Trail Maintenance

INTRODUCTION

Regular trail maintenance is essential to keeping trails safe, accessible, functional, and enjoyable for users. Maintenance needs vary depending on trail type, surface, surrounding environment, level of use, and seasonal conditions. Communities should establish a consistent maintenance program during the trail planning and design process to identify responsibilities and schedules that can help address issues early, extend the life of trail infrastructure, and maintain connections within a larger trail network.

Trail maintenance can include routine activities as well as regular inspection of structures and amenities. Trail maintenance is often a shared responsibility. Municipalities can work with neighboring communities, counties, regional organizations, conservation groups, volunteers, and other partners to share expertise, resources, and responsibilities. Clearly defined maintenance agreements can help establish who is responsible for different portions of a trail and how ongoing costs will be addressed.



Multi-use trail in Chadds Ford Township, Delaware County



Gravel trail in Chadds Ford Township, Delaware County

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

<u>Solid Surface Trails:</u> Asphalt • Concrete • Boardwalk • Other constructed surfaces

Hard-surface trails require regular inspection to identify cracking, potholes, drainage issues, and damage to structures or edges. Repairs should address surface deterioration and drainage problems before they create larger maintenance or accessibility issues.

Common Maintenance:

- Surface: crack and pothole repair
- Drainage maintenance
- Boardwalk and bridge inspections
- Vegetation management along trail edges

<u>Natural Surface Trails:</u> Compacted dirt • Mowed grass
• Woodchips • Crushed stone

Soft-surface trails generally require more frequent attention to erosion, rutting, vegetation growth, drainage, and surface displacement. Regular grading, resurfacing, mowing, or replenishing of trail materials can help maintain a stable and usable trail.

Common Maintenance:

- Grading and resurfacing
- Erosion control
- Drainage maintenance
- Mowing and vegetation management
- Replenishing surface materials
- Clearing debris and trees

BRANDYWINE CONSERVANCY

Routine for all Trail Types:

Regardless of surface type, routine inspections should identify and address vegetation encroachment, damaged signage, litter, fallen trees, drainage issues, and other potential hazards. Any trail amenities such as signage, waste baskets and restrooms must also be regularly checked and maintained.

MAINTENANCE PLANNING

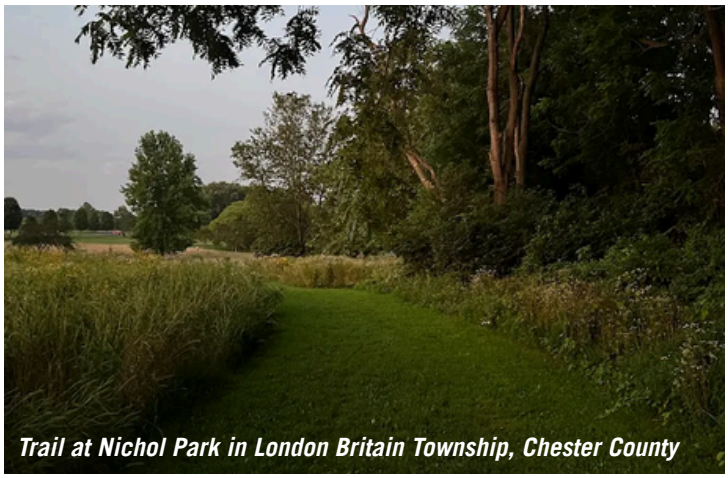
Maintenance should be considered from the beginning of the trail planning and design process. Identifying responsibilities, inspection schedules, funding, and maintenance needs early on can help communities keep trails in functional and in good condition long term. A logbook to keep records of maintenance or inspection activities, and the date they occurred, is also essential to the maintenance process.

WHO?	Identify maintenance responsibilities: • Municipal staff • County/regional agencies • Conservation groups • Friends groups &/or volunteers • Property owners • Contractors

WHEN?	Routine Maintenances & Inspections
	• Seasonal
	  ◦ Winter weather: snow & ice removal
	  ◦ Storm-related inspections
	  ◦ Fall leaf/debris removal
	• Periodic:
	  ◦ Surface upkeep and rehabilitation
	  ◦ Structural inspections & repairs

HOW?	• Draft a budget and identify anticipated maintenance costs • Identify funding sources and/or grants • Create maintenance agreements • Contract services as needed • Gather User Reports for live feedback • Draft and review Trail Easement maintenance responsibilities

For more information, scan the QR code to find additional resources related to recreation and transportation infrastructure.



Trail at Nichol Park in London Britain Township, Chester County

SUCCESSFUL CASE STUDIES

1. Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) – Southwestern Pennsylvania

GAP Conservancy + segment owners + volunteers

The Great Allegheny Passage demonstrates how maintenance can be successful across a long, multi-jurisdictional trail. Different public and nonprofit entities are responsible for individual trail segments, with the GAP Conservancy and volunteer groups helping coordinate maintenance needs and improvements. Recent efforts have focused on documenting trail conditions, including surfaces, structures, and drainage, to help segment owners identify and address maintenance needs consistently across the 150-mile corridor.

2. Schuylkill River Trail – Southeastern & Eastern Pennsylvania

Schuylkill River Greenways + Multiple trail partners + ambassador program

The Schuylkill River Trail relies on multiple organizations to maintain different portions of the larger regional trail network. Schuylkill River Greenways owns and maintains trail segments in Berks and Schuylkill Counties and uses volunteers through its ambassador program to assist with regular maintenance. This shared approach allows organizations and volunteers to help monitor trail conditions, address routine maintenance needs, and support the ongoing operation of the larger trail system.

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