



connections

The newsletter of the Massachusetts
Greenways and Trails Program

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Accessible Trails

One of the main purposes of a trail is to provide access to places, features, experiences and scenic landscapes. As such, trail designers, developers and maintainers should always consider how trails can enhance accessibility for a range of users, including people with disabilities. We certainly don't want to pave the wilderness, nor do people with disabilities only wish to experience trails in highly developed settings, but we do need to consider trail accessibility throughout the range of recreational opportunities and settings that we provide.

In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that many trails become accessible. Accessible Trail Guidelines for what this might mean are being finalized at the federal level now. As we create new trails or alter old ones, we need to consider questions like; will a person with limited mobility have an equal opportunity to use this trail? Are there existing conditions that may limit the trail's ability to become accessible? Ultimately, how can we make trails most accessible? Hopefully, the information below will provide some guidance as you think about these questions.

Frequently Asked Questions about Accessible Trails and How We Create Them

Excerpted from Stuart Macdonald, American Trails magazine and Chair, National Association of State Trail Administrators

1. What is an accessible trail according to federal guidelines?

The proposed guidelines for accessible trails provide minimum technical specifications for accessibility. A fully accessible trail should have:

- A firm stable surface
- Clear tread width of 36" minimum
- Tread obstacles less than 2" high (up to 3" high where are 5% or less)
- Maximum cross slope of 5%
- Running slope (trail grade) that meets one or more of the following:
 - 5% or less for any distance.
 - up to 8.33% for up to 200' (with resting intervals no more than 200' apart)
 - up to 10% for up to 30'
 - up to 12.5% for up to 10'
- No more than 30% of the total trail length exceeding a running slope of 8.33%
- Passing space (with a width of at least 60") at least every 1000'
- Signs that indicate the length and characteristics of the accessible trail segment

2. What kinds of trails are subject to the proposed accessibility guidelines?

The proposed guidelines for accessible trails apply to those trails which are designed and constructed for pedestrian use. Trails primarily designed and constructed for recreational use by equestrians, mountain bicyclists, snowmobile users, or off-highway vehicle users do not need to follow the guidelines, even if pedestrians occasionally use them. It is important to note that multi-use trails specifically designed and designated for hiking and bicycling are considered pedestrian trails.

3. Does that mean an urban bikeway is a "pedestrian trail"?

Accessibility guidelines would apply to trails used by bicyclists and skaters for non-motorized transportation, because they are also designed for pedestrian use. However, bicyclists and skaters have design needs which exceed the minimum guidelines for trails. In some cases, the AASHTO Guide used for bikeways may require a greater level of accessibility than the proposed trail accessibility guidelines.

4. Will existing trails need to meet accessibility standards?

The proposed guidelines apply only to

- Newly designed trails
- Newly constructed trails
- Altered portions of existing trails

5. Must we improve accessibility when trail maintenance is done?

You do not need to improve accessibility when doing routine or periodic maintenance or when you repair existing trails. Examples of routine maintenance include removal of debris, reshaping the trail bed, erosion control, etc. However, if maintenance activities can be carried out to enhance accessibility, then they should.

6. Does an accessible trail have to be paved? What about handrails and other edge protection?

Paving is not required, as long as the surface is "firm and stable." Handrails and edge protection are not required, but if they are provided, they should meet appropriate standards.

7. What about new trails that are nowhere near a road or an accessible trailhead?

Only trails that connect to an accessible trail or an accessible trailhead must meet the proposed standards.

8. What if building a trail to an accessible standard just isn't logical, desirable, or even possible?

Trail builders are encouraged to provide access as much as possible. However, you do not need to follow the proposed accessibility guidelines if doing so would:

- Cause substantial harm to cultural, historic, religious, or significant natural features or characteristics;
- Significantly change the nature of the setting or the purpose of the trail;
- Require construction methods or materials that are prohibited by federal, state, or local laws; or
- Not be possible because of terrain or the prevailing construction practices.

9. Who will these accessibility guidelines apply to?

Initially, these proposed trail accessibility guidelines will apply to federal agencies. However, it is likely that these will be incorporated into state regulations soon.

State agencies, municipalities, non-profits and citizen trail groups should consider adopting these or similar guidelines now to accomplish the goal of providing accessible recreational experiences to all.

Tips and Tools

(Resources, links, and publications)

National Park Service (NPS) Rivers and Trails Program is inviting applications for requests for assistance. Application deadline is August 1, 2008. This program provides 1-2 years NPS staff time related to river restoration, community trail networks, or urban parks. For more information contact Charles Tracy, charles_tracy@nps.gov or 617-223-5210 or go to <http://www.nps.gov/nero/rtca/MA.pdf>. Application: http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/contactus/cu_apply.html.

