

Universal Access on Recreational Trails

Workshops Build Trail Accessibility for All

The Challenge

The New England/New York area is a heavily populated section of the United States that nearly 30 million people call home. Millions of residents and tourists use public recreational trails each year to take part in outdoor activities such as hiking and bird watching.

Many people have disabilities, however, that prevent or reduce their ability to fully enjoy the natural landscape along thousands of miles of public access trails. Some trails may be too narrow, steep, or rough to allow access for people who use wheelchairs or have some other type of special needs.

Federal legislation provides guidance, mandates, and recommendations for making trails accessible to people with disabilities and special needs. The legislation notes that sometimes even minor alterations to existing trails and facilities such as decreasing slope and widening access areas can greatly improve accessibility. However, many people who are responsible for trail management do not have the proper training to improve trails and facilities so that they provide universal access for all people.

The Solution

The USDA Forest Service Northeastern Area Civil Rights Committee provided a \$4,000 grant and additional resources to develop trail accessibility workshops. The State of New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands then worked with the New Hampshire Trails Bureau, the USDA Forest Service National Accessibility Program Manager, and the Northeastern Area Urban and Community Forestry Program to plan, host, and coordinate the workshops. Sessions were held in two New Hampshire communities for people who are responsible for maintaining and improving trails.

The workshops, entitled “Creating Universal Access on Recreational Trails: Trail Design, Construction and Maintenance Techniques,” used field exercises to help attendees evaluate the accessibility of trails and



Workshop attendees gather to discuss potential trail improvements.

included expert panel discussions on overcoming related challenges. The workshops provided training on:

- Federal trail accessibility guidelines
- Designing and building trails for universal access
- Trail maintenance
- Resources, products and tools

Resulting Benefits

The collaborative efforts trained dozens of people from nonprofit organizations and agencies who work on the front lines of public trail construction and maintenance. These people in turn are now helping to make more miles of public recreational trails accessible for people with disabilities and special needs so that thousands more Americans can fully enjoy all that the great outdoors has to offer. Simply by making small changes to trails, they are making them more accessible, without changing the inherent character of the trails or the surrounding environment. The workshops also helped to make possible trail surface and bridge design improvements at the New Hampshire Urban Community Forestry Center in Portsmouth, a popular tourist destination.

Sharing Success

The universal access workshops in New Hampshire served to increase demand for this training elsewhere in the Northeast. Public recreation managers in New York, Massachusetts, and elsewhere are asking the Forest Service to provide training in their locations in 2006. This additional training will expand the knowledge base of professionals and enthusiasts who will in turn make even more miles of public trails universally accessible.

Sometimes even minor alterations to existing trails can help make them more accessible to people with disabilities.



USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

For more information, contact:
Kathryn P. Maloney, Area Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
Email: kmaloney@fs.fed.us

John Parry, Urban Forestry Coord.
271 Mast Road
Durham, NH 03824
Phone: 603-868-7688
Email: jparry@fs.fed.us