



NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

TRAIL MANAGEMENT POLICY

Approved by the Board on May 9, 2017

1 INTENT AND OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY

Building and maintaining hiking trails is a core service that the Trail Conference provides. This Trail Management Policy specifies the fundamental principles and guidelines governing the management of the trails for which we are responsible. Further details about how this policy is implemented are contained in the practice and procedure documents referenced below including the Trail Management Guide.

2 DEFINITIONS

ABA – Architectural Barriers Act (<https://www.access-board.gov>).

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act (<https://www.access-board.gov>).

Animal powered – Any trail use involving animal power for transport, chiefly equestrian use. **Bicycle** – Any exclusively human powered wheeled vehicle.

Board – The Board of Directors of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference.

Foot use – Trail usage including, but not limited to walking, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, running, birding, geocaching, hunting, and ADA means of transport.

Leave No Trace – Outdoor ethics principles defined by the [Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics](#).

Local Trail Committee Chair (LTC Chair) – A Trail Conference volunteer leader who is responsible for trails in a specified area and manages the volunteer Trail Supervisors, Crew Chiefs, maintainers, and other volunteers in that locality.

Land managers – Landowners or landowner representatives such as park managers empowered to make trail and land use decisions.

Motorized – Any vehicle partially or fully powered by a motor.

MOU (Memo of Understanding) – A document, which may have other names in some jurisdictions, outlining mutually agreed performance expectations for two or more entities.

Multi-use trails – Trails where more than one use category is allowed.

Regional Trails Council (RTC) – A Trail Conference organization of volunteer leaders within a specific geographic region which works with Trail Conference staff and land managers to coordinate operational activities and issues and to provide input to policies and the annual plan and budget.

Snowmobiles – Motorized vehicles appropriate for use with full snow cover.

Sustainable trail – A trail designed to minimize degradation from anticipated usage or from natural processes such as erosion.

Trail – A defined pathway primarily intended for recreational travel.

Trail approval process – A Trail Conference process by which the Trail Conference agrees to construct a trail, make significant trail changes, adopt a trail for maintenance, or abandon a trail which it maintains.

Trail assessment – A process in which a trained person walks a trail and reviews its condition and characteristics including whether it meets the standards of its classification and whether there are any problems which should be corrected.

Trail standards – Criteria for the design, construction, and maintenance of trails.

Trail Supervisor – A Trail Conference volunteer leader who has primary responsibility for trails and managing volunteer trail maintainers in an assigned area and who reports to an LTC Chair.

3 STATEMENT OF POLICY

3.1 Trail management principles

Fair and reasonable access to trails on public land should be based on the following principles:

1. **Role of user groups:** Since its founding in 1920, the Trail Conference has worked closely with land managers to support the development, construction, and maintenance of trails for public use. While the establishment and continued use of trails is ultimately the responsibility of land managers, user organizations should actively assist land managers in planning trails and trail systems and in organizing volunteers to carry out work on trails. User groups should be responsible for building, monitoring, and maintaining to appropriate standards the trails they use to protect the resource from damage by their users and by nature. For multi-use trails, user groups should cooperate to determine which group manages each trail and by what standards. Long-term commitment to public trail management, such as defined by an MOU between land managers and user groups, is necessary to sustain such trails as a recreational resource.
2. **Resource protection:** Trail use should entail minimal damage to the trail corridor and minimal disruption of plant and animal life. When developing and rehabilitating trails, resource degradation should be minimized through designs which take into account factors such as the purpose of the trail, the terrain through which it travels, and the anticipated trail use density. Alterations to the terrain should be made only to prevent resource damage or alleviate dangerous conditions. When trails deteriorate, they should be assessed as to whether moving or repairing is a better alternative. If moved, the old trail must be rehabilitated. Protection of endangered species is imperative.
3. **Safety:** While activities in the natural environment involve some risk, trails should be designed and maintained to minimize unreasonable or unexpected risks to responsible users engaged in permitted uses. Multi-use trails should be wide enough to allow safe passing and have adequate sight lines to avoid collisions. Safety information and educational material, including signs indicating permitted uses, help to ensure the safety of all trail users.

3.2 Trail adoption

The Trail Conference solely determines which trails it constructs and maintains, subject to MOUs or other agreements with land managers.

3.2.1. Guidelines for trail adoption

The Trail Conference maintains only trails for non-motorized recreation which permit foot traffic.

The Trail Conference will not maintain trails in areas that charge an entrance fee or restrict hiking to members only, except upon the recommendation of the Regional Trails Council and approval of the Board. A parking fee is not considered an entrance fee as long as hikers may enter on foot or by public transportation at no cost.

3.2.2. Trail Approval Process

The Trail Conference will establish a Trail Approval Process to ensure that only appropriate trails are constructed or adopted, that adequate resources are available to manage adopted trails, and that any required approvals by land managers or others have been obtained. This Trail Approval Process must be followed in these cases:

- Construction, rerouting, or other changes to a trail beyond normal maintenance by any Trail Conference workers.
- Adoption of a trail to be maintained by the Trail Conference.
- Abandonment of a trail which will no longer be maintained by the Trail Conference.

The Trail Approval Process specifies the details required for approval including special cases or situations. In all cases, the land manager must approve. If the land manager has a process for trail changes, the Trail Conference will work with the land manager to complete that process. If there is no established process, the Trail Conference will collaborate with the land manager to define and carry out an appropriate process, typically one similar to that used by other land managers in similar circumstances.

