



Your Adventure Starts Nearby.

# CHAPTER LEADERSHIP HANDBOOK



A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO MANAGING AN EFFECTIVE CHAPTER OF THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION

1. Introduction .....	0
The History and Management .....	1
The Partnership .....	2
NCTA Organizational Structure .....	4
2. Chapter Basics .....	8
Chapter Charters and Bylaws .....	9
Core Values .....	9
3. Members and Volunteers .....	10
The Three R's: Recruit, Recognize and Retain .....	10
Reporting Volunteer Hours .....	12
Key Volunteer Position Descriptions and Committee Structures .....	13
4. Financial Management and Chapter Funds .....	18
Chapter Accounts .....	19
Trail Protection Grant .....	21
5. Outreach and Communications .....	23
NCTA Brand Standards .....	23
Chapter Brochures and Newsletters .....	24
NCTA Website and Social Media .....	24
Chapter Pages and Content .....	25
Maintaining a Chapter Email Distribution List: .....	25
Events .....	26
<i>North Star</i> and Blue Blaze Bulletin .....	28
6. Managing the Trail .....	31
Stages of Trail Development .....	32
Equipment Inventory, Registration and Insurance .....	34
Managing Partnerships .....	36
Focus on Safety .....	36
Volunteer Protection .....	37
7. Mapping the Trail .....	38
8. Trail Protection and Private Land .....	40
9. Summary .....	41

# 1. Introduction

## The North Country National Scenic Trail

---

The North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST or NCT), stretching more than 4,600 miles from Vermont to Central North Dakota, is the longest of the 11 National Scenic Trails authorized by Congress. Like its sister trails, it was designed to provide world-class outdoor recreational opportunities in some of America's outstanding landscapes.

Passing through the eight states of North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont. The NCNST connects more than 160 public land units—including parks, forests, scenic attractions, wildlife refuges, game areas, and historic sites. The list includes 10 National Forest areas (Finger Lakes in New York, Allegheny in Pennsylvania, Wayne in Ohio, Hiawatha, Manistee, and Ottawa in Michigan, Chequamegon in Wisconsin, Superior and Chippewa in Minnesota and Sheyenne National Grassland in North Dakota) and four areas managed by the National Park Service (Michigan's Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Wisconsin's St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, New York's Fort Stanwix National Monument, and Ohio's Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park). Other federal facilities along the NCNST include two National Wildlife Refuges (Minnesota's Tamarack and North Dakota's Audubon), two Bureau of Reclamation projects (North Dakota's Garrison Diversion Unit's New Rockford and McCluskey Canals), and six Army Corps of Engineer impoundments (Baldhill Dam at Lake Ashtabula, North Dakota, Tom Jenkins Dam and Burr Oak Lake, William H. Harsha Lake [also known as East Fork Lake], Ohio, Tionesta Lake, the Kinzua Dam, and Allegheny Reservoir, Pennsylvania). The NCNST also threads its way through 57 state parks and state historic areas, 47 state forests, 28 state wildlife or game areas, eight state water conservation districts, at least 10 county forests and parks, a national fish hatchery and a state fish hatchery. Several thousand miles of Trail will eventually cross private land thanks to owners who have granted easements across their property.

There are places along the NCT where it navigates pristine wilderness, expansive wildflower meadows, virgin stands of timber, extraordinary overlooks, and the third largest waterfall east of the Mississippi; other segments take hikers on strolls through towns, past tempting ice cream parlors and aromatic bakeries. Many areas of the NCNST pass through working landscapes used for lumbering, mining, agriculture or other human uses. Throughout, the NCT is deeply connected with American history, following the footsteps of the country's first peoples, voyageurs, surveyors, soldiers, canal boaters, sailors, lumbermen, runaway slaves, miners, and aeronauts as well as a few less savory characters here and there. America's greatest scenic trail is a national treasure, a people's trail, linking and celebrating our natural heritage and the cultural and historic diversity of our northern heartlands. **You are among those greats that build, maintain and protect it for future generations.**

## The History and Management

---

The National Trails System Act of 1968 was ground-breaking legislation that designated National Scenic, Historic and Recreation Trails. The original Act designated two long distance hiking trails (The Appalachian and the Pacific Crest) and called on volunteers and partner groups to make them a reality. There are 11 National Scenic Trails today:

- Appalachian National Scenic Trail
- Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
- Continental Divide National Scenic Trail
- North Country National Scenic Trail
- Ice Age National Scenic Trail
- Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail
- Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail
- Florida National Scenic Trail
- Arizona National Scenic Trail
- New England National Scenic Trail
- Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail



On March 5, 1980 Congress passed legislation adding the North Country National Scenic Trail to the list. The Secretary of the Interior delegated management authority to the National Park Service and volunteer organizations in eight states began to mobilize to put the trail on the ground.

The NCNST is administered by the National Park Service, managed by federal, state, and local agencies, and built and maintained primarily by the volunteers of the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) and its partners. The Comprehensive Management Plan was issued in 1982 and is intended to guide us in our planning, management and use of the NCNST. This document and other plans regarding the management of the Trail can be found at [www.nps.gov/noco](http://www.nps.gov/noco)

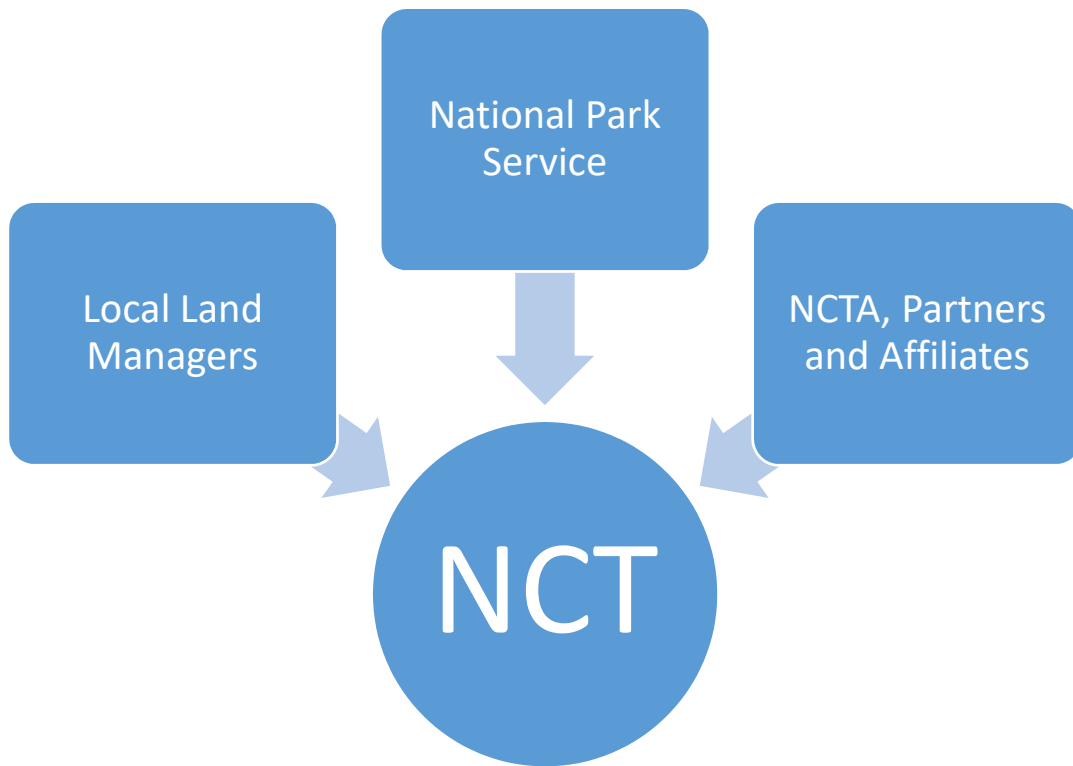
The Nature and Purposes of the North Country Trail, as defined by the National Park Service, is to provide a world-class non-motorized trail experience within a protected trailway and landscape through the northern heartlands of America. The trail, open to foot travel its entire length, may offer other non-motorized uses along particular segments of the trail.

The Trail reflects a tapestry of people both past and present, woven together with the places and stories that define them. The grandeur of rugged mountains, vast prairies and placid lakes, the tranquility of rural farms, the variety of working landscapes, the boundless horizons of the Great Lakes, the splendor of true wilderness, and the nostalgia of historic canal towpaths and communities intertwine to create a cultural tapestry of great breadth and depth.

Linked by common commitment, the Trail is supported by a multitude of public and private partners and volunteers working to create a continuous pathway telling this story.

## The Partnership

---



### **National Park Service (NPS)**

The National Park Service administers the North Country National Scenic Trail, providing management oversight to the entire Trail by working with the federal agencies, state and local governments, private organizations, landowners and land users and providing guidance to NCTA as a partner. The NPS provides: funding for NCTA programs, technical assistance and training, planning and decisions on trail routing, trail tools, supplies and signage for volunteers, trail certification guidelines and volunteer support through the VIP program. Currently, the National Park Service has staff dedicated to the Trail in Lowell, Michigan.

### **Local Land Management Partners**

The land management agencies (USDA Forest Service, State Parks and Forests, etc.) are the legal managing authority for the Trail and the land on which the Trail traverses. Decision making rests with each agency in order to adhere to their specific governing policies and procedures. NPS and NCTA hold many agreements with agencies across the Trail that guide how the Trail should be managed by that agency and spell out conditions of our relationship. If you are unsure of what agreements we hold, please contact NCTA staff to find out.

## **The North Country Trail Association (NCTA)**

NCTA was founded in 1981, and is the primary partner of the National Park Service in the management of the North Country National Scenic Trail (NCNST). A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the NCTA is guided by its Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws with the purpose of achieving its mission and vision. A copy of the Articles and Bylaws can be found at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) and is available from the NCTA Headquarters on request.

### **VISION**

Our vision for the North Country Scenic National Trail is that of the premier footpath of national significance, offering a superb experience for hikers and backpackers in a permanently protected corridor, traversing and interpreting the richly diverse environmental, cultural, and historic features of the northern United States.

### **MISSION**

The mission of North Country Trail Association is to develop, maintain, protect and promote the North Country National Scenic Trail as the premier hiking path across the northern tier of the United States through a trail-wide coalition of volunteers and partners.

### **CORE VALUES**

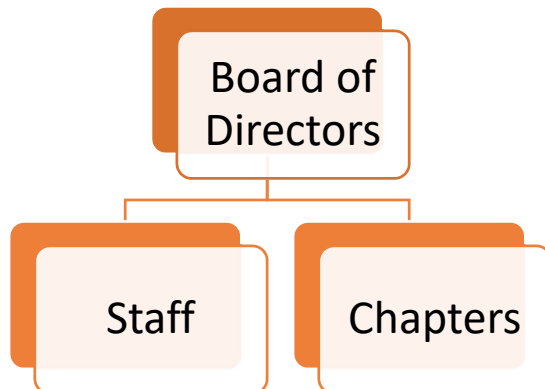
- Volunteerism
- Making a legacy contribution for the greater good to something larger than ourselves
- Stewardship
- Mutual respect, cooperation and partnership
- The importance of exercise, recreation and health

The *NCTA Annual Report* is compiled by NCTA staff and includes program highlights, financial reports and donor recognition. It's a great document to use when talking to potential funders or partners. It is published and available to the public in February of each year.

