

South Whidbey Parks and Recreation District Trail Construction/Management Plan

A. Issues and Considerations

Before creating new trails and trail systems on District property, some specific issues should be considered. Evaluating concerns as well as opportunities will help develop a vision for the future and appropriate guiding principles and strategies. The considerations recognized by the Park District Board of Commissioners and Staff are divided into three main areas: Trail Users, Wildlife Habitat, and Liability Issues.

Trail Users

The District expects Trails to be day-use-only serving several different user groups such as walkers, runners, mountain bikers, and horse riders. Each group has associated needs and concerns.

A hallmark of existing trails on Whidbey Island has been how well the various user groups share resources. The development of new trails will follow that tradition by serving the needs of a wide variety of non-motorized users.

Wildlife Habitat

Most areas that would be considered for trail development on Whidbey Island are valuable wildlife habitat. Over time, as surrounding properties are managed and developed, the trail properties will become a refuge for wildlife. With this in mind, trail design and activity should be planned in a way that values the relationships between trail users and wildlife, and considers the space and habitat needs of wildlife.

Liability Issues

As with all District owned and managed properties, the District code of conduct applies regarding behavioral and usage restrictions.

An objective in trail design and construction will be made to maintain an undeveloped buffer of land between trails and private property to help keep visitors away from private land. Signage, vegetative screening, or fencing can also be used for this purpose.

If conflicts arise, the Parks District will identify a solution in the best interests of all park district citizens while considering the concerns of the adjacent property owners.

Other recommendations for managing the system to ensure the privacy and security of adjacent landowners:

- Design and build trails to non-motorized users.
- Implement a volunteer “trail steward” program.
- Educate users about private property rights through signs, brochures and outreach.
- Keep open lines of communication between the District and adjacent landowners with a “good neighbor” policy.
- Coordinate with other Trail stakeholders in Trail development

B. Vision, Guiding Principles and Strategies

The Vision

All trail properties will be recognized as community assets. Users with diverse interests will visit the properties for a variety of activities and be respectful of their natural surroundings. People will enjoy visiting the properties because they are safe and well maintained. For some, there will be places within the properties to find solitude; for others, trails will be designed to be sensitive to wildlife while accommodating different types of non-motorized recreational activities. Trails also will be

linked to the community's larger non-motorized and recreational trail system and related public facilities.

Guiding Principles and Strategies

Guiding Principles are broad recommendations to help achieve the overall vision. They are designed to guide decision-making and policy creation regarding actions that affect the property.

Based on priorities they identified as the most important elements of the property and its use, the District board of Commissioners created five principles, each with a series of related strategies that should be implemented.

1. Provide opportunities for low-impact, non-motorized recreation that minimizes human pressures and impacts on wildlife, the natural landscape, and neighbors.

- Design and create trails that are sensitive to wildlife habitat and riparian areas and that require minimal alteration to the property's landscape. (i.e.-using existing skidder trails and logging roads as the basis for trails to minimize impact to the eco-system)
- When deemed necessary by the Park District Board, review conceptual Trail Plan map with third party experts and adjust final trail design and construction to be consistent with the expert's recommendations.
- Provide buffers between trails and neighboring properties to prevent users from trespassing onto adjacent private land.
- Establish policies regarding day use operation, permitted uses, and dog leash requirements.

2. Offer facilities for self-directed and directed exploration, education, and personal renewal.

- Provide a trail system that is consistent with the conceptual trail map and design recommendations, accommodates a variety of non-motorized uses, and minimizes conflicts between the different uses.
- Develop signage to guide users through the property and educate them about permitted uses and resources found on the property.
- Locate facilities such as benches, shelters and kiosks in appropriate locations.
- As opportunities arise, explore potential off-site facilities that would complement the property.

3. Ensure appropriate access and connectivity.

- Provide access onto the property so that entryways, parking areas and trailheads are located in places where they can be accessed easily and safely and still be sensitive to the natural area.
- Develop educational materials such as signage, brochures, and other outreach materials to inform users about private property rights.
- Communicate future development plans or changes in policy in advance to adjacent landowners.
- Design the property's trail system in a way that can link easily to existing and future publicly-accessible land and trails.

4. Respect the health and integrity of Maxwellton Creek and its headwaters.

- Work with partnering groups and agencies to provide classes, workshops, and written materials that educate users about the watershed and about "leave no trace" practices.
- Monitor property to ensure that trails are being used only for their permitted uses and that users are not straying off the trail and damaging habitat and riparian areas.
- Develop a volunteer steward program to monitor and maintain the portion of Maxwellton Creek that is located on the property.

