

# **New England Trail**

## ***Trail Stewardship Council Resolution***

### **The Issue**

In both Connecticut and Massachusetts, over 40% of the 215-mile New England Trail (NET) is hosted on land considered to be “unprotected.” Although current landowners hosting the trail are generally supportive, the trail’s overall continuity is at risk in several areas as land ownership inevitably changes over time. In the decade since designation as a national scenic trail, land trusts and municipalities have had some success in permanently protecting trail lands with grants from state-funded programs, including the State Assistance Program of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). In other areas, significant land protection opportunities have been lost, requiring trail rerouting that decreases hiker safety and scenic quality. Currently, the use of Federal LWCF grants—a standard option for permanently protecting national scenic trails—is not an option that can be used along the NET, unless the Blueprint for Management is amended. The National Park Service (NPS) typically offers financial and technical assistance for trail land protection on other national scenic trails and has a wealth of experience that it currently cannot lend to ongoing efforts to protect the NET due to a current provision in the Blueprint for Management.

### **Background**

During the public review process in 2005 for national scenic trail designation of the historic MMM Trail, there was a strong concern expressed in parts of Massachusetts that NPS should not own or manage lands that host the trail. Because of previous federal use of eminent domain the Appalachian Trail, there was a fear that this could happen on the New England Trail. The consensus was that trail protection could happen in partnership with states, communities and land trusts. Federal condemnation of land along the NET is strictly prohibited in the trail’s authorizing legislation and we do not propose changing that prohibition. However, there has been at least one instance when land that was critical for the continuity of trail did not meet priority criteria for state or land trust protection. Because the NPS was prohibited from acquiring the land, the trail protection opportunity was lost and the trail had to be relocated. We believe the following language in the Blueprint for Management is overly restrictive and impedes the ability to protect the trail corridor with assistance through federal funding sources or by allowing the National Park Service to hold an interest in land along the trail such as a conservation easement, when local options do not exist:

Because the Blueprint for Management is referenced in the authorizing legislation for the NET, the only way to change this requirement is through a vote to amend it taken by the Trail Stewardship Council in both states. The ability for the Trail Stewardship Council to amend the Blueprint for Management is also referenced in the Blueprint.

The Connecticut TSC approved the following resolution in March:

### **The Proposed Resolution**

We, the New England Trail Stewardship Council of Massachusetts, an advisory body comprised of representatives from trail towns, partner organizations, landowners and other land managing entities for the management of the New England National Scenic Trail, do hereby support the following amendment to the Trail’s Blueprint for Management, the legislated management document for the New England Trail:

“The National Park Service will acquire, own, or manage lands for the New England National Scenic Trail only after considering other viable options and only with willing sellers. As previously stated in the Blueprint for Management and authorizing legislation, federal condemnation of land shall not be used and will not be considered as an option in establishing or protecting the trail system.”