



NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

TRAIL PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESSES

Approved by the Policy Council on February 24, 2026

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INTRODUCTION AND SIMPLIFIED PROCESSES

INTRODUCTION

When the Trail Conference agrees to maintain additional trails or to carry out trail work beyond normal maintenance, it is important to ensure that:

- The Trail Conference has appropriate agreements in place with the land manager under which the Trail Conference will build and maintain trails, and has the ability to refer to approvals to address any future issues of permission or liability.
- The Trail Conference has the resources to maintain the trails and carry out the planned work.
- Any planned trail work conforms to the rules and processes of the land manager and the Trail Conference.
- Information about the changes is updated in the Trail Conference trail database, maps, and publications.

To achieve these goals, the Policy Council has defined four separate processes, some or all of which may be required for a particular project:

1. **Park Adoption Process:** This process is used if the Trail Conference is agreeing to adopt trails in a new park or area where we do not already have an agreement with the land manager to build and maintain trails in that area. It is also used if we will cease working on trails in an entire park or area. The process, which ensures that we have an appropriate agreement in place and that we have the resources to work in the new area, must be completed before either of the other two processes can be finalized.
2. **Trail Adoption Process:** This process is used if the Trail Conference intends to maintain a trail or to close or abandon a trail we maintain.

3. **Trail Construction Approval Process:** This process, which involves both the land manager and the Trail Conference, is used to obtain the necessary approvals for trail work beyond normal maintenance on trails we have adopted.
4. **Trail Network Change Process:** This process is used when planning significant changes to the markings and/or names of existing trails within a park unit.

If more than one of the four processes is required for a project, they can proceed in parallel, but a process cannot be completed until the process listed above it has been completed.

These processes apply to projects on trails which the Trail Conference maintains, or soon plans to maintain, within the regions managed by the Regional Trail Councils. They do not apply to for-fee projects undertaken by staff on trails not maintained by the Trail Conference.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE PROCESSES

For each applicable process, the project manager, typically the Chair or Supervisor, works with the Regional Program Coordinator (RPC) and usually the land manager. In most cases, these processes can be carried out informally through email communication as described here. If more guidance for completing a process is needed, it may be found in the detailed information about each process included later in this document. In particular, the checklist of items to consider before starting the process is often useful.

PARK ADOPTION PROCESS

This Trail Conference process should be followed if the Trail Conference is agreeing to adopt trails in a new park or area where we do not already have an agreement with the land manager to build and maintain trails. It is also used if we will cease working on trails in an entire park or area. The process, which ensures that we have an appropriate agreement in place with the land manager and that we have the resources to work in the new area, must be completed before any other processes described below can be finalized. This process is normally initiated by the Chair for the area in which the park is located in collaboration with the land manager.

If you wish to adopt a park, you should discuss with your RPC. The [Park Adoption Process Details](#) included below describe issues you should consider in deciding to adopt a new park. If it is agreed to adopt the park, the RPC must see that the trail database is updated accordingly.

TRAIL ADOPTION PROCESS

This Trail Conference process should be followed if the Trail Conference intends to maintain a new trail or close/abandon a trail in an area where we maintain trails. This process is normally initiated by the Chair or Supervisor for the area in which the trail is located in collaboration with the land manager.

If you wish to adopt a new trail or to close or abandon a trail, you should discuss with your RPC. The [Trail Adoption Process Details](#) included below describe issues you should consider in deciding to adopt a new trail. If it is agreed to adopt the trail, the RPC must see that the trail database is updated.

TRAIL CONSTRUCTION APPROVAL PROCESS

The land manager must agree before the Trail Conference undertakes any work beyond that outlined in the Trail Maintenance Manual. The primary responsibility rests with a project manager, typically the Chair or Supervisor, who is responsible for the project. The necessary steps vary widely depending on the nature of the project and the established standards in a particular region. Land manager approval is always required and should be documented. A simple project requested by the land manager may require just documenting the request and updating the trail database if necessary when the work is complete. A complex project might require submitting a land manager approval form, getting drawings approved, obtaining permits, and finding a way to pay for materials. The [Trail Construction Approval Process Details](#) included below provide more detailed guidance.

