

Trails Policy New York - New Jersey Trails Conference

August 21, 2001

Trails Council

Approved by Board, August 21, 2001
Previous version: May 20, 1997

Introduction

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a nonprofit organization established in 1920 for the building, maintenance and preservation of hiking trails. The Trail Conference accomplishes this work through volunteer efforts of its affiliated member groups and other Conference members. The Trail Conference maintains about 1300 miles of hiking trails in a trail system extending from the Pennsylvania border at the Delaware Water Gap through northern New Jersey into southern New York to the Connecticut border.

The Trail Conference seeks to protect the trail lands from indiscriminate and inappropriate misuse. The Conference works in close cooperation with various governmental agencies in the region and is the only coordinating organization for hiking trails in its area.

The Trail Conference employs a small office staff to carry out administrative and executive functions and has a governing Board of Directors. The Trail Conference membership is composed of member clubs and individuals who constitute the volunteers that carry out the work on and for the trails. The important chain of responsibility of those volunteer trails chairs, supervisors and maintainers is described in this document. The Trails Policy governing trails in the region is also explained herein.

In this document a trail is a defined pathway primarily intended to be used 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 and/or preservation of the resource and its environment. A hiking trail is intended for foot traffic only. Multiple use trails are those trails which are suitable for other uses in addition to hiking, e.g. horses, bicycles, snowmobiles, etc.

Trails Council

The Trails Council determines the trails policy (Article VI, Section 2 of By-Laws).

The Board of Directors shall determine which trails committees will exist, e.g. Appalachian Trail, Long Path, and other New York-New Jersey trails committees. The chairs of these committees, and others if approved by the board of directors, make up the Trails Council which is responsible for the protection, construction and maintenance of the trails, campsites and shelters within the jurisdiction of the Conference and other duties as assigned by the Board. The Trails Council shall also be responsible for monitoring any land or easements under the jurisdiction of the Conference. Further details may be specified in the Trails Policy developed by the Trails Council and approved by the Board of Directors.

Membership

- X Section 6.1 of the by-laws provides that the president appoints the chair of the Trails Council. At least one member of the Council must be a board member, known as the Board Liaison for Trails. Normally these will be the same person. The Chair and Board Liaison are voting members of the Trails Council.
- X Each Trails Committee Chair is appointed by the President with the approval of the Board of Directors each year. For the AT, the President appoints the chair of the local management committees,. Trail Chairsare voting members of the Trails Council. The Supervisors of these committees are also voting members of the Trails Council.
- X The current trail committees of the Trails Council are listed in Appendix A.
- X The Chair may appoint any other officers that are necessary, e.g. secretary or vice chair.
- X The Trails Council members must be members of the Trail Conference.

Meetings

The meetings of the Trails Council shall be open to all interested parties. Voting members are encouraged to attend. Maintainers, monitors and trail crew members are particularly welcome. Normally meetings will be held bimonthly.

Responsibilities

The Trails Council can and should discuss any trail related issues and policies. Many issues can be handled completely by the Trails Council. Others must be referred to the Board for final resolution. The issues requiring Board approval are:

- X Changes to the Trails Policy (this document)
- X Issues which significantly change existing policies, e.g acceptance of a multiple-use trail

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- X Issues related to legal matters
- X Issues requiring significant expenditures other than those provided for in the budget
- X Adoption of new trail systems or trail(s) in a new area
- X Issues about which the Trails Council has 3 or more dissenters or which the Council feels needs Board approval. See Voting below.

Voting

Decisions are usually reached by consensus of those present. Any of the Trails Chairs may call for a formal vote of the Trails Council members. In any such vote the majority rules. Issues with significant dissension should be referred to the Board for final resolution with both majority and minority opinions being submitted. A quorum of 12 voting members is required to transact official business.

Trail Policy

The Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail (AT) has special considerations because of the involvement of parties outside the NY-NJ Trail Conference. The Appalachian Trail Conference (ATC) has been delegated management responsibility for the AT by the National Park Service. ATC in turn has delegated management responsibility for the AT in New York and New Jersey to the NY-NJ Trail Conference. Thus the management is a joint responsibility of the AT local management committees, the NY-NJ Trail Conference, ATC, NPS and several state agencies. The details of these responsibilities are spelled out in various ATC and NPS documents as well as the local management plans of the AT local management committees. The maintenance standards are those spelled out in the ATC maintenance manual (as modified by local management plans). Local management plans should be reviewed and approved by the Trails Council and the Board of Directors before submission to ATC. In other respects the AT should follow the Trails Policy.

The Catskill Park

Special considerations apply to NY-NJ Trail Conference activity in the Catskill Park due to the involvement of state constitutionally protected Forest Preserve lands. Primary management responsibility of the Park's trails and lean-tos resides within the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). By mutual agreement between the Conference and the DEC, and on a case by case basis, many of these trails and lean-tos are being adopted by the Conference. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Conference and the DEC details maintenance standards and procedures to be followed within the Park. More restrictive standards apply to Conference operations within designated Wilderness areas than in Wild Forest areas of the Park.

Conference Trails (except AT and its side trails)

Conference Trails are those hiking trails which are recognized and maintained under the auspices of the Trail Conference.

Trail names

Trails may not be named after living people.

Trails in usage fee or permit areas

The Conference will not maintain trails in areas that charge an entrance fee or require a permit except with the permission of the Board of Directors and the Trails Council. A parking fee (such as in Harriman Park) is not considered an entrance fee since there is no charge if the hiker arrives on foot or by public transportation.

Multiple use trails

In general, the Conference adopts and maintains hiking trails. Handicapped access, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are considered foot travel for these purposes.

The AT is restricted to foot traffic only, except in a few places where grandfather clauses and special use permits allow horses.

Cooperative Management Agreements and Easements

All trails on public lands should have a cooperative management agreement between the Trail Conference and the public agency.

All trails on private lands should have a signed permission from the land owner. It is even better to obtain a recorded easement to cross the land. Lacking either of these a verbal agreement must be obtained and backed up by the person getting the agreement writing a note to FILE at the Trail Conference giving the particulars of the agreement.

New trails

New trails arise from several sources. Some may be existing trails in new areas, e.g. Minnewaska State Park. Others are old unmarked trails which now warrant marking and maintaining. Still others are new trails to connect points of natural interest, incorporate vistas or historic sites or to connect existing trails.

All proposed new trails must be approved by the Trails Council. At each presentation the following items should be thoroughly covered:

- X Reason for trail
- X Sketch map and description
- X Permission from land owner(s), public or private
- X Trails on public land should be covered by a cooperative management agreement between the public agency and the Trail Conference.
- X Trails on private land should be covered by written agreement
- X Proposed maintainer(s) (or acceptance by a member club)
- X Name for trail
- X Suggested blaze compatible with adjoining trails
- X Single named trails should have a uniform blaze over the entire length

New trail construction in the Catskill Park is by delegation of responsibility from the DEC and must conform to the controlling DEC Unit Management Plan (UMP). Likewise, abandonment and reinstatement of trails in the Park are subject to the UMP process.

Abandonment

Proposals to abandon a trail or part of a trail must be submitted to the Trails Council with supporting evidence and be approved by the Trails Council.

Reinstatement

A reinstated trail is considered a new trail and the same procedure must be followed.

Conference Affiliated Trails

Conference affiliated trails are not adopted as Conference trails but are maintained by Conference clubs. The club must apply to the Trails Council for this special status. The maintainers report directly to the landowner or governmental body, e.g. the Long Island Greenbelt Trail. The maintainers are expected to report to the Trails Council at least once a year on the status of these trails. By adopting the affiliated trail, the Conference is committed to assist in the protection of that trail.

Maintenance standards

The Trails Council uses the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference's *Trail Maintenance Manual* as the standard for trail maintenance. It is also responsible for updating this manual when appropriate. State Park or Appalachian Trail maintenance regulations may also apply. The more restrictive regulation takes precedence. Catskill Park trail standards are defined in the MOU with the DEC. The detailed standards are provided to each new Catskill maintainer.

