
New Jersey Trails Plan – 1996

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction. This plan is a major component of New Jersey's State Trails Program efforts, with the purpose of preserving and expanding trails and trail systems throughout the state by incorporating these as part of a State Trails System, and providing a planning guide for establishing trails. The Trails Program was established with the passage of the New Jersey Trails System Act, and includes staff within the Division of Parks and Forestry, whose major task includes the planning for trails to be incorporated in a State Trails System, and also the New Jersey Trails Council, an advisory board to the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Transportation. As part of these purposes the plan has four specific goals: 1) provide a vision of what a State Trails System should be in the future; 2) identify trails and trail systems eligible for the State Trails System or routes that can be developed into trails to expand the system in the future; 3) identify new issues affecting trails that have arisen since 1982, and plan for these issues in the use, development and management of trails in the State Trails System; and 4) set goals for implementation of the State Trails Plan.

The legislative mandate for establishing a trails system is incorporated in the New Jersey Trails System Act (N.J.S.A. 13:8-30 et seq.). This act established three classes of trails, scenic, recreation, and connecting. It also stated that abandoned railroad rights-of-way could be studied for inclusion into the system. The other important act concerning New Jersey trails is the act creating the New Jersey Trails Council to study and prepare a plan for a State Trails System.

Based on surveys conducted in 1991, and updated up to 1995, information was collected from public park agencies with over four miles of all trail types, for hiking (including backpacking and nature walking), horseback riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, bicycling, snowmobiling, off road vehicles (ORVs) or other motorized trail vehicles, wheelchair or other disabled access, and water/canoeing. Within New Jersey there are over 1,500 miles of marked or mapped trails on federal, state, interstate, and county lands, and waterways suitable for canoeing. Many of these trails are multiple use trails, used by hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers, and cross-country skiers. Approximately 93% of the land trail mileage is available for hiking, and about 30% of the hiking-only trails are available for cross-country skiing in winter. Although mountain biking is a recent trail use, 435.5 miles of trails are available for its use, close to that for horseback riding (455.5). Most long distance trails, almost 700 miles, are found within New Jersey State Parks and Forests, and most of these are found in northern New Jersey. County parks account for approximately 300 miles of trails, and most of these are available for hiking, with some used for cross-country skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, and bicycling. Essex, Monmouth, and Morris counties have the greatest amount of mileage for marked trails in the state. Federal lands, such as the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, have approximately 65 miles of trails available.

Eligible Trails for the State Trails System. Trails and trail systems under public ownership or public easement and at least five miles in length were examined for their eligibility to the State Trails System based on their scenic quality, accessibility, length, preference for multiple use, development and maintenance needs and costs, presence of public support, and presence or absence of environmental degradation. Based on the inventory and site inspections, trail systems found eligible include:

- Allaire State Park Trail System: 25 miles of multi-use trails in central New Jersey.
- Appalachian Trail: 73 miles for hiking within the Appalachian Ridge and Valley Province. The trail was designated in the New Jersey Trails System Act.
- Batona Trail: 50 miles for hiking through the Pine Barrens.

