

DUNBARTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION TRAIL POLICY

6/10/20

Trails are an important asset for passive recreation, but they do have an effect on wildlife, and wildlife habitat protection is a top priority in Town Conservation Areas.

Trail development on conservation properties must take into account:

- Appropriate uses, e.g., foot traffic only, limited or seasonal motorized, horses, mountain bikes
- Construction costs, e.g., need for bridges, tree removal, hillside ditching
- Anticipated effort required for maintenance
- Impacts on wildlife as described and documented in *Trails for People and Wildlife* (www.wildnh.com/trails) or similar, recognized publications. Such impacts are ameliorated by:
 - Keeping unfragmented, trail-free areas as large as possible
 - Avoiding patches of high quality or special habitats, e.g., deer yards, steep slopes
 - Avoiding trails immediately adjacent to wetlands, vernal pools and riparian areas associated with them and along streams
 - Avoiding known and potential wildlife travel corridors
 - Avoiding known locations of rare wildlife
- Known cultural/archaeological features, whether as sites to avoid or to promote

The Commission will draw upon the *NH Wildlife Action Plan*, the NH Natural Heritage Inventory, relevant GIS layers and applications, local knowledge, and existing specialized reports in identifying property-specific trail corridors. As part of its assessment, Commission members will walk the proposed corridor and any other relevant areas of the property under consideration. To improve site-specific natural resource information, the Commission may involve qualified individuals or groups interested in preparing natural resources inventories.

For each property, the Commission will also strive to maintain a list of sightings and other relevant information provided to it by knowledgeable individuals and/or professionally certified biologists. All such property-specific data shall be kept by the secretary and may be used for both conservation/resource protection and public education purposes. Features of interest on Town Conservation Areas include plants, animals, water, soils, topographic features, geologic features, and historic resources.

Following its evaluation, the Commission will take a final vote to approve the route selected.

Available data sources notwithstanding, it is understood that the absence of information on use of suitable habitat by wildlife does not diminish the area's existing or potential importance for wildlife, hence, our reliance on broad principles contained in documents like *Trails for People and Wildlife*.

Each conservation property will be individually considered as a potential site for trail development. If development is deemed appropriate and/or desirable, any trail so developed shall be consistent with this Policy. For ease of management and use monitoring, each property with a trail(s) should have one trailhead with an associated parking area. Multiple trail access points are discouraged.

Trail use will be designated for specified use(s), as for pedestrian use (hiking, x-c skiing, snowshoeing, nature enjoyment) only, pedestrian and human-powered, non-motorized uses (mountain biking), pedestrian, non-motorized and motorized uses (motorized uses may be limited to snowmobiles and restricted certain trail segments), or pedestrian and horseback riding, which may be restricted to certain trail segments. Trails will be designed for year-round use, although temporary closings may be warranted under certain circumstances, e.g., flooding, mud season, a large section of blowdown affecting trail. Such uses and restrictions, as well as other property-related information, will be posted at the property.

Trail construction and maintenance shall conform to best trail-building practices. Appropriate guidance is available from the Appalachian Mountain Club (currently, *The Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance*, C. Demrow, D. Salisbury, Appalachian Mountain Club), NH State Parks (currently, *Best Management Practices* manual (<https://www.nhstateparks.org/uploads/pdf/BMP-Manual.pdf>), the National Park Service, or similar organizations known for their trail building and maintenance expertise.

Established trails should be evaluated periodically for unintended, negative impacts on wildlife and/or the public's enjoyment. The same considerations and approach used to establish trails on conservation areas will be applied to existing trails/trail sections in order to determine whether an existing trail/trail section should be rerouted or decommissioned. Such rerouting or decommissioning will require a favorable, majority vote of the Commission.

Members of the public may be invited to serve as property stewards, to assist with trail maintenance activities, or to otherwise help protect conservation properties for wildlife to flourish and people to enjoy. Any such volunteers will conduct trail work only with the express authorization of the Commission.

The Commission may, at its discretion, concentrate trails in a particular Conservation Area to encourage public use at that property and minimize trail impacts on wildlife or other important natural features in other conservation properties.

Not all conservation properties owned by the Town and managed by the Conservation Commission may be appropriate for a trail or trails.

This Policy shall apply also to privately owned properties on which the Conservation Commission is responsible for trail design, construction, and maintenance.

This Policy shall be available to the public on the Conservation Commission's website.

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