Concurrent trails

Several trails sometimes follow the same footpath so they may have multiple maintainers. All the maintainers are responsible for the joint sections unless they have made arrangements with the other maintainers to share the responsibility. At boundaries between maintainers, both maintainers are responsible for visibility and continuity of blazes as they approach their section. In particular, when the boundary is a road (and the trail goes along the road for a short distance) both maintainers are responsible for blazing the road unless they have made arrangements with the other maintainer to share the responsibility. A maintainer's supervisor needs to know about all shared responsibilities so that they can be renegotiated when maintainers change.

The maintainers should cooperate on the blazing and put their respective blazes in the same sequence on each tree, one above the other. There should be no trees with less than the full complement of blazes except where the trails separate. If applicable, an AT blaze will be the top blaze, followed by an LP blaze, followed by a Highlands blaze, then any others.

The details of the blazing at the junction of more than two trails should be worked out with the Supervisor.

Concurrent trails in the Catskill Park do not have multiple maintainers. Marking throughout a trail's length is done with DEC approved markers only. The Long Path in the Catskills is identified only at trailheads and critical trail junctions with appropriate marking.

Relocations

Major

A major relocation is one which would be visible on Trail Conference maps (e.g. more than 100 yards) or which moves the trail onto property owned by a different land owner. Major relocations require approval of the appropriate Trail Chair and the Trails Council. Prior approval of public agency, if required, must be obtained. Major relocations in the Catskill Park require DEC approval through the UMP planning process. There is a direct impact on the hiking community.

Minor

A minor relocation is not visible on a map but is likely to be noticed by someone familiar with the trail. It requires the maintainer to receive approval from the appropriate Trail Chair. A typical example is moving a trail 10 to 20 feet over a distance of 100 feet to avoid swampy conditions or erosion problems. Minor relocations in the Catskill Park are made only after consultation with the responsible DEC Forest Ranger.

Insignificant Insignificant relocations may be handled by the maintainer with no consultation. However they should be reported to the supervisor. Insignificant is defined as affecting less than 20 feet of trail and with no major construction such as bridges. Typical examples are moving nearer to a tree suitable for a blaze, to a better place for erosion prevention or for safety. Even people familiar with the trail would not be likely to notice the change.

Notification

Details of all new trails and major or minor relocations must be reported to the Publications Committee after approval, and will be published in the *Trail Walker*. See Appendix C for the form to be used for reporting.

Emergency Preparedness

The Trails Council shall maintain an action plan that details how to deal with various emergencies. These include fire danger, storm damage, lost hikers and trail closures (see below).

The Conference Office must be notified of any emergency conditions as soon as possible. The existing reporting structure should notify the affected Trails Chair, Supervisors and Maintainers as necessary to get coverage of the problem as early as possible. In addition special groups of volunteers should be trained to handle specific problems e.g. Fire Patrol, Search and Rescue.

Temporary Closing

Trails may be closed temporarily for a number of reasons, some of which are out of the control of the Trail Conference. Extreme fire danger is a typical example. Trails may be closed temporarily while the Trail Conference is negotiating with land owners.

Each Trails Chair should set up a mechanism for notifying all his/her Supervisors, Club Trails Chairs and Maintainers. For short term closures the Trail Conference recorded message should advise hikers of the closing. The Webmaster should also be notified as these closings will be posted on the Web. Longer term closings should be published in the Trail Walker and on the Web.

Reports

All reports will be on the latest versions of the forms in Appendix B.

1. Each maintainer/shelter caretaker will submit a written report twice a year to his/her supervisor.2. Each supervisor will submit copies of the maintainers reports and a summary of the maintainers reports twice a year to their Trails Chair.
3. Each Trails Chair will submit the summary reports to the Trail Conference.
4. Each monitor will submit a written report twice a year to his/her Corridor Manager.
5. Each Corridor Manager will submit a summary report to the Trail Conference and to ATC.

