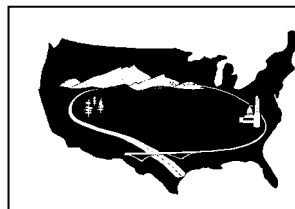


**FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
&
U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE**



**GUIDANCE ON THE
FEDERAL LANDS HIGHWAY
REFUGE TRAILS PROGRAM**

**ESTABLISHED BY
Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act:
A Legacy for Users
SAFETEA-LU**

January 6, 2006

Table of Contents

Background	1
Public Trails	1
Scope of Improvements	2
Trails.....	2
Foot Bridges	2
Safety Projects.....	2
Planning Requirements	3
Accessibility	3
Design Standards	3
Signage	4
Program Effectiveness Measures.....	4
Project Selection Priorities.....	4
Public Involvement	4
Projects Completed Under Budget.....	5
Real Property Inventory.....	5
Definitions.....	5
Appendix.....	6
Eligibility	6
Work Items Eligible for Funding.....	7
Work Items Generally Not Eligible for Funding.....	9
Work Items Not Eligible for Funding.....	10

Guidance Document For The Refuge Trails Program
Prepared by the Federal Highway Administration
and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Revised August 3, 2005

Background

The document provides guidance to help identify trail projects and project enhancements that may be funded under the Refuge Roads program (RRP) category. The basic eligibility requirements were established by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFTEA-LU) and are included in Title 23 - United States Code (23 USC).

In coordination with the Federal Highway Administration, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture through the Federal Interagency Council on Trails, those trails that have national designations (National Scenic Trails, National Historic Trails, and National Recreation Trails) will be given a higher priority for project selection. See Trail Project Grading Criteria in the Appendix for details.

Funds will be made available for use only to pay the cost of:

(A) *Maintenance and restoration of existing trails*, may be interpreted broadly to include any kind of major trail maintenance (except annually reoccurring maintenance), restoration, rehabilitation, or relocation. This category may include maintenance and restoration of trail bridges, or providing appropriate signage along a trail.

(B) *Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages for recreational trails*, may be interpreted broadly to include development or rehabilitation of any trailside and trailhead facility. The definition of “rehabilitation” means extensive repair needed to bring a facility up to standards suitable for public use (not routine maintenance). Trailside and trailhead facilities should have a direct relationship with a recreational trail; a roadside rest area or visitor center is not an appropriate use of trail funds.

Please note that construction of new facilities is not authorized.

Examples of eligible items are included in the **Appendix**.

Public Trails

The authorization to obligate funds for trails under 23 USC 204 is same as it is for refuge roads.

The trails must:

- 1) Provide access to or within a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System and,
- 2) Title and maintenance responsibility are vested in the United States Government.

For the purpose of this document, public trails are defined as any designated nonmotorized, terrestrial or aquatic trail open to public travel and listed in the Service’s Real Property Inventory

(in the case of water trails, this would primarily be launch sites). Public trails may include paved and unpaved terrestrial trails, aquatic trails, boardwalks, and trail bridges. The use of motorized vehicles for official purposes only (emergency, enforcement, maintenance) may be permitted on otherwise nonmotorized trails. *Note: wheelchair use by mobility-impaired people, whether operated manually or powered, constitutes pedestrian use, not motorized trail use.*

To be considered a public trail, the trail must be opened to the general public during substantial parts of the year. Trails may be open to multiple uses (i.e., hiking, equestrian, biking, bird watching, nature observation, skiing, snowshoeing) and may be zoned by time and location at various times of the year to accommodate compatible use. Seasonal closures, so long as they apply to all members of the public, will not affect the public use status of a trail.

However, trails only open for or developed for limited public interests (i.e., hunters only, photographers only) are not considered public trails under this guidance and are not eligible for project funding.

Trails used only by refuge staff, interns, volunteers, partner agencies, special use permittees or cooperative agreement signatories are not public trails. Trails that are used by members of the public only while escorted by the above are also not public use trails.

