

Amherst Conservation Commission Trails Standard

Rev: March 2018

The Amherst Conservation Commission (ACC) promotes low-impact outdoor recreation on the lands that it manages. The most significant management activity is the development and maintenance of >25 miles of trails and associated infrastructure (e.g., bridges, kiosks, parking areas, and web-based trail maps and guides). ACC is committed to accommodating multiple types of trail use: hiking, wildlife observation, trail running, x-country skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain biking. It does not allow motorized vehicles on any of its trails.

This document details ACC's standards for trail development, maintenance, and mapping.

Trail Development

ACC may elect to develop new trails on the properties it manages, following these guidelines.

- Any new trail should be proposed and agreed by a quorum of ACC Commissioners. A trail proposal should include a map of its routing and an explanation of how it fits ACC guidelines.
- Trail placement and usage will follow deed and easement restrictions, if any.
- New trails should respect the conservation objectives of the ACC property where it will be located. This includes taking the least invasive route through known sensitive habitats, including but not limited to crossing wetlands and grasslands.
- Trails should be designed to accommodate the following uses, unless specifically determined otherwise by ACC: hiking, wildlife observation, trail running, x-country skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain biking. No motorized vehicles are permitted on any trails except for approved maintenance (including trail grooming).
- Trail routes will be laid out to provide access to points of interest in the property, connect to other trails, or form loops (rather than dead ends). Trails should seek to distribute traffic rather than concentrate it along highly trafficked routes.
- Changes in trail elevation should be moderate to accommodate a range of users and to avoid erosive drainage. This is best achieved by maintaining a maximum average grade of each trail section to 10%. The trail should not ascend/descend directly along the fall-line of a hillside, but rather follow contour lines as much as possible, crossing contours at a maximum of 45 degrees. Trails should include reverse grades to break up long ascents/descents to give users a break and to minimize water flow down the length of the trail.
- Trail routes should be flagged and vetted by potential users prior to construction.
- Trails should have at least a 2-foot treadway, and vegetation should be cleared at least an additional foot on each side (for a total passage of 4 feet width) and 8 feet high.
- Trails must have access, either direct or via connecting trails, to a public trailhead that includes a map kiosk and preferably parking.
- Trails may include bridges, which should be constructed with pressure-treated lumber, with a width of at least 30", with beams and decking of adequate thickness to support the weight of the intended types of trail users.
- Stonewalls, cellar holes, and foundations encountered during trail building should be protected (leave stone walls intact). If it is necessary to cross a stone wall, find an existing opening, route around the wall, or construct a wooden structure to traverse the wall. If cellar holes, foundations or other heritage objects are encountered, please contact the Amherst Heritage Commission to properly research and document.

- Trails should be blazed using colored plastic tags provided by ACC. Blazes should not be nailed flush to a tree – about 0.5” space should be left between the nail’s head and the trunk to allow for tree growth. Each trail should have its own blaze color. There are four blaze configurations: a) a single upright rectangle to indicate the regular course of the trail; b) two upright blazes, one above the other, to indicate a turn, the top blaze offset in the direction of the turn unless the blazes are visible from both directions on the trail, in which case the blazes should be aligned vertically; c) three upright blazes, two side-by-side and one above, to signify the beginning of a trail; and d) three upright blazes, two side-by-side and one below, to signify the end of a trail.

In recent years, significant assistance in trail development has come from external organizations such as the New England Mountain Bike Association. Lumber for infrastructure has been generously donated by businesses such as Currier Lumber. ACC will cultivate these relationships, but ensure they result in trail development that is consistent with the above guidelines.

Trail Maintenance

ACC relies heavily on volunteers to develop and maintain trails. Trail maintenance is undertaken by a large group of volunteers in Amherst that are approved by ACC as *trail stewards*. Every trail will have one or more trail stewards operating under the guidance of an ACC Trail Steward Manager. Their activities include:

- Serving as an emissary for the trail by greeting other users when encountered on the trail, answering questions, and assisting other users with navigation in a friendly manner.
- Trimming vegetation that protrudes into the trail at least once a year to ensure that there is a 4-foot wide and 8-foot high clearance. Clearing vegetation can generally be done with loppers or a small handsaw that is easy to carry while hiking. Pruning branches even with the trunk, while preventing damage to the bark provides the best results for trail user safety and aesthetics. Symmetrical limb removal is recommended. Small trees growing into the trail space should be cut even with the ground. Pro-active cutting of limbs and small trees that may grow into the trail in the future is always helpful.
- Fallen limbs, trees, and other natural debris should be cleared on a *weekly* basis. Major tree blowdowns, where additional assistance is required, should be reported to the ACC Trail Stewards Manager.
- Any litter should be removed on a *weekly* basis.
- Where trail blazes area damaged or missing, they should be replaced with ACC-provided plastic rectangular blazes of the appropriate color for that trail. When nailing blazes to a tree -- about 0.5” space should be left between the nail’s head and the trunk to allow for tree growth.
- Any major repairs required to bridges, kiosks, or other infrastructure should be reported to the ACC Trail Stewards Manager.
- Any unauthorized trail uses, such as motorized vehicles, camping, campfires, or other activities that are not consistent with the conservation objectives on the property should be reported to the ACC Trail Stewards Manager.

Mapping

ACC maintains a current set of trail maps and guides for public access at:
<https://www.amherstnh.gov/conservation-commission/pages/amherst-trails>

In addition, most trailheads have a physical trail map with a QR code that will load an electronic version of a trail map onto a user’s smartphone.

Maps are developed using GPS (a variety of GPS applications can be used). GPS data are then shared with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) to be mapped on their on-line mapping platform, MapGeo (<https://nrpcnh.mapgeo.io/>).