Information on accessible trails, the new ADA regulations, and how they apply to specific situations is at the American Trails website:

<http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/index.html>

The final report of the Regulatory Negotiation Committee on Accessibility Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas proposes ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) for trails, outdoor recreational access routes, beach access routes, and picnic and camping facilities is available at: <http://www.access-board.gov/outdoor/outdoor-rec-rpt.htm>

USDA Forest Service's guidelines on accessibility are available at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/accessibility/>

Blazing the Way

The **Mass Central Rail Trail** is one step closer to completion. On May 1, 2008 the board of the MBTA approved a 99-year lease agreement with the state for 26 miles of abandoned railway between Waltham and Berlin. The DCR will convert the rail bed to a pedestrian and bicycle path. According to DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan, "The final 104-mile bikeway will truly be the backbone of the state bike and pedestrian trail system, linking numerous DCR parks, forests, local conservation lands, and long distance hiking trails." When finished, it will connect Waltham with Northampton.

The **Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP)** is an inventory process that provides objective information about trail conditions. Beneficial Designs, Inc. received funding in 1993 to create a universal mapping system and identified five characteristics of a trail that greatly affect access: grade, cross slope, surface type, obstacles, and trail width. The information obtained through an assessment can be used by land managers to enhance the safety and enjoyment of trail users (by providing accurate, objective information about the on-trail conditions), monitor environmental impact of the trail, prepare budgets,

develop maintenance and construction plans, and identify potential access barriers. See <http://www.beneficialdesigns.com/trails/utap.html> for more information.

American Trails and the National Trails Training Partnership offer a **one-day accessible trails workshop**, with components on the requirements, hands-on application, and problem solving. The one-hour sessions are called Sustainable Trail Design, Accessibility and Legal Issues, Introduction to Universal Trail Assessment Process, On-The-Trail Practical Session, and Solving Participant Problems. More information is at <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/accessible/accessworkshop.html>.

On the Road Ahead

(Upcoming events and deadlines)

Beyond Economics – Creating a Livable Healthy Community, a free Public Forum, Monday, May 19, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. at the Attleboro High School small auditorium. Mark Fenton, a national expert in livable community issues will provide a light hearted summary of the central ideas of an active living community. For more information, contact the Duane German at the YMCA 508-222-7422 or dgerman@attleboroymca.org.

Climate Change in the Northeast: Preparing for the Future – A Workshop, June 3-5, 2008 at UMass Amherst. Contact Sarah Hines (shines@fs.fed.us) or Sheela Doshi (sdoshi@fs.fed.us). Focusing on oceans and forests, land and resource managers in New England and New York will develop a common understanding of natural and cultural resource issues and explore climate change management approaches.

National Trails Day, June 7. American Hiking Society's signature trail awareness program, National Trails Day, inspires the public and trail enthusiasts nationwide to seek out their favorite trails to discover, learn about, and celebrate trails while participating in educational exhibits, trail dedications, gear demonstrations, instructional workshops and trail work projects. Massachusetts has many National Trails Day events around the state, including these listed on National Trails Day web site. For More information or to register an event go to: <http://www.americanhiking.org/NTD.aspx>.

ORGANIZATIONS	EVENT	CITY
Sudbury Valley Trustees	Hike through the Crane Swamp Region	Westborough
Sturbridge Trails Committee	Trail Ribbon Cutting	Sturbridge
U. S. Army Corps of Engineers	Family Fun in hiking	Southbridge
U. S. Army Corps of Engineers	Trail opening ceremony	Brimfield
Cape Cod Pathways	Cape Walk	Barnstable
Westport River Watershed Alliance	River Clean Up	Westport
F.A.I.R & City of Attleboro	National Trails Day	Attleboro

<u>Bay State Trail Riders Association, Inc.</u>	Benefit Pleasure Ride	Oxford
<u>Wachusett Greenways</u>	Family Fun Day	West Boylston
<u>The Trustees of Reservations</u>	Weir River Farm Trail	Hingham
<u>Essex County Greenbelt</u>	Willowdale Meadow Loop Trail	Topsfield
<u>REI Hingham</u>	REI Hingham Presents National Trails Day - Wompatuck Trail Care Event	Hingham
<u>Friends of North Andover Trails</u>	Andover/North Andover Trails Day	Andover/North Andover
<u>People Making a Difference (PMD)</u>	Belle Isle Marsh	East Boston
<u>REI Boston</u>	REI Presents National Trails Day Service Project at Franklin Park	Boston

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Please also forward this to others who might be interested in Massachusetts Greenways and Trails.



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