

***NEW JERSEY
TRAILS PLAN***

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INTRODUCTION

***Purpose of Plan
New Jersey Legislation for Trails
Summary and Status of the 1982 New Jersey Trails Plan
Existing Trail Systems in New Jersey***

PURPOSE OF PLAN

This plan is a major component of New Jersey's State Trails Program efforts, with the purpose of preserving and expanding trails and trail systems throughout the state by incorporating these as part of a State Trails System, and providing a planning guide for establishing trails. The Trails Program was developed with the passage of the New Jersey Trails System Act and consists of staff within the Division of Parks and Forestry and the New Jersey Trails Council, an advisory board to the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Transportation. As part of these purposes, the plan has four specific goals. They are:

Provide a vision of what a State Trails System should be in the future.

As directed by the New Jersey Trails System Act, trails should provide for the outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population, and promote appreciation and travel within the natural and remote areas of the state and also urban areas. To meet the recreational needs of the population, there must be a variety of trail uses within different regions of the state. This trail system can be a network of trails interconnecting with each other, and also include other trails that connect nodes, such as urban areas. Also, some trails may be included that stand alone as exemplary for their type, such as the Appalachian Trail in northern New Jersey. Trails and routes recommended in this plan represent that vision of the State Trails System.

Identify trails and trail systems for designation to the State Trails System.

Because of New Jersey's changed population, economy, and landscape since the 1980's, the demand for recreation has expanded, while the amount of open space has declined. It is necessary to identify what trails are most significant and therefore eligible for the state system, so that they can have recognition and protection from development. There are many more miles of local trails that may not be eligible for inclusion in the system but still provide a particular public benefit. It is also necessary to

plan for the development of routes as future trails that can be incorporated into the system or serve as connectors between designated trails or trail systems.

Identify new issues affecting trails, and plan for them in the use, development and management of trails in the State Trails System.

An update must consider changing trends and laws affecting trails, and plan for them accordingly. Although all types of trail uses must be in the State Trails System, certain trail types have arisen which have new requirements for safety and needs for maintaining environmental integrity. With the passage of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, trails must be examined to determine their suitability and development for use by the disabled. The popularity of mountain bikes has presented trail planners with new issues of single or multi-use, trail design and safety that need to be addressed and policies established. Although considered in the 1982 plan, trails for motorized vehicles must be addressed again, as their demand has increased. A major provision of the National Recreational Trails Act of 1991 was that funding under that act be used for motorized trail development and facilities. If new trails are to be developed on lands not already managed for public recreational use, then public agencies and public interest groups should be aware of the alternatives available for protecting the land for trails. Finally, new funding sources for trail planning and development need to be identified.

Set goals for implementation of the Trails Plan.

To make a plan work, those tasks necessary to be completed within a certain time frame, and who is to do them, must be identified. They should be as specific as possible so that there are no questions of what should be done. The plan identifies actions to be taken over the five years following plan adoption.

NEW JERSEY LEGISLATION FOR TRAILS

New Jersey Trails System Act

Effective November 14, 1974, the Trails System Act (N.J.S.A. 13:8-30 et seq.) laid the groundwork for a network of trails (Appendix 1). This system was to provide for outdoor recreation and an appreciation of the outdoor, natural and "remote" areas of New Jersey. In beginning the system, the Appalachian Trail was designated as its initial component.

The legislation established three classes of trails:

- scenic trails are to provide "maximum potential for the appreciation of natural areas..." They are to be extended trails and limited to foot use only, although segments may be used by horses or non-motorized bicycles as appropriate;
- recreation trails are to provide for a variety of outdoor recreation; and
- connecting trails are to provide additional points of access to scenic or recreation trails.

Since a large part of enjoying a trail is appreciating the surrounding landscape, the act specified that the route for a designated trail be compatible with its surroundings, and that natural vegetation remain undisturbed, except for clearing required for construction of the trail, occasional vistas or facilities. In anticipating concerns by adjacent landowners about the potential invasion of privacy and crime generated by use of a trail, the act further stated that trails minimize negative impacts on adjacent property owners.