5. Protect fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resource values.

- Permit only recreational activities that are compatible with the ecological health and functioning of the watershed.
- Organize events around special days like National Trails Day and Public Lands Day to provide educational outreach to the public about the property's resources and its significance in the watershed.
- Develop a volunteer trail steward program to maintain designated trails and overall quality of the property.

Trail Standards – Requirements for Varying Types of Trails

Trails come in many types for various users and in varied terrains. Their construction and maintenance is tied to their characteristics. An objective for trail construction is minimal alteration to the natural landscape and moderate trail width to preserve the habitat and protect against canopy disruption. Maintaining a closed tree canopy over forested trails is important to preserving native wildlife and avoiding invasive species. The following classification systems were considered in deciding how the District would move forward with new trail construction and ongoing maintenance of trails.

The SWPRD Board of Commissioners determined that for District owned trails there will be the following

primary classifications of trails for District properties:

1. Arterial/Mainline Trails- Trails that are fully groomed and built of appropriate imported materials. These trails will be wide and usually provide for a wide variety of uses. Signs should advise of permitted and prohibited use as well as inform as to directions and information relevant to the trail. Users should be provided with a contact number via signs to bring problems or concerns to the attention of the trail authority. On such trails maintenance should be scheduled monthly and users should be recruited and encouraged to assist in trail inspections and in bringing problems to the attention of the parks department.
2. Capillary/Single-track Trails- Developed trails that remain in a rugged or primitive state. These trails are often suitable for one lane of passage and will have frequent locations requiring reductions in speed or more care in maneuvering. Signs on this type of trail will be limited to providing basic directions and environmental protection. If such trails provide a link as part of a designated trail, they should show the trail designation. These trails may undergo some informal and infrequent grooming, and maintenance is usually done every few years to preserve trail or respond to concerns.

In development of the Park District Trail guidelines, staff and Commissioners considered the items included in Appendix A as reference material.

A. Maintenance

Maintenance of signs and trails will be the responsibility of the SWPRD. A volunteer trail stewards program can be a great support. Good trail management includes:

- Trash pick-up

- Monitoring to protect adjacent property
- Repair or replanting of privacy screening materials
- Enforcement to exclude unauthorized users
- Cleaning of trailhead facilities (if applicable)
- Prevention and repair of vandalism
- Erosion control or repair
- Native plant restoration
- Wildlife habitat protection

B. Recreational or Environmental Programming

Outdoor Environmental Education and Recreational Programming will be the sole responsibility of SWPRD. As trail construction throughout the District progresses, additional programs may be made available either directly from District employees or through contractual agreement with outside providers.

C. Funding for Trail Development and Amenities

As a junior taxing district of Island County, the District has a voted levy for Maintenance and Operations of District properties and programs. This levy covers the maintenance and operating expenses for the District over a two, four or six year period. Any additional monies the District wants for capital expenses such as equipment or construction must be raised through a special funding bond or through grants or partnerships.

Other potential sources of assistance include:

- Grants from Federal, State or County sources or from private businesses and foundations
- In-kind contributions
 - Volunteers
 - Americorps, Youth Conservation Corps
 - Prison Crews, Juvenile Adult Offenders
- Fundraising, e.g., local service clubs and organizations
- Donations – individual and corporate sponsors

Appendix A-Reference Materials

Classification System Example 1:

Example Plan from Trustland Trails Management Plan

Class 1 – No development

Trails that exist in a rugged state and provide one-lane passage. Used primarily by hikers, these trails are rarely or never groomed and have a surface of rock, dirt, sand, and other natural materials. Such trails are informally created and can be a problem, disturbing sensitive habitat areas, causing erosion and presenting ungroomed, unsafe surfaces.

Class 2 – Minor development; one lane width

Developed trails that remain in a rugged or primitive state. These trails are often suitable for one lane of passage and will have frequent locations requiring reductions in speed or more care in maneuvering. Signs on this type of trail will be limited to providing basic directions and environmental protection. If such trails provide a link as part of a designated trail, they should show the trail designation. These trails may undergo some informal and infrequent grooming, and maintenance is usually done every few years to preserve trail or respond to concerns.

Class 3 – More development; two lane width

Trails that have been developed to allow many uses. Generally wide and suitable for two-way passage or equestrian use.

These trails must have signs to identify types of use, directions, traffic warnings, and trail identification. Maintenance on these trails should be scheduled and completed annually as well as in response to problems.

Class 4 – Built with few irregularities

Built trails that are wide, often smooth and with few irregularities. Such trails may have multiple uses and usually consist of hard natural materials.

