

The New England National Scenic Trail

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The 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act included the designation of much of the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett (MMM) Trail system in Connecticut and Massachusetts as the New England National Scenic Trail. The route is approximately 220 miles long and includes both an extension to Long Island Sound through Guilford in Connecticut and a deviation from a portion the historic MMM route in Massachusetts to take advantage of substantial state-owned lands and avoid an area that is almost completely devoid of protected lands.

The MMM Trail system was created over 40 years ago and is still maintained by volunteers of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) Berkshire Chapter.



Nearly 2 million people live within 10 miles of the Trail, which travels through a classic New England landscape with stunning scenery and rich natural resources. At a time when Americans are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature, the New England National Scenic Trail provides a valuable, accessible outlet for enjoying the outdoors. Yet growth continues to change the landscape of Southern New England and portions of the trail have experienced pressures that threaten its long-term viability.

National scenic trail designation provides the opportunity for technical and financial assistance to maintain and protect the trail. Land protection will continue to be accomplished through existing state and local entities on a willing seller basis only (no eminent domain), and the National Park Service will not own or manage any lands.

In 2006, the National Park Service completed a multi-year feasibility study in cooperation with several public working groups which identified national scenic trail designation as the best way to ensure long-term viability of a continuous trail route. The study invited the participation of all interested parties; considerable attention was given to addressing private landowner concerns. Public comment on the draft feasibility study was supportive of national scenic trail designation and the recommended "Trail Management Blueprint."

Trail Management Blueprint: Highlights

The national scenic trail designation in the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to use the "Trail Management Blueprint" as the framework for managing and administering the Trail. The Management Blueprint is part of the feasibility study and addresses critical landowner issues. Key recommendations include:

- Establish a system for ongoing communication with landowners.
- Establish a "liability protection fund" to pay legal costs for landowners in the event of a suit and explore additional options for liability protection – this will be dependent on future funding.
- All existing landowner uses and rights will continue to be at the discretion of the landowners.
- Trail protection will occur with landowners on a voluntary basis only. No land takings will occur.
- Landowners and municipalities will have representation on the Stewardship Council.
- No segment of the Trail shall be recognized as such against the wishes of the landowner.

A Trail Stewardship Council is being assembled to guide implementation of the Management Blueprint. The Council will include representatives from the states, municipalities, landowners, regional planning agencies, nonprofit land conservation organizations, AMC and CFPA. The primary role of the National Park Service will be to assist the Stewardship Council and other partners in implementing the Management Blueprint. It will also coordinate the expenditure of any federal funds for trail management and protection with the Council.

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