

Prince William County Comprehensive Plan Trails Chapter

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INTENT

The quality of life for residents of Prince William County is linked closely to the development and management of a well-maintained system of parks, trails, and open space.

A network of multi-use trails will connect residential areas with county, state, and national parks, forests, and wildlife management areas as well as with places of cultural and historical interest, schools, retail areas, and transportation nodes. Recreational trails will include appropriate designation of selected county streams and rivers as "blueways" for recreational use, and satisfy a need to provide public access to waterways that can support canoes and boats for recreation and fishing. The trail system will be a subset of a larger system of recreational, environmental and heritage corridors.

A network of trails provides a range of economic, aesthetic, environmental and recreation benefits to citizens of a community, beyond the benefits that accrue to private landowners. A trails network (including blueways) can increase residential and commercial property values, encourage the revitalization of declining areas, attract tourists, encourage the establishment of "clean" businesses, and provide an alternative to the use of automobiles that can help reduce traffic congestion.

DEFINITIONS

Blueways are rivers, lakes, or streams with public access for recreation that includes fishing, nature observation, and opportunities for boating such as rowing, canoeing and kayaking.

Trails are linear routes that are open to the general public for non-motorized transportation or recreation purposes such as walking, jogging, hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, and mountain biking. In the network of Prince William trails, blueways are water-based trails. For safety or other management purposes, some Prince William public trails and blueways may be restricted to particular uses.

NOTE: This Comprehensive Plan chapter addresses trails on public land or waters, or private land where the trail is open to public use. This chapter does not deal with trails where only residents of a Home Owner Association or private club are allowed to use the trail or water access facility.

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GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTION STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: Preserve the existing trails network (including blueways) within the County.

TR-Policy 1: Complete and maintain an accurate inventory of trails (including blueways) in Prince William County

- Action Strategy 1 – The Planning Department shall prepare a current comprehensive inventory of existing trails, and the Planning Commission shall approve the completed inventory through the public hearing process. The inventory will include trails within public parks and open space, paved multi-use trails alongside highways, natural surface trails, and other paths open to the public for non-motorized travel. The inventory will also include existing blueways (such as the John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail) and public access points to lakes and streams in the county.
- Action Strategy 2 – The Planning Commission shall define and publish guidelines for calculating changes to the inventory of trails when Comprehensive Plan Amendments, rezonings, site plans, and Special Use Permits are approved.
- Action Strategy 3 – In order to minimize future encroachments, reduce the need for enforcement and ensure that current landowners, future landowners and county residents have access to the location and restrictions for all trails, the Planning Dept. shall develop and maintain a publically available online inventory of all trails. This inventory will include a Trails Inventory Map showing specific locations of trails, made available as a Geographic Information System (GIS) layer on the County Mapper.

GOAL 2: Plan and implement a comprehensive countywide network of trails

TR-Policy 1. Establish and empower a Trail Commission to serve as the focal point for developing and protecting a comprehensive network of trails (including blueways) in Prince William County.

- Action Strategy 1 – The Board of County Supervisors will charter a Trails Commission (similar to the Historical Commission) to guide development of new trails as Comprehensive Plan Amendments, rezonings, site plans, and Special Use Permits are approved. The Trails Commission shall be comprised of interested citizens from all magisterial districts, with staff support from the Planning Department, Park Authority, Department of Public Works, and the Department of Transportation.
- Action Strategy 2 - The Trails Commission, with staff support from the Planning Department, Park Authority, Department of Public Works, and the Department of Transportation, will review the comprehensive inventory of existing trails, and identify potential corridors (as documented in Appendix C) for establishing new trails that connect residential areas, county, state, and national parks, forests, and wildlife management areas, places of cultural and historical interest, schools, retail areas, and transportation nodes. The corridors shall be wide enough to provide substantial flexibility in designing specific trail routes at a later date.

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- Action Strategy 3 - The Trails Commission will consider it a priority to identify opportunities to increase public access to blueways, and to create safe portage paths around obstacles (dams, low bridges, etc.). Access may require parking to allow for “car top boating access” at key locations on streams.
- Action Strategy 4 –The Trails Commission will create benchmarks to measure the progress in completing Prince William's comprehensive trail network, and to compare the status of the Prince William trail system with comparable jurisdictions.

TR-Policy 2. Maximize partnerships and public participation in all phases of the County trail and blueways programs.

