

New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

Trail Inventory and Assessment Program

Project Description

Issue: The lack of a trails inventory is a major impediment to adequately managing the recreational trails in this region. Management of the trails by park agencies and volunteer support groups would be greatly enhanced if a well-organized and maintained inventory of their assets and deficiencies were developed. A complete list of all trails within a integrated system, their points of interest, tread alignment, access points, condition problems, structures, and safety issues, that is updated annually and compatible with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) would go a long way to provide the base information needed for the agencies and volunteer groups to oversee and care for these resources. Such an inventory would help manage risk, substantiate structure replacement funding requests, law enforcement needs, increased accessibility as well as enhancing our ability to convince legislators and the public of the importance of our work. To reap the greatest benefits of such a program it needs to be developed with a long-term vision in mind, which will allow for an ongoing assessment of changing conditions in our public lands. The time has come for us to develop a sustainable, thorough inventory program.

Background: In recent years the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the National Park Service have developed an inventory program in response to the National Park Service requirement that a system be developed for all National Parks to document the condition of their built assets. This program is intended to provide more accountability for funding requests and a standardized system for documenting the condition of their assets. Because of the unique features of the AT an inventory process was developed that include such items as the trail itself, shelters, privies, campsites, major bridges, parking lots, buildings and dams. In addition the conditions of each of these assets is recorded. This inventory is fully GIS compatible. We have been aware of this programs development and have assessed the program as it progressed with a similar one for New Jersey trails in mind. The program has now matured to a point where the transfer of the technology to New Jersey is practical.

Current Condition: The NPS/ATC program was developed by David Reus, with the Appalachian Trail National Park Office and Mathew Robinson, with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and resulted in the inventory process now perfected for the AT. Various resources developed with that program such as a specific "dictionary" of terms describing the assets and deficiencies and procedures for acquiring and managing the data is now available putting us in the position of being able to bring these resources to use on the balance of the trails we help manage in northern New Jersey.

As a volunteer run organization with a large trail and land responsibility well beyond that of the AT alone the NYNJTC has the opportunity to adapt this program to our unique needs. With our current maintainer reporting procedure, one part of an inventory program is in place, allowing for an annual update to be done without having to complete a re-assessment of the whole system. This thorough volunteer coverage of our trail system will allow for a considerably reduced amount of staff involvement, although some will still be necessary for program oversight, maintaining consistency and to manage the data in a useable form.

The greatest challenges for making this program successful will be to develop clear meaningful descriptions and terminology (a data dictionary), train and deploy adequate staff and volunteers, and to acquire necessary software and hardware to start the project. Some of these challenges will be minimized by obtaining permission to piggyback onto the NPS/ATPO program using their dictionary and procedures for a starting point. The NYNJTC is asking for a Recreational Trails grant to cover the cost of:

- Two global position system data collection units
- Required accessories and interfacing software
- Various data management software
- Staff time needed to complete and manage the program for one year.

The Proposal: One way to get this program off the ground would be for the NYNJTC to implement a pilot project in a clearly defined, contiguous area of mostly New Jersey State lands. One such area might be the **Farny Highlands centered on the Split Rock Reservoir**. This area is roughly bordered by the Berkshire Valley road on the west, I-80 on the south, Kinnelon Road on the east and Route 23 on the north. This area has approximately 30 miles of maintained trails and may have up to 20 additional miles of proposed and unmaintained trails. There are no up-to-date trail maps of this region available, and as far as we know the trail assists have never been determined. Such an inventory of this area would provide the NYNJTC with the opportunity to continue with a planned new set of North Jersey trail maps scheduled for completion in 2007, would provide the NJ DEP Div. of Parks and Forestry as well as the Div. of Fish, Game and Wildlife with valuable information about the facilities under their management and assist all of us in raising funds to improve access and management of these public lands.

Timeline: The first stages of this program would begin with the data collection by the staff and volunteers as soon as possible after approval of the grant. This will take approximately 30 days of field work spread over approximately nine months. These nine months for the data collection process may be necessary in order to make optimum use of leaf-off conditions in the fall, winter and spring. This data would be downloaded using various data management software and would then be sorted and managed for dispersal through GIS.