

Connecticut National Recreational Trails Program Recreational Trails Plan

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Connecticut Recreational Trails Plan

Introduction

Connecticut, though small in land area, is rich in natural, historical, and recreational resources. Weaving through and connecting the varied landscapes are trails of all descriptions, from the narrowest of hiking paths to multi-use corridors running through many cities and towns. Thousands of walkers, cyclists, equestrians, skaters, and others take advantage of these pathways each day.

While always recognized for their recreational value, trails today are also seen as a means to improve the health and economic vitality of the areas through which they pass. This plan is intended to ensure that Connecticut's trail system is sustained and expanded in a way that supports these functions and meets the needs of trail users without compromising the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection's (DEEP) basic mission. An examination of the existing trail network and potential connections is needed, as is a look at how the system may be best improved in the future. This includes forging new partnerships beyond the traditional trail constituencies.

Trails and greenways have a positive impact on individuals and improve communities by providing not only recreation and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development. Some of the many trails and greenways benefits include:

- * making communities better places to live by preserving and creating open spaces;
- * encouraging physical fitness and healthy lifestyles;
- * creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation and non-motorized transportation;
- * strengthening local economies;
- * protecting the environment; and
- * preserving culturally and historically valuable areas.

"To make a greenway is to make a community." - Charles E. Little, Author of Greenways for America.

Trails can be the threads that help knit together diverse geographical and cultural communities, creating a seamless whole that unites people and places. In order to accomplish this goal, however, both financial and human resources must be committed at all levels. This document establishes the framework to bring that goal to fruition.

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

A significant source of funding for trail projects around the state has been the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), which provides grants to state and local governments and organizations for construction, maintenance, and educational projects on trails around the United States. Funding comes from a portion of the gasoline tax on off-highway vehicles and is administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The funds are apportioned to each state and passed through to a state agency. In Connecticut, the RTP is administered by the DEEP.

Each spring the DEEP solicits applications for trail projects from towns, state agencies, and organizations around the state. Application deadlines are generally in February. All projects are reviewed by DEP staff and by the State Trails Advisory Committee, as well as the State Historic Preservation Office. The application form, score sheet, and members of the Trails Advisory Committee are included in the Appendix.

The state has generally received just over 1 million dollars to distribute to grantees; this amount will increase under the provisions of SAFETEA-LU, the latest iteration of the Federal Transportation fund. There are always many more applicants with deserving projects than there is money to fund them. This plan, which is required by the FHWA as part of the Recreational Trails Program, will help to guide the decisions of the DEEP and the Advisory Committee in making grant awards.

This narrative represents the planning process.

Connecticut Trails – A Status Report

While trails have been in existence as long as humans have moved from place to place, trail planning is a relatively new phenomenon. Land use decision making at the state, regional, and local levels have rarely taken these pathways into account. Opportunities to preserve publicly-owned rights of way or historic routes were lost in the development boom of the last few decades. Only recently have trail advocates been able to make the case that these corridors are valuable community assets.

There are over 1000 miles of trails in Connecticut, running through federal, state, municipal, and private property. Almost 700 miles of these are part of the Blue Blazed Trail System, managed by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. Many of these trails, which are primarily for hikers, are on public land but the majority are located on private property. Loss of these trails to development and changes in ownership is an ongoing threat. There is constant pressure on the CFPA to open these trails to bicycles and horses as well as foot traffic. In addition, there is continuous illegal use of these systems by motorized off-road vehicles.

The longest multi-use trails, paved and unpaved, are located along abandoned rail, trolley, and canal lines that were purchased by the State as part of the railbanking program. These include the Farmington Canal Heritage Greenway, which runs from New Haven to Suffield, and the Air Line, Hop River, Moosup Valley, and Larkin State Park Trails. All of these are open to walkers and cyclists. The Farmington Canal is paved, allowing access to in-line skaters but preventing equestrian use. The State Park Trails are surfaced for the most part with stone dust to allow for horseback riding. The exception is when the trails pass through urban centers such as Willimantic, where paving provides a more suitable surface for community needs. There are some significant gaps that need to be closed in order to complete these trails.