The Trail is a partnership between the NPS, land management agencies and the volunteer organizations that build and maintain the Trail.

## NCTA Organizational Structure

---



### A Federated Governance Model

NCTA is moving toward operating as a federated system, sharing various responsibilities through its Chapters and Affiliates/Partners, with administrative authority centralized in a national Board of Directors. Under the federated model, the Board establishes policies, common standards and practices, offers training and focuses program priorities that are relevant throughout the Trail and trail community. Locally Chapters exercise significant autonomy in operating within the overarching policy guidance of the Board. Under NCTA’s governance model, the Board is self-perpetuating, with local representation primarily accomplished through communications and relationship building with staff and Board members.

### Board of Directors

The National Board of Directors has ultimate authority and fiscal responsibility for the North Country Trail Association. The Board sets Association-wide policies, raises funds, supervises the Executive Director, approves Chapter charters, and bylaws and may direct the Association’s Chapters with needed policies. The NCTA Board includes at least one member from each state, with the rest being “at-large,” for a total of 14 to 21 Board members. The Board Governance Committee, in consultation with the President and Executive Director, prepare a slate of nominees for the Board positions being vacated and submits for Board election. The NCTA bylaws call for an Executive Committee and an additional five standing committees. The President may convene Ad Hoc Committees as needed. Below is our current list of committees.

### Standing Committees

- **Executive Committee** – The Executive Committee shall consist of the President, the three Vice Presidents, Treasurer, Secretary and selected ex-officio members. It shall carry out policies previously established by the Board of Directors;
- **Board Governance** – Responsible for nominating candidates and officers for the Board of Directors and officer roles, respectively, and making recommendations for strategic and tactical steps that in the aggregate ensure that every director meets his or her potential;
- **Awards** – Responsible for soliciting award nominations, deciding recipients, and presenting awards.
- **Field Grants** – Responsible for the Field Grant program;

- **Trail Protection** - Responsible for developing and supporting Association activities that help protect the NCNST from threats to its corridor; and
- **Advocacy** - Responsible for leading activities to support or fight legislative initiatives on the local, regional, and national level related to issues of strategic importance to the Association or the NCNST.

### **Ad Hoc Committees**

- **Executive Director Goals and Compensation Review** - Responsible for establishing and following a formal process and timetable for evaluating the performance of the Executive Director;
- **Marketing/Communications** - Advise the BOD and staff on developing and carrying out a marketing plan. Make recommendations to BOD and staff regarding addressing strategic planning objectives in marketing and communications;
- **Membership** - Make recommendations regarding membership goals in Strategic Plan: coordinate and support Chapter member recruitment and retention efforts;
- **Long Distance Hikers** - Consider issues and opportunities related to, and the recognition of, long distance hiking on the NCNST;
- **Extended Outing** - Guide Extended Outing Program, develop policy, approve proposals and submit budget requests; and
- **Endowment** – Develop and regularly review policies, based on best practices for nonprofit organizations, for the use and management of the NCTA Endowment Fund.

### **Executive Director**

NCTA's Executive Director is hired and supervised by the Board. The executive director serves as liaison between Board and Staff as well as Chapters. The ED is the NCTA's legal agent, responsible for contracts approval and management at all levels (including Chapter) of organization. The executive director serves as NCTA's spokesperson, negotiator and chief advocacy officer. The ED supervises all NCTA staff as well as exercising management oversight of Chapter operations.

### **Staff**

The Association has full and part-time employees based either at the Association's national headquarters in Lowell, Michigan or remotely across the Trail. Staff members manage the day-to-day operations and growth of the Association, following goals set by the Board. NCTA staff manage the organization's finances (including Chapter accounts) and reporting needed to maintain our 501(c)(3) status. Staff members provide technical assistance, leadership, and coordination to the Association's volunteers, Chapters, Affiliates and Partners. Staff members also provide various services and act as a central point of contact for members and the public and facilitate committee work with the Board of Directors. Staff members are accountable to the Executive Director.

### **Chapters and Volunteers**

NCTA Chapters establish methods and set budgets, priorities and work schedules for their own activities and for the Trail in a designated geographic area. Although a great amount of autonomy is inherent in this dispersed organizational structure, Chapters operate under the bylaws of the NCTA and the direction of the NCTA Board of Directors. Chapters must follow all Association policies for the management of the



organization and all NPS policies regarding the management of the Trail. Chapters are accountable to the national Board, and to designated staff acting on behalf of the Board.

Today, NCTA's volunteers do it all: Plan, build and maintain the Trail, bridges and other structures, lead hikes and attend outreach events, and promote the Trail, provide meals for a hard working trail crews, manage relationships with our land managers and private landowners, as well as support membership recruitment and fundraising for the organization. In 2019, our volunteers contributed 83,300 hours toward building and maintaining the Trail and telling its story. None of this would be possible without you!

### **Partner Organizations and Affiliates**

NCTA has entered into formal agreements with other organizations responsible for managing the NCNST. These organizations are not managed or funded by NCTA but work in coordination for the best management of the Trail. Our current Trail Maintaining Affiliates are the Middlebury Area Land Trust, Adirondack Mountain Club, Finger Lakes Trail Conference, Buckeye Trail Association, Superior Hiking Trail Association, Border Route Trail Association, Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association, the Rachael Carson Trails Conservancy and the Friends of the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery.

See a list of and contact information for all Chapters, Partners and Affiliates online at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org).

### **Volunteer State Councils**

When approved by the Board, Volunteer Councils may be formed when the needs of the Trail in a state or geographic area are best served by one. These councils normally consist of representatives from local Chapters, Affiliates, or Partners and serve to strengthen efforts and improve coordination in a given geographic area. Councils have no authority to act on behalf of the Association, its Board of Directors, officers or staff; as with NCTA Chapters, Volunteer Councils are accountable to the national Board. See the NCTA Bylaws for more information.

## Important Organizational Functions

---

### Advocacy

Advocacy is the art of building relationships with people representing government agencies and legislators. Educating and persuading officials and Members of Congress or state legislatures to support the North Country Trail is a critically important function for the NCTA, at national as well as statewide and local levels. No one has more influence with a legislator than one who lives and votes in the district or state the legislator represents. Cultivating a corps of NCTA volunteers skilled in and willing to build and maintain key connections at local, state and national levels is an important objective.

Advocacy with legislators involves managing contacts in each of their offices, keeping or contributing to a central database that maintains a record of contact data and meeting outcomes, and responding (1) proactively to gain legislator support for bills, appropriations or other issues of interest to the NCTA and (2) reactively, in educating legislators about the impacts of various bills and actions on the Trail.

It's important that the NCTA's advocacy efforts are well coordinated so we have a consistent and powerful voice. The NCTA's advocacy committee is responsible for leading activities to support or fight legislative initiatives on the local, regional, and national level related to issues of strategic importance to the Association or the NCNST, subject at all times to applicable limits the violation of which could jeopardize the tax exempt status of the Association. The committee focuses on national legislation and funding appropriations that impact the NCNST like funding for the National Park Service, the Arrowhead reroute and Vermont extension, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The NCTA accomplishes much of its advocacy efforts through partnership with the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS), of which NCTA is a member of its Leadership Council.

We currently don't have the capacity to address all of the state and local legislation that may impact the trail but urge you to bring important items to our attention.

## 2. Chapter Basics

### What does a Chapter do?

---

The better question might be... What doesn't a Chapter do? Our Chapters build and maintain the Trail, associated structures and promote its use. They work to build partnerships with land managers and with landowners to protect it for future generations. They fundraise for the organization and recruit members and volunteers to keep us going. Our Chapters aren't just part of the NCTA, they ARE the NCTA. Along with this handbook, the NCTA offers a Chapter leadership webinar. We recommend every Chapter Officer participate in one of these sessions to get started.

#### **Volunteer Management**

Each Chapter is a team of volunteers. You will have many different volunteers with unique backgrounds and personalities and they have been given diverse duties and responsibilities. It's the job of the Chapter Leadership to ensure that our volunteers feel supported, appreciated, recognized and are given the direction and support needed to do their jobs. It's also critical that that they represent NCTA in a positive light. See Section 3: Membership and Volunteers.

#### **Trail Management**

Responsibility for each mile of the NCNST is covered under charter by a Chapter, or a Partner or Affiliate organization. It is your responsibility to work with the land management agencies (federal, state and local), landowners and partner organizations to insure that the Trail is built, maintained and signed properly in accordance with National Park Service standards set out in *A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance*, which can be found online in the Volunteer Resources section of [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org). Developing a long distance hiking path takes patience, persistence, flexibility and a good sense of humor, and your perseverance will be rewarded. See Section 6: Managing the Trail.

#### **Trail Promotion**

Your hard work building and maintaining the NCNST will create a world class National Scenic Trail. Now let's get the public to enjoy it. Your Chapter has endless tools at your disposal to promote the Trail in your community. Public hikes, outreach events, trail festivals, and promoting Hike 100 are just a few ideas of ways to get the word out. Invite your elected officials to go hiking, take out ads in the local paper, start a meet-up group for parents to hike with their kids, promote our Hike 100 program and develop a geotrail. And don't forget online; create engaging content for your website and post regularly on NCTA's and your Chapter's social media channels. See Section 5: Outreach and Communications.

### **Communication with Headquarters**

All Chapter officer/leaders will receive a monthly email titled *NCTA News for Chapter, Affiliate and Partner Leadership*. You will also receive announcements as things arise. Don't hesitate to call NCTA HEADQUARTERS or our regional staff at any time when you need something, to ask questions, etc. Managing a Chapter is a difficult and multifaceted job. We don't expect you to know all the details. We are here as a resource, call on us when you need it!

Each year, NCTA staff will ask Chapters to submit a brief report on their accomplishments of the year and their anticipated projects coming up. This will help us share the big picture of the progress we are making Trail-wide.

## **Chapter Charters and Bylaws**

---

Each Chapter must have a charter and bylaws. A Chapter's Initial Charter shall last for five years. During its first five years a Chapter is expected to complete its by-laws. NCTA provides the template for the Chapter charter and a template for the Chapter bylaws. Several items are required but there is some discretion.

After successfully completing their first five-year charter, and upon completion of Chapter by-laws, NCTA Chapters shall be granted a renewed charter without time limits (lasting indefinitely). Chapter charters may be revised or renewed with the consent of the Chapter President and the NCTA Board President. The NCTA Board of Directors may void any Charter by written notice to the Chapter leadership on the basis of non-fulfillment of the Chapter's obligations to the NCTA. Any Chapter may notify the NCTA Board of Directors, in writing, of its intent to disband and, by so doing void its Charter. Keep a copy of your bylaws in this book for easy access. Review them on a regular basis and make sure you are fulfilling all the obligations. If not, the Chapter should consider revising them.

If you would like a copy of your Chapter's charter or bylaws, please contact NCTA Headquarters.

## **Core Values**

---

The North Country Trail Association is guided by the following core values that represent the organization's commitment to the Trail, our partnerships and each other.

**Accountability** - We take ownership and responsibility for our actions, policies and decisions. We engage in wise stewardship of public and private resources.

**Collaboration** - We value the spirit of cooperation between staff, volunteers, all partners and landowners and are committed to building and maintaining this culture of collaboration. Service is the backbone of our organization.

