

NJ Trails Plan

2.

Status of Trails Planning in New Jersey

Under ideal circumstances trails planning in New Jersey would be comprehensive, cooperative and coordinated, with sufficient staff and funding resources at all levels to carry out trails programs. The status of trails planning in New Jersey could be improved. Governmental priorities tend to lag behind public desires and, as a result, there has been a lack of resources devoted to trails planning in New Jersey.

At the state level within the State Park System, which is the primary source of state managed trails, park superintendents generally do not have facilities plans or management plans to guide their trails planning efforts, and they lack the funding and staff to develop them. As a result, critical operations and maintenance efforts come first and planning for trails is deferred.

At the county level, several counties have exemplary and active trails planning and development programs and they coordinate their trails planning efforts with other counties, municipalities and the state. Slightly more than half the counties have prepared or are developing formal trails plans or other planning documents that address trails planning. Unfortunately, this means that about half of the counties in the state have not prepared plans to guide their efforts to implement and manage trails.

While there are many examples of successful urban trails, most municipalities have placed little or no emphasis on planning for trails and few routinely consider trails either as a part of their planning activities or as part of their transportation infrastructure. Addressing trails in municipal master plans is a start, but further efforts to implement plans and put trails on the ground are needed. For those municipalities that have made efforts at developing trails, the result is often fragmented trails with inadequate coordination and communication. At all levels of government, despite the previously discussed link between trails and transportation, there is a disconnect between those who plan trails and those who develop transportation projects, especially bridge projects. Consequently, opportunities for appropriate trails connections are often missed.

*If we keep doing
what we're doing,
we're going to
keep getting what
we're getting.*

– STEPHEN R. COVEY
US leadership and
success consultant

The New Jersey State Trails Program

Managing New Jersey's State Trails Program is the responsibility of the Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM) in NJDEP's Division of Parks and Forestry. The Trails Program is just one of several programs managed by that office, which is currently staffed by one full-time employee. Because of its limited staff resources, in recent years the Trails Program has primarily been focused on the administration of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP).

The ONLM provides staff support to the New Jersey Trails Council that participates in the RTP project selection process and has played a significant role in lobbying for the development of this (and former) State Trails Plans. The Trails Council could play a significant role in the implementation of some of the recommendations made in this Plan. However, any additional responsibilities for the Trails Council would require additional staff support from ONLM.

The reality is that without adequate staff resources, it is not currently feasible for ONLM or the Trails Council to play a major role in leading the implementation of the many recommendations included in this Plan. The effective implementation of Plan recommendations for addressing issues, achieving goals and fulfilling the Vision for trails in New Jersey is unlikely to occur unless and until additional staff resources are devoted to the Trails Program. Regardless, the role of other organizations within the trails community could be expanded to move forward with recommendations even if no additional state funding is allocated to the state Trails Program.

The Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the U. S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration. Under this program, Federal transportation funds are made available to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses.

The RTP funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund and represent a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from non-highway recreational fuel use: fuel used for off-highway recreation by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks.

The RTP funds are distributed to the States by legislative formula: half of the funds are distributed equally among all States, and half are distributed in proportion to the estimated amount of non-highway recreational fuel use in each State. Each State administers its own program.

In New Jersey the program is administered by the ONLM. Each year in September, an application package is distributed by mailing to counties, municipalities and trails-related non-profit organization landowners (the application is also available on the Division of Parks and Forestry's web page). Land on which a trail facility targeted for funding is located must be public land or private land with an easement for public recreational use. Applications are due mid-December. Grant applications are reviewed and evaluated by ONLM staff. Applications are discussed with the Trails Council that assists in the selection of projects recommended to receive funding. Grant ceilings vary from year to year depending on funds available and total applications received. Currently the maximum grant award for non-motorized trail project is \$25,000. Notification of awards is made in August or September of the following year.

