

PO11-004 RECREATIONAL TRAILS POLICY**DISCUSSION**

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages 5.6 million acres of state-owned forest, range, aquatic, agricultural, conservation, and commercial lands for the people of Washington. Approximately 3 million acres are trust lands that generate more than \$200 million each year in non-tax revenue through income-producing activities such as timber harvest, commercial properties, and agricultural and communications site leases. The revenue provides support for trust beneficiaries such as public schools, state institutions, and county services.

Recreation on DNR-managed lands primarily happens in the 2.2 million acres of forested trust lands, with additional opportunities within DNR-managed natural areas and community forest trust lands. There are more than 1,100 miles of designated recreational trails on DNR-managed lands that provide opportunities including hiking, off-road vehicle riding, biking, horseback riding and pack stock use, and winter uses such as snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. Not every recreation type is allowed on every recreational trail, and some recreational trails provide specialized experiences for specific recreation types.

Millions of people visit DNR-managed lands every year in search of enjoyable recreational experiences. Recreational trails are an integral part of connecting people to the land and provide many health, social, and economic benefits to the communities of Washington. Managing and developing recreational trails on DNR-managed lands must be consistent with the mission, goals, plans, policies, rules, and regulations of the department as well as surrounding communities, counties, and the state.

Recreational Trails on Forested Trust Lands: The Multiple Use concept (RCW 79.10) directs and allows DNR to provide recreational trail opportunities on trust lands when compatible with the basic activities necessary to fulfill the financial obligations of trust management.

Recreational Trails in Natural Areas: The DNR Natural Areas Program protects outstanding examples of the state's extraordinary diversity. The program manages two types of conservation lands, natural resources conservation areas (NRCAs) and natural area preserves (NAPs). The program manages more than 92 sites statewide, for a total of more than 152,000 acres. The majority of recreational trails in natural areas are in NRCAs where they provide opportunities for "low-impact public use" (RCW 79.71.030). Recreational

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trail development and management in natural areas must be consistent with conservation and protection responsibilities and site-based management plans.

Recreational Trails in Community Forests: Community forest trust lands are a discrete category of natural resource lands in a nonfiduciary community forest land trust (RCW 79.155). Recreational trail development and management on community forest trust lands must be consistent with the community working forest management plan and any other plan developed for that forest.

DNR strives to enforce applicable rules and regulations while providing enjoyable, safe, and sustainable recreation opportunities. Education, security, and enforcement on DNR-managed trails is a combined effort from DNR's Natural Resource Police, commissioned Recreation Wardens, recreation program staff, and partner agencies, with additional support from volunteers, recreation groups, and local communities.

DNR is fortunate to have a large constituency who is willing to volunteer time and resources to common goals on state lands including recreational trail maintenance and development projects. Volunteers play a vital role in preserving and expanding recreational trails, and DNR works to consider and incorporate ideas from volunteers, and other members of the public and local communities in recreational trail projects.

Recreation Program Vision

Provide diverse and high quality recreational opportunities on DNR landscapes that foster community engagement, promote a strong sense of environmental stewardship, and enrich the quality of life in Washington.

Goals for Managing Statewide Recreation

- Promote the safety of the public, DNR employees, and volunteers
- Support enjoyable recreation that is compatible with land management responsibilities
- Work in collaboration with volunteers and interested stakeholders to provide engaging recreational opportunities
- Manage healthy natural landscapes and working forests that can sustain recreation for current and future generations

Definitions

Primary Management Objective (PMO) - the principal recreation type(s) for which an area or facility is designed and managed. A Primary Management Objective does not necessarily mean that other recreation types are excluded.

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Allowed/Secondary Use(s) - recreation types allowed in an area/facility or on a recreational trail, but are not necessarily designed or managed for that recreation type.

Trail Management Objective (TMO) - a description of the planned purpose and management for a specific recreational trail or trail system based on management direction and access objectives.

Recreation Suitability Assessment – a process that involves scientists, planners, GIS analysts, and land managers who identify and map biological, geological/soils, and management criteria within a defined area. The purpose of the assessment is to identify locations within the mapped area that have low or moderate suitability for specific recreational types. Recreation suitability assessments tend to be broad scale, for an area or landscape.

Site-Specific Suitability Evaluation – is used when evaluating an area for new recreational trail development or assessing existing trails. This site-specific inspection looks at many factors including, but not limited to, drainage, slope degree and stability, the presence of critical areas, vegetation type and location, soil types, presence of viewpoints, potential for accessibility, consideration of endangered species, and compatibility with management responsibilities.