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- Belleplain State Forest Trail System: 42 miles of multi-use trails, including motorized trails, in mostly Pine Barrens woods.
 - Cattus Island Ocean County Park Trail System: 6 miles of multi-use trails through coastal marshes.
 - Cooper River Camden County Park Trail: 9 miles of multi-use trails in a suburban and urban setting of southern New Jersey.
 - Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park Trail: 60 miles of multi-use trails on the towpath and abandoned Bel-Del Railroad.
 - Estell Manor Atlantic County Park Trail System: 16 miles of multi-use trails within the vicinity of the Great Egg Harbor National Wild and Scenic River.
 - Island Beach State Park Trail System: over 13 miles of trails including the beach for horseback riding, a paved bicycle path, and a canoe trail in Barnegat Bay.
 - Kittatinny Mountain Trail System: over 140 miles of trails in Worthington State Forest, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Stokes State Forest, and High Point State Park.
 - Lenape Trail of Essex County: 20 miles of multi-use trail completed, connecting several county parks.
 - Long Path in Palisades Interstate Park: 11 miles of hiking trail. The trail continues into New York State.
 - Morris Area Trail System: over 40 miles of multi-use trails in Lewis Morris County Park and Morristown National Historic Park.
 - Parvin State Park Trail System: 16 miles of multi-use trails in southern New Jersey.
 - Patriots' Path of Morris County: 20 miles of an existing multi-use trail, with 54 additional miles planned.
 - Paulinskill Valley Trail: 27 miles for multi-use on the abandoned New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad right-of-way.
 - Ramapo Mountain System: over 62 miles of multi-use trails in Ringwood State Park, Bergen County's Ramapo Valley Reservation, Mahwah Township Park, and Ramapo Mountain State Forest.
 - Shore Trail in Palisades Interstate Park: 11-mile hiking trail.
 - Sussex Branch Trail: 20 miles of multi-use trail on the former right-of-way of the Erie Lackawanna Railroad Sussex Branch.

Waterways determined to be eligible include:

- Cedar Creek: 10 miles of Pine Barrens slow waters, mostly within Double Trouble State Park.
- Delaware River: 115 miles of river with some rapids from the New York State line to Trenton. A segment within Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is designated to the National Wild

and Scenic Rivers System, and a segment south of that to Washington Crossing is being studied for federal designation.

- Great Egg Harbor River: 16 miles of Pine Barrens waters from Penny Pot to Lake Lenape. Major sections of the river and several of its tributaries are designated to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.
- Millstone River: 18 miles of slow-moving waters in central New Jersey from Lake Carnegie to its confluence with the Raritan River.
- Musconetcong River: 31 miles of river with some dams and rapids, from Lubbers Run in Allamuchy State Park to Bloomsbury.
- Rancocas Creek: 17 miles of slow-moving waters with some dams between Browns Mills and Mount Holly.
- Wharton Water Trails: Consisting of the Lower Atsion, Batsto, Wading and Oswego Rivers, for approximately 52 miles of canoeable waterways in Wharton State Forest.

Potential Trails Eligible Pending Review. Several other trails and trail systems may qualify for designation in the future. These may include:

- Hartshorne-Huber Woods Parks Trail System in Monmouth County
- Henry Hudson Trail in Monmouth County
- Norvin Green State Forest in Passaic County
- Pequannock Watershed in Morris, Passaic and Sussex Counties
- Wawayanda State Park in Passaic and Sussex Counties
- Wells Mills County Park in Ocean County

Waterways may include:

- Crosswicks Creek
- Flat Brook
- Hackensack River
- Intracoastal Waterway
- Maurice River
- North Branch of the Raritan River
- Passaic River
- Paulins Kill
- Pequest River
- Ramapo River
- South Branch of the Raritan River
- Toms River

Potential Trail Routes for the State Trails System. Potential new trails must consider such factors as proximity to population centers, presence of unique features, geographic representation, costs for acquisition and development, linkage with existing public lands or trails, availability and public acceptance. Potential trail routes include:

- Allaire to Raritan Bay Greenway: 21.5 miles of some abandoned but mostly inactive railroad in Monmouth County.
- Cape May Trail/Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line, West Jersey and Southern Railroad: 35 miles from Cape May City, Cape May County, to Maurice River Township, Cumberland County.

The route passes through Belleplain State Forest, Cape May County Park, Beaver Swamp Wildlife Management Area, and Peaslee Wildlife Management Area.

