

## **Section III-Trail Management**

Trail management is the key to having a successful trail system. A successful trail system must have specific and consistent management strategies implemented to ensure trail access, provide a quality experience for the user, and minimize maintenance impacts upon Park Authority staff. The education of the users and public involvement is a major component in the Park Authority's trail management strategy. Accurate signage, maps, markings, trail etiquette, and the Park Authority's own programs all form the basis for this strategy. Park Authority trails are designated as multi-use trails unless otherwise posted.

### **Trail User Information**

A vital component of any trail system is information about a trail's location and routing. Information regarding Park Authority trails is presented to trail users in a variety of formats.

#### **Trail Brochures**

Trail Brochures have been developed for Park Authority trails. There are two folder designs – one for the Cross County Trail maps and one for other Park Authority trail maps. The folders form a self-mailer and may contain individual maps as requested by the user. For mapping purposes the Cross County Trail is divided into ten sections and is mapped as the sections are completed. Other Park Authority trails, including trails in major parks, are also mapped. These brochures are available in the kiosks

#### **Park Authority Website**

Completed and updated trail maps are available on the park website at: [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks) Text from the brochures are also included on the website.

#### **Fairfax County Trails Map**

The Fairfax County Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) maintains a map of existing trails appearing on the countywide trail plan. As Park Authority trails are constructed or mapped internally, that information is sent to DPZ to be included in updates of that map.

### **Signs, and Marking**

Trail amenities, signs, and markings provide a major link towards making trails beneficial to a broad variety of users. These additions will allow a user to select a trail depending upon their capability. Or, adding some of these features could very well be the means of communication that will help minimize conflict.



#### **Interpretive Signs**

Interpretive signs enhance the recreational experience on a trail by providing information about the area surrounding the trail. Information may be environmental, historical, or cultural. Standard interpretive signs are constructed with imbedded fiberglass panels set in steel or aluminum frames. A typical interpretive sign is shown here:

### Trailhead Signs

Trailhead signs are installed at the point of entry for major trails. They display a map of the trail with a “you are here” dot showing exact location.



### Directional Signs

Many Park Authority trails are quite complex with numerous intersections and combined trail loops. In these and other instances, directional signs can be instrumental in making the trail easier to follow and more enjoyable to use in the process. Signs may also direct users to other park amenities, such as restrooms, athletic fields, picnic areas, etc. They may point to the locations of nearby streets and other facilities, such as schools or parking.



These signs are constructed of aluminum and marked with green letters or symbols on a white background. They may be mounted on u-channel posts, wood posts, or attached to fences, etc. A typical direction sign, constructed of 2” u-channel post with a 12”x18” aluminum sign is shown here.

### **Back Country, Mountain Biking, and Equestrian Trail Markers**

These gravel/stonedust or natural surface trails are frequently inaccessible by a maintenance vehicle. The trail route is also often complicated, with many side trails and turns. In order to mark the trails so that users do not become confused or lost, a lightweight, flexible trail marker will guide the way on these trails. The markers may be color-coded to indicate different trail loops within a trail system, such as for a mountain biking complex. They are also used on less accessible sections of the Cross County Trail, labeled with the Cross County Trail logo. A typical flexible trail marker is shown here:



### **Distance Markers**

Distance markers are beneficial for users on certain trails where the distance is easily identifiable and a great number of intersections do not exist. For example, on a loop trail where there is a defined beginning and ending designation; or on a straight trail section that connects from one strategic point to another. The distance markers are set at ½ mile intervals, providing the user with a reference point for goal-oriented workouts and other measurements.





## Multi-User Coordination

The County has a wide variety of visitors using its trails and for the most part, these visitors share the trails without conflicts. Unfortunately, some conflict is inevitable. The most common user conflict occurs between those on foot and those riding bicycles, horses or in-line skating. The users may avoid much of this conflict by following the rules for right-of-way outlined below.

Information about Trail Etiquette, right-of-way rules, other trail use guidelines and safety warnings will be included in the information at kiosks, on individual signs and in the printed trail brochures as well as on the website.

An important factor considered throughout the planning, design, construction, and management processes is to avoid user conflict through design whenever possible. To some extent, surface type will naturally segregate users, as certain surfaces are better suited for certain uses. For example, equestrians generally do not use an asphalt trail, while natural surface trails are not selected by in-line skaters.



Evaluation of trail use and wear is an on-going part of trail management. In some situations, it will be necessary to prohibit one or more user-types from a trail, or even to close a trail completely. This is particularly true of soft surfaced trails (gravel, stonedust and natural surfaces).

