

TRAILS FOR ALL AMERICANS

The Report of the National Trails Agenda Project
Submitted By American Trails to the National Park Service

Summer, 1990



U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Prepared through a Cooperative Agreement between American Trails
and the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service

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Trails for All Americans

What would it take for all Americans to be able to go out their front doors and within fifteen minutes be on trails that wind through their cities, towns or villages and bring them back without retracing steps? Along the way they could pass shops and restaurants, go to work, school or a park, visit an historic site or the zoo, and experience the great outdoors without a car or bus. If they were to follow the right path, the trail could take them into the countryside or possibly link up with another trail that would lead them into the deepest wilderness or to the highest mountain or across the widest prairie. They could travel across America on trails that connect one community to another and stretch from coast to coast, and from border to border.

Such a network of trails was endorsed in 1987 by the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors when it called for a nationwide system of greenways within easy access of all Americans. However, the Commission also raised a major challenge when it noted, "Decisions made between now and the year 2000 will determine the fate of America's remaining land and water resources." The ability to create a national system of trails depends on land-use decisions being made every day.

The critical task today is thinking about trails in the context of whole systems and making land-use decisions that explicitly consider connecting the trails, setting aside land to allow connections, thinking systematically about trails, linear parks and greenways, and acting now because decisions made in this decade will determine the long-term fate of essential resources.

In 1988, the National Trails Agenda Project was initiated as a cooperative venture between the National Park Service and American Trails (a non-profit, broadly based trails coalition) to look at trail issues and develop recommendations to satisfy America's current and future need for trails. To form a national system, trails must be viewed as part of the nation's physical infrastructure and included along with highways, utility and sewer lines, airports, and other public facilities as part of the general conduct of everyday governance; trails must be seen in the larger context of the corridors and environments through which they pass; corridor protection must be the primary goal; and the highest priority in developing such a system must be in close-to-home areas, particularly where resources are closest to population centers. To develop a system all land- and waterbased resources must be assumed to have trail potential.

This report is directed toward an audience that includes all levels of government, the business community, private organizations and user groups, and every American citizen. Only through coordinated action can the ever-changing outdoor recreation needs of the nation be met and the diverse objectives for open space, physical fitness, natural and cultural diversity, education, transportation, and economic development be fulfilled.

The creation of a true national system of trails begins with all Americans in their own backyards — in neighborhoods and communities, in churches, schools and social organizations, in cities and towns, in every county and state. All Americans are called upon to act immediately to safeguard trail resources.

Background

Trails and the American Landscape

Footpaths and trails have been an integral part of America's landscape. Native Americans hunted animals by following their trails through forests and across open prairies. Over time these narrow paths became trade routes and established transportation corridors. Later, the Western frontier was explored and expanded largely by trail. Canals and towpaths brought settlers and goods across the Appalachian Mountains. Pioneers following Indian pathways opened up the Northwest Territories. The Oregon Trail led wagontrains of pioneers to the Pacific Northwest, while El Camino Real linked Spanish Missionaries to the California Coast. America's highway system and the streets of towns and cities more often than not follow many of these early trails and footpaths that started as animal tracks through North America's forests, mountains and prairies.

Today, for millions of Americans, trails are a link to the outdoors, providing opportunities for recreation, exercise, and transportation.

- A landscaped, urban bikepath provides children with a safe route to school.
- A streamside greenway provides a relaxing pathway for senior citizens traveling from home to a nearby shopping area.
- A wilderness trail provides a "classroom" for college students studying forest ecosystems.
- An abandoned railroad corridor is transformed into a multi-use trail and used by a local track team as a fitness course.
- A mountain trail challenges the skills of a person with disabilities.

Thirty years ago the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission found that 90 percent of adult Americans enjoyed outdoor activities. As America grows, available recreation resources must keep pace with a growing population of outdoor enthusiasts. As linear corridors, trails and greenways have the potential to satisfy great numbers of Americans. Providing more recreation and alternatives than a single parcel of land, trails connect people with natural and community resources, and provide safe and scenic routes from home to shopping areas, schools, and business centers. Trails unite neighborhoods and link urban, suburban, and rural environments. A continuous linear corridor can include a baseball diamond, an extended bicycle trail, a bridle path, *and* a meandering footpath. These corridors are, by nature, multiple-use and cost-effective facilities.

What is a trail?

For the purpose of this report, a trail is a linear corridor, on land or water, with protected status and public access for recreation or transportation. Trails can be used to preserve open space, provide a natural respite in urban areas, limit soil erosion in rural areas, and buffer wetlands and wildlife habitat along waterways. Trails may be surfaced with soil, asphalt, sand and clay, clam shells, rock, gravel or wood chips. Trails may follow a river, a ridge line, a mountain game trail, an abandoned logging road, a state highway. They may link historic landmarks within a city. Trails may be maintained by a federal, state, or local agency, a local trails coalition, or a utility company.

Trails: A National Priority

Americans are seeking trail opportunities as never before. No longer are trails only for the "rugged individualist" pursuing a solitary trek through breathtaking wilderness. The trail landscape is found everywhere and trail users include young people and senior citizens, families, individuals and organized groups, people with disabilities and the physically fit.

The activities that occur on trails are as diverse as the users. From walking to horseback riding to mountain biking to snowmobiling to cross country skiing to skate boarding to bicycling to backpacking, trails are used by all types of people for all types of outdoor activities. Sixty million Americans are now bicyclists, compared with 12 million in 1960. Seventeen million are horseback riders, compared with 7.8 million in 1960; more than 20 million are off-highway vehicle riders. Six million are cross-country skiers. Nine million are canoeists. More Americans walk for pleasure (100 million) than participate in any other outdoor activity.

