

# 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. This Comprehensive Plan chapter addresses trails on public land or waters, or private land where the trail is open to public use.

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 designated routes on land or water with public access for recreation or transportation purposes such as walking, jogging, hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, mountain biking, canoeing, kayaking, and backpacking. In the network of Prince William trails, blueways are water-based trails.

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For safety or other management purposes, some Prince William public trails and blueways may be restricted to particular uses.

**Public Trails** are trails for use by the general public and may be located on land of any size including, but not limited to, urban, suburban, subdivided, and rural land.

**Trail Alignments** are parcel specific layouts of the trail treadway (path) in horizontal and vertical planes.

**Trail Corridors** are lands set aside on either side of a trail to act as a buffer zone protecting the trail against impacts which would detract from the quality and experience of a trail;

### **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 STRATEGIES:**

1. The County shall prepare a current comprehensive inventory of existing trails (using the classification system in Appendix A) and 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.
2. 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.
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 County shall develop and maintain a publicly available online inventory of all trails. This inventory shall include a Trails Inventory Map showing specific locations of trails, made available as a Geographic Information System (GIS) layer on the County Mapper.

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### **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 STRATEGIES:**

1. The Board of County Supervisors shall charter a Trails Commission to advise and assist the Board of County Supervisors in efforts to create, implement and protect a Countywide Trail Network. Trail Commission membership shall be comprised of no more than 12 voting members to include four citizens representing the County at-large and one representative nominated by each of the following stakeholder organizations: Nokesville Horse Society, Prince William Conservation Alliance, Prince William Wildflower Society, Friends of Prince William Forest Park, Prince William Trails and Streams, Bull Run Mountain Conservancy, Northern Virginia Builders Industry Association and the Friends of Potomac River Refuges. Representatives from the following organizations shall serve as non-voting members of the Trails Commission: Prince William County Park Authority, Prince William County Public Works, Prince William County Planning Dept., Prince William County Public Schools, Virginia Dept. of Transportation, Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the Virginia Dept. of Forestry. The Trail Commission shall be responsible for developing baseline criteria for creating public trails as well as recommending priorities for inclusion in the Capital Improvements Projects budget, guiding the development of new trails through development processes, and actively seek to establish a broad range of partnerships to ensure a high quality and comprehensive Countywide trail network.
2. The Trails Commission, with staff support from the Prince William County Park Authority, shall complete a comprehensive inventory of existing trails, and identify potential corridors 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, and provide their recommendations to the Board of County Supervisors for inclusion in the County's Comprehensive Plan. The corridors shall be wide enough to provide substantial flexibility in designing specific trail routes at a later date.
3. The Trails Commission shall consider the identification of opportunities to increase public access to blueways, and to create safe portage paths around obstacles (dams, low bridges, etc.) as a priority. Access may require parking to allow for "car top boating access" at key locations on streams.
4. The Trails Commission shall create benchmarks to measure progress in completing Prince William's comprehensive trail network.

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

### ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. The Trails Commission will invite input from county/state/regional/Federal agencies, adjacent jurisdictions, landowners and developers, as well as community and regional organizations (including athletic leagues, civic groups, conservation and environmental groups, plus hiking, cycling and equestrian groups), to update the corridor plan, develop high-quality facilities, and attract alternative sources of land and funding.
2. The Board of County Supervisors shall 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.
3. The County shall facilitate arrangements with Virginia Railroad Express (VRE) and Omnilink for transport of bicycles, to increase access to trails in other Northern Virginia jurisdictions.
4. The Trails Commission will negotiate with willing Home Owner Associations whenever possible, to incorporate existing trails into the public trail system and assume the maintenance responsibility and liability for the trail in return for public access.
5. The Trails Commission will negotiate with the Prince William County Service Authority to allow trail easements in utility corridors and on Service Authority properties.
6. The Trails Commission will negotiate with 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).
7. 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.
8. The Trails Commission will consider establishing 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 STRATEGIES:

1. The Board of County Supervisors 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.
2. The Trails Commission will review all land use development applications (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.
3. The County shall 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 County shall 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).
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.
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.
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.
- The existence of boardwalks and bridges does not affect the classification of a trail.

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 trail that connects to trails outside the County, such as the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail and the Virginia Bikeway. Surface and width vary depending upon the terrain and regional uses.
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.

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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.

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.

