

# National Recreation and National Water Trails





# National Recreation Trails: Designating Your Trail for NRT Status





# Today's Learning

- NRTs = National Recreation Trails
- What are NRTs?
- Goals of NRTs
- History of NRTs
- Eligibility Requirements
- Benefits of Designation
- How to Apply
- Recent Updates
- FAQs



= Slide for both NRT's and NWT's





# What are NRTs

- Established under the National Trails System Act of 1968.
- Existing land-based and water-based trails that provide close to home recreation opportunities on Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands, and connect to National Trails System trail networks.
- Recognized and designated by either the **Secretary of the Interior** or **Secretary of Agriculture**.





# NRT Goals

Calls for establishing trails in both urban and rural settings for persons of all ages, interests, skills, and physical abilities.

Promote the use and care of existing trails and stimulate the development of new trails throughout the U.S.

Provide recreation access for urban and rural communities.

Economic development through tourism.

Provide healthy recreation opportunities.





# NRT History

Currently there are over 1,300 NRTs in all 50 states, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

## First NRTs

- Schockaloe Trail, MS – 1969
- East Bay Skyline Trail, CA – 1970
- Gabrielino Trail, CA – 1970

## Newest NRTs

- 2022 – 9 new NRTs
- 2023 – 9 new NRTs
- 2024 – 4 new NRTs





# Trail Eligibility

A trail is a travel way established either through construction or use and is passable by at least one or more of the following, including but not limited to: foot traffic, stock, equestrian, watercraft, bicycles, in-line skates, wheelchairs, cross-country skis, off-road recreation vehicles such as motorcycles, snowmobiles, ATVs, and four-wheel drive vehicles.

Roads and highways suitable for passenger car travel are not eligible for NRT designation.





# Trail Eligibility

The trail must be open to public use, have no gaps, and be designed, constructed, and maintained according to best management practices, in keeping with the use anticipated.

Trails that demonstrate state-of-the-art design and management are especially encouraged to apply for NRT designation.





# Trail Eligibility

The trail is in compliance with applicable land use plans and environmental laws.





# Trail Eligibility

The trail is in existence and will be available for public use for at least 10 years.





# Trail Eligibility

All public and private property owners of trail lands or waters have been notified and have given their written consent and support for designation.





# Trail Eligibility

Trails on state, local government, or private land (anything other than federal) must have a letter of support from their appropriate State Trail Administrator.