There is an expectation on such trails that signs will exist to advise of directions, information regarding trail use, designation, hazard warnings, etc. These trails require maintenance at least once a year to ensure that the trail is cleared for use. It is recommended that user groups be recruited to assist in trail inspections and encouraged to report any problems.

Class 5 – Most developed, multiple users

Trails that are fully groomed and often paved or built of appropriate imported materials. These trails will be wide and usually provide for a wide variety of uses. Signs should advise of permitted and prohibited use as well as inform as to directions and information relevant to the trail. Users should be provided with a contact number via signs to bring problems or concerns to the attention of the trail authority.

On such trails maintenance should be scheduled monthly and users should be recruited and encouraged to assist in trail inspections and in bringing problems to the attention of the parks department.

Classification System Example 2:

Proposed Trail Classification Hierarchy

Below are eight proposed classifications describing the hierarchy of trails within the jurisdiction of the City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation.

Class	Description	Min.-Max. width	Example
I.	On-Street Trail, or spur section, of which a considerable portion is within Parks and Recreation jurisdiction. Typically a cross-jurisdictional bicycle or walking route. Route is published and/or signed.	5'-0 min., may vary	Central Park Trail
II.	Paved multi-use trail. Surfacing either concrete or asphalt. Uses including walking, jogging, skating, and bicycling. Cross-jurisdictional, urban, includes street crossings although vehicular access is limited to service vehicles.	8'-0 min.	Burke Gilman, Green Lake, Alki Blvd.
III.	Paved multi-use trail. Surfacing either concrete or asphalt. Uses including walking, jogging, skating, bicycling and service access. Contained within a Park, vehicular access limited to service vehicles.	8'-0 min.	Seward Park loop.
IV.	Paved Pedestrian-only walking path contained within a Park.	5'-0 min., may vary	Almost any developed Park.
V.	Soft Surface Multi-purpose trail. Crushed rock paving. Primarily walking, service access, limited bicycle use. Contained within a Park, vehicular access limited to service vehicles.	8'-0 min., 12'-0 max.	Carkeek Park.
VI.	Arterial Walking Trail. Crushed rock paving. Pedestrian only, no vehicles access. Contained within a Park.	4'-0 min., 8'-0 max.	Most fully developed primary trails within "undeveloped" or natural parklands.
VII.	Secondary Walking Trail. Improved mineral soil or crushed rock paving. Pedestrian only, usually associated with a Class VI arterial trail. Should reconnect back to arterial, developed area, or terminate at a destination of some significance. Lowest legitimate level of development within the Park system.	2'-0 min., 4'-0 max.	Far loop at Dead Horse Canyon - Lakeridge Park.
VIII.	Dirt Track. Illegitimate path or underdeveloped class VI or VII trail awaiting improvement. Illegitimate paths may include private points of access or those in very wet or steep areas typically deemed inappropriate for continued maintenance or future development.	as narrow as 1'-0	Many short cuts throughout the Parks trail system.

Classification System Example 3:

Washington State Parks Characteristic Trail Criteria

	Max. Sustained Grade	Max. Short Grade	For Max Distance of	Min. Clearing Width	Min. Clearing Height	Min. Tread Width	Tread Surface
PEDESTRIAN							
Universal Access	5%	10%	50'	72"	8'	48"	Firm, stable, slip resistant
Easy	12%	20%	50'	48"	8'	24"	Obstacle free
Moderate	15%	25%	200'	48"	8'	18"	Minor obstacles
Difficult	18%	30%	300'	36"	8'	12"	Negotiable obstacles OK
EQUESTRIAN							
Easy	10%	15%	200'	8'	10'	24"	Develop for stability
Moderate	15%	25%	300'	6'	8'	24"	Minor obstacles
Difficult	20%	30%	500'	6'	8'	18"	Negotiable obstacles OK
BICYCLE							
Easy	5%	10%	100'	60"	8'	24"	Mainly smooth
Moderate	8%	20%	200'	48"	8'	18"	Minor obstacles
Difficult	10%	30%	300'	36"	8'	12"	Negotiable obstacles OK

Classification System Example 4:



Trail Class Matrix (FSH 2353, Section 14.2, Exhibit 01)

Trail Classes are general categories reflecting trail development scale, arranged along a continuum. The Trail Class identified for a National Forest System (NFS) trail prescribes its development scale, representing its intended design and management standards.¹ Local deviations from any Trail Class descriptor may be established based on trail-specific conditions, topography, or other factors, provided that the deviations do not undermine the general intent of the applicable Trail Class.