RTP Facts and Trends

Facts

- NJDEP has received an average of 125 RTP grant applications per year for the last 3 years.
- Approximately 37-38 applicants are awarded grants per year, or about 30% of the applications.
- An average of \$840,000 in RTP funds has been available over the last 3 years.
- The total funding requested over last 3 years has been \$3,044,947; this is over 3 times the amount that is available.

Trends

- There has been a large increase in the number of non-profit applications and a slight increase in the number of county applications over the past few years. There has been a slight decrease in the number of applications from State Park Service. Approximately 45% of all applications are from municipal government.
- There is approximately twice the number of multi-use trail projects as there are hiking-only projects. The majority of multiple use projects are for bicycle or mountain bike trails that also accommodate foot use such as hiking.
- There has been an increase in water trail applications for canoeing and kayaking.
- There have been relatively few equestrian trail projects, although this past year has seen an increase.
- There have been very few motorized trail applications the last 3 years.
- There has been an increase in the number of applications that include new trail access; last year almost half the applications contained this component.
- A maintenance component was the next most prevalent, followed by development of trail-side, trailhead facilities (parking areas, signs, etc.). These are followed by trail restoration and access for the mobility impaired (although access for the mobility impaired claimed by applicants is not always “legitimate”).



*“New Jersey Trails System Act” (Chapter 159; P.L.)
Chapter 367: Laws of the New Jersey Trails Council*

The 1982 New Jersey Trails Plan

*Administrative
Order No. 19*

1974	1975		1982	1992
<p>Found that trails should be established in natural, scenic areas and in and near urban areas to promote public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of outdoor, natural and remote. Declares it to be state policy to achieve this by instituting a Statewide system of recreational and scenic trails.</p>	<p>Authorizes the creation of the New Jersey Trails Council to study and devise a plan for a coordinated system of trails throughout the state. Trails Council serves as lay advisory board to NJDEP and NJDOT</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined the trail use categories to be addressed • Described the (then) current situation with regard to trails • Identified the supply of trails resources, based on an extensive inventory process; • Described user needs • Discussed key issues related to or influencing trails development • Proposed numerous policies and recommendations, both statewide and locally • Proposed eleven initial components of a State Trails System • Identified the following for potential inclusion in the State Trails System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing trails • Proposed trails • Abandoned railroad rights-of-way • On-road bicycle touring routes • Beaches • Canoeable waterways • Connector trails 	<p>Reforms the Trails Council, having it continue to serve as lay advisory board in the development and implementation of a State Trails System. Specifies 11 members to consist of interest groups, state government agencies (NJDEP/NJDOT) and user groups, which may include, but not be limited to, hiking, canoeing, bicycling, and horseback riding.</p>



NJ Trails Plan Update

The 1996 New Jersey Trails Plan
Rules of 2000

NJ Trails Plan Update



1996

- Focused on the implementation of the State Trails System
- Administered a survey of existing trails to:
 - Ascertain the number, type and location of existing trails
 - Determine which were of "statewide significance."
- Evaluated trails in terms of:
 - Scenic quality
 - Accessibility
 - Length
 - Maintenance Costs
 - Public Support
 - Environmental Impact
- Recommended the Appalachian Trail and 25 others for the State Trails System.
- Identified 18 trails potentially eligible for the State Trails System, pending review
- Identified 23 potential trail routes that would meet existing and future demand for trails.
- Discussed 16 key trails issues and needs
- Presented a brief Action Plan to implement the State Trails System
 - One-year action items
 - Three-year action items
 - Five-year action items
 - Ongoing action items

2000

NJDEP readopts State Trails System Rules, which required completion of a management plan for the trails right of way. Eight trails were designated as parts of the State Trails System.

2006/2009

The New Jersey Trails Plan Update will...