Scope of Improvements

a. Trails

The refuge road funds may only be used for rehabilitation to extend the service life of an existing trail and to enhance safety. Such work includes the placement of additional surfacing materials and/or other work necessary to return an existing trail, including the trailside and appurtenances, to a condition of structural adequacy.

Most trail work will occur on the existing trail route. Trail work generally will not involve widening beyond the existing surface area or require the construction of new retaining walls, or cuts and fills. Exceptions where trails projects could occur off of the existing trail route include work on drainage structures, existing retaining walls, slope failures, relocation of the trail route for safety or to reduce resource damage, and spot safety improvement work.

Construction of new trails is not authorized.

b. Foot Bridges

Eligible trail bridge work includes approach fill rehabilitation, superstructure (deck, rails, and girders) replacements, abutment and foundation repairs, abutment slope protection, foundation scour repair and protection work, and piling replacements. Requests for new bridges on existing trails must be justified in refuge planning documents with compelling health and safety concerns or needs for resource protection.

Safety Projects

Reconstruction of refuge or trails for safety, accessibility, or resource improvement project work to correct identified problems may be undertaken with refuge trail funds. Such work is limited to specific sites (e.g. switchback, bridge, or road crossing) where safety problems have been documented, and where solutions have been developed to address the problems. Studies of safety, accessibility, and resource problems may be funded out of the refuge trails program.

Many of the limitations noted in this guidance do not apply to safety improvement work. Work could include trail widening, realignments, new paving, new guardrails or walls, new trails or bicycle paths for separation of pedestrian and bicycle traffic, trail lighting, or other improvements which can be expected to reduce the rate or severity of collisions at that location. In addition, needed safety work such as pedestrian overpasses or tunnels involving non-refuge roads or trails intersecting with refuge trails may be included in refuge trail funded projects. These projects must be coordinated with the agency having jurisdiction of the intersecting roadway and funding should be split with that agency if possible, or refuge roads funds can be used to supply a State's non-Federal matching needs for the project.

Planning Requirements

The metropolitan and statewide transportation planning requirements apply to recreational trails. All trail projects must be consistent with the refuge's comprehensive management plans and/or public use management plans. All trail projects funded with refuge roads funding must be listed in the Service's 5-year transportation plan for inclusion in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and applicable Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Programs (metropolitan TIPs). Trails should also be included in Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans, and any applicable regional or local trail or open space plans. Guidance on how to accomplish this is available from the FWS Trails Coordinator in the NWRS Headquarters Office or from the State Trail Administrator for the applicable state. This person is usually in a State Parks and Recreation Office. STAs can be located at the following website:
www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm

Accessibility (Access for People with Disabilities)

All project proposals must give consideration to improvements that will provide enhanced recreational access for people with disabilities. Trail designers must seek opportunities to incorporate accessible features and elements, and to include trail routings that meet accessibility criteria to ensure that there are recreation opportunities for a variety of users within an overall recreational trails program. Where trail-related facilities, such as parking, shelters, toilets, drinking fountains, and other features are provided on or along an accessible trail site, they must provide the required level of accessibility and be served by an accessible route. Accessible trails and trail related facilities must be noted in appropriate refuge publications and websites.

Information about Accessibility Guidance can be found at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/guidance.htm. Note: the U.S. Access Board is developing accessibility regulations for outdoor developed areas on Federal lands. See www.access-board.gov/outdoor/index.htm.

Design Standards

Currently there are no Service-specific Trail Standards. Trails that are improved using RRP Trails funding need to meet all the FHWA standards for trail construction and design, while other trails on refuges are only required to meet general Service and DOI management guidelines. Refuges are encouraged to coordinate their standards for design, construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of trails with the State trails agency and neighboring Federal land management agencies and incorporate their best practices when appropriate.

The Forest Service and Department of Transportation publication *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook* can be ordered from the Federal Highway Administration's Recreational Trails Program web site at: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/trailpub.htm.