TRAIL NETWORK CHANGE PROCESS

Trail systems and networks usually develop organically over many years, often with the addition of new linear trails which connect points of interest or other existing network elements. It can sometimes be helpful to take a fresh look at a trail network and update it to match modern user behavior. Examples include merging a variety of short separate trails into single longer ones, creating loop trails to simplify navigation, or changing colors for improved clarity or visibility. While these changes often simply require changing blazes and names, with no new adoption or construction needed, they still have large implications. Network changes can necessitate updates to maps, books, hike descriptions, kiosk signage, and more.

If you wish to change trail markings and names in a way that will substantially change how people navigate it, you should discuss with your RPC. The [Trail Network Change Process Details](#) included below provide more detailed guidance. If the land manager ultimately agrees to these proposed changes, the RPC must see that the trail database is updated.

DEFINITIONS

Adoption – Adoption refers to the process by which the Trail Conference accepts parks and trails into its maintained network, assigning them to volunteers for long-term stewardship, as described in the Park Adoption and Trail Adoption processes.

Land manager – Landowner or landowner representative such as a park manager empowered to make trail and land use decisions.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – A document outlining mutually-agreed performance expectations for two or more entities. In the current context, this is the Trail Conference and the land manager. Some land managers use alternative names such as Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), General Agreement (GA), or others.

Park – A generic term used here to mean any piece of land owned by a single entity, whether government (federal, state, county, or local) or private (nonprofit or individual landowner).

Park system – A group of nearby parks managed by the same land manager.

Regional Program Coordinator (RPC) - A Trail Conference staff member responsible for a geographic region.

Trail Database – A database maintained by the Trail Conference which includes all trails which the Trail Conference maintains and some other trails.

Historical background for this document

The Policy Council and its Trail Approval Task Force considered the approval processes for trail projects in great detail during 2017-2020. The first three processes listed above, park adoption, trail adoption, and trail construction, were identified and detailed approval process documents were approved for each.

It soon became apparent, however, that these processes were too formal and cumbersome and were not being followed. At the [June 10, 2020 meeting](#), the Policy Council agreed to recommend the three process documents as guidance, but to employ a simpler and less formal process. This involves communication, usually by email, between the project manager (typically the chair or supervisor) and the RPC to reach agreement about the project. They must, of course, ensure that other necessary approvals such as that of the land manager are obtained. This informal process, which was last updated on 6/14/2021, has worked well.

On 4/12/2025, John Magerlein combined the above introductory material (previously documented only on the website) with the three more detailed process descriptions into a single document.

2/24/2026: A fourth process for trail network changes was added, minor updates were made, and this entire document was approved by the Policy Council.

PARK ADOPTION PROCESS DETAILS

INTENT AND OVERVIEW

In adopting a park, the Trail Conference agrees to maintain trails in the adopted park. This approval process must be followed for adopting a new park. A park must be adopted before completing the related Trail Adoption Process to adopt any trails in the park, either existing trails or trails to be built. The Trail Conference only adopts parks that are open to public access and only maintains trails in parks that have been adopted. The process is also used to drop a park from the list of adopted parks and cease maintaining trails there.

LTC Chair approval is required to adopt a park. The checklist below lists factors the LTC Chair should consider in deciding whether a park should be adopted. Critical factors are the availability of resources to manage the trails in the park and the establishment of necessary relationships with the land manager. In the event that the LTC Chair does not agree to take on the park, the process is referred to the RTC, which may agree with the LTC Chair to not adopt the park, consider splitting the LTC region and restarting the process with a new LTC Chair, or taking other appropriate action.

