

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



Trail Eligibility

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

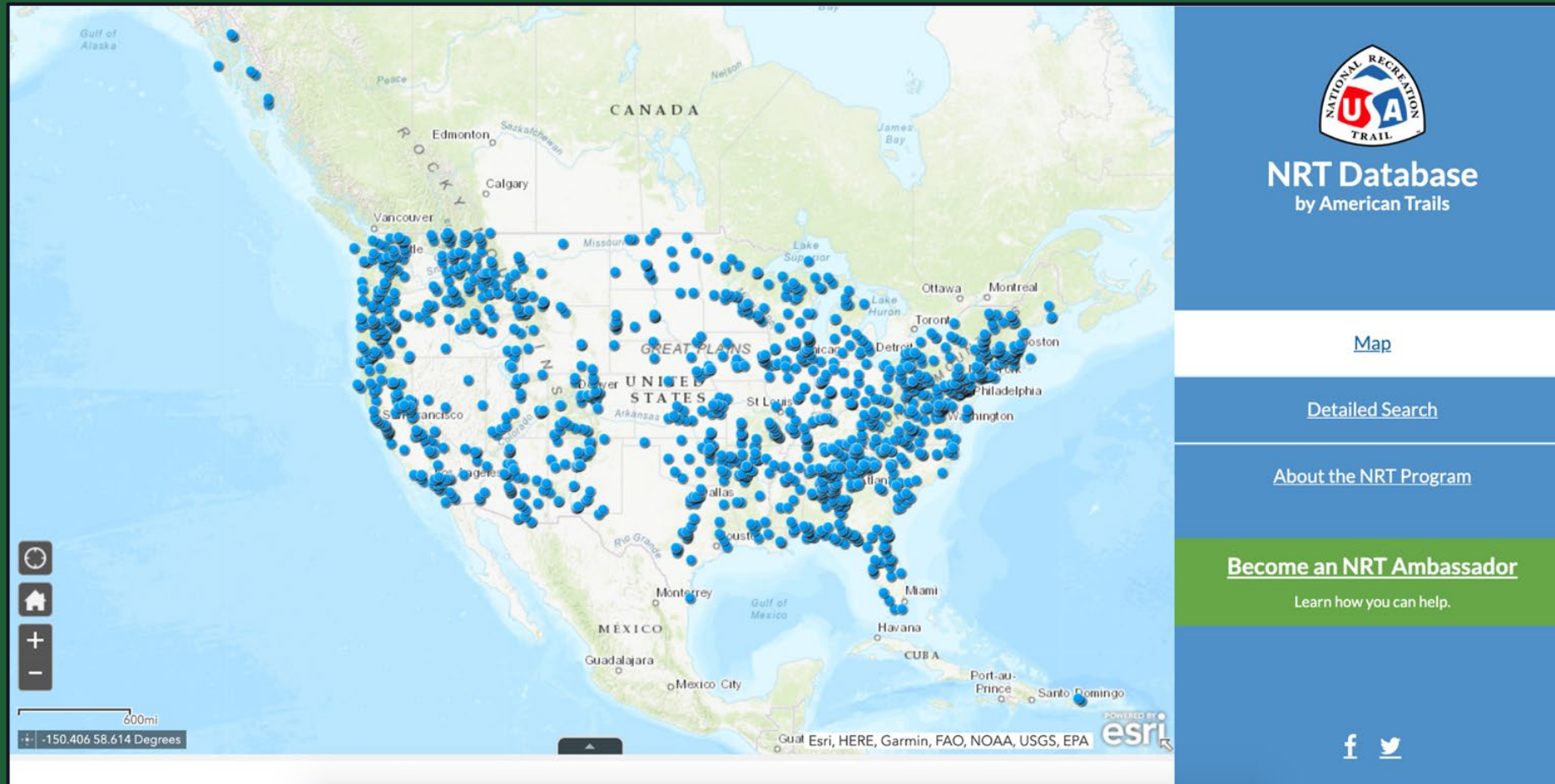
Photo Contest

Ambassador Program

Funding Opportunities

Benefits- National Database

Database of over 1,300 searchable trails



The image is a screenshot of the National Recreation Trails Database website. On the left, a map of the United States is displayed with numerous blue circular pins indicating the locations of trails. The map includes labels for major cities and regions such as Vancouver, Seattle, Denver, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, Montreal, Philadelphia, Washington, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Havana. The map also shows the Gulf of Alaska, Gulf of Mexico, and the Rio Grande. In the bottom left corner of the map, there is a scale bar for 600 miles and a coordinate display showing -150.406 58.614 Degrees. The bottom right corner of the map area features the Esri logo and a list of data providers: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, EPA.