Trail Use Policy

Trails should afford an appropriate and satisfying outdoor experience to the widest possible segment of the population. The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (NYNJTC) recognizes that trails on public land should be available to all responsible non-motorized users. Fair and reasonable access to trails on public land should be based on the following four principles:

Esthetics: People seek an outdoor experience as a respite from the trappings and tensions of life. Trail users should be able to enjoy the natural peace and beauty of the lands through which the trails pass. For many trail users, encounters with wheeled vehicles or horses, however friendly, negate that goal and may lead to preemption of that trail by these other users. Hiking-only trails should be available within all trail systems open to the public. The NYNJTC opposes the use of mountain bikes or horses in areas designated (or being considered for designation) as wilderness or natural areas.

Resource Protection: Trail use should entail minimal damage to the treadway and minimal disruption of plant and animal life. When planning new trails, the purpose of the trail, the terrain through which it travels and the trail density should be considered. Alterations to the terrain should only be made to prevent resource damage. When trails deteriorate, they should be repaired when possible rather than moved.

Safety: Pedestrian safety should not be jeopardized by interaction with other user groups. Steep and/or narrow trails should be single-use. Multiple-use trails must be wide enough to allow safe passing and two-way use, and should have sufficient sight lines to avoid collision. Even though collisions are rare, it is important to convey a perception of safety. On multiple-use trails, the NYNJTC recognizes the International Mountain Biking Association's rules of responsible trail riding. Safety information and educational material, including signs indicating permitted uses, help ensure the safety of all trail users.

Management: While the establishment of trails is ultimately the responsibility of the land managers or owners, volunteer user organizations should actively assist land managers in planning trails and trail systems. NYNJTC advocates that organizations be responsible for building, monitoring and maintaining the trails they use to appropriate standards to protect the resource from likely damage by their users as well as nature, and provide users with a safe experience. Long term commitment to trail management is necessary to sustain public trails as a recreational opportunity.

Communication and cooperation among the user groups, landowners and land managers enhances the opportunities for outdoor recreation. NYNJTC is willing to work with non-motorized trail user groups that share its concern of the region's trail systems and its appreciation for the special character of the lands through which the trails pass.

Operations

Chain of responsibility

The following job descriptions set the policy. More complete job descriptions are available in the conference administrative guide.

The AT Trails Committees report to the Trails Council and Trail Conference, not directly to ATC.

Board Liaison for Trails

The Board Liaison reports Trails Council recommendations to the Board of Directors and the Delegates upon request of the President. Trails Chairs may also report directly to the Board of Directors or Delegates.

Trails Chairs

The Trails Chair appoints Supervisors for subsets of the trails under his/her jurisdiction. The Trails Chair also appoints a Trail Crew Chief with the same status as Supervisors. These appointments are subject to approval by the President. The Trails Chair is responsible for collecting and summarizing the reports of the individual maintainers with the aid of the supervisors. These reports are submitted to the office. The Trails Chair should walk selected trails to be familiar with the problem areas. Trails Chairs participate in the new trail and relocation decisions, make recommendations to the Trails Council and Board of Directors and vote at delegates meetings.

For the AT, the Trails Committee Chair is the chair of the local management committee. The management committees fill their committees as specified by their local management plans. Committee members with the titles of Corridor Manager, Overseer or Supervisor (of monitors and maintainers) are considered Supervisors (see below) within the Trail Conference with the same rights and duties as other Supervisors.

Trail Supervisors/Overseer for AT

Trail supervisors are either the Trail Chair or some other Trail Conference member appointed to supervise some subset of the trails in an area. Normally they should supervise less than 50 miles of trail. They should walk all of the trails in their area once a year to be familiar with the trails and the problems reported by maintainers. New problems that they find should be reported to the maintainer. The supervisor should counsel the maintainer on old uncorrected problems. The supervisor should also check proposed relocations or requests for trail crew work and coordinate those requests with the maintainer and the Trails Chair. Trails supervisors are expected to collect and summarize the maintainers' reports for the Trail Chair.

For the AT, the role of Overseer and Corridor Manager may be combined with one person responsible for both the trail and the corridor in his/her area.

