

Trails Technical Document #7

Trail Project Approval Process for NYS Parks

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A primary goal for all New York State Parks Trail Systems is to develop sustainable trails that have minimal impacts on the environment, require little maintenance, and meet the needs of the users. This document is one of a series of technical documents developed by State Parks to provide standards and guidelines for trail design and development, accessibility, and trail assessment and maintenance techniques that help ensure a sustainable trail system. Additional topics include guidelines for trail signage, trail monitoring, and trail closure and restoration. The complete list of technical documents is provided on the web at:

<http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/recreation/trails/technical-assistance.aspx>.

These documents were designed for use within New York State Parks but can be used as resources for trail projects outside of the Parks. These documents may be updated periodically. Additional documents will be developed in the future as part of this series.

This document establishes the review and approval process which trail projects will follow within State Parks. Some parks have Trails Plan documents which were developed through an extensive and comprehensive planning process while many parks do not. The information and flow charts below distinguish between trail projects that are part of an adopted Trails Plan and those that are not.

In many cases, staff in state parks work with volunteers of trail organizations or Friends Groups on trail development, maintenance and trail closure/site restoration projects within the parks. In other cases, all trail work is performed by park staff. The *Annual Project Work Plan - Trails* form (Appendix A) is to be submitted to the Park Manager for review and approval for ALL trail projects beyond standard maintenance practices (blazing, clearing brush from treadway/tree pruning, maintenance of erosion control structures). Use of this form is discussed further below.

Trail Projects as part of a Trails Plan

Adopted Trails Plans, whether produced in conjunction with a master plan or as a stand alone document, have been the subject of an environmental review process under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR). Environmental impacts are addressed in the master plan or stand alone trails plan document. For the purposes of SEQR compliance, therefore, the master plan or trails plan itself satisfies the requirements for an environmental impact statement as specified in Part 617, the rules and regulations implementing SEQR. The review and approval process for trail projects, including the relocation of existing trails, development of new trails, and new uses of existing trails, identified as part of the implementation of a trails plan may be less extensive than others.

All additional trail projects which are not identified in a trails plan will follow the review and approval process as described in the next section.

Trail work proposals as submitted on the *Annual Project Work Plan* will be reviewed by the Park Manager for consistency with the Trails Plan. All trail work beyond standard maintenance practices (as defined above) must be approved prior to commencement of work. The Park

Manager will meet with Trail Groups on an annual basis, at minimum, to discuss proposed trail development and maintenance plans and review the consistency of those plans with the Trails Plan.

The following flow chart depicts the review and approval process that these projects must go through. The Park Manager is expected to consult with Regional Staff in reviewing submitted Work Plans. In some cases, existing or proposed trails may align near or through sensitive ecological areas as well as water resources in parks. The Natural Resource Steward may require on-site inspections of the work area or may provide suggestions on timing of proposed work due to ecological concerns. Permits may be required in some cases where trail work may affect water resources. This process provides for communication and coordination among Parks Staff in an effort to better protect park resources and provide quality experiences for visitors in the parks.



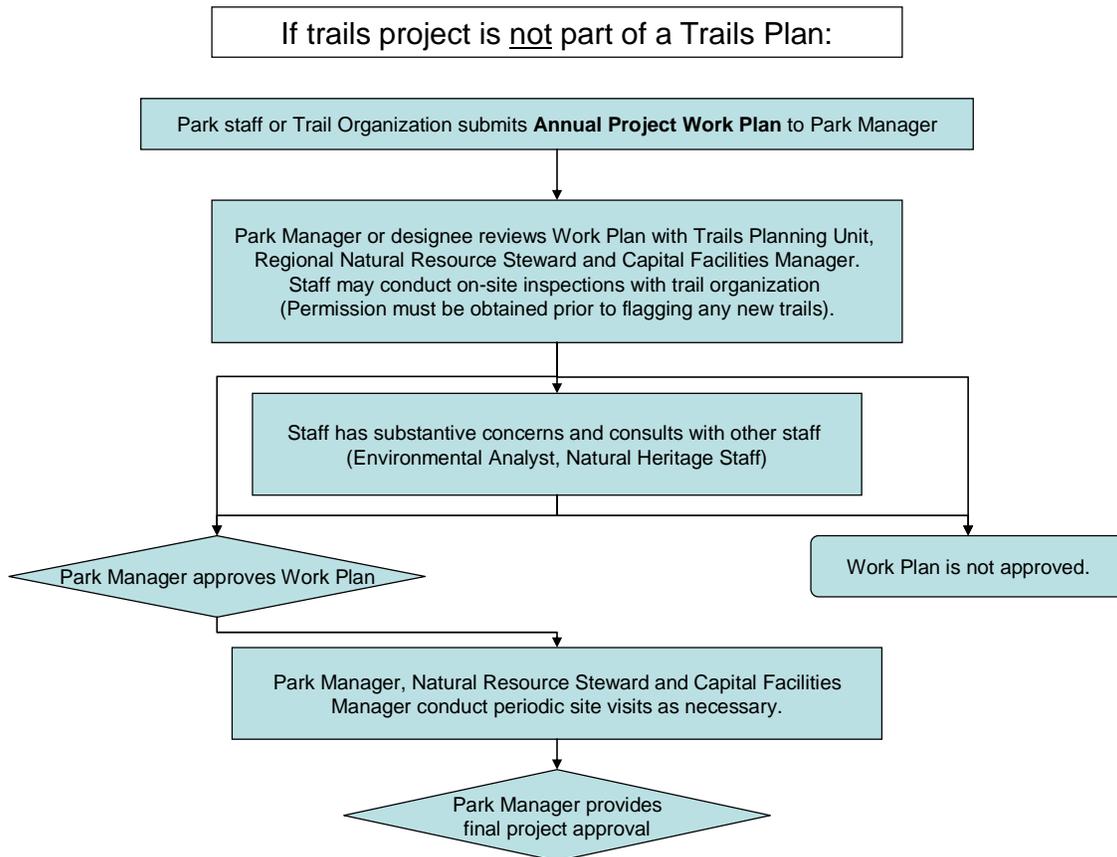
Trail Projects which are not part of a Trails Plan