# Benefits

National Database

Signage

Photo Contest

Ambassador Program

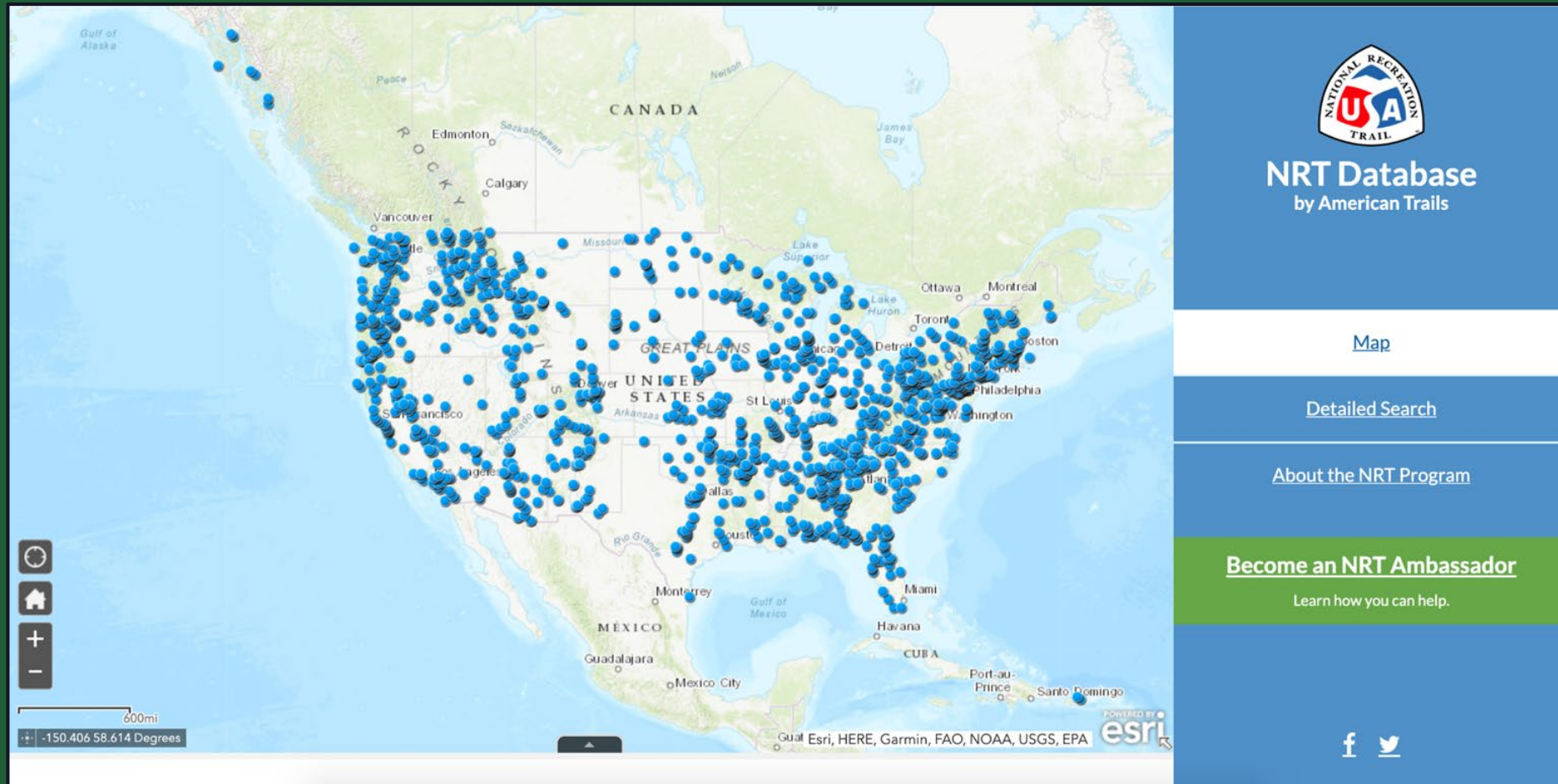
Funding Opportunities





# Benefits- National Database

Database of over 1,300 searchable trails



[National Recreation Trails Database \(nrtdatabase.org\)](http://nrtdatabase.org)



# Benefits - Signage

## Upon Designation

- Two 8"x8" metal signs
- Three 3.5"x3.5" metal signs

## After Designation

- Plastic signs
- Low-cost metal signs



# Benefits – Photo Contest

Recognition for your trail through great photography



## 2024 Photo Contest

Photo entries submitted for the 2024 National Recreation Trails photo contest hosted by American Trails



[2024 NRT Photo Contest](#)



# Benefits – Ambassador Program

- Led by American Trails
- 300+ individuals in all 50 states committed to improving NRTs.
- Ambassadors are:
  - Trained for safety and consistency of data gathering.
  - Tasked with reaching out to trail managers and agency staff to build understanding of NRTs and NWTs, and ensure the trail meets standards of quality.
  - Help to identify centerline GPS tracks and ensure quality information on each NRT and NWT.



# Benefits – Improved Funding Opportunities

- While there is no direct funding for NRTs, being an NRT may improve your fundraising opportunities.
- Many State Recreational Trails Program funding provides priority to trails that are a part of the National Trails System.
- NRT status provides outside acknowledgement of trail quality and legitimizes your trail in a very tangible way, which can improve your fundraising story.
- American Trails has built a national “Trail Fund” that may prioritize funding for diverse NRTs.





# How to Apply

**Trail on land / waters  
of US Department of  
Agriculture land (USDA)?**



**Apply through the USDA  
process**

**Trail on lands / waters not a  
part of Department of  
Agriculture land?**



**Apply through the Department  
of the Interior process**



# How to Apply - USDA

If your trail is on federal land administered by (or associated with) the US Department of Agriculture:

The USDA Forest Service has authority for designating NRTs on land administered by the Department of Agriculture (National Forests, National Grasslands, and National Recreation Areas) and associated lands.

Proposed NRTs on U.S. Forest Service lands are nominated and approved using an internal application with specific criteria.







BARR  
TRAIL

# How to Apply - USDA

## Designation Process:

1. Recommendation & Approval
2. Trail Location Description
3. Trail History
4. Trail Description & Management Objectives
5. Best Management Practices
6. Assessment of Impacts
7. Public Use Statement



# How to Apply - DOI

If your trail is on Federal, State, Tribal, or local land not including U.S. Forest Service land:

The Department of the Interior has authority for designating NRTs on all lands other than those administered by the Department of Agriculture.