SCOPE

The Park Approval Process applies to all parks that have not yet been adopted including new parks in an existing park system. Any parks in which we maintain trails at the time this process is adopted are deemed already adopted. The process also applies if the Trail Conference proposes to drop a park from the list of adopted parks and cease maintaining trails there.

ROLES

1. **Local Trail Committee (LTC) Chair** - Assess and advise regarding proposed adoption or decommissioning of trails and major trail relocations in the LTC area.
2. **Regional Program Coordinator (RPC)** - Facilitates the process.
3. **Executive Director** - Signs any MOUs involved in the process
4. **Land Manager** - Signs any MOUs involved in the process

STEP BY STEP PROCESS FOR ADOPTING A NEW PARK

1. Tentative proposal to adopt a new park, typically initiated by the park.
2. The LTC Chair, working closely with the RPC, evaluates the proposal using the checklist below and makes a recommendation whether the park should be tentatively adopted pending successful MOU negotiations.

3. The LTC Chair notifies RTC members of intentions.
4. Put in place an appropriate agreement with the land manager:
 - a. **Case 1:** For a new park in an existing approved park system, check the existing MOU or other land manager agreement to make sure it includes the new park and adjust if necessary.
 - b. **Case 2:** For a new independent park or new park system, it is preferable to sign an MOU with the land manager ([sample MOUs](#)). The LTC Chair and the RPC should work together to negotiate the MOU and coordinate legal review with the Board counsel. In some cases, another option is for the land manager to join the TC as a maintaining club. If the land manager is unwilling to create an MOU, a handshake agreement describing the terms under which the Trail Conference will maintain the trails should be documented. Typically this might be an email to the land manager including details about the property and the agreement, probably including a map, and a response from the land manager indicating agreement.
5. The LTC Chair attaches the MOU or other agreement to the park records.
6. Based on a successful MOU process, the LTC Chair makes the decision to adopt.
7. A designated staff person will add the park and all trails in it to the Trail Database. The park must be created in the database before trails in it can be added.
8. The LTC Chair notifies the land manager and Trail Conference Communications Manager that the Trail Conference has agreed to maintain the trails in the park.

PROCESS FOR REMOVAL OF A PARK

The LTC Chair, working closely with the RPC, reviews the proposal to drop a park and notifies affected parties as in the adoption process above. If the decision is made to drop a park, the Trail Database is edited to mark the park and all the trails in the park are marked as non-TC maintained. Follow the [Records Retention and Destruction Policy](#) for handling all contracts, MOUs, or other agreements associated with the park. Most MOUs allow either party to drop out of the MOU, so if the park drops out, we must remove the park.

CHECKLIST FOR LTC APPROVAL OF A NEW PARK

1. Is the park within the area normally served by the Trail Conference? Adopting a park outside this area (e.g. west of the Catskills or in the Adirondacks) needs Board approval.
2. Is there an approved trails plan for the park? (review it)
3. Number of miles of existing or potential trails?
4. Allowed trail users of the existing or planned trails?
5. Who are the user groups and are there existing conflicts?
6. Are existing trails generally in good condition or do they need extensive work?

7. Number of maintainers needed for trails:
 - a. The Trail Conference supplies maintainers
 - b. The park supplies maintainers but the Trail Conference provides training, crews, management, etc.
8. Number of new supervisors needed for above number of maintainers?
9. Can existing trail crews handle the load or is a new one needed?
10. Has recruiting for new volunteers been easy or hard in your region?
11. Might you need to split the LTC because of your limits to managing additional volunteers or interacting with land managers?
12. Will costly infrastructure construction or improvements such as bridges or puncheon be needed? Is funding for this likely to be available?
13. Is there funding for Conservation Corps crews to work there?
14. Are we going to take on all or only some of the trails?
15. Does the park have “unusual hoops” to jump through that will take extra management time, e.g. is the process for approving additional trails long or arduous?
16. What, if any, red flags were found in dealing with the land manager during this approval process?
17. What is the politics of a denial? If we do not agree to maintain trails in the park, would there be results which would cause problems for the Trail Conference?

