NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

TRAIL ADOPTION PROCESS

Approved by the Policy Council on June 26, 2019

1 PREFACE

Approvals are needed whenever the Trail Conference agrees to maintain additional trails or to carry out trail work beyond normal maintenance. These approvals ensure that:

- The Trail Conference has appropriate agreements in place with the land manager under which the Trail Conference will build and maintain trails and has the ability to refer to approvals to address any future issues of permission or liability.
- The Trail Conference has the resources to maintain the trails and carry out the planned work.
- Any planned trail work conforms to the rules and processes of the land manager and the Trail Conference.
- Information about the changes is recorded properly in the Trail Conference trail database.

There are three separate approval processes, some or all of which may be required for a particular project. These are:

1. **Park Adoption Process**: This Trail Conference process is required if the Trail Conference is agreeing to adopt trails in a new park or area where we do not already have an agreement with the land manager to build and maintain trails in that area. It is also used if we will cease working on trails in an entire park or area. The process, which ensures that we have an appropriate agreement in place and that we have the resources to work in the new area, must be completed before either of the other two processes can be finalized.
2. **Trail Adoption Process** *(subject of this document)*: This Trail Conference process is required if the Trail Conference intends to maintain a trail or to close or abandon a trail we maintain.
3. **Trail Construction Approval Process**: This process, which involves both the land manager and the Trail Conference, is used to obtain the necessary approvals for trail work beyond normal maintenance on trails we have adopted.

This document describes the Trail Conference Trail Adoption Process in detail. See the links above for details about the other two processes. If more than one of these processes is required for a project, the processes can proceed in parallel, but a process cannot be completed until the process listed above it has been completed.

2 INTENT AND OVERVIEW

The adoption of a trail using this process means that the Trail Conference agrees to maintain the trail. We may adopt existing trails or conceptually adopt new trails that will be built. The criteria for these two cases differ. The process is also used to close or abandon a trail.

The Local Trail Committee (LTC Chair) is the official adopter for the Trail Conference, but must consult with the Regional Program Coordinator (RPC). The RTC and the RPC are available as resources for consultation and advice. The RTC should be consulted for larger projects.

Trail adoption can occur concurrently with the related Park Adoption Process or the Trail Construction Approval Process. A park must be adopted before trails in it can be adopted, and a trail must be adopted before construction on it can be finally approved. The Trail Conference maintains trails only in parks that have been adopted and are open to public access.

No trail will be adopted unless LTC Chair agrees that resources are available to manage the trails in the park and that necessary relationships with the land manager have been established. See the Appendix for a checklist of factors the LTC Chair should consider in deciding whether to adopt a trail.

3 APPLICABLE POLICIES

The Trail Management Policy mandates that there shall be process of approving/adopting new trails.

4 DEFINITIONS

Adoption – Adoption is the result of applying this process, i.e. the Trail Conference agrees to maintain a particular trail.

Land managers – Landowners or landowner representatives such as park managers empowered to make trail and land use decisions.

Trail Classification – See Trail Design Standards. Minimally developed, Moderately developed, Developed, Highly developed, Fully developed, Other. (most TC trails are either Moderately developed or Developed.)

Trail Database – A database maintained by the Trail Conference which includes all trails which the Trail Conference maintains and may include other trails.

5 DESCRIPTION OF PRACTICE OR PROCESS

5.1 Scope

The New Trail Adoption Process applies to all trails that have not yet been adopted. All trails maintained by the Trail Conference when this process is approved are deemed already adopted.

In the process of adopting a new park, the Trail Conference may adopt all or some of the existing trails using this process. When adopting multiple trails in a new park, all must be considered at the same time and not done piecemeal. This process is also used to adopt

proposed new trails, i.e. trails to be built if approved, in adopted parks or parks being adopted.

This process is also used to abandon trails that the Trail Conference will no longer maintain.

5.2 Roles

- **Local Trail Committee (LTC) Chair -** Agrees to manage the trails in the park and is the one who approves the adoption of a trail.

- **Regional Program Coordinator (RPC) -** A Trail Conference staff member responsible for a geographic region who facilitates the process.

- **Land Manager -** Agrees to Trail Conference maintaining the trail and changes any of their internal documentation to assign maintenance to the Trail Conference.

