



TRAILS FOR ALL

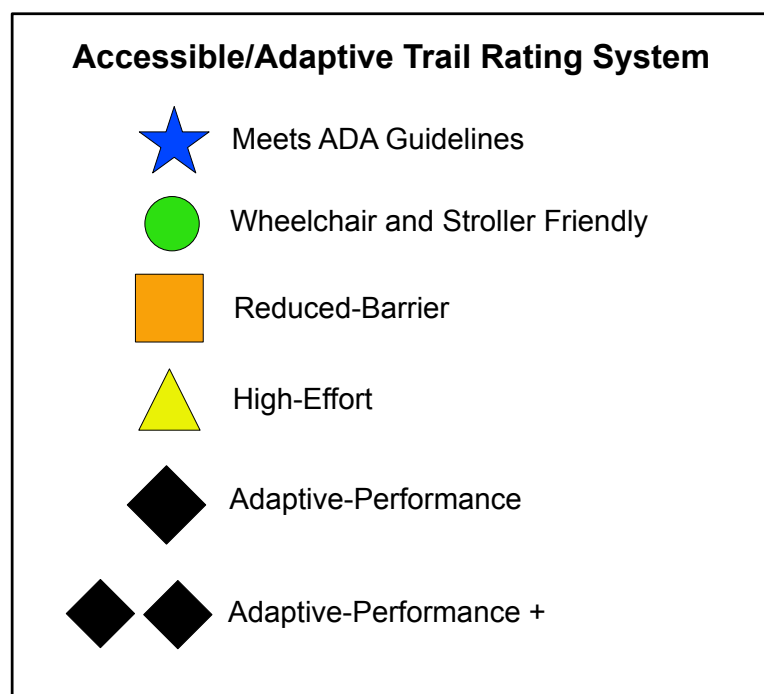
EXPANDING THE
ACCESSIBLE
TRAILS NETWORK IN THE
COMMONWEALTH

2026



APPENDIX C: PROPOSED TRAIL RATING SYSTEM

The proposed trail rating system, developed by Meg Bandarra, uses shape and color to divide trails into difficulty categories based on trail attributes. Using both shape and color is a color blindness friendly system that provides multiple ways for people to recognize the trail category that is right for them. The rating and category for each trail is dependent on the maximum grade, length of grade, cross slope, and whether or not the trail meets established guidelines such as ADA/ABA Access Routes or the US Forest Service Trail Accessibility guidelines (FSTAG).



PROPOSED RATING SYSTEM



CATEGORY 1: MEETS ADA ACCESS ROUTE GUIDELINES

This category of trail meets ADA guidelines for accessible routes and exceeds FSTAG guidelines.

- Maximum grade: 5%
- Access Ramps: up to 8.33%
- Maximum cross slope: 2%
- Surface: Firm and Stable
- Width: 3-6ft, paved surface widths could be as narrow as 3ft, unpaved surfaces shouldn't go below 4ft, ideally 5-6ft.
- Maximum Transition Height: ½" beveled
- Mobility Device Recommendations: Everyday Equipment
- Potential Alternate Name(s): All Persons Trail, Barrier-Free Trail, ADA Trail



CATEGORY 2: WHEELCHAIR AND STROLLER FRIENDLY TRAIL

This category of trail meets FSTAG accessible trail guidelines, and is close to ADA guidelines.

- Maximum grade: 5%
- Access Ramps: up to 8.33%
- Maximum cross slope: 5% (This exceeds ADA guidelines)
- Surface: Firm and Stable
- Width: 5-6ft+
- Maximum Transition Height: 2" (This exceeds ADA Guidelines)
- Mobility Device Recommendations: Everyday Equipment
- Potential Alternate Name(s): Gentle Trail



CATEGORY 3: REDUCED-BARRIER TRAIL

This category of trail meets FSTAG accessible trail guidelines. Depending on trail conditions and personal needs, some users may find that they need assistance or specific equipment to navigate this trail.