Identify the appropriate Trail Class for each National Forest System trail or trail segment based on the management intent in the applicable land management plan, travel management direction, trail-specific decisions, and other related direction. Apply the Trail Class that most closely matches the management intent for the trail or trail segment, which may or may not reflect the current condition of the trail.

Trail Attributes	Trail Class 1 Minimally Developed	Trail Class 2 Moderately Developed	Trail Class 3 Developed	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed
Tread & Traffic Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tread intermittent and often indistinct • May require route finding • Single lane with no allowance constructed for passing • Predominantly native materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tread continuous and discernible, but narrow and rough • Single lane with minor allowances constructed for passing • Typically native materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tread continuous and obvious • Single lane, with allowances constructed for passing where required by traffic volumes in areas with no reasonable passing opportunities available • Native or imported materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tread wide and relatively smooth with few irregularities • Single lane, with allowances constructed for passing where required by traffic volumes in areas with no reasonable passing opportunities available • Double lane where traffic volumes are high and passing is frequent • Native or imported materials • May be hardened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tread wide, firm, stable, and generally uniform • Single lane, with frequent turnouts where traffic volumes are low to moderate • Double lane where traffic volumes are moderate to high • Commonly hardened with asphalt or other imported material
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles common, naturally occurring, often substantial and intended to provide increased challenge • Narrow passages; brush, steep grades, rocks and logs present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles may be common, substantial, and intended to provide increased challenge • Blockages cleared to define routes and protect resources • Vegetation may encroach into trailway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles may be common, but not substantial or intended to provide challenge • Vegetation cleared outside of trail way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles infrequent and insubstantial • Vegetation cleared outside of trailway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles not present • Grades typically < 8%

Trail Attributes	Trail Class 1 Minimally Developed	Trail Class 2 Moderately Developed	Trail Class 3 Developed	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed
Constructed Features & Trail Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures minimal to non-existent Drainage typically accomplished without structures Natural fords Typically no bridges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures of limited size, scale, and quantity; typically constructed of native materials Structures adequate to protect trail infrastructure and resources Natural fords Bridges as needed for resource protection and appropriate access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures may be common and substantial; constructed of imported or native materials Natural or constructed fords Bridges as needed for resource protection and appropriate access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures frequent and substantial; typically constructed of imported materials Constructed or natural fords Bridges as needed for resource protection and user convenience Trailside amenities may be present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures frequent or continuous; typically constructed of imported materials May include bridges, boardwalks, curbs, handrails, trailside amenities, and similar features
Signs ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route identification signing limited to junctions Route markers present when trail location is not evident Regulatory and resource protection signing infrequent Destination signing, unless required, generally not present Information and interpretive signing generally not present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route identification signing limited to junctions Route markers present when trail location is not evident Regulatory and resource protection signing infrequent Destination signing typically infrequent outside of wilderness; generally not present in wilderness Information and interpretive signing not common 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route identification signing at junctions and as needed for user reassurance Route markers as needed for user reassurance Regulatory and resource protection signing may be common Destination signing likely outside of wilderness; generally not present in wilderness Information and interpretive signs may be present outside of wilderness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route identification signing at junctions and as needed for user reassurance Route markers as needed for user reassurance Regulatory and resource protection signing common Destination signing common outside of wilderness; generally not present in wilderness Information and interpretive signs may be common outside of wilderness Accessibility information likely displayed at trailhead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route identification signing at junctions and for user reassurance Route markers as needed for user reassurance Regulatory and resource protection signing common Destination signing common Information and interpretive signs common Accessibility information likely displayed at trailhead
Typical Recreation Environment & Experience ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, unmodified ROS: Typically Primitive to Roaded Natural WROS: Typically Primitive to Semi-Primitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, essentially unmodified ROS: Typically Primitive to Roaded Natural WROS: Typically Primitive to Semi-Primitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, primarily unmodified ROS: Typically Primitive to Roaded Natural WROS: Typically Semi-Primitive to Transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe modified ROS: Typically Semi-Primitive to Rural WROS: Typically Portal or Transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maybe highly modified Commonly associated with visitor centers or high-use recreation sites ROS: Typically Roaded Natural to Urban Generally not present in wilderness

¹ For National Quality Standards for Trails, Potential Appropriateness of Trail Classes for Managed Uses, Design Parameters, and other related guidance, refer to FSM 2.353, FSH 2309.18, and other applicable agency references.

² For standards and guidelines for the use of signs and posters along trails, refer to the Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service (EM-71 00-15).