Changes approved through the Trail Approval Process must be promptly entered into the Trail Conference trail database.

3.3 Trail database

The Trail Conference will maintain an accurate database of all trails it maintains. The Trail Management Guide provides further information. Updates are typically made as part of the Trail Approval Process, from maintainer appointment forms, by updates from Trail Conference volunteers and staff, and through trail assessments.

3.4 Reporting

All trail workers must record hours worked and a description of the work according to the process described in the Trail Management Guide. Summaries of the reported information will be given to the Trail Conference Board of Directors, land managers, and other interested parties, with the amount of information reported determined by their roles and interests.

3.5 Land manager relations

Maintaining close and cooperative relationships with land managers of both public and private trail lands is essential for the Trail Conference to carry out its mission. Trail Conference volunteer leaders and staff are expected to maintain regular communication with land managers on a full range of trail issues. The Trails Management Guide contains further information about interacting with land managers.

The Trail Conference adheres to regulations of land managers and parks when building or maintaining trails.

Whenever possible, the Trail Conference prefers to have an MOU or similar document with land managers to describe the roles of the Trail Conference and the land manager and how the parties intend to interact.

3.6 Trail use

A Trail Use Policy will be adopted and will include Trail Conference guidelines for appropriate trail use and for interacting with land managers on trail use issues. The Trail Conference collaborates with land managers

proactively on appropriate signage and on educating trail users regarding permitted uses. The Trail Conference encourages cooperation with other non-motorized user groups.

3.7 Trail standards

Trail standards are sets of measurable trail characteristics which provide guidance when trails are designed, constructed, and maintained. The Trail Conference has standards to bring consistency and agreement to the desired outcomes of its trail work. For example, standards can help answer the question of whether a trail is “overbuilt”, “built just right”, or “underbuilt.” Trails differ in many ways including desired user experience, expected usage, aesthetics, safety, accessibility, resource protection, physical constraints, cost, and land manager mandates. Trail standards therefore define different classes of trail and provide standards appropriate for each class. Classification decisions are made in consultation with land managers.

The Trail Conference defines three standards: a trail **design standard**, a trail **construction standard**, and a trail **maintenance standard**. Each standard is used during the corresponding phase of trail work. The design and construction standards are described in separate trail standard practice documents; the maintenance standard is described in the Trail Conference Trail Maintenance Manual.

The classification of new trails and relocations will be determined as part of the Trail Approval Process, typically that of nearby or connecting trails and based on the factors listed above. These new or relocated trails will be build according to the standards for the assigned classification

Many of our existing trails have not been classified. Over time, the Trail Conference, generally with land manager guidance, will classify existing trails as part of a trail assessment process described in Section 3.8. If existing trails do not conform with the standards for their classification, they will be brought into conformity as time and resources permit, with priority given to trails with the greatest deficiencies. Trails which have not yet been classified are to be maintained according to the classification which is similar to their current or recent state.

3.8 Trail assessment

Trail assessment is useful to determine whether a trail is correctly classified (or to classify it if not previously classified), whether it meets the standards appropriate for its classification, whether it has degraded due to use or natural processes, and whether its overall maintenance is satisfactory. Under the direction of LTC Chairs or Supervisors, Trail Conference volunteers will assess trails we maintain as resources permit, with a goal of assessing each trail at least every five years. A trail assessment practice will be developed to define the details of the trail assessment process. Assessment results will be entered into the trails database.

3.9 Trail inventories

Land managers occasionally request that we inventory specific trail features such as bridges or other constructed features, typically features which may need repair or replacement from time to time. We will work with land managers regarding trail inventories and will attempt to carry out requested inventories as we are able.

3.10 Bridges

Many trails maintained by the Trail Conference have bridges over streams or wetlands. Failure of bridges can lead to trail closures and safety concerns and the repair or replacement is costly and time consuming. The Trail Conference will develop a Bridge Practice, which includes guidelines about when bridges should be used and about the siting, design, approval process, construction, inspection, and maintenance of bridges.

3.11 Naming of trails

1. The Trail Conference does not name or recommend naming trails after living people.
2. Land managers have the final say on trail names.

3.12 Safety of trail workers

The Trail Conference will have a set of Outdoor Activity Safety Guidelines, which will include recommended and required safety practices for a range of outdoor activities in which Trail Conference volunteers and staff participate.

3.13 Visitor use management

The Trail Conference recognizes that some trails have so many users that the trail condition and trail experience are seriously degraded. We advocate for more trail lands and trails for non-motorized use so more trails are available for the increasing number of trail users. The Trail Conference will develop a practice on visitor use management, recognizing that land managers have the ultimate responsibility. This practice is expected to include determining which trails are overused, trail design for increased usage, techniques to better distribute trail users, working with land managers on visitor use management, and related subjects.

3.14 Applicable policies, practices, and procedures

This policy is supported by the following documents:

1. Trails Management Guide
2. Trail Use Policy
3. Trail Approval Process
4. Trail Design Standards
5. Trail Construction Standards
6. Trail Maintenance Standards (Trail Maintenance Manual)
7. Bridge Practice
8. Outdoor Activity Safety Guidelines
9. Trail Assessment Practice

These documents are to be reviewed by the Policy Council at least every three years and updated as needed. Any changes to policies require Board approval.

4 POLICY EFFECTIVE DATE AND PRIOR POLICIES REPLACED

This policy is effective upon Board approval.

This policy replaces the Trails Policy approved by the Board of Directors on March 29, 2011.