**Excellence** - We strive for exceptional quality and safety, both in the work we do in building and maintaining the Trail and in the experiences of the users of this world-class trail.

**Inclusion** - We are committed to ensuring that everyone is respected, included and valued for their contributions to our mission and culture. We actively welcome people of different backgrounds, perspectives, thoughts and beliefs.

## 3. Members and Volunteers

### You are a VIP

---

What does it *mean* to be a volunteer on the North Country National Scenic Trail? Members and volunteers are the heart and soul of NCTA. They give us more hands building and maintaining trail, more leaders taking groups of kids on hikes, more sawyers to clear blow downs after a big storm and more people singing the praises of the NCNST to everyone they come across. And yes, members bring more money into the Association, allowing us all to do more work. Most importantly members share the enthusiasm and passion for a long distance foot trail across the northern states, creating a unified voice speaking on behalf of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

It means something different and unique to each and every one of you but you share a commonality and kinship with a special group of people, not only across our eight states but across the entire National Park System. You are a Volunteer-In-Park (or “VIP”), one of the trustees of the many special places throughout our country called National Parks. You are one of the lucky people who other people see having fun at work in our nation’s most treasured places and think, “Wow. I wish I did what they do!”

You are a volunteer but as a Chapter leader you also take on the role of volunteer manager. In this section we will cover the three R’s of volunteer management, the importance of and how to report your Chapter’s volunteer hours and some key volunteer positions and committee structures for your Chapter to consider.

### The Three R’s: Recruit, Recognize and Retain

---

The key to managing volunteers lies in the **Three R’s: Recruit, Recognize and Retain**. You should actively try to recruit new additions; you should be recognizing your volunteers’ work and making them feel appreciated; and you should be thinking of ways to keep them engaged. Remember that this job shouldn’t fall all on one person alone. Inspire those around you and no doubt you will be inspired by them. Start a membership committee and/or designate a membership liaison that will work with the NCTA Membership Committee to get the job done.

Visit [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) for additional information and volunteer resources.

#### Recruit

In an NCTA membership survey, Chapters and Affiliates reported that the top three ways to increase membership are:

1. Trail Events
2. Exhibit at public event/location
3. Focused hikes (section hike challenges, special hikes, etc.)

### Some recruitment tools available to you:

**Volunteer Match Learning Center** - Just a reminder that Volunteer Match can help us recruit volunteers through their website. Not only is this a great way to reach out to new potential volunteers but they offer great resources for managing the volunteers you already have. Check out the schedule of trainings in their [online learning center](#). And if you are interested in posting your volunteer opportunities, contact NCTA staff to create a chapter login.

**Volunteer.gov** - Submit volunteer listings to the National Park Service that will be seen nationally.

**Website list of R & R Strategies** - Volunteer Resources at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org).

The number one reason people say they don't volunteer is that no one ever asked. Make sure you ask.

### Recognize

We primarily recognize our volunteers with Volunteer Awards (National Park Service, NCTA and Chapter Honor Awards) but there is also plenty of room for your Chapter to develop your own award/reward system and don't discount the how far a "thank you" goes.

**National Park Service Awards** - The NPS rewards our volunteers based on volunteer hours. The Awards are presented by NPS staff at a chosen event each year except for the parks pass which is awarded when earned.

100 hours - NPS pin, name badge, and certificate

250 hours - Water bottle

250 hours - America the Beautiful parks pass

400 hours - Personalized shirt with the NCTA logo and the NPS volunteer patch

1,000 hours - Personalized vest

2,500 hours - Personalized jacket

4,000 hours - Presidential Award (pin, certificate and a letter from White House)

10,000 hours - Personalized plaque

**NCTA Awards** – Each NCTA’s Awards Committee takes nominations for a series of Volunteer Awards (see list of awards, criteria and nomination form at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org)). We have categories for volunteers that build trail and build partnerships, categories for young volunteers and those in government service, for landowners and business owners. So, take a good look at those around you that support the trail in many different ways and choose a few that you think deserve to be recognized. Nominations are generally **due in the spring** dependent on timing of our Annual Celebrations.



**The Chapter Honor Awards** are chosen by the Chapter to honor someone who demonstrates loyalty, commitment and hard work annually to the local organization’s chosen activities. These Awards will not be part of the NCTA Awards presentation, but instead chosen in early September by each Chapter/Affiliate and awarded at a local event.

### **Retain**

Each month your Chapter receives a set of Membership Reports. The purpose of these reports is to provide our Chapter officers with the tools and information needed to maintain great Chapter membership. This document explains what information is provided in each report. These reports are sent via email to the list of Chapter officers on file at NCTA headquarters. If you need to add or delete a recipient, please notify NCTA headquarters with the changes. Monthly, there are three membership reports that are provided based on the information at the close of the month previous. If a chapter does not have new or expired chapter members, those reports will not be included in the correspondence:

1. **Membership Report** - This report lists the members your Chapter has. It will provide the members contact information and details about their membership dates.
2. **New Members Report** - This report gives you the contact information for those who are new to your Chapter. +
3. **Expired Members Report** - This report lists members with a membership that has expired.

### **Reporting Volunteer Hours**

---

Volunteer hours are one of the biggest demonstrations of public support when justifying federal funding or other grants and when telling people why they should care about the NCNST. Your hours illustrate the commitment citizens have to the Trail and why it should be supported by our communities.

Volunteers have several ways to report their hours. You can fill out the form online at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) or complete the individual or log sheet mentioned below found in the Volunteer Resources at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org), and email, mail or fax it to the NCTA headquarters.

Some Chapters choose to report on behalf of the entire Chapter on a regular basis and others let the individual members handle their own reporting. Whichever you choose, we suggest you report hours at the time you have completed your volunteer duties and always keep a copy for your records. The NPS year end for volunteer hours is September 30<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, all hours from October 1<sup>st</sup> through until September 30<sup>th</sup> need to be submitted by October 7<sup>th</sup> in order for NCTA to report to NPS the total number of hours.

The Volunteer Hours Reporting forms have recently been updated. Here are some things you will notice: We now ask you to report your hours in seven categories instead of four. This is an effort to better define the work that is being done and to be in line with the activities on which the National Park Service is required to report. The categories are described right on the report form so you don't need to reference a separate document. It may seem burdensome at first, but it really will help us reflect the reality of the work across the Trail and show us where we need to put additional resources. Do your best to choose the category that reflects your activities. Having the hours reported is what's most important.

Along with the online form, we provide two printed forms for you to report your hours:

#### **Volunteer Log for Groups**

- A group who performs service on a limited basis (e.g. the Boy Scouts or a college group.) Total hours can be reported for the group as a whole. Individual names do not have to be listed but a total number of adults and youth is needed.
- A list of volunteers who gathered to work on a specific project. Individual names can be listed for credit. Names and addresses of those who are *not* NCTA members can be listed on the back of the form so that they may be added to our mailing list.

#### **Volunteer Log for Individuals**

- Individuals wishing to report their hours themselves. Again, we suggest turning in hours when work has been completed or at the minimum quarterly through the year.

We tally the numbers each year after the October 7<sup>th</sup> deadline and report the total number of volunteers, the volunteer hours broken down into the 7 categories, as well as Boy and Girl Scouts that have volunteered to the National Park Service. We use those numbers to quantify the volunteer match on grant applications, to advocate for NPS funding with our elected officials and to show the world the great contribution you make with your time and energy.

### **Key Volunteer Position Descriptions and Committee Structures**

---

Chapters consist of volunteers in key positions or entire committees that assist in creating a sustainable Chapter. Successful Chapters strive to have a large group of volunteers, each doing important tasks coordinated with one another.

Many of our volunteers got involved because they want to dig in the dirt... they want to build trail. But there are many others that want to have a role in assisting with the Chapter's other responsibilities – and we need them all! Try to assess the skills that already exist in your Chapter. Do you have the head of a PR firm, a professor of history, a lawyer or party planner? Your volunteers are often much more skilled than you realize and it only takes a conversation to open up that door. Recruit new volunteers specifically for the



skills you do need. Look to the businesses, universities and other organizations in your area that may have people that could fill a much needed roll in your Chapter.

Chapter officers must be NCTA members in good standing according to our bylaws. The NCTA headquarters keeps a list of all officers and other leadership roles in order to maintain good communication. Please inform us when you have an election or appoint a new position.

The main four Chapter officer positions are:

### **Chapter President (and Vice President)**

The Chapter President is the liaison between the Chapter and the NCTA. The president should be able to communicate regularly with the NCTA staff about potential projects in the area as well as communicate NCTA news with the rest of the Chapter. The President should be a leader for Chapter volunteers, organize, and encourage the Chapter's membership, and be able to keep abreast of local issues concerning the Trail. It is suggested that the President and Vice President be ad hoc members or liaisons to all committees by each focusing on half of the committees. It is also good practice to plan for Chapter leadership succession.

### **Chapter Treasurer**

The Chapter Treasurer is responsible for keeping up with Chapter expenses, applying for field grants, and funding from the National Park Service, and keeping tabs on receipts. The Treasurer should report to Chapter Membership regarding Chapter financial statements, approve Chapter expenditures (volunteer reimbursements, vendor/supplier payments), manages the Chapter Petty Cash (if applicable) and communicate effectively with NCTA's financial manager.

### **Chapter Secretary**

The Chapter Secretary keeps the Chapter meeting minutes and shares them with Chapter members, NCTA staff, the State Volunteer Council (if applicable). This volunteer should to attend all meetings, and maintain communications between members, NCTA, and other groups.

### **Other Possible Positions**

The following are example volunteer position descriptions. Many of these could be filled by one person or a committee of people. The four main officer positions (President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary) are standard but many of the other positions are dependent upon the Chapter. Tweak them based on your needs and the strengths and skills of your volunteers.

### **Events, Outreach and Communication**

Develops an effective outreach strategy to promote the NCTA and get people involved including events, improving public information, and building partnerships within the community. They will plan hikes, winter programs, celebrations, and fun activities for the membership. They do not have to be good at any of the specific activities planned; rather they need to be able to attract "specialists" within the membership or friends outside the Chapter to lead hikes, give programs, or teach skills.

## **Possible volunteer positions within Events, Outreach and Communication:**

### **Hike Leader**

The Hike Leader is a huge asset for building membership. The best outing leaders are those who know a bit about a lot of things in the area, and who can maintain a reasonable pace for hikes and understand that safety is the top priority. Remember that the slowest hiker determines the pace of a hike. Having a leader who can make frequent short stops to discuss flora and fauna, keep an eye on those in the back of the group, and share their enthusiasm for the outdoors with all is a real asset. A good hike leader also involves others who may have different fields of expertise to expand the value of the outing.

### **Volunteer Manager**

The Volunteer Manager insures that all volunteers at work parties are signed up as VIPs, helps coordinate the reporting of volunteer hours for the whole Chapter, and helps recruit new volunteers and might start a Chapter award program for your existing volunteers, as well as share your great volunteer stories.

### **Communications Liaison**

The Communication Liaison maintains contact with members and keeps them informed of work projects, outings, and meetings. This individual should be in charge of the Chapter's brochures, newsletters, website, social media and updates the main NCTA calendar with the local Chapter's events. In addition, they make sure that the local paper and other media outlets are aware of Chapter activities, especially workdays and accomplishments.