- Readopt the more comprehensive approach of the 1982 Plan
- Present a detailed look at County Trails
- Address needs at all levels, including especially urban trails and ADA considerations
- Address an expanded list of issues
- Evaluate user needs in terms of detailed trail user profiles and the "ideal" trail experience
- Consider emerging and potential user trends
 - Adult tricycles
 - Recumbent bicycles
 - Bicycle trailers
 - Hand cycles
 - Wheelchairs
 - Kick scooters
 - Segways
- Consider emerging and potential social trends
 - Suburbanization/sprawl, along with reurbanization
 - Aging population – more leisure time
 - Limited public funding
 - High costs for right-of-way acquisition
 - Continued NIMBY resistance



The New Jersey Trails System

The New Jersey Trails System Act of 1974 declared it state policy and authorized the Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to establish a State Trails System, comprised of state scenic trails, state recreation trails and connecting or side trails. The Act designated the Appalachian Trail as the initial component of the system. In 1975, the New Jersey Trails Council was established as a lay advisory board to the NJDEP and NJDOT and the Council was authorized to undertake a study and devise a plan for a coordinated system of trails.

A multi-year effort to fulfill this charge was carried out. The result, *The 1982 New Jersey Trails Plan*, was comprehensive in its scope, providing direction and guidance to those involved in trails development and operations at all levels of government. It identified and defined the trail use and trail user categories, inventoried trails resources, described user needs, discussed key issues related to trails development and proposed numerous policies and recommendations, both general and for specific trail (user) types for the state, counties, and municipalities. The Plan recommended that eleven existing trails (including the Appalachian Trail), nine proposed trails, six existing trails areas, three proposed trails areas, eleven abandoned railroad rights-of-way, seven (on-road) bicycle touring routes, three beaches, twenty canoeable waterways and fourteen connector trails as initial components of the proposed Statewide Trails System (see Appendix). In the following years, no formal action was taken to designate these trails as elements of the **New Jersey Trails System**.

- **Appalachian Trail**
- **Batona Trail**
- **Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park**
- **Paulinskill Valley Trail**
- **Sussex Branch Trail**
- **Belleplain State Forest Trail System**
- **Cedar Creek**
- **Wharton Water Trails, 52 miles for canoeing and kayaking**
- **Wells Mills County Park Trails System.**

The 1996 New Jersey Trails Plan focused almost exclusively on the implementation of the State Trails System. The Division of Parks and Forestry (Office of Natural Lands Management), supported by a reactivated Trails Council, evaluated numerous trails in terms of their meeting a series of proposed guidelines for inclusion in the **New Jersey Trails System**. These guidelines included scenic quality, accessibility, length, multiple use, development and maintenance costs, public support and environmental impact. In addition to the Appalachian Trail, twenty-five trails or trails systems (including “blue” trails) were recommended as being eligible for inclusion in the State Trails System.

In March 2000, NJDEP readopted the State Trails System Rules that outline in detail the procedures and requirements for adding a trail to the system. Of particular note was the requirement that in addition to meeting the procedural and eligibility requirements, the preparation of a management plan was required (see Rules, Appendix). Eight new trails or trails systems were designated as components of the New Jersey Trails System:

Since then, no new trails have been designated to become a part of the System. Considering the many trails and trails systems found to be eligible or potentially eligible for inclusion in the New Jersey Trails System in the 1982 and 1996 plans, this is not because of a lack of candidate trails. It is because few management plans have been prepared for the numerous trails previously found to be eligible or potentially eligible. This includes such noteworthy trails as Patriots’ Path and the Highlands Trail. This is largely attributable to a lack of funding and staff. As a result, benefits that could accrue from

identifying and promoting our most significant trails have yet to be realized. Another deterrent is the misperception, especially among landowners, that the State of New Jersey would have jurisdictional oversight of a trail accepted into the State Trails System.



New Jersey Department of Transportation

The NJDOT plays a significant role in trails planning and implementation as part of their Pedestrian and Bicycle Program activities. Their local Pedestrian/Bicycle Planning Assistance Program funds local and regional planning efforts that often include or address trails planning. Various funding programs administered by the Department include trails as facilities that may be funded. These include the state funded Bicycle and Safe Streets to

School programs and the federally funded Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to School programs. In the most recent year that awards were made under these programs, a total of \$18.43 million was awarded.

