

9. Technical Accessibility Guidelines for Trailheads, Related Amenities, and Signage

Trailheads and Related Amenities

Trailheads are the public points of access to trails and shared use paths. They are developed sites, designed and constructed with the primary purpose of providing user amenities and staging for the trail or shared use path.

The following do NOT constitute trailheads:

- Junctions between trails where there is no other access.
- Intersections where a trail crosses a road or users have developed an access point, but where no improvements have been provided beyond minimal signage for public safety.¹¹⁷



Trailheads servicing trails or shared use paths may offer one or more of the following amenities:

- Parking
- Information kiosk
- Passenger loading/unloading
- Bicycle racks
- Lighting
- Drinking water
- Toilets

- Benches
- Picnic shelters and tables
- Barriers, such as gates, fences, and buffers
- Trash and recycling containers

While it is beyond the scope of this manual to go into detail about the features mentioned above, trail and shared use path planners should note that the standards to follow regarding these amenities largely depends on whether the entity falls under the ADA or the ABA.

The binding 2010 ADA Design Standards govern many aspects of trailhead design and construction for non-federal entities. For instance, the 2010 ADA Design Standards provide requirements for the number and dimensions of parking spots and access isles, specifies maximum slope, and mandates that parking areas have a stable, firm, and slip resistant surface. The 2010 ADA Design Standards specify that a minimum of one accessible route must connect the accessible parking area to the accessible facilities. At least one accessible parking space must be provided for every 25 standard parking spaces. A good discussion of regulations governing accessible parking can be found at ADA Design Guide I: Restriping Parking Lots, <http://www.ada.gov/restripe/htm>, as well as in Chapter 5, General Site and Building Elements, of the 2010 ADA Design Standards.¹¹⁸



The 2010 ADA Design Standards also provide specific requirements governing the design, construction, and quantities of other amenities frequently found at trailheads.¹¹⁹ Chapter 3: Building Blocks, of the 2010 ADA Design Standards, deals with a wide range of design and construction parameters related to

surfaces, ramps, barriers and gates, turning spaces, protruding objects, and more. For example, the design and construction of a kiosk located at a trailhead would be informed by standards contained within that chapter of the 2010 ADA Design Standards.

Entities building trailheads also should consult Chapter 3 of the *Pennsylvania Trail Design Manual* for design details relating to trailheads and associated amenities.

For federal entities, the Outdoor Guidelines come into play to the extent that the trailhead contains “outdoor constructed features.”¹²⁰ These include picnic tables, fire rings, grills, fireplaces, wood stoves, trash and recycling receptacles, water hydrants, utility and sewage hookups, outdoor rinsing showers, benches, telescopes, and periscopes.¹²¹ These facilities are subject to the applicable Outdoor Guidelines scoping and technical specifications *regardless of whether the trail itself is accessible*. When outdoor constructed features are provided at trailheads or along a trail, at least 20%—but not less than one of each feature—must be accessible. Technical specifications for these facilities are found in the Outdoor Guidelines, Chapter 10.11 through 10.15; their scoping requirements are contained both in the Outdoor Guidelines and in the ABA Chapter 2.¹²²

Trail Signage and Accessibility

Signage is Crucial

The National Park Service points out that “signs are probably the quickest and easiest way to leave the trail user with a positive impression.”¹²³ Their importance in overall planning and design cannot be underestimated. All pedestrians and hikers rely on some level of navigation to find their way along a given route. A remote wilderness trail may provide only subtle clues as to the path of travel; nonetheless, clues are there by which the experienced user can navigate. Highly developed trails feature defined tread and structures that assist navigation, yet users still need signage to provide direction and information.

Although the need to find one’s way is universal, some people need more assistance than others. As one expert noted:

Unfortunately, for people with disabilities, including those with vision loss, options for exercise may be limited by the built environment. . . . [O]utdoor structures have a major effect on participation in physical activity among people with vision loss. Structures such as gyms, fitness centers, outdoor trails, parks, and swimming pools often have poor signage, lack detail on how to use the equipment or participate in a program, or provide poorly

delineated access routes to and from the facility or program. These issues can have a major