

BLM Manual 8353 – Trail Management Areas – Secretari ally Designated  
National Recreation, Water, and Connecting and Side Trails

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8353 – Trail Management Areas – Secretari ally Designated  
National Recreation, Water, and Connecting and Side Trails (Public)

1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: This release transmits one of three manuals in the National Trails System manual series (BLM Manuals 8353, 6250, and 6260/6270). This manual addresses secretari ally designated National Recreation Trails (including the National Water Trails) and Connecting and Side Trails, including requirements for cooperative relationships; trail marking; identifying, evaluating and recommending trails; nominating trails through the submission of application packages; and data and records management.

2. Reports Required: None.

3. Material Superseded: M-1626 Travel and Transportation Manual Section .06 A. 2. C., regarding the requirement to address all National Recreation Trails in resource management plans; H-8342-1 Travel and Transportation Handbook, Section IV. E. i. regarding the requirement to address all National Recreation Trails in resource management plans; H-1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook Appendix C, III. B. 6, regarding National Recreation Trails (03/11/05); and Washington Office Instruction Memorandum 2008-069, "Addressing National Recreation Trails in the Land Use Planning Process."

4. Filing Instructions: File as directed below.

REMOVE  
None

INSERT  
8353  
(Total: 18 Sheets)

/S/ Mike Pool  
Acting Director  
Bureau of Land Management

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## Chapter 1. Overview

### 1.1 Purpose

1. This manual is provided to guide the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in fulfilling the requirements and purposes set forth in the National Trails System Act (NTSA), in concert with other supporting laws and policies.
2. This manual provides the BLM policy and program guidance for the identification, evaluation, and recommendation of qualifying trails to the Secretary for designation.
3. This manual provides the BLM with guidance on the preparation of application packages to nominate recommended trails for secretarial designation as National Recreation Trails (including National Water Trails) and Connecting and Side Trails, all of which are components of the National Trails System.

### 1.2 Objectives

1. Comply with the requirements of the NTSA and other laws and policies.
2. Provide a variety of outdoor recreation uses in or reasonably accessible to urban areas or high-use areas.
3. Identify, evaluate, and recommend National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails as components of the National Trails System.
4. Prepare application packages through which recommended trails are nominated for secretarial designation.
5. Promote the preservation of public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation.
6. Manage the diverse network of nationally designated trails by encouraging and assisting volunteer citizen, community, and partnership involvement.

### 1.3 Authority

1. National Trails System Act of 1968, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1241-1251)
2. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended (43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*)

3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*)

#### 1.4 Responsibility

- A. *The Director, Bureau of Land Management*, through the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning, are responsible for:

1. Establishing policy to support the identification, evaluation, recommendation, nomination, and management of National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails.
2. Coordinating National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails budget and policy development and implementation with other BLM programs.
3. Developing and maintaining relationships with tribes; other Federal, state, and local agencies; private and nonprofit organizations; partners; willing landowners; land users; and individuals (tribes, affected agencies, partners, and interested parties).
4. Reviewing application packages nominating recommended trails for designation by the Secretary as National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails, and approving and submitting these packages to the Secretary.
5. Maintaining a list of designated National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails within the BLM.

- B. *State Directors* are responsible for:

1. Developing and implementing budget and policy direction and providing statewide program coordination for National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails.
2. Developing and maintaining relationships with tribes, affected agencies, partners, and interested parties.
3. Reviewing application packages nominating trails for designation by the Secretary as National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails, and if the State Director approves, submitting these packages to the Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning with a concurrence/endorsement letter.
4. Maintaining a list of designated National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails within the state.

C. *District and Field Managers* are responsible for:

1. Identifying budget and policy needs and implementing budget and policy direction.
2. Developing and maintaining relationships with tribes, affected agencies, partners, and interested parties.
3. Identifying, evaluating, and recommending trails for designation as National Recreation Trails or Connecting and Side Trails through a land use planning process; an implementation-level planning process (e.g., travel management plan, trailwide Comprehensive Plan, recreation area management plan); or a stand-alone recommendation process with associated NEPA to support the final designation decision by the Secretary.
4. Providing appropriate opportunities for public participation as part of the identification, evaluation, and recommendation process.
5. Submitting the application package that contains the nomination of a recommended trail for designation by the Secretary to the State Director.
6. Maintaining a list of designated National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails within the Field Office.

