



ADOPT *a* TRAIL

Handbook



Background

The approximately 400-mile Canalway Trail System needs regular maintenance to keep it in good repair for biking, walking, and other trail activities. While state and local agencies are ultimately responsible for maintaining the trail, local volunteer groups can play their part in helping the trail look its best.

Since 2003, Adopt-a-Trail Program (AAT) and its volunteers have helped the New York State Canal Corporation with light maintenance for segments of trail under the Corporation's jurisdiction. The AAT program is funded by the New York State Canal Corporation and administered by Parks & Trail New York (PTNY).



About Parks & Trails New York

Parks & Trails New York believes public lands are for all. We champion and protect our parks and greenways by advocating for resources, connecting communities, strengthening a network of stewards, and sharing the awe of nature

For more information, visit www.ptny.org.



About the New York State Canal Corporation

The New York State Canal Corporation runs the New York State Canal System, which includes the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals. Spanning 524 miles, the waterway links the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, the Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain. The Canal System includes the Canalway Trail, a network of approximately 400 miles of multi-use trails across upstate New York. The Canalway Trail follows the towpaths of both active and historic sections of the New York State Canal System as well as adjacent abandoned rail corridors. Together, the canals and trail create a world-class recreationway that is a vibrant, scenic, and unique New York resource. To learn more about the New York State Canal and Canalway Trail System or to obtain a free map, please call 1-800-4CANAL4 or visit the Canal Corporation's website at www.canals.ny.gov.



What do trail adopters do?

Adopters, also referred to as volunteers or stewards, help keep the Canalway Trail accessible and welcoming to all by inspecting their section, taking on light maintenance such as mowing, brush cutting, removing litter or fallen branches, raking, and weeding (with additional activities listed below). This steady, on-the-ground attention improves the overall trail experience and contributes to stronger, more connected communities along the Canal system.

Adopters can also help influence decision-making by assisting with various data collection efforts. Manual counts in particular are conducted once a year, with guidance provided by PTNY staff. Data collected through this program is useful because:

- The level of potential use is one of the critical pieces of information needed to make the case for a project, and it is frequently required for grant applications.
- Assessing the value of trails is critical for ensuring that local public officials continue to steer public investment into the construction, operations and maintenance of trails.
- Establishing baseline trail-usage levels can highlight changes in usage patterns over time and enable jurisdictions to evaluate the effectiveness of their trail investments.
- This information can further justify prioritization for key projects.

The adopter t-shirt (provided by PTNY) and lawn signs (provided by PTNY) help identify adopters as a resource for trail users. Adopters can provide direct assistance to users and share recommendations with others. This role allows volunteers to interface with trail users directly, including, but not limited to:

- Providing directions to nearby points of interest.
- Providing users with guidance on trail etiquette.
- Sharing the history of the Canal with interested users.
- Offering recommendations for nearby services, amenities, and attractions.

What are the requirements?

1. Commit to a one-year adoption period.
2. Visit adopted section(s) at least once a month between April 1 and November 30.
3. Spend 4 hours per month performing adopter activities (can be shared among volunteers).
4. Host a [Canal Clean Sweep](#) event.
5. Complete and submit monthly field reports by the first of the month (April - November)

Adopters are permitted, but not required to, perform the following activities. **The frequency at which you provide the following services can be indicated in the application:**

Activities	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Light Maintenance			
Inspect and monitoring the Trail			
Pick up litter/debris			
Mowing-electric or push mower (with NYSCC approval)			
Weed whacking (with NYSCC approval)			
Pruning - Hand trim tree/shrub branches			
Raking/sweeping, removing excess downed vegetation			
Weed and/or mulch flower beds (i.e., gardening including watering and plantings)			
Community Engagement			
Educate trail users about Canal history			
Provide assistance to trail users (directions, points of interest, information about trail conditions)			
Promote proper trail etiquette			
Offer recommendations to trail users (lodging, attractions, food and drink)			
Recruit new Bike Friendly Businesses			

Who can adopt a trail section?

Individuals, families, and organizations (including BSA troops) may adopt a minimum of one mile along the Erie or Champlain Canalway Trails. It is also possible to adopt specific locations that include a trailhead or trail parking area. To ensure that the program is accessible to all, more than one person/family, group/organization can adopt the same section of trail. Under these circumstances, adopters will be introduced via email, but will not be required to coordinate activities or share in administrative responsibilities. Volunteers in the AAT program must be at least 12 years old; a parent or guardian signature is required for anyone under the age of 18.

How often do adopters perform trail work?

AAT groups must engage in adopter activities at least 4 hours a month between April and November.

Trail adopters are not bound by set schedules, although they are required to engage in trail activities at least once a month, for a minimum of 4 hours. During the winter season, adopters are not required to visit their section of trail. Adopters should keep track of the maintenance activities performed, and the number of volunteer hours spent on those activities in order to submit a monthly [field report](#).

