

CHAPTER 6: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Roles and Responsibilities

The 2008 Trails Plan is a Vision Plan, comprehensive in scope. The Plan identifies and examines a broad range of needs, desires, topics, issues and ideas that affect trails development and operations from the standpoint of both trail users and trail providers. The Plan reflects extensive input derived from surveys, workshops, focus groups, interviews and the participation of a Plan Advisory Committee representing a broad base of stakeholder organizations. It evaluates potential solutions and proposes a series of strategic and long-term actions required to achieve the goals and fulfill the vision of the Plan. Many players and partners were involved in the quest to understand current conditions, trends, needs and opportunities and in generating a vision, goals and potential solutions. Many have a role to play in implementing or supporting the implementation of actions required to implement the Plan.

The previous section of the Plan specified a number of strategic and long-range actions to be undertaken. In most cases the entity to carry out the actions was specified or implied. This section further examines and identifies entities and the roles and responsibilities that they need to take on. The level of involvement by each participant varies. Some play a lead role since they are involved in program activities that directly fund, implement and operate trails. Other parties are involved less directly and play a supporting role. Setting out roles and responsibilities in this manner runs the risk of leaving the impression that implementation of the Plan is largely a governmental, “top down” exercise. In fact, achieving goals and fulfilling the various vision themes will require involvement from volunteers, advocacy groups and non-profits working collaboratively.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

The New Jersey Department of Environment Protection has a primary role in implementing the Plan. It is home to the Division of Parks and Forestry which is directly responsible for administering 42 state parks, 11 state forests, 3 recreation areas and more than 50 historic sites and districts. These facilities include many of the longer trails and trails systems in the state. The Division includes the Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM) which is directly responsible for the Trails Program. This includes the administration of the Recreational Trails Program grant funds program and the designation of trails to the State Trails System under N.J.A.C. 7:5D.

NJDEP is also home to the Division of Fish and Wildlife, which manages over 310,000 acres in 121 Wildlife Management areas, which represents more than 44% of New Jersey’s state-owned public open space. By far the most popular activity on these lands is not hunting or fishing, but what is referred to as wildlife-oriented recreational activities (wildlife observation, photography, etc.).

Another NJDEP function is the Green Acres Program that administers funding programs, including the Garden State Preservation Trust and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, to acquire open space and develop outdoor recreation facilities such as trails. Its programs include State Land Acquisition, which acquires lands for State Parks and Forests and Wildlife Management Areas, and the Local Assistance Program, which provides grants and low interest loans (2%) to municipal and county governments and matching grants to non-profit organizations for open space acquisition and park development projects. Their Planning Incentive Program, provides matching grant funding for land preservation projects to local governments that have enacted an open space tax and have adopted an open space and recreation plan. The goal of these programs is to achieve, in partnership with others, a system of interconnected open spaces, whose protection will preserve and enhance New Jersey’s natural environment and its historic, scenic, and recreational resources for public use and enjoyment.

New Jersey Department of Transportation

The New Jersey Department of Transportation provides strategic direction for transportation planning in New Jersey. The Department has established policies to support bicycle and pedestrian travel. The Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs leads the Department’s efforts to implement these policies. It administers technical assistance programs to support planning and project development activities for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations,

including trails (including funding for the development of this Trails Plan. The Department's Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator is a member of the Trails Council. The Division of Local Aid and Economic Development administers both federal (TE and SRTS) and state programs that fund bicycle and pedestrian facilities including trails (where they perform a transportation function).

New Jersey Trails Council

The New Jersey Trails Council is a lay advisory board to the NJDEP and NJDOT, which, in addition to supporting and participating in this Plan update, assists in the selection of Recreational Trails Program grant recipients. ONLM provides staff assistance to the Trails Council. It is anticipated that ONLM and the Trails Council will be in the vanguard of those implementing the Plan. This includes playing a significant role in rolling out the plan to the public and implementation of this Trails Plan.

Counties and Municipalities

All save one of New Jersey's counties include a unit of government responsible for developing and operating county-owned recreation lands. Most counties include trails on their recreation lands or as "stand alone" facilities. Many municipalities also develop and maintain parks facilities that include trails or trail systems. County and municipal transportation agencies are responsible for the development and upkeep of transportation systems that include accommodations for pedestrian and bicycle travel. County and municipal Master Plans offer the opportunity to integrate trails into the transportation, recreation and open space plans of the community and coordinate the development of facilities with adjacent communities and other levels of government. Municipalities control land use decision through local zoning and subdivision regulations.

Trails User Groups/Advocates/Interest Groups

A wide range of private and non-profit organizations have an interest in trails. These include trail user groups, advocacy organizations, land trusts, and recreation and open space organizations. What they have in common is their desire to serve the interests and needs of their members and/or influence policy and governmental decision making that can affect the future of trails. Their concerted efforts can be a powerful influence.

Office of the Governor, Legislature

With executive powers, the Governor sets policy and provides leadership. The Office of the Governor can highlight the importance of trails and direct the Departments of the executive branch to undertake actions recommended in this Plan. Ideally, the Governor's Office would be a champion for trails in New Jersey. With its funding authority, the Legislature has the power to insure that legislation is passed that supports trails and provides adequate funding. Members of the Legislature can also serve as champions for the implementation of the Plan.

Division of Travel and Tourism in the Department of State

New Jersey Travel and Tourism is the appropriate agency to market and promote interest in trails and trail use by providing information about trails opportunities throughout the State via the Travel and Tourism website and various publications.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

The three MPOs in New Jersey: North Jersey Transportation Planning Association (NJTPA); South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO); and, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) can support trails by including trails-related projects with transportation benefits on regional and state Transportation Improvement Programs. MPO's can also fund studies on trails through their technical studies programs.

New Jersey Meadowlands and Pinelands Commissions, NJ Highlands Council

With their mandates to plan for and manage lands with special environmental sensitivities, the Pinelands, Meadowlands and Highlands Commissions have the opportunity to support the development and use of trails as a means of recreation and as a tool for education by enabling the public to visit and understand the value of these special places.

Land Trusts and Foundations

Land trusts (conservancies, foundations, or associations) are local, regional, statewide or national nonprofit organizations that are established to protect land and its resources. Their main purpose is to protect lands that have natural, recreational, scenic, historic, or productive values. There are over two dozen land trusts operating in New Jersey.

Department of Health and Senior Services

The Department of Health and Senior Services has many programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.

Office of Smart Growth

The Office of Smart Growth in the Department of Community Affairs coordinates planning throughout the state to protect the environment and guide growth and development. It is in charge of implementing the goals of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The Office awards Smart Growth Grants and administers the State's Transfer of Development Rights program.

Department of Agriculture

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is home to the State's farmland preservation program, which has the potential to provide opportunities for new trails rights of way.

Individuals (trail users)

Individual trail users are responsible for advocating for trails they prefer and informing policy makers and trail providers of their interests and desires.

Private Sector

Private entities can donate land or easements to their land for trails. Developers can incorporate trails into their site plans or provide trails as off-site improvements.

The following Matrix lists agencies and organizations that play principal and supporting roles in implementing facets of the Plan.

Strategic Priorities

If all of the recommendations included in the Action Plan were to be advanced, New Jersey would assuredly be able in the long run, to fulfill its Vision for Trails. As the Plan has made clear, resources are not currently available to do all these things, certainly not at once. The challenge, then, is to identify a set of key actions that must be initiated and be well on their way to completion within the strategic time frame. Otherwise the chances of substantially improving trails and trail opportunities in New Jersey will be diminished. The following actions should be initiated as soon and as vigorously as possible and advanced to appropriate milestones within the next 3 to 5 years: