

TRAILS PLAN

CONTENTS

The components of the trails plan are:

- Intent
- Definitions
- Goals, Policies, and Action Strategies
- Trails Map (Figure 3)
- Appendix A – Trail Standards and Classification (Appendix A)

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 water, 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.

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, and provide an alternative to the use of automobiles that can help reduce traffic congestion.

DEFINITIONS

Blueways: Rivers, lakes, or streams with public access for recreation that includes fishing, nature observation, and opportunities for boating.

Trails: 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. For safety or other management purposes, some Prince William public trails and blueways may be restricted to particular uses. Trails may be located on land or water bodies of any size including, but not limited to, urban, suburban, subdivided, and rural land.

GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTION STRATEGIES

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

T1-POLICY 1: Complete and maintain an accurate inventory of trails (including blueways) in Prince William County.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall prepare a comprehensive inventory of existing trails (using the classification system in Appendix A). The inventory will include, but is not limited to trails within public parks and open space, paved multi-use trails alongside roadways, natural surface trails, and other paths open to the public for non-motorized travel. The inventory will also include existing blueways and public access points to lakes and streams in the county.
2. Periodically update the trails inventory to include newly constructed trails.
3. Develop and maintain a publicly available online inventory of all trails.

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

T2-POLICY 1: Establish a trails and blueways advisory committee to serve as the focal point for developing a comprehensive network of trails (including blueways) in Prince William County.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. The Board of County Supervisors should consider the creation of a trails and blueways advisory committee to operate under the auspices of the Park Authority to advise and assist the Park Authority Board and the Board of County Supervisors in efforts to create, implement and protect a countywide trails network. The trails and blueways advisory committee shall be responsible for developing baseline criteria for creating public trails as well as recommending priorities for inclusion in the Prince William County capital improvement program and the Park Authority capital improvement program, reviewing comprehensive plan amendments, rezoning and special use permit applications and recommending trail development opportunities, and actively seeking to establish a broad range of partnerships to ensure a high quality and comprehensive countywide trail network.

2. The trails and blueways advisory committee, with staff support from the Prince William County Park Authority, Planning Office, and other agencies as directed by the Board of County Supervisors, shall identify 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.
3. The trails and blueways advisory committee shall identify opportunities to increase public access to blueways, and to create safe portage paths around obstacles (dams, low bridges, etc.).
4. The trails and blueways advisory committee shall create benchmarks to measure progress in completing Prince William's comprehensive trail network.

T2-POLICY 2: Maximize partnerships and public participation in all phases of the County trail and blueways programs.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. 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 trails map, develop high-quality facilities, and attract alternative sources of land and funding.
2. 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. Facilitate arrangements with Virginia Railroad Express (VRE) and Omnilink for transport of bicycles, to increase access to trails in other Northern Virginia jurisdictions.
4. Encourage home owner associations whenever possible to incorporate existing trails into the public trail system.
5. Work with the Prince William County Service Authority to collocate trail easements in utility corridors and on Service Authority properties.

6. Work with utilities and other private property owners to incorporate existing trails, not open to the public now, into the county's comprehensive trail network.
7. Consideration regarding residential privacy will be included as a factor when siting trails. Provide adequate public parking at appropriate trail access points to ensure residential or commercial interests will not be inconvenienced inappropriately by trail users.
8. 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.
9. Corridors, trails, and blueways generally shown on the trails map may take place on public property, within the public right-of-way, or on private property through voluntary donations by citizens, and through negotiating proffers from landowners and/or the development community as development occurs. Private property owners are not obligated to participate in the trails program.
10. For trails planned in the rural area not included in the County transportation chapter's thoroughfare plan, neither the Prince William Board of County Supervisors nor the Park Authority shall pass any law whereby private property will be taken, condemned, or damaged for the "public use" of parks, open space, or trails. In addition, private property owners have the right to request that the County, the Park Authority, or any other non-profit entity remove their property from any public map indicating existing, proposed, or future trails, open space, or parks.

T2-POLICY 3: Make land use decisions that stimulate both private sector developments and public transportation improvements that are consistent with the county's desired trails network.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. Assure that approvals for new development (such as comprehensive plan amendments, rezonings, and special use permits) will include appropriate proffers for trails. Assure that approvals for new development will not negatively impact existing trails, and that new developments will preserve public access to trails.
2. Review all federal, state, regional and county transportation projects in Prince William to ensure funding includes appropriate lateral crossings in the 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. Consider the suitability of sidewalks and on-road bicycle lanes as interim measures for completing a comprehensive network of dedicated trails.

3. 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.
4. Acquire easements and other property rights using donations, grants, and proceeds from bond issues as well as proffers, to implement the comprehensive trails network.

T2-POLICY 4: Develop and maintain standards and guidelines for trail planning, development, and maintenance.

ACTION STRATEGIES:

1. Amend the DCSM to include construction standards for trail types identified in Appendix A.
2. Amend the Park Authority Comprehensive Plan to include trail guidelines, types, and standards consistent with this plan.

This page intentionally left blank.

From the Piedmont to the Potomac



TRAILS PLAN APPENDIX A

TRAIL STANDARDS AND CLASSIFICATION

Trails serve a multiplicity of purposes including exercising, walking, jogging, hiking, cycling, mountain biking, bird-watching, boating, 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 Cities of Manassas, Manassas Park, or the towns of Occoquan, Dumfries, Haymarket, or Quantico.