Proposed NRTs on Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands (other than U.S. Forest Service lands) are nominated and approved following a public application with specific criteria.





# How to Apply - DOI

## Designation Process:

- Trail Information
- Contact Information
- Owner Consent & State Support
- If any portion of the trail is on non-Federally managed land, a letter from the respective State Trail Administrator is required
- Trail Photo(s) and Map
- Best Management Practices
- Additional Support Materials
- Signed Signature Page
- Application Reviewed by Interagency Staff
- Approved applications submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for official designation

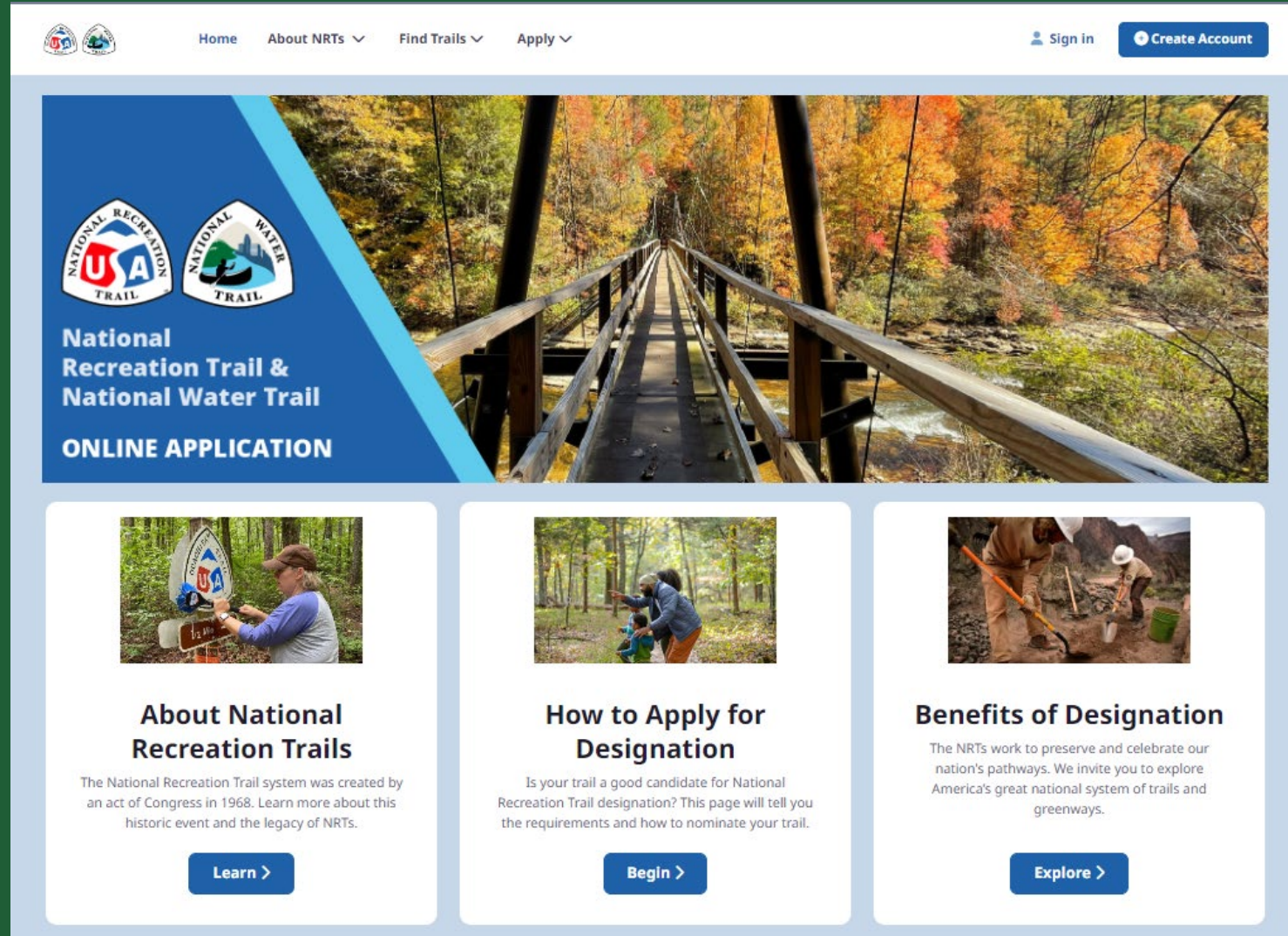
Deadline to submit application is November 1