On the right side of the screenshot, there is a blue navigation menu. At the top is the National Recreation Trails logo, which consists of a circular emblem with 'USA' in the center and 'NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL' around the perimeter. Below the logo, the text reads 'NRT Database by American Trails'. The menu items are: 'Map', 'Detailed Search', 'About the NRT Program', and 'Become an NRT Ambassador'. The 'Become an NRT Ambassador' item is highlighted with a green background and includes the subtext 'Learn how you can help.' At the bottom of the menu are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter.

[National Recreation Trails Database \(nrtdatabase.org\)](http://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 | 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.



A wooden sign for Barr Trail. The words "BARR TRAIL" are painted in large, bold, yellow letters. Below the text is a circular logo for the National Recreation Trail, featuring a mountain range and the letters "USA" in red and blue. The sign is mounted on a wooden post and shows signs of wear and tear.

BARR
TRAIL

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

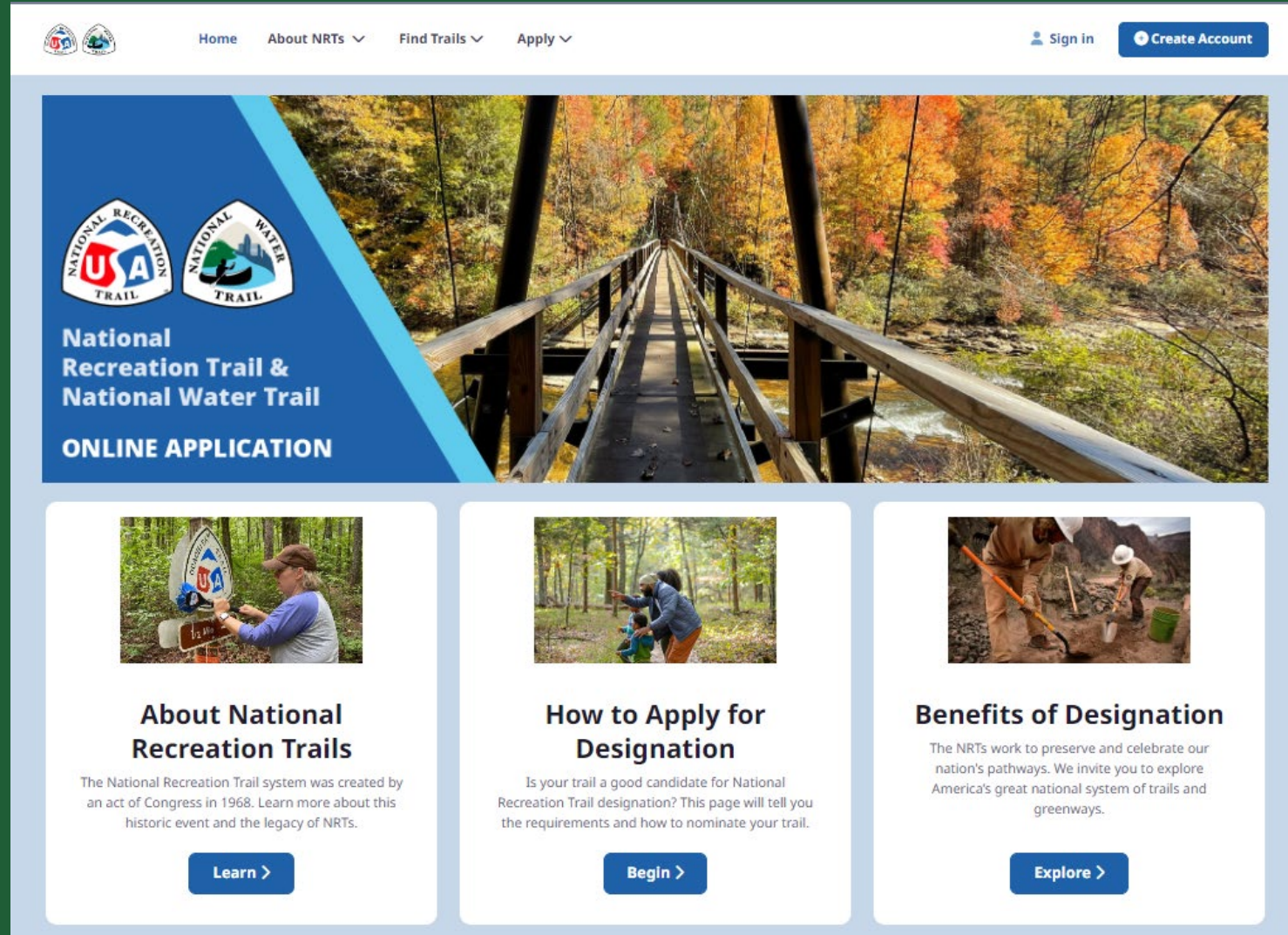
Designation Process:

