

NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM (NTS)



*Advancing climate resilience, equitable outdoor access,
local economic growth and public health*

With 69% of Americans living within an hour drive of a National Trail, the National Trails System (NTS) includes 30 Congressionally designated National Scenic Trails and National Historic Trails that preserve iconic landscapes and capture significant stories of the nation. The continually evolving NTS is ideally positioned to advance the following Biden-Harris Administration priorities:

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND THE 30X30 INITIATIVE

Most National Scenic and Historic Trails have existing and largely untapped land protection authority designed to safeguard their Congressionally identified values.

National Scenic and Historic Trails are collaboratively managed by nonprofit partners and federal land administrators. This uniquely positions the NTS to advance the 30x30 initiative and meet the demand for outdoor recreation spaces. National Trails are wildlife and migratory corridors that will eventually weave landscapes into a 55,000+ mile system that traverses all 50 states and Washington DC and links over 440 national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas and public lands. About 20,000 miles of National Trails are unprotected, resulting in gaps in the trail system. There also is ample opportunity to increase accessibility and environmental impact by adding side trails and protecting viewsheds, i.e. the vast, adjacent vistas that are home to high-level biodiversity and expansive old growth forests that operate as carbon sinks.

EQUITABLE OUTDOOR ACCESS

Trails link urban centers to rural towns and wild spaces, yet many people feel disconnected.

Ample opportunity exists to make trails more accessible and welcoming to diverse visitors and to better represent America's indigenous populations and cultural diversity. Examples of some steps that can be taken to improve the NTS include connecting gap in trails, ensuring meaningful community engagement with tribal communities, providing accurate, balanced historic interpretation on trails, expanding inclusive programming, creating pathways to careers in trails and including tribal names on NTS signage.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

National Trails attract tens of millions of people per year and can be arenas for skills development.

Trails attract overnight and day-visitors to businesses, hotels, and restaurants in cities and rural towns. Programs that promote trail-focused recreational and heritage tourism are proven to increase business in rural 'trail towns'. Plans for significant initiatives that could stimulate local economies are underway, such as connecting metropolitan areas to trails and identifying and interpreting trails in major cities to better connect low-income neighborhoods to healthy green spaces. Finally, trail development and maintenance present opportunities for workforce training and service corps involvement.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Trail use skyrocketed during the pandemic as people enjoyed the health benefits of nature.

Experts expect trail use to remain high after more people turned to outdoor recreation for socially distant activities during the pandemic. Regular outdoor recreation on trails can be a cost-effective way to improve physical health. Time spent in nature can lower stress levels and increase well-being while shared adventures can help strengthen relationships between friends and family.

Now is the time to prioritize the National Trails System.

Increased investment in NTS land acquisition, sufficient management and maintenance will result in unparalleled immediate and long-term natural and historic preservation benefits for the American public. To learn more, please contact Valerie Rupp at valerie@pnts.org.



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National Historic and Scenic Trails are collaboratively managed with volunteer based, private nonprofit partners and federal land administrators. In 2020 alone, nonprofit partners secured \$48.8 million in private funding and volunteer hours.

The following are suggestions for priority activities that could help the Department of Interior (DOI) take advantage of the capacity and momentum for National Trails to advance Biden-Harris Administration priorities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Select an Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and a Director of the National Park Service who understand the opportunities presented by the NTS and who are excited to engage in cooperative management;
- Support budget request increases for NTS-administering agencies to provide needed funds for agencies and nonprofit trail organization partners to effectively manage and maintain trails;
- Address understaffing in agencies by filling vacant positions and increasing staff for trails and in land acquisition offices;
- Prioritize projects on National Trails when selecting Land & Water Conservation Fund projects to provide up to \$50 million per year to improve NTS connectivity;
- Reserve \$1.5M in the Challenge Cost Share or Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program for an urban trails initiative through the National Recreation Trails program;
- Resume use of collaborative landscape proposals and complete comprehensive plans for all National Scenic and Historic Trails;
- Increase collaboration between agencies on trail land preservation projects and NTS communications;
- Declare that all DOI-administered NTS components managed by the Park Service are “units” of the National Park System;
- Require Bureau of Land Management to include line items in its budget for trails and for National Scenic and Historic Trails; and,
- Instruct all DOI agencies that administer trails to submit recommendations, developed pursuant to engagement with local and tribal communities, suggesting opportunities to enhance the representation of America’s indigenous populations and cultural inclusion on trails, particularly in relation to National Historic Trails.