

ALASKA STATE PARKS

TRAIL MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

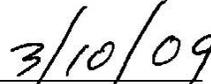
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APPENDIX F: TRAIL MANAGEMENT POLICY



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Introduction:

The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is responsible for approximately 67 trails, comprising more than 650 miles (not including water trails) within 128 units of the State system. These trails are very important to Alaskans. According to a public recreation survey, seven of the top ten favorite activities of Alaskans involve trail usage (SCORP, 2004). This same survey found that the majority of respondents indicated that trail rehabilitation, upgrades, and expansion should be a high priority for the State.

The *Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan 2007-2017* reports that the deferred maintenance backlog for park facilities (which includes trail operations) is over \$67 million. Funding tends to focus on the high-use front-country areas, where most management and public safety problems occur. For this reason, trail programs tend to receive little attention other than “basic” maintenance, such as removing fallen trees or other minor repairs, and almost no preventive maintenance. Often, trail operations have been viewed as a non-technical element of overall park operations and little emphasis has been placed on formal training for staff involved in trail programs. In most cases, staff has been provided with limited direction and guidelines and few training opportunities. This has proved detrimental as improperly built and maintained trails are in some cases inadequate for their current uses, and can lead to park resource damage.

Purpose:

This Trail Management Policy will provide direction on how the Division will manage, develop, maintain and assess the condition of its trails. It is designed to provide the overarching framework guiding sustainable and responsible trail development and management. To complement this policy the Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook has been created to provide greater detail on how to design, construct and maintain trails using standards, guidelines and best management practices.

The five primary goals of this policy and the Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook include:

1. Standardize *sustainable* trail construction and maintenance techniques.
2. Organize a process to assess, prescribe and prioritize State trail system needs.
3. Promote wise management of Alaska State Park trail resources through proper planning, design and training.
4. Achieve long-term savings in maintenance costs.
5. Provide reference resources to the public, other organizations and park staff to establish, promote and enhance sustainable trail systems throughout the State.

These goals will be carried out through the creation, use and in some cases adoption of the following trail management concepts:

1. Trail Management Objectives (TMO's)
2. Trail Classification System
3. Best Trail Management Practices (BMP's) through use of the adopted "Sustainable Trail Framework"
4. Trail Inventory and Assessment (through GIS / GPS application)
5. Standardized Trail Dictionary

1. Trail Management Objectives

Trail Management Objectives (TMO's) are defined as the documentation of the intended purpose and management strategies of a trail based on the trail vision. TMO's document the Trail Class, Designed Use, Design Parameters, and other trail-specific considerations for both planned and existing trails. TMO's also provide information for subsequent trail planning, management and reporting purposes.

All Alaska State Park's *managed trails*¹ will have TMO's developed based on management plan direction and a trail's specified Designed Use. Absent of a management or trail plan, TMO's will be developed with consideration given to how individual TMO's accommodate the public needs, protect resources and are sustained into the future.

See Section 1 of the **Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook** for the Trail Management Objective form and instructions.

¹ See the Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook for a formal definition (Trail Use Strategies and Managed use)

2. Trail Classification System

A Trail Classification System provides uniform standards for trail nomenclature, maintenance, marking, design, and construction. The Trail Classification System adopted by this policy is a close adaptation of the National Trail Classification System that has been formally adopted by most federal land management agencies, and therefore will be a major step forward in applying consistent terminology and management guidance on trails across Alaska. This system is based on identifying the standardized category (Type and Class) of an existing or planned trail.

Two general types of trails will be referenced in the Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook: Standard Terra Trails and Snow Trails. Each trail, regardless of type, is further broken-down into one of five Trail Classes, ranging from least developed (Trail Class 1) to most developed (Trail Class 5). General criteria are supplied to define Trail Classes applicable to all system trails. Trail Classes are further refined through Trail Design Parameters that offer construction specifications by the type of trail use, such as hiking, biking, all-terrain vehicle, and snowmobile trails. Trail Design Parameters provide guidance for the assessment, survey and design, construction, repair and maintenance of trails, based on the Trail Class and Designed Use of the trail.