See the Federal Highway Administration web page on Recreational Trails Program – Publications at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/publications.htm for other suggested manuals and guides, and sources for technical assistance.

Signs

Signs which function as traffic control devices must conform to the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD). Part 9 of the MUTCD, *Traffic Controls for Bicycle Facilities*, covers the bicycle related signs, pavement markings, and signals that may be used on highways or bikeways. Part 9 is suitable for shared use paths (nonmotorized multiple-use trails which may provide a transportation purpose). The publication *Standard Highway Signs* has the detailed drawings for the highway signs prescribed in the MUTCD. These documents are available at <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/>.

Signs which do not function as traffic control devices are not subject to the MUTCD. However, informational signs and kiosks must also meet accessibility guidelines as noted above.

Program Effectiveness Measures

As part of the RRP funds available to spend on trails a Trails Inventory, similar to the Refuge Roads Inventory, will be conducted by the FHLA.

The planned performance measure for refuge trails is the change in the condition of trails, boardwalks and trail bridges as measured by the Facility Condition Index. Besides this degree of improvement shown in the Trail Inventory Program condition surveys, the ratio of administrative costs to construction costs, and the average cost per mile for projects will be used by FWS and FHWA to measure how efficiently and effectively the Service operates its program.

Project Selection Priorities

23 USC 202 (e) and 204 (k) (3) provides guidance on criteria for selection of projects to be improved under the Refuge Trails program. Projects shall be selected taking into consideration:

- 1) documented safety issues and/or documented resource impacts,
- 2) partnerships (byways, enhancements, or trails) involved with the trail,
- 3) designation status of the trail (is it a national, state or regionally designated trail),
- 4) current use of trails at the field station (percent of visitors using trails),
- 5) annual refuge visitation level,
- 6) completeness and clarity of the project proposal,
- 7) inclusion of the project in the existing five-year regional deferred maintenance plan,
- 8) the current condition rating of the trail asset(s) based on the FCI,
- 9) The comprehensive conservation plan for each refuge,
- 10) The need for access as identified through land use planning,
- 11) The impact of land use planning on existing transportation facilities,
- 12) The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended.

Since funding to for eligible projects is to be based upon the relative needs of the various refuges, the selection process will favor project items that improve the condition rating factors that help establish the needs.

The ratings matrix used to prioritize Refuge Roads Program Trails Projects is included as an appendix to this guidance.

Public Involvement

Service policy requires public involvement in the development of the land management plans, and should involve the public in project proposals for trails. The State Recreational Trail Administrator, usually located in the State Parks and Recreation Department, may assist in developing public involvement policies and programs. Other sources for assistance in public involvement in trails planning are the State Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator and the State Transportation Enhancement Program Manager. The NPS' Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program can assist with this process as well. There are several nonprofit trails advocacy groups that could assist with public involvement, such as the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, American Hiking Society, American Trails, and the Partnership for the National Trails System.

For contact information:

- State Trail Administrators:
www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm
- State Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinators:
<http://design.transportation.org/?siteid=59&pageid=852>.
- State Transportation Enhancement Program Managers:
www.enhancements.org/statecontacts_TE.asp.

- NPS RTCA website: www.ncrc.nps.gov/rtca/
- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: www.railtrails.org/
- American Hiking Society: www.americanhiking.org
- American Trails: www.americantrails.org
- Partnership for the National Trails System: www.nationaltrailspartnership.org/

The NWRS Refuge Roads Trails Coordinator is also available for advice and assistance with public involvement.

Projects Completed Under Budget

If one or more projects are completed under budget, the remaining unspent funds must be deobligated. The deobligated funds may be reobligated for another trail project, provided the Region has other approved projects waiting for funding. All requests for reobligation to another project must be approved by the national Refuge Roads Program coordinator for both FHWA and FWS funded projects.