TRAIL ADOPTION PROCESS DETAILS

INTENT AND OVERVIEW

The adoption of a trail using this process means that the Trail Conference agrees to maintain the trail. We may adopt existing trails or conceptually adopt new trails that will be built. The criteria for these two cases differ. The process is also used to close or abandon a trail.

The Local Trail Committee (LTC Chair) is the official adopter for the Trail Conference, but must consult with the Regional Program Coordinator (RPC). The RTC and the RPC are available as resources for consultation and advice. The RTC should be consulted for larger projects.

Trail adoption can occur concurrently with the related Park Adoption Process or the Trail Construction Approval Process. A park must be adopted before trails in it can be adopted, and a trail must be adopted before construction on it can be finally approved. The Trail Conference maintains trails only in parks that have been adopted and are open to public access.

No trail will be adopted unless the LTC Chair agrees that resources are available to manage the trails in the park and that necessary relationships with the land manager have been established. See the below for a checklist of factors the LTC Chair should consider in deciding whether to adopt a trail.

SCOPE

The New Trail Adoption Process applies to all trails that have not yet been adopted. All trails maintained by the Trail Conference when this process is approved are deemed already adopted.

In the process of adopting a new park, the Trail Conference may adopt all or some of the existing trails using this process. When adopting multiple trails in a new park, all must be considered at the same time and not done piecemeal. This process is also used to adopt proposed new trails, i.e. trails to be built if approved, in adopted parks or parks being adopted.

This process is also used to abandon trails that the Trail Conference will no longer maintain.

ROLES

- **Local Trail Committee (LTC) Chair** - Agrees to manage the trails in the park and is the one who approves the adoption of a trail.
- **Regional Program Coordinator (RPC)** - A Trail Conference staff member responsible for a geographic region who facilitates the process.
- **Land Manager** - Agrees to Trail Conference maintaining the trail and changes any of their internal documentation to assign maintenance to the Trail Conference.

STEP BY STEP PROCESS FOR ADOPTING A NEW TRAIL

In most cases, the LTC Chair, in consultation with the RPC and others familiar with the trail and park, decides whether to adopt the trail. If the trail passes through areas managed by multiple LTC Chairs or has unusual requirements, other Trail Conference leaders must be consulted as appropriate. If the RPC does not agree with the decision, it may be escalated, though previous consultations should normally have resolved any disagreements. The Trail Management Policy specifies that projects covered by an MOU or other agreement with the land manager must be approved, though they must follow this process to ensure that affected people are notified and the trail database is updated.

The steps for trail adoption are:

1. The adoption process begins with the LTC Chair working through the checklist below. A major consideration is whether the Trail Conference has the resources to maintain the trail, in particular one or more maintainers or a maintenance crew.
2. If the decision is made to adopt the trail, the trail database is edited as described below, then the RTC, Publications Committee and Communications Staff are notified.

PROCESS FOR ENDING TRAIL CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT OF A TRAIL

This same process should be followed if the Trail Conference will no longer maintain a trail, whether or not the trail will continue to exist. The process is not needed if a trail is being closed temporarily and is expected to reopen under Trail Conference management.

EDITING THE TRAIL DATABASE

The Trail Conference trail database contains detailed information about all the trails we maintain and some other trails including trail name, length, blazing, segmentation for various purposes, the park and political jurisdictions in which it is located, and maintainer information. It is critical that this database be updated whenever new trails are adopted, reroutes are completed, blazes or trail names are changed, trails are abandoned, or other significant changes are made.

Updating the database is complex and significant changes in the database are anticipated as part of ongoing Trail Conference technology upgrades. Therefore the database is normally updated by staff members who have this responsibility. The RPC is always responsible for assuring that all necessary updates are made.