#### 1.5 References

1. Executive Order 13195, Trails for America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
2. Secretarial Order 3319, Establishment of a National Water Trails System
3. BLM Manual 1203, Delegation of Authority
4. BLM Manual 1601, Land Use Planning
5. BLM Manual 1626, Travel and Transportation Management
6. BLM Manual 6120, Congressionally Required Maps and Legal Boundary Descriptions for National Landscape Conservation System Designation

7. BLM Manual 6250, National Scenic and Historic Trail Administration
8. BLM Manual 6260/6270, National Scenic and Historic Trail Management
9. BLM Manual 8320, Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services
10. BLM Handbook 1601-1, Land Use Planning
11. BLM Handbook 1790-1, National Environmental Policy Act
12. BLM Handbook 8342-1, Travel and Transportation Management
13. BLM Handbook 9114-1, Trails
14. Trails for America: Report on the Nationwide Trails Study, 1966
15. The National Trails System Interagency Memorandum of Understanding

## 1.6 Policy

### A. Purposes of Trails

National Recreation and Water Trails and Connecting and Side Trails have as their purpose:

1. *National Recreation Trails* provide a variety of compatible outdoor recreation uses in or reasonably accessible to urban areas or high-use areas and must meet the NTSA criteria and any supplementary criteria that the Secretary of the Interior may prescribe.
2. *National Water Trails* provide exemplary and high-quality outdoor recreational experiences and a network of public access points connecting people, places, and communities along waterways, including stretches of river, lake, shoreline, bay, stream, estuary, ocean, canal, or any combination of waterway. National Water Trails are components of the National Trails System, and are established as a class of National Recreation Trails, pursuant to the National Trails System Act. Such trails are considered in a National Water Trails System.

3. *Connecting Trails* complement designated National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails by providing additional points of public access between or connecting to such trails, and for National Scenic and Historic Trails, Connecting Trails support, and do not detract from, the resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses.
4. *Side Trails* complement designated National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails by providing additional single points of public access to special features along such trails, and for National Scenic and Historic Trails, Side Trails support, and do not detract from, the resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses.

**B. *Statements of Programmatic Policy***

1. National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails are designated by the Secretary of the Interior (or the Secretary of Agriculture, as delegated to the Regional Forester, where lands administered by USDA are involved). The BLM will identify, evaluate, and recommend trails for designation through a land use planning process; an implementation-level planning process (e.g., travel management plan, trailwide Comprehensive Plan, recreation area management plan); or a stand-alone recommendation process that includes a NEPA analysis to support the Secretary's final designation decision. As part of the identification, evaluation, and recommendation process, the BLM will provide appropriate opportunities for public participation. If a trail is analyzed through a land use planning or implementation-level planning process, the BLM will evaluate and make a recommendation on the trail(s) at issue through the associated NEPA analysis. The applicable decision document for the land use plan or implementation-level plan must make clear that the recommendation is not a decision. If a trail is analyzed through a stand-alone recommendation process/NEPA analysis, the Secretary's decision on the trail's designation, as documented within the letter of designation, will be supported by the NEPA analysis. In all cases, the BLM's identification, evaluation and recommendation are neither protestable nor appealable decisions. Once a trail is recommended for designation, the BLM will prepare an application package which will nominate the recommended trail to the Secretary for designation (see the nomination criteria listed in section 1.6. D. 1. of this manual.) The ultimate designation decision, made by the Secretary, is final agency action.
2. Recommended trails must conform to the management objectives set forth in the existing land use plan. Where an existing land use plan identifies a trail and/or

- related areas for recreation purposes and where said trail or area meets the nomination criteria set forth below, no new planning is necessary. The BLM may conduct a stand-alone recommendation with associated NEPA analysis to support a Secretarial decision on designation. The BLM will provide appropriate opportunities for public participation to support the nomination of that trail and/or related area for designation. If the existing management objectives within the land use plan conflict with the recommendation, then a plan amendment is necessary.
3. BLM National Scenic or Historic Trail Administrators, after consultation with the land managing agency, may identify, evaluate, and recommend Connecting or Side Trails through the trailwide Comprehensive Plan and may submit their recommendation(s) to the Secretary or delegated designee, through an application package for trails that meet the nomination criteria (see BLM Manual 6250, National Scenic and Historic Trail Administration).
  4. Once designated by the Secretary, the BLM shall manage National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails in accordance with the NTSA and other applicable laws, in addition to the governing land use plan and the Best Management Practices listed in Section 1.6 D. 3 of this manual. In addition, Connecting and Side Trails shall be managed in a manner that complements the adjoining National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails and the BLM will continue to provide public access points to or connections between such trails and/or continue to provide access to special features along such trails.
  5. For National Recreation or Connecting or Side Trails that adjoin designated National Scenic or Historic Trails, access must support, and not detract from, the nature and purposes; resources, qualities, values, and associated settings; the primary use or uses; and must not introduce an incompatible use. For National Historic Trails, if a waterway serves an access purpose with the same primary historic use or uses as the trail to which it connects, Connecting or Side Trail designation may be recommended and nominated. Waterways are not normally designated as Connecting or Side Trails. Consultation with the National Scenic or Historic Trail administering agency (see BLM Manual 6250) is required.