The Appalachian Trail, a National Scenic Trail, runs through the Northwest corner of the state on part of its route from Georgia to Maine. There is currently a study of the Metacomet-Mattabesett system (Blue Blazed Trails) for inclusion in this federal program. The East Coast Greenway, which is a National Millennium Trail running from Florida to Maine, also passes through Connecticut. Maintaining the integrity of these systems and closing existing gaps are a priority for the Trails program.

Sub-regional systems connecting or feeding into these major trails are now springing up around the state. The Quinebaug River Trail will connect the Air Line in Putnam with the Moosup Valley Trail in Plainfield, a critical link in the Hartford to Providence section of the East Coast Greenway. Other corridors are being planned and developed along many of the State's major waterways, including the Housatonic, Quinnipiac, Willimantic and Naugatuck Rivers. These will offer opportunities for "blueway" access as well as traditional on-land trails. A group of towns from East Haven to Madison is currently developing a Shoreline Greenway Trail, planned to link state park and forest lands with local open space properties and on-road lanes to create a multi-use pathway, and to

eventually serve as a spur off of the East Coast Greenway. In Fairfield County, efforts continue to create a trail in the Merritt Parkway right of way.

As is probably the case in other states, there continues to be some conflict between trail users, and all are vocal in their desire to expand their opportunities. Equestrian, mountain bike, and especially motorized groups lobby continuously for more access to trails. Several bills have been introduced in the General Assembly which would address these issues by requiring the State to open areas, but none have passed.

Critically underserved is the motorized community (about 65,000 vehicles), with one motorcycle trail (for street-legal bikes) in a State Forest, one dirt bike facility on federal land, and one ATV club with access to riding areas on private land. There are several authorized areas for snowmobiles. DEEP has developed a policy on ATV use on State land, which would open the way to the establishment of one or more of these facilities in the future. Legislation supporting the policy and creating a special ATV account with revenues from registrations failed to pass in the 2003 legislative session. There is also growing interest from people with street legal 4x4 vehicles for an off-road area serving their sport.

The DEEP has been looking for opportunities to forge new partnerships with non-traditional organizations to increase the reach of the trail program. To this end, DEEP has been working with Connecticut Departments of Health, Transportation, and others to make trail information easy for the public to access. DEEP's State Parks website is loading maps for trails in state parks and forests as they become available. *Pathways through Connecticut*, a guide to over 60 multi-use trails in the state, is hosted on DOT's website and linked to both DEEP and the Health Department. In addition, tourism and economic development interests are becoming part of the constituent base. The DEEP will continue to work with representatives of all user groups to develop a unified "voice" for trails in Connecticut.

Goals and Objectives

The following goals and objectives reflect the need to preserve, enhance, and develop trails and access for wide variety of uses. Achievement of these goals is dependent on continuation of funding through the National Recreational Trails Program and other sources, and on the availability of staff at the state and local level to carry out the objectives.

Goal #1 - Ensure the continuity and linkage of trail systems around the state

1) *Develop comprehensive database of trails in Connecticut linked to maps created using GPS/GIS technology.*

Lack of basic trail data is a continuing problem in the development of a comprehensive state-wide system. Information must be collected, synthesized, and put into a user-friendly format in order to make future decisions on planning, acquiring, and funding corridors and connections.

2) *Develop comprehensive database of state, municipal, and private open space.*

A base map of open space will enable trail planners to evaluate potential connections on preserved open space. Any possible level of activity (hiking vs. bikes and/or horses) would need to be determined by the underlying use of the property (habitat protection, recreation, watershed management, etc.) The DEEP has contracted for this work and expects it to be complete in about three years.