### **Webmaster**

The Webmaster is responsible for making sure the Chapter's website information is up to date.

### **Membership Chair**

It is important to have a designated membership contact person to support existing members, recognize volunteers, encourage renewal, and actively recruit new members following the plan of Recruit, Recognize and Retain. One major goal is to offer at least one event per month open to the public by working with the chairs of Trail Development, Hike Leaders, and Events & Outreach. It is best if the Membership Chair can recruit individuals to contact renewing, lapsed or expired members, welcome new members, plan events, set up exhibits, contact local organizations, recognize volunteers.

### **Trail Development/Management**

This is a big job and will most likely take a committee. This group will develop the plan for the Trail in your Chapter's section, assess the needs of the Trail and prioritize the projects, communicate those priorities to NCTA's Director of Trail Development and NPS staff, assist in grant writing to fund the projects, manage the relationships with the land managers and insure the quality of the Trail lives up to its National Scenic Trail status.

## **Possible positions within the Trail Development/Management committee:**

### **Trail Adopter and Adopter Coordinator**

The Trail Adopter takes responsibility for a specific section of Trail, monitors its condition, maintains what they can and reports back if assistance is needed. The Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the entire Trail in the Chapter's section is well maintained by managing the Adopter program. This includes being sure that no Adopter is responsible for more than they can handle. The Adopter Coordinator recruits new and replacement Adopters, sees that they are trained, and ensures that they do a thorough job of maintaining their sections of Trail.

### **Crew Leader**

The Crew Leader is responsible for organizing and leading crews in the field. In addition to knowledge about NCNST trail construction standards, the Crew Leader should be able to safely lead and motivate volunteers and have a good understanding of successful project planning and implementation. Crew Leaders must have a strong commitment to building sustainable trails and get satisfaction out of helping others have a good time while doing good work. Leading trail work volunteers' entails teaching and supervising the technical tasks of a particular project while managing a team of people who typically bring a wide range of skills, experience and physical stamina to the crew. The NCTA offers Crew Leader trainings annually across the Trail. Contact the Director of Trail Development for more information.

### **Quartermaster**

The Quartermaster is responsible for keeping tools in good condition. The Quartermaster schedules the assignment of tools like DR Mowers. The Quartermaster also makes sure that, along with the Adopter Coordinator, workers are familiar with safe operation of the tools that they check out. Quartermasters also schedule routine maintenance, replacement, or repair of key equipment.

### **Trail Information Specialist /GIS**

The primary responsibility of this position is to provide the NCTA with current trail data (from GPS) for any new or rerouted trail or trail features, as well as fill in a list of descriptive attributes about these elements. This person would also act as the contact for the NCTA's GIS Coordinator during reviews and updates of maps being made within that Chapter's area. See Section 7: Mapping the Trail.

### **Blaze Painter**

It takes a special individual to mark the Trail carefully; placing blazes where they are visible and spaced close enough to be useful but not so close together as to be intrusive. Volunteers who paint blazes must consider the setting of the Trail, learn about the characteristics of the bark of a variety of trees, have the patience to pick the best tree for each blaze, and paint neat tidy blazes.

### **Education/Training**

Identify the needs of the Chapter's volunteers to effectively manage their Trail section and communicate with the NCTA headquarters and NPS on how to meet those needs.

**Camp Cook/Chef**

The Camp Cook plans menus, purchases food, and prepares great-tasting hearty meals for workdays and Chapter gatherings. Long time campers, scout leaders, or folks with a reputation for great food at potlucks really enjoy this position. It is always OK to have more than one cook!

**Other possible volunteer positions:****Grant Writer/Fundraiser**

This person should assist the Chapter in all grant writing (public, private, corporate and foundation) and keep track of the requirements, progress and reporting for these funds, as well as coordinate their efforts with NCTA's Director of Development.

**Trail Protection/Landowner Coordinator**

The Landowner Coordinator really needs to like working with new and varied people, have the ability to relate to local issues and values, enjoy talking to people one-on-one, and be able to explain the Trail to property owners/managers. Patience and knowledge of landowner agreements is a requirement as well.

**Historian**

Each Chapter has a storied past and an exciting future. Find a volunteer that is interested in researching and recording your past, as well documenting what you are doing now so those stories are kept long into the future. This will help you celebrate milestones, anniversaries, accomplishments and significant projects or contributions.

## 4. Financial Management and Chapter Funds

Financial management is a skill that does not come easy to all. As an IRS-registered nonprofit organization, the NCTA has important financial management standards that must be followed. This section will focus on the ins and outs of managing your Chapter funds, what to expect as a Chapter Treasurer and what support you can expect from NCTA staff.

The North Country Trail Association is incorporated, and is recognized as a 501(c)(3) organization by the Internal Revenue Service. As such, the national Board of Directors of the NCTA has ultimate fiscal responsibility for the entire organization, including each Chapter. The finances of Chapters are not independent of the overall finances of the NCTA. Although local officers control local funds, all transactions must be reported to the IRS annually, through incorporation in the Association's form 990. Failure to report all transactions of the Association (including those handled locally on behalf of the Association or its local entities) would amount to filing fraudulent or incomplete reports to the IRS. Further, Board policy requires an annual audit. Like the form 990, this audit must take into account the entirety of the Association's finances and transactions, including those handled locally. The Association currently manages more than 50 independent accounts, including operations accounts of Chapters and state entities, restricted grants or other projects, etc. To facilitate our required annual audit as well as the fiscal oversight responsibilities of the national Board, the NCTA holds these accounts in one central bank. If the accounts were dispersed to local banks, the annual audit required by the federal government would be virtually impossible or astronomically expensive, not to mention a huge additional burden for Chapters.

In managing Association funds in this manner Chapters enjoy significant freedom from onerous accounting, reporting and licensing requirements – at both state and national levels that each would otherwise be required to do individually in order to maintain nonprofit 501(c)(3) status and its associated advantages. Despite the reporting requirements of the IRS, the audit requirements of the federal government, and its need to provide organization wide fiscal oversight, the NCTA Board recognizes that volunteers need and deserve an easy and flexible system to make local purchases and accept local revenues. To meet these expectations, the Board has established and improved policies over the years concerning the management of state and Chapter funds. This section summarizes the current policies in effect, adds new flexibility for investments, establishes procedures to address noncompliance and offers suggestions for fundraising at the chapter level.

Sound financial management is the basis of all successful organizations. If your financial building blocks are in place, you are free to take off and accomplish your mission.

## Chapter Accounts

---

The NCTA maintains a basic “operating account” for each Chapter and approved Volunteer Council.

Two types of deposits are typically made into Chapter accounts.

- Revenue shares as defined by NCTA policy on National Funding of Chapters
- Donations directly to the Chapter

NCTA Field Grants and other grants from outside agencies or organizations are held and tracked separately for project tracking purposes and/or determined by the specific grant agreement.

### Monthly Reports from NCTA HEADQUARTERS

Monthly reports for each Chapter account are emailed to Chapter officers each month. The reports cover the activity for the previous month, and include opening and closing account balances. Reports are emailed even if no transactions were recorded. Volunteers may call or email the Financial Administrator at the NCTA headquarters at any time to ask about the balance of an account, or to question the information shown on past reports.

To track spending on Field Grants or other special projects, NCTA HEADQUARTERS will only provide a separate project report each month the project has activity (spending). This report will include project expenses and balance.

### Chapter Petty Cash

The NCTA formerly allowed Chapters to maintain petty cash accounts. To facilitate proper financial management, the Board decided to eliminate the use of petty cash accounts.

NCTA Chapters are not authorized to open or maintain accounts at any financial institution. All funds controlled by Chapters must be deposited in their chapter operating account managed by NCTA HEADQUARTERS.

### Paying and Reimbursing Expenses

NCTA headquarters will not charge a Chapter expense against any account without the authorization of a Chapter President or Treasurer or, in the case of a volunteer council account, the Volunteer Council Chair. NCTA HEADQUARTERS has the authority to allocate expenses associated with Chapter activity to those Chapters such as trailer registration, property or event insurance, etc. In some cases, a Chapter President or Treasurer might want to send NCTA HEADQUARTERS a note giving blanket authorization for certain types of expenses for a certain volunteer. For instance: “It’s ok to reimburse any newsletter expenses that John Doe submits.” That way, NCTA HEADQUARTERS can speed up the reimbursement without needing to involve a local officer every time. If NCTA HEADQUARTERS receives reimbursement requests that have not been authorized by a local officer, NCTA HEADQUARTERS staff will hold them until they can get authorization. This protects the Chapter by ensuring that only approved expenses are charged to the Chapter’s accounts.

There are four different ways for a Chapter to access its funds to pay expenses:

1. If a **volunteer pays for expenses personally**, they can send NCTA HEADQUARTERS an Expense Report Form (signed by an appropriate Chapter officer) and NCTA HEADQUARTERS will promptly send a check to the volunteer for reimbursement. The Chapter or state entity can set up any procedure for handling

these reimbursement requests and getting them to NCTA HEADQUARTERS. Expenses should be reported within 90 days.

2. A Chapter can **set up a charge account under the NCTA's name with a local vendor** that it uses frequently (like a hardware store or lumber yard). Then, authorized volunteers can go in, make a purchase, and charge it to the account. The vendor then bills NCTA HEADQUARTERS directly, and NCTA HEADQUARTERS pays the bill. With charge accounts like this, the Chapter Treasurer or President should let NCTA HEADQUARTERS know in advance: to expect a bill, roughly how much it will be, that it's ok to pay it, and which account to apply it to. A quick email to the Financial Administrator is fine. For instance: "We're buying some lumber from 'Sally's Lumber' and you should be getting a bill for around \$250. It's ok to pay it, and please charge it to our special account for the 'Rattlesnake Creek Crossing' project."

3. If a Chapter is going to make a purchase and knows exactly how much it will be and who the vendor will be, the President or Treasurer can **request a check made out in advance**. NCTA HEADQUARTERS will send it to whichever volunteer will need it, so he or she can take it to the store to make the purchase.

4. The Chapter President or Treasurer can direct a vendor to send their invoice directly to NCTA HEADQUARTERS for payment. Payments can be made by check or over the phone with a credit card if needed. Prior notification to the Financial Administrator is appreciated.

## **Noncompliance**

The NCTA has a few measures in place to be sure that the finances of Chapters and state entities are being managed appropriately. The IRS, the Association's auditors, the federal government, and the Association's donors place various expectations on the NCTA, and the Board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that these expectations are met. Inappropriate management of funds could jeopardize the Association's nonprofit status, federal funding, budget, or credibility with donors. Equally important, the Board acknowledges the importance of open, transparent and timely communications with Chapters regarding management of chapter funds as well as NCTA finances. NCTA pledges adequate oversight of NCTA HEADQUARTERS operations to ensure that financial management and accounting functions are in accordance with accounting standards. The Board further will ensure that regular reports on NCTA's financial status are made to Chapter leadership through timely monthly statements.