#### B. *Cooperative Relationships*

1. The BLM shall coordinate with tribes and Federal, state, local governments, and willing private landowners to encourage and assist the development and implementation of provisions for compatible land practices on portions of the trail located both on and off public lands through use of cooperative agreements.



2. The BLM may provide volunteers and volunteer organizations with education and training.
3. The BLM may develop stewardship programs to organize and supervise volunteer trail management efforts for trails that are components of the National Trails System or for trails that could qualify for designation as components of the National Trails System.

*C. Trail Marking*

1. The BLM shall mark the National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails with signs to facilitate identification and navigation, using the official uniform marker.
2. The BLM shall identify and provide public information regarding the National Scenic or Historic Trail to which the Connecting or Side Trail provides access, and for Side Trails, the BLM shall identify and provide information regarding the special features along such trails.
3. Trail markers and signs must not be used or placed as property boundary identifiers.

*D. Nominating National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails for designation by the Secretary of the Interior.*

1. *Identification and Evaluation Requirements.* The BLM will identify and evaluate potential National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails through a land use planning process, an activity-level planning process (e.g., travel management plan, trail-wide Comprehensive Plan, recreation area management plan) or a stand-alone recommendation process that includes NEPA analysis to support the Secretary's final designation decision. As part of the identification, evaluation, and recommendation process, the BLM will provide appropriate opportunities for public participation. Recommended trails are nominated to be designated through an application based on the following nomination criteria:
  - i. Nominated National Recreation Trails must provide a variety of compatible outdoor recreation uses in or reasonably accessible to urban or high-use areas. Nominated Connecting and Side Trails must complement National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails by providing public access points to or connections between such trails or access to special features along such trails.

For connections to or between National Scenic or Historic Trail segments, this access must support the resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses.

- ii. National Recreation Trails and Connecting and Side Trails may be located on public lands. A nominated trail located on public lands must be available for public use as set forth in the applicable the land use plan. When no federal land acquisition is involved, National Recreation Trails and Connecting or Side trails may be located across lands administered by interstate, state, or local governmental agencies with their consent or on privately owned lands with the written consent of the landowners. If located across lands administered by interstate, state, or local government or on privately owned lands, the governing entity or landowner will provide a written statement that the trail will be available for public use and enjoyment for a minimum of 10 consecutive years after designation.
- iii. A nominated trail must meet the intent of the best management practices described in 1.6 D. 3 of this manual.
- iv. A nominated trail must have been designed, constructed, and maintained according to best management practices, in keeping with the trail’s identified uses. The trail may pass through a variety of locations if the trail design is in accordance with planned trail use and reasonably provides for public safety.
- v. A trail must be in compliance with applicable land use plans and environmental laws prior to nomination.
- vi. Recorded deeds or agreements for public access rights must be in place with all landowners, state or private, whose property or interest in property the trail crosses.
- vii. Roads and trails suitable for passenger car travel are not eligible for National Recreation Trail designation.
- viii. Proposed Connecting and Side Trails that adjoin, connect to, or provide access to special features along National Scenic or Historic Trails must support the resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses.

- ix. Connecting and Side Trails may be established, designated, and marked as components of National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails. Trail management corridors are not required for National Recreation or Connecting and Side Trails, but may be encompassed by a National Scenic or Historic Trail Management Corridor to support management purposes.
  - x. Benefits of designation may include secretarial recognition, signs and marking, and entry into a publicly accessible database.
  - xi. In situations of mixed ownership, the BLM shall conduct an adequate review of boundary evidence and ensure recorded deeds for public access rights or agreements are in place with all state or private landowners whose property or interest in property, the trail may cross.
2. *Application Requirements.* The BLM shall prepare and submit an application package to nominate a recommended trail for designation by the Secretary as a National Recreation Trail or Connecting or Side Trail to the Washington Office within the yearly established timeframes. The BLM shall meet all requirements shown in the Department of the Interior application materials package (see [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)), including:
- i. A recommendation statement from the Field Manager and the National Landscape Conservation System unit manager, as applicable.
  - ii. The land use plan NEPA analysis; activity-level plan NEPA analysis; or stand-alone recommendation that includes a NEPA analysis, prepared to support the Secretary’s final designation decision.
  - iii. The name, location, and length of the trail; a map of sufficient scale that clearly depicts the trail and land status; directions to the trail; the congressional district(s) in which the trail is located; a description of land uses; valid existing rights; and supporting photographs or images.
  - iv. The history of the trail, such as date of initial construction; purpose; significance in local, regional, or national events; and other notable information.
  - v. A description of the trail, trail resources, and features, and for Connecting and Side Trails, a description of the resources, qualities, values, and