National studies continue to document the importance of trails to the nation's population. Trail use was consistently cited among the 10 most popular outdoor recreation activities in 13 national surveys conducted between 1959 and 1978. Walking for pleasure was reported as the most widespread activity (along with swimming) in the 1982-83 Nationwide Recreation Survey. In 1986, one out of every 10 unsolicited testimonies and comments heard by the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors related to trails issues, ideas, and recommendations.

Trail Benefits: Meeting the Needs of a Changing Nation

By the year 2000, more than 80 percent of the nation's population will reside in urban areas. The growing number of two-career couples, single-parent families, the physical and economic limits to mobility, and the decrease in available leisure time (since the mid-1970s) already influence recreation options and restrict the ability of more and more Americans to travel to distant park and recreation facilities. Close-to-home opportunities are a priority. Existing streets, sidewalks, and parks, available minutes from home, are the starting points for local recreation. These however are inadequate to satisfy the full range of needs that an extended trail system is capable of providing close to home.

Trails have multiple values and their benefits reach far beyond recreation. Trails can enrich the quality of life for individuals, make communities more liveable, and protect, nurture, and showcase America's grandeur by traversing areas of natural beauty, distinctive geography, historic significance, and ecological diversity. Trails are important for the nation's health, economy, resource protection and education.

Health, Fitness & Safety

Awareness of health and physical fitness continues to change and grow. With the development of a more mechanized society has also come a more sedentary life style. Regular physical activity, once the norm for most of the population, is now prescribed as an important factor for maintaining physical and mental health. A healthy population is an asset.

A 1986 Market Opinion Research survey found that fitness and health were the two reasons that people cited most often for engaging in outdoor activities. Although some choose to join "health clubs," the most popular form of exercise continues to be walking.

The availability of safe opportunities for exercise and fitness is critical in every community. Local trails can provide such opportunities and accommodate a variety of users and activities. Walking, bicycling, jogging, and other aerobic activities can all be accomplished on trails and are popular means of exercise and recreation for physical fitness.

Trail activity and use promotes individual health in an environment that is removed from many of the safety hazards inherent to other types of activity. Infinite trail environments provide the challenges and settings desired by and suited to individual tastes and capabilities.

Trails indirectly affect people's health by contributing to the quality of the air and water. Natural trail corridors preserve trees and vegetation that refresh the air and filter runoff flowing into rivers and streams.

Long-distance trails provide an important opportunity to satisfy health and fitness needs. However, extended outdoor trail adventures offer less tangible benefits that are not always associated with shorter day-use recreation, including: a sense of accomplishment that leads to a greater feeling of self-esteem; the satisfaction of meeting a challenge, a success which builds self-confidence; encounters with local residents that builds social bonds and restores faith in the goodness of people; and a physical involvement with the diverse geography of the country, a way of knowledge that fosters a sense of awe and respect for history.

Economic Benefits

Economic Benefits of Trails

The 32-mile Elroy-Sparta Park Trail winds through five west-central Wisconsin communities. Established in 1965 with the purchase of a 51,200 right-of-way, a study of the trail 23 years later documents its significant economic benefits. In 1988, an estimated 50,000 people used the trail - 49% from out of state - and an estimated \$1,257,000 was received in trail-related revenue. Restaurants, bike and equipment stores, and transportation and tourist information services have all flourished in meeting the demands of trail users. The trail has also brought increased revenue to the state park which collects user fees for use of its facilities. Plans for a future hostel raise additional possibilities for trail related revenue and added conveniences for the trail's many users.

Revenues and job opportunities are national concerns. Economic values have, to say the least, traditionally played a significant role in the use of the American land. An organized trail system is a desirable amenity and can contribute to the economic vitality of a community. A trail can guide both visitors and residents through diverse neighborhoods, past interesting shops, enticing restaurants, and many other businesses. Trails can attract businesses as well as tourists and residents. Trails are important amenities that have time and again increased the property values of adjacent homes and businesses.

Real estate values of the homes near Seattle's 12-mile Burke-Gilman Trail are higher due to the trail's appeal. Advertisements for homes along northern Virginia's Washington and Old Dominion Trail frequently mention the trail's proximity and the easy access it provides to other facilities in the automobile-choked region.

Iowa's 26-mile Heritage Trail has brought thousands of visitors to Graf, Iowa - population 100. In response to the needs of trail users, local businesses have expanded. One businessman built a campground and a restaurant, serving 3500 trail users in his first year of expanded operation. Residents and visitors alike have benefitted from new trails in Graf and other Iowa communities.

Neighboring states often compete ferociously for tourism dollars and one state's economic gain is a neighboring state's loss. Trails provide an opportunity for states to work together for mutual benefit. Revenue generated from trail-related recreation and sports activities provides substantial income. Additional trails have the potential to maximize economic benefits for all states. Recreational facilities located within a reasonable proximity to each other create a greater draw than an isolated facility.

Resource Protection

In 1861, Henry David Thoreau wrote, "In wildness is the preservation of the world." The linear corridor that often envelopes a trail preserves the original character of the corridor and nurtures plants and wildlife not found elsewhere in a region. Trails protect unique or endangered natural resources by providing designated areas for users

Trails and Resource Protection

The Paint Creek Trail in Oakland County, Michigan, exemplifies the way in which trails serve to protect natural resources. The trail has brought local attention to the importance of protecting and preserving the areas riparian resources. Protection is being achieved in the following ways: strong local ordinances have been passed to protect wetlands along the trail corridor; two side parcels have been donated to a local park commission by private land owners with conservation interests; and, erosion control efforts (stairs and terraces) have been implemented to protect fish habitat in this protected trout stream. The trail corridor also serves as a buffer between residential and industrial sections, preserving peaceful, natural scenery and recreational resources.

Education

and removing people from critical areas needing protection.

Local trail corridors can be used as buffers between different land uses, separating commercial and residential areas. They can be used to define areas where growth is planned or to protect unique environmental areas, such as floodplains or critical habitat areas. Trails and linear parks can be important components of riverfront rehabilitation as well as a means to unite new development with existing resources.