## **Examples of problems:**

### **Over-Billing an Account**

Volunteers will be held personally liable for any expense they incur (directly or indirectly) on behalf of the Association that **exceeds the available balance** in the account to which the expense is being charged. Under most circumstances, the Association will refuse payment of such expenses. In rare instances, the Association may agree to loan funds to an account if arrangements have been made in advance between the volunteer(s) incurring the expense(s) and the Executive Director to repay the loan. Alternately, an officer of the Chapter or state entity may promptly request the Association to transfer funds from another account to temporarily cover the deficit, provided that the officer has the appropriate authority over such funds and that such use does not violate any restrictions on the funds.

### **Failure to Report Transactions**

All income generated locally must be submitted to NCTA HEADQUARTERS in reasonable time (no more than 30 days). Revenue sharing and Field Grants will be withheld from any Chapter or state entity that fails to report transactions and balances according to the guidelines in this document. Failure to report

expenditures within a reasonable time (90 days after the expense or the completion of a project), might cause reimbursement to be reduced or denied.

### **Chapter Fundraising**

Chapters are encouraged to coordinate fundraising efforts with NCTA HEADQUARTERS. Fundraising informed by and coordinated with NCTA HEADQUARTERS ensures smooth functioning and avoids conflicting or competitive efforts.

### **Chapters Seeking Outside Grants**

NCTA encourages Chapter initiative, in coordination with Association objectives and policies, to pursue grant funding at the local level. For all grants over \$500, Chapters must first coordinate with and obtain permission from NCTA HEADQUARTERS before submitting the grant application. With appropriate lead time NCTA HEADQUARTERS can offer guidance in grant writing, advice in coordinating efforts with other Chapters, councils and Affiliates, and ensure compliance with NCTA policy. Chapters must list North Country Trail Association as grant recipient on all applications (with funds then allocated to Chapters according to policy).

### **Employee Matching Grants**

Chapter members who are employed by companies offering matching donations/shared giving options, or who make donations in match to a volunteer's documented hours, are encouraged to designate NCTA as the recipient. Upon request Chapter members may share all or a portion of these donations with the local Chapter.

### **Trail Protection Grant**

NCTA's Trail Protection Grant has been established to provide funding to permanently protect the corridor of the North Country National Scenic Trail. Grants may be applied toward the purchase of Rights of Way including Trail Access Easements (TAE) and related costs and in some cases, the acquisition of conservation easements or fee simple land purchase. The size of each grant is limited only by the funds available and by competing needs for such funds. The Trail Protection Committee reviews grant requests as they come in. To the extent possible, the NCTA will provide technical assistance, but the awarding of a Trail Protection Grant carries with it the assumption that local volunteers will play a significant role in the acquisition/protection process. See Section 8: Trail Protection and Private Land for more information on the [\*Trail Protection Grant Guidelines and Application\*](#).

### **Field Grant Program**

To support the work of volunteers, NCTA offers [\*Field Grants\*](#) in the amounts of \$200-\$5000 to Chapters, Affiliates and Partner organizations. Field Grants are funded by membership dues received and additional funding as available. Applications are reviewed four times each year by the Field Grant Committee and awarded according to merit, benefits to the Trail and the Association, need of the applicant, the applicant's grant history and available funds. Field Grants funds projects like special events or programs to build public support of the Trail; Installation or repair of the Trail, trail facilities, trail signage or displays; Purchase of major tools or equipment for work related to the Trail; and volunteer training events.



## **Tools and Equipment**

The NPS provides funds for chainsaw training as available (check with the NPS Volunteer Coordinator to schedule a training) as well as CPR and First Aid certification (check with NCTA staff for availability of funds). The NPS provides trail marking and signage, tools, blaze paint and safety equipment as needed. Please use the *NPS Sign, Tool & Equipment Order Form* for these items, which can be found on NCTA's website.

## **Procurement of Products and Services**

It is the policy of the NCTA to ensure full and open competition between potential vendors or contractors on project awards, in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget.

Federal projects or grants are awarded to applicants from Chapters, clubs, and NCTA Affiliate/Partner organizations. It is the responsibility of the project award recipient to obtain a minimum of three quotes from local vendors or contractors solicited to provide project products or services. If competitive quotes are not solicited a written justification for lack of competition must be submitted to the NCTA Office Manager or Financial Administrator. (Reference Schedule A in the full policy.) The quotes and price/cost support for vendor or contractor selection shall be maintained by the project award recipient for a minimum of one year after completion of the project.

In the event a single vendor or contractor is retained on a project or projects that will pay them \$25,000 or more the NCTA must confirm that the vendor or contractor has not been suspended or debarred by the Federal Government. It is the responsibility of the project award recipient to notify the NCTA Office Manager or Financial Administrator of the vendor/contractor name and address. The NCTA Office Manager or Financial Administrator will check the Federal Excluded Parties List System at [epls.gov](http://epls.gov) for any incident of suspension or debarment for the vendor/contractor. If the vendor/contractor is suspended the length and reasoning for the suspension can be reviewed and a determination made whether to retain the vendor/contractor. If the vendor/contractor has been debarred, a new supplier must be located and retained.

The NCTA is committed to providing full and accurate disclosure regarding projects and grants from their multiple funding sources. Project award recipients are required to submit project details and supporting documentation upon request from the NCTA in the event of an audit or program review. Questions regarding this policy can be forwarded to the NCTA Executive Director, Office Manager, or Financial Administrator.

# 5. Outreach and Communications

## NCTA Brand Standards

---

A brand is more than just a logo. It is a promise about what an organization is and what benefits it delivers every time people come in contact with it. Our brand is experienced by the public in what they see, hear, read and personally encounter with the North Country Trail Association and our Chapters. If we are consistent in the way we present ourselves, we can increase the public's understanding of what we do. By adopting a consistent brand identity, our Chapters will help the public to recognize they are a part of the larger whole - whether they are from North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York or Vermont. At the same time, the character of each individual Chapter is important. There are many things you can do to highlight what is special about your section of the NCT and your Chapter, while still creating a connection to the larger community. In the long run, adopting a consistent and a unified brand will help us become a stronger organization. Our supporters will remember us, return to us, and recommend us to others.

To help us achieve our consistent and cohesive message, the North Country Trail Association established and approved (2020) brand standards for our organization and our Chapters. To review these specific standards, please visit the Volunteer Resources web page at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org).

### Chapter Logos

NCTA Chapters, as members of the eight-state North Country Trail community and the aggregate North Country Trail Association, need to adopt the established branding standards in order to maintain our organization's cohesive message. As mentioned above, by adopting a consistent brand identity and message, our Chapters will help the public to recognize they are a part of the larger whole. Think of the American Red Cross as an example, no matter where you are when a disaster strikes, you will always be able to know where to find help by recognizing the same organizational brand – regardless of the specific chapter.



We want to achieve the same recognition for NCTA Chapters across the North Country National Scenic Trail. As an added benefit to recognition, NCTA Chapters will also save time, money and effort, by utilizing this design work provided for them. You can download your Chapter logo for free from the Volunteer Resources web page at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org).



## Chapter Brochures and Newsletters

Chapters are encouraged to create print or electronic brochures and newsletters for their members. Brochures are primarily a marketing tool to help “sell” your Chapter or event to prospective members. They are also your chance to show off, so make sure to use appealing and positive ideas when developing content. Also keep in mind, that readers generally just scan brochures and do not spend too much time reading specific details. Create content that has both eye-catching visuals and written highlights but does not provide an abundance of detailed information. Consider the audience: Are you trying to recruit volunteers? Inform a community about your Chapter’s Trail section? Advertise Chapter events? Chapter brochures should include an overview map or description of your Chapter’s area. NCTA’s Technical Series maps are also a great resource for Chapters.

Newsletters are a chance to provide more in-depth information to current members and possible prospective members. Content can include upcoming event/meeting details, member stories or trail tales, important news updates, success stories, and more. While you may want to use some catchy visuals with newsletters too, information distribution is the main focus of this communication piece. Also, information that is written in a conversational manner, using clear, concise, and professional language, will work most effectively. Consider using social media channels to spread announcements faster.

Finally, whether you are creating a brochure or newsletter, whether it is electronic or print, please adhere to the NCTA branding standards in their entirety for consistency. When using email for your newsletters, please adhere to anti-spam laws which require you to have someone’s permission to send them email, and a way for them to unsubscribe themselves. Using a free service like MailChimp will keep you compliant.

## NCTA Website and Social Media

The NCTA website is a wealth of organized information from the national level down to the Chapters and Affiliates. To save time spent developing your print publications and to keep publications concise, it is recommended to keep written content brief and direct the reader to the website. There, they may learn about topics beyond what a brochure could hold. When sharing website navigational information, it is recommended to only use [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) or one level further, such as [northcountrytrail.org/hike100challenge](http://northcountrytrail.org/hike100challenge). Otherwise the URL gets too lengthy to interpret and it will waste space in your publication. There is also a chance the URL will change in the future, so simply using [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) avoids potentially ineffective links.

The NCTA maintains both a Facebook and an Instagram account. Many Chapters maintain their own Facebook pages, as well. Chapters and individuals are encouraged to share content from the main NCTA page often and tag/hashtag for easy searching and categorization. The NCTA headquarters staff also encourages Chapters to pitch social media post topics. Tag with **@northcountrytrail** and use the main hashtags **#northcountrytrail** **#nationalscenictrail** and **#hike100nct**. There is also a North Country Trail Community Facebook group, which is administered / moderated lightly by NCTA staff and more so by a few Chapter leadership volunteers. This acts as a forum for trail users in search of NCT information.

The NCTA utilizes Flickr for photo storage and sharing. When photos are submitted to the NCTA (e.g. posted on the social media channels or submitted alongside a Hike 100 Completion Form), the photographer is granting the NCTA permission to use the photo(s) with proper photographer credit. The

Flickr page is accessible to the public but the photo permissions policy remains: The photographer must be credited when a photo is used.

### **Chapter Pages and Content**

Each Chapter has a designated web page within the main NCTA website, providing higher visibility for your Chapter, more consistency across the Association, and less technical maintenance burden for your Chapter leadership. Chapters are asked to provide brief yet engaging introductions of their Chapter, suggested hikes, links to any social media or meet-up groups, basic contact information, any helpful links to area information, and a few high-resolution photos. To request changes or updates to your page, please contact the Marketing and Communications Coordinator at the NCTA headquarters.

Chapters are also encouraged to contribute to the NCTA website with timely information, such as blog posts about recent events or trail projects, and trail alerts. Please submit blog posts to the Marketing and Communications Coordinator along with photos or videos. These posts will give your Chapter even higher visibility among the greater NCTA community and the general public.

### **Trail Alerts**

Trail alerts can be submitted via a form on the NCTA website.

### **Chapter Emails**

Each Chapter is set up with a standard email address including the three-letter Chapter abbreviation and @northcountrytrail.org (e.g. bsc@northcountrytrail.org). It is the responsibility of a Chapter's Communications Liaison (or other designated Chapter leader), to check this email regularly. These email addresses are the primary form of communication for Chapter specific questions, general Association information, inquiries from potential members, questions posted to the NCTA website, etc. Moreover, it is recommended that Chapters use these standard emails, rather than personal emails, when communicating with volunteers and members as whole, mainly for the sake of leadership position turnover but also for branding consistency. If you have questions regarding your Chapter email or need login assistance, please contact the NCTA headquarters.

The Chapter email address gives you access to the other Google applications like Google Calendar and Google Docs, and a few other tools that are great for sharing information within your Chapter and beyond.