- Action Strategy 1 – The Trails Commission will invite input from county/state/regional/Federal agencies, adjacent jurisdictions, landowners and developers, and community organizations (including athletic leagues, civic groups, conservation and environmental groups, plus hiking, cycling and equestrian groups), to plan the initial trail corridors (see Appendix C), update the corridor plan, develop high-quality facilities, and attract alternative sources of land and funding.
- Action Strategy 2 – The Planning Department will ensure that the county's plans for a comprehensive trail network are included in the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) "Northern Virginia Bikeway and Trail Network", the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG) "Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the National Capital Region," plus other relevant state and regional planning documents.
- Action Strategy 3 – The Transportation Department will facilitate arrangements with Virginia Railroad Express (VRE) and Omnilink for transport of bicycles, to increase access to trails in other Northern Virginia jurisdictions.
- Action Strategy 4 – The Trails Commission will negotiate with Home Owner Associations, utilities, and other private property owners to incorporate existing trails, not open to the public now, into the county's comprehensive trail network. The Trails Commission will ensure that private entities are aware that under section 29.1-509 of the Code of Virginia, landowners are generally not liable for injury or death occurring on their property when they have given public access easements for certain recreational purposes, including trails (see Appendix B).
- Action Strategy 5 – The Trails Commission will locate trails to minimize intrusion on residential privacy, and will provide adequate public parking at appropriate trail access points to ensure residential or commercial interests will not be inconvenienced inappropriately by trail users.
- Action Strategy 6 – The Trails Commission will establish an Adopt-a-Trail Program to stimulate community support and protection of individual trails, and to offset the need for county resources to build, monitor, and maintain trail facilities.

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TR-Policy 3. Make land use decisions that stimulate private sector development and public transportation improvements that are consistent with the county's desired trails network.

- Action Strategy 1 – The Planning Commission will consider the potential corridors proposed by the Trails Commission, and then create Trail Overlay Districts (comparable to Highway Corridor Overlay Districts) to ensure that appropriate property rights are acquired whenever parcels that could contribute to the trail system are rezoned or developed.
NOTE: These Trail Overlay Districts shall be general in nature, and shall not include specifics such as which side of the stream or road will contain the trail. The final route shall be decided based upon the site conditions at the time of trail development.
- Action Strategy 2 – The Trails Commission will review all land use development plans (such as Comprehensive Plan Amendments, rezonings, site plans, and Special Use Permits) including residential, commercial, and industrial, development and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and the Board of County Supervisors on how to apply potential proffers, donations, grants, and other acquisitions to complete a comprehensive countywide network of trails.
- Action Strategy 3 – The Planning Commission will assure that approvals for new development (such as Comprehensive Plan Amendments, rezonings, site plans, and Special Use Permits) will include the appropriate proffers for trails (see "Guidelines for Trail Proffers," Appendix D). The Planning Commission will also assure that approvals for new development will not negatively impact existing trails, and that new developments will preserve public access to trails (discouraging "privatization" of the routes, by new development that conceals access to trailheads or limits public parking).
- Action Strategy 4 – The Trails Commission will review all Federal, state, regional, and county transportation projects in Prince William to ensure they include appropriate lateral crossings in the funding, design and construction of bridges and road projects, as well as bicycle and pedestrian signage, crossing signals, and crosswalks that facilitate easy pedestrian and bike access across highways, streams, and railroads. The Trails Commission will consider the suitability of sidewalks and on-road bicycle lanes as interim measures for completing a comprehensive network of dedicated trails.
- Action Strategy 5 - The Board of County Supervisors will consider using existing county rights-of-way or other county-owned lands for trails, parks, and open space, prior to determining if other disposition is more appropriate.
- Action Strategy 6 - The Board of County Supervisors, using donations, grants, General Funds, and proceeds from bond issues as well as proffers, will acquire easements and other property rights to implement the comprehensive trails network.

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Appendix A

Trail Standards and Classification

Trails serve a multiplicity of purposes including exercising, walking, jogging, hiking, cycling, mountain biking, bird-watching, and equestrian use. They provide safe, alternative, non-motorized transportation routes to destinations such as private residences, work, schools, or shopping. For safety and other management purposes, some trails may be restricted to particular uses.

Trails are designed to provide a variety of experiences for users of different ages and abilities. Based on factors including the terrain, surrounding natural resources such as vegetation, surface material, trail width, stream crossings, and road crossings, users will be offered a range of experiences.

Furthermore, because of the range of user abilities and purposes, it is impossible for one trail type to be optimal for all purposes and users. For example, baby strollers need a smooth, paved surface while mountain bikers prefer a natural surface with some challenging features.

Trail Standards

- Whenever feasible, the trail should be separated from vehicular traffic, except for regulated uses such as maintenance and emergency access.
- A trail should either have definitive start and end points, which may include residential areas, businesses, schools, parks, other trails, or, as in the case of a loop trail, the trail itself, or a potential for future connectivity. In many cases it may take a number of years to assemble all the pieces needed to make a meaningful trail connection.
- A trail should be mapped in the appropriate trail database.
- A trail should be signed in such a way that it can be navigated with reasonable ease from one end to the other.
- A trail should be maintained so that it is generally passable. Many trails, especially natural surface trails, have some use limitations due to uncontrollable weather events.