3) *Encourage, through grants and technical assistance, the mapping of local/regional trail systems by regional planning organizations and other entities.*

For the foreseeable future, DEEP will not have either the staff or financial resources to fully investigate and encourage trail development at the local level. Regional organizations have been making progress in this area, but they generally need financial support to collect the information and put it into a format that is consistent from region to region. This kind of data collection at the regional level will also encourage planning and discussion of trail issues among towns within a planning area.

4) *Determine threats to existing trails and take steps such as acquisition of land to ensure their future, especially within the Blue Blazed Trail system.*

Many trail systems in the state, particularly the Blue Blazed Trails, rely on the good will of private landowners who allow recreational access to their properties. The rising value of land in the state and the passing of large tracts to multiple heirs have created a potential threat to the integrity of many trails. There are also new trail connections that may need to pass over private land. Working with the Connecticut Forest and Park Association and other organizations, the DEP should identify those trails most at risk for interruption and make permanent easements or acquisition of the rights of way or alternative pathways a priority. Non-

traditional types of trail protection, such as tax incentives for private landowners who allow public recreation on their properties, should also be encouraged.

- 5) ***Determine priorities for completing major trail sections in the state, such as those making up Connecticut's link in the East Coast Greenway. Coordinate with neighboring states to ensure interstate trail linkages. Work to secure funding for these projects.***

Large interstate, statewide, or regional projects attract a great number of users and have the potential for major transportation and economic impacts on local communities. DEEP's highest priority should be the completion of such major trails as the Air Line, Hop River, and Moosup Valley State Park Trails, the Charter Oak and Quinebaug River Greenways (major links in the East Coast Greenway), and the Farmington Canal Heritage Greenway. In addition, it is critical that a connection from the New York border to the Farmington Canal, and from the Canal to Hartford be developed if the East Coast Greenway is to be completed in Connecticut. Funding of these projects should be the highest priority for both Recreational Trails and TEA grants. While informal cooperation with both Rhode Island and Massachusetts has been on going on several projects, formalized bi-state compacts committing the states to trail completion and promotion should be developed.

- 6) ***Encourage the inclusion of trail and greenway issues in local, regional, and state plans of conservation and development. Make sure that this plan is consistent with other DEEP planning efforts regarding Wildlife, Fisheries, Forestry, Watersheds, and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan(SCORP)***

The DEEP has long suggested that trails and greenways be included in municipal plans of conservation and development as proof of local commitment to these types of projects. Land acquisition, trail grant, and greenway designation decisions have all been made based on municipal and regional plans. In addition, Officially Designated Greenways are listed in the State Plan of Conservation and Development as proposed conservation areas. This listing has an effect on State-funded projects that would have a potential impact, either positive or negative, on greenways and trails.

Meanwhile, the Department itself is in the process of developing plans for a variety of conservation and environmental quality issues. All of these plans should be consistent and complement each other in the area of trails and greenways.

- 7) ***Investigate the feasibility of developing trails/linkages along utility rights of way.*** Many utility easements, for gas, water and sewer lines, fiber optic cables or power lines could connect or extend trails around the state. Although some of these easements are owned by private citizens, some are in public rights of way. A process for identifying such linear easements and determining their potential for trail use should be developed.

8) *Ensure a steady source of funding and staffing for trail and greenway efforts.*

The successful implementation of trail and greenway projects depends on steady and reliable sources of funding and staffing at the state and local levels. Over the past several years, Recreational Trails Grants have been the only monies consistently available for trail construction and maintenance. From 1997 – 2001 \$100,000 was available annually for Greenways programming, but that funding was eliminated. Connecticut did benefit from five years of land acquisition bond funds, which helped the state, municipalities, and private groups purchase open space. As budgets were cut, however, these funds dried up as well. While there may be more in the pipeline for the upcoming fiscal years, this may not be a reliable funding stream. There is currently one staff person at the state level to administer grants and provide technical assistance for trail and greenway planning.