5.3 Step by Step Process for Adopting a New Trail

In most cases, the LTC Chair, in consultation with the RPC and others familiar with the trail and park, decides whether to adopt the trail. If the trail passes through areas managed by multiple LTC Chairs or has unusual requirements, other Trail Conference leaders must be consulted as appropriate. If the RPC does not agree with the decision, it may be escalated, though previous consultations should normally have resolved any disagreements. The Trail Management Policy specifies that projects covered by an MOU or other agreement with the land manager must be approved, though they must follow this process to ensure that affected people (see 5.3.2) are notified and the trail database is updated.

The steps for trail adoption are:

5.3.1 The adoption process begins with the LTC Chair working through the checklist in the Appendix. A major consideration is whether the Trail Conference has the resources to maintain the trail, in particular one or more maintainers or a maintenance crew.

5.3.2 If the decision is made to adopt the trail, the trail database is edited as described below, then the RTC, Publications Committee and Communications Staff are notified.

5.4 Process for Ending Trail Conference Management of a Trail

This same process should be followed if the Trail Conference will no longer maintain a trail, whether or not the trail will continue to exist. The process is not needed if a trail is being closed temporarily and is expected to reopen under Trail Conference management.

5.5 Editing the Trail Database

Prerequisites:

- Understand how we define Trails and Trail Segments (read first two pages of How to manage the trails database).
- Understand how we classify trails and segments. See Trail Design Standards.
- Obtain or create a map of all the trails being considered for adoption in this project.

Trail segments in the database go through a sequence of statuses:

- Pending Adoption
- Adopted
- Under Construction
- Open
- Closed (trail exists but is closed, possibly due to land manager request)
- Obsolete (trail is kept in the database to retain history but no longer exists, possibly because it has become part of another trail)

The database also has a field "TC maintained" indicating whether the trail is maintained by the Trail Conference.

This approval process is only concerned with Pending Approval and Approved. The pending status is needed for parallel processing of construction (which needs the trail to exist in the database) while the adoption process is working its way to adoption. Adoption of existing trails go straight to Approved status. The TC maintained flag is turned on when the trail status is changed to Open and maintenance begins.

If the new trail(s) need a new supervisor, this is the time to create a new position and either fill it or mark it as vacant, which means that the LTC Chair is the acting supervisor. The chair has committed to recruiting the required maintainers, and that is part of your available resources determination.

If a trail will be abandoned and cease to exist, it is removed from the database. If the trail continues to exist but the Trail Conference will no longer maintain it, the TC maintained flag is turned off and the status is set to Open or Closed as appropriate.

5.6 Forms Supporting the Practice or Process

- [How to manage the trail database](#)
- [Add a new trail](#)
- [Add a new trail segment](#)

6 CONTACTS

This process is the responsibility of the Policy Council, which will review it periodically.

7 EFFECTIVE DATE AND PRIOR PROCESS REPLACED

This process is effective upon Policy Council approval.

Many existing adopted trails have not gone through any approval process and they are grandfathered into being approved.

APPENDIX: CHECKLIST FOR LTC APPROVAL OF A NEW TRAIL

1. Is there an approved trails plan for the park? (review it)
2. Length of the trail?
3. Allowed uses of the existing or planned trail?
4. Who are the user groups and are there existing conflicts?

5. Is the trail in generally in good shape or does it need extensive work?
6. Number of maintainers needed for the trail:
    a. The Trail Conference supplies maintainers
    b. The park supplies maintainers but the Trail Conference provides training, crews, management, etc.
    c. The maintenance is assigned to a Trail Conference member club.
7. Are more supervisors needed for the above maintainers?
8. Can existing trail crews handle the load or is a new one needed?
9. Has recruiting for new volunteers been easy or hard in your region?
10. Might you need to split the LTC because of your limits to managing additional volunteers or interacting with land managers?
11. Will costly infrastructure construction or improvements such as bridges or puncheon be needed? Is funding for this likely to be available?
12. Is there funding for Conservation Corps crews to work there?
13. What are the politics of a denial? If we do not agree to maintain this trail, would there be results which would cause problems for the Trail Conference?
14. Are there other potential trail adoptions in your region and how does this one compete with the resources needed for other adoptions?