CHECKLIST FOR LTC APPROVAL OF A NEW TRAIL

1. Is there an approved trails plan for the park? (review it)
2. Length of the trail?

3. Allowed uses of the existing or planned trail?
4. Who are the user groups and are there existing conflicts?
5. Is the trail generally in good condition or does it need extensive work?
6. Number of maintainers needed for the trail:
 - a. The Trail Conference supplies maintainers
 - b. The park supplies maintainers but the Trail Conference provides training, crews, management, etc.
 - c. The maintenance is assigned to a Trail Conference member club.
7. Are more supervisors needed for the above maintainers?
8. Can existing trail crews handle the load or is a new one needed?
9. Has recruiting for new volunteers been easy or hard in your region?
10. Might you need to split the LTC because of your limits to managing additional volunteers or interacting with land managers?
11. Will costly infrastructure construction or improvements such as bridges or puncheon be needed? Is funding for this likely to be available?
12. Is there funding for Conservation Corps crews to work there?
13. What is the politics of a denial? If we do not agree to maintain this trail, would there be results which would cause problems for the Trail Conference?
14. Are there other potential trail adoptions in your region and how does this one compete with the resources needed for other adoptions?

TRAIL CONSTRUCTION APPROVAL PROCESS DETAILS

INTENT AND OVERVIEW

The intent of this process is to ensure that we have all the necessary permissions before construction begins and that updates to the trail database are made when needed. All trail construction beyond normal maintenance must be reviewed to determine what approvals are necessary and whether updates to the trail database will be needed. The review is typically done by the LTC Chair or other project manager, often consulting with the RPC. Land manager approval in some form is generally required.

For larger projects, it is important to widely publicize proposals at the concept phase, at least within the RTC, so various ideas from different people may be considered. While RTC input is taken into consideration when forming a trail construction plan, the Trail Conference's chosen course of action ultimately lies with the land manager and Trail Conference project manager.

DEFINITIONS

Categorical Exclusion – A Categorical Exclusion (CE) refers to a category or type of action which, under normal circumstances, predictably does not cumulatively or individually have the potential for significant environmental impact. These types of actions are not excluded from the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Rather, they generally do not require preparation of an Environmental Assessment to determine if impacts are significant or an Environmental Impact Statement to assess and mitigate significant impacts.

Approval type – One of:

- New trail
- Extension of existing trail
- Relocation
- Maintenance requiring permissions, e.g. bridge, wetlands, etc.
- Remediation of trail being closed or abandoned

SCOPE

All trail construction beyond normal maintenance must be reviewed to determine what approvals are necessary. Projects to be reviewed include new construction, reroutes, trail structures such as bridges or shelters, and remediation on a trail to be closed or abandoned. Approvals may not be needed for small projects such as replacing a few steps or broken boards on a bridge. Projects done either by Trail Conference volunteers or paid Trail Conference crews must be reviewed. No construction work beyond normal maintenance may be started until the project has been reviewed and needed approvals obtained.

The review is typically done by the LTC Chair or other project manager, often consulting with the RPC. The land manager is always a party to the approval process, though the land manager's approval process is agency specific. The Trail Conference will work with the land manager to obtain the necessary land manager approvals. In general, trail maintenance work covered in the Trail Maintenance Manual does not require approval. A few land managers, e.g. NPS and ATC, supply categorical exclusion lists that document more thoroughly when permits are required. The Appalachian Trail requires ATC approval for most changes. Typically permits are required for construction in wetlands, wilderness areas, or historic sites.

For the Trail Conference, the LTC Chair can approve most projects. Projects which require a budget for supplies or staff time or are outside the LTC region require additional approvals as described below.

Even if no formal permissions are necessary, the project manager for any construction which requires changes to the trail database (e.g. new mileage, new structures, or altered maintainer segments) must ensure that the database is updated.

