



# Partnership for the National Trails System

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## THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM

### 40 Years of Connecting People to America's Diverse History, Cultures, Landscapes, and to One Another.

- America's **National Trails System is one of the great conservation acts of Congress** from the 1960s era that also included:
  - Land & Water Conservation Fund Act
  - Wilderness Act
  - Wild & Scenic Rivers Act
  - National Environmental Policy Act
  - National Historic Preservation Act
  - Outdoor Recreation Act
- Today the **National Trails System totals over 60,000 miles in all 50 states** (longer than the Interstate Highway System) and is comprised of:
  - **8 national scenic trails** – authorized by Congress
  - **17 national historic trails** – authorized by Congress
  - The scenic and historic trails span more than 48,350 miles through 47 states
  - More than 1000 **national recreation trails** – designated by the Departments of the Interior or Agriculture – spanning more than 11,000 miles in every state, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico
  - Several connecting and side trails
  - Thousands of miles of “railbanked” rail trails
- **Traveling a National Trail brings you into direct contact with adventure, history, heritage, community, and nature.** National Trails provide countless opportunities for healthful recreation in the fight against obesity. The National Trails System embodies many strands of America's natural, historic, and cultural heritage. On Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails you experience the great diversity of landscapes and ecosystems that comprise this great American land. Historic trails enable you to experience the rich tapestry of cultures and peoples that comprise our Nation and the many stories of pioneer travel, exploration, and struggles for civil and religious freedom that shaped our history (Native American, Hawaiian, Inuit, Hispanic, Anglo, African-American and Asian)

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#### *Affiliate Members:*

American Discovery Trail Society  
Arizona Trail Association  
National Frontier Trails Museum  
Back Country Horsemen Association  
Pacific Northwest Trail Association  
Kansas City Area Historic Trails Association

#### *National Scenic Trail Organizations:*

American Hiking Society  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Continental Divide Trail Alliance  
Continental Divide Trail Society  
Florida Trail Association  
Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation  
North Country Trail Association  
Pacific Crest Trail Association  
Potomac Heritage Trail Association

#### *National Historic Trail Organizations:*

E Mau Na Ala Hele  
Anza Trail Coalition of Arizona  
Heritage Trails  
Camino Real Trail Association  
Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc.  
Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation  
Mormon Trails Association  
Nez Perce Trail Foundation  
National Pony Express Association  
Old Spanish Trail Association  
Oregon California Trails Association  
Overmountain Victory Trail Association  
Santa Fe Trail Association  
Trail of Tears Association

- **Congressionally authorized National Scenic and Historic Trails are complex partnerships.**
  - Various Federal agencies – primarily the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and US Army Corps of Engineers -- play key roles in administering and managing these trails, while the Federal Highway Administration has been an important source of funding for them.
  - States are essential partners – especially where an entire trail is within one state as in Alaska, Hawaii, Florida, and Wisconsin – in helping to manage extensive sections of trails and, in Florida and Wisconsin, in acquiring rights-of-way and lands for them. The scenic and historic trails connect over 300 state parks.
  - However, the bulk of the work of developing and maintaining these trails is done by volunteers coordinated by dozens of dedicated nonprofit trail organizations.
  
- **A hallmark of the National Trails System is people-based stewardship** of significant national natural and cultural resources. Volunteers – not paid professionals -- often take the lead in nearly all aspects of trail resources inventorying and database construction, planning, development, interpretation, preservation, and maintenance. In 1968 this was a new way to care for public resources, and 40 years later it still is innovative and routinely leads to creative leveraging many times over of the Federal funding provided for these trails by Congress. In 2006 volunteers organized and guided by the non-profit partner trail organizations contributed more than 687,000 hours valued at \$12,400,000 to help develop and sustain the national scenic and historic trails and the natural and cultural resources along them. This people-based approach to public land stewardship also involves communities linked by these trails so that the National Trails System has become a “culture of people-based community conservation.”
  
- The National Trails System Act was signed into law October 2, 1968, yet forty years later **only the initial two trails – the Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails – are fully available for the public to experience from end to end.** Despite recent progress in opening new miles on the Continental Divide, Florida, and Ice Age National Scenic Trails through the generosity of private land owners, organizations, corporations, State agencies, and other entities; **the other six National Scenic Trails and all of the National Historic Trails are still,** after many years of effort by citizen volunteers and public agency trail managers, **in various stages of completion.** Many miles of right-of-way need to be acquired for the public to be able to fully enjoy the National Scenic Trails and many sites and remnants remain to be preserved and fully interpreted for the public to fully understand and appreciate the National Historic Trails. Properly preserved Historic Trail resources evoke a sense of the past that helps visitors to appreciate how the events of long ago forged the way to the world of today. Although steady progress has been made to transform these trails from lines on maps to places in the landscape for people to learn from and enjoy, at the current pace it will be decades before most of them will be fully available for public use.
  
- **To fully realize the promise of the National Trails System** for public benefit we should dedicate ourselves to a **“Decade for the National Trails”** leading to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Trails System in 2018. Over this Decade we should:
  - **Raise public awareness of the National Trails System so that it becomes well known to every citizen and community in the United States;**
  - **Complete and enhance the designated National Trails for public appreciation and enjoyment;**
  - **Build the capacity of the Federal agencies to better administer, manage, and sustain National Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails;**
  - **Enhance the capacity of non-profit organizations to be able to continue to recruit, train, and supervise ever more volunteer stewards of the National Trails forming a Nation-wide network of community based natural and cultural resource stewardship.**