A consistent and unified brand will help us become a stronger organization.

---

### **Maintaining a Chapter Email Distribution List:**

Most Chapters create an email distribution list. Collecting emails from those who attend hikes or events and from new members is a great way to build your list. You can use that list to alert people to upcoming events or work days.

Please do not add a person's email address to your list without their permission. For example: If you collect emails on sign up forms for hikes, please make sure they know they are signing up for your email list.

Sample wording: “Please provide your email to receive information about upcoming events and hikes.”  
Please use an email service for your email list.

Email services such as MailChimp or Constant Contact will keep you compliant with the CANSPAM act which regulates email marketing and advertising. These services also give you easy to use design templates, signup forms that you can place on your Facebook pages or link to on social media, and a clear way for people to unsubscribe.

MailChimp has a free plan that allows you to have up to 2,000 subscribers, and you can send up to 12,000 emails per month. MailChimp is easy to use and offers plenty of tutorials and instructions.

If you’re not maintaining your group list through an email service, you run the risk of violating the CANSPAM act. You also run the risk of recipients marking your messages as “spam” if there is not an easy way for them to unsubscribe.

This could result in your IP address (your computer’s unique address) getting “blacklisted.” This could mean that all your email messages (not just ones you send to your group list) could end up in everyone’s spam boxes.

You can read a compliance guide for the CANSPAM <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business>.

In summary, if you send regular updates to a list, please use an email service.

## **Promotion and Publicity**

---

Promotion and publicity connect your Chapter with the community. It’s fairly easy to promote an event internally- sending out an email announcement to your Chapter mailing list - but how do you reach those in your community who might be really interested, might want to attend your event, and might even join your Chapter... If they only knew?

Finding creative ways to reach new people is the focus of promotion and publicity. Part of the equation is where you look to find those people who share your interests, and the other part is how you reach those people in a meaningful, effective way. To get you started, think of who might be interested in your activity (hike, trail work, etc.). Who are your potential volunteers/participants/members? Imagine what they do for a living, how they spend their leisure time, and what other organizations they may belong to. Write a list, and then think of ways you could reach them through each of those outlets. Ways to reach out could include, but are not limited to: partaking in community events, writing online articles, publishing a newspaper blurb, creating a brochure, mailing an announcement, putting up flyers, or promoting details through social media. Just remember to provide contact information regardless of the means you choose.

### **Events**

Outreach events, hikes and trail projects are at the core of Chapter activity. This is how you engage and grow your membership and create the sense of community that keeps them involved for years to come. Types of events can include, but are not limited to: day hikes, extended outings, community involvement events, Trail Town celebrations, potlucks and picnics, trail maintenance events, Chapter volunteer

appreciation events, regular Chapter meetings, etc. Be creative and consider teaming up with other groups to make events more diverse and to reach new audiences.

While many Chapters coordinate events through their Communication Liaison, it is encouraged to recognize a designated Event Coordinator. In either situation, please remember to track any volunteer hours that result from NCTA events. See Section on Membership and Volunteers, for more information on tracking volunteer hours.

Larger scale “Special” Events such as the Annual Celebration, may request assistance from the staff at NCTA headquarters for help with registration and promotion. Support from NCTA Headquarters will be determined on a case to case basis, depending on event scale, overall need requirements, and availability of resources.

Two of the biggest days to hold events are:

1. *North Country National Scenic Trail Day* is an annual celebration held the fourth Saturday in September. The objective is to raise the profile and awareness of the NCNST as a trail of national significance and a valuable recreational resource to local communities. We also hope the event will support membership recruitment and renewal, local partnerships and your marketing efforts of the local trail as part of the National Scenic Trail system. We hope to have events across the Trail all on the same day, all celebrating the NCNST! You will find the guide to planning and hosting an NCNST Day event and many event ideas in our online Volunteer Resources Center.
2. *National Trails Day*, organized by American Hiking Society is the country’s largest celebration of trails and a great way to join others across the nation as we highlight and enjoy our trail. American Hiking Society offers great planning information for event host and an online portal to register your events at [americanhiking.org](http://americanhiking.org)

### ***A Note About NCTA’s Liability Insurance***

NCTA holds a General Liability policy that protects the Association from claims involving bodily injury or property damage, up to the limits set in the policy. When holding a public event, you may be asked for proof of our General Liability policy, which can be provided to you at any time. Occasionally, they may also ask to be added as an additional insured. We don’t encourage but can accommodate this request for the cost of \$50 annually.

### **Event Calendars**

In addition to Chapter email, it is the Communications Liaison’s role (and/or a designated Event Coordinator) to ensure individual Chapter event calendars are up to date. Chapter event calendars are accessible through the Chapter email accounts. It is also important for the main calendar on the [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) website to show current events. For your benefit, we have a link to a quick “how to” presentation on the Trail Wide Events Calendar, located at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org). You can also call the call the NCTA headquarters with any questions.

## Videos and Presentations

Chapters are encouraged to give presentations about the Trail to their members, volunteers, supporters and other local community groups. NCTA has several promotional videos that you can use at events or online to educate the public about the Trail. We have also provided template PowerPoint presentations on the NCTA website to assist in your presentations. These PowerPoint presentations are designed with general information and should be edited to reflect the local Chapter or geographic information before use. PowerPoint presentations are located in Volunteer Resources at northcountrytrail.org. Program specific presentations may also be available for programs such as Trail Towns.

### North Star and Blue Blaze Bulletin

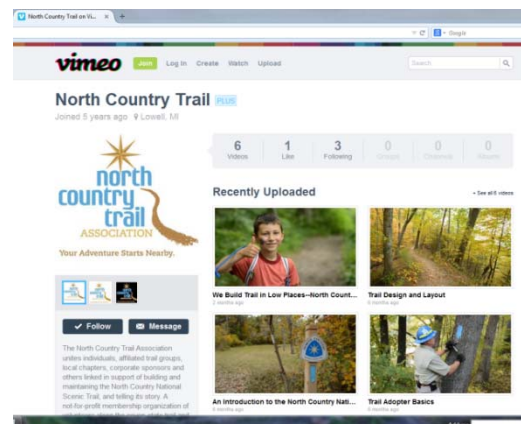
Content for both our *North Star* magazine (print) and our Blue Blaze Bulletin (electronic) is intended to share material of common interest and provide opportunities to learn about how other's in our eight-state community have experienced success. To do this, we rely on local Chapters and groups to provide details on hiking events, extended outings, trail improvements and development status, outreach and membership programs, and noteworthy news of many different kinds. All Chapters, Affiliates and Partners are invited and encouraged to provide stories and pictures to either publication.

#### 1. *North Star*

*North Star* is the quarterly magazine of the North Country Trail Association. Its content is intended to share material of common interest among our members and supporters, including permitting landowners, agency partners, and legislators. While we like to have at least one good hike article in each issue, much of the content shares triumphs, passions, projects, and even problems of the various groups which host the Trail, both Chapters and Affiliates. So we like to have input from local groups about successful outreach or membership programs, trail care items, and major trail improvements.

Please feel encouraged to share your news at any time of the year, perhaps even to the point of including the editor on your newsletter email list. Deadlines for the next issue are always published in a "Submission Guidelines" box somewhere in each issue of the magazine, along with the editor's email, phone, and postal address. We seek high-resolution photos of events or places, prints, slides, or digital contributions, preferably sent as .jpg attachments, not embedded in your email. Please include a caption for each picture, and the photographer's name.

If you'd like your picture to be considered for the front cover, vertical format is better, and it must be at least 300 dpi. The rear cover photo is always horizontal format.



The biggest reader contribution issue of the year is the first one (Jan-Mar), in which our State of the Trail feature shares accounts from groups all across the Trail about their projects for the previous year. All Chapters and Affiliates are invited to provide text and pictures, and we have

much to learn from each other's efforts. Remember that a line of people facing the camera at a trailhead is mostly boring, while a picture of people actually doing something is much more intriguing!

Volunteer Editor: Irene Szabo, treeweenie@aol.com

### **Blue Blaze Bulletin**

The Blue Blaze Bulletin is the NCTA's electronic newsletter which is sent out monthly via email subscriptions. NCTA members are automatically signed up for this distribution, but anyone with an email address can be added to the subscription list. Like the *North Star*, its content is intended to share material of common interest among our members and supporters, including permitting landowners, agency partners, and legislators. The Blue Blaze Bulletin also prefers to have input from local groups about successful outreach or membership programs, trail care items, and major trail improvements.

To share your news, please email information to the Marketing and Communications Coordinator. If you are hoping to have information referenced in the bulletin in a timely manner, please make sure to indicate the approximate date you would like to have your info included, in the email subject line.

Different from the *North Star*, the Blue Blaze Bulletin generally provides the highlights or introduction to articles and information with a link to where readers can find more information online. Links can be set to direct readers to blog posts, Facebook pages, etc. Please make sure to include any link URLs (web address information) in the email request sent to the Marketing and Communications Coordinator. The Blue Blaze Bulletin also requests that photos or graphics are sent with articles to appear in the electronic newsletter. For photos and graphics, please use a .jpg or .png format with a resolution of 72dpi or greater.

Since the Blue Blaze Bulletin is created internally by NCTA staff, if you have questions and/or additional information is required please call the NCTA headquarters for support.

### **Additional Media**

**Blog** - We would like to keep our NCTA blog up to date with topics from all around our Eight-State community. These types of topics include, but are not limited to: community events, out of the ordinary projects, news about hiking the Trail, reroutes, etc. If interested, please send your blog posts with photos to the Marketing and Communications Coordinator at the NCTA headquarters.

It is the Communications Liaison's role (and/or other Chapter designee) to ensure individual social media communications are kept professional, respectful, and engaging. It is also important that any social media platforms utilize standard naming conventions and follow branding standards.

### **Trail Towns**

Chapters are encouraged to establish "Trail Towns" along the North Country National Scenic Trail. A Trail Town is a community through which the North Country Trail passes that supports hikers with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and



celebrated. To assist with cultivation of community relationships and to provide information about Trail Towns in general, you can find a *Trail Town Handbook* and other resources at [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org).

As an added benefit to the establishment of a Trail Town, the NCTA Headquarters will assist with promotion of the towns by highlighting the communities on the Trail Town portion of the main NCTA website. Communications Liaisons (and/or other Chapter designee) are asked to provide town/community narratives, along with pictures of the town, to NCTA's Marketing and Communications Coordinator.

### **Extended Outings**

NCTA Extended Outings are guided trips lasting five or more days on the NCT. The program serves as a member service, membership recruitment tool and to raise the profile/awareness of the Trail.

If you are interested in leading or organizing a trip in your area, proposals should be made to the NCTA Extended Outing Committee and should include: complete description, dates, itinerary, budget, Certificate of Insurance from outfitters (if used), outfitter information and credentials, article for *North Star* and website. Proposals should be made about one year in advance to allow for advertising and recruitment. The committee will review and approve proposals and act as an advisor to trip leaders.

### **State of Emergency Communications**

In the event of full scale "state of emergency" situations affecting the North Country National Scenic Trail, each Chapter is asked to designate a single response representative (such as the Chapter President or the Chapter Communications Liaison), who will communicate timely and ongoing information to the NCTA headquarters for Trail wide information distribution. "State of emergency" communications are high priority and it is vital they occur throughout the entire duration of such an event.

