

Understanding National Recreation Trails & National Water Trails



Today's Learning

- NRTs = National Recreation Trails
- NWTs = National Water Trails
- What are NRTs and NWTs?
- Goals of NRTs and NWTs
- History of NRTs and NWTs
- Eligibility Requirements
- Benefits of Designation
- How to Apply
- Recent Updates
- FAQs
- Questions and Answers



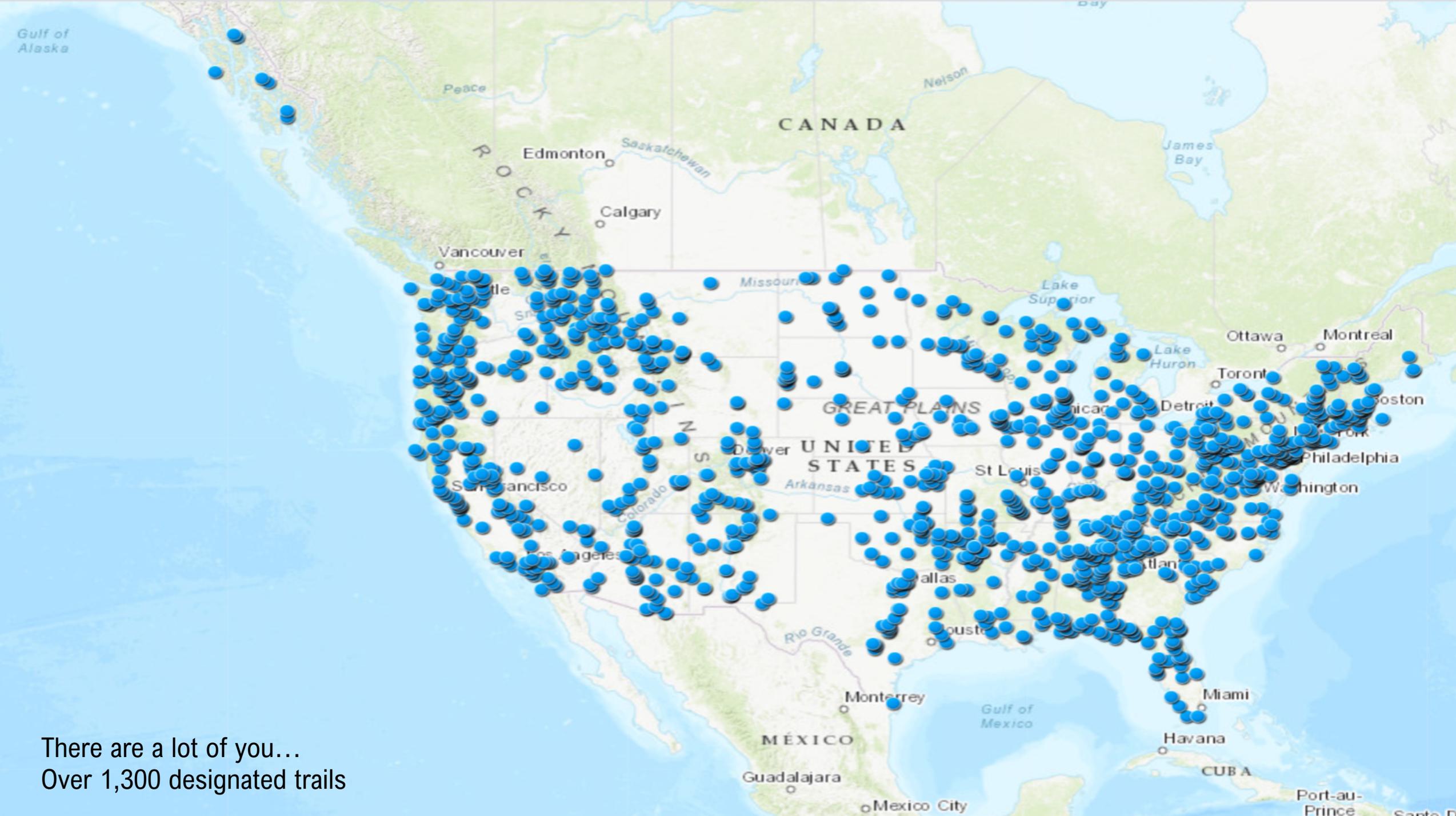


But first...