Trail Standards and Best Practices - are used and developed to guide trail location, design, construction, maintenance, inventory, condition assessment, and the assembly of trail construction packages.

Policy - sets forth the basic operating philosophy of the department. A policy is intended to provide general and broad direction upon which decisions can be based. It clarifies what otherwise might be confusing situations by providing direction, setting standards, explaining authorities, setting priorities, limiting options, and the like, for department personnel.

Trail – a physically established route, other than a road, that is suitable for travel by motorized or non-motorized means.

Designated trail – a recreational trail, on DNR-managed lands, that is recognized and managed by the department as part of a formal recreational trail system.

Nondesignated trail – a trail on DNR-managed lands that is not recognized by the department as part of a formal recreational trail system

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Adaptive management – for recreational trail management and development provides for ongoing modifications of practices in order to respond to new information, changes in site-specific circumstances or the regulatory environment, innovative technological developments, or evolving recreation patterns.

Recreational Trails Policy Objective

To guide the statewide management and development of recreational trails on DNR-managed lands.

This policy establishes a consistent set of practices for managing and developing recreational trails on DNR-managed lands that are compatible with land management responsibilities. These practices also provide flexibility to accommodate different natural settings, land-management objectives, resources, local values, and public and volunteer input.

Recreational Trails Policy Goals

- Offer recreational trail opportunities that cause the least impact to the land in accordance with the Primary Management Objective for the area, and provide protection for water quality, and natural, environmental, and cultural resources.
- Expand designated recreational trail experiences that DNR and its volunteers can support across the state.
- Maintain the lowest trail construction and maintenance costs reasonable, based on site-specific information, Primary Management Objectives, and Trail Management Objectives.

POLICY**Recreational Trails and Recreation Planning**

DNR will use recreation planning in the development of new recreational trails.

Recreation planning may range in scope from in-depth, multi-year processes for large landscapes to smaller scale, site-specific efforts.

Recreation planning is a process DNR uses to evaluate recreational use and public access in a defined area. Recreation planning considers, but is not limited to:

- Previous planning efforts on the landscape
- Land management obligations
- Environmental responsibilities

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- Adjacent landowners and land uses
- Local values
- Input from interested recreationists and the public
- Safe and sustainable recreational opportunities

Topics may include, but is not limited to:

- Recreational trail suitability assessments
- Identifying areas for new recreational trails/trail systems
- Developing recreational Primary Management Objectives and secondary/allowed uses
- Identifying nondesignated trails for future evaluation and potential adoption or decommissioning
- Incorporating new recreational trail types into an area

Establishing Primary Management Objectives

DNR will use Primary Management Objectives to indicate the principle recreation type(s) for which a designated recreation area is managed.

Primary Management Objectives may be used in conjunction with allowed/secondary uses to identify all allowable recreation types for which a designated recreation area is managed, as well as identify any prohibited recreation types.

Establishing Trail Management Objectives

DNR will establish Trail Management Objectives for new recreational trails that define the planned purpose and recreational trail experience.

Trail Management Objectives must be consistent with any Primary Management Objectives and/or allowed/secondary uses developed for the area.

Trail Management Objectives reflect the management intent and any special considerations that are important for the development and management of the recreational trail. The following are examples of the types of trail experience considerations that may be addressed by Trail Management Objectives:

- Trail hierarchy and designations; including primary and secondary recreation types
- Shared use vs. Single use
- Two-way vs. One-way trails
- Trail design parameters

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- Level of expected use
- Level of challenge provided/difficulty rating
- Prohibited recreation types
- Less common recreation types

Recreational Trail Standards and Best Practices

DNR should use trail standards developed by the United States Forest Service as primary guidelines for trail design, construction, and maintenance.

The department may adopt trail construction guidelines, standards, best practices, and documents from other agencies and organizations, when appropriate, as additional primary guidelines.

DNR will develop its own trail standards or best practices when primary guidelines are deemed insufficient or inapplicable.

Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria

DNR will apply Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria when assessing an area for new recreational trails or when evaluating existing trails.

DNR will maintain a list of Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria and update the list as needed.

Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria are in the Appendix of this policy.

Nondesignated Trails

DNR does not allow trail construction without prior approval.

DNR may remove, reroute, or block access to nondesignated trails at any time, without notification.

DNR may evaluate nondesignated trails as staff and financial resources are available.