"State of emergency" conditions are defined as severe circumstances, which have been officially recognized and responded to by the local, state or federal government authorities, including the National Park Service, National Forest Service, DNR, or applicable law enforcement agencies. Emergencies may include fire, flood or other severe weather incident impacting the Trail, tragedy related to an injury of a volunteer or a hiker, or any other controversial topic.

### **NCTA's Trail Shop**

---

**Merchandise:** NCTA merchandise is always available for Chapters at the member discounted price. If a Chapter is interested in purchasing a larger quantity of this merchandise for resale it may be possible to receive a bigger discount if we include your quantity in our regular schedule to restock inventory. The order must be made as a group (not individuals requesting individual items) with one payment from your Chapter account.

**Selling through the Trail Shop:** If a Chapter or Affiliate produces print materials and/or merchandise they would like us to sell on the NCTA website, we will consider each product carefully. If approved for sale, NCTA will purchase the product up front.

## 6. Managing the Trail

There are many things to consider when managing the Trail itself. The details of your Chapter's work plan are dependent on the status of your section of Trail, the resources of your land management agency and the strength of your relationship with them, the size of your Chapter's active volunteer force, the funds available and the availability of other partners to help get the job done. Make a list of your projects. Prioritize that list but be flexible as the situation may change and opportunities arise.

The skills needed to do the variety of tasks needed to build and maintain the trail are many. Because of the geography of the Trail, it's difficult to hold regular training sessions with all of the volunteers that need it. We use our annual gathering as a chance to hold workshops and try our best to notify you of the useful resources that can be found online. We can also work with you to plan and implement a professional training in your area if possible.

The specifics about how to build the NCNST can be found in the National Park Service's [\*A Handbook for Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance\*](#). That document should become your #1 trail building companion. Other in-depth "how to" resources are available in various publications, DVD, and online from many of the other trail organizations and agencies. Check out NCTA's training videos, the Student Conservation Association's "Lightly on the Land;" the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's Design, Construction and Maintenance manual; the Adirondack Mountain Club's Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance, and a training series from the USDA Forest Service on many more topics.

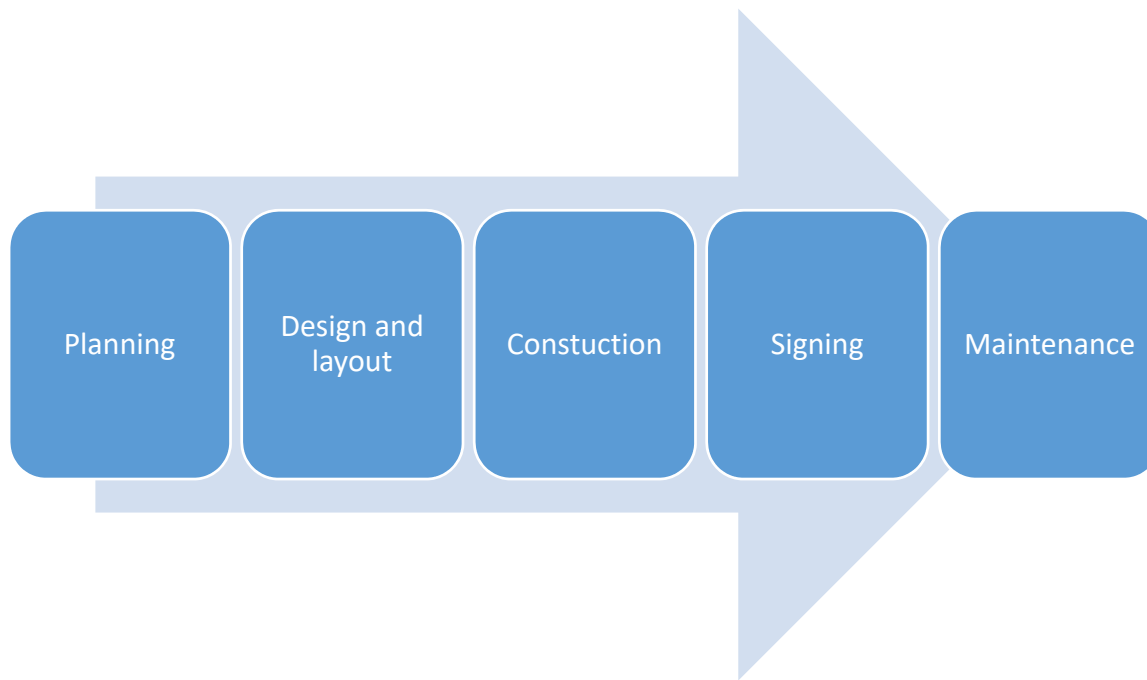
But there are many other topics outside of building the tread to consider in the trail development process so we've outlined some major steps below to provide some guidance. Your Chapter should have a volunteer position or an entire committee dedicated to the management of the Trail. Each Chapter has unique strengths to draw upon as well as faces challenges that may differ from their neighbors. Play on your strengths, ask for help to fill in the gaps and don't be afraid to learn by trying.



## Stages of Trail Development

---

Developing the Trail is a process that begins long before you build the Trail and continues long after.



### **Trail Planning**

The Optimal Location Review (OLR) process as one means to document selection of the best route for the Trail with the most desirable recreation setting, connect any outstanding natural or cultural features, and allow for safe use and access to trailheads, suitable water sources and camping sites. Steps 1-5 are a very brief introduction to the process. The NPS provides a full handbook on the process that will help you locate segments of the Trail to fill the gaps where no trail has yet been developed, or relocate the Trail when there are changes in land management or opportunities to put the Trail in a more sustainable, permanently protected location.

1. Form a trail planning committee that includes your agency partner, NCTA and NPS staff if needed.
2. Set objectives for the optimal location.
3. Inventory the area - Identify control points. Get out on the ground to scout the options.
4. Identify rules and regulations – What restrictions do you have from land managers, landowners, federal regulations, state laws, etc. What are the necessary permits and/or environmental and cultural resource surveys that will need to be completed?
5. Analyze your options - Look at multiple routes, get input and then select the best option.
6. Project funding - Funds for construction and maintenance projects can come from various sources including and not limited to the NPS, NCTA, Chapter funds, federal, state and local grants. (See Section 4 on financial management for more info).

## Trail Design and Layout

7. Develop a Construction Plan – You have decided why and where in the previous step, now put together the who, when and how it will get done. It's important to consider the timing of the resource reviews and permits mentioned in Step 4.
8. Layout the Trail - Flag and refine the route.
9. In both Step 5 and Step 8, choose the option that offers the best combination of permanency and good design parameters such as scenery, dry/constructible soils, least stream crossings, etc.

## Construction

10. Clearing the Trail and building Trail – Follow the guidelines provided in the *NPS Manual on Design, Construction and Maintenance* for the NCT as well as guidance and approval from the land manager.
11. Volunteer Support - Dependent on complexity of the project, you may be able to accomplish it with a weekend work party or you may want to consider contracting with another organization like AmeriCorps NCCC, Student Conservation Association, Minnesota Conservation Corps, a Boy Scout troop or host an American Hiking Society Volunteer Vacation. Or, if you have considerable, recurring construction to do, consider establishing a Chapter trail construction patterned after the Wisconsin Rovers. Some of these options cost and some don't, but all require coordination far in advance of the planned project date.
12. Support Structures – Follow the guidelines provided in the *NPS Manual on Design, Construction and Maintenance* for the NCNST as well as guidance from the land manager for what structures are appropriate and what permits are required. Contact the NPS or NCTA for sample construction plans if needed.
13. Signing the Trail - Follow the guidelines provided in the *NPS Manual on Design, Construction and Maintenance*. Some basic signage is provided (see NPS Order Form) and your Chapter can apply for grants for larger signage needs like highway signs.
14. Tools and Equipment - The NPS provides basic tools as needed for Chapter use (see the NPS Order Form) and provides funding for larger equipment like mowers and trimmers as funding is available. Many Chapters own trailers to house and transport their tools. Tool trailers should be licensed to and insured by NCTA including all equipment within (See next section). Adding official NCTA decals to your trailers is a great way to promote the Trail and the Association.
15. Safety First! - Make sure all volunteers on the project are signed up as VIPs and that everyone take necessary precautions for the situation, anyone using a chainsaw has a current certification and that safety issues are addressed properly (See *Focus on Safety* below).
16. Project Completion – Make sure you fill out the certification application to insure your sections of trail are considered official North Country National Scenic Trail by the National Park Service. Certification applications must meet the approval of the land manager or landowner to ensure the longevity of the NCNST on their property.
17. Update maps and trail information – NCTA manages a GIS database for the entire Trail. As soon as a section of Trail is built arrangements should be made with the NCTA (either the GIS Coordinator or local RTC) to get this new construction GPS'd and mapped. Often times a Chapter may have a particular volunteer that has worked closely with NCTA regarding the requirements for GPS'ing a section of Trail (See Section 3 for the Trail Information Specialist /GIS Volunteer description and Section 7 for more detailed information about mapping the Trail).

18. Celebrate success! If is a significant addition or reroute of the Trail, we should celebrate. Promote your accomplishments within your Chapter, local community; and NCTA staff can help sing your praises across the eight states.

## Maintenance

Your section is built and signed! Before you barely finish celebrating, regular maintenance will be needed to keep it in good condition. Your trail management committee will need to monitor the condition and assess what's needed and assign the tasks to regular adopters, work crews or organize volunteer days to get the job done.

19. Trail Adopter Program – Many Chapters rely on a Trail Adopter program to keep their section maintained. Check out our Adopter Manual or our new Trail Adopter Basics video for details.



## Equipment Inventory, Registration and Insurance

---

**Tools and Safety Equipment:** Most of the tools and safety equipment needed in your day to day duties on the Trail are provided by the National Park Service. Review the NPS Order Form online and submit your orders directly to the NPS. It is up to the Chapter to keep an inventory of the tools and to keep them clean. It's also the responsibility of the Chapter to make sure all volunteers have access to the needed safety equipment.

**Mowers and other power equipment:** Many Chapters use mowers to keep the growth down along the Trail or power wagons to help carry heavy equipment and supplies in the field. Some prefer DR products but others have recently been demoed with positive results. It is up to the Chapter to seek the funds to purchase this type of equipment. Field grants are a great source.

Chainsaws should not be purchased by NCTA funds but the Chapter can fundraise locally to purchase a Chapter chainsaw(s). Certified Chapter sawyers all share a responsibility to maintain a Chapter's chainsaw in good working order. If private chainsaws are used, it is the responsibility of the individual Certified Sawyer to keep their personal chainsaw clean and in operating order.

**ONLY certified sawyers are authorized to use a chainsaw on the North Country Trail.**

**Trailers:** Registering the trailer license plate varies from state to state. We would prefer that the license be purchased in the state where it resides but NCTA can also register any trailer here in Michigan for you. You will need the bill of sale so you can register it to the NCTA (and the Chapter) but check your Secretary of State's website for other information you may need like our tax exemption letter(s) (state letter if applicable) or a letter from the NCTA stating we approve of the registration. We're happy to provide that if needed.

For insurance purposes we will need the trailer VIN number and a copy of the certificate of origin. If you are packing your trailer full of tools, mowers, etc., please send us a list of contents with an estimate of the cost so they will be covered. A picture of your full trailer is also a great way to document what you have stored inside.

