

Now that February is upon us and the days are getting longer, it's a wonderful time to get out and do some exciting backcountry skiing in the Moosalamoo National Recreation Area. Backcountry skiing is the fasted growing winter activity and Moosalamoo has some fabulous areas to engage in this fun and healthy activity. Some days will be very cold and some so warm that you can literally ski in your tee-shirts, but one thing is for sure, there will be plenty of snow to outlast almost any thaw, if it comes.

Here are a few of my favorite areas that don't require any major telemarking or too-challenging skills:

- Voters Brook/Moosalamoo Campground/Forest Road (FR) 103 to Sugar Hill Reservoir -This is accessed from Forest Road 32 (Ripton-Goshen Road). Park at the Moosalamoo Campground Road gate.
- Sucker Brook/Sugar Hill Reservoir loop This is accessed from Forest Road 32 (Ripton-Goshen Road). Park at the Sucker Brook Trailhead road and ski on the snowmobile trail over Goshen Dam at Sugar Hill Reservoir, then turn right uphill for short distance to FR 67 and take that south to the Sucker Brook Trail back to the snowmobile trail again to the car.
- Widow's Clearing/Wilkinson Trails/Water Tower Trails network There are two great ways to do this long loop. One way is to start at the Widow's Clearing parking area on FR 32 and the other is to start at the Chatfield parking area off VT 125 and FR 67 east of the Middlebury College Breadloaf Campus (this is the longer route, but has a fabulous downhill to return on).
- Forest Road up to Silver Lake and back This is accessed from VT 53. Park at the Falls of Lana lot and walk up the short way to the road.

Best bet for all trails is to get the Moosalamoo Outdoor Recreation Map, which is available at most inns in the Middlebury/Brandon Area, or the local Chambers of Commerce.

A word of precaution - always leave word of your destination with someone you know, in case you don't make it back in time. These areas don't all have reliable cell phone service. Also, dress warmly and in layers, bring hand warmers, carry plenty of water and be sure you have good skis with steel edges (the newer skis are wider at both ends and allow better control).

All in all, you can spend an entire day or just a part of it enjoying something new in the Moosalamoo NRA!

The mission of the Association is to: Collaborate with public entities to plan, manage, and provide stewardship for wildlife habitat conservation and quality public recreation opportunities and facilities, promote responsible recreation participation and environmental awareness through interpretation, education and resource monitoring, demonstrate the unique capabilities of public and private partners working together, and strengthen partnerships at the local level in cooperative projects such as trail construction and maintenance, wildlife habitat improvement, or

visual enhancement of roadsides.

Moosalamoo NRA is a 20,000-acre region of public and private land nestled in the Green Mountain National Forest. Moosalamoo's diverse ecosystem is home to a large number of plants and animals. The region is also a marvelous recreation area for wildlife viewing, berry picking, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, picnicking, and camping. Find out more by visiting www.moosalamoo.org.

Bruce Acciavatti operates Wonder Walks, an outings company that provides hiking and snowshoeing tours in the Moosalamoo Region, as well as throughout Vermont, the Northeast and beyond. He has been leading tours for 20 years. Learn more about Wonder Walks at www.wonderwalks.com.