NJDOT has advanced many important trail projects throughout New Jersey. For example, NJDOT's Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning has provided funding for route location studies for long distance and regional trails such as the New Jersey section of the East Coast Greenway (ECG) and the Delaware River Heritage Trail. NJDOT has also provided funding to advance more local projects, such as the Lawrence Hopewell Trail. Besides funding trails planning and development, NJDOT hosted the ECG Summit, a gathering of representatives from all counties and municipalities along the trail route to promote the implementation of the ECG. NJDOT has developed and distributes route directions for the interim ECG route, the High Point to Cape May bicycle touring route and a series of over a dozen Tour Guides of shorter bicycle touring routes around the State. NJDOT has and continues to support the development of trails and other bicycle and pedestrian accommodations throughout New Jersey through a variety of funding and technical assistance programs.

Federally Managed Trails and Programs

It should be noted that the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manage properties in New Jersey that include trails. The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DWGNRA), Gateway National Recreation Area and Morristown National Historical Park each include foot trails. Morristown National Historical Park includes horse trails and the DWGNRA permits mountain biking on dirt roads and biking on paved roads. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages five National Wildlife Refuge Areas. Five of them (Forsythe, Great Swamp, Supwana, Wallkill River and Cape May NWR) have hiking/nature trails. Supwana and Wallkill offer water trails.

In addition, a number of exemplary trails of local, regional or national significance have received special designations under U.S. Department of the Interior programs as part of the National Trail System and

the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. For example, the Appalachian Trail, the first trail to be included in the State Trails System, is also recognized as a National Scenic Trail, and the Delaware River has been named a National Scenic River with designated water trails. The Long Path, Shore Trail, D&R Canal Multiuse Path and Patriots Path have received designation as National Recreation Trails through application by the managing agencies and organizations. These trails enjoy increased visibility as part of America's national system of trails, and are eligible to receive benefits that can include promotion, technical assistance, networking and access to funding.

The Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) of the National Park Service also offers valuable technical assistance to many New Jersey trail initiatives, including conceptual planning, organizational development and capacity-building. RTCA provides tailored assistance to non-profit and government organizations by invitation on a wide variety of conservation and recreation projects. For example, both Groundwork Elizabeth (Elizabeth River Trail) and the Lower Passaic and Saddle River Alliance (Passaic River Water Trail) received assistance from RTCA to advance their trail initiatives. It is important to seek national designations for New Jersey's significant trails, which both raises awareness and increases eligibility for federal sources of technical assistance and funding.

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DWGNRA), Gateway National Recreation Area and the Morristown National Historical Park each includes foot trails. Morristown National Historical Park includes horse trails and the DWGNRA permits mountain biking on dirt roads and biking on paved roads. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages five National Wildlife Refuge Areas. Five of them (Forsythe, Great Swamp, Supwana, Wallkill River and Cape May NWR) have hiking/nature trails. Supwana and Wallkill offer water trails.

Current Planning Initiatives



While funding constraints slowed progress in expanding the State Trails System, interest in trails is strong throughout New Jersey, and many trails and trail networks have been planned and built since the first Trails Plan was published. Local advocates and non-profit organizations are often the champions of trail initiatives. Successful partnerships with municipalities and counties have led to a growing network of trails both planned and built, demonstrating a society-wide recognition of the value

of trails to New Jersey communities. There are many prominent regional trails as a result, such as the Iron Belt Trail, the Warren Trail, the Morris Canal Towpath, the Patriots Path, and the Farney Highlands trail network.

Though municipal and county efforts are too numerous to mention, some of the current planning efforts taking place at the regional and state levels that involve or affect trails include:

Regional Level

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority – *Access and Mobility 2030 Plan*. This Plan “envisions” New Jersey as a state where people will choose to walk or bike as part of their multimodal transportation system.”

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission – *Destination 2030*. This Plan focuses on many facets of planning within the Philadelphia-Camden-Trenton region. One area of interest is a proposal for a Regional Greenspace Network within the Land Use section of the plan. The Greenspace Network is proposed to link and expand the region’s existing open space so that parks, forests, meadows, protected farms and streams are joined as an interconnected system. The DVRPC suggests that this is “a form of public infrastructure that is necessary for community health, function and sustainability.”

