

# National Recreation Trails

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Preserving and Celebrating  
Our Nation's Pathways

# National Recreation Trails

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What are they?

- National Trails System (NTS) 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 NTS trail networks.
- Recognized and designated by either the **Secretary of Interior** or **Secretary of Agriculture**.







# Why National Recreation Trails?

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





# NRT Goals

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- Promote the use and care of existing trails and stimulate the development of new trails throughout U.S.
- Provide recreation access for urban and rural communities
- Economic development through tourism
- Provide healthy recreation opportunities





# NRTs of all Kinds

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All trail user types, all terrain and setting types, and vary in length from less than a mile to 1500 miles

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

- 2020 - 31 new NRTs
- 2021 - 10 new NRTs
- 2022 - 9 new NRTs





# Trail Eligibility

- A trail is a travelway 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 of NRT Designation

Recognition, Legitimacy, Partners





# NRT Database

Database of over 1,300 searchable trails

**NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL USA**

**NRT Database**  
by American Trails

[Map](#)

[Detailed Search](#)

[About the NRT Program](#)

[Become an NRT Ambassador](#)  
Learn how you can help.

500mi  
+ -150.406 58.614 Degrees

powered by **esri**



# Signage

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Free signs for all current NRTs

- Free plastic signs (3.5" and 8")
- Low cost metal signs (3.5" and 8")

## Future Plans...

- Signage programs that provide free signs and sponsorship to support ongoing maintenance through Smart Outdoor.

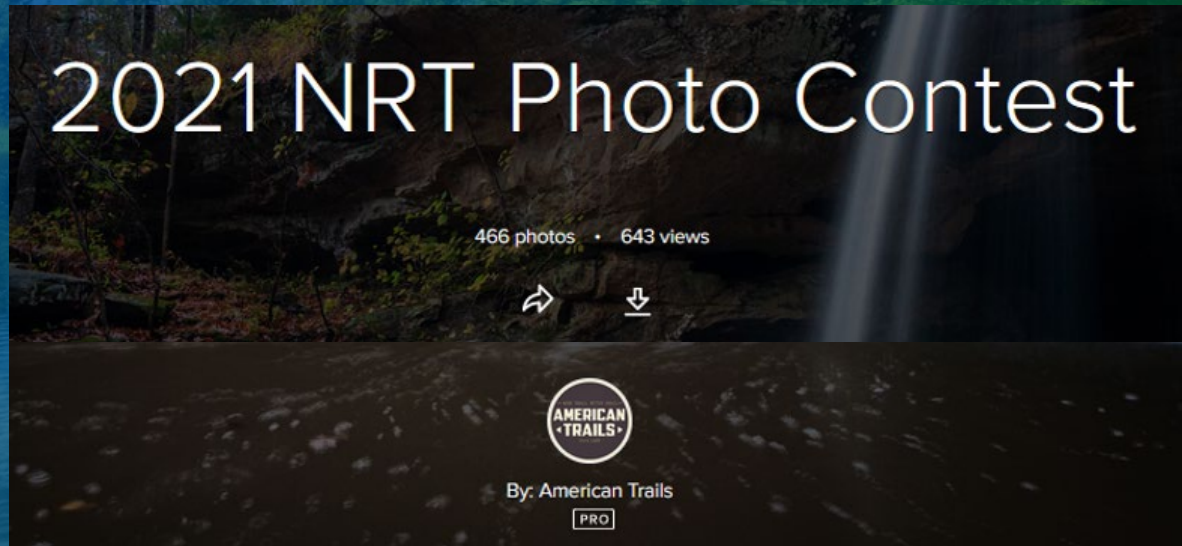




# Annual NRT Photo Contest

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Recognition for your trail through great photography





# NRT Ambassador Program

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300+ individuals in all 50 states committed to improving NRTs

NRT Ambassadors are:

- Trained for safety and consistency of data gathering.
- Tasked with reaching out to trail managers and agency staff to build understanding of the NRT Program and ensure the trail meets standards of quality.
- Help to identify centerline GPS tracks and ensure quality information on each NRT.

Future Plans...

- American Trails is working with app developers to create an app that streamlines ambassador tasks and connects land managers with the public.





# Improved Funding Opportunities

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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.

## Future Plans...

- American Trails has built a national “Trail Fund” that may prioritize funding for diverse NRTs.







# How to Become an NRT

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The process for different types of trails





# Application Process U.S. Forest Service

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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.





# Application Process

## U.S. Forest Service

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### Designation Process:

- Recommendation & Approval
- Trail Location Description
- Trail History
- Trail Description & Management Objectives
- Best Management Practices
- Assessment of Impacts
- Public Use Statement





# Application Process

## Department of the Interior

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If your trail is on Federal, State, 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.





# Application Process

## Department of the Interior

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### Designation Process:

- 1) Trail Information
- 2) Contact Information
- 3) Owner Consent & State Support
- 4) If any portion of the trail is on non-Federally managed land, a letter from the respective State Trail Administrator is required
- 5) Trail Photo(s) and Map
- 6) Additional Support Materials
- 7) Signed Signature Page
- 8) Application Reviewed by Interagency Staff
- 9) Approved applications submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for official designation

\*Deadline to submit application is November 1

\*National water trails have slightly different application questions to focus on best management practices





# NRT Frequently Asked Questions

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- 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.





# Thank You!

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For More Information and Details about How to Become an NRT

Visit the American Trails website

<https://www.americantrails.org/national-recreation-trails>

You can also email

[nrt@americantrails.org](mailto:nrt@americantrails.org)