

PNTS National Scenic Trail Workshop

Nov. 2016, Pensacola Beach, FL

50th Anniversary of the NTSA Legislative Agenda

NCNST – Route Adjustment Act (BWCA & NY/VT); Parity Act – Unit Status

LWCF Re-Authorization

FLTC Re-Authorization

PCTA – Acceptable uses; corridor definition – “legislative corridor”; Amendments or new acts?

Recreation Not Red Tape Act

Trail Threats

Connectivity between NSTs; need data on use; Nat. Rec. Trails? Side & Connecting Trails?

Use SCA/CLCs, etc. to move 50th forward.

Funding essential

Bicycle use – clarify

Need training on OHV enforcement

Need more LEOs

Use state specific legislation or administrative action instead of amendments to NTSA?

IDEAS due to PNTS A&P Committee by early Dec.

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Visitor Use Management

Every trail has been doing VUM since they began building trail, campsites, etc.

Long distance permit - 3rd year limit on # of people who can start per day @ southern PCT terminus; trailhead quotas not integrated on PCT.

Interagency Visitor Use Mgt. Council – many federal agencies involved; Fed sued over quotas on wild and scenic rivers, lost case, created new VUM planning framework to provide defensible quotas. Check their website for definition and rationale of VUM. <http://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/>

Its good some trails are not having problems with crowding – gives them time to plan for it. 30% increase in A.T. thru-hikers in 2016, 10%/year since 2007, to record levels. ATC just hired a VU Mgr.

Planning process – framework, inventory what's out there already, determine indicators/thresholds, tweak as you go along till where you want to be.

ATC very reactive – need data to inform decisions when changes occur. Wilderness Skills Institute: had a VUM course led by USFS. Fundamental data down pat first – establish baseline: current conditions, e.g. size of campsites, trail heads, trail inventory, use counts.

The VUM planning process is essentially site specific but works for all types of areas, e.g. front country or Wilderness, paved vs. unpaved trails, etc.

Desired condition – research to determine legislative intent; get there w/o hurting condition.

Many points of entry on PCT (and A.T.) – too many to get use #s?

In GA VUM planning process 1st realization: bad data. Have some A.T.-wide use surveys. PCT has no use data. A.T. numbers come from “bottlenecks” like GRSM, Baxter State Park (both with permit systems), etc. PCT – JMT; A.T. – White Mts.: how count those places for consistency?

Recreation ecologists' recommendations. Trail counters helpful but not perfect. Need 2nd way of validating tr. counter counts, i.e. calibrating them, to determine statistical accuracy. Must be placed properly to avoid walk arounds, etc.

Often no permits out west. Long period of time: kinks out & usable. Data at one time one place not very helpful; data collection needs to be ongoing & consistent data.

Rosters/registers? Collect data but no requirement to fill out so low compliance – 50 to 80% & also need calibration/validation, e.g. person watching, manual clickers.

Hard to discern between one way and two way trail traffic. (Use cameras?)

Need good visitor use counts to justify quotas/carrying capacity/legal requirements

(NPS sued because Wild & Scenic River act has a requirement to have a capacity analysis for Tuolumne River. Same requirement in NTSA and yet not really implemented. Some capacity analysis has been done for Wilderness areas, but on PCT capacity done unit by unit. Carrying capacity was discredited for a while – resulting in shift to VUM. Carrying

capacity started as grazing capacity.

VUM needs indicators, thresholds & monitoring. See Interagency VUM website.

VUM is all about desired condition – resource, cultural, visitor experience – achieving or maintaining it.

Need sense of #s: conditions on landscape result of quality/quantity of use. Not linear. User education plays a role – behavior as or more important than #s – one user or user group can do a lot of damage. How are we affecting user behavior?

When trail mgrs. and users start “seeing too many people” it is a red flag to do something – but it would be better to start working on VUM before a red flag goes up!

A.T. is seeking to provide an appropriate user experience (desired condition) – survey of users says GA A.T. section has too much use. Likewise, PCT southern end: 40 – 100 users in same place at same time (H2O) – PCTA & USFS are strapped for resources to deal with it.

Why is GA an A.T. problem spot? Too many people in one place at one time: thru-hikers in March & April, along with many section hikers and day hikers. Same problem in Baxter State Park in ME – BSP mgrs. manage BSP as Wilderness, very concerned about significant increases in northbound thru-hiker #s.