Trails on public and private lands can be considered for inclusion in the system. Also, abandoned railroad rights-of-way could be studied for inclusion as well. A variety of acquisition methods, e.g., scenic easements and donation, may be employed to set aside land for trails.

One of the provisions of the act specifically addressed in this plan, is the development of rules and regulations governing the trails system.

New Jersey Trails Council

As stated in P.L. 1975, Chapter 367, the New Jersey Trails Council was established to act as a lay advisory board to the departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation in providing a general forum for issues related to the State Trails System, and in coordinating the development of a plan for a system of trails through the state, which it developed in 1982 (Appendix 2). It was given further responsibilities in Administrative Order No. 19, signed by DEPE Commissioner Weiner in 1992, (Appendix 3) to make recommendations on land acquisitions and trails for the State Trails System, periodically revise the State Trails Plan, and recommend additions, deletions and modifications.

The Council is composed of eleven members representing trail user groups, outdoor recreation interests groups and state government agencies. Trail user groups can include interests for hiking, canoeing, bicycling, horseback riding, snowmobiling or trail motorcycling, and ski-touring. Members are appointed for three year terms.

With expertise in various trail interests, outdoor recreation and state government, the Trails Council provides valuable information on trail interests of the citizens of New Jersey, as well as information on the specific needs of trail users.

SUMMARY AND STATUS OF THE 1982 NEW JERSEY TRAILS PLAN

The 1982 Trails Plan was undertaken pursuant to P.L. 1975, Chapter 367 to provide a framework for the development of the State Trails System. The Legislature recognized the need for a coordinated system of trails throughout the state in the New Jersey Trails System Act (N.J.S.A. 13:8-30 et seq., P.L. 1974, c. 159). Included in the plan were issues and recommendations relevant to trail needs, uses and management at municipal, county and state levels of government.

The plan was intended to be used by planning agencies in government, and by private organizations and individuals. It was designed as a guide for recreational trail use, acquisition and facility development. To help with practical issues related to trail development and management, a sample of a local trail easement agreement and copies of related laws were appended; sources were listed for further information and for standards and specifications for trail design and construction.

Needs: Summary

The plan included a trail inventory and discussion of user requirements for each of the use categories: foot, water, horse, bicycle, snow and motorized. Each of the trail uses has needs including conditions and facilities specific to that use.

Some of the trail use categories described in the plan include more than one kind of recreational use. For example, typical forms of foot trail use include hiking, backpacking, walking for pleasure, nature walking, jogging and running, and fitness exercise. Water trails along sections of streams or rivers may provide recreation for canoeing, kayaking, rafting and tubing. Snow trails are used for ski touring, snowshoeing and winter hiking. Finally, motorized trails are designed for off-road motor vehicles, which include trail motorcycles and snowmobiles.

Needs: Status

The needs of individual types of trail use have not changed since 1982. What has changed is the level of trail design that accommodates more than one compatible use. Trail planners have more knowledge of what uses work compatibly with each other under certain conditions of amount of use in certain areas and trail condition. For example, trails for hiking and horseback riding have height clearance that allows for safe passage and visibility for the horseback rider, and they are wider than footpaths, allowing for hikers or horses to pass each other. The most abundant single-use trail is still a hiking trail, particularly in the mountainous sections of northern New Jersey. Trail use categories not discussed in 1982 are mountain bikes, and for motorized trail users, all terrain vehicles and four-wheel drive vehicles, included as a general class of Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs).

Issues: Summary

The following issues presented in the plan were concerns of trail users and managers.

- **Liability:** Publicizing the New Jersey Landowner Liability Act of 1968 (N.J.S.A. 2A:42A-2 et seq.) limiting the liability of landowners who opened their property to the public for low impact outdoor sports and recreation was recommended in order to encourage the opening of private land for trail use.
- **Public Use of Private Land:** It was noted that the state could help foster public use of private lands by developing a standard agreement for negotiating with landowners, revising municipal land-use laws to include trails planning, and providing tax relief to landowners who allowed public access.