ROLES

1. **Project Manager** - The person who fills out the [trail approval form](#) and certifies completion. Normally this is the LTC Chair, but may be a crew leader, supervisor, staff, or other designee. It requires some fluency in filling out web forms.
2. **LTC Chair** - Responsible for the whole project and can override the Project Manager
3. **Land Manager** - Signs for park approval of the project
4. **Regional Program Coordinator** - A Trail Conference Staff Member responsible for a geographic region who facilitates the process.

STEP-BY-STEP DESCRIPTION

Summary of steps

1. Ideas for a trail change come from multiple sources such as the land manager, Trail Conference volunteers or staff including the assigned trail maintainer or supervisor, or the general public. A Trail Conference official, typically an LTC Chair, Supervisor, or RPC, initially takes the lead role in moving the idea forward.
2. The LTC Chair should follow the direction of the land manager as to which projects require land manager notification and/or approval. If the LTC Chair determines after review that the land manager does not need to approve the proposed project and that the trail database will not need to be updated, the project may proceed with no further action. Otherwise continue with the following steps.
3. Check that the park(s) involved in the change are adopted by the Trail Conference. If not, start the process of Park Approval and proceed in parallel if possible. The new park needs to be at least entered into the database even if not adopted yet.

4. Check that the trail involved in the change is adopted by the Trail Conference. If not, start the process of Trail Approval and proceed in parallel if possible. The new trail needs to be at least entered into the database even if not adopted yet. New segments may be marked as Pending Approval so they are ignored for most reporting purposes.
5. Initially the proposed project is discussed by appropriate Trail Conference personnel and the land manager. It is important for the person promoting the project to seek comment from Trail Conference volunteers and staff with expertise relevant to the proposed project during this concept phase. For a major project, it is important to get broad input since it might affect the timing of map publication for the area or a grant proposal might need to be written to obtain funding.
6. The [Trail Design Standards](#) should be consulted to determine the desired classification for the trail or segment and to understand how a trail of the desired classification should look.
7. A specific proposal which is agreeable to both the land manager and the Trail Conference must be developed before any further steps are taken. At that point, the online approval form describing the proposed project should be started. This is done by a project manager chosen by the LTC chair. This may be the person promoting the project initially or someone else. The project manager is responsible for entering details of the project into the online approval form, making sure that all needed approvals are obtained, and finally agreeing that the project has been completed.
8. All necessary approvals are obtained and recorded in the approval form. The necessary approvals depend on the nature of the project and are described below.
9. Once the project manager sees that all approvals have been completed and recorded, work on the project may start.
10. When work is completed, the project manager goes back to the approval form and indicates that the project is complete. The Trail Database must then be updated with the new information. The Regional Program Coordinator is responsible for seeing that the database update is done in a timely way.

Summary of needed approvals

- Written approval of the land manager is always required, even if in the form of a simple email. When it is obtained, the project manager should document the approval in the approval form.
 - If the land manager has a form or other clear approval procedure, the Trail Conference may fill out the form or work with the land manager as appropriate to obtain the approval. Sometimes a simple written statement of approval from the land manager is sufficient.
 - In many cases, the land manager is responsible for carrying out steps such as environmental assessments which the approval process specifies. Sometimes the Trail Conference will carry out these steps on behalf of the land manager. In those cases, the land manager should clearly agree in writing about what is to be done and who will pay for it.

- If the land manager has no established process, the Trail Conference will collaborate with the land manager to define and carry out an appropriate process, typically one similar to that used by other land managers in similar circumstances.
- If the project is part of an MOU or other agreement between the Trail Conference and the land manager, no approvals beyond that of the land manager are needed. The information about the project must, however, be entered into the Trail Database.
- If the land manager or a contractor other than the Trail Conference makes trail changes that affect the Trail Database, the LTC Chair should ensure that the database is updated..
- Projects that require a budget for either supplies or excess staff time (as determined by the RPC) need budget approval through the Regional Program Coordinator. The project may need to be delayed until funding is approved.
- Projects spanning multiple LTCs or RTCs need approval by all parties.
- Once the above approvals are complete, the final Trail Conference approval can usually be done by the LTC Chair. Before approving the request, the LTC Chair must clearly understand the changes to be made and the reasons for them and agree that all the required approvals are in place. The LTC Chair must notify their RTC Chair and Regional Program Coordinator about the project approval.

