

New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
Mountain Bike Policy
(Adopted December 14, 2010)

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference (Trail Conference) focuses its efforts on the creation, stewardship and protection of foot-only¹ trails. By far the largest number of trail users continues to be hikers². Accordingly, the great majority of available trails should meet their needs. Hikers typically wish to enjoy quiet, slow travel and the enjoyment of natural settings without the intrusion of mechanical conveyances. Foot-only trails best meet the needs of hikers and provide them with the highest quality experiences. The experience of hiking and the interests of hiking constituents should vigilantly be protected.

The Trail Conference recognizes that mountain bikers are an active community of trail users. We believe that, subject to careful consideration of the impact on other users and the environment, mountain bike trails often may be accommodated on public open space. Consequently, we are prepared to work cooperatively with mountain bikers and encourage cooperative trail planning and stewardship.

The Trail Conference believes that a diverse system of trails, each designated for a specific use, is the best way to provide satisfying trail experiences for a broad range of users. We disagree with the concept that multi-use trails are the best solution for various users to simultaneously experience open space. Multi-use trails designed to accommodate a range of users will typically result in a sub-optimal experience for most users. However, multi-use trails may be an appropriate option when a diverse system of trails cannot be accommodated, e.g., in a sensitive environment or where terrain or space impose limitations.

The Trail Conference

- Believes that there are instances where multi-use trails can be appropriately developed on public land and made available to responsible, non-motorized users, provided that:
 - An appropriate network of foot-only trails, as described in the first paragraph, is available in each trail system to avoid user conflict and displacement;
 - The total number and types of trails in an area do not overwhelm the resource; and
 - These trails are designed to accommodate safely all designated uses.
- Opposes the conversion of foot-only trails to multi-use trails, except in rare instances, and only after the impacts on the environment and existing users are carefully considered;
- Believes that each trail should be managed for the primary purposes for which it was designed;

The perspective of the Trail Conference on issues related to mountain bike usage is largely consistent with that of the American Hiking Society. The Trail Conference's Mountain Bike Policy incorporates a significant amount of the wording used in AHS's Mountain Bike Policy.

¹A trail is a defined pathway primarily intended to be used for recreational travel. It may or may not be marked; it generally will not be paved or otherwise improved, except as is consistent with the need for safety, preservation of the resource and its environment, or to be handicapped accessible. Foot-only trails may accommodate a wide variety of activities, including: walking, hiking, trail running, jogging, backpacking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

² *Outdoor Foundation 2009 Participation Survey*

- Opposes the use of mountain bikes in areas designated or considered for designation by the government for enhanced protection as wilderness.

In the event that a trail is developed for or converted to multi-use, the Trail Conference recommends that the following design and management criteria be used:

The Experience of Hiking: Trails developed for or converted to multi-use should be designed with consideration to the needs and concerns of hikers.

Safety: Trails should be designed to allow for the safety of users and safe passing of one traveler by another, and should provide for adequate visibility to avoid collisions. The likelihood of conflicts between hikers and mountain bikers increases at higher levels of use and rates of speed. Thus, the design of multi-use trails should recognize and accommodate varying speeds of travel.

Resource Protection: All trail use should be consistent with the protection of an area's natural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives, and should not disturb wildlife or other natural resources.

- Trail surfaces should be designed to sustain all allowed uses under all conditions or be managed with provisions that protect against environmental damage and erosion;
- When planning new trails or trail networks, the purpose of the trail, the terrain through which it travels, the density of trail use, and the concentration of trails should be considered; and
- Alterations to the terrain should be made only to prevent or repair resource damage or alleviate dangerous conditions.

Management: While the establishment and continuity of trails is ultimately the responsibility of the land managers or owners, volunteer user groups should actively assist land managers in planning trails and trail systems.

- Trail-use designations should be based upon the collective input of all stakeholders and address any attendant resource concerns.
- Each trail should be managed and maintained for its primary purpose, with multi-use trails assigned primarily to one group, with assistance from others where appropriate. Other uses and types of travel should be evaluated for their impact on the primary use and purpose of the trail.
- Trails should be managed and maintained to acceptable standards for the designated uses; and
- Usage should be controlled when needed to protect the resource, safety, and/or hiking experience.

For safety, resource protection and management, long-term commitment by each user group to public trail maintenance and management is necessary to sustain non-motorized trails as a recreational resource.