Wisconsin's LaCrosse River State Trail sustains several species of rare prairie plants. Along the trail, the original prairie ecosystem remains intact and protected, unspoiled by agriculture or other development. Trail corridors that encompass floodplains also protect communities from natural water disasters.

Public lands within the estates of the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service or the Department of the Interior's Park Service and Bureau of Land Management are managed under distinct mandates. While the Forest Service was primarily established for resource access and management, the Park Service has a mandate to preserve and protect the nation's natural and cultural resources, and the Bureau of Land Management is charged with the custodial management of its public lands for the greatest public benefit. All share a responsibility to safeguard the future of our natural resources and all must provide recreation opportunities for the American public.

While trails encourage resource protection, they also use first-hand experience to educate citizens about the importance of the natural environment. Whether a trail is used for a formal course or a simple afternoon walk, the user is exposed to the outdoors. Nurturing appreciation and knowledge develops respect for the natural environment. Education and hands-on involvement with trails can also foster an atmosphere of respect and cooperation among trail users.

Trails, used by environmental education classes from preschool through college, help develop a conservation ethic. Historic trails, such as Washington, D.C.'s Black History Trail, can connect a number of historic sites in a community and provide the user with a lesson in the history of the community.

Alternate Transportation

Transportation is now viewed primarily as the movement of people by cars, buses or other motorized vehicles. Yet growing numbers are walking and bicycling to work, school and other destinations and use sidewalks, paths, and roadways for local transportation. Trail systems provide an alternative transportation system at the local and metropolitan level. Trails can connect homes with schools, offices, and shopping areas. They can be designed as much for transportation as for recreation and allow people to appreciate the outdoors while reducing air and noise pollution and energy consumption.

Building on Our Legacy

In united effort, public and private sectors can realize the full benefits of trails. To reach the goal of a national system within the next decade, however, the following will be necessary: cooperation, identification of a broad spectrum of trail users, response to demand, and increased accessibility for all users, including people with disabilities.

Just as trails benefit all, the responsibility for trail planning, development, and maintenance must also be shared. Working together, trail users and organizations, citizens, local, state and federal land managers, planners, and policy makers all have a role in ensuring the planning, development, protection, and maintenance of trails.

Building Cooperation Processes must be developed to clarify responsibility and accountability in such a way that all groups and individuals involved in creating a national system are able to contribute their knowledge and expertise.

Providing a Spectrum of Opportunities The diverse trails community includes many people with distinct needs and trail requirements. Appropriate planning will ensure that all people have the ability to “hit the trail.” The broad community of trail users includes: hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, backpackers, wheelchair users and physically challenged persons, conservationists, fitness enthusiasts, snowmobilers, walkers, off highway vehicle users, educators, dog sledders, fishing enthusiasts, hunters, canoeists and kayakers, tourists, senior citizens, utility companies, federal, state and local land managers, sporting goods manufacturers, state trail managers, and service providers. Although not every trail is suitable for every use, methods must be developed for maximizing safety and minimizing other conflicts among trail users.

Satisfying Demand Trails are a means of satisfying needs, whether for improved quality of life, health and safety, economic revitalization, or resource protection. The long-term needs of current and potential trail enthusiasts must be determined. Trails must be planned in response to these needs — including planning future trails with proximity to residential areas and longrange planning to accommodate growing recreation activities. Where appropriate, multiple use trails should be encouraged.

Assuring Accessibility for People with Disabilities People with disabilities are ardent recreation enthusiasts and trail users. Yet many trails are still inaccessible to the physically disabled. Despite the existence of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which mandates full access for people with disabilities in all federally conducted and funded activities, compliance has been inadequate. Individual agency standards are applied with varying effectiveness but with little increase in the overall accessible trail mileage. In some instances, trail reconstruction has established separate or “special” trail facilities for persons with disabilities — isolating them from the mainstream rather than establishing an environment structurally suited to meet the needs of the greatest number of users.

The tools exist to plan trails to meet the needs of both a wide range of persons with disabilities and “able bodied” trail users. But agency and state criteria — a type of affirmative action for trails — are lacking. This is necessary if trail enthusiasts with disabilities are to enjoy opportunities equal to those currently enjoyed by others.

Trails reveal the character of the American landscape: parks, wildlife refuges, deserts, alpine areas, wetlands, and forests. They highlight the diversity of our close-to-home environments. Village residents amble along Vermont’s Stowe Recreation Path. Bicyclists and pedestrians journey from the New York Aquarium to any one of 13 parks on the multi-jurisdictional Brooklyn-Queens Greenway. State residents and tourists alike enjoy the 470-mile Colorado Trail, extending from Denver to Durango. Fitnessconscious walkers and backpackers hike the interstate Potomac Heritage Trail. Whether for an hour or a month, trail opportunities provide insight into the America’s diversity and rejuvenate the lasting spirit.

A National System of Trails

A national system of trails and greenways would lead users to a series of trails around their community, state or country. The system would be made up of all kinds of trails and greenways located on public and private lands and administered by all levels of government and a variety of organizations and agencies.

The National Trails System Act of 1968 and its subsequent amendments provide a foundation for the development of such a system. The Act calls for and defines four types of trails, National Scenic, National Historic, National Recreation and connecting and side trails. The first two are long distance trails and designated as national trails by acts of Congress. The third and fourth are designated by the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture. All four, for the most part, are existing trails that have been set aside as having national significance. Unfortunately, they have monopolized attention at the federal level when discussions have been held about a national system of trails. However, the designation and creation of these trails does not result in a national system of trails; in many ways the designated long-distance trails and the national recreation trails have kept people from thinking about trails in a systematic way, kept them focusing on individual trails.

