



Jericho Underhill Park District P. O. Box 164 Underhill, VT 05489

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Jericho Underhill Park District Annual Report 2023

Mills Riverside Park continues to be a popular destination with a 30% increase in visitors. The park remains available year-round, whether strolling, biking, horseback riding during the warmer months, or cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and walking in the winter. Soccer fills the playing fields from April through October with a slight summer break. The Farmers' Market encompasses the front lawn from May through the first week of October. Five free summer concerts entertain our community in July and August. The pavilion hosts many family gatherings and serves as a platform for the Burlington Dancers. The pond and river attract school groups for scientific study. And of course, dog walkers visit throughout the day and in all kinds of weather. Our annual average of doggie bag usage is high at 25,000 a year! Mills Riverside Park draws visitors from many towns and has become a tourist destination, as well.

The Jericho Underhill Park District is responsible for creating a safe experience for park visitors while protecting the park's wildlife habitat. This year the Board of Trustees has focused on several improvements. The well-used playing fields had their first aeration and overseeding in many years. This attention will continue with one-step fertilization and aeration. The cost is significant, so one field will be improved per year. This annual maintenance is necessary as the ground compacts and becomes nutrient-deprived over time.

The West Fieldstone Loop is also a focus. This Loop has always been the most difficult to restore. Ledge, clay soils, and water seeps keep large sections muddy. In 2017, slightly over one-third of the trail was improved. This year, a grant from the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation is assisting with half the cost of fixing the remaining portion of the West Fieldstone Loop. This work began in early August. The rain-soaked summer slowed progress and so, trail work will continue again following winter and mud season.

With increased visitor activity, we also have car parking issues. The Park District was extremely pleased to receive support from the Towns of Jericho and Underhill to improve the entrance and exit driveways and double the parking area size. This federal ARPA funding will create a much more pleasant experience for those driving to the park. Drainage issues on the front lawn will also be addressed. This work started in October 2023.

The Park District Board of Trustees is continuing to put some funding aside annually to replace the "cover" on the bridge. This project became too expensive to consider as the abutments would need to be replaced and most likely relocated further from the Browns River. The expectation is that Mills Riverside Park will, once again, have a covered bridge at a future date.

Assisting with park maintenance, there is a new gate from the neighboring Balch Drive. This access allows heavy vehicles, such as gravel-filled dump trucks, to enter the park. Emergency vehicles can also use the gate.

The Jericho Underhill Park District wishes to thank all of our volunteers who helped with park work this year. In particular, thanks to Camden Yandow, who built a bench located in the off-leash dog area and restored trail signs for his Eagle Scout project. Other improvements include new seating at Eagles Meadow Picnic Area courtesy of Boy Scout Troop 627 and honeysuckle removal by the Jericho Families in Nature. Mills Riverside Park runs on volunteerism, and we are very appreciative.

Special thanks also go to the Jericho Underhill Park District Board of Trustees, seven individuals who are dedicated to managing Mills Riverside Park. For more information about the park, please visit our website at www.millsriversidepark.org. Board meetings are the first and third Wednesday of every month at 7: 00 p.m. at the Deborah Rawson Memorial Library's project room. The public is always invited.

Livy Strong (Chair)
Dave Williamson (Vice-chair)
Donna Pratt (Treasurer)
James Massingham (Secretary)

Bruce Blokland (Projects, trail work)
Chris Tardie (Projects, outdoor stewardship)
Kim Spaulding (Projects, outdoor stewardship)