REMEDICATION OF A TRAIL TO BE CLOSED OR ABANDONED

Closure or abandonment is done through the [Trail Adoption Process](#). If permissions are required to remediate a trail prior to closure or abandonment, this Trail Construction Approval Process should be used to assure that the necessary permissions are obtained.

TRAIL NETWORK CHANGE PROCESS DETAILS

INTENT AND OVERVIEW

The interconnected set of trails within a park or area form a trail network. While we generally talk about individual trails with unique markings and names, trail users often create their own *routes* by utilizing portions of different trails to create a single experience. As usage patterns change and perhaps new trails are added to the network, it may become clear over time that certain individual trails no longer make sense. Frequently, a trail network change reconfigures markings and names so that there is a closer alignment between *trails marked* and *routes followed*. For example, if most visitors walk a loop using portions of four different trails, those trails might be changed to a single consistently-marked loop. By creating a closer overlap between trails marked and routes followed, trail network changes can significantly reduce confusion and lost person incidents.

The intent of this process is to ensure that we propose an optimal new trail network, have the required permissions before making significant trail network changes, and make necessary updates to the trail database. Engaging all the appropriate stakeholders is critical to make knowledgeable, data-driven changes which serve trail users. In addition to the land management partner, this includes at least the LTC Chair or other project manager, the local trail supervisor, and the RPC. Other possible contributors include the staff Senior Trail Planner, trail stewards, experienced maintainers, search and rescue personnel, or other local experts. Public surveys or stakeholder engagement sessions are sometimes used to drive informed decision making. For larger projects, proposals at the concept phase should be shared within the RTC to get additional input. While we seek broad input, the course of action ultimately lies with the land manager and Trail Conference project manager.

DEFINITIONS

Trail Network – The phrase trail network, synonymous with trail system, is a very general term which refers to all of the trails in a given area. This definition is scalable and may refer to different boundaries - for example a park network, county network, or regional network. The term may also be applied to different user groups, for example “the mountain biking trail network in Sterling Forest”. Trails within a network may be contiguous and tightly interconnected, or separate and fragmented.

SCOPE

Changing the name or color of a single trail does not dramatically change how people navigate through a trail network, and does not require this specific process. Instead, this process is intended to be followed when there are changes to multiple trails simultaneously, in particular

when those changes cause several trails to move, combine, subsume, or otherwise impact each other in ways that will render old maps, guidebooks, and resources obsolete.

Typically, these trail network change projects are characterized by intense planning discussion and multiple rounds of revision with various stakeholders over a period of several months. Once the project manager has final land manager permission to implement a trail network change, the physical work done by volunteers is simply changing blazes along existing trails. Trailhead maps and wayfinding signage may also need to be updated, often in coordination between volunteers and park staff.

Rather than construction permits or environmental reviews, the primary obstacle to trail network changes is usually concerns about map and book production. Where possible, trail network changes should be timed to coincide with map updates or re-printing. Even if no trail routes are changing, the project manager for any trail network change must ensure that the trail database is updated (e.g. new mileage, new structures, or altered maintainer segments).

ROLES

1. **Project Manager** - The person who coordinates all involved stakeholders and guides discussion toward a final new trail network design. Normally this is the RPC, who must have the capacity to create, revise, and distribute various versions and ongoing revisions of digital maps. However this may be the LTC Chair, a supervisor, a different staff member, or some other designee.
2. **LTC Chair** - Responsible for the whole project and has final say on approving or altering trail network designs produced by the Project Manager.
3. **Land Manager** - Signs for park approval of the project
4. **Regional Program Coordinator** - A Trail Conference staff member responsible for a geographic region who facilitates the process.