# Recent Updates


- New and improved application system
- Designated trail update form





The screenshot shows the homepage of the National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail ONLINE APPLICATION website. The header includes navigation links: Home, About NRTs, Find Trails, and Apply. There are also links for Sign in and Create Account. The main banner features the logos for the National Recreation Trail and National Water Trail, with the text "National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail ONLINE APPLICATION". Below the banner are three featured sections: "About National Recreation Trails" with a photo of a person at a trail marker and a "Learn >" button; "How to Apply for Designation" with a photo of a family and a "Begin >" button; and "Benefits of Designation" with a photo of workers and an "Explore >" button.

Home About NRTs Find Trails Apply Sign in Create Account

   
National Recreation Trail & National Water Trail  
ONLINE APPLICATION

  
**About National Recreation Trails**  
The National Recreation Trail system was created by an act of Congress in 1968. Learn more about this historic event and the legacy of NRTs.  
[Learn >](#)

  
**How to Apply for Designation**  
Is your trail a good candidate for National Recreation Trail designation? This page will tell you the requirements and how to nominate your trail.  
[Begin >](#)

  
**Benefits of Designation**  
The NRTs work to preserve and celebrate our nation's pathways. We invite you to explore America's great national system of trails and greenways.  
[Explore >](#)



[National Recreation Trails application \(nrtapplication.org\)](http://nrtapplication.org)



# FAQs - NRTS

- Recognized by the federal government, with the consent of any Federal, State, Tribal, local, nonprofit, or private entity having jurisdiction over the lands the NRT traverses.
- All potential trails must apply for the distinction of a NRT.
- Upon designation as a NRT, all management responsibilities remain with the existing land management entity.
- National water trails (NWT), a subset of NRTs, are water-based recreation trails. The category of NWT was authorized in 2012 under Secretarial Order 3319.
- There is no minimum or maximum length for a NRT.



# National Water Trails: Designating Your Trail for NWT Status





# What are NWTs

- Established under the National Trails System Act of 1968.
- National Recreation Trails - existing land-based and water-based trails that provide close to home recreation opportunities on Federal, State, Tribal, and local lands, and connect to National Trails System trail networks.
- Secretarial Order 3319 – “Establishment of a National Water Trail System (2012).
- Recognized and designated by either the **Secretary of the Interior** or **Secretary of Agriculture**.



# NWT Goals

To create a distinctive national network of exemplary water trails that expand access to water-based recreation for healthy recreation and tourism.

To protect and restore waterways across the country.

To improve user safety on our water trails.

To establish a network of practitioners that promotes the development of water trails and shares best management practices.





# Designated NWTs

37 National Water Trails have been designated as of 2024

NWT's currently range in length from 1.5 miles to 631 miles

Lakes, swamps, ocean, canals, rivers of all kinds





# 1. Recreation Opportunities

Established public access points that accommodate a diversity of trip lengths and provide access to a variety of opportunities for recreation and education.



Accessible boat launch



Hudson River Greenway NWT in Manhattan. Credit: Scott Keller





## 2. Education & Interpretation

Education is integral to the program's success by providing learning opportunities about the value of water resources, cultural heritage, boating skills, safety and outdoor ethics.



Environmental education



Safety education



# 3. Conservation & Stewardship

Water trails provide opportunities for communities to develop and implement strategies that enhance and restore the health of local waterways and surrounding lands.



Salt Marsh Restoration at Concrete Plant Park, Bronx River



River Cleanup, Tuckasegee River



Fisheries Restoration on the Alabama River





# 4. Community Support

Local communities provide support and advocacy for maintenance and stewardship of the water trail.



