

Middlesex Fells Trail System Plan Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Trail System Plan?

A trail system plan is a process outlined in our DCR Trail Guidelines and Best Practices Manual. The plan is a working document that considers the whole trail system - its existing features, recreational experiences and management challenges. It provides a guide for short and long-term management of the trail assets under the stewardship of the DCR, and helps DCR set priorities for allocating limited staff and financial resources. The plan will identify stewardship partners and opportunities and sets priorities for responding to stakeholder requests. Finally, it is intended to function as both a stand-alone trails plan and component of a future Resource Management Plan

Why develop and implement a Trail System Plan for the Middlesex Fells now?

- Middlesex Fells is an extremely popular destination which experiences high levels of recreational use, particularly trail use
- All trail uses have impacts to soils, water quality, wildlife and vegetation
- User-created trails, off-trail use, unsustainable trail designs, and redundant / overlapping trails compound these impacts
- DCR receives requests from various stakeholders for trail maintenance, programming, new trails, and changes in trail use designations
- The trail system plan considers and evaluates the trail system within the context of available natural and cultural resources information, and makes recommendation to better protect these sensitive resources.

Where can I find DCR's Trail Guidelines and Best Practices Manual?

This manual is available at

http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/greenway/docs/DCR_guidelines.pdf.

What are the general steps in the Trail System Planning Process?

Get to Know The Trails

1. Involve Stakeholders
2. On-The-Ground Assessment
3. Gather Maps (Complete DCR Road and Trail Inventory)
4. Identify Critical Management Roads (Fire Roads)
5. Describe Use Patterns and Demand
6. Identify Scenic, Recreational and Cultural Destinations and Features
7. Identify Your Main Parking and Access Points
8. Identify Desired Recreational Experiences
9. Identify Critical Connections to Make
10. Highlight Problem Areas and Redundant Trails
11. Highlight Culturally and Ecologically Sensitive Sites and Areas
12. Identify Potential Trail Closures
13. Designate Trail Uses
14. Re-route and Restore Problem Trails
15. Highlight Potential New Trails

16. Identify Stewardship Partners and Opportunities
17. Identify Necessary Trail Use Policies
18. Develop Education and Enforcement Strategies

How will the public and stakeholders be involved?

We hope that interested trail users, stakeholders and the general public will be involved along the way.

- We anticipate a Public Trail Planning Workshop to be held in January.
- We are inviting public / trail user input via internet. Please go to <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/news/publicmeetings/greenwaysfellsusersurvey.htm> to provide your thoughts and ideas.
- Once we have developed a draft plan, we will hold a public presentation and invite public comment.
- We hope interested users and stakeholders will be involved in the plan's implementation.

What is the timeline for completing this plan?

Although subject to change, our anticipated timeline is:

- Complete the DCR Road and Trail Inventory – Fall 2009
- Public Trail Planning Workshop – February, 2010
- Public presentation and review of draft plan – September 2010
- Public Comment Period – through November 19, 2010
- Initiate Resource Management Plan Process – November 2010
- Initiate Plan Implementation – Winter 2010-2011

What is the DCR Road and Trail Inventory and who is Completing it?

For several years, the DCR has been contracting, through our Bureau of Forestry, to GPS every road and trail in our state parks and forests. This inventory has been initiated in the Fells and will be completed this fall. The inventory records the location of all trails (official and un-official), their condition, width, surface and type. It also records the locations, types and conditions of trail damage and all trail structures. The contractor for this work will be selected through our Master Service Agreement Contract "DCR 167" which can be searched for at <http://www.comm-pass.com/>.

Will Comments submitted by the public be posted on the internet?

We posted a summary of the Public Workshop results, on our web site. All comments received during the draft plan public comment period will be posted on our web site following the close of the comment period.

Will any decisions in the draft Trail Plan or actions proposed therein be taken before the end of the comment period in November?

No, while various park management decisions and projects are ongoing, the specific recommendations of the draft Trail System Plan will not be implemented until after the end of the public comment period.

Which actions do you anticipate will be implemented after the comment period has ended but before the full RMP is completed?

The Trail Plan includes a “Recommendations Summary Table” starting on page 46 which includes a suggested implementation schedule. Following the public comment period, recommendations may be implemented by DCR in accordance with this table, and prior to the completion of the full RMP process.

How and why was it decided that some issues would be decided through the Resource Management Plan (RMP) process and others would be implemented prior to the completion of an RMP?

As previously stated, the Trails System Plan is one of the integrated planning tools that DCR uses to make management decisions about our properties. It serves both as a stand-alone plan and as a component of an RMP. DCR has identified a set of recommendations through the trails planning process that we believe are appropriate and should be implemented in the near future to best protect the Fells and enhance the user experiences there. We have outlined the timeframe for implementation of those in the “Recommendations Summary Table” within the plan. DCR also recognizes that some recommendations might benefit from additional information collection, a broader analysis and an additional public process that might be afforded by an RMP process. We have identified those as recommendations that should be further “evaluated in the RMP” process.

In reference to Recommendation for designating Virginia Wood as pedestrian-only, does that mean just the single track trails in that area, or would that ban bikes from the fire roads too?

Implementing this recommendation would restrict bikes, and possibly dogs, from all trails (including fire roads) in Virginia Wood.

When you say Virginia Wood, do you mean the entire rectangle of Fells between Pond St/Woodland Rd/Ravine Rd/Fellsway East? Or is the Virginia Wood subset of that block of land?

This recommendation refers to the entire portion of the Fells bounded by Pond Street, Woodland Road, Ravine Road and Fellsway East.