How being used even if great? # of people impact, also increase in hikers: but total # is very small on Ice Age Tr.

Hiker registry – regulatory framework that sets limits (VUM). Set limits NOW while use is low. On PCT 100+ were leaving southern terminus on the same day though camping capacity is not adequate. PCTA/USFS started limiting number of thru-hike permits to 50/day with some grumbling/complaints by users. (ATC has received few complaints about their efforts.)

Main PCTA permit limit critic says it is a hardship on international travelers (very small % of use is international).

A.T. mgrs. had blinders on due to lots going on – now behind the curve. Permit systems internationally are common place.

Should volunteers get preferential access to trails? All give free use + access for citizens.

Integrate long distance users with local quota + limit on long distance users – must be science based & implementable.

Grand Canyon – how to implement permit process. Impacts/problems around campsites.

PCT has unmanaged campsite system, changing where campsites are put on maps, users hop between unmanaged guides.

Campsite mgt. on A.T. – discourage dispersed camping in some places (e.g. national and state parks), on USFS land dispersed camping predominates though now tending toward designation of sites in some areas. Campsite inventory IDs camp sites that do not meet acceptable standards, e.g. too close to water or A.T. Undesirable campsites are removed from published lists, e.g. A.T. Data Book, Guthook’s app, AWOL’s guide, ALDHA’s Thru-hiker Companion, etc.

Don’t close an existing bad campsite unless a good alternative is provided.

Don’t increase amenities with increased use – unsustainable, e.g. privies.

PCT more unconfined experience.

Solutions are site specific.

How does Boundary Waters Canoe Area cope with increasing use, re: privies?

Increase regulation slowly over time – use the least amount of input to achieve the desired condition.

Increase capacity or regulation? Depends on desired location of specific sites or areas. Increased capacity changes the experience.

Shelters reduce resource impacts only when at or below capacity. Over capacity they are an attractive nuisance.

A.T.: Hawk Mt. shelter is old school site design, i.e. a flat place near water, in a high use area = acres of impact area. Most important: trail experience or resources? Desired condition – the two or inextricably intertwined.

Don't leap to solution w/o going through VUM process – will likely miss potential good solution alternatives.

Should we have NSTs be barrier to use? Should use be concentrated on NSTs since they are national trails?

NST desired conditions are variable. Some emphasize qualities of Wilderness.

What is threshold that prevents degradation? Difficulty in identifying that point.

Fed. Agencies all balance providing public use with protecting the resource, e.g. NPS mandate is inherently in conflict.

Tr. mgrs. need best data to explain rationale for VUM decisions; if limiting public it may be controversial. Education!

There is art as well as science to coming up with the right amount of people – need to continually monitor, reassess and re-evaluate VUM Rxs.

Grizzly bear planning dictates # of people allowed in their mgt. area (and with other T&E, too). Limit on # of roads & high use trails. 20 parties a week; already there grandfathered in. If trail isn't established then close other things. Glacier griz encounter – close off trail for a specific amount of time. There will be more griz encounters as # of griz increases.

Value of trails provided to public. Have a vision of what trails will do for the world and stick with that.

Proverbs: "Without vision the people will perish." Edison: "Vision without execution is just hallucination."

Are we there to prove value of NSTs? NPS past proving innate value of NSTs?

Don't manage NSTs to lowest common denominator.

PCT – treating H2O – don't have hard data. Pick 2 points with most problems – resolve issues there. Capacity to deal with larger problems currently lacking. Collective.

What about day use? Complicated. Haven't regulated day use for the most part. Have to think about it but some can't be used by a day user. Camping impacts are more important at this time.

Fees are a contentious issue. Know your constituents – west/east may have different views on fees. Political reality + public opinion reality. Non-profits seek donations.

All NSTs want as unrestricted an experience as possible. A.T. camper registration is voluntary and designed to provide users with a tool to avoid crowded sites. System could be used to switch to permits if needed. (Not live yet.) Current

A.T. thru-hiker registration system has about 60% use – the rest don't know about it or care to use it.

Does spreading people out in time and space ruin the whole resource? On the A.T. there has been cyclical use with a peak of thru-hikers in 1998, down through 2006, then up 10%/year since 2007 with a 30% increase in 2016 – the second record year in a row. Not sure what is to come. If VUM works properly, measures will be put in place on the A.T. to assure that spreading people out does not ruin the whole resource. Currently there are nearby A.T. sections that are not crowded during the spring thru-hiker season which is crowded in GA. If we could simply move spring break hiker use and section hiker use out of GA during this time it would achieve our VUM goals.