South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization - *Cumberland County Bike Trail Study*. A section of this study referring to Trail Use Considerations mentions, “local community should determine the types of uses the trail should accommodate and the trails should then be planned and designed to maximize the suitability of desired users and minimize user conflicts.”

New Jersey Highlands Council - *Highlands Draft Regional Master Plan* covers the New Jersey portion of a 4-state Mid-Atlantic Highlands system. The draft plan states that the Highlands Region “currently supports an extensive network of recreational bikeway and pedestrian paths, connecting parks and open spaces.” Recommended policy includes the encouragement of non-vehicular modes of transportation by providing a managed trail system and the establishment of a regional network of trails to provide recreation opportunities as well as eco-tourism and environmental education. Municipal plans will conform to regional plans.

State Level

New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan – last completed in March 2003, with a new edition to be completed by the end of 2007 by NJDEP’s Green Acres Program. This Plan is “comprised of seven chapters that discuss New Jersey open space and recreation program and its various elements of open space planning, preservation and funding.”

New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan – produced by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, Office of Smart Growth. This Plan provides comprehensive goals and strategies regarding various aspects of planning. Within the Plan, a statewide policy section is dedicated to open lands and natural systems. Within this section, trails, greenways and blueways as public open space linkages, open space goals, acquisition priorities and the coordination of regional, county and municipal plans are some of the initiatives mentioned.

New Jersey Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Phase 2 – Prepared by the New Jersey Department of Transportation, this Plan promotes healthy lifestyles and alternative transportation modes by way of walking and biking. This plan “presents a vision and an action plan for improving the bicycling and walking environment throughout the state, and reflects many significant accomplishments and new directions in bicycle and pedestrian accommodation since the Plan was first published in 1995.”

New Jersey River to Bay Greenway Program – The Trust for Public Land, in conjunction with local communities and municipalities, has initiated a River to Bay Greenway Program. It is the program’s intent to provide a 70-mile multi-use recreational route in southern New Jersey linking the Delaware River to the Barnegat Bay. This program will unite communities and neighborhoods with new and existing recreation areas, waterfront parks, historic sites, habitat conservation areas, bicycle-pedestrian corridors, state parks and forests, and the Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

Garden State Greenways – Garden State Greenways presents a vision for a statewide, interconnected system of natural resources, including agriculturally rich soils, wetlands, forests, beaches and dunes. Developed by the NJDEP, Rutgers University and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Garden State Greenways is accessible online and is a useful tool for land use planning. Long distance trails and railroad corridors are additional features of Garden State Greenway’s interactive map. Their goal is “connect to protect”—connect people with outdoor places and protect New Jersey’s water and wildlife.

Safe Routes to School – Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federally-funded program administered by the states (in New Jersey by the NJDOT) designed to enable and encourage children to walk and bike to school. This program is designed to assist communities within New Jersey in developing and implementing projects and programs that encourage students to walk/bike to school while increasing safety.

There are also a number of significant trail initiatives that cross the state, which are in planning and development stages. Some examples of these are:



High Point to Cape May Bicycle Touring Route – A 238-mile route from High Point to Cape May, prepared by NJDOT, identifies and provides route directions to a challenging and multi-faceted ride through the center of the state from the northern most point in New Jersey to the southern most point. It is hoped that counties and municipalities will create bicycle networks and trails that link to this spine route.

Liberty to Water Gap Trail – A 156-mile trail that runs from Jersey City to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. This trail, which is the first planned cross-state trail for New Jersey, connects several aspects of NJ terrain and communities.

East Coast Greenway – The 28-mile trail in the Delaware and Raritan Canal Tow Path located in Somerset and Mercer Counties is one example of New Jersey’s contribution to the East Coast Greenway route, proposed to extend from Maine to Florida and connect the major cities of the eastern seaboard. The route through New Jersey extends from Trenton to Jersey City by way of Newark.