Who out there has a great trail
or water trail in their
community or on their public
lands?



Who out there has a
designated NRT or NWT?



There are a lot of you...
Over 1,300 designated trails

What are NRTs & NWTs

- 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.
- Secretarial Order 3319 – “Establishment of a National Water Trail System (2012) (For NWTs).
- 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.



NWT Goals

Everything stated before plus...

To create a distinctive national network of exemplary water trails that expand access to water-based recreation for healthy recreation and tourism.

To protect and restore waterways across the country.

To improve user safety on our water trails.

To establish a network of practitioners that promote the development of water trails and share best management practices.

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

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



NWT History

Secretarial Order 3319 – Establishment

35 National Water Trails have been designated as of 2022

NWT's currently range in length from 4.2 miles to 631 miles

Lakes, swamps, ocean, canals, and rivers of all kinds!



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

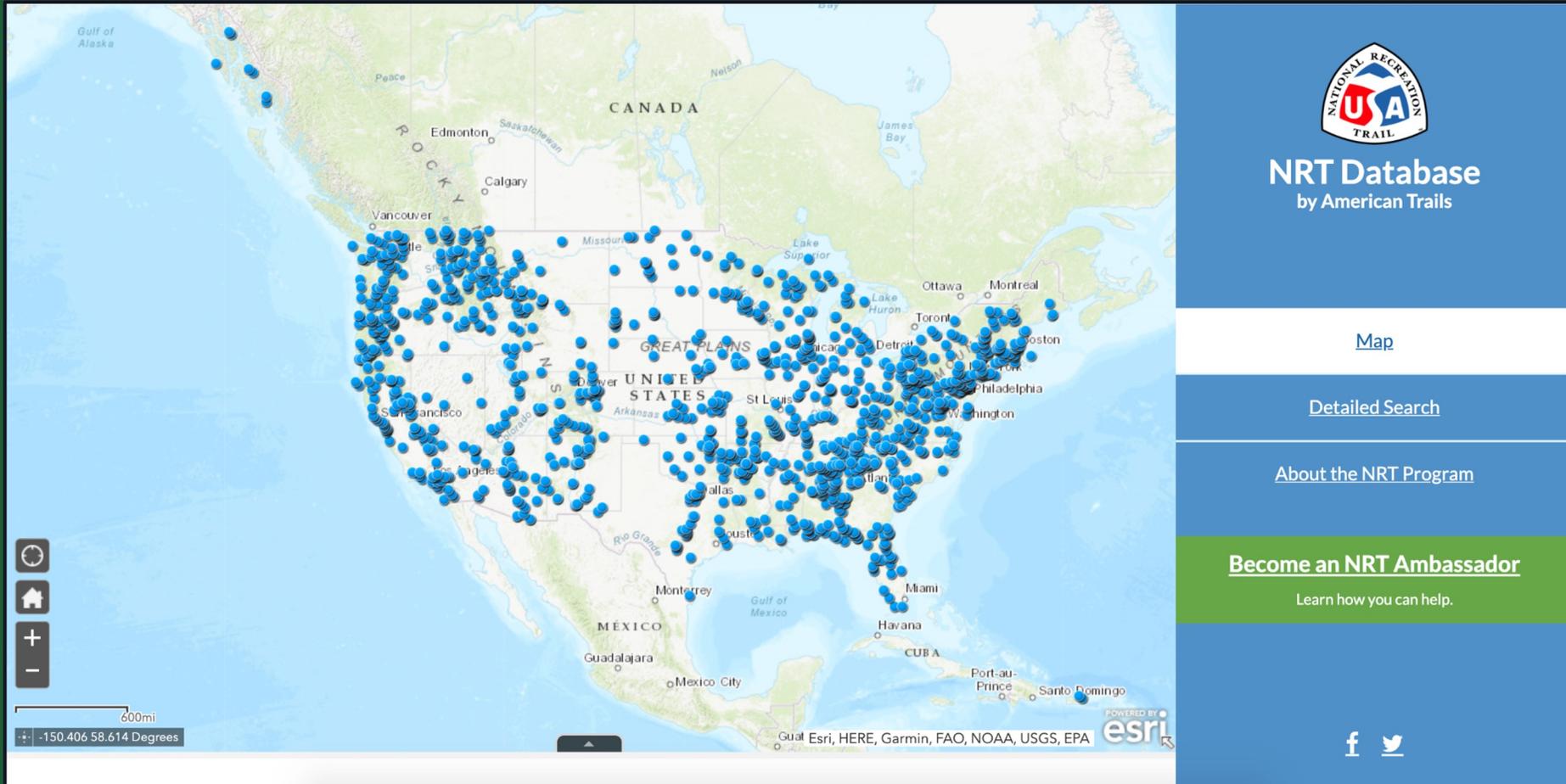
Photo Contest

Ambassador Program

Funding Opportunities

Benefits- National Database

Database of over 1,300 searchable trails



The image shows a screenshot of the National Recreation Trails Database website. On the left, a map of the United States is displayed with numerous blue location pins indicating trail locations. The map includes labels for major cities, states, and geographical features. On the right side, there is a blue navigation menu with the following items:

-  **NRT Database**
by American Trails
- [Map](#)
- [Detailed Search](#)
- [About the NRT Program](#)
- [Become an NRT Ambassador](#)
Learn how you can help.

At the bottom right of the navigation menu, there are social media icons for Facebook and Twitter. The map interface includes a scale bar (0 to 600 miles) and a coordinate display (-150.406 58.614 Degrees). The map is powered by Esri, with data from Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, and EPA.

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

Benefits - Signage

Upon Designation

- Two 8"x8" metal signs
- Three 3.5"x3.5" plastic 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 and NWTs
- 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 or NWTs, being an NRT or NWT 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 or NWT 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 and NWTs.

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 and NWTs on land administered by the Department of Agriculture (National Forests, National Grasslands, and National Recreation Areas) and associated lands.

Proposed NRTs and NWTs 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 capital 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 and NWTs on all lands other than those administered by the Department of Agriculture.

Proposed NRTs and NWTs 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

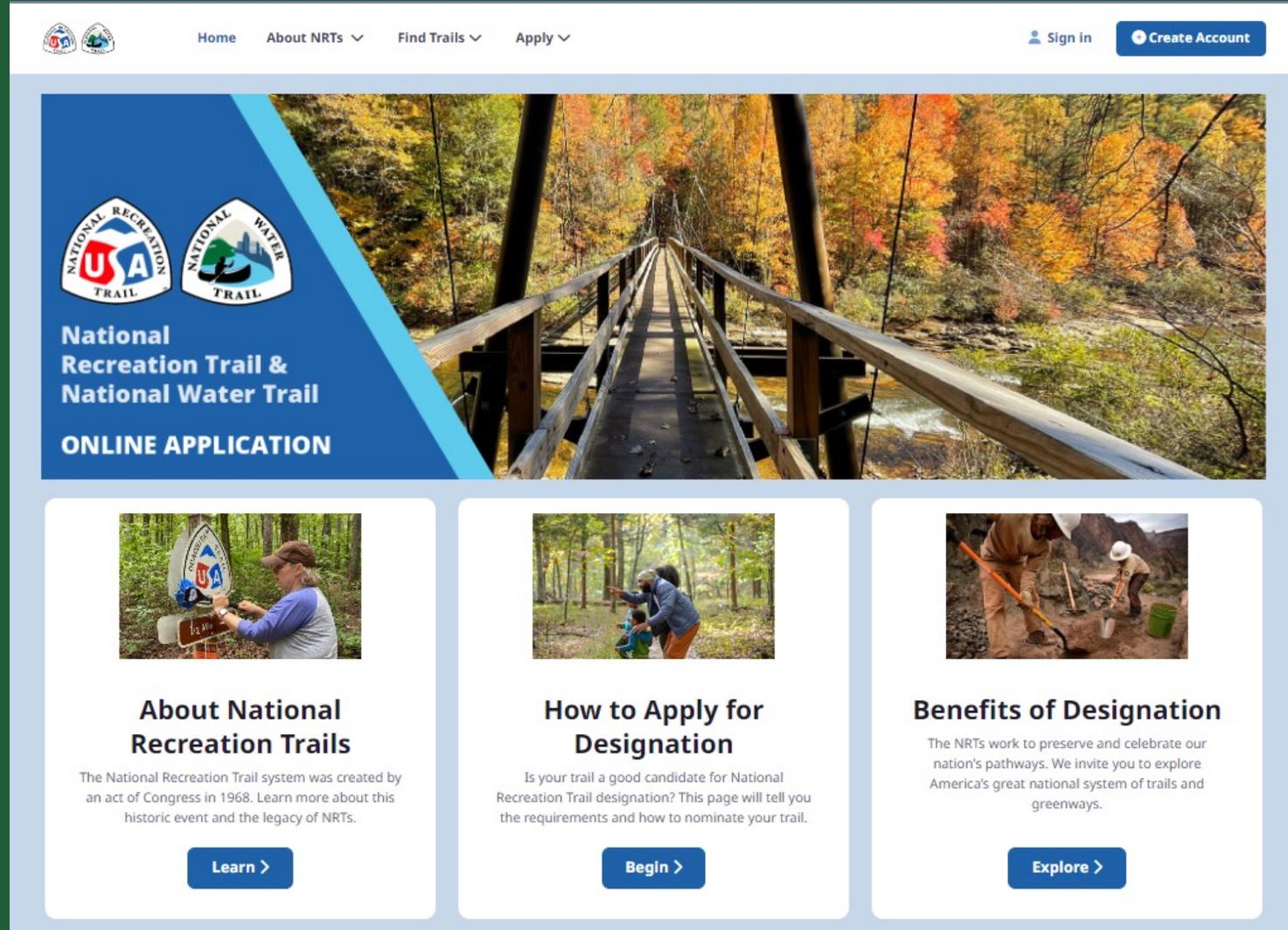
Designation Process:

- 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 the logos for the National Recreation Trail and National Water Trail, with the text "National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail ONLINE APPLICATION" overlaid on a background image of a wooden suspension bridge over a river in a forest with autumn foliage. Below the banner are three content cards: "About National Recreation Trails" with a photo of a woman at a trail marker and a "Learn >" button; "How to Apply for Designation" with a photo of a family and a "Begin >" button; and "Benefits of Designation" with a photo of workers and an "Explore >" button.

[National Recreation Trails application \(nrapplication.org\)](http://nrapplication.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 or NWT.

FAQs - NWTs

Any type of water can be designated, but we do look at water quality for public health safety.

Distance between access points should be reasonable for a new paddler to travel in a day's time (or less). Distance varies depending on type of water and rate of flow.

Access points should be available to the general public with suitable parking.

Trail doesn't meet all BMP's.

Trail doesn't have signage, maps or online information needed to aid users in trip planning, orienting and identification of safety hazards.

Trail is incomplete without suitable point-to-point access.

Application lacks information about access point ownership and permissions.

An individual is applying, rather than a robust, proven organization.

Trail designation is being sought by a rather new entity, or an entity that doesn't manage lands, without long-term plans for how it will be maintained.

Contacts

DOI Lead (NPS): Peter Bonsall (peter_bonsall@nps.gov)

USFS Lead: Andrew Welsh (andrew.welsh@usda.gov)

American Trails:

Mike Passo (mikepasso@americantrails.org)

Candace Gallagher (candace@americantrails.org)

Mike Bullington (mike@americantrails.org)

General Questions: nrt@americantrails.org



Questions?

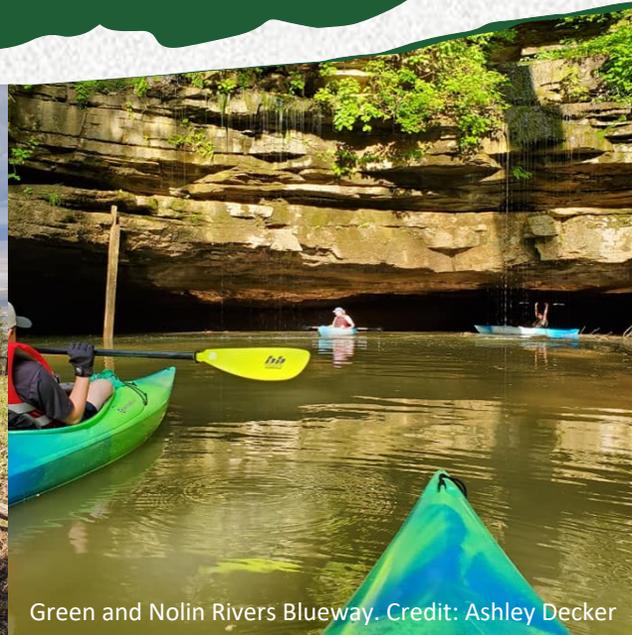
Thank You!



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