While it appears that the Recreational Trails Grant program will be around for another few years at least, other sources of funding for trails and greenways should be developed at the state and local levels to ensure the long-term success of these projects into the future. Finally, all user groups should be encouraged to raise their own funds for land acquisition for their particular recreational activity. Conservation and trail organizations have purchased thousands of acres of land around the state with public, private and foundation donations. This model could translate to motorized, equestrian, and biking organizations as well.

Goal #2 – Develop areas for all trail users in the state

1) *Streamline and publicize DEEP’s policies for trail use in parks, forests, and other properties.*

Current policies regarding trail uses on State land should be evaluated in light of significant changes in recreational trends. Working within the standing DEEP Trails Committee, these policies may be modified to broaden the scope of recreational opportunities while continuing to manage and protect the state’s natural resources. This information should then be made available to the public in a user-friendly format.

2) *Where feasible, implement DEEP’s ATV policy and encourage development of motorized trails on other lands*

The lack of facilities for all terrain vehicles continues to be one of the most pressing trail issues in Connecticut. There is currently one trail for motorcycles (street legal) in a state forest, one dirt bike facility on Army Corps property, and one private club with riding opportunities for quads. The motorized users and some legislators have been putting pressure on the DEEP to develop several riding areas on state land, citing a statistic of 65,000 vehicles in the state. This

figure is hard to verify, however, as only about 2500 ATVs are registered with the CT DMV.

To address the needs of this community, the DEEP has developed a policy to guide the establishment of ATV facilities on state land. (Included in Appendix). A key provision of the policy requires new supporting legislation, including the ability to use fees from vehicle registration to fund ATV projects. Due to last minute disagreements between land conservation groups and motorized interests regarding universal registration, the bill did not pass the 2005 General Assembly. Every attempt will be made to bring all of the parties together to draft mutually agreeable language for a future session. In the meantime, DEEP will look at the possibility of partnering with other public or private interests to bring another motorized trail into being. Funds from the Recreational Trails program will be extremely important in this effort.

Another motorized group seeking recreation areas are those with street-legal 4x4 vehicles who enjoy off-road activities like rock crawling. While not requiring the same physical trail length desired by ATV riders, 4x4 areas will require larger parking and staging facilities. Such trails could also be funded through the trail grants.

3) *Work with CT Horse Council on state-wide map of equestrian accessible trails. Protect and enhance trail access for horseback riders.*

Like other groups, equestrians have expressed concern about their ability to use trails around the state, especially those that had historically been open to them but have undergone paving or other “improvements.” Private lands that were open to horses have also been closed off in the wake of development of farmland and other large open tracts. While DEEP has attempted to surface State Park Trails with “horse friendly” materials and construct parking lots that can accommodate horse trailers near popular equestrian areas, there are still complaints about the fact that parts of hiking systems like the Blue Blazed trails in state forests and parks remain off limits to horses (and bicycles as well).

DEEP has volunteered to work with the CT Horse Council on developing a map of equestrian-accessible multi-use trails in the state. (By their nature, all trails allowing horses are multi-use. Not all multi-use trails are horse accessible, however. This plan does not advocate separate trails for different uses, with the exception of motorized recreation.) Horsemen are recording information on topographical maps, which will be converted to digital format for planning purposes. The Horse Council has also initiated a volunteer patrol effort in several state forest and trail areas in order to assist the DEEP at a time of staffing cutbacks.

4) *Expand options for mountain and street bike access to trails*

Mountain biking continues to grow in popularity in the state, with demands for more riding areas increasing as well. As stated previously, mountain bikers

would like more access to areas that are now restricted to hiking. DEEP is evaluating its internal policy on this activity to potentially allow for more use in state parks and forests. At the same time, however, overuse and illegal trail building in areas like Bluff Point State Coastal Reserve and Mashomasic State Forest are causing serious environmental damage and presenting safety hazards to the public,

The New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) sponsors a Trail Ambassador program to spread the word about responsible biking and to answer questions for all users of bike accessible trails. They are also active in sponsoring trail maintenance activities in these areas. The DEEP will continue to work with NEMBA and other cycling organizations to develop additional trail opportunities and to educate “renegade” cyclists about problems resulting from illegal riding.