Trails are everywhere. There are trails in parks and forests, on private lands, along the banks of rivers and the shores of lakes and oceans. There are trails in mountains and across prairies and trails winding through the densest urban areas. Unfortunately, few people think of individual trails as part of a system. A community may think of the trails within its boundaries as a system but more often than not that is as far as the thinking goes. There is little understanding of how that local system connects to an adjoining locality's system and how they are part of a statewide network that is part of a nationwide network of trails.

A national system is one that is made up of the trails in a city or town, those that pass through the countryside, those on private lands and on public lands in state and national parks and forests. Creating a system means learning where trails are and developing connections that link them together into networks and where desirable and necessary, building new trails that also connect. Just as the nation's roads, whether interstate highways, state roads, county roads or village streets, are seen as a system, developed and managed by various entities and levels of government, so should trails be viewed. A system will result only when individual trails or a community or park or forest trail system are looked at and planned for in the context of a larger system.

All levels of government and the non-profit sector are responsible for creation of the larger system. Each level must work within its own area of responsibility but also understand how its work fits into the context of a national system. Some of the most important decisions occur at the local level. The trails community must work with various levels of government to help define where trails should be and how they should be used and help develop the programs that will result in a national system.

Local Government and Trails

Local and metropolitan trails serve the needs of an individual jurisdiction or a metropolitan area and may be one of the most taken for granted community resources. Although there are few source-books, local trails are numerous. They range from individual trails running through cities, to trails within city parklands, to integrated trail systems in communities. Local governments have the greatest impact on the development of trails. It is at this level that most land use decisions are made. Local governments are also the nation's primary provider of public recreation opportunities.

Trail needs vary from community to community. Local trail development and management are hampered by many factors, including loss of land resources, shortages of funds and technical skills, and lack of a clear purpose. The challenge is to design a trail system that covers a community's diverse needs.

Clearly, local trails address a community's everyday, close-to-home recreation needs. They vary from neighborhood sidewalks and roads to community pathway systems. Easily accessible and conveniently located trails make it possible for individuals to enjoy the important "simple pleasures" of walking, hiking, and bicycling. When planned properly these trails can stretch for miles, winding through a city, connecting and serving many neighborhoods. Trails as linear parks serve a great number of citizens and neighborhoods while using a relatively small landbase.

Building A Local System of Trails

The success of a trail system depends on citizens and decision-makers in defining local issues and developing a trail plan. The plan may outline a whole new system of trails or may show the links and connections between existing trails. Agreeing on the purpose of local trails is the first step in the development of an integrated and responsive trail system. By actively participating in the planning process, trail advocates can help decision-makers understand the value of trails and how a trail system can better address the needs of a community.

To satisfy a community's diverse needs, its resources must be assessed to identify existing and potential trail corridors. Local resources are found everywhere, including park-lands, school grounds, college and university campuses, utility corridors, rivers, streambeds, reservoirs, and abandoned rail corridors. Private lands should also be assessed and, in some instances, may be the only resource available to accomplish a certain goal.

Development of a trail system involves more than building paths. Land acquisition, negotiation of an easement or purchase of development rights may be necessary. Land-use planning and zoning are basic tools for local trail development; other legal mechanisms include taxing and bonding, acquisition of land, easements or development rights, all of which are available at the local level to help set aside and protect trail corridors.

Through the local plan and its marketing strategy, issues such as user conflict, neighbor opposition, and day-to-day management responsibilities are addressed. The local plan not only maps the corridors but also assigns responsibilities for trail development and maintenance to citizens, local decision-makers, and others.

Information and Technical Assistance

Private Sector Support for Trails

The Specialty Vehicle Institute of America (SVIA) is a member organization largely supported by the four main off-road vehicle manufacturers: Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, and Kawasaki. The organization has a Rider Support program which provides grants and assistance for the development of specific trail projects. In January 1989, a grant was made to the Midwest Riders Association to purchase sound-level readers. The group used the equipment to help develop a 300-mile off highway vehicle (OHV) trail in the Mark Twain National Forest. They subsequently donated the equipment to the US Forest Service for OHV sound-level monitoring.

SVIA also provides technical assistance and grants to OHV enthusiasts to establish and strengthen local trails organizations. In its first year, this program has already involved over 200 clubs in 30 states.

Information on how to develop and market trails is necessary for a community to agree on a local trails agenda. Examples of success in other communities can be beneficial in developing a plan. Often, local citizens and interest groups, who have a great responsibility for advocating the trails agenda at the local level, lack understanding of the issues or do not have the critical information to be successful in this endeavor.

National and regional trail-related organizations have a responsibility to educate their constituents about the issues involved in the development of local trails — the issues that face trail users everyday where they live and work. Information on resource conservation and citizen activism are two rallying points for national organizations. A variety of mechanisms exist for communicating this information: it can be conveyed in newsletters, through presentations at annual events, in the creation and distribution of audiovisual "how to's" of successful trails projects, and through many other vehicles.

State and federal officials are also valuable in the development of local trail systems. Their policies and plans should incorporate the efforts and initiatives of local trails groups. They should also provide, where appropriate, technical assistance, guidance, and funding through various programs to insure coordination and integration of activities. They should make known the efforts of other groups as they provide assistance.

Funding

Trail Volunteers

Boston Harbor Islands State Park relies on volunteers to do over 50% of trail construction and maintenance work on the islands' trail system. Each summer, 100-150 volunteers from the Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands, a local non-profit organization, spend anywhere from three days to three weeks working on the islands.

In another effort, in 1987 and 1988 the Boston Globe Foundation provided grants to support trail crews on the islands. The ten-person crews provided over 800 hours of work each summer. In 1987 the crew built a one-mile trail across Calf Island, one of the harbor's outer and more primitive islands. Thanks to the work of these volunteers and the support of the Massachusetts Department of State, the island is now open to visitors.

Trail activities cost money. Funding is available from various entities and levels of government; however, there is no single source that a community can look to for all the funds needed to develop a trail system. Securing funds will require that local trails groups and decision makers think creatively. The type and extent of a trail system will determine the funding requirements. It is necessary to understand the many unique sources available to a particular community and ways a community can stretch available resources.

Traditionally, volunteer involvement has been essential. Without volunteers, many trails would not have been built or maintained. Volunteer efforts will continue to play an important role in the development and maintenance of trails. Local government needs to acknowledge this and provide some financial support for covering basic volunteer costs, organizing volunteers or supporting volunteer efforts.

Funding at the metropolitan level is complicated by variations between jurisdictions. While one area may be well maintained, another, in a different jurisdiction, may be neglected. The problem of inconsistent funding, maintenance and management within metropolitan trail systems must be addressed.

Trails and the Role of the States

Public/Private Partnerships on Trails

Pennsylvania's Schuylkill River stretches northwest from center city Philadelphia through the rural landscape of Pennsylvania Dutch country. The Schuylkill Greenway Association, a membership organization started in 1975, works with municipalities along the river to build trails—thus far, over 120 miles of trail have been built!

Using the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as a model, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania passed parallel state scenic river legislation. The Schuylkill Greenway Association's efforts to have the Schuylkill designated Pennsylvania's first scenic river have been successfully rewarded. The river is now permanently protected by state designation and eligible for funding to further the recreation potential of its greenways. Efforts, initially focused on developing a bike trail along the corridor, now also include several small parks and boat access ramps.

The states have a very different role. In addition to managing their own trails, states have the responsibility for looking at trails issues within their boundaries and developing trail systems that extend beyond local jurisdictions. They act as conveners of various trails interests and have the responsibility for mediating and resolving conflicts between factions.

Statewide trails programs may involve transportation, natural resource and planning agencies, and federal land-managing agencies in addition to local jurisdictions. Various state agencies and institutions cooperate in planning, development and maintenance. The diverse coalition of trails interests within a state add an important element to the planning and development processes.

In some states, longer trails crossing numerous local jurisdictions are administered by the state parks or natural resources agency. Wisconsin, with its system of trails on abandoned rail corridors, is one example. In western states, trails on federal lands may cross county lines and be managed by the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management, often with the help of volunteers, — as is the case in the John Muir Trail in California. In other cases, the state is just one partner in a cooperative management team that may also include local and federal agencies and trail-interest organizations.

States are responsible for the protection of land- and waterbased resources within their boundaries. Sometimes, these are of national significance. Trails and linear parks safeguard natural resources by creating areas of benign public use.

State economies are directly influenced by their natural resources. Natural resources attract residents as well as tourists for outdoor recreation. Trails provide access to these resources. Whether it is access to a favorite fishing spot, a quiet vantage point to birdwatch, or a long, relaxing bicycle ride, trails connect people with their surroundings. Trails are an important factor in many state tourism and recreation industries.

Trails cut across jurisdictions and encompass a variety of outdoor activities that may involve every agency with land, water, and transportation interests, and a diverse community of trail enthusiasts and organizations. Cooperation is needed among trail users for trail planning, development, maintenance, and information; and, it is also needed between public agencies and private trail groups. Cooperation can take the form of partnerships, technical assistance, equipment loans, and information sharing. State government plays an important role in convening the various players and helping to develop partnerships.

States can provide the link mediating between the smaller, focused local and metropolitan trails, and the expansive, multipurpose interstate trails. At the state level, the full picture is visible: trail planners and managers must be attentive to the needs of citizens and interest groups and, at the same time, they must be cognizant of where they are headed — how their work fits into a national system of trails.

Building State Trail Systems

Technical Information on Trails

The Purdue University Department of Landscape Architecture and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources sponsor the Midwest Trails Training Workshop. Developed in response to a demand from agencies, organizations, and individuals, this unique continuing education opportunity brings together park officials, planners, landscape architects, conservationists, and trail enthusiasts from all across the country. While previous trail workshops have focused on trail building and maintenance, this program also addresses community infrastructure, advocacy, development opportunities, planning, and funding for trails.

Successful efforts to link trails in various regions and across jurisdictions underscore the importance of cooperation and mutual goals. Trails will be most effectively developed and managed when all the players view a state system of trails that builds on local and metropolitan resources while also incorporating state forests, parks, and private open space.

Some states show an impressive and coherent effort by citizens and all levels of government to realize the full potential for trails. In North Carolina, trail groups organized, determined their needs and goals and took this information to the state legislature. The united effort of these groups resulted in the appointment of a State Trails Coordinator. The Coordinator, in association with agencies and citizen groups, drafted a State Trails Plan. Following this, a line item for designated trails projects was included in the state budget.

Many states include trail needs and resources in their Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs). Although not required, 35 states already address the need for trails in their SCORPs. Some states have drafted more detailed plans to unite local trails efforts with state and federal resources.

The SCORP identifies resources and facilities required to satisfy the need for state recreational activities. SCORPs are handled differently from state to state — some states treat the SCORP purely as a requirement for Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) monies, while other states use the document as a planning tool. Since 1964, 6,600 state and local trails projects have been funded from a total of 34,000 projects at this level.

Currently, it is impossible to compile an overview of all trails on public and private lands for any given state. In addition, the potential for developing water- and land-based trails as part of river planning is an under-used means of corridor protection and resource enjoyment.

As state trail systems are developed, planners need to look to private lands as a means of linking trails. Trail neighbors, potential neighbors and existing or potential trail hosts, particularly those who are being compensated for the use of their property, have several unique concerns. In order to realize the vast trail potential on these lands, and to formalize and legitimize the use of these corridors, the concerns of private landowners must be addressed. Lack of a consistent or adequate response to these concerns may lead landowners to limit public access on, or deny access to, private lands. Although they differ from state to state, many recreation liability statutes offer landowners some level of protection from liability arising from trail use; however, landowners are rarely protected from the expense of legal defense. This issue continues to be a concern of private landowners and is often the reason cited for preventing the use of private lands for trails, even where there are recreation liability statutes.