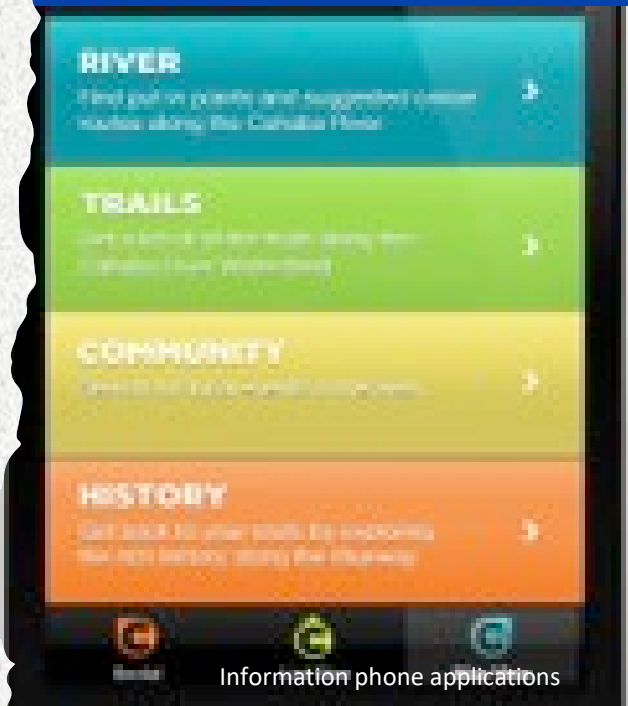


# 5. Public Information

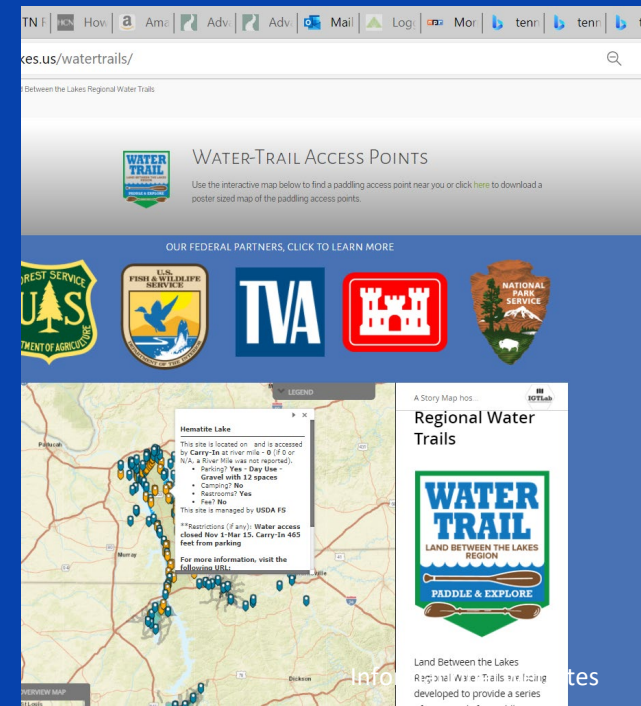
The public is provided with accessible and understandable water trail information, including details for identifying access and trail routes; cultural, historic, and natural features; hazards; and water quality. The water trail is promoted to the community and broad national audience.



Interpretive signage



Information phone applications





## 6. Trail Maintenance

Demonstrated ability to support routine and long-term maintenance investments on the water trail. Facilities are designed, constructed, and maintained by incorporating sustainability principles.





## 7. Planning & Management

Maintain a water trail plan that describes a vision, desired future conditions, and strategies to strengthen best management practices. [a.k.a. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY]





# Answers to Frequently Asked NWT Questions

- There is no minimum or maximum length for an NWT.
- Designation is only provided for the section of waterway that meets the 7 BMP's.
- Maps provided in the application should reflect only the section of waterway being applied for designation.
- Trails that are already NRT's can apply to have their designation changed to NWT.
- Distance between access points should be reasonable for a new paddler to travel in a day's time (or less). Distance varies depending on type of water and rate of flow.
- Access points should be available to the general public with suitable parking.
- Any type of water can be designated, but we do look at water quality for public health safety.
- NPS does not provide oversight or maintain the trail upon designation.



# Common Issues with NWT Applications

You may not be ready to apply if...

- Trail doesn't meet all BMP's.
- Trail doesn't have signage, maps or online information needed to aid users in trip planning, orienting and identification of safety hazards.
- Trail is incomplete without suitable point-to-point access.
- Application lacks information about access point ownership and permissions
- An individual is applying, rather than a robust, proven organization.
- Trail designation is being sought by a rather new entity, or an entity that doesn't manage lands, without long-term plans for how it will be maintained.





# Contacts

## NPS Leads:

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## American Trails:

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Photos: Top-Black Canyon Water Trail. Credit: NPS;  
Left-Munising Cross Country Ski Trail. Credit: NPS  
Right-Grandstaff Canyon. Credit: Peter Bonsall





# Thank You!



Huron River Water Trail. Credit: Unknown



Gabriel Tiller. Credit: Oregon Timber Trail Alliance



Green and Nolin Rivers Blueway. Credit: Ashley Decker



Pacific Northwest Trail – Galcier Segment. Credit: NPS