Depending upon factors such as user demographics, topography, and connective value, trails are classified into one of eight categories:

1. Major Regional Trail: A major regional trail connects to trails outside the County. This includes the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the Virginia Bikeway. These are usually paved and 8 feet or more in width.
2. On-road Bicycle Route: Designated bike lane or signed bike route on road surface.
3. Major paved trail: Concrete or asphalt trail, 8 feet or more in width
4. Minor Paved Trail: Concrete or asphalt trail, 4 to less than 8 feet in width
5. Multi-Use Trails: Minor paved trail with a parallel natural surface or stone dust trail
6. Natural Surface or Stone Dust Trail: Stone dust, wood chip, or packed soil, usually 6 – 8 feet in width
7. Stream Valley Trail: Trail in a stream valley, surface and width vary depending upon the terrain
8. Trails Belonging to Other Jurisdictions: Trails that belong to the City of Manassas, Manassas Park, or the Towns of Occoquan, Dumfries, Haymarket, or Quantico.

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Appendix B

State Law Limiting Landowner Liability

§ 29.1-509. Duty of care and liability for damages of landowners to hunters, fishermen, sightseers, etc.

A. For the purpose of this section:

"Fee" means any payment or payments of money to a landowner for use of the premises or in order to engage in any activity described in subsections B and C of this section, but does not include rentals or similar fees received by a landowner from governmental sources or payments received by a landowner from incidental sales of forest products to an individual for his personal use, or any action taken by another to improve the land or access to the land for the purposes set forth in subsections B and C of this section or remedying damage caused by such uses.

"Land" or "premises" means real property, whether rural or urban, waters, boats, private ways, natural growth, trees and any building or structure which might be located on such real property, waters, boats, private ways and natural growth.

"Landowner" means the legal title holder, lessee, occupant or any other person in control of land or premises.

B. A landowner shall owe no duty of care to keep land or premises safe for entry or use by others for hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, participation in water sports, boating, hiking, rock climbing, sightseeing, hang gliding, skydiving, horseback riding, foxhunting, racing, bicycle riding or collecting, gathering, cutting or removing firewood, for any other recreational use, or for use of an easement granted to the Commonwealth or any agency thereof to permit public passage across such land for access to a public park, historic site, or other public recreational area. No landowner shall be required to give any warning of hazardous conditions or uses of, structures on, or activities on such land or premises to any person entering on the land or premises for such purposes, except as provided in subsection D.

C. Any landowner who gives permission, express or implied, to another person to hunt, fish, launch and retrieve boats, swim, ride, foxhunt, trap, camp, hike, rock climb, hang glide, skydive, sightsee, engage in races, to collect, gather, cut or remove forest products upon land or premises for the personal use of such person, or for the use of an easement as set forth in subsection B does not thereby:

1. Impliedly or expressly represent that the premises are safe for such purposes; or
2. Constitute the person to whom such permission has been granted an invitee to whom a duty of care is owed; or
3. Assume responsibility for or incur liability for any intentional or negligent acts of such person or any other person, except as provided in subsection D.

D. Nothing contained in this section, except as provided in subsection E, shall limit the liability of a landowner which may otherwise arise or exist by reason of his gross negligence or willful or malicious failure to guard or warn against a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity. The provisions of this section shall not limit the liability of a landowner which may otherwise arise or exist when the landowner receives a fee for use of the premises or to engage in any activity described in subsections B and C of this section. Nothing contained in this section shall relieve any sponsor or operator of any sporting event or competition including but not limited to a race or triathlon of the duty to exercise ordinary care in such events.

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E. For purposes of this section, whenever any person enters into an agreement with, or grants an easement to, the Commonwealth or any agency thereof, any county, city, or town, or with any local or regional authority created by law for public park, historic site or recreational purposes, concerning the use of, or access over, his land by the public for any of the purposes enumerated in subsections B and C of this section, the government, agency, county, city, town, or authority with which the agreement is made shall hold a person harmless from all liability and be responsible for providing, or for paying the cost of, all reasonable legal services required by any person entitled to the benefit of this section as the result of a claim or suit attempting to impose liability. Any action against the Commonwealth, or any agency, thereof, for negligence arising out of a use of land covered by this section shall be subject to the provisions of the Virginia Tort Claims Act (§ 8.01- 195.1 et seq.). Any provisions in a lease or other agreement which purports to waive the benefits of this section shall be invalid, and any action against any county, city, town, or local or regional authority shall be subject to the provisions of § 15.2-1809, where applicable.

(Code 1950, §§ 8-654.2, 29-130.2; 1962, c. 545; 1964, c. 435; 1977, c. 624; 1979, c. 276; 1980, c. 560; 1982, c. 29; 1983, c. 283; 1987, c. 488; 1988, c. 191; 1989, cc. 26, 500, 505; 1990, cc. 799, 808; 1991, c. 305; 1992, c. 285; 1994, c. 544.)

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Appendix C

Trail Corridor Map

(to be determined by the Trails Commission - see separate document for a starting point)

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Appendix D

Guidelines for Trail Proffers

(to be determined...)