WAC 332-52-405 states that it is a misdemeanor to construct, modify, repair, or maintain a trail on DNR-managed lands without written authorization from the department. DNR may enforce prevention of illegal trail building through Law Enforcement, staff assistance, cameras and other technology, maps, signage, volunteers, and public support.

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Nondesignated trails that are compliant and consistent with the department recreational trail standards and best practices and meet the applicable Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria may be incorporated into the recreational trail system. Trails that are determined to be inconsistent with department recreational trail standards and best practices or do not meet applicable Recreational Trail Development and Evaluation Criteria may be decommissioned, abandoned, and restored to a close approximation of the natural condition prior to the disturbance.

Community Engagement and Public Outreach

DNR will work collaboratively with local communities, interested recreation groups, organized DNR advisory and focus groups, stakeholders, and as appropriate, adjacent landowners, about the development and management of designated recreational trails the evaluation of existing trails.

DNR recognizes the importance of notifying and communicating with the public, volunteers, and recreationists regarding management actions that affect recreational trails, such as seasonal trail closures, organized trail-based events, and forest management actions.

Advance notification can include, but is not limited to, web page updates, signage, email notices, direct communication, advisory and focus group meetings, and e-newsletters.

Working with Recreation Volunteers

DNR will coordinate with volunteer groups and individuals on recreational trail development and maintenance projects.

DNR's volunteer program will maintain a manual that provides guidance for the successful implementation and management of volunteer recreational trail projects.

DNR will enter into a hold-harmless agreement with all volunteers coordinating with the department under this policy or entering into other agreements that limit the department's liability.

When appropriate and within the resources of the department, DNR may enter into cooperative agreements with recreational groups to support recreational trail maintenance and development goals consistent with this policy.

PO11-004 RECREATIONAL TRAILS POLICY**Obtaining Local Government Permits**

DNR staff will work in partnership with representatives of local governments to find efficiencies in gaining local government permits for the development and maintenance of recreational facilities and trails. If barriers to permitting efficiencies require legislative action to overcome, the department will provide options for solutions to the appropriate legislative committee.

Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines

Recreational trail signage will comply with DNR's Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines manual.

Standards and guidelines are intended to provide clear, concise delivery of understandable and consistent messages across landscapes. In addition, signs on DNR-managed lands should foster safety of visitors, provide direction and guidance for the use of recreation lands and facilities, inform and educate the public, and provide a positive DNR recreation image and identity for the agency.

DNR may modify and/or make updates to the Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines when necessary to meet new signage needs and uphold the intent of the standards and guidelines. Modifications and updates will be coordinated between the Division Recreation Program and the regional recreation management and staff.

Organized Trail-Based Events

DNR may allow organized trail-based events on recreational trails and trail systems.

Organized trail-based events must be compatible with any PMOs, TMOs, or allowed uses for the area, environmental and fire protections, forest management activities, WAC 332-52-205 requirements, and applicable program guidance or procedures.

Forest Management Activities and Recreational Trails

DNR recreation and natural area staff will work with DNR land managers to look for opportunities to minimize potential impacts on designated recreational trails resulting from forest management activities.

Forest management activities may include, but are not limited to, timber harvest or thinning, road construction, road abandonment, chemical applications, and stand management. Efforts may include using language in contracts and/or easements to provide access and mitigate impacts, providing temporary signage regarding forest management

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activities (e.g., active logging, chemical applications, detours, trail closure, etc.), and restoring or re-routing portions of designated recreational trails.

Recreational Trail Conflict Resolution

DNR will work with the public and volunteers to address conflicts on recreational trail management and development issues.

Local recreational trail or natural area managers will be the initial point of contact with the public and volunteers.

If the local recreational trail or natural area manager is unable to resolve the conflict, it will be elevated to area supervisors. Decision making authority is delegated to the Region Manager for the area. Unresolved issues may elevate to the Commissioner of Public Lands.

Additional Guidance

Recreational trail management and development under this policy will be consistent with RCWs, WACs, other relevant local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and ordinances, DNR policies, procedures, plans, trail standards, best practices, guidelines, or any that DNR may develop.