Real Property Inventory

All proposed projects must be identifiable in the Real Property Inventory (RPI) of the Service's Asset Maintenance Management System (SAMMS). Such records must include the name of the trail; identify any special national, State, or regional designations; length in linear feet; construction material; current condition assessment; describe the infrastructure associated with the trail; and describe the public use by types of users, numbers, and seasons of use. The property description should include a verbal description of the asset, where it goes and what the public can see. When the Interagency Trail Data Standards (ITDS) are formally adopted, they will be distributed to field stations for use in developing necessary trail information in the RPI. This information and the information generated by the Refuge Roads Program Trails Inventory will eventually be used to populate the fields in the ITDS.

Other FHWA or State Trails Funding

Refuges are encouraged to seek addition funding for trails in addition to the RRP Trails Program. The FHWA has competitive award programs for trails administered by the States that refuges can apply for. These programs usually require a cash or in-kind matching requirement. RRP or RRP Trails funds can be used for this "non-federal" match.

The three FHWA programs most used for trails project are:

- Recreational Trail Program: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails has information on each States' program and contacts.

- National Scenic Byway Program: www.bywaysonline.org/grants/ has information on the funds the FHWA awards each year. Trails associated with designated State and Federal byways may be eligible for funding.
- Transportation Enhancement Activities: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te has information on each State's program. See State contacts at www.enhancements.org/statecontacts_TE.asp.

Further assistance in competing for these funds can be obtained from the regional Refuge Roads Coordinators and the NWRS Trails, Byways, Transportation Enhancements, and Alternative Transportation Coordinator.

There are also many programs in the States that fund trail projects. Consult the State Trails Administrator for assistance with those programs.

Definitions

1. Nonmotorized use project: A project primarily intended to benefit one or more modes of nonmotorized recreational trail use, such as pedestrian (i.e., walking, hiking, wheelchair use, running, bird-watching, nature interpretation, backpacking, etc.), equestrian, nonmotorized human-powered snow uses (i.e., skiing, snowshoeing, etc.). *Note: wheelchair use by mobility-impaired people, whether operated manually or powered, constitutes pedestrian use, not motorized trail use.*
3. Motorized Recreation – The term ‘motorized recreation’ means off-road recreation using any motor-powered vehicle, except for a motorized wheelchair.
4. National Trails – Trails that have been designated by Congress as National Scenic Trails or National Historic Trails or by the Department of the Interior as National Recreation Trails.
5. Recreational Trail – The term ‘recreational trail’ means a thoroughfare or track across land, snow or water, used for general, public recreational purposes such as—
 - (A) pedestrian activities, including wheelchair use;
 - (B) equestrian activities, including carriage driving;
 - (C) nonmotorized snow trail activities, including cross county skiing and snowshoeing;
 - (D) bicycling or use of other human-powered vehicles; and
 - (E) aquatic or water activities.

Note: trails whose primary function is to provide hunters access to hunting areas or to provide photographers access to photo blinds are not considered recreational trails under this program.
6. Water Trails – Canoe, kayak, or rowboat trails may be eligible for consideration as recreational trails.

Appendix

Eligibility

Except when unusual safety concerns require or for remediation of documented resource impacts, the following work will not be funded under the Refuge Trails program:

- 1) constructing new pedestrian trails, boardwalks, bicycle paths, or trail bridges, widening off of the present trail bench,
- 2) realigning and relocating trails (vertical or horizontal realignments), except for safety reasons and to reduce documented resource damage, and
- 3) recurring maintenance practices such as grading trails and mowing trail sides.

Regions can obtain assistance for refuge trail project planning, design, compliance, and construction contracting services from the Regional Engineering Offices, their respective Federal Lands Highways (FLH) Divisions, other Federal agencies (e.g. Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Forest Service, etc.), or consulting engineering firms. The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA), administered by the National Park Service (NPS) can assist the Service with planning and design projects.

Project administrative costs such as travel for on-site reviews and meetings related to the RRP program may be included in estimated project costs. However, salaries of permanent staff in FWS Regions and Refuge field stations, that are base funded, cannot be charged to the FLH Program project accounts. The only exception to this may occur to pay the overtime portion of force account work. However, this higher rate should have been used in the documentation justifying the use of force account work versus doing the work by contract.

