

PROPOSAL TO THE GUY WATERMAN ALPINE STEWARDSHIP FUND FROM THE GREEN MOUNTAIN CLUB

The Reach and Teach Alpine Ecology Program

I. Organizational Overview:

The Green Mountain Club (GMC) was founded in 1910, and is the oldest conservation/recreation organization in Vermont. We currently have over 9,000 members. Our mission is to “make the Vermont mountains play a larger role in the life of the people” by maintaining and protecting the Long Trail System, a 455-mile hiking trail network centered around the Long Trail, the nation’s oldest long-distance hiking trail.

To achieve our mission, the GMC publishes guidebooks, maps, and other informational materials; educates hikers about Leave-No-Trace practices in the backcountry; protects fragile mountaintop ecosystems through a summit and shelter caretaker program; and offers a wide range of educational workshops and trainings.

We also manage a land conservation and stewardship program - The Long Trail Protection Campaign. Over the last 16 years, this campaign has protected more than 22,400 acres of land and 70 miles of hiking trails through 71 conservation projects.

II. Project Description:

A. Project Location and Description: Each year thousands of people stream across the fragile alpine zones of Vermont’s mountains. An estimated 35-40,000 visitors walk across Mount Mansfield, 20-25,000 hike on Camel’s Hump and 10-15,000 summit Mount Abraham. Approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of all these visitors are part of organized groups. Group use of hiking trails in the Northeast is on the rise; more than 325 groups hiked through Vermont’s mountains in 2001. Groups’ impacts on alpine vegetation, water quality, wildlife habitat, trails, and the experience of other hikers can be disproportionately large with negative results.

The Reach and Teach Alpine Ecology Program aims to provide alpine ecology outreach education to organized hiking groups and group leaders who will be visiting our alpine zones. The target audiences are school groups, summer camps, and Boy and Girl Scout troops who annually visit any of the three alpine zones in Vermont. These three sites, Mount Mansfield, Camel’s Hump, and Mount Abraham all contain fragile alpine vegetation and are popular destinations for groups. By contacting groups known to frequent these areas ahead of time, we aim to create partnerships that will minimize impacts on these fragile zones.

The Green Mountain Club employs shelter and summit caretakers for the hiking season from early May into October. These caretakers meet with groups at the summits of Mount Mansfield, Camel’s Hump and Mount Abraham and give quick lessons on how to respect the alpine environment. There are times, though, when an area is overrun by visitors/hikers and the caretaker cannot provide outreach to groups. If the groups have not been previously educated, they may not know to keep off the alpine tundra. With the number of people on the summits rising, it is not possible for one caretaker to educate all the people about the “rock walk”, let alone convey the uniqueness of the alpine ecosystem. By proactively educating groups prior to their field trips, we would be able to significantly reduce the negative impact groups have on the alpine zones.

Our plan is to utilize a PowerPoint presentation on alpine ecology to provide a two- to four-hour lesson combining glacial geology, plant and animal adaptations, threats to the alpine zones, and preventative

measures to avoid damage. This program will give the groups a greater understanding of the vulnerable environment they will be traveling through as well as provide them with the skills to enjoy a mountain experience with minimum impact on the fragile alpine community. After gaining a greater awareness of the fragility and broader understanding of ecological processes, the participants will be more likely to travel and behave respectfully.

This initiative, with ongoing funding, will expand our goal of protecting Vermont's mountains and natural resources while furthering our educational mission of seeking to teach safe travel skills, promote backcountry appreciation and active stewardship of Vermont's trails and mountains.

Goals of the Project:

1. To encourage appreciation of and respect for the alpine environments in Vermont.
2. To provide an opportunity for children and young adults to discover and foster an awareness of their connection to Vermont's mountain environment.
3. To give pro-active presentations about alpine ecology and Leave No Trace practices in alpine areas.
4. To promote alpine stewardship and instill a desire to protect these unique areas.
5. To support a growing need to protect the fragile alpine areas in the face of growing use of these resources.

B. Methods and Materials:

Methods:

1. *Create the program curriculum.* We will create a comprehensive curriculum including hands-on activities for on and off the trail. We will refer to current scientific information on alpine ecology, the threats to alpine areas, and methods to help protect the area.
2. *Obtain the necessary technical equipment.* This includes a laptop computer with Microsoft's PowerPoint program, and a PowerPoint projector.
3. *Develop a 1/2 – 3/4-hour PowerPoint presentation using digital and archival print photos.* Working with volunteers, we will scan photos, charts and text into the computer program to create a professional, artistic, and interesting presentation.
4. *Market the program.* The education coordinator and group outreach coordinator, with support from the volunteer education committee, will begin to market the program through direct contact with the targeted groups.
5. *Contact groups, schedule visits and deliver the program.* We will target groups that we know will be visiting the summits (taken from the database we keep of existing groups and itineraries). We aim to reach approximately 30 school, camp and scout groups that visited Mount Mansfield, Camel's Hump and Mount Abraham in 2002. We will give priority to groups that can come to the Green Mountain Club headquarters for presentations but we will also travel as far as one hour from our headquarters to deliver this program. After making the presentation, we will hand out a packet of information to the leader/teacher for use on the trail as well as course evaluations to all the participants. Before leaving we will collect their itinerary, if possible.
6. *Send follow up thank you.* We will send a letter thanking them for their time along with a certificate that acknowledges their dedication to learning about alpine ecology.

Laptop computer	\$1,800
Windows XP Office Professional	\$ 300
Postage and printing	\$ 100
Staff time (340 hours total)	\$3,740
60% Group outreach coordinator	
40% Education coordinator	
TOTAL:	\$6,240

Income:

The Guy Waterman Alpine Stewardship Fund Request	\$3,500
AmeriCorps service position	\$1,020
<u>GMC Contribution</u>	<u>\$1,720</u>
TOTAL:	\$6,240