Information/ Technical Assistance

Trail Information and Technical Assistance

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources publishes the Trail Explorer, a series of trip guides that highlight weekend trail routes. Four annual issues — two hiker/biker summer issues and two cross-country ski/snowmobile winter issues — are distributed to more than 2000 Minnesota residents. Though not advertised, the demand for the guide continues to increase. When department funds began to run low, users donated \$4,000 (enough to produce almost two guides). The donations which came in \$3-\$12 increments reflect the number of people who have come to rely on the guides to help them make the best use of existing trail resources.

Funding

There are two primary needs for technical assistance: technical information, data, and research; and hands-on support. Research needs include analyses of the cost-effectiveness of trails, health and fitness benefits, economic and tourism benefits, and the public demand for trails. Technical research needs to be conducted on trail surfaces, maintenance costs, construction standards, accommodation of people with disabilities, and innovative materials. Also needed are case studies on trail projects sharing the corridor with pipelines, power lines, fiber optics transmission lines, canals for irrigation and transportation, rapid transit lines, abandoned railroad corridors, and other alternative corridors.

The need for hands-on participation in trail projects is similarly varied. There are a variety of skills that can be performed by land trusts, volunteer groups, federal and state agencies, universities, and consultants. Because available resources vary tremendously from year to year and from state to state, it is difficult for communities and citizen groups to be aware of all the assistance that may exist.

States administer a variety of funding mechanisms for trails. LWCF grants can be used for trail acquisition and development. However, as the federal LWCF appropriation for the states decreases, the need to safeguard a dwindling resource-base steadily increases.

Individual states have adopted a range of funding mechanisms. In Colorado, three percent of the state's lottery revenue is allocated to the state's Division of Parks & Recreation. Of this money, \$450,000 is set aside for matching grants to citizen groups and local governments for trails work. Arizona has established a State Trails Fund, which is supported by contributions from committed citizens, governments, and businesses. The State Trails Fund finances development of new trails and extensions on existing trails. In New Jersey, an Open space Bond Issue provides needed funds for trails acquisition and development. The federal government is also encouraging the state effort: the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service have begun joint venture programs that reward initiative in cooperative outdoor recreation projects.

Another funding mechanism for trails development and maintenance is that of user and entrance fees. Hunters, anglers, and individuals who enjoy the use of off-highway vehicles have grown accustomed to routine licensing and fee requirements. OHV user fee revenue benefits all users of multiple use trails. But the idea of charging a fee for use is new to many other trails users.

New York's recently passed legislation initiating a voluntary fee system for trail users. Although the mechanism for collection has not yet been determined, the State hopes to raise \$500,000 in the first year from such donations. In Minnesota, user fees have become law. Recently, a pass system was established for crosscountry skiers — a fee is charged for admission to over 200 publicly owned cross-country ski facilities in the state. User fees encourage a sense of pride and stewardship and establish accountability for trails.

States are becoming increasingly innovative in designing means to fund trail efforts. Such work should be encouraged and additional sources of dedicated funding should be considered.

Interstate Trails and the Federal Role

Many of the nation's most interesting and important trail opportunities cross state lines, follow rivers, historic canals or mountain ridges. Although these trails are the realm of several states and the federal government, local communities and their citizens also play an important role in interstate trail planning and development. Examples of interstate trails include the Mason-Dixon Trail where Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland share management responsibilities or the congressionally designated long-distance trails, such as the Appalachian Trail, which passes through 14 states.

National Scenic and Historic trails, as indicated in the National Trails System Act, must be at least 100 miles in length. However, the "actual" mileage of these trails (miles of trail that are usable) varies from the "projected" mileage: of the North Country National Scenic Trail's 3,200 miles, only 1,000 miles are developed; the 1,000-mile Nez Perce National Historic Trail includes only 360 miles of developed trail.

Interstate trails provide an extended trail experience. But interstate trails also provide close-to-home opportunities for a large segment of the population. Interstate trails can aid in preserving resources and protecting habitats from encroaching development. In this way, many nationally significant natural and cultural resources remain intact.

Thundering rivers, often the great divider between states; majestic mountain ranges and large tracts of unspoiled, wild prairie habitat — all these define the uniqueness of America's geologic and natural heritage. Immediate action is necessary to maintain the integrity and character of the nation's natural resources. Stewardship responsibilities entail ensuring that land parcels and rivers be maintained regardless of whether or not they cross state boundaries. The development of interstate trails responds to these needs on several levels. Trails, traversing a large expanse of land or water, satisfy present needs for citizen recreation and future needs for the continued protection and integrity of the corridor.

To realize the full potential of interstate trails, including resource protection, economic benefit, and health and fitness opportunities, trails must be addressed in a systematic manner. Although the National Trails System Act directly responds to trails at the interstate level, issues of planning, information and technical assistance, and funding are not comprehensively addressed in the Act.

Building an Interstate Trail System

Non-Profit Organizations and Interstate Trails

The Potomac Appalachian Trail Club initiated the interstate Big Blue Trail, a 144-mile footpath across a national park, a national forest, a state game preserve, two county-owned reservations, and about 40 privately owned parcels. The trail is largely a private-sector initiative involving five types of agreements. The club now owns about 17 miles of the footway, partly purchased through a land acquisition fund and partly acquired via landowner donations.

Nationally there is no consistent interstate body responding to the need for interstate trail corridors — inventorying existing resources, identifying potential resources, and ultimately, advocating protection of the entire greenway system. In New England, an effort to identify significant regional resources and plan for their protection was recently completed. The New England Governor's Conference enlisted the assistance and support of six states and the Committee for Land Conservation in New England, which represents several dozen non-profit land conservation organizations. Together these groups identified 45 regionally significant resources and ranked those river and landbased recreation corridors according to greatest need for preservation.

