to normalize the rise/run to a manageable slope of 6%. Cribbing the steps would help with stabilization and safety. Consider rerouting the main trail to eliminate obstacles such as narrow widths and steep slopes. The second, more accessible trail should be improved, and the trail corridor should be pruned to provide a clear, wide path for all users.

Bog Bridge & Dock — Repair the bog bridge, replacing the rotten boards and rebuilding the final section that has become twisted. Fix the gangway and consider replacing the existing dock, as it is currently underwater and unusable. A new, accessible dock would significantly improve water access for visitors with disabilities.

Bollards — Widen the gaps between the bollards to at least 36 inches (ideally 42 inches or more) to accommodate wheelchair users and others with mobility challenges.

Site 4: Colchester Point (44.536688, -73.274996)

Findings:

Parking Area — The site has a large, flat parking area with two designated handicapped spaces (Figure 13.). There is room to establish more accessible spaces if needed. An accessible porta-potty is located nearby, and there is an informational kiosk (Figure 14.). However, one of the designated accessible spaces is missing its sign. The site is close to a population center and is generally quiet but can get busy during peak hours.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.

Trail to Water — There is no formal trail to the water; instead, the large parking lot extends right up to the water's edge. The distance from the parking lot to the water is about 65 feet, with a slight 4% slope leading to the floating dock via a gangway. The boat ramp itself is steep, with a 15% grade, which could make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to access the water safely. The site is not shaded, so visitors are exposed to full sun.

Dock & Water Access — The floating dock is the primary access point to the water (Figure 16.), but modifications would be needed to make it more accessible to individuals with mobility challenges, particularly those using wheelchairs. The site also has a wooden fence along the water's edge, but the current railing height may not be accessible for wheelchair users who want to fish.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.

Signage — Signage is generally good, but one of the accessible parking spaces is missing its designated sign.

Recommendations:

Parking & Signage — Install the missing accessible parking sign to ensure compliance with accessibility standards. Consider adding more designated accessible parking spaces if needed in the future, given the ample space available.

Dock Modifications — Modify the floating dock to improve accessibility, potentially by installing a lift or an EZ dock system, which would allow individuals with disabilities to access the water more easily and safely.

Fishing Access — Lower the height of the railing on the wooden fence along the water to make it accessible for individuals in wheelchairs who wish to fish.

Shade Considerations — While not essential, adding some shaded areas near the parking lot or along the water could improve the comfort and usability of the site for all visitors, particularly during peak hours when the site gets busier and in sunny weather.

Site 5: Delta Park (44.536078, -73.276513)

Findings:

Parking Area — The parking area is small, lacks designated accessible parking spaces, and has no restroom facilities. Bollards are present, further limiting accessibility.

Trail to Beach — The trail leading to the beach is long and composed of soft sand, making it difficult to navigate. Additionally, several downed trees block the path, and the beach itself is scattered with driftwood and other natural debris. The soft sand and obstacles make it highly challenging for people with mobility impairments.

Site Suitability — Given the condition of the trail, the sandy terrain, and the lack of accessible infrastructure, this site is unsuitable for an accessibility project. It was reviewed simply because it was in close proximity to other sites being assessed.

Recommendations:

No Action — Delta Park is not recommended for an accessibility project at this time due to its unsuitability for accessible recreation and the extensive natural and structural barriers present.

Site 6: Heineburg Bridge (44.525482, -73.256472)

Findings:

Parking Area — The parking area is small, made of dirt, and currently has no designated accessible spaces or restroom facilities. Some signage is present in the parking area, but accessibility features are lacking.

Trail to Water — The trail leading from the parking lot to the water passes through an open, grassy field. It is about 100 feet long, relatively narrow, and has a gentle slope of 1%. However, once the trail reaches the top of the sandy bank, the slope becomes very steep (approximately 22%), and there is no established access infrastructure (Figures 17). The current path to the water is essentially a gullied-out bank that visitors scramble down (Figure 18.), which poses safety and accessibility challenges.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

Site Environment — The site is quiet and partially shaded, creating a peaceful environment. However, it is located next to a busy road, which introduces some car noise. The site is near a population center, making it a potentially well-used area.

Recommendations:

Trail & Water Access Improvements — To make this site accessible, the trail would need significant modifications. The most viable option for accessibility would involve using machinery to regrade the trail, creating a consistent 5% slope from the parking lot down to the

water. However, this approach would be very invasive and could detract from the natural aesthetic of the site. Seasonal flooding is also a challenge. Alternatively, building stone staircases could improve access for the general public, but this solution would not provide accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Parking Area Upgrades — Consider designating and paving one or more accessible parking spaces in the dirt lot. Installing an accessible porta-potty would also improve site amenities.

Infrastructure Considerations — Installing a more formal water access point, such as a boardwalk or small dock, could provide a safer and more structured path to the water, even if full accessibility for individuals with disabilities proves challenging at this site.

Site 7: Millyard Access (44.489816, -73.190726)

Findings:

Site Condition — Due to recent storms, the infrastructure at Salmon Hole has been completely washed away. The site is no longer suitable for an accessibility project, as no usable facilities or access points remain.

Recommendations:

Site Assessment — The site would require significant rebuilding and restoration before it could be considered for an accessibility project. The addition of stone steps along informal access trails is a worthy effort to improve access here, primarily for anglers and the public.

Conclusion:

The site visits provided valuable insights into the current state of accessibility at these seven water access points. While some locations already feature aspects that cater to individuals with disabilities, several require substantial modifications to improve accessibility. By implementing the recommendations developed during these assessments, we can significantly enhance the inclusivity of these sites, ensuring that they are safe and welcoming for all users, regardless of ability. The team will continue to refine these plans, prioritize projects based on feasibility and funding, and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to move forward with our Accessibility Initiative. Based on these initial assessments, the sites best suited to this accessibility initiative

are Indian Brook and Colchester Point. Shelburne Pond is a good candidate as well, though it would require a more intensive scope of work to address a couple of challenges.

Recommended Accessibility Projects:

1. Indian Brook

Proposed workplan:

- Widen existing accessible parking spot and add an additional one
- Install an accessible portapotty near the parking sites
- Improve wayfinding signage along the road and at the access site to clearly indicate accessible infrastructure
- “Pave” trail to put-in with hard-packed gravel, widening to ~5’, flattening out dips, and clearing trail corridor
- Improve put-in area by removing rocks, leveling/widening boat launch by adding compacted material, and building a water bar to divert small stream currently flowing through access area

2. Colchester Point

Proposed workplan:

- Install missing accessible parking sign at the current handicapped parking space, establish one more space next to it. Add more accessibility signage.
- Improve water access from dock by adding accessible infrastructure (i.e. EZ or Boardsafe Dock)
- Consider alternate options for dock railing – currently borderline too narrow for wheelchairs
- Lower the height of the wooden railing adjacent to the parking lot to allow fishing access for those with disabilities

3. Shelburne Pond

- Construct an accessible unloading/parking area down by the water in grassy area to left of the dock
- Add accessible restroom in parking area
- Build accessible trail from parking area down to water with >5% grade
- Remove large rocks from boat launch area to left of the dock, build new accessible launch so as to avoid grooved ramp to right of dock

- Modify dock to accommodate accessible paddlers. Install lift or EZ dock system