



connections

The newsletter of the Massachusetts
Greenways and Trails Program

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The 1st Annual Massachusetts Trails Conference “Building Connections” Conference Follow-Up



On November 12, 2011 the Massachusetts Recreational Trails Advisory Board (MARTAB) in partnership with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) held the 1st Annual Massachusetts Trails Conference in Leominster, MA.

The goal of this one-day conference was to build a statewide-based coalition of trail advocates in Massachusetts by focusing on strengthening *capacity* and *community* across the spectrum of trails enthusiasts and supporters. Concurrent sessions in the morning focused on building capacity through education and discussion of issues like funding, permitting and economic impacts of trails. The afternoon session consisted of participatory discussions, planning, and a celebration of trail successes, with the goal of strengthening a sense of community among trail advocates across the state.

The conference was a great success with 120 participants attending. Attendance included trails advocates and professionals from non-profit organizations, friends groups, municipalities,



Conservation Commissions, the state and federal government. Unfortunately, the demand for the conference overwhelmed the capacity of the venue, so many interested trails folks did not get to attend. This confirms that a future conference should not only be held, but that it will require a larger venue in which all interested participants will be ensured a space!

Conference Summary: Making Trails Happen in Massachusetts

During the afternoon session of the conference, participants broke out into regional groups to provide for more intimate, geographically and community-specific discussions of trail goals, commonly encountered challenges, and possible solutions for overcoming those barriers. Discussions ranged from the issues of the individual group to those challenging trail advocates statewide. From these discussions and reports back to the larger group, a list of common themes was created. Below is a summary of those needs and challenges, and proposed solutions or “key steps” to help “Make Trails Happen” in Massachusetts.

1. **Organize** within and throughout the Massachusetts trail community. Bring trail supporters together to discuss and prioritize goals and strategies but also to get out and work on trails. Include and listen to the interests of the diverse trail-user and trail-type groups throughout the state. Organize a volunteer base and take every opportunity to educate and advance their skills.
2. **Survey/Data Collection:** Identify the current information and resources that are available and collect information that will be crucial in guiding the community in furthering its trail goals. This can be in the form of surveying stakeholders, mapping existing and proposed trail networks, and holding workshops and conferences for networking and data gathering purposes.
3. **Pursue Partnerships:** Coordinate and communicate with other trail supporters. Identify where partnerships can be forged, for any specific purpose, and work together towards common goals.
4. **Identify Funding Opportunities:** Ensure that all of the money available for trails is identified, clarified, solicited and used.
5. **Advocate** for trails and trail funding in Massachusetts and on the national level.
6. **Skills/Knowledge Building:** Offer and attend skill building and knowledge trainings and/or identify good, quality professionals who can be hired who have the knowledge. Share knowledge on various platforms, including user group or trail-type specific sessions, workshops and conferences.
7. **Participate and Cooperate:** Whether an individual or non-profit organization, ensure your own participation and cooperation as a part of the trails community in Massachusetts. Offer and share your knowledge, expertise and experience on the local, regional and statewide scale.
8. **Market/Promote Trails:** Market and promote trails so that more people are aware of and use them, therefore raising the profile of and level of support for trails in Massachusetts. Submit your trail for national/statewide/regional recognition.
9. **Outreach** and education to the population outside of the trail community. Communicate with those who oppose, or simply do not support, a general or specific trail (appeal to what they care about, such as economic impact, natural resources, aesthetics, etc). Learn and then share compelling and relevant information in support of trails. Reach out to political figures and keep them updated on the latest successes and issues facing trails. Reach out to professionals, such as

engineers, lawyers, machine operators, to recruit possible pro-bono, volunteer or donated work on trail projects. Reach out to the youth and teach them about trails to secure the next generation of trail advocates.

10. **Create Responsible Trails that are in the best interest of the state, community, individuals, and the environment** so that the Massachusetts legacy of trails is preserved as accommodating to all persons and is economically, physically, psychologically and spiritually beneficial and environmentally sustainable.

These key steps incorporate the knowledge and feedback of the greater trails community, meant to encompass all of the factors that contribute to the success of trails on the local, state and national level. One major goal of this conference was to narrow down the abundant list of needs and challenges facing the trail community and, as a group, identify and agree upon the most urgent and priority steps that should be the primary focus in the coming years. Through the afternoon discussion as well as the conference follow-up survey, those priority steps have been identified as the following:

1. Funding (Advocacy and Identification of sources)
2. Skill and Knowledge Building
3. Coordination/Cooperation/Communication Among Trail Groups

Groups were also asked the question of whether or not a statewide trail partnership should be formed, or identified, to take a leadership role in organizing and pursuing important statewide goals. The majority of conference participants agreed that this would be a good step. MARTAB, as a unique group of trail advocates that consists of representative of each trail user group in Massachusetts, has begun to take on the first steps of this important role, in the planning of the statewide conference as well as the development of a website and in promoting advocacy for trails on both the federal and state level. However, this is just a first step and it is likely that forming a separate, unifying partnership of trail advocates will offer the best opportunities for trails in Massachusetts.

Do you believe that there is a role here for a central trails organization, to lead the Massachusetts trail community in taking steps towards making trails happen in Massachusetts? How might you contribute to the development and action of such a group?

Next Steps

1. **Develop a trail partnership** to organize the trail community into action. Some first steps include the creation and management of a website devoted to trails information and resources in Massachusetts, implementing trail advocacy campaigns to increase funding opportunities, and planning/recruiting for future conferences and skill/knowledge-building opportunities. A key role of this organization will be to advocate for the future of funding for trails in Massachusetts, through public and private sources.

2. MARTAB plans to continue its efforts to advocate for and unite the trails community, as well as maintain its primary mission as a board of user-group representatives formed to review and recommend Recreational Trails Program grant proposals for funding. At this time, MARTAB is in need of additional voting members on the board to represent various trail user groups that are not currently represented. Please contact Amanda Lewis if you have interest in becoming a member of MARTAB, either as a voting member and representative of one of the following user-groups, or as a general “associate” member to assist MARTAB in furthering the goals of the trails community. For more information on MARTAB and its purpose and goals, visit <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/greenway/martab.htm>

- Water Trails: Paddling/Canoeing/Boating
- Skiers/Snowshoers
- Off-Road Motorcyclists
- Climbers
- Universal Access
- Land Manager: Local Land Trust/Non-Profit
- Local Committee Member: Community Trails/Greenways
- Private Landowners with permitted public trails

MARTAB is also looking for alternates for the following user-groups:

- All of the Above
- Walkers/Hikers/Trail Runners
- Bicyclists
- Equestrian Riders and Drivers
- ATV Riders

3. Take a look at the conference materials posted online at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/greenway/publications.htm> (scroll to bottom of page).
4. Stay alert for future announcements regarding steps towards the unification of the Massachusetts Trails Community under the common purpose of trail advocacy and the enhancement and stewardship of the statewide trail network.

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Connections is the electronic newsletter from the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Greenways and Trails Program,

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