The costs for any planning studies such as Trail System Evaluations, or RRP Engineering Studies, will be the responsibility of each Region using their RRP funds.

As part of an overall trail improvement project, Regions may use RRP funding for sign upgrades to meet the Service standards and Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices standards. However, routine replacement due to wear and age is ineligible for FLH Program funding.

On a specific trail improvement project, no more than 5% of the individual improvement project funds may be used for non-trail related improvements including interpretive facilities.

Specific Examples of Project Refuge Road Eligibility Criteria

The following lists provide general guidance as to what may be funded.

WORK ITEMS THAT ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING:

Project Support Items:

- Trail engineering and safety studies.
- Identification and surveillance of crash locations.
- Trail Inventories.
- Bridge and safety systems.
- Necessary environmental studies and resource investigations confined to the general trail construction limits.
- Project-related revegetation and control of invasive plants.
- Necessary architectural and landscape engineering services.
- Engineering design for trails, bridges, adjacent vehicle parking areas, provisions for pedestrian and bicycles, and roadside rest areas including sanitary and water facilities.
- Construction engineering for contract administration, inspection, and testing.
- Necessary interagency program/project formulation meetings.
- Interagency program review meetings (per interagency agreement).
- Necessary interagency project coordination.
- Research part of coordinated technology implementation program.

Construction and Improvements Items:

- Resurfacing (milling, recycling, and overlaying) existing pavements.
- Excavating and replacing failed base courses and poor subgrade materials.
- Replacing, upgrading or relocating deteriorated, undersized, or poorly located drainage structures (aprons, inlets, culverts, and headwalls etc.).
- Repair or upgrading existing guardrails or guardwalls.

- Minor widening of the trail if the work can be accomplished on the existing trail bench.
- Repairing, rehabilitating, or replacing existing retaining walls.
- Repairing and or stabilizing landslides, severely eroding, or failing slopes.
- As part of trail rerouting project, reclamation of abandoned sections of trail with the use of native vegetation.
- Interpretive signs as part of a trail project. The costs may not exceed 5% of the trail construction costs.
- No more than 5% of the project's estimated construction costs should be expended off of the trail to widen or realign the trail, or add other features unless the trail is being relocated or realigned for documented safety or resource damage reasons.
- Removing or grinding existing pavement to convert a trail to an aggregate surface.
- Replacing, upgrading, or adding new pavement markings and signage to address changing trail patterns, new uses, or safety problems as well as to meet current standards if occurring in conjunction with an RRP trail project. Sign or marking replacement due to age, damage, or deterioration is not eligible for funding, unless undertaken as part of a trail rehabilitation project.
- Engineered pavement overlays that add structural value or design life.
- Double bituminous surface treatments and chip seals that are part of predefined stage construction or form final surface on low volume trails.
- Engineered rehabilitation or reconstruction of pavement structures, bridges, and bridge decks.
- Engineered spot safety improvements resulting from safety studies.
- Upgrading of substandard trail barriers and bridge rails to current standards.
- Replacement of nonstandard traffic regulatory and guide signs.
- Upgrading substandard or nonconforming trail markings (one time only).
- Accommodating traffic and pedestrians through construction zones.
- Installation of warranted trail lighting.
- Adjustment of utilities directly related to trail work.

- Conduits crossing under the trail to accommodate existing or future planned utilities.
- Landscaping and native plant seeding of areas disturbed by the RRP program projects.
- Landscaping required to meet Environmental Impact Study mitigation measures resulting from roadway construction.
- Construction of erosion control and environmental mitigation measures directly related to trail construction.
- Experimental features where there is a planned monitoring evaluation schedule.
- Restoration of borrow pits created by projects funded from the RRP program.
- Force account and day labor, including materials and equipment rental being performed in accordance with approved plans and specifications that have been determined to be cost-effective.
- All the aforementioned work can be performed on existing parking areas, sidewalks or bicycle paths if the work is incidental to a RRP trail project.