Corridor Managers for AT

The Corridor Manager supervises the monitors under his/her jurisdiction and is a Supervisor level position.

For the AT, the role of Overseer and Corridor Manager may be combined with one person responsible for both the trail and the corridor in his/her area.

Trail Maintainners/Shelter Caretakers

Approved by Board August 21, 2001

In May and November maintainers must report the condition of their trails to their Trail Supervisor, suggest improvements and request help where necessary. Trail maintainers are expected to maintain the trail to conference standards which includes:

- X Clearing brush to maintain treadway width
- X Maintaining blazes
- X Maintaining erosion controls
- X Keeping the trail safe and easily passable.
- X Removing litter and graffiti

In addition trail maintainers who have shelters on their section should either accept the responsibility for checking on the shelter and requesting repairs when necessary or decline the responsibility. If the maintainer declines, the supervisor should appoint a shelter caretaker whose responsibilities are to check the shelter and request or perform repairs when necessary.

Special circumstances apply in the Catskill Park. Maintainers are required to make a minimum of three (3) annual patrols of their trail or lean-to, notifying the responsible Forest Ranger prior to each visit. There are separate chains of responsibility for trail and lean-to maintainers with supervisors for each reporting to the Catskill Chair. Marking is done with approved colored plastic markers only and is subject to standards detailed in the MOU between the Trail Conference and the DEC. Special care must be taken when cutting brush on the protected Forest Preserve lands of the Catskills. Anything larger than 3" diameter at breast height is considered a tree and may not be cut. Vistas or viewpoints may not be cut, trimmed or enlarged except by DEC personnel. Details of brushing, marking, communication, and lean-to standards are outlined in documentation provided at the time of assignment.

Assignment of maintainers

Trails Chairs assign member hiking clubs and individual Conference members who may or may not be directly affiliated with a club to specific trail sections when vacancies appear, subject to verification that the assignee is currently a member or member club. Maintainers may request assignment to any available trail. Member hiking clubs are responsible for finding their own maintainers for their assigned sections of trail. Clubs must keep the Supervisor informed of changes in their club trail supervisor and their maintainers.

Trail Crew Chief and Trail Crews

The trail crews exist to support the trail maintainers. Trail crews do jobs beyond the capabilities of the maintainer, such as construction or repair which needs more time, labor or expertise than the maintainer can give. Trail crews are not to be used for work normally expected of a maintainer. The trail crew chief recruits members of the trail crew who must be Conference members. Membership may be waived for up to 6 months for new members of the crew. An exception is permitted when workers represent a maintaining club and the crew is working on one of that club's trails. They may work on trails with no current maintainer at the request of the trail chair or supervisor.

Trail crews will work wherever needed by invitation. Maintainers, Maintaining Clubs or Supervisors needing a trail crew should request Trail Crew assistance from the Trail Chair who will assign priorities and give the prioritized list of projects to the Crew Chief.

Outside groups who are not trail conference members, e.g. scouts or Telephone Pioneers, may help with some aspects of trail maintenance. These activities should be arranged through the Trails Council or any of several members who coordinate scout projects. Such projects should have conference members participating in at least an advisory role.

Trail Crew Chiefs must keep track of participants for insurance coverage and submit appropriate forms to the office. In addition they should promptly report completion of projects to the Chair.

Monitors

Monitors patrol the boundaries of land for which the Trail Conference is responsible. They check that easement restrictions are followed and that there are no encroachments.

Removal of Trails Chairs, maintainers, monitors, supervisors, clubs

When Trails Chairs, maintainers, monitors, supervisors or clubs do not fulfill their basic responsibilities, they may be removed. The Board of Directors may remove Trails Chairs or more simply not reappoint them. Trails Chairs may remove Trails Supervisors or more simply not reappoint them. Trails Chairs or Trails Supervisors cannot directly remove club trails chairs (who act as supervisors) or club maintainers. They can only suggest that the club itself solve the problem or face losing the maintenance responsibilities for a particular trail or all their trails. When all trail maintenance responsibility is to be removed from a club, details should be brought before the Trails Council for approval because there are financial implications.

