National Recreation Trails: Designating Your Trail for NRT Status
Today’s Learning

• NRTs = National Recreation Trails

• What are NRTs?
• Goals of NRTs
• History of NRTs
• Eligibility Requirements
• Benefits of Designation
• How to Apply
• Recent Updates
• FAQs
What are NRTs

- Established under the National Trails System Act of 1968.
- Existing land-based and water-based trails that provide close to home recreation opportunities on Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands, and connect to National Trails System trail networks.
- Recognized and designated by either the Secretary of the Interior or Secretary of Agriculture.
NRT Goals

Calls for establishing trails in both urban and rural settings for persons of all ages, interests, skills, and physical abilities.

- Promote the use and care of existing trails and stimulate the development of new trails throughout the U.S.

Provide recreation access for urban and rural communities.

Economic development through tourism.

Provide healthy recreation opportunities.
NRT History

Currently there are over 1,300 NRTs in all 50 states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

First NRTs
- Schockaloe Trail, MS – 1969
- East Bay Skyline Trail, CA – 1970
- Gabrielino Trail, CA – 1970

Newest NRTs
- 2021 - 10 new NRTs
- 2022 - 9 new NRTs
- 2023 – 9 new NRTs
A **trail** is a travel way established either through construction or use and is passable by at least one or more of the following, including but not limited to: foot traffic, stock, equestrian, watercraft, bicycles, in-line skates, wheelchairs, cross-country skis, off-road recreation vehicles such as motorcycles, snowmobiles, ATVs, and four-wheel drive vehicles.

Roads and highways suitable for passenger car travel are not eligible for NRT designation.
Trail Eligibility

The trail must be open to public use, have no gaps, and be designed, constructed, and maintained according to best management practices, in keeping with the use anticipated.

Trails that demonstrate state-of-the-art design and management are especially encouraged to apply for NRT designation.
Trail Eligibility

The trail is in compliance with applicable land use plans and environmental laws.
Trail Eligibility

The trail is in existence and will be available for public use for at least 10 years.
Trail Eligibility

All public and private property owners of trail lands or waters have been notified and have given their written consent and support for designation.
Trail Eligibility

Trails on state, local government, or private land (anything other than federal) must have a letter of support from their appropriate state trail administrator.
Benefits

- National Database
- Signage
- Photo Contest
- Ambassador Program
- Funding Opportunities
Benefits- National Database

Database of over 1,300 searchable trails

National Recreation Trails Database (nrtdatabase.org)
Benefits - Signage

Upon Designation
• Two 8”x8” metal signs
• Three 3.5”x3.5” metal signs

After Designation
• Free plastics signs upon request
• Low cost metal signs
Benefits – Photo Contest

Recognition for your trail through great photography

2022 NRT Photo Contest

Photo entries submitted for the 2022 National Recreation Trails photo contest hosted by American Trails

2022 NRT Photo Contest | Flickr
Benefits – Ambassador Program

• Led by American Trails
• 300+ individuals in all 50 states committed to improving NRTs.
• Ambassadors are:
  • Trained for safety and consistency of data gathering.
  • Tasked with reaching out to trail managers and agency staff to build understanding of NRTs and NWT, and ensure the trail meets standards of quality.
• Help to identify centerline GPS tracks and ensure quality information on each NRT and NWT.
Benefits – Improved Funding Opportunities

• While there is no direct funding for NRTs, being an NRT can improve your fundraising opportunities.

• Many State Recreational Trails Program funding provides priority to trails that are a part of the National Trails System.

• NRT status provides outside acknowledgement of trail quality and legitimizes your trail in a very tangible way, which can improve your fundraising story.

• American Trails has built a national “Trail Fund” that may prioritize funding for diverse NRTs.
How to Apply

Trail on land / waters on Department of Agriculture land?
Apply through the U.S. Forest Service process

Trail on lands / waters other than Department of Agriculture land?
Apply through the Department of the Interior process
How to Apply - USDA

If your trail is on federal land administered by (or associated with) the US Department of Agriculture:

The USDA Forest Service has authority for designating NRTs on land administered by the Department of Agriculture (National Forests, National Grasslands, and National Recreation Areas) and associated lands.

Proposed NRTs on U.S. Forest Service lands are nominated and approved using an internal application with specific criteria.
How to Apply - USDA

Designation Process:
1. Recommendation & Approval
2. Trail Location Description
3. Trail History
4. Trail Description & Management Objectives
5. Best Management Practices
6. Assessment of Impacts
7. Public Use Statement
How to Apply - DOI

If your trail is on Federal, State, Tribal, or local land other than U.S. Forest Service land:

The Department of Interior has authority for designating NRTs on all lands other than those administered by the Department of Agriculture.

Proposed NRTs on Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands (other than U.S. Forest Service lands) are nominated and approved following a public application with specific criteria.
How to Apply - DOI

Designation Process:
- Trail Information
- Contact Information
- Owner Consent & State Support
- If any portion of the trail is on non-Federally managed land, a letter from the respective State Trail Administrator is required
- Trail Photo(s) and Map
- Best Management Practices
- Additional Support Materials
- Signed Signature Page
- Application Reviewed by Interagency Staff
- Approved applications submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for official designation

Deadline to submit application is November 1
Recent Updates

- New and improved application system
- Designated trail update form

National Recreation Trails application (nrtapplication.org)
FAQs - NRTS

Recognized by the federal government, with the consent of any Federal, State, Tribal, local, nonprofit, or private entity having jurisdiction over the lands the NRT traverses.

All potential trails must apply for the distinction of a NRT.

Upon designation as a NRT, all management responsibilities remain with the existing land management entity.

National water trails (NWT), a subset of the NRT system, are water-based recreation trails. The category of NWT was authorized in 2012 under Secretarial Order 3319.

There is no minimum or maximum length for a NRT.
Contacts

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Right-Grandstaff Canyon. Credit: Peter Bonsall
Thank You!