## Trail Etiquette

Trail etiquette is included as part of the official Park Rules. The rules are guidelines for behavior on the trails and includes the following:

- Maintain proper control of bicycles at all times
- Faster users pass on left
- Announce your passing –“Passing on your left”
- Stay on existing trails
- Stay off single-tracks when raining or muddy. Traffic on wet trails causes damage
- Do not disturb vegetation or wildlife
- Pets must be leashed at all times
- Trails and park close at dark
- Call 911 for emergencies



## Trash-Free Trails

The Fairfax County Park Authority’s trail system is a trash-free recreational facility. Trash cans are not provided along the trail system. Users are requested to carry out any trash they bring in and be respectful of the environment and other trail users. Information on this program is provided in trail brochures.



## Public Support and Involvement

Public support and involvement is critical to the success of the trail system. Many Park Authority trails have user support. The Park Authority works extensively with volunteer groups who want to perform projects to either clean up designated areas or to improve our trail system. The volunteers can be scouting groups, clubs, special interest groups, private companies, or individuals or participants in Park Authority programs. Volunteer projects are very helpful and highly encouraged, but they require coordination with Park Authority staff to ensure success of the project. Park staff responsible for the land where the work will occur must be involved in the planning of any project. It is important that the scope of the project, timing, and defined responsibilities of the volunteer group and the Park Authority are established and agreed upon. If training is required, a training session is arranged between the volunteer group and Park Authority staff. If the project is the construction of a trail, Park Authority staff and representatives of the volunteer group will mark the route of any new trail clearly prior to any work commencing.



Organized trail groups provide input to the design, development and implementation of the trail system. They also provide trail maintenance and/or inspect and report maintenance needs to the staff through volunteer programs.

### **Trail Related Organizations:**

- ***Fairfax Trails and Streams*** (FTAS) is the grassroots trail and environmental advocacy group that originated the Cross County Trail idea, identified a feasible/scenic route, led first Cross County Hike (Lorton to Great Falls) in 1999. Monthly meetings, e-news; leads hikes, trail construction/cleanup crews; working with landowners/users/governments to complete CCT.
- ***Great Falls Trail Blazers*** (GFTB) is a volunteer organization whose goal is to connect trail segments to provide multi-use, non-motorized access to parks, ball fields, shops, neighborhoods and the library.
- ***Hunters Valley Riding Club*** (HVRC) has been in existence since the early 1960's. It has a year round program of riding activities which include the use of riding rings, jumps, and trails. HVRC maintains an excellent network of trails in the Hunters Valley area of Vienna/Oakton.



- **Mid-Atlantic Off Road Enthusiasts (MORE)** is a non-profit organization dedicated to environmentally sound and socially responsible mountain biking. MORE is committed to expanding recreational opportunities for trail cyclists in the Washington, DC metro area by promoting multi-use trails.
- **Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA)** is a non-profit bicycle advocacy organization. WABA's mission is improving bicycling conditions and promoting bicycling in the metropolitan Washington, DC region. WABA envisions bicycle accommodations in all our transportation systems (roads, bridges, transit, trains, airports, and trail systems) so bicyclists have safe and secure access for recreation and commuting.
- **Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail** The Huntley Meadows Park trail system has been designated as part of this trail by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

- **Homeowners Associations**

A number of homeowners associations work with the Park Authority to maintain trails on common property that may connect with Park Authority trails. It can be beneficial on occasion to resurface the entire trail section on both Park and HOA property at one time, requiring coordination between the HOA and the Park Authority. The most significant benefit to the Park Authority is that these HOA trails connections are often the only access points available to the Park Authority trail section for a community. The HOA's also function as eyes and ears on the trails in their area, reporting maintenance and safety issues to Park Authority staff.

- **Countywide Non-Motorized Transportation Committee (NMTC)**

The NMTC also supports the CCT and works to recommend, coordinate and disseminate information on facilities for people to easily and safely travel between and through major commercial, residential, and natural areas using non-motorized transportation. The NMTC is comprised of citizens appointed by the Board of Supervisors to represent each Supervisory District and the major non-motorized transportation user groups as well as Fairfax County and Park Authority staff.

## Park Authority Programs

### **Adopt-A-Park**

The Adopt-a-Park program is a cooperative venture between the Park Authority and interested organizations, groups or individuals through which the members of the community assume maintenance responsibilities for designated park areas. These areas frequently include trails and trail entrances. This program has been highly successful in fostering a sense of ownership within a community of the park facilities within their community. The sense of pride that results benefits all park users and allows the Park Authority to direct its resources to other areas of the park system, which benefits the County at large.

The citizens, park staff and the resource itself benefit greatly from this program. All groups or organizations performing maintenance tasks on Park Authority trails must enter into an Adopt-A-Park agreement (with the exception of one-time stream valley clean up events).





## Park and Trail Watch

This program is designed to bring County citizens, Park Authority staff and the Fairfax County Police together to ensure a safe system of parks and recreation facilities and services. This program operates much like a Neighborhood Watch program. Trail users can become involved in the Park and Trail Watch program and report illegal or suspicious activity, vandalism, hazardous conditions, maintenance needs, and other appropriate matters. Park Watch brochures will be made available at the trail information kiosks and staffed park sites to inform and encourage trail users to get involved in the program.