IMPLEMENTATION

Region Managers have decision-making authority, subject to the Commissioner's Delegation Order, and are responsible for implementation of this policy within their region. Responsibilities of Region Managers or their designees include:

- Management of recreational trails
- Development of new recreational trails
- Evaluation conclusions about existing trails, and adoption or removal of trails; in consultation with their staff and with Conservation, Recreation, and Transactions Division staff, relative to natural areas and state lands
- Approving recreational trail standards and best practices, in cooperation with the Assistant Division Manager for Recreation and the Assistant Division Manager for Natural Areas
- Securing all required permits
- Approval and administration of organized trail-based events
- Resolving conflict around recreational trail management and development decisions

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- Coordinating among land managers, recreation staff, and natural areas staff regarding impacts to recreational trails from forest management activities
- Ensuring trail management and development decisions are communicated effectively and transparently to affected parties

The Assistant Division Manager for Recreation has decision-making authority and responsibility for implementation of this policy that pertains to responsibilities within the Division role. Responsibilities of the Assistant Division Manager for Recreation or designee include:

- Approval of modifications or updates to the Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines
- Developing and/or approving recreational trail standards and best practices, in cooperation with the Assistant Division Manager for Natural Areas and the Region Managers
- Ensuring trail standards and best practices are being followed consistently statewide
- Overseeing the development of policies, procedures, and program guidance

The Assistant Division Manager for Natural Areas has decision-making authority and responsibility for implementation of this policy that pertains to responsibilities within the Division role. The responsibility of the Natural Heritage Conservation Section Manager or designee includes:

- Approving recreational trail standards and best practices, in cooperation with the Statewide Recreation Program Manager and Region Managers

DNR's adaptive management approach to recreational trail development and management will involve the Region Managers, the Assistant Division Manager for Recreation, and the Assistant Division Manager for Natural Areas, or their designees.

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Approved By: 

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Policy Director

SEE ALSO

PO06-003 Volunteer Program

PO10-002 Public Use on DNR-Managed Trust Lands

PO11-002 Recreation Enforcement

PO11-003 OPDMD Use-Department Managed Recreation Facilities and trails

PO13-002 Natural Area Preserves Public Access

Chapter 4.24.200-210 RCW (Recreational Immunity)

Chapter 43.30 RCW (Department of Natural Resources)

Chapter 79.02 RCW (Public Land Management)

Chapter 79.10 RCW (Land Management Authorities and Policies)

Chapter 79.70 RCW (Natural Area Preserves)

Chapter 79.71 RCW (Natural Resources Conservation Areas)

Chapter 79.155 RCW (Community Forest Trusts)

Chapter 197-11 WAC (SEPA Rules)

Chapter 332-52 WAC (Public Access and Recreation)

DNR's Statewide Sign Standards and Guidelines Manual

Trust Lands Final Habitat Conservation Plan, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, September 1997

Policy for Sustainable Forests, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, December 2006

APPENDIX

RECREATIONAL TRAIL DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following factors will be considered, as applicable, when evaluating an area for a new recreational trail or trail system, and when evaluating existing designated or nondesignated trails (listed in no particular order):

- Identification as a priority action in a recreation planning process
- Consistency with any statewide strategic or management plan
- Cost and benefit to the trust
- The results of a site-specific suitability evaluation for specific recreation types
- Carrying capacity of the land based on land type, recreational uses, quantity and intensity of recreational use, and anticipated future pressures.
- The trail's potential impact on the environment, natural resources, and water quality, including the risk of invasive species spread
- Consistency with the Primary Management Objective for the area
- Adjacent landowner use and land management practices
- The reasonable availability of financial, staff, and volunteer resources for planning, development, and sustainable, long-term management and stewardship.
- The physical condition of the area in a landscape context
- Cost effectiveness (balance of development and long-term maintenance needs and costs)
- Availability of appropriately sourced materials
- Compatibility with nearby recreation types, patterns, and intensities of recreational visits
- Compatibility with land management responsibilities and protections
- Potential for safety hazards
- Proximity to developed facilities, recreational trails, and trail systems
- Legal access
- Need for permits and additional infrastructure/development
- Consistency with the Habitat Conservation Plan objectives, components, and strategies including consideration for threatened and/or endangered species habitat
- Sensitivity to cultural, archeological, and/or historical resources
- Historical use of area
- Location
- Community needs being met
- Recreational group, public, and volunteer input
- Potential liability from off-site access points
- Potential for encouraging future illegal trail building
- Potential for enabling or increasing theft, vandalism, garbage dumping, and other illegal activities
- Suitability of existing trails as constructed
- Capacity for rerouting, realigning, or readjusting trail sections or features to meet the standards when the rest of the trail meets standards
- Other management considerations, as needed