- **Multiple Jurisdictions:** Cooperative agreements, adequate funding from various sources and volunteer time and labor were cited as basic ingredients in maintaining regional trails that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- **Management and Enforcement:** Personnel and maintenance equipment were noted requirements for managing trails and enforcing regulations. The use of volunteer organizations and individuals was encouraged as an economical and effective way to maintain and monitor trail corridors.
- **User Education:** The discussion of this issue emphasized the need for the development and wide distribution of guidelines to educate trail users as to basic standards of conduct.
- **Multiple Use and Compatibility:** Designation of a corridor for more than one trail activity seems to be an efficient use of a recreational resource, as long as consideration is given to the quality of the trail experience for each user group and the potential of use pre-emption by one group.
- **Motorized Uses:** To resolve the basic conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses, segregation of the two was discussed. Providing for motorized use areas, vehicle registration, driver education and training programs for snowmobiles and trail motorcycles were proposed to ease conflicts with non-motorized trail users.
- **Recreation and Transportation:** Some recreational trails could also serve as commuter corridors for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **Handicapped Trail Users:** Wherever possible, modifications to existing recreational trails were recommended to accommodate the needs of these users, as opposed to developing special trails.
- **Urban Trails:** For a trails system to be accessible to all state residents, major population areas must be incorporated.
- **Rights-of-Way:** Rights-of-way (ROWs), either abandoned or in-use, include corridors of land such as those used by utilities and railroads. They can be used as long trails or links to existing trails, if the land is suitable for a trail, and if the utility company has ownership of the land.
- **Funding:** New Jersey's Green Acres Bond Issues have provided the primary source of funding for open space in the state. However, with public funds diminishing, private foundations and corporations may become more important funding sources.

Issues: Status

The circumstances concerning or solutions to issues such as liability, multiple jurisdictions, management and enforcement, and user education have remained mostly the same. Other issues, such as use of rights-of-way are still relevant but circumstances have changed somewhat. These are referenced in this plan. Others, such as use by the disabled, are still relevant, but have new circumstances and requirements affecting their use. For these, new recommendations are required, and are addressed in more detail.

Trails Program and System: Summary

In the Trails Plan of 1982, detailed recommendations were made for municipal, county and the state governments to develop, maintain and facilitate access and use of trails. General recommendations for government agencies emphasized the establishment and maintenance of a State Trails System, and the establishment of an advisory board to oversee implementation of the Trails Plan and advise government agencies on all trail matters. Cooperation and coordination among all levels of government and with the private sector were recommended in order to acquire, develop and promote trail use, maintain continuity and

develop connections between existing parks.

The 1982 New Jersey Trails Plan proposed a system of trails that included existing and proposed segments. The following 11 trails, existing or in progress, were listed and mapped as initial components of the trails system:

- Appalachian Trail: 54 miles - National Scenic Trail. From the Delaware Water Gap, Warren County through northern Sussex County and exiting the state west of Greenwood Lake, Passaic County.
- Palisades Shore Trail: approx. 10 miles - Along the base of the cliffs from Fort Lee, Bergen County, exiting the state in Alpine, Bergen County.
- Palisades Long Path: 10 miles - National Recreation Trail. Along the top of the cliffs from Fort Lee, Bergen County, exiting the state in Alpine, Bergen County.
- Middletown Branch: 4 miles - Beaver Lake to Ogdensburg, Sussex County.
- Lenape Trail: 42 miles - South Maplewood west through Essex County to link with Patriots' Path.
- Patriots' Path: 27 miles - National Recreation Trail. East and west through Morris County.
- Round Valley Trail: 10 miles - Round Valley Reservoir, Hunterdon County.
- South Branch Nature Preserve: approximately 12 miles - Follows the South Branch of the Raritan River, Hunterdon County.
- Delaware & Raritan Canal Towpath: 60 miles - New Brunswick, Middlesex County to Trenton, Mercer County and north to Bull's Island, Hunterdon County.
- Batona Trail: 40 miles - Wharton State Forest to Lebanon State Forest, Burlington County.
- Cooper River Complex: 10 miles - Cooper River Park, Camden County.

