

- A trail that goes past a prominent feature must always be accessible at least to the feature—no matter how far from the end of the trail—unless there’s an uncorrectable environmental barrier between the end of the trail and the prominent feature (figure 107).

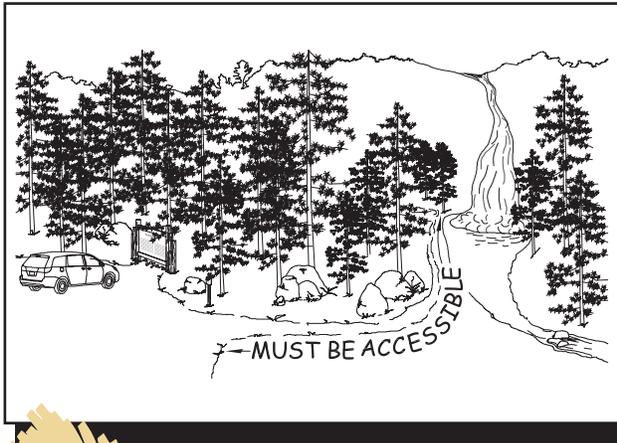


Figure 107—There are no uncorrectable barriers between the end of this trail and the waterfall, so this section of the trail must be accessible.

Even if visitors can’t use the entire trail, they should be able to enjoy a short hike—especially if it includes a prominent feature (figure 108).

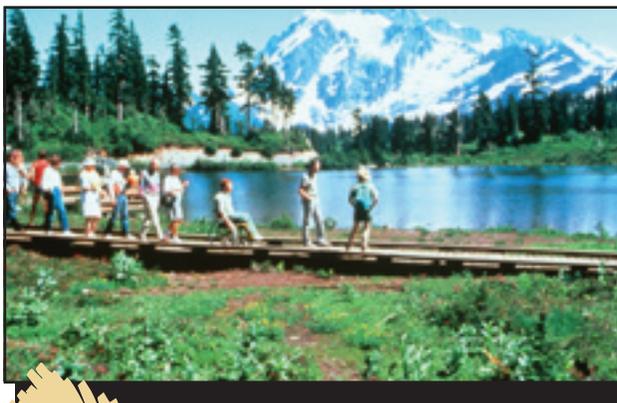


Figure 108—All hikers can enjoy this beautiful alpine lake.

A prominent feature is a natural, cultural, or historic feature along or adjacent to a trail that has national, regional, or local distinction or significance. It might be the focal point, main attraction, or destination of the trail or it may simply be an interesting secondary feature, such as a boulder outcrop, waterfall, grouping of old or unique trees, cultural or historic structure, a wildflower meadow, an area popular for wildlife viewing, or a vista.

General Exception 1 addresses extreme environmental barriers (figure 109) that are effectively impassable and render the trail beyond unreachable for many people

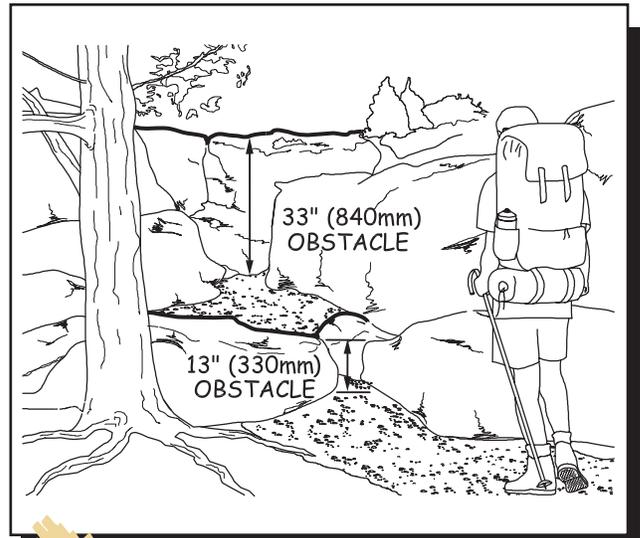


Figure 109—The 33-inch (840-millimeter) rock face is an example of an extreme environmental barrier.

with mobility limitations. It only applies when there are one or more conditions for departure **AND** at least one of the following limiting factors:

- The combination of trail grade and cross slope exceed 20 percent for more than 40 feet (12 meters).
- The surface is not firm and stable for 45 feet (13.7 meters) or more.

- The clear tread width is 18 inches (455 millimeters) or less for at least 20 feet (6 meters).
- A trail obstacle at least 30 inches (760 millimeters) high extends across the full width of the trail.

Remember that sections at the ends of a trail must always be accessible if they lead to prominent features or are more than 500 feet (152 meters) long before the first uncorrectable environmental barrier.

General Exception 2 addresses trails with numerous environmental barriers that can't be eliminated, meaning that the trail would have no possibility of meeting the intent or objectives of an accessible hiking opportunity. Where one or more conditions for departure result in deviations from the technical provisions for more than 15 percent of the length of the trail, the trail is exempt from accessibility requirements. The percentage of trail affected by deviations is calculated by adding up the length of trail impacted by each deviation and dividing that distance by the total length of trail.

Consider the design for a new 1-mile- (1,600-meter-) long trail. Fifteen percent of 1 mile (1,600 meters) is 792 feet (240 meters). If all the lengths of trail where slope, width, or other requirements can't be met because of conditions for departure add up to more than 792 feet (240 meters) of trail, the technical provisions of FSTAG section 7.3 won't apply to most or all of the trail.

Remember that sections at the ends of a trail must always be accessible if they lead to prominent features or are more than 500 feet (152 meters) long before the first uncorrectable environmental barrier.

Some long-distance trails, such as the Continental Divide, Pacific Crest, Appalachian, or Florida National Scenic

Trails, or the Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail, span many districts or forests. For these trails, only the length of trail planned for construction or alteration within the current planning period is considered when figuring the 15 percent, not the entire length of the trail. This principle applies even if the planning period is several years long. Lengths of trail that are not connected but are covered by the same planning process should be considered separately, unless there is a special circumstance where several trails function together to access one attraction or serve one purpose. Connected sections of trail that will be constructed or altered over several years should be considered together.

Documenting Decisions

If a determination is made that the FSTAG either doesn't apply to a trail or can't be met on some sections of the trail, section 7.1.3 of the FSTAG requires the determination to be documented and saved in the project file. The documentation doesn't have to be anything elaborate, and there's no required format. A single page stating how and why the determination was made, which conditions for departure and exceptions apply to what trail sections, the date, and the names of the people who made the decision is sufficient to show that the FSTAG was used at the onset of the project and that a good-faith effort was applied to the consideration of accessibility. A decision not to make a trail accessible is an important decision that will affect both current and future trail users and managers. The documentation is required to ensure that the decision can still be understood if the people involved are no longer available.