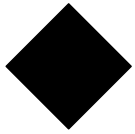
- Maximum grade: Between 5-8.33% for up to 200ft
- Access Ramps: up to 8.33%.
- Maximum cross slope: 5%
- Surface: Firm and Stable
- Width: 5-6ft+
- Maximum Transition Height: 2"
- Mobility Device Recommendations: Everyday Equipment, Specialized Equipment for Outdoor Use



CATEGORY 4: HIGH-EFFORT TRAIL

This category of trail meets FSTAG accessible trail guidelines, however some users may find trails in this category exceed their physical ability, or that they need assistance on these trails. In particular, trail users with manual mobility devices are likely to need assistance.

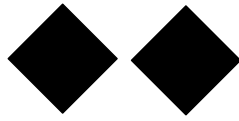
- Maximum grade: 8.33-12%
- Access Ramps: up to 8.33%.
- Maximum cross slope: 5%
- Surface: Firm and Stable
- Width: 5-6ft
- Maximum Transition Height: 2"
- Mobility Device Recommendations: Specialized Equipment for Outdoor Use, Some Everyday Equipment



CATEGORY 5: ADAPTIVE-PERFORMANCE TRAIL:

This category of trail DOES NOT meet FSTAG accessible trail guidelines. Trails in this category will have some accessibility features. Trail users with mobility disabilities are likely to need assistance, powered equipment, or other specialized outdoor equipment to navigate trail grades. Users with other types of disability may be able to navigate this space without encountering barriers, or few potential obstacles

- Maximum grade: Between 12-15%
- Maximum cross slope: 5-8%?
- Surface: Generally firm and stable, few barriers such as rocks, roots may occur. Some may exceed 2" in height?
- Width: 4-6ft
- Maximum Transition Height: 2"
- Mobility Device Recommendations: Specialized Equipment Likely Needed
- Potential Alternate Name(s): Adaptive Trail, Adaptive Device Trail



CATEGORY 6: ADAPTIVE-PERFORMANCE +

This category of trail DOES NOT meet FSTAG accessible trail guidelines. Some users may find trails in this category exceed their physical ability, or that they need assistance on these trails. In particular, trail users with mobility disabilities are likely to need- assistance, powered equipment, or other specialized outdoor equipment to navigate trail grades. Users with other types of disability may encounter some potential obstacles.

- Maximum grade: above 15%
- Maximum cross slope: Cannot exceed 12%
- Surface: Mostly firm and stable, some areas of loose surface may occur. May have some barriers such as rocks and roots. Some may exceed 2" in height
- Width: 4-5ft
- Maximum Transition Height: 2+
- Mobility Device Recommendations:
Specialized Equipment Likely Needed,
Powered Equipment May be Needed
- Potential Alternate Name(s): Performance +,
Power-Access Trail, Assisted Access Trail

PROPOSED TRAIL SIGNAGE

ACCESSIBLE/ADAPTIVE TRAIL SIGNAGE

ACCESSIBLE TRAIL SIGNAGE

Signage would have the trail name at the top and an icon indicating it's accessible. There is space at the top for the logo of the agency or organization the manages the trail.

Directly below the name is the trail rating, category, and reason(s) why the trail was given its rating. For the Trails the meet or exceed FSTAG guidelines, the reason is likely to be grade and/or cross slope, for trails of higher difficulty, the reasons could also include other reasons such as surface.

Detailed trail information is represented as icons, to help users who are unfamiliar with trail terminology understand terms like cross slope and grade. This builds and expands on DCR's recently adopted system for Trail Access Information Signage. An icon for "Environment" has been added to help communicate information about other types of barriers trail users might encounter.

To further detail the trail there is a place to list features, and any potential barriers. It should be noted that in this example water views is listed as a feature, but for some types of disabling conditions water can be a dangerous attractant so knowing there is water near the trail serves as both a feature and potential barrier warning. For those who would like more information about the trail there is a QR code. This could also serve as a way for people to get the most up-to-date trail conditions.






There is also a QR code that would link to the trail rating system so that trail users can familiarize themselves with all trail rating categories.

Space at the bottom of the sign can be used to add contact information or to date the trail information.