How do I adopt a trail section?

The first step is choosing a section of trail to adopt. Start by exploring the [AAT map](#), which highlights available segments in orange. Each section varies in length and character, and access to trailheads or parking areas will depend on the location. If you're interested in joining the program but unsure where to begin, you can reach out to PTNY (see contacts below) to discuss open segments or learn about opportunities to volunteer with an existing group.

Once you've identified a section, click on the section within the map, and complete the online application. A representative will reach out within 1 week of submission.

After your application is approved, a one-year adoption agreement will be sent for signature—this final step confirms the adoption. An email will be sent within one week of your agreement to share online forms** and other relevant information, including onboarding information.

**If your group will consist of additional people, be sure to share the volunteer registration form with all participants. Anyone who submits their registration before the end of April will receive a t-shirt ahead of the season kickoff (all shirts will be mailed to the primary address on file).



Safety

Some of the activities you perform may expose you to risks such as poison ivy, insect or other bites, injuries, or falls. It is your responsibility to know your own limitations and to only engage in activities suited to your abilities and physical conditions. The following check-list will ensure that volunteers are safe and understand appropriate trail etiquette:

- ☐ Yield right of way to trail users.
- ☐ No motor vehicles shall be driven on Canalway unless required for medical emergency.
- ☐ Do not pick up anything that could be hazardous to your health or safety. This includes needles, jagged glass, animal carcasses or heavy objects.
- ☐ Stay off the underside of overhead bridge structures. Do not lean over bridge railings, water embankments, or barriers and railings at the canal locks.
- ☐ Avoid overexertion and dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids.
- ☐ Do not engage in any activity that will compromise your safety, the safety of other volunteers, or trail users.
- ☐ Minors (ages 12-17) may not operate motorized or power equipment.
- ☐ Keep a safe distance between volunteers to avoid being whipped by branches or injury from tools.
- ☐ Be sure that areas to be mowed are clear of debris such as rocks, glass and other objects.
- ☐ Wear safety glasses and a hard hat when operating motorized equipment. Other volunteers and trail users should be well clear of cutting, mowing and trimming operations.
- ☐ Wear appropriate gloves and long pants. Learn to recognize and avoid poison ivy or other irritants. Leather shoes or boots are recommended.
- ☐ No horseplay.

Reporting Issues

If you encounter a serious injury or illness, immediately call 911 or get someone else to do so. Dealing with such emergencies, including possible heart attacks, seizures, loss of consciousness, head or back injuries, and broken bones, is best left to trained personnel. If you have first aid/CPR certification, you may offer assistance after you have called 911.

Adopters should report conditions on the Canalway Trail that are beyond the scope of the volunteer group to the nearest Canal Section Office, and the Trail Manager (see contacts below). Adopters can also email PTNY staff, who will notify a representative at the Canal Corporation.

Recognition

Sharing pictures and stories from your AAT activities through social media is a great way to generate excitement and interest in the Canalway Trail, as well as provide you with a way to recognize your volunteers.

PTNY and the NYS Canal Corporation both maintain active Facebook and Instagram pages. PTNY also maintains the Facebook page and official website for the Erie Canalway Trail, www.cycletheeriecanal.com. Share your photos with PTNY, and tag the preceding pages in your posts and photos for greater reach.



Contacts

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY)

As the administrator of the Adopt-a-Trail program, PTNY should be your first call for questions regarding finding an available trail section, registering volunteers, or connecting with other trail groups and adopters.

Parks & Trails New York
33 Elk Street
Albany, NY 12207
Phone: 518-434-1583
Email: canaltrail@ptny.org
Website: www.ptny.org/AAT

Parks & Trails New York
Rebecca Murray
Rmurray@ptny.org
(518) 217-8575

NYS Canal Corporation

The NYS Canal Corporation is responsible for maintenance of the Canalway Trail throughout much of its length. The Canal Corporation will provide trash bags and arrange for disposal of materials collected during volunteer maintenance if coordinated in advance of service. Contact your local section office or www.canals.ny.gov/trails/adopt.html for more information.

NYS Canal Corporation - Trail Manager
Sasha Del Peral
Sasha.delPeral@canals.ny.gov

New York State Canal Corporation Section Offices

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #1
Lower Broadway/Route 4
Fort Edward, NY 12828
(518) 747-4613

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #2
200 Davis Avenue
Waterford, NY 12188
(518) 233-8575

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #3
3 Bridge Street
Fonda, NY 12068
(518) 853-3823

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #4
105 North Genesee Street
Utica, NY 13502
(315) 733-9530

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #5
9052 River Road
Phoenix, NY 13135
(315) 695-2210

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #6
7665 Dry Dock Road
Lyons, NY 14489
(315) 946-6192

NYS Canal Corporation – Section #7
141 North Liberty Street
Albion, NY 14411
(585) 589-5689