associated settings and primary use or uses of the National Scenic or Historic Trail to which the trail connects.

- vi. Management direction for the trail, including resource protection, safety, maintenance, regulations, signing, and recreation facilities.
  - vii. An estimate of annual maintenance costs.
  - viii. A statement from the applicable land use plan providing for public access and management of the area/trail that is being recommended and nominated for designation.
  - ix. A description of how the best management practices described in Section 1.6. D.3. of this manual will be applied when projects are proposed within the trail once designated.
  - x. A State Director-signed letter of concurrence/endorsement of the recommendation by the Field and NLCS managers for the trail shall accompany the application package. The application package shall be forwarded to the Division Chief, Recreation and Visitor Services, for consideration and submission to the Secretary. If a recommended trail connects to designated National Scenic or Historic Trails, or are contained within other units of the National Landscape Conservation System, the application package must be signed by the Division Chief, National Landscape Conservation System.
3. *Best Management Practices for Designated Recreation Trails, and Connecting or Side Trails.* Once a trail is designated by the Secretary as a National Recreational, Water, Connecting or Side Trail, the following categories of best management practices (BMPs) should be considered during evaluation of any project proposal to ensure the BLM maintains high-quality outdoor recreation experiences:

i. Recreation Opportunities

- a. The trail route has established public access points that accommodate a diversity of trip lengths and provide access to a variety of opportunities for recreation and education.

(1) Public access points shall be maintained to policy standards.

- (2) Recreation and education opportunities shall be consistent with approved uses of the trail.

ii. Education

- a. The trail users are provided with opportunities to learn about the value of natural resources, cultural heritage, and outdoor skills and ethics.

- (1) Recreation and education opportunities shall be provided through onsite and offsite interpretation programs and outreach.

- (2) Education programs shall incorporate natural resource, visitor skill and safety, and outdoor ethics messages.

iii. Conservation

- a. The trail provides opportunities for communities to develop and implement strategies that enhance and restore the health of the local waterways, trails, and surrounding lands.

- (1) Coordination with communities, tribes, affected agencies, partners, and interested parties shall occur to achieve healthy waterways, trails, and surrounding lands goals and objectives.

iv. Community Support

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

- (1) Efforts of local communities to build capacity for the stewardship of the trail will be supported.

- (2) Support of partnership and volunteer efforts will be provided.

v. Public Information

- a. The local, regional, and national public shall be provided with accessible and understandable trail information, including details for identifying access and trail routes; cultural, historic, recreation, and natural features; hazards; and water quality.

- b. The trail shall be promoted to the community and a broad national audience.

vi. Trail Maintenance

- a. There is demonstrated ability to support routine and long-term maintenance investments on the trail.
- b. Facilities associated with the trail are designed, constructed, and maintained incorporating sustainability principles.

vii. Planning

- a. Maintain a trail plan that describes a vision, desired future conditions, and strategies to strengthen best management practices.
  - (1) Trail plans shall be developed in coordination with tribes, affected agencies, partners, and interested parties.

1.7 File and Records Maintenance

A. A case file will be established for each designated National Recreation, Water, or Connecting or Side Trail. Offices administering or managing Connecting or Side Trails that adjoin or connect to National Scenic or Historic Trails must incorporate Connecting and Side Trail records into the corresponding National Scenic and Historic Trail serialized case files (see BLM Manual Sections 6250 and 6260/6270) and BLM Manual Section 6120. Recordkeeping requirements are mandated by Executive Orders 12866 and 13353, the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. 3501), and the guidelines of the BLM Paperwork Schedule program. The case file shall include:

1. A map of the National Recreation, Water, or Connecting and Side Trails.
2. The portrayal on the Geographic Coordinate Data Base.
3. A copy of the land use plan or activity-level plan and supporting NEPA documentation that includes the BLM's recommendation or the stand-alone NEPA analysis prepared to support the Secretary's final designation decision.
4. A copy of the recommendation statement, State Director concurrence/endorsement letter, and application package.