STEP-BY-STEP DESCRIPTION

The steps to be followed depend on the project complexity and the stakeholders involved. Network changes occur rarely and it is critical to get broad input and select the optimal trail network design. Steps might typically include the following:

1. A need for trail network changes is identified by a NYNJTC volunteer or staff member, land manager partner, search and rescue personnel, or members of the public.
2. The idea is discussed among the LTC Chair, RPC, and others with relevant experience such as the local supervisor, land manager, and Senior Trail Planner.
3. If the LTC Chair and RPC agree that changes are needed, the RTC Chair is notified and a project manager is appointed.

4. The project manager must first brainstorm with all stakeholders to develop the most appropriate trail network design and choose among possible options. This may be done in various ways, but for a relatively complex project, this might include steps such as:
 - a. Set up an initial meeting which requires input from the LTC Chair, Supervisor, and RPC. Other attendees might include park staff, a staff Senior Trail Planner, Trail Stewards, long-time experienced and collaborative maintainers, local SAR volunteers, and Publications Committee volunteers or staff.
 - b. Maps should be sent in advance so that everyone has the opportunity to brainstorm independently before discussion takes place.
 - c. During the meeting everyone should share their ideas for trail network changes, with the facilitator identifying key similarities and differences in people's concepts.
 - d. Use of a GIS platform or graphics program may be useful in capturing different ideas clearly in one place.
5. After this initial planning meeting, the facilitator or designee should create a new draft map showing the preferred new trail network. If there are differences of opinion during brainstorming, the project manager and RPC should work to determine consensus during this map creation.
6. The Publication Committee should be consulted about whether the timing of the project can be coordinated with the publication schedule for maps and books.
7. If the land manager did not participate in making the draft map, share it with the land manager and make changes to address any concerns before sharing more broadly.
8. Share the draft map with the RTC to solicit broader final input, either at a meeting or by email, allowing members to make comments. Note that if shared via email, all RTC members should be copied as BCC to prevent "reply all" discussion.
9. Ensure that the draft map and notice of changes is also shared with all local trail maintainers for their input and as a heads-up. This is especially important if any existing trails will be closed or significantly altered.
10. After incorporating RTC input, share the proposed final map for land manager approval. If needed, make changes to accommodate the land manager.
11. Once approval for implementing the final map is secured, have the Trail Conference cartographer produce an updated map. After this professional updated map is made, the revision stage of the project is done. No further changes should be made unless critically important.
12. Plan logistics of implementation.
 - a. Divide trail changes up by segment, and assign each segment to one or more volunteers to implement the necessary changes.
 - b. Plan the implementation timeline to coincide with map revisions, if possible.

- c. RTC should be notified of the final map and implementation plan/timeline.
13. Once implementation begins, post “before/after” maps at all affected trailheads and intersections explaining the changes in progress.
 - a. Coordinate this with social media and web announcements.
14. After implementation is complete, leave all “before/after” maps up until that hiking season ends, at minimum.
15. Ensure any trailhead kiosk and online maps are updated accordingly.
16. Work with the RPC to ensure that necessary third-party platforms, such as AllTrails, are updated accordingly.

Summary of needed approvals

- Written approval of the land manager is always required, even if in the form of a simple email.
- If the project is part of an MOU or other agreement between the Trail Conference and the land manager, no approvals beyond that of the land manager are needed. The information about the project must, however, be entered into the trail database.
- Projects that require a budget for either supplies or excess staff time (as determined by the RPC) need budget approval through the RPC. The project may need to be delayed until funding is approved.
- Projects spanning multiple LTCs or RTCs need approval by all parties.
- Once the above approvals are complete, the final Trail Conference approval can usually be done by the LTC Chair. Before approving the request, the LTC Chair must clearly understand the changes to be made and the reasons for them and agree that all the required approvals are in place. The LTC Chair must notify their RTC Chair and RPC about the project approval.