



NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

TRAIL USE POLICY

Approved by the Board October 24, 2017

1 INTENT AND OVERVIEW OF THE POLICY

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (Trail Conference) recognizes that final decisions about permitted trail uses lie with the managers of the lands on which the trails lie. The role of the Trail Conference is to make well-considered recommendations regarding trail use designations and associated education and enforcement activities.

This policy presents guidelines for use by Trail Conference volunteers and staff in developing recommendations regarding permitted trail use decisions. It also outlines recommended actions by land managers in the development of trails use decisions. The scope of the policy is all trails within the geographical area served by the Trail Conference.

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.

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

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

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 manages the volunteer trail maintainers and is responsible for trails in a local area.

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.

Multiple-use trail – A trail on which more than one use (e.g. foot use and bicycle use) is permitted.

Single-use trail – A trail on which only one use (e.g. foot use or bicycle use) is permitted.

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

Trail – A defined pathway primarily intended for recreational travel. It may or may not be marked; it generally will not be paved or otherwise improved, except as is consistent with the need for safety, resource protection, or the need to be handicapped accessible.

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

3 STATEMENT OF POLICY

3.1 Basic Principles for Trail Use

Trails should collectively afford an appropriate and satisfying outdoor experience to the widest possible segment of non-motorized users. Fair and reasonable access to trails on public lands should be based on the following four principles:

- **Trail Experience:** All trail users should be able to enjoy the natural peace and beauty of the lands through which they pass.
- **Resource Protection:** Trail use should entail minimal damage to the treadway and minimal disruption of plant and animal life. The Trail Conference supports Leave No Trace principles.
- **Safety:** Safety of responsible users engaged in permitted uses should be a primary factor in determining permitted trail uses.
- **Management:** The establishment of trails and providing for their maintenance is ultimately the responsibility of land managers. Volunteer user organizations have an important role in actively assisting and advising land managers with the planning, construction, and maintenance of trail systems. In many cases, the assistance of volunteer organizations is key to providing enjoyable and well-maintained trails.

3.2 Trail Conference Guidelines for Developing Trail Use Recommendations

Permitted trail use limitations

- Some trails are designated by law or regulation as permitting foot travel only. The Trail Conference supports these regulations:
 - The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is for foot travel only (aside from a short section on Canada Hill, NY, which allows equestrian use).
 - Trails in New York State DEC designated wilderness areas permit foot travel only.
- Trail segments on public roads follow public road use regulations.
- On cross-country ski trails during ski season, hikers and snowshoe users may be prohibited or directed to avoid ski tracks.
- Motorized trail use is incompatible with all other uses and should not be permitted in trail systems for non-motorized use. Where permitted by land managers, snowmobiles are an acceptable use on appropriate trails when snow cover is sufficient to minimize damage. For long distance trails that require continuity for thru hiking, it may sometimes be preferable to cross private lands that permit ATV use than to route the trail on public roads.

Single vs. multiple use issues

- Where practical, the Trail Conference supports the concept that parks or sections of larger parks be designated as primary destinations for particular uses. The designated use should be permitted on most or all trails in such an area. This approach reduces user conflicts and enforcement effort.
- Foot use should be permitted on all trails except possibly for trails constructed for particular non-foot activities such as mountain bike jumps. Foot users should generally avoid areas designated as primary destinations for uses other than foot traffic during high use times so as to minimize user conflicts.
- Additional uses should not usually be permitted on existing trails which have historically permitted only a single use. Trails in areas newly designated as primary destinations for specific non-foot uses may be an exception.

- In parks or areas that permit uses other than foot traffic and are not destinations designated for non-foot uses, the Trail Conference generally advocates for permitting only foot traffic on some portion of the trails.

Considerations for determining permitted uses

- When determining permitted trail uses, the full range of safety, environmental impact, and trail experience issues should be considered.
- Trail terrain and design often influence permitted trail uses. For example, trails with steps are generally not suited for bicycles and trails with large areas of exposed bare rock may be unattractive for horses.

Trail standards

- Trails should be constructed to the standards required for the permitted uses.
- If additional uses are proposed on a trail, changes to bring the trail to the standard appropriate for the proposed uses and to ensure user safety should be made before additional uses are permitted.
- Signage, including permitted uses and right-of-way rules for multiple-use trails, and other educational information should be used to help ensure the safety of all trail users.
- If separate single-use trails for different uses exist in a single area, consideration should be given to avoiding mutual visibility and undue segmentation of the property. For paved trails which permit equestrian use, an adjacent dirt track for horses may be constructed.

Need for user groups to assist in maintaining trails

- The Trail Conference seeks fair distribution of construction and maintenance responsibilities among permitted users and encourages collaboration with other user groups to help bring this about.

3.3 Role of the Trail Conference

- Retains the right to decide which trails it agrees to maintain subject to existing MOUs.
- Adheres to the regulations of land managers and parks while building and maintaining trails.
- Expects its staff, LTC chairs, and/or their designees to regularly and proactively communicate and collaborate with land managers regarding trail use decisions.
- Collaborates with land managers proactively on appropriate signage and on educating trail users regarding permitted uses.
- Works to educate users about responsible trail use and minimizing their impact on the trail. To reduce trail overuse, the Trail Conference recommends reasonable group size limits be specified by land managers.

3.4 Trail Conference Expectations of the Land Manager

- Is encouraged to seek Trail Conference recommendations regarding trail use decisions.
- Communicates regularly with appropriate Trail Conference leaders about trail plans, problems, and expectations.
- Communicates trail use rules through appropriate signage and enforces the rules. Enforcement is an important component of useage management.
- Establishes long-term working relationships such as MOUs with groups performing trail work to define the manner in which the parties intend to interact. For multiple-use trails with work done by multiple organizations, the responsibilities of each group should be defined.

4 POLICY EFFECTIVE DATE AND PRIOR POLICIES REPLACED

This policy is effective upon Board approval.

This policy replaces the Mountain Bike Policy adopted December 14, 2010.