³ The Trail Class Matrix shows the combinations of Trail Class and Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) or Wilderness Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (WROS) settings that commonly occur, although trails in all Trail Classes may and do occur in all settings. For guidance on the application of the ROS and WROS, refer to FSM 23.10 and 2.353 and FSH 2309.18.

Implementation

A. Management and Operations

For trails created on District property, management and operations will be the sole responsibility of South Whidbey Parks & Recreation District. This includes the management of trailhead parking, amenities and trails.

Multiple Use on Trails

A wide range of people and groups usually want to take advantage of the benefits offered by trails. It is important to realize who is using the trail(s) and to determine if multiple uses of the trail are reasonable.

Factors to consider when deciding on permitted uses should include:

1. Natural terrain
2. Influence on other permitted uses
3. Public demand
4. Ability to safely partake in this use
5. Effect of this use on integrity of wildlife habitat

Equestrian Use

Riding horses on trails can create hazards if other trail users are not aware of equestrian use. The idea of a horse and rider sharing the trail with cross country runners can quickly bring to mind some hazardous consequences.

Where equestrian use of the trail is allowed, efforts should be made to ensure that all trail users are informed of this fact and are taught how to share the trail. While the owner or rider of the horse has responsibility for the actions of their mount, the owner of the trail has a responsibility to warn of the variety of users on the trail.

Horseback riding and hiking are compatible where trail sight distance of 50-100 feet, passing room, and dry surface conditions can be provided. Where the trail becomes wet for short distances a separate trail should be provided and the split well marked.

Horseback riding and mountain biking may be compatible on trails of considerable width with flat to moderately flat terrain for sight distance and passing room. This combination should be provided on primarily low-use trails.

Right-of-way rules and instructions for users on how to pass each other should be clearly displayed and enforced when possible. For example, bikers must yield to horses by stopping completely and moving to the side of the trail. Bikers should be cautioned about the likelihood of frightening a horse and the safety implications to both rider and biker.

In general a pathway 4 to 6 feet wide with ideally 8 to 12 feet of clearing from shrubs and trees should be provided. (A track width of 2 to 4 feet for one-way/single track is recommended, and 5 to 6 feet for two-way/double track. In addition clearing width should be 6 to 12 feet and the overhead clearing height should be 8 to 12 feet in height.) A natural dirt trail surface, wood chips, or crushed gravel is preferred. Any surface should be as well drained as possible, particularly if trail is open to other uses, e.g., hiking.

Signs

Signage will play a crucial role in ensuring successful trail use. Residents and visitors alike will require orientation, guidance and information about permissible trail uses. Development of a sign plan is encouraged to avoid clutter and to help create a trail identity. Elements to include in the sign plan

are: establish and use a consistent logo to identify the trail; standardize construction materials; and create a 'family' of sign designs. Various types of signs might include:

- Trail Identifier: Identify the trail system and trail in name and with a logo. This should be posted at trailheads and other access points.
- Property Boundaries: Use to keep people on the trail and away from private property.
- General Information: Basic trail information will be needed at trailheads. This will include an overall trail system map showing locations of trailheads, parking, and restrooms. Other information to consider includes hours of operation, accessibility information, and who to contact in emergency situations.
- Trail Etiquette: General guidance about using and sharing the trail (e.g., Stay on Trail, Pets on Leash, Pack It In/Pack It Out) should be provided.
- Trail Rules: Post rules and regulations, e.g., hours of operation, non-motorized uses only, illegal use of drugs, alcohol and firearms, etc.
- Transition Points: Directional signage to inform trail users about the location of the trail. For instance, at a "T" intersection, a directional arrow may be needed to inform the user which way the trail goes.
- Mile Markers: Mile markers should be provided to allow users to track where they are on the trail.
- Interpretation/Education: Interpretive signs to enhance nature education might be added to some trails.
- Safety: Signs should be used to warn of a danger. If user(s) report or the Parks District has knowledge of a danger.

Sometimes the search for perfect sign language results in a sign that reads like a legal document. People, especially children, will not take the time to read a sign that is long in text. Create simple, clear signs and use standardized, recognized symbols.

Not only should signs communicate clearly to young and old alike, they should also do so to those who speak any language. The primary purpose of a safety sign is to prevent an accident, not to avoid liability.

The location of a sign can be as important as the wording. Safety signs should be in clear view and located in a manner that they can be seen by anyone approaching a hazard.

1. The safety sign is to PREVENT accidents
2. Keep it SIMPLE
3. Locate it where it serves the PURPOSE