See Sections 2 and 3 of the **Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook** for Trail Classification Criteria and Design Parameter Matrices.

3. Best Management Practices (BMP's) for Trails through use of a "Sustainable Trail Design Framework"

A Sustainable Trail is most simply defined as a trail that conforms to its terrain and environment, is capable of handling its intended use without serious degradation, and requires minimal maintenance.

Trail sustainability is designed around the following four design fundamentals:

- Integrated Water Control
- Curvilinear Layout
- Grade Control
- Full Bench Construction

The foundation of sustainable trail construction focuses on initial trail design to prevent future resource degradation and human impacts. While initial construction costs are typically higher, overall life-cycle costs will be reduced with lower maintenance costs as well as minimizing resource degradation in the future. Integral to sustainability is proper trail planning – a sound plan is the core for any successful trail project. Additionally, a Sustainable Trail integrates well into its environment; it does not destroy the feel, aesthetics or ecological integrity of the environment.

The Division adopts these core fundamental sustainable trail design concepts and will integrate them into its trails program. While some elements may be difficult or impossible to

fully implement without major expense, all reasonable measures shall be implemented whenever feasible. This policy mandates that the “Sustainable Trail Design Framework” be incorporated as follows:

- **New Trails** – All new Division trails will be built using the “Sustainable Trail Design Framework” as part of their design standard. No new trails will be constructed without adherence to this standard.
- **Existing Trails** – As trails are repaired, re-routed or otherwise upgraded, they will be built to sustainable levels when feasible.

See Section 4 of the **Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook** for reference to the adopted “Sustainable Trail Design Framework”.

4. Trail Inventory and Assessment System

Before trail maintenance and repair strategies can be fully developed, an assessment of trails and their condition will be made based on the TMO’s developed for each trail. While TMO’s provide a vision for *future* trail conditions, Trail Assessments will offer an accurate snapshot of *existing* conditions and what is needed to meet sustainable standards. Differences identified between a TMO and Trail Assessment will expose those areas where shortfalls and gaps exist. Corrective measures and rehabilitation efforts to address identified shortfalls shall utilize sustainable trail concepts and best practices. Information derived from assessments and evaluated against sustainable standards and guidelines will also aid in the determination of how a trail may be best managed given its current state.

It will be Division policy to collect an inventory and assessment of all managed trails to determine the condition and immediate need of park trail systems. Alaska’s Minimum State Mapping Standards will be applied for the creation of mapping documents, as listed in the Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook. It is also mandated that all data collected will conform to the newly developed Interagency Trail Data Standards. Universal trail data standards will enable national, regional, state, and trail-level managers and the public to use mutually understood terminology for recording, retrieving and applying spatial and tabular information. Data standards will make it easier for trail information to be accessed, exchanged and used by more than one individual, agency or group. Any data collected for the Division shall be exchangeable and functional for other partner agencies and public use.

See Section 5 of the **Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook** for the Trail Assessment Procedures and Guidelines, Alaska’s Minimum State Mapping Standards and the (soon to be adopted) Interagency Trail Data Standards.

5. Trail Terminology

A major goal of this policy is to clarify and implement consistent terminology to provide for effective communication and common understanding. Terminology referenced in this policy has been obtained from many sources including the US Forest Service (in collaboration with the

National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management) and non-profit organizations such as Alaska Trails. It is the policy of the Division to utilize a standardized trail dictionary. Use of a standardized trail dictionary will allow management to become more uniform in the implementation of sustainable trail design practices and carry a common, consistent voice in the trails community.

See Section 6 of the **Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook** for a glossary of trail terms.

Alaska State Parks Trail Management Handbook

Complementary to this Policy, the Division has developed a reference guide that incorporates the necessary detail for implementation. This handbook will be an evolutionary publication that will start with the basics of pertinent trail guidelines and will grow over time with regular updates. The Handbook is intended to be used as a practical, hands-on tool to help improve trail management throughout the State.