We also encourage Chapters to install the correct trailer decals. A full set costs around \$750 and includes two large decals (one for each side) and one small decal for the back.

Trailer graphics can be ordered directly from:

Alpha Graphics  
3223 Parmenter St.  
Middleton, WI 53562  
(608) 836-999  
alphagraphics.com

Chapters should pay for the registration and decals out of Chapter funds or write the cost into the grant in which they are requesting the trailer.



## Managing Partnerships

---

The North Country Trail crosses 160 different land management units from North Dakota to New York. From National Forests, Grasslands and Wildlife Refuges, state parks and recreation areas to county forests and other locally managed areas, we must work with many different partners to make the NCNST a reality. While NCTA and National Park Service staff focus their efforts on the national or state level, our volunteers are building these relationships from the ground up with the land managers that have direct management responsibility of the Trail.

These partnerships bring ideas and resources to the table, enabling us to accomplish more than we ever could alone, helping us “*do more with more.*” We have incredible success stories across the Trail and celebrate when it works well. But we sometimes gloss over the fact that building effective partnerships is difficult. It takes time, patience, persistence and sometimes, a good sense of humor. Every relationship has its tough times and partnerships aren’t about always agreeing; they are about working towards a common goal. We must keep a positive working relationship with those that manage the Trail even if we don’t always see eye to eye. With a shared vision, clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the will to empower our volunteers, there is no limit to what we can do together.

The NCTA and the NPS have formal Memoranda of Understanding with some federal and state agencies, which outlines roles and responsibilities of each but it is our volunteers that nurture relationships with agency staff on the ground, educating and informing them of trail projects and issues, and recognizing them for their efforts on behalf of trails.

We suggest regular communication and a yearly partnership meeting with the agency, your Chapter leadership, NCTA staff and a NPS representative. At this meeting, we can discuss the state of the Trail in and the state of the partnership, focusing on where things are working and what improvements we would like to make. Understanding your agency partners’ policies and budgeting calendar is also important so you can approach them in a timely manner if you are requesting funding for a project on their lands or a project that will need much advanced approval time.

There are great tips for Managing Partnerships on [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) and the [National Park Service partnership website](#).

## Focus on Safety

---

Last but certainly not least, let’s talk safety. In 2016, the volunteers of the North Country Trail reported no injuries. While it’s a great thing to celebrate, we must not let our success make us complacent.

How can we ensure the safety of our volunteers in the future? By integrating a “culture of safety” into each task we perform and each decision we make, and being strong enough to stop ourselves or others when safety is about to be compromised. Take the time to review and discuss safe work practices before the start of a project, and at each changing phase of the job.



Use the “Tailgate Safety Series” found on the NPS website at [nps.gov/noco](https://nps.gov/noco) as a good conversation starter for these discussions with your crew. Review the Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) sheets also found on the website. Integrate safety into your thought process. Look up, down, and around at your surroundings. Look out for the volunteer next to you. Set an example for others and wear your Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). And by all means, stop what you are doing if you find yourself getting into a sticky situation. Find a safer way to accomplish your task, even if it means coming back to it another day with a better plan.

In 2013, we created a Safety Handbook for volunteers working on the North Country Trail. This manual can be edited to make it pertinent to your Chapter by including local emergency contact information or specific safety concerns for your geographic area or circumstances. And in 2016, Trail Safe!, a unique safety training program designed specifically for National Park Service (NPS) Trail Volunteers, was made available online and can be found at [nps.gov/noco/trail-safe.htm](https://nps.gov/noco/trail-safe.htm).

## **Volunteer Protection**

---

All current NCTA members are officially registered with NPS as VIPs once their Chapter has a Volunteer Agreement on file with the volunteer coordinator. VIPs are entitled to the same injury considerations and protections through the Department of Labor that regular government employees receive, provided they are operating within their approved scope of duties and NPS policies. Other volunteers and organized groups must submit a volunteer agreement in order to be covered. That form can be found on the NPS website at [nps.gov/noco](https://nps.gov/noco). It should be filled out and sent to the NPS Volunteer Coordinator. Immediately report all injuries to begin the claim process. Your Chapter can be provided Injury Reporting Kits. Be sure you know where they are and how to use them, share kit locations with others, and use them if need arises.

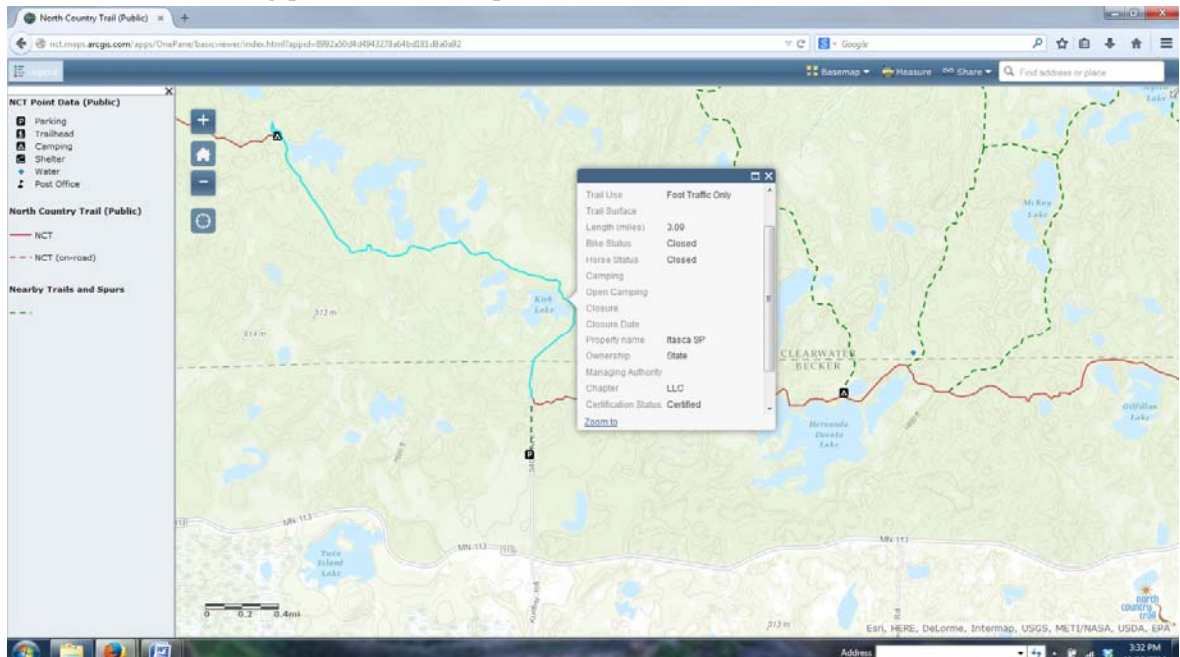


# 7. Mapping the Trail

The NCTA uses a sophisticated computer system to produce maps and manage all of our trail information. Referred to as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), this is the tool we use to maintain information on the Trail and its associated features. GIS can provide detailed statistical analysis and reporting on the Trail, and is the primary tool NCTA uses for map production. NCTA employs a GIS manager/cartographer, who is in charge of keeping the data for the Trail but we rely on volunteers in the field to get us accurate information.

**NCTA map production** – NCTA generally produces several types of maps: online interactive, technical series for download, retail and special project.

1. Special Project maps can be made specifically for Chapter projects like brochures, kiosks and for specific planning needs. Please fill out a map request form in order to determine if we are able to fulfill your requests or direct you to suitable resources at least six months prior to your due date. Getting your requests in as early as possible is best.
2. Interactive Online map - For the Trail user, this map allows seamless scrolling along the Trail, the ability to search for a specific location, measure distances and change the base map. **As trail managers**, this online map gives us an incredible opportunity for you to see directly into our GIS database, which can point out errors that we may have missed in the era of relying on printed maps to communicate. Click on the line for any given Trail segment and the attribute information (including certification, Chapter, managing authority and use) will appear.
3. Technical Series maps – For the Trail user and manager, this completely free series of maps can be downloaded for print or for use with the Avenza app.
4. NCTA doesn't currently produce retail maps are for sale.



## Updating Trail Information

The information in our mapping system is constantly in flux. We are regularly adding and removing trail segments resulting from reroutes or new construction. Additionally, we often add improved data (for example GPS versus hand drawn or better quality GPS data). As stated above, our interactive web map is the best portal into our current information for your area. The Trail information shown in this map feeds all of the mapping efforts at NCTA. Please review the web map regularly and coordinate data collection efforts with NCTA's GIS staff to provide any updates needed for your area.

We primarily rely on volunteers in the field to get us the information we use to update our mapping products.

There are a number of options for updating trail information in your Chapter's area. A conversation with NCTA's GIS staff is always welcome and is the best place to start. We've prepared a number of tutorial documents to help with GPS field work or interfacing with our web map.

## 8. Trail Protection and Private Land

Private landowners play an integral role in developing the NCNST. Many key pieces of the current Trail could not exist without generous permissions from private landowners to cross their land, and the next 2,000 miles of Trail development depend on them! While the Trail goes through many federal, state and county lands, the miles of private land in between are critical to maintain a continuous path. Many of you already have handshake or written trail access agreements with landowners but few permanent easements exist to secure access for the NCT into the future. It's time we begin solidifying our rights for public access to ensure the Trail you build stays intact and that the North Country National Scenic Trail is here for future generations. Collectively, NCTA Chapters, staff, Affiliates and Partners, as well as the National Park Service, state and local agency partners and local land trusts need to team up to accomplish this task.

This section will outline the basics but please take some time to review the *Trail Protection Handbook* for more detailed information. That publication can be found online with other tools for working with landowners like the current Recreational Use Statutes for each state, template trail use agreements and easements and a Landowner Options brochure. Check the Volunteer Resources section of [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org). Contact NCTA Headquarters for printed copies of the Landowner Options brochure or any other materials.

## 9. Summary

We hope this handbook provides you with an overview of the North Country National Scenic Trail, insight into the North Country Trail Association and the guidance needed to effectively manage and grow your Chapter. But this is just a start; many other resources are available to help you take the next step.

- Sign up for one of our Chapter Leadership webinars. The schedule will be posted on the NCTA website;
- Volunteer Resources on [northcountrytrail.org](http://northcountrytrail.org) and [nps.gov/noco](http://nps.gov/noco) provide the tools, documents and additional information mentioned in this handbook;
- The monthly leadership email will provide the most current updates to keep you informed;
- Workshops at our Annual Conference cover topics including trail management, communication and outreach, fundraising and much more, while also providing a chance to share with and learn from your peers;
- Publications like the *North Star*, Blue Blaze Bulletin and the blog share skills, techniques and stories to inspire you;
- Check out the training programs of our Affiliate and Partner organizations like the [Buckeye Trail Association](#), [Finger Lakes Trail Conference](#) and the [Superior Hiking Trail Association](#);
- Organizations like American Trails and Land Trust Alliance offer great online information and you can turn to many other local organizations for workshops in your area; and
- Most importantly, remember the NCTA staff is here to help!

So, get out there and challenge yourself, have fun, and don't forget to celebrate your successes! You are leaving a legacy that will be enjoyed by generations to come. But for now, simply enjoy your time on the Trail and with the NCTA community.