

At Middlebury College, Blending Athletics and Sustainability

Middlebury College – Coordinator for Athletic Sustainability, Middlebury

Middlebury College is well known nationally for many of its environmental initiatives. After all, it does have the oldest undergraduate environmental studies program in the country. It also aims for sustainability to be an integral part of the entire campus community. The dining halls divert 75% of their food waste from landfills through a composting program. A student-run, college-owned bike shop allows students to get help fixing their bikes or rent bikes for just \$25 per semester. The list of environmental projects and initiatives at Middlebury is a long one, and now it also includes sustainable athletics.

Andrew Gardner became the college’s Coordinator for Athletic Sustainability a few years ago when a discussion about installing sustainable turf on the football field made it clear that all of the college’s athletics teams could be doing more to lessen their environmental impacts. Since that time, Andrew and student liaisons from the different athletic teams have instituted changes such as converting a pick-up truck used to haul ski equipment to run on waste vegetable oil, improving travel schedules so that some of the men’s and women’s teams share buses to away games, and converting to low flow shower heads in the locker rooms.

In the future, the plan is for Gardner and the team liaisons to choose one project each year on which to focus, like increasing the number and quality of bicycle parking areas near the athletic center in an effort to increase the use of bicycles by athletes on campus.

Already the team liaisons have been a driving force in improving sustainability in athletics at the college. Gardner says that many of the grant proposals to make improvements, such as changing out light switches in the locker rooms and some equipment purchasing decisions, have come from the students. In his words, “the kids run the show.”



Image provided by Middlebury College

► Contact information:

Andrew Gardner, Nordic Ski Team Head Coach and Coordinator for Athletic Sustainability,
Middlebury College
<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/about/green>
agardner@middlebury.edu



A Trail That’s Close to Homes and Hearts

Trail Around Middlebury; New Haven, Weybridge, Cornwall and Middlebury

If you enjoy getting out on the trail for a hike, Vermont is a great place to live. Hiking trails crisscross the state’s mountains, forests, and meadows. Some of these paths are maintained by government agencies and nonprofit organizations, and some, like the Trail Around Middlebury (TAM), are maintained through unique collaborations.

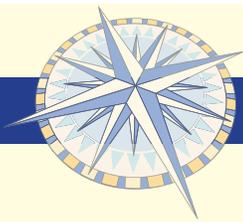
The construction on TAM began in the early 1990s, and today it is a 16-mile loop that runs through the towns of New Haven, Weybridge, Cornwall, and Middlebury. The Middlebury Area Land Trust (MALT), the participating towns, Middlebury College, and private landowners own the land through which it runs, and volunteers maintain the trail. Suzanne Young, MALT’s Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator, says, “It’s really a collaboration of a lot of volunteers who make it



Image provided by Middlebury Area Land Trust

► Contact information:

Middlebury Area Land Trust
www.maltvt.org
info@maltvt.org



happen.” John Derick is a volunteer who keeps MALT up to date in terms of what needs to be done to maintain the trail. He also organizes volunteer crews to do the work. Some of those crews are comprised of individuals who live in the nearby communities, and others are organizations like the youth group from a local Congregational Church.

Additionally, each year approximately 100 to 130 individuals volunteer to participate in the TAM Trek, an event that raises between \$8,000 and \$10,000 annually to cover the trail’s maintenance. Participants choose how much of the trail they want to travel during the TAM Trek and find sponsors who will donate to the cause. Some folks go three miles, and others complete all 16 miles in one day. Some people choose to walk and some choose to run. And that’s the thing about the TAM. As Suzanne Young puts it, “it means so many different things to so many people,” and perhaps that’s truly what has sustained it all these years.

“Its really a collaboration of a lot of volunteers who make it happen.”



Reading the Tree, Harvesting the Knowledge

Vermont Family Forests, Robinson Elementary School, Starksboro Public Library Collaboration, Starksboro

How does the health of our town forests impact the vitality of our communities? Third and fourth grade students at Robinson Elementary School in Starksboro found that forest resources play a supporting role in one of their favorite town institutions, the local public library.

In 2001, Robinson students spent time in the Starksboro Town Forest with David Brynn of Vermont Family Forests. With Brynn’s help, students learned about the types of trees growing in their woods, they measured the size of the trees, and they looked at the health of the forest. Working in small groups, the students then proposed harvesting certain trees from the forest to both improve the forest’s health and to gain lumber for shelves in the public library. Brynn was surprised at the students’ enthusiasm for the project. “I thought none of them would be interested in harvesting trees, but they all were,” he said. The students’ input was used to select the tree to be used to construct the shelves.

Next, students met with the logger who would be cutting down the tree. He explained what he was going to do and how, describing the equipment he would use and the steps in the process. After the tree was harvested, it was taken to a local sawmill, then dried in a local kiln and finally delivered to a local woodworker who built and installed the shelves. Today in the Starksboro Public Library, a display explains how the shelves came to be there. Brynn says that the project was “a great educational experience” for all involved, and one might imagine that the students learned as much about citizenship and their community as they did about forest ecology throughout the course of their work.



Vicky Backus

► Contact information:

David Brynn, Director
Vermont Family Forests
<http://www.familyforests.org/research/starksboro.shtml>
david@familyforests.org
802-453-7728

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