5 to 10 years we could be looking at a huge problem if we don't use VUM. Building new campsites can increase agency liability, e.g. for hazard trees (though there are methods to mitigate this hazard, e.g. building campsites only in natural or created meadows).

ATC's Protecting the A.T. Hiker Experience VUM planning process for GA will be available soon as a NST VUM case study.

<http://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/>

Energy Corridors Session Notes

- Getting notified: Know who is around you. There are many unfilled positions within the agency and you might not get reached out to.
- There is a shift to FERC handling permitting=loss of connectivity to land managers who have NST mandates, understand issues.
- Benefit to FERC-NEPA, opportunity to contribute if you know about it.
- FERC has Rec Planners on staff-know your rep.
- FERC leads on interstate projects, transmission lines mostly Sec of Interior as the decision makers. Lead NEPA may be different by project.
- Environmental Groups do a good job monitoring proposals. Know who to call, coordinate notices with NGO's.
- Planning-USGS maps as primary source for energy planning. Need to make sure the trail is on the Master Title Platt so they can be considered/planned for. LR2000 (BLM)
- USGS-Regional office is removing trails due to funding on the 1:100 maps. Denver Service center. If this impacts you, reach out.
- **ACTION ITEM: contacts for data Sharing with USGS for 368 projects (Beth Boyst)**
- For large landscape scale projects, NST's should coordinate comments, action items, etc.
- Challenge: even when you are on the map, planners cannot see federally managed, congressionally designated resources and who to call.
- Is this something the WO can help us with (BLM/USFS/NPS) Guide the next steps.
- Challenges with Mitigation-Shared boundaries complicated mitigations, vested interest.
- Success in pushing corridors to areas of existing impact.
- AZT example, attend public meetings, meet with consultant, could not avoid impacts, identified mitigation strategies within plan and help to plan which strategies to apply on the AZT.
- Susquehanna Roseland example on the AT: existing corridor wanted to upgrade to taller towers, total mitigation cost of \$64 million, \$10 million to ATC due to ATC's policies on corridor crossing with NPS premise on no "net loss", must compensate for residual impacts.
- PNTS policy a good place to start when looking for examples.
- How to determine impacts, apply \$ value?, visual simulations helpful, agencies and universities are a great resource. (Noelle BLM)
- Effects analysis, ROD, mitigation plan, comp. mitigation has to be recorded in the ROD
- NGO and agency partners can both advocate for mitigation, agency not always skilled negotiators, NGO can help.
- Doing your own simulations can change the conversation with the regulatory agency in reviewing the proponents submittals.
- Question and Review viewshed and impacts analysis
- Ways to mitigate viewshed impacts through design
- The road is typically the biggest impact for the transmission line/construction
- Visual clearing house website <http://blmwyomingvisual.anl.gov/documents/>

Using GIS technology to capture and inventory trail data

- CDTC is using *Fulcrum* (fulcrumapp.com, a software as a service) for some data collection tasks
 - Solid data dictionary
 - Mobile access
 - Cloud based data storage
 - Issues that were raised:
 - Verify who owns data when you use software as a service?
 - Federal Agencies may have to deal with restrictions with these types of applications, particularly if the service creates a direct data “tunnel” to the service provider w/o allowing for equal public access to the data i.e. exclusivity.
- Data dictionary
 - What questions does your data answer for you?
 - Software that offers controlled input fields (drop downs, check boxes, etc) increases data accuracy by forcing a consistent input format.
 - Training and special attention is needed for data collection that involves subjective observations – what is a vista, etc.
- Is there an opportunity for a shared data model driven by PNTS members?
 - Step 1 - start by sharing existing data dictionaries
 - Benefits include being able to analyze the whole trail system, as well as compare trail with each other.
 - Should explore opportunities for PNTS members to either better contribute to the NTS GIS group (overcoming Federal firewalls, etc) and/or organize a working group through PNTS.
- Data Quality
 - GPS data will inherently have some level of error.
 - Quality Control/Quality Assurance measures are important, and can include:
 - Differential correction enabled GPS (or GPS data)
 - Topology rules built into the GIS “data model” with error checking done by the GIS software.
 - Consistent data entry – dropdown menus, etc used with the data collection device.

