

# Getting Started...

# A Guide to Planning Trails in New York State



A joint publication of:  
Parks & Trails New York  
*and* Hudson River Valley Greenway



**Parks & Trails**  
NEW YORK

formerly New York Parks  
and Conservation Association



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Dear Prospective Trail Builder:

*Congratulations on taking the first steps towards establishing a trail in your community. The journey can be lengthy and complex but also highly rewarding.*

*We encourage you to read through this publication to prepare for the journey. Getting Started: A Guide to Planning Trails in New York State is based on the experience of many successful trail organizers. Their experience has shown that, although no two trails are developed in exactly the same way or under the same circumstances, there are a number of common steps along the way. Getting Started lays out those steps to help guide you on your way.*

*As you plan, design, and build your trail, remember that you are creating a resource for your community that will be enjoyed by your family, friends, and neighbors, as well as visitors, far into the future.*

*Best of luck and thank you for making New York a better place to live, work, and play.*

*Sincerely,*



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION: CREATING A NETWORK OF TRAILS ACROSS NEW YORK

*Imagine going out your front door and within a few minutes being on a trail that leads through your community. You pass shops and restaurants on your way to work, school, or a local park. By taking a turn and going farther, you might follow the trail into the countryside, or link with another trail that extends along a river to the next town, or into the mountains - or all the way across the state.*

*This compelling vision is driving a groundswell of trail building throughout New York, as local citizens begin to understand that access to the great outdoors and to our natural, historic, and cultural treasures is part of the answer for re-invigorating and enhancing the livability of New York's cities, towns, and villages and improving the fitness and health of its citizens.*

The purpose of this guide is to foster the vision of a network of trails across New York State — with the Hudson River Greenway Trail, the Canalway Trail, and several long-distance hiking trails — as backbones of the system. The best way to foster this vision is by helping *you* get started with trail planning in *your* community. The most successful trail projects are usually initiated at the local level. By developing a trail in your community, the goal of establishing a statewide network of trails across the Empire State is one step closer.

New York State is fortunate to already have a substantial number of trails, from community-based multi-use recreation trails to such renowned long-distance hiking trails as the Appalachian Trail and Finger Lakes Trail. With thousands of miles of scenic rivers and streams, lakeshores, canals, historic roadways, and abandoned railroad corridors, plus hundreds of appealing cities, towns and villages, opportunities for additional trails abound in every region of the state.



# CHAPTER 1

At first, it may seem like a daunting task to develop a trail. And there's no denying that the process is complicated. Any project that involves assorted governmental entities and community organizations and, sometimes, hundreds of property owners would have to be. But, when the process is broken down into smaller steps, it is quite manageable. Hundreds of ordinary citizens — just like you — have worked to successfully develop trails in their communities. Throughout this publication, you'll meet some of these people and learn more about their trail projects.

The chapters that follow set out the general steps involved in developing a trail. Since each community and each trail project differs, you will want to adapt the information in this guide to fit your community's interests, needs, politics, and opportunities.

## More help is available

*Getting Started* is intended to provide information and resources applicable to all of New York State. Technical assistance and more in-depth information is available, statewide, through Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program and, in the Hudson Valley, through the Hudson River Valley Greenway. Other organizational resources are listed in Appendix A.



## WHO USES TRAILS?

Walkers, bicyclists, hikers, joggers, in-line skaters, cross-country skiers, equestrians, dog walkers, bird watchers, parents with baby strollers, people in wheelchairs, seniors getting exercise, tourists, locals, kids learning to ride bicycles, retirees. In some places, snowmobilers enjoy the trails. In communities along rivers or lakes, anglers and boaters use the trails. Decisions about trail use are usually local and tailored to individual communities.



## Trails: A proven asset for good health

Studies from the national Centers for Disease Control show that providing better access to places for physical activity, such as local trails, increases the level of physical activity in a community. Becoming more active can help:

- control weight and high blood pressure
- reduce the risk for type 2 diabetes and heart attack
- lessen symptoms of depression and anxiety
- decrease arthritis pain and disability
- prevent osteoporosis and falls

Despite these proven benefits, in 2000, only 45% of men and 32% of women in New York engaged in the recommended 30 minutes of daily moderate physical activity. As a result, more than half of New York adults are overweight or obese. More than \$6 billion of New York's Medicare and Medicaid costs are directly attributable to obesity. Trails offer an enjoyable, versatile, and practical means to engage in a wide variety of physical activities, including walking, jogging, bicycling, in-line skating, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing.

### Seniors can benefit most

Seniors are the least active age group in the United States. Research has shown that seniors who have healthy lifestyles that include regular physical activity reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not.

## Trails bring economic vitality to New York's communities

Parks & Trails New York and The Business Council of New York State teamed up to publish a brochure, *Greenways and Trails—Bringing Economic Benefits to New York*. The brochure demonstrates the very tangible way greenways and trails are helping bring new economic vitality to New York's cities, towns, and villages. The brochure is available on the PTNY website — [www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org) — or by contacting PTNY.

## How trails benefit communities

Communities benefit greatly from trails. Following are some of the many benefits that trails provide:

- Nearby places to pursue healthy physical activities
- Close-to-home recreation
- Safe places to walk or bike to work, school, and local shops
- Economic development resulting from increased tourism and enhanced quality of life
- Open space protection
- Enjoyable places for people of all ages to experience the great outdoors and learn about the natural world
- An opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in leisure recreation and fitness activities as well as access otherwise inaccessible natural areas
- River and stream corridor protection
- Historic resource preservation
- Enhanced civic engagement through people coming together to plan, build, and use the trail
- Connections between the many special places in a community, including the downtown area, parks, waterfront areas, historic and cultural sites, and other public amenities
- Critical routes for wildlife
- Preservation of community character
- New way to discover the special places in a community
- Positive community image