Many trail projects will be submitted that are not part of a trails plan. Many parks do not have a trails plan and for parks with a plan, there is the potential for submission of additional trail projects that are not listed in the plan. In these cases, there may be a more lengthy review process for proposed trail projects depending on the scope of the project.

Trail work proposals as submitted on the *Annual Project Work Plan* will be reviewed by the Park Manager in conjunction with other Parks staff. All trail work beyond standard maintenance practices (as defined above) must be approved prior to commencement of work. The Park Manager will meet with Trail Groups on an annual basis, at minimum, to discuss proposed trail development and maintenance plans.

The following flow chart depicts the review and approval process that these projects must go through. The Park Manager is expected to consult with the Trails Planning Unit in Albany, the Regional Natural Resource Steward and Capital Facilities Manager in reviewing submitted Work Plans. In some cases, existing or proposed trails may align near or through sensitive ecological areas as well as water resources in parks. The Natural Resource Steward may require on-site inspections of the work area or may provide suggestions on timing of proposed work due to ecological concerns. Permits may be required in some cases where trail work may affect water resources. If the scope of the project has the potential for significant impacts on natural or cultural resources in the park, additional Parks Staff may be consulted, such as an Environmental Analyst, for review of the project work plan.

The scope and associated impacts of the proposed project on natural and cultural resources will determine the extent of the review process. In most cases, park and regional-level review is sufficient. In some cases, a more extensive environmental review will be required under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR).



Implementation

Implementation of trail projects will be guided by staff knowledge of trails, any available trail assessment information, additional future assessments of trail conditions and the *Standards and Guidelines for Trails in NYS Parks (Technical Document 1)*.

The Park Manager is expected to keep submitted *Annual Project Work Plan* forms on file with any additional documentation and information gathered during the review and approval process.

Prior to trail construction, review of final trail layouts will be conducted in the field by appropriate agency staff (e.g. Park Manager, Regional Natural Resource Steward) to ensure consistency with trail standards and protection of sensitive resources.

The Park Manager will be responsible for periodic inspections of all trail projects to ensure that they are being carried out in accordance with approved plans.

For many trails, Parks staff partners with trail organization(s) for development and/or maintenance. It is important that clear lines of communication are maintained among all involved parties.

Improvements and reroutes should be completed prior to expanding multiple use opportunities. Priority will be given to basic maintenance and rehabilitation of existing trails, as well as trail reroutes and closures to correct unsustainable conditions and/or to protect sensitive environmental areas. Priorities for new trails will be based on availability of funding and resources.

New trails and rerouted sections of trails will be designed to protect the natural resources of the parks. Sensitive ecological areas including locations of rare and endangered species will be considered during new trail alignments. Trail projects that involve closing and restoring a trail or trail section will utilize appropriate closure/site restoration techniques as laid out in *Technical Document 3 - OPRHP Guidelines for Closing/Restoration of Trails*.



Appendix A - Annual Project Work Plan – Trails Form

(Submit to Park Manager for review and approval prior to commencing work)

For ALL trail work beyond standard maintenance practices (blazing, clearing brush from treadway/tree pruning, maintenance of erosion control structures) on existing designated trails.

State Park Name:

Year: 20__

Organization:

Contact Name:

Contact Address:

Contact Phone #:

Contact Email Address:

Trail Name:

Description of location of trail section to be worked on (if applicable):

GPS coordinates if available (Lat/Long): _____

(Format: Decimal Degrees; Datum (circle one): NAD27, 83 or WGS84 (preferred))

Type of work (check all that apply):

- Re-alignment/relocation of trail section
- New trail development (includes designating new trails)
- Tread upgrades including installation of water management structures
- Bridge construction/replacement
- Trail Closure/Restoration
- Other: _____

Scope of work included in Trails Plan: Yes No (If no, requires additional review of proposal)

Description of work: (be specific including rock moving, tree cutting, trail work within 100 ft. of a water body/wetland, bridge work (*may require DEC permit*), construction of switchbacks or retaining walls, culvert and turnpike installation, etc.)

Work Schedule:

- Attached map depicting area of work (required).
- Digital photo (before) Digital photo (after)

Submitted by (print name):

Date:

Signature:

Approved by Park Manager (print name):

Date:

Signature:

Forward copy to Regional Natural Resource Steward and Capital Facilities Manager.
Also forward copy to Trails Planning Unit if scope is not part of a Trails Plan.