WORK ITEMS THAT WILL GENERALLY NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING:

(Funding will be determined on a case-by-case exception basis taking into consideration overall relative Refuge Road program priorities)

Project Support Items:

- Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites.
- Brochures for public use.

Construction and Improvements Items:

- Acquisition of alternative transportation systems.
- Construction of visitor information centers and related items.
- Bridge painting work on structures (painting of major large structures considered on a case-by-case exception basis) except as part of a larger project with includes a major reconstruction, reconstruction, and/or replacement of a bridge.
- Public trails which provide access to areas under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the FWS but which are not owned by the Service and/or are not required to be maintained by the Service.

- Trail funds cannot be used to provide paths or sidewalks along or adjacent to public roads or streets, unless the path or sidewalk is needed to complete a missing link between other recreational trails.

WORK ITEMS THAT ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING:

Project Support Items:

- General refuge planning.
- Non-program specific conferences, field trips, or training conferences.
- Cultural resources investigations and work outside trail construction limits
- Equipment to build and/or maintain trails.

Construction or Improvements Items:

- Construction of new trails.
- Cyclic trail maintenance work including chip and slurry seals (seal coats), pavement patching, trail grading, addition of trail tread material shoulder and ditch grading, cleaning culverts, snow removal, trailside mowing, vegetation control, normal sign repair, and trail markings.
- Seal coats on top of new asphalt concrete pavements.
- Cyclic bridge maintenance work including cleaning and repairing bridge joints, cleaning repairing bridge drainage, and repairing other bridge appurtenances.
- Landscaping and irrigation systems of areas not disturbed by refuge trail construction.
- Landscaping of disturbed areas with non-native plant species.
- Utilities and buildings not disturbed by construction.
- Sanitation facilities not disturbed by construction.
- Walls and erosion protection that are not part of or support the trail prism.
- Recreational boat launching facilities and ramps.
- General refuge development projects.

- Trails that serve only an administrative site such as refuge/hatchery housing, maintenance area, or refuge/hatchery dormitory (or a combination of these).
- Trails that are primarily used for administrative purposes and open to the public only for very limited periods during the year under restrictive conditions.
- Restoration of borrow pits (or portions of borrow pits) created by projects funded with non Refuge Road program funds.
- Repairs to or replacement of fences not disturbed by trail construction.

DRAFT

Trail Project **GRADING CRITERIA**

Standards	5-4	3-2	1-0
Documented safety and resource problems X10	Both identified = 5 points	Only one identified = 3 points	None identified = 0 points
Project involves Partnerships X10	National Scenic Byways, Transportation Enhancements, or Recreational Trails Program project > one = 5 points One = 4 points	Local program partnership, Trails Organization partnership > one = 3 points one only = 2 points	None identified = 0 points
Trail Designation X9	National 5 points	State or Regional 3 points	Local, = one point None, Unknown = 0
Benefits to visiting public X8	Over 20% of the public use trails = 4 points Over 40% = 5 points	Between 5% and 10% = 2 points Between 10 and 20% of the public use trails = 3 points	Less than 5% of the public use trails
Potential benefits x7	Over 100,000 visitors per year = 4 points Over 250,000 = 5 points	Between 30,000 and 65,000 = 2 points 65,000 to 100,000 visitors per year = 3 points	Between 10,000 and 30,000 visitors per year = one point Under 10,000 = 0
Completeness and clarity of proposal x6	Project and details are clearly stated and proposal compete = 5 points	Project is defined, however proposal lacks detail = 3 points	Project and details are vague and poorly supported, proposal incomplete = 1 point
Identified in the 5-year deferred maintenance plan X5	1 to 2 years away 1 = 5 points 2 = 4 points	3 to 4 years away 3 = three points 4 = 2 points	5 years away = 1 point
Condition Assessment X3	Failed = 5, Poor = 4	Fair = 3, Good = 2	Excellent = 1. Unknown = 0