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SUPs & Competitive Events

NCT – lots of competitive events, embraced by most chapters; old line view: not appropriate on NSTs

BLM – require SUP for competitive events – on NST require effects analysis which applicant must pay for

NCT – event organizers added paint & mile markers to NCT against agreement – much damage

PCT – trying to protect hiker (Ollie from Ohio) not expecting event; users have expectation that does not include meeting event participants.

Pot. Heritage – Not Wilderness, trail not well known – events bring attention & cause no damage.

A.T. – Agencies find other alternative for event venues off A.T.

Ice Age – Hike with great PR generated huge response with ~500 cars causing bad neighbor relations – problems can result from a “regular” poorly managed trail use.

BLM – Variety of “allowances” on various NSTs confusing to public and a big time suck for agency staff dealing with misconceptions.

PCT – agency staff turn-over is a problem for institutional memory on how to handle events.

Beth – to prohibit something permanently requires a regulation. “Can’t substantially interfere with the nature & purposes” of the NST. Cumulative effects need to be considered.

CDT – Tourism income from events is important for small towns. Setting up SUP system that is site specific.

A.T. – JFK run is a big revenue producer for locals; grandfathered in – would not be allowed now.

NCT – Do agency Tr. Mgrs. talk about this? Yes.

CDT - SUP modernization (USFS): will not need to do NEPA for some events; get more people on public lands with less red tape.

NCT – what happens w/huge number of participants on rainy days? Substantial impact results – should be canceled.

Monitoring of events and impacts is critical to deal with future events appropriately.

Beth – once a race is permitted, it is very hard to make it stop.

What about challenge events (non-competitive)? Problematic (off trail fund raising, group size may require SUP)

Impacts are real – numbers of participants more important than whether competitive.

AZ – doesn’t trust event organizers to do a good job so AZNST does event organization to pick appropriate spots & times. AZNST has low use so events increase awareness; they sponsor 6 events, net ~\$50K which goes to trail maint. 60-100 participants per event.

PCT – let SUP mgrs. know events are not a nominal effect & are controversial.

Can mitigation be part of a SUP? Yes.

Some running groups have adopted trail sections.

AZ – Best practices to avoid negative impacts, e.g. advise other users of event

Professional /sponsored athletes?

Veterans? Very controversial at beginning, moot now.

Managing National Scenic Trails off Federal Lands *NST Workshop Pensacola Beach FL Nov14-18, 2016*

Thu Nov 17 3pm Session summary

- Participant trails (5) have similar challenges and creative strategies for working off federal lands
- All agreed that an off federal lands component is a valuable addition to the workshops and should continue
- We agreed it would be helpful to collaborate and share best practices virtually throughout the year informally

Trail Breakdown Discussion

Florida Trail 1,300 miles

- 44% federal Lands and 15% or 194 miles on National Forests
- 30% State Lands
- 18% Water Management Districts
- 8% private/other

Ice Age Trail 1,200 miles

- 200 miles State
- 200 miles County Forest
- 42 miles National Forest
- 2 miles Wild and Scenic Riverway

New England Trail 220 miles

- All non-Federal
- 60% protected lands in CT
- 40% non-protected
- 70% protected lands MA
- 30% non-protected

North Country Trail 4,800 miles

- 650 miles National Forests
- 50 miles National Park
- 15 miles USFWS
- 34 miles Army Corps
- 160 different land management units, 7 Tribes

Arizona Trail 800 miles

- 75% federal Lands
- 15% State Trust
- 1 private land owner

Strategies and Ideas

FT

- Forest Service initiated a Coalition of partners made up of State, Federal, Local Agency leads as well as partner leads to guide discussion and collaborate on achieving the goals of the 5 year Strategic Plan. This Plan was established and written by the coalition group and in its 5th year. Meets twice annually.
- Established in State Statute as Florida's long distance hiking trail

- Participant member on State greenways and Trails Council
- Working with state agencies to be incorporated in all land management plans
- Engaged with MPO's throughout the state as well as county level planning offices

AZT

- Established as State Scenic Trail by statute

AT

- MOU's with each state
- State legislations in some states
- ATC, NPS and state agencies

Group

- Identified challenges that vary across agency and sometime within agencies at the land unit level particularly around perceived user conflict with hunters etc.
- Need to build relationships to help with land acquisition and easement needs
- Varies approaches to boundary monitoring and land management with scattered ownership
- Let's share ideas, successes and challenges throughout the year as a group