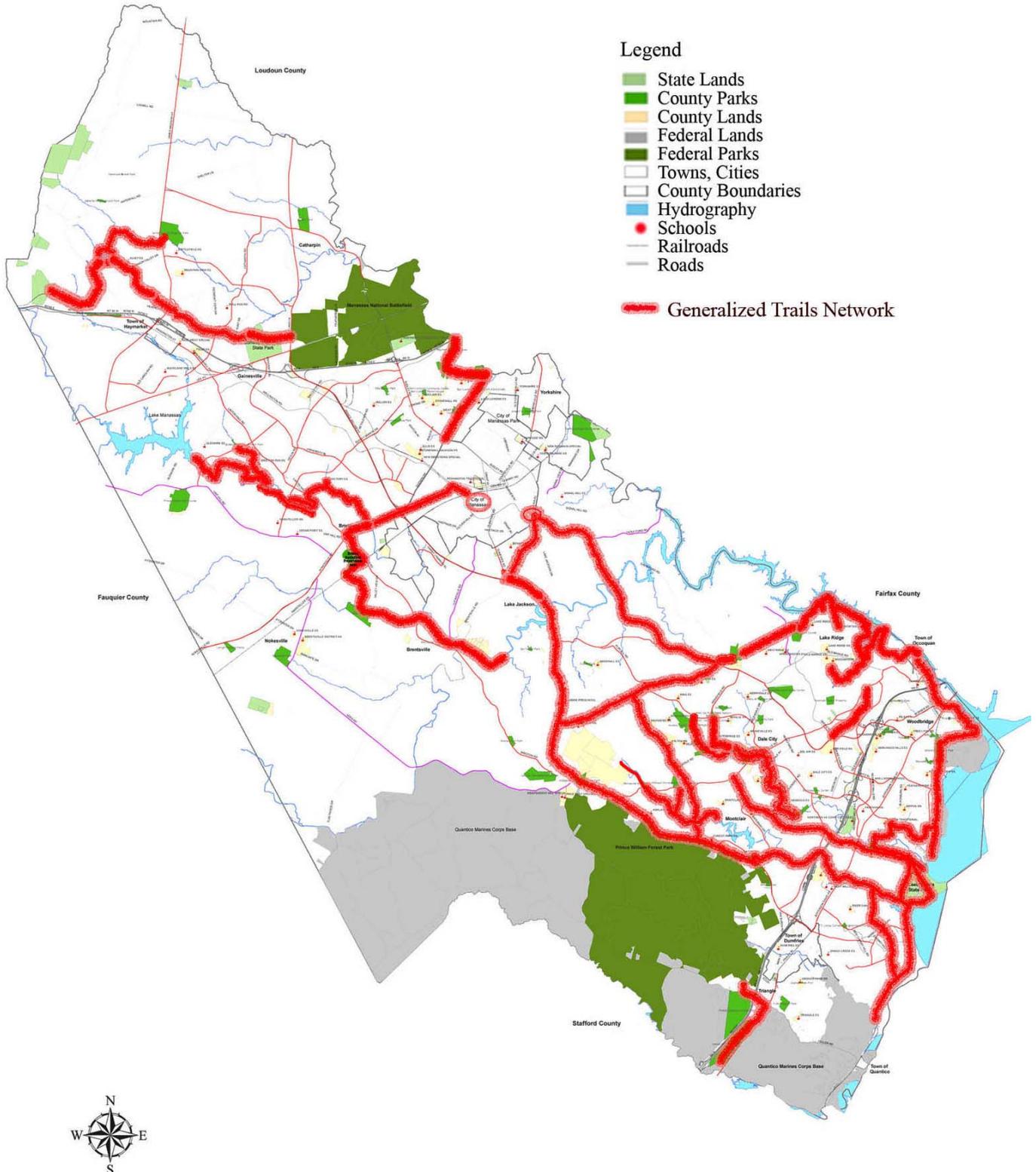
(Code 1950, §§ 8-654.2, 29-130.2; 1962, c. 545; 1964, c. 435; 1977, c. 624; 1979, c. 276; 1980, c. 560; 1982, c. 29; 1983, c. 283; 1987, c. 488; 1988, c. 191; 1989, cc. 26, 500, 505; 1990, cc. 799, 808; 1991, c. 305; 1992, c. 285; 1994, c. 544.)

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## Appendix C

### Prince William County Generalized Trails Network

*for purposes of providing a starting point for use in land use decisions  
until the Trails Commission completes their comprehensive map.*



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**Appendix D**

**Guidelines for Trail Proffers**

<u>Trail Type</u>	<u>Standard*</u>
Multi-Use Trails	1 mile per 3,000 population
Hiking Trails	1 mile per 4,000 population
Nature or Interpretive Trail	1 mile per 2,500 population
Equestrian Trail	1 mile per 6,250 population
Bicycle Trail	1 mile per 2,600 population
Jogging Trail	1 mile per 2,000 population
Exercise Trail	1 mile per 7,500 population

*\* Derived from the National Parks and Recreation Association Standards*