In another approach, the Regional Plan Association (RPA), a not-for-profit organization based in New York, has been working since 1985 to establish an open-space plan for the 31-county, tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut). The RPA began its work by conducting a citizen-needs assessment, then collected information on

Planning and Management of Trails

A water trail, the Upper Delaware River, flows through two states and numerous local jurisdictions. In 1978 Congress included the Upper Delaware in the Wild and Scenic River System and also created a unique management structure for the river. The National Park Service is responsible for managing the river system, but the river corridor is not publicly owned. The NPS has created a management council, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, to carry-out management of the river.

where resources, both actual and potential, are located. RPA is now in the process of mapping actual and potential open space resources and determining their interrelationships. Local civic groups, city planners and officials have been an integral element in providing information on location and viability of land/water resources for the open space network.

The work of the New England Governor's Conference and the RPA has served a dual purpose: identifying valuable spaces which require protection and building a network of committed organizations, governments, and businesses to aid in project implementation.

Both approaches rely on local governments and citizens to identify the baseline resources and needs. Out of a lack of an established process, both groups have created planning models that could be adopted by other groups around the country.

There is an illusion that many trails "end" at state borders. Upon scrutinizing a map, many a hiker or bicyclist has been disappointed to find that a trail seems to stop at a state border. The corridor may, in fact, continue and a trail may be maintained on the other side, but most states do not recognize the trail activity of adjacent jurisdictions.

Current federal legislation has only one mechanism that resembles a planning process. The LWCF requirement that each state designate an agency to draft a SCORP. With some modifications, SCORPs could be the cornerstone for regional trails plans.

Unlike the National Trails System Act which designates trails only by Act of Congress, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act permits river designation pursuant to an act of the legislature of the state. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, section 1273(a)(ii), entitles the states to submit applications to the Secretary of the Interior to designate specific rivers as Wild and Scenic. Designation ensures protection from the issuance of licenses for construction of dams, water conduits, reservoirs, powerhouses, transmission lines or other public works projects that would destroy the wild and scenic values of the river.

The National Trails System Act contains no clause indicating the type or extent of protection granted to designated trails; nor does it permit states (individually and jointly) to submit applications to the appropriate Secretary for inclusion of a trail into the national system of scenic or historic trails.

Information and Technical Assistance

Trails have enjoyed a tradition of strong citizen involvement for more than 65 years. Many of the nation's most successful trails have grown from an individual's vision. The individual's idea is nurtured, a group is born, and the awareness of a few, then of many people is heightened. The trail concept sweeps a neighborhood, a metropolitan area, one state.

Interstate trails incorporate a vast expanse of land. Passing through private, state, and federally owned lands, management responsibilities for one interstate trail can be as varied as the geography it traverses. Planning, development, and maintenance of a continuous linear corridor requires clear and proven evidence of the ultimate utility and benefit of such a resource.

Many interstate trails traverse areas owned privately. Private landowners' attitudes towards trails are important. Increasingly, potential trail neighbors and hosts are viewing trails as a menace. They fear crime, vandalism and littering on or near their property. Based on these fears, resistance to trail development has been high in this population. Yet studies document that the attitudes of adjacent landowners toward

Trail Information and Research

Bikecentennial of Missoula, Montana, a national non-profit organization incorporated in 1974, is researching and developing a complete national network of bicycle routes. Supported by memberships and publication sales, Bikecentennial is working to make trails and trail information widely accessible. To-date, they have identified more than 15,000 miles of mostly quiet secondary roads as low traffic, scenic routes for cyclists. Existing routes include the cross-country TransAmerica Bicycle Trail, the Canada-to-California and California Coast Routes, the Great Parks Bicycle Route, the Iowa-to-Maine Bicycle Route, the Washington-to-Minnesota Bicycle Route, and the Great River Bicycle Route. Bikecentennial's commitment to trail research provides an invaluable service to the biking community.

the trail become much more positive and concerns subside after the trail is completed.

Local municipalities, states, and even federal agencies must evaluate the overall effect of the interstate trail on the land or water resource and the local economy.

The components of an interstate trail are myriad: from constituency building, to land acquisition, to design of a barrier-free trail. A variety of skills are necessary. Trail advocates and organizations, public land management personnel, and decision-makers each bring an important element to the discussion of interstate trails. Working together, common goals for trail development and effective maintenance and management can be realized.

As an element of this process, the diverse community of trail users must look beyond specific trails and identify necessary means of sustaining land and water resources. Federal and state agencies must initiate a dialogue about the overall use of the nation's public holdings. Such a dialogue will foster an integrated sense of a national system of trails rather than a sense of isolated and seemingly unrelated parcels. Sharing technical expertise with state and local governments and trail-related organizations, federal agencies will ensure that resource management plans are sound and built on success. Decision makers must ensure that citizens actively participate in the planning process. Finally, there must be an established forum for information-sharing discussion of policy and planning between representatives of each of these groups.

Funding

There is no guaranteed benefactor for trails. The National Trails System Act promises neither continued funding for development and maintenance of congressionally designated trails nor dedicated funds for land acquisition. The Appalachian Trail is an exception, with an authorization intended to establish a publicly owned greenway along the trail's 2,100-mile length. Other congressionally-designated trails must share a funding pool, where priorities for expenditure are determined by the appropriate land-managing agency.

In the few instances where funds are authorized for a designated trail, the National Trails System Act precludes acquisition of lands or interests in lands outside the boundaries of the federal estate. However, more than half of America's forests and rangelands are in private ownership and many existing and potential trail corridors are on private land. These resources — increasingly threatened by encroaching development — are significant to the natural and cultural heritage of the nation.

Due to their overwhelming popularity, trails have consistently ranked well among those projects funded with state LWCF monies. However, continued support is not assured: priorities are established on a state-by-state basis with no obligation to fund or even address trails in SCORPs. At a minimum, state and local trail organizations need to participate in the SCORP process to ensure that trail needs are addressed in the priorities of state plans.