In addition to the existing trails, 11 proposed trails, 6 trail areas and 3 proposed trail areas, 11 abandoned railroad rights-of-way, 8 bicycle touring routes, 3 beaches, 14 connector trails and 20 canoeable waterways were also listed and mapped for potential inclusion in the New

Jersey Trails System. The intent was to have trails with a variety of uses distributed throughout the state so that all residents would be able to take advantage of easily accessible outdoor recreational activities.

Establishing a trails system was found to be a feasible undertaking due to the varied types, quantity and distribution of trails already in use. By unifying the trails into a state system, existing trails would be protected and establishment of new corridors would be encouraged. In this way recreational opportunities would be expanded by trail use itself, and by linking recreational and open space areas with each other and with communities.

Trails Program and System: Status

The New Jersey Trails Council has been reactivated to provide recommendations on federal trails funding, acquisition of land for trails, updates and revisions to the Trails Plan, and designation proposals to the State Trails System.

Of the 11 trails listed for designation as initial components of the system, eight are included in this plan with justifications for designation based on set criteria. Of the proposed trails, only one, the Batona Trail southern extension to Bass River State Forest has been completed. Of 11 abandoned railroad rights-of-way identified in the 1982 Plan, four were acquired by public agencies: NYS&W - Paulinskill Valley Trail; Newton to Branchville - Sussex Branch Trail; CRRNJ, "Bayshore Bikeway" - Henry Hudson Trail by Monmouth County; and Bel-Del RR from Bulls Island to Milford - part of Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park. That part of the NYS&W RR from Columbia Lake to Sparta Junction was purchased. The High Bridge Branch of CRRNJ was acquired by Columbia Gas to be part of the proposed Cross-Jersey Trail. The Middletown Branch was incorporated into the Hamburg Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

EXISTING TRAIL SYSTEMS IN NEW JERSEY

Performing a survey of existing trails in New Jersey was considered essential for two reasons: to determine the number, type and location of existing trails before recommendations could be made on developing new trails; and to determine which trails were of statewide significance and therefore eligible for designation to the State Trails System. The trail survey was conducted in 1991, with updates in 1995, by contacting federal, state and county park agencies. These agencies were requested to supply information on marked or mapped long distance trails and trail systems. Long distance trails were defined as trails of at least four miles in length, marked or mapped as trails, and on public land or on private property with an easement for trail purposes. Not included were paths, dirt and sand roads partially used as trails but not marked as trails or used for vehicular purposes. Agencies were requested to supply the number of miles for hiking, backpacking (in which overnight facilities were available for hiking), nature walking (for which a guide describing the surrounding landscape is available), horseback riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, bicycling, snowmobiling, off road vehicles (ORVs) or other motorized trail vehicles other than snowmobiles, wheelchair accessible or other disabled access, and water/canoeing. Other trail uses, such as dog sledding, were not considered, although they may be allowed on individual trails.

From the information submitted, it was found that there are over 1,500 miles of long distance trails in New Jersey (Table 1). This includes land trails and rivers used for canoeing and small boats. Many of the land trails, over 1,000 miles, are multiple use trails, used by any combination of hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers and, in the winter, cross-country skiers (Figure 1). Approximately 93% of the land trail mileage (1,025 miles) is available for hiking, and about 30% of "hiking only" trails are available for cross-country skiing in the winter. Although mountain biking is a recent trail use, 435.5 miles of trails are available for its use, close to that for horseback riding (455.5 miles). Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park has the most mileage available for the wheelchair disabled, as the flat

surface of the tow path next to the canal makes it highly usable for wheelchairs. Although there is little mileage recorded for wheelchair use, this can be attributed to the fact that more trails may be available at short distances within local parks, and not included in this inventory. Permitted motorized trail use has the least amount of mileage of all trail types. The New Jersey State Park Service does allow snowmobiles on about 71.5 miles of selected trails in the winter, mostly within northern New Jersey. Within state parks and forests, "licensed" motorized trail vehicles are allowed on sand and dirt roads that are dedicated public roads, and which are available for other trail users as well. Based on N.J.S.A. 39:3C-1 et seq., snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles are to be registered vehicles with the New Jersey Division of Motor Vehicles. With the exception of large state parks in southern New Jersey, there are very few streams within public lands available for canoeing. River access for canoeing must be obtained either at road crossings or publicly owned river access areas, used by fishermen, boaters and canoeists.