- 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



The screenshot shows the homepage of the National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail Online Application website. The header includes navigation links for Home, About NRTs, Find Trails, and Apply, along with Sign in and Create Account buttons. The main banner features a scenic view of a suspension bridge over a river with autumn foliage, and the text: "National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail ONLINE APPLICATION". Below the banner are three content cards:

- About National Recreation Trails**: Includes an image of a person at a trail marker and text stating the system was created by an act of Congress in 1968. A "Learn >" button is at the bottom.
- How to Apply for Designation**: Includes an image of a family in a forest and text asking if a trail is a good candidate for designation. A "Begin >" button is at the bottom.
- Benefits of Designation**: Includes an image of workers on a trail and text explaining the NRTs' work to preserve pathways. An "Explore >" button is at the bottom.

[National Recreation Trails application \(nrtapplication.org\)](http://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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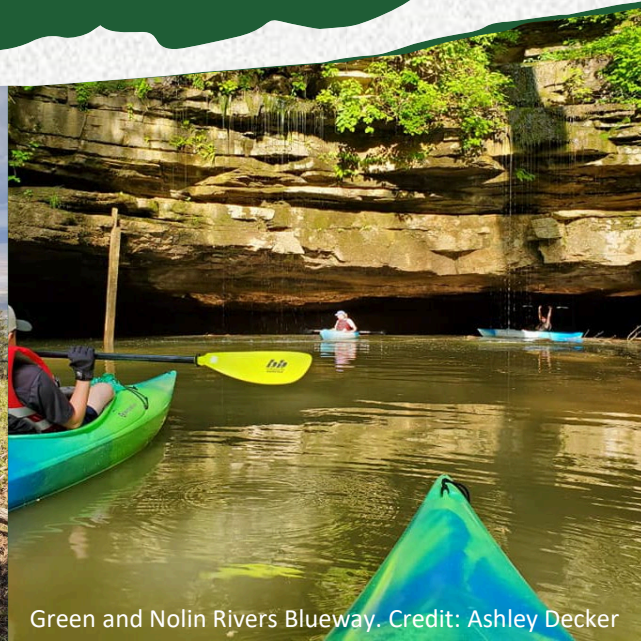
Thank You!



Muron River Water Trail. Credit: Unknown



Gabriel Tiller. Credit: Oregon Timber Trail Alliance



Green and Nolin Rivers Blueway. Credit: Ashley Decker



Pacific Northwest Trail – Galcier Segment. Credit: NPS