



## Hiking Trails Position Statement

### *Philosophy*

Hiking has long been an important outdoor activity, whether as a means of exploration, exercise or reflection. The act of setting foot down a path through natural areas provides an unparalleled opportunity to build the human spirit, improve physical fitness, and increase environmental awareness. Hiking offers all Americans a healthy, enjoyable and relatively simple way to deepen their connections to nature, people, and place.

As a national conservation-based recreation organization, American Hiking Society works tirelessly to build, maintain and protect hiking trails and their natural corridors so that current and future generations can experience the many joys and benefits of hiking and are inspired to protect this legacy.

Hiking trails, or foot-only trails, are pathways developed and managed for quiet pedestrian travel and the enjoyment of nature away from mechanical conveyances. American Hiking is dedicated to the preservation and protection of foot-only trails as an important resource for the hiking public.

American Hiking Society is devoted to the interests of hikers and the creation and protection of trails that serve hikers. Foot-only trails offer the best opportunity to meet the unique needs of hikers and provide them with the highest quality experiences. Among the wide array of possible outdoor recreational pursuits, hiking is unique in that it is available to a very wide segment of the population. It requires very little “skill,” mastery of equipment, or investment in equipment. Notably, hiking-only trails often require the smallest investment in infrastructure and maintenance, providing natural experiences to the broadest possible demographic for a relatively low investment in resources.

Multi-purpose trails, which address a variety of recreation needs, may accommodate both foot and other forms of travel, provided the trails recognize a primary designated use, are managed for that use, and are designed to protect the interest of hikers. When appropriate, American Hiking Society supports the development of multi-purpose trails that accommodate hikers. Where there are multi-purpose trail systems, American Hiking supports the development and stewardship of some foot-only trails within those systems to avoid displacement and user conflict.

American Hiking seeks to work cooperatively with organizations that promote other trail uses, and encourages cooperative trail planning and stewardship at the local level between hikers, bicyclists, equestrians, and other trail constituencies. Inherent in this spirit of cooperation is the position that the experience of hiking and the interest of hikers must vigilantly be protected, whether on foot trails or multi-purpose trails suitable to hikers. Where the interests of hikers cannot be guaranteed in a multi-purpose trail system, foot-only trails must be incorporated and

protected. American Hiking strives to prevent and minimize both reductions in the quality of the hiking experience as well as hiker displacement that may occur with poorly managed multi-purpose trails.

### ***Policy***

To preserve the values of hiking and the hiking experience, American Hiking Society supports the appropriate development and management of a diverse array of hiking trails, from universally accessible to rugged and challenging, located across a spectrum of settings (e.g., urban/developed to wilderness/pristine) and environments (e.g., forest, grassland, wetland, desert). American Hiking Society supports the principle of managing trails for the primary purposes for which they are designated. Other uses and types of travel should be evaluated for their impact on the primary use and purpose of the trail.

Trail designations should be based upon the collective input of all stakeholders, which may include local users, American Hiking Society, and other national groups when dealing with federal lands, as well as any attendant resource concerns. In issues involving local and state trails, American Hiking may defer to the local hiking constituency. Public land managers should weigh the input of stakeholders against their obligations to provide quality recreational experiences to users, regardless of particular skill or socioeconomic status, to prevent undue resource impacts from developing trails, and to invest public funds wisely and responsibly.

When requested by a local hiking constituency, American Hiking may assist on behalf of hikers or intervene to mitigate conflict. Particularly in matters pertaining to federal land, American Hiking may speak on behalf of hikers at large, particularly where the hiking constituency is not organized.

### ***Hiking Trail Guidelines***

American Hiking Society supports adoption of professional trail management practices that protect natural and cultural resources and high quality hiking experiences:

*Environmental protection.* Managers should incorporate the best available methods (see Reference section) for the design, construction, and management of trails to avoid or minimize environmental and cultural resource impacts and sustain safe, high quality hiking experiences. For example, the most sustainable designs for new trails and relocations limit trail grades, follow side-hill alignments, and include periodic grade-reversals to drain water from treads. Construction practices should include outsloped treads and adequate tread hardening and/or drainage in areas most susceptible to degradation. An ongoing trail maintenance program should keep trail corridors free of obstructing vegetation and ensure functional drainage features that quickly shed water during storms. Visitor management programs may include regulations governing the types and amounts of allowable trail uses and ensure compliance through adequate enforcement. Educational initiatives, such as the national *Leave No Trace* program, encourage adoption of low impact trail use practices to protect natural and cultural resources, the quality of visitor experiences, and help reduce the need for restrictive regulations.

*The hiking experience.* Hiking trails should be managed to protect important experiential qualities, including the minimization of crowding, conflict, and noise. Hiking trails should be designed in accordance with the setting or zoning, using means such as the Recreation

Opportunity Spectrum, where appropriate, to provide a diverse array of high quality hiking experiences and opportunities. Trails should be designed to allow for a balance of challenge and comfort for the intended trail users. Trails developed for multiple uses should be designed with consideration given to the needs and concerns of people traveling on foot. Research has demonstrated the potential for conflicts between hikers and other types of trail use, particularly at higher levels of use and rates of speed (see American Hiking Society policies on Mountain Bikes and Motorized Uses). Relative to noise, management should strive to enhance the appreciation of natural quiet and the sounds of nature by minimizing noise associated with developed environments, motorized uses, air tours, and trail users.

### ***Suggested Resources***

1. AMC Trails Department. 2008. *The Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance*. 4th ed. Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, MA.
2. Birchard, W. & Proudman, R.D. 2000. *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*. (2nd Ed.). Harpers Ferry, WV: Appalachian Trail Conference.
3. Birkby, Robert C. 2005. *Lightly on the Land: The SCA Trail Building and Maintenance Manual*. 2nd ed. Student Conservation Association, Inc. The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, WA.
4. Hesselbarth, W. & Vachowski, B. 2007. *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*. Publication 0723-2806-MTDC. USDA Forest Service, Technology and Development Program, Missoula, MT.
5. IMBA, 2004. *Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack*. International Mountain Bicycling Association, Boulder, CO. 272 p.
6. State of Minnesota DNR, 2007. *Trail Planning, Design, and Development Guidelines*. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Trails & Waterways Division. St. Paul, MN.

*Adopted by the American Hiking Society Board of Directors April 13, 2013*