Individual monitors, maintainers or the club responsibility for a particular section may be removed by Trails Supervisors or Trails Chairs by the following procedure

- X Trails Supervisors should keep the Trails Chair informed of all actions.
- X Verbally advise the monitor, maintainer or club of the deficiency
- X If the deficiencies are not corrected promptly, the monitor, maintainer or club should be notified in writing with a copy to the Trails Chair.
- X If the deficiencies persist beyond a reasonable period after written notification, the monitor, maintainer or club may be removed and a successor appointed. The Trails Chair is responsible for notifying the monitor, maintainer or club in writing.
- X Removal may be appealed to the Trails Council whose decision is final.

Communications

Open communication with government partners establishes Trail Conference credibility and should be an ongoing effort on both groups' parts. Trail Conference officials should know who to contact for particular problems. In addition it is prudent to establish that communication before problems occur. In the Catskills, maintainers are required to communicate with the responsible Forest Ranger regarding activity on their trail. There is an explicit press policy adopted by the Board of Directors on November 22, 1988 that suggests an overall policy:

Press Announcements by Conference Officials: Any Conference official who submits any article or letter to the editor of an outside publication using their Conference title should submit the article to the Conference office for review beforehand. This policy does not apply

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to letters addressed to government officials unless such letters make policy for the Conference.

Policy discussions

Discussion with park officials of matters of policy, memorandums of understanding, etc. should be carried out only by people assigned by the President, Board or Trails Council for a specific purpose.

Problem discussions

Discussions of particular problems should be with the appropriate level park official capable of solving the problem. Most such communication will be by trails supervisors or chairs with park superintendents or chief rangers in their areas. Maintainers should feel free to report problems such as litter bags left for pickup directly to park rangers or trail misuse that requires immediate action directly to the police.

Periodic discussion

The Trails Council should prepare a Trail Conference officials list that is suitable for yearly distribution to park officials. Trails Chairs and/or supervisors should set up regular meetings, about once a year, with park officials in areas where they have trails.

Public meetings

When speaking or testifying before public bodies such as PIPC, zoning boards, Greenway hearings, etc., one should be careful to distinguish between personal opinions and Conference opinions. It is difficult for government partners who know the speaker as a Trail Conference official to not assume that all remarks are Conference opinions.

Press contacts

When speaking to the press, be especially careful and clear remarks with the Trail Conference office if at all possible.

Appendix A - Current trails committees and assignments

This appendix is not part of the formal part of this document and may be changed without explicit approval to reflect the current state of what trail committees exist.

New York Trails Southern West Hudson Committee - Harriman-Bear Mountain and Sterling Forest trails, excluding AT and LP.

New York Trails Northern West Hudson Committee - New York trails west of the Hudson River, north of Harriman-Bear Mountain and south of the Catskills, excluding AT and LP.

New York Trails East Hudson Committee - all New York trails east of the Hudson River except those mentioned separately below.

Catskill Trails Committee - all Conference Trails in the Catskills including the Long Path

North Jersey Trails Committee - Morris County, Ramapos, Ramapo Reservation, Wyanokies, Ringwood, Stonetown/Monksville, and Shore Path.

West Jersey Trails Committee - High Point, Stokes, Worthington, Delaware Water Gap, Pequannock Watershed, and Greenwood Lake/Wawayanda.

Dutchess-Putnam County Appalachian Trail Management Committee - the AT in Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester Counties including blue side trails

Orange-Rockland County Appalachian Trail Management Committee - the AT in Orange and Rockland Counties including blue side trails

New Jersey Appalachian Trail Management Committee - the AT in New Jersey including blue side trails

Long Path North Committee - the Long Path north of the Catskills

Long Path South Committee - the Long Path south of the Catskills

Highlands Trail Committee - overall management of the trail with co-aligned section maintainers reporting to the local committee

Metro Trails Committee - all trails on Long Island, Staten Island, New York City and lower Westchester County

Approved by Board August 21, 2001

Appendix B - Report Forms

Approved by Board August 21, 2001

Appendix C - Trail Update Form