

Contributing to planning processes to protect the NCT

The NCT is a project needing incredible coordination between many land management agencies and partners. Each agency responsible for a section of the NCT may have a different mission (wildlife management, timber production, recreation) but they all have something in common, the NCT, and it's our job to remind them the Trail is important, that it traverses 7 states, connects large landscapes and that it needs proper management to live up to the standard of a National Scenic Trail.

The process may differ from agency to agency, but each agency will have an avenue for the public and partners to get involved in land management plans as well as specific project proposals that may impact the Trail. Providing comment online, attending local meetings and maintaining regular communication with your land managers will ensure the NCT is considered. In larger plans, the NCTA and NPS staff will be involved and we can offer guidance and support to help you through the more local planning process if needed.

What types of plans or processes might need your input?

Federal Land (National Forests, National Parks and Wildlife Refuges):

NEPA – On Federal land, land managers are required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which provides an opportunity for the public to comment on federal actions that might have an environmental impact. Check out the [Citizen's Guide to the NEPA](#). and a simplified version of the process in [this brochure](#).

SOPAs – To keep track of these proposals, make sure you check the quarterly schedule of proposed actions, or SOPAs. These are updated in January, April, July and October. You will find information about special permit requests, timber cuts, land sales, utility projects and much more in these announcements. If a specific proposal might impact the trail, contact the corresponding "Project Contact" listed in the SOPA and indicate your interest in being involved. They are [posted online](#) and most forests maintain mailing lists for notifications.

Forest Plans – Each National Forest has a Forest Plan that governs the management of the Forest and its assets. Make sure you know

your Forest Plan and how the NCNST fits in. In 2012, the Forest Service revised their Forest Planning Rule, which governs the making of Forest Plans. Because of the advocacy efforts of the Partnership for the National Trails System, including NCTA, we are happy to see that the new planning rule requires National Scenic Trails to be considered a special management area and that each forest plan should provide management direction in those areas. It's great news but we still have some work to do. Most of our Forest Plans won't be revised for at least a few years. We need to be ready with our suggestions for what we would like to see in these plans moving forward. Check out our [Land Management Plan Tracker](#) with links to the plans in each National Forest.

State by State:

SCORPs – In order to be eligible for Land and Water Conservation Fund money, each state must revise their State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every 5 years. Check out our [Land Management Plan Tracker](#) with links to the plans in each state.

Park/Forest/Trail Plans – Many divisions for the Department of Natural Resources will have their own plans. It's important to monitor your state park and state forest plans and comment on behalf of the NCT. Most of our states also have some sort of State Trails Plan but they vary from state to state.

Locally: Counties and local municipalities have their own plans. Meet with County commissioners, City Councils and recreation boards to tell them about the NCT and to make sure it's accounted for in their plans.

When commenting on proposed actions in a specific location or when providing suggestions for a larger plan, here are some things to consider:

- Do we (NCTA or NPS) have an existing agreement with that agency? Check with me if you aren't sure. Is this proposal/plan in line or in conflict with it?
- How will it impact the trail tread as well as the surrounding environment?
- Will it change the view shed and the soundscape?
- How will it impact the user's experience?
- Is there a safety issue?
- Will it support or deter the volunteers that support the Trail?

- Will future funding or trail development possibilities depend on its inclusion in this plan?

Craft your talking points with the following in mind:

- Don't reserve your comments for only the proposals you oppose. Comments in support of a proposal that help the trail are important too.
- Point out any inaccuracies in the plan.
- Be specific about the impacts and document the facts.
- Be respectful.
- Make your case without emotion and opinions.

Keep NCTA and NPS staff in the loop. There is a roll for advocacy at the local level and up to the state, regional and national level to keep the NCT front and center with our agency partners. It's a big task to keep track of all of these processes so don't let yourself get overwhelmed. Get on the mailing list so you are informed, choose to get involved where you think you'll have the most impact and don't hesitate to ask for help. Remember also to [exercise good partnership skills](#) when working with your land managers. Their job is not an easy one. Reminding them that we are here to help goes a long way.