As previously outlined, not-for-profit organizations and citizen groups often provide the critical first step in trails planning and development. An active constituency group may be responsible for tasks ranging from drafting a trails plan, to maintaining and clearing the trail, to promoting user cooperation and trail safety, to negotiating easements with involved landowners. To encourage and promote these efforts, funds should be made available to these groups.

Conclusion

To assist in the development of this report, American Trails asked representatives from a broad range of public and private trail groups to develop information and lend expertise in analyzing the issues. Fifteen individuals came together, forming the National Trails Agenda Task Force.

The Task Force began meeting in the summer of 1988 to assess the major issues confronting trails and trail development nationwide. Through the next year and a half the task force met to discuss the identified issues and review working papers. Their work was distributed extensively to trails interests around the country and the comments and ideas raised by this broader group were incorporated into the papers and this report.

This report is the culmination of this study, review and analysis. It is a discussion of the value of trails and how local and metropolitan, state, and interstate trails make up a national system of trails.

The key factor in the development and planning of most trails is local, grassroots efforts: that is, the citizens who drive the local, state, and federal government to act. Everything from establishing the vision and need for greenways to defining specific trail corridors, to participating in the zoning process, to forming citizen coalitions, to developing guidelines for trail use and access should be within the abilities of each citizen. With broad-based support, the vision of a national system of trails can be realized.

Recommendations

Recommendations for bringing about a national system of trails follow. Although the recommendations synthesized by the Task Force are intended to provide decision-makers in both the public and private sector with specific actions for improving trail opportunities, they are not a substitute for basic citizen action.

Legislation

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should consider legislative initiatives related to the National Trails System Act that address such issues as corridor protection, funding, designation of other nationally significant trails, federal incentives for completing long-distance trails, incentives for state and local governments to build trails, connecting and completing trails. Specifically, such initiatives should address: 1. protection of National Scenic and Historic Trail segments outside federal boundaries; 2. the ability of federal agencies to acquire or fund acquisition of development rights or conservation easements (or provide equivalent safeguards by regulation) for scenic or sensitive areas adjacent to National Scenic and National Recreation Trails; 3. the provision of funds to states for protection of designated corridors, upon state commitment of support for National Scenic and Historic Trails.

RECOMMENDATION: Trail organizations on the state and local level should support the enactment of (where not existing) recreation use liability statutes and include provisions to pay attorney's fees if the defendant is found not liable due to a recreation use liability statute.

RECOMMENDATION: Trail organizations on the state and local level should work for and support the enactment of (where not existing) user responsibility statutes that make trail users responsible for their own mistakes, thus removing the public or private landholder from liability.

Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Existing planning programs at the statewide level should be encouraged to address trails in a comprehensive fashion to support the idea of a national system of trails with the state playing a primary coordination role for issues within the state.

RECOMMENDATION: State recreation and planning agencies should develop model programs for state and local planners to include trails in comprehensive land-use plans, including zoning and parkland dedication requirements.

RECOMMENDATION: State planners, in conjunction with local authorities, should be encouraged to plan, where appropriate, both water- and land-based trails as a part of state programs.

RECOMMENDATION: States should be encouraged to develop means to better coordinate statewide trails programs, developing a state trails plan; establishing a state trails coordinator, agency trail contact, interagency trails committee, and a state trails council.

Technical Assistance and Information

RECOMMENDATION: National non-profit organizations should encourage and assist local trails interest groups to create a community trails coalition to advocate local trails programs, provide communication among trail users, encourage the participation of under-served and potential trail users, improve the effectiveness of the trails community in local decision making, and establish leadership training programs.

RECOMMENDATION: Federal and state agencies, and national non-profit agencies should provide, where appropriate, information and technical assistance to local officials and trails constituency groups on creative ways, in addition to acquisition, to protect greenways and trail corridors, including information on conservation easements, open-space valuation policies, transfer of development rights, zoning and subdivision regulations, and regional trails authorities.

RECOMMENDATION: State recreation agencies should work with environmental educators and universities to have trails and greenways more clearly addressed in all related departments, such as planning, landscape architecture, etc.

RECOMMENDATION: State recreation agencies should provide technical assistance to communities and citizen groups on all aspects of trails, including, but not limited to: appropriate design to accommodate users with disabilities, effective shared use of the corridor, designing a trail to meet the needs of a community. State recreation agencies should also identify technical support in other state agencies and organizations.

RECOMMENDATION: As a regular component of their trails or research programs, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture should consider research on the environmental, social, and economic effects of trails. Results of research should be published and distributed to the trails community.

RECOMMENDATION: The Department of the Interior (NPS, BLM) and the Department of Agriculture (FS) and other appropriate departments should, where appropriate, expand their technical assistance services for trails planning, development, maintenance, protection, volunteer and professional development and training.

RECOMMENDATION: A national trail signing and standards system designating difficulty and accessibility should be developed.

RECOMMENDATION: Congress should consider targeting trails acquisition and development through existing grants and aid programs. Priority funding should be granted to trail opportunities within proximity of populated areas, trails accessible to persons with disabilities, and trails that connect with other trails.

RECOMMENDATION: Where appropriate, state recreation and trail organizations should establish a permanent source of trail funding and coordinate existing funding opportunities.

Funding

RECOMMENDATION: Managers of existing grant and partnership programs, such as the U.S. Forest Service's Challenge Cost Share Program, should be encouraged to expand such programs and state and federal funding sources should allow and encourage in-kind volunteer service match (rather than dollars) for grants, especially for local and metropolitan area trails projects.

RECOMMENDATION: A broad-based trails organization should draft a matrix of all current and available funding programs for trail projects at all levels. The matrix should include funding providers, stipulations, and whom to contact for more information and should be distributed to trails organizations and advocates.

RECOMMENDATION: The National Trails Committee should be reestablished to coordinate federal agency activities in trails.

National Trails Agenda Project

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