DEEP will also partner with the DOT’s Bicycle/Pedestrian program and groups like the CT Bicycle Coalition to promote on-road bike lanes that can serve as transportation corridors and as connections to off-road bike paths around the state.

5) *Expand opportunities for “blueway” access along rivers and streams.*

More and more people are purchasing and enjoying small vessels such as canoes and kayaks, with which they can access the state’s waterways. This is especially true along rivers and streams that have been successfully cleaned up after decades of pollution and neglect. The DEEP, municipalities, and riparian organizations are all exploring options for expanding public access to these resources.

Recreational Trails grants have been used for boat launches along some of these blueways, and other DEEP funding sources have been used to produce guides to water trails. The Parks Division will continue to work with Boating, Fisheries, and other units to coordinate efforts to provide increased water access, particularly in river corridors that have been designated Official State Greenways.

6) *Whenever feasible, provide parking and access for persons with disabilities.*

Although not every trail in the state will be accessible for people with disabilities, the DEEP will make every attempt to identify areas where physically challenged individuals may have a positive recreational experience. Rail trails that offer relatively flat grades can be surfaced in materials that can accommodate wheelchairs. Parking adjacent to trails can be designated, and barriers such as bollards should be designed for chair access. DEEP will evaluate the use of Universal Trail Assessment in design and maintenance. Recreational trail grants have been used by municipal and private entities to enhance opportunities for the disabled, and funding for these types of projects will continue to be an important part of the administration of the grants.

7) *Develop/enhance trails and greenways in urban areas.*

While much of the state’s trail mileage is in rural/suburban areas, trails often run through and connect urban centers to each other and to the less developed

countryside. Residents of densely- populated cities, particularly lower-income neighborhoods, may have fewer recreational opportunities than those of outlying communities. It is critical that trail planning take urban areas in account for a number of reasons. Besides recreation, trails and greenways can provide a free, safe, and attractive means of exercise for a population at risk for lifestyle-related diseases. Urban trails may be used for non-motorized transportation, helping to reduce traffic on clogged city streets and lessen pollution. In many places around the country, paths and green spaces have been an important part of economic development projects designed to bring visitors and dollars back into cities, and have brought a sense of pride and community to many neighborhoods.

9) *Evaluate the need for trailside amenities and plan for their future development*

As trails (particularly multi-use rail trails) become used by larger number of people, trail-side amenities become more than luxuries. The very young, the elderly, and others seek access to convenient bathrooms, water, and places to rest. In addition, adequate parking areas need to be acquired and developed as time and money allow.

10) *Ensure year-round trail access for other user groups*

Several other user groups have expressed interest in Connecticut's trail systems. Sled dog racing is becoming more popular, and it is enjoyed year-round by mushers using special wheeled sleds. When snow cover is sufficient, sleds can be rigged with traditional runners. Other winter sport enthusiasts include cross-country skiers, snowshoers, and snowmobilers. DEEP does have some areas designated for snowmobile use, and the clubs have been active partners in several trail development and maintenance projects. While current staffing and funding levels may preclude the plowing or grooming of trails and parking areas in the winter, providing opportunities for off-season access to these facilities should be part of future trail planning efforts.

11) *Conduct trail research to determine current and future uses and needs*

Little research has been done regarding the number and types of trail users around the state, potential conflicts, and safety concerns. The University of CT has recently completed a survey of bicycle safety on bike paths in the state. Working with some of the academic institutions in the state, the DEEP should develop a protocol for surveying trail users so that the present and future needs of these constituents can be met.