5. A copy of the secretarial designation of the trail.

#### 1.8 Data Standards and Management

1. Each BLM State Office shall identify a National Recreation Trail or Connecting and Side Trail data steward. Data stewards shall coordinate data collection and ensure National Recreation Trail or Connecting and Side Trail data are documented in BLM or other approved, including geospatial standards and LR2000, databases, and is noted to the Master Title Plats, as applicable.
2. Trail data and data collection shall comply with Department of the Interior data management systems and the Federal Trail Data Standards.
3. The BLM shall share data with various agencies, organizations, partners, and the public according to data sharing agreements and established protocol.

## Glossary of Terms

-A-

*associated settings.* The geographic extent of the resources, qualities, and values or landscape elements within the surrounding environment that influence the trail experience and contribute to resource protection. Settings associated with a National Scenic or Historic Trail include scenic, historic, cultural, recreation, natural (including biological, geological, and scientific), and other landscape components (see resources, qualities, and values).

-C-

*Comprehensive Plan.* Statutorily required plan providing strategic direction and guidance for the future administration and management of a congressionally designated National Scenic or Historic Trail. The plan includes identification of the nature and purposes, goals and objectives, high potential sites and high potential segments (historic trails), and the selection of the National Trail Right-of-Way.

*Connecting Trail.* Secretarially designated trails that complement National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails by providing additional points of public access between such trails or connecting to such trails (see Side Trail).

-I-

*incompatible use.* An activity that hinders or obstructs the nature and purposes of a designated National Trail.

-N-

*National Historic Trail.* A congressionally designated trail that is an extended, long-distance trail, not necessarily managed as continuous, that follows as closely as possible and practicable the original trails or routes of travel of national historic significance. The purpose of a National Historic Trail is the identification and protection of the historic route and the historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment. A National Historic Trail is managed to conserve, protect, and restore the nationally significant resources, qualities, values, and associated settings of the areas through which such trails may pass, including the primary use or uses of the trail.



*National Recreation Trail.* Trail designated by the Secretary of the Interior or delegated officer, through a standardized process, including a recommendation and nomination by the BLM. National Recreation Trails provide a variety of compatible outdoor recreation uses in or reasonably accessible to urban areas or high-use areas.

*National Scenic Trail.* A congressionally designated trail that is a continuous and uninterrupted extended, long-distance trail so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses of the areas through which such trails may pass. National Scenic Trails may be located so as to represent desert, marsh, grassland, mountain, canyon, river, forest, and other areas, as well as landforms that exhibit significant characteristics of the physiographic regions of the Nation.

*National Trails System.* Congressionally authorized system of trails recognized through the authority of the National Trails System Act, containing National Scenic and Historic Trails, National Recreation Trails, Connecting and Side Trails, and authorities applied to rail-trails.

*National Trails System Act.* Public Law 90-543, as amended and codified in 16 U.S.C. 1241-1251, which establishes the National Trails System.

*National Water Trail.* Recreational routes with a network of public access points connecting people, places, and communities to the waterways, including stretches of river, lake, shoreline, bay, stream, estuary, ocean, canal, or any combination of waterway, that have been designated, mapped, and publicly identified with the intent to provide high-quality outdoor recreational experiences.

*National Water Trails System.* A distinctive system, established by Secretarial Order 3319, Establishment of a National Water Trails System, that connects Americans to the Nation's waterways and strengthens the conservation and restoration of those waterways by becoming a catalyst for protecting and restoring the health of local waterways and surrounding lands and by establishing a community that mentors and promotes the development of water trails. The National Water Trails System is a subset of National Recreation Trails, as defined by the National Trails System Act.

*nature and purposes.* The term used to describe the character, characteristics, and congressional intent for a designated National Trail, including the resources, qualities, values, and associated settings of the areas through which such trails may pass; primary use or uses of a National Trail; and activities promoting the preservation of, public access

to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of National Trails.

-P-

*primary use or uses.* Authorized mode or modes of travel, and/or activities identified in the National Trails System Act, enabling legislation, or legislative history, through the trailwide Comprehensive Plan or approved Resource Management Plan, which promotes the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of National Trails.

-R-

*resources, qualities, and values.* The significant scenic, historic, cultural, recreation, natural (including biological, geological, and scientific), and other landscape areas through which such trails may pass as identified in the National Trails System Act (see associated settings).

-S-

*Side Trail.* Secretari ally designated trails that complement National Recreation, Scenic, or Historic Trails by providing additional single points of public access to special features along such trails (see Connecting Trail).