- Central Railroad of New Jersey, Southern Branch: 24.5 miles of abandoned/inactive line from Woodmansie in Burlington County to Waterford Township, Camden County. The line passes through Wharton State Forest.
- Central Railroad of New Jersey, Toms River and Barnegat Branch: 17 miles of abandoned railroad from Barnegat, north to South Toms River, all in Ocean County.
- Coastal Heritage Trail: primarily a vehicle touring route from Raritan Bay to Delaware Bay; portions of the route could be used for hiking and biking.
- Cross-Jersey Trail: 100 miles from the Delaware River in Hunterdon County to Newark, Essex County. Parts would incorporate Patriots' Path and the Lenape Trail.
- East Coast Greenway: part of a proposed trail from Boston to Washington and south. Parts would use the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park and local roads.
- Elizabeth and Trenton Railroad: 23.5 miles of abandoned line from Hamilton Township, Mercer County to East Brunswick Township, Middlesex County. It crosses or is very near several county and local recreation areas.
- Highlands Trail: Over 100 miles of a trail, some parts multi-use, will stretch from the New York State border to the Delaware River. The trail will consist of existing trails in public lands and new trails to be developed on private property.
- Hudson River Waterfront Walkway: 18 miles along the west shore of the Hudson River from the George Washington Bridge south to the Bayonne Bridge. Part of the walkway includes Liberty State Park.
- Lehigh and Hudson River Railroad: 27 miles in Warren and Sussex Counties connecting with the Sussex Branch Trail.
- Lehigh and New England Railroad: 21 miles in Sussex County, intersecting the Paulinskill Valley Trail, the Sussex Branch Trail, the Appalachian Trail and the Walkkill River National Wildlife Refuge.
- Lenape Trail Extension: To connect with the existing 20 miles of multi-use trail, another 15 miles is planned throughout Essex County.
- Meadows Path: A 13-mile multi-use trail in the planning stages of the Hackensack Meadowlands Development Commission.
- Penn Central Railroad, Camden and Burlington County Branch and the Union Transportation Company: This line runs approximately 10 miles from Mount Holly, through Pemberton, to Fort Dix. The route passes through Burlington County's only county park, Smithville Village.
- Penn Central Railroad, Philadelphia and Long Branch Line: 27 miles of abandoned railroad from Pemberton Township, Burlington County to the Garden State Parkway in South Toms River, Ocean County. The route passes through Lebanon State Forest and the New Jersey Natural Lands Trust's Crossley Preserve.

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- Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line, Bridgeton Secondary: 18 miles from Glassboro in Gloucester County to Bridgeton, Cumberland County.
 - Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line, Newfield Branch: 23 miles from Egg Harbor Township to Route 54 in Buena Township, Atlantic County.
 - Six Mile Run Trail System: Adjacent to the Delaware and Raritan Canal in Somerset County, this 3,000-acre site has the potential to provide approximately 37 miles of multi-use trails. Leased agricultural lands would be excluded from consideration as trails.
 - Sourland Mountain Trail System: Within Somerset and Hunterdon counties, a series of short and long multi-use trails.
 - Warren Grove Multi-use Trail System: Several miles of sand paths in Burlington and Ocean counties.
 - Watchung Trails: Various trail proposals in Somerset and Morris counties, and the Watchung Reservation with 40 miles of multi-use trails, in Union County.
 - West Wharton Multi-use Trail System: Area west of Route 206 with numerous sand paths in Wharton State Forest.

New Trail Issues and Needs. Important issues influencing trail development and management include:

- **Liability.** The Landowners Liability Act provides limited but not total protection for landowners. Volunteers are also concerned about protection for work performed and workers' compensation.
- **Management and Enforcement.** As long as a trail exists, these considerations will exist also. Both management and enforcement require funding to hire staff. The ridge runner program, as used along the Appalachian Trail, is one partial solution to performing some of the responsibilities during high seasonal use periods.
- **Public Use of Private Land.** This is influenced by the fear of liability. The Green Acres Tax Exemption and the Open Lands Management Program both provide incentives for use of private lands.
- **Recreation and Transportation.** The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) provided new funding sources for trail projects.
- **Rights-of-Way.** Paper streets and utility rights-of-way are potential trail routes. In some cases road shoulders and "rails-with-trails" may also be appropriate trail routes.
- **Urban Trails.** Urban trails are being included in greenway planning, in which they link parks and provide habitat for plants and animals.
- **User Education.** User etiquette is becoming more important as the number of different trail users increases.
- **Safety for Trail Users.** Self-protection measures, such as helmets, are being required for trail users. Park patrolling is becoming more important as a preventive measure to identify hazards, assist legitimate trail users against criminal activities, and provide medical assistance.

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- **River Trail Access.** Ongoing restrictions from private lands continue to be a problem.
 - **Trail Access for People with Disabilities.** Because of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, new requirements are being placed on public and private agencies supplying outdoor recreation. Where in the past, only some trails were designed to meet the needs of individuals in wheelchairs, now all trails must be examined for their suitability for all disabled people. Certain standards are suggested for trail design to meet the requirements of the act.
 - **Motorized Trail Vehicles.** With the passage of the Symms National Recreational Trails Act in 1991, at least 30% of federal funding from that act must be used for motorized trails. This has put new emphasis on motorized trails and their use in New Jersey. Recommendations are made to have some form of vehicle permit or registration system for trail vehicles and general guidelines for developing trails to provide safe trails with little or no environmental degradation and an ORV park area for supervised riding and educational programs for riders.
 - **Off-Road Bicycling/Mountain Bikes.** Mountain biking is the most recent form of trail use. As a new trail activity, mountain biking has created a new set of issues and potential problems concerning safety, user conflicts, and environmental degradation. Guidelines are provided for trail design and educational programs.
 - **Multiple Use and Compatibility.** Although multiple trail use is desirable, it is not always appropriate. Existing single use trails may not be suitable for conversion for multiple use. But, if new trails are properly designed, or circumstances allow for existing trails to be converted, multiple use can provide a pleasurable experience for all trail users. Management practices and user standards that can be employed for multi-use trails are included in the plan.
 - **Methods of Land Protection for Trails.** Several strategies that can be applied to protect land for trail corridors include fee simple acquisition, easements, covenants, and cooperative agreements.
 - **Funding Sources for Trails.** Both new and old sources of funding trail acquisition, development and maintenance should be pursued. At the federal level, the newest sources of funding include ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) of 1991, and the Symms National Recreational Trails Act.

Measures to Implement the New Jersey Trails System Act. Included in this plan are:

- **New Jersey Trails System Regulations.** Regulations (rules) are the primary vehicle for implementing the act. The rules are used to determine eligibility for designation to the trails system, procedures for approval or possibly de-designation, purpose and content of a management plan, and procedures for reviewing capital construction projects funded by NJDEP affecting designated trails.
- **Designation of Trails to the State Trails System.** No formal method of designating trails was included in the first plan. Designation procedures are included in the rules for the New Jersey Trails System. Classes of trails are also selected at this time.
- **Management Plans for Designated Trails.** Once a trail or trail system has been designated, the administering agency, in coordination with NJDEP and the New Jersey Trails Council, prepares a management plan to provide a set of management guidelines and techniques that protect and enhance the trail and its surrounding corridor.

- Sources of Information on Trail Design and Construction. A sampling of existing information sources on trail design for both single use and multi-use trails are included. Some sources are specific to particular types of trails.

Plan of Action. Activities to be performed to implement this plan are given for one, three, and five years subsequent to adoption.

- Within one year, the state will begin the process of designating eligible trails to the State Trails System and develop a uniform marking system;
- Within three years, develop management plans for half the eligible trails included in this plan; support legislation or amendments to the current law on ATVs and snowmobiles, to register off-road motorcycles; establish a monitoring system for designated trails; provide recommendations on land acquisition for trails including abandoned railroad rights-of-way; develop guidelines for locating motorized trails; and work with federal agencies to reenact the National Recreational Trails Act.
- Within five years, continue development of management plans for trails; examine the 1995 Trails Plan and update as needed; and review plans completed in the first two years for applicability to current conditions.
- Acquisition of routes and abandoned railroad rights-of-way will be ongoing. Also, The Trails Council and the Division of Parks and Forestry will establish an education program to promote the Trails Plan and the State Trails System.