The majority of long distance land trails, about 680 miles, are found within New Jersey State Parks and Forests. Most of these lands are found in the northern half of the state. Stokes State Forest, High Point and Wawayanda State Parks each had the most mileage of all state recreation areas, with trails for all types of trail users other than ORV's. In central New Jersey, Allaire, Delaware and Raritan Canal, and Monmouth Battlefield State Parks had the most trail mileage, servicing the needs of multiple trail users. Few state lands in southern New Jersey have marked trails, other than the Batona Trail, and trails in Belleplain State Forest and Parvin State Park.

However, many public lands, including Wharton State Forest, the largest single public land holding in the state, are criss-crossed by innumerable sand roads and paths that are unmarked and not included in the survey. The sand roads are available for motorized and non-motorized trail users alike. Only one state wildlife management area, Assunpink Wildlife Management Area, recorded any mapped trail

mileage. Although there are 13 state wildlife management areas that allow horseback riding by an annual permit, Assunpink is the only area that included marked trails. The others have "designated areas" available for horseback riding.

County parks accounted for approximately 300 miles of trails, about one half of the number of miles in state lands. These trails are used mostly for hiking, but also for cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and bicycling. Essex, Monmouth, and Morris counties have the greatest amount of mileage for marked trails in the state. Essex County reported 70 miles of trails within four parks. Within Essex County, South Mountain Reservation, with 33 miles, has some of the longest trail mileage available of all public lands in the state. Trails there are available for hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. Trails were not officially open for mountain biking at this or any of the other parks in Essex County. The Monmouth County Park System is notable because its 40 miles of multi-use trails are fairly evenly distributed in seven parks located throughout the county.

Palisades Interstate Park is the only "interstate" park, spanning New Jersey and New York State. Within the New Jersey section the Shore Trail and the Long Path are National Recreation Trails, accounting for 22 miles of the 29 miles of trails within the park. Both are available only for hiking.

The federal facilities, including one park, two recreation areas, and one wildlife refuge, had approximately 65 miles of long distance trails. A portion of the Appalachian Trail runs through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, and a part of Patriots' Path is found in Morristown National Historic Park. Although these federal lands only account for 65 trail miles, all but Gateway National Recreation Area are located adjacent to other public recreational areas. Delaware Water Gap NRA is sandwiched between Worthington and Stokes state forests; Morristown National Historic Park is adjacent to Lewis Morris County Park; and Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is adjacent to Somerset County's Lord Stirling Park. The end result is that for most of these areas, several miles of interconnected trail systems are available within

different administrative jurisdictions.

Of the existing regional trails, those being 50 miles or longer, the Appalachian Trail and the Batona Trail are for hiking, and the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park is multiuse. When Patriots' Path and the Lenape Trail are both completed, they will be multi-use as well. Portions that are completed are multi-use.

What is notable about existing trails is that very few long-distance trails use abandoned railroad rights-of-way. Portions of the Bel-Del Line are incorporated in Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park; the Sussex Branch and the Paulinskill Valley Trails are the only trails for which railroad rights-of-way are used for trails. However, portions of rights-of-way are sometimes incorporated into existing trails. For example, about a 1/4 mile portion of the former Lehigh and New England Line is used for the Appalachian Trail, and a 3.5 mile section of the Freehold and Jamesburg Line is incorporated into Allaire State Park. Although the supply of trails does not extensively use railroad abandonments, many such trails are in the development stages, such as in Atlantic, Hunterdon, and Monmouth counties.