Riverbend Accessible Trail

Trail Rating: ● **Reason:** Cross Slope


Category: Wheelchair and Stroller Friendly

<p> Length: 1.5 mi, round-trip</p>	<p> Grade: Typical- 2-3% Max- 5% for 20ft.</p>
<p> Cross Slope: Typical: 2% Maximum: 5%</p>	<p> Width: Typical: 6ft Min: 5ft boardwalks</p>
<p> Environment: Sunny Trail, Low Noise</p>	<p> Surface: Stone dust, wooden boardwalk</p>
<p> Features: Water Views Seated Resting</p>	<p> Barriers: Limited Cell Service, Full Sun up to 1/4m</p>

Trail conditions as of: _____

For more about this trail visit our website: 

About The
Trail Rating
System




Managing
Department or
Organization
Logo


Example of Signage for Accessible Trail

ADAPTIVE TRAIL SIGNAGE









At some point, either when trails exceed FSTAG guidelines, or when trails exceed ADA guidelines for ramp grades, the symbol at the top of the sign would change from a standard wheelchair user symbol to an icon that indicates adaptive use, but also cautions that condition expectations should be considered and will differ from what may be widely accessed by most users with mobility considerations.

Summit View Trail




Trail Rating:  **Reason:** Grade, Cross Slope


Category: Adaptive-Performance

<p> Length: 3 mi, round-trip</p>	<p> Grade: Typical- 5-7% Max- 15% for 12ft.</p>
<p> Cross Slope: Typical: 2% Maximum: 8%</p>	<p> Width: Typical: 5ft Min: 5ft</p>
<p> Environment: Low Noise</p>	<p> Surface: Stone dust</p>
<p> Features: Viewpoint, Seated Resting</p>	<p> Barriers: Steep Grades and Cross Slopes</p>

Trail conditions as of: _____

For more about this trail visit our website: 

About The Trail Rating System



Managing Department or Organization Logo

Example of Signage for Adaptive Trail

HOW THE ACCESSIBLE/ADAPTIVE TRAIL RATING SYSTEM WOULD BE USED

Individual Trail Ratings would be on signage located at trailheads, included as part of online trail listings, and located in other places that feature trail information (e.g. regional guides, trail advertisements, apps).

The entire trail rating system would be published online, and potentially also included in other areas (e.g. trail brochures, signage in state parks, web-based trail information aggregate sites) so trail users can gain familiarity and understanding of the system, and learn which trail is right for them.

ADOPTION

State entities would use this system, and any accessible trail funded in whole or in part by state funds would also be required to use this system. With the goal that for consistency purposes, NGOs would adopt this system for use on other accessible trails that are not supported by state funds. If they are required to use the system for some of their trails, that may be motivation to use it across all their trails. Alternatively, there could be a state requirement for all accessible trails that are open to the public to adopt this system as part of a universal public information campaign.

Federally managed trails would not have to use this system, but the hope would be that they would adopt it for use on properties within the Commonwealth as a show of partnership with the state.

NON-ACCESSIBLE TRAIL SIGNAGE

Signage for trails that fall outside the accessible and adaptive trail rating system would still contain information detailed trail access information. This information is critical to understanding conditions that users would find the trail, and allows users to determine whether or not the trail is right for their needs, abilities, and desires.

Making this information available opens up access to more users and makes trails more welcoming and inclusive to all.

HOW THE NON-ACCESSIBLE TRAIL RATING SYSTEM WOULD BE USED

Access information is needed in order for non-accessible trails to become more inclusive. Signage with access details would be located at trailheads, included in online trail listings, and located in other places that feature trail information (e.g. regional guides, trail advertisements, apps).

ADOPTION

State entities would use this system, and any accessible trail funded in whole or in part with state funds would also be required to use this system. Like the accessible trail rating system, the aim would be for NGOs to eventually use this same information across all their trails. A guideline for adoption could be to start with trails that are on more heavily visited properties, near denser population areas, and have lower difficulty levels, since these are the trails where having access information is likely to make the impact and have the most benefit.

Wandering Brook Trail



Length:
3 mi, round-trip



Grade:
Typical- 5-7%
Max- 10% for 15ft.



Cross Slope:
Typical: 2-6%
Maximum- 8%



Width:
Typical: 3ft
Min- 1.5ft



Environment:
Moderate Use



Surface:
Natural Soil, Rocks



Features:
Viewpoint,
Water Views,
Seated Resting and
Picnic Areas



Barriers:
Steep grades and
cross slopes.

Trail conditions as of: _____

For more about this trail
visit our website:

QR

Managing
Department or
Organization
Logo

Example of Signage for Non-Accessible Trail