A study is currently being conducted by the State Department of Health Services and Eastern Connecticut State University to determine if at-risk patients of primary care physicians in eastern Connecticut will utilize trails as part of a health regimen. To determine this, copies of Pathways Through Connecticut are being distributed to doctors and their patients who need to increase their exercise. They will be tracked to see if having information about trails results in the use of these trails and a resultant improvement of medical conditions.

Goal #3 - Ensure public participation in and support of state trail programs

1) Support the development of an umbrella trail users organization.

While there are many groups in Connecticut that represent different types of trail users, there is no one organization that speaks for all of them. The CT Forest and Parks Association, with technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, has held two meetings of a fledgling State Trails Assembly that would fill this niche.

It will be important for the various interests involved in this effort to focus on the areas of commonality (more open space acquisition, funds for trail development, education, and enforcement), than on their differences. There are almost certainly close to a million trail users in the state, ranging from the casual park visitor to the committed hikers, bikers, and others who are on the trails daily. This constituency needs to develop a unified voice to bring concerns to the General Assembly, state and federal agencies, and the media.

The DEEP will continue to work with groups like the CT Forest and Parks Association, CT Bicycle Coalition, New England Mountain Biking Association, CT Horse Council, Appalachian Mountain Club, CT Greenways Council, and various groups representing the motorized users to ensure that all interests are represented in the planning and decision-making processes.

2) Develop brochures, web sites, and other materials to inform and educate the general public about the opportunities for trail use in Connecticut.

Making trail information readily accessible to the public will be a priority for the DEEP. Budget and staff cuts have reduced the Department's ability to respond to phone and mail inquiries regarding trails. In order to serve the largest number of potential customers in the most efficient manner, trail materials should be made available on line.

Items that the public can already access include *Pathways through Connecticut*, a booklet produced by the DEEP, ConnDOT, and the CT Department of Health, which lists over 60 multi-use trails around the state. It is available at the DEEP store or on DOT's website. Maps of trails in state parks and forests are being made available on DEP's website as they are completed. The DEEP is also working to link to other websites with trail information at the local, state, regional, and national levels.

Ultimately, DEEP would like to develop digital maps of all projects funded through the Recreational Trails Program, which could be included in a comprehensive interactive trails database. The CT Department of Health has expressed interest in this as well, since it could give health care providers and their patients an easily accessible listing of places to exercise. This undertaking

would be expensive and labor intensive, and a funding source would need to be identified in order to bring it to fruition.

3) *Continue to work with other local, state and federal agencies to reach a larger constituency.*

DEEP will need to look beyond traditional trail advocates to expand the support base for these projects. In this time of restricted resources, creative partnerships need to be forged to get the most “bang for the buck” where trails are concerned. Health-related organizations, transportation planners, and economic interests are already proving to be allies in moving the trail agenda forward. In particular, trails that can add to healthy lifestyle activities can help prevent costly ailments such as diabetes and heart disease.

Beyond the Department of Health, groups such as hospitals, HMO’s, and health insurance companies should be contacted about publicizing trails around the state. There is a growing body of evidence that the traveling public is interested in outdoor recreational opportunities, and that considerable dollars are expended when those opportunities are available. Chambers of Commerce, Tourism Bureaus, and local businesses may all be interested in promoting trails as travel destinations.

4) *Develop educational materials on trail access and etiquette for a variety of users*

One of the problems with expanding trail opportunities for horses, mountain bikes, and motorized vehicles is the public perception that some of these users are “renegades” who do not obey rules and regulations on existing trails. While only a small percentage of these users may be flouting the law, they create a negative image that can tarnish the reputation of a whole group.

In order to alleviate this problem, a series of fact sheets on trail opportunities should be developed for each user group in conjunction with the organizations that represent the various disciplines. These could be distributed through dealers, repair shops, feed stores, and on line to ensure broad outreach. All of these groups should be strongly encouraged to include information on responsible trail use in their own promotional materials, particularly web sites. Dealers and manufactures of bicycles and ATVs should be approached for funds to aid in this effort. Ultimately, it may be necessary to require dealers to post and/or distribute information on how and where to ride in Connecticut.

Goal #4 - Ensure construction and maintenance of trails in an environmentally sound manner

1) *Continue to have all projects on DEEP land evaluated through comprehensive project review by all disciplines.*

Trail projects proposed and carried out by the DEP should serve as models for others around the state. The current project review process requires input from a

number of divisions including wildlife, fisheries, parks, forestry, inland/coastal wetlands, and the natural diversity data base. Trail planning should be consistent with current or evolving management plans for these DEEP divisions, and especially with the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). DEEP should also attempt, within budget and staffing limitations, to utilize new materials or technologies for trail building and maintenance as they become available.

The Department's ATV policy also discusses assessment of proposed motorized trails before moving on to construction, but few local groups have the expertise to make the preliminary evaluations needed. Information sharing and distribution for these users is most important because of the real and perceived impact on natural resources from motorized trail vehicles.

2) *Provide guidance to municipal and private entities on best practices for trail construction and maintenance.*

The DEEP should utilize existing materials (the Air Line Trail Guide, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council Trail Manual, National Parks Service Manual) and develop new ones for distribution to municipalities and private organizations involved with trails. The services of groups such as CT Forest and Parks Association, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the New England Mountain Bike Association, which have experience in holding training sessions on trail design, construction, and maintenance, should also be solicited.

There is already a great deal of trail-related literature available from a number of other sources, much of it in electronic format. The DEEP should compile a listing of these resources and post it to the trails and greenways sections of the Department's website.

In addition, there are opportunities to hold workshops with the whole range of users attending. Many groups (motorcyclists, mountain bikers, hikers, snowmobilers, and equestrians) already do their own volunteer work on state trails, but they often do not anticipate the needs of the other disciplines. Getting them together for small, hands-on sessions not only provides for better construction and maintenance, but also establishes channels of communication among the groups.

3) *Utilize the Recreational Trails Program to promote these concepts.*

Education grants under Recreational Trails should be used to support workshops, manuals, etc that provide information and assistance on the best management practices for various types and uses of trails. In addition, DEEP review of Recreational Trails Grant applications evaluates projects for their potential impact on water resources, threatened and endangered species, cultural and historical resources, and other areas of concern. Projects that may have an adverse impact on these resources will not receive funding.

4) *Developed standardized protocols for public/private partnerships on state land.*

As trail user and support groups become more organized, they often volunteer to develop and/or maintain trails on state land. A project review process has been developed by the DEEP Trails Committee in order to ensure that the work meets the standards required by the DEEP. To prevent confusion over various responsibilities, a Memorandum of Understanding between the DEEP and the outside organization will be drafted. This MOU will then be available to all parties should trail management questions arise.

5) *Ensure maintenance of trail systems as they are developed.*

As trails are developed, especially with TEA or Recreational Trail monies, they are almost immediately inundated with use. While this is a positive outcome, it means that significant wear and tear occurs on trail facilities. Trail managers will consistently point out that maintenance is a critical issue for them. A considerable portion of Trail Grant money is awarded each year for this purpose. More sources of reliable funding are needed to keep trails in good condition.

Goal #5 – Utilize trails as educational venue

1) *Develop interpretive guides and other materials for use on trails.*

Trails can provide users with more than just exercise. There are many opportunities for educating the public about environmental protection, natural resources, culture and history, while they are taking advantage of recreational trails. Several communities have linked these pathways to schools to allow children to take advantage of the educational possibilities.

The DEEP will continue to work with trail user groups and others to develop interpretive materials within the corridors, as “hard copy” booklets and brochures, and as web accessible information.

2) *Utilize trails to educate the public about resource management practices.*

Trails running through or adjacent to working forests, wildlife areas, wetlands, or even agricultural lands provide excellent opportunities to inform the public about resource protection and management. The DEEP should work with other interested parties to develop interpretive materials for this purpose.

3) *Encourage stakeholder groups to work together to develop trail “stories”*

Many trails have more than one constituency (historians, naturalists, tourism, etc) interested in educational and interpretive opportunities. These groups should work together to develop cohesive narratives about their trails that weave together information on a variety of topics.

Current Status Maps

The DEEP will continue to develop accurate and informative maps, first of all state trails and then for trails that have received or will receive Recreational Trails grants. The following are available now:

- Current Greenways map (attached)
- Set of 54 current GPS maps for trails in state parks and forests (available on DEP website www.dep.state.ct.us)
- GPS maps of the Blue Blazed Trails (available through the Connecticut Forest and Park Association)
- Multi-use trail maps and info in *Pathways Through Connecticut* (available through DEP Bookstore or online at www.ct.gov/dot)

DEEP is working with regional planning organizations and others to develop protocols for recording trails data in a standard electronic format.

DEEP State Parks Recreational Trail Priorities

1) National significance

- a) East Coast Greenway Connection – New Haven to NY border
- b) East Coast Greenway Connection – Farmington Canal Greenway to Hartford.
- c) East Coast Greenway – Completion of Quinebaug River Trail connecting Air Line Trail in Putnam to Moosup Valley Trail in Moosup.
- d) East Coast Greenway – Completion of East Hartford/ Manchester/Bolton connection of Charter Oak Greenway to Hop River Trail.
- e) Pursue permanent protection of Metacomet/Mattabessett Blue Blazed Trails for possible inclusion in National Scenic Trail System.
- f) Provide protection and maintenance Appalachian Trail segment in CT

2) Inter-state regional significance (all have potential connections to New York, Massachusetts or Rhode Island)

- a) Fill gaps in Farmington Canal Greenway, with particular focus on Plainville connection where rail line is still active
- b) Develop routes into Willimantic from the Hop River Trail in Columbia and the Air Line Trail in Lebanon. Old trestles are still up but connect to private property.
- c) Close one-mile gap on the Air Line Trail in Putnam
- d) Determine route of Air Line Trail connection from River Trail in Putnam through Thompson.
- e) Confer with State of Massachusetts on proposed Providence and Worcester rail line abandonment (trail dips into Thompson, CT and back into MA)
- f) Encourage trail and river access where appropriate along the Housatonic River in CT and MA along designated greenway
- g) Support protection of properties in the Mianus River watershed

3) State significance

- a) Pursue protection of the Blue Blazed Trail System through fee purchase or permanent recreation/conservation easements on threatened segments
- b) Continue work on Naugatuck Valley Greenway from Shelton to Thomaston and encourage expansion to Torrington and north
- c) Continue work on the Housatonic Railbed Greenway from Bridgeport to Monroe with potential connection into Newtown
- d) Continue work on Willimantic River Greenway/Blueway
- e) Continue work on Quinnipiac River Linear Trail
- f) Promote connections to Riverfront Recapture projects along the Connecticut River north and south
- g) Support the development of the Shoreline Greenway Trail (East Haven/ Branford/Guilford/Madison) as appropriate for the various properties over which it may pass

4) Regional/Local significance – DEP will continue to work with Regional Planning Organizations, Municipalities, Trail Groups, and others to determine local priorities. The highest of these should include connections and linkages with larger trail systems.

- a) Ives Trail (Danbury/Brookfield/Ridgefield)
- b) Still River Greenway (Danbury/Brookfield)
- c) Still River (Grossman) Greenway (Torrington/Winstead)

Appendixes/References

DEEP State Parks Recreational Trail Use Policy

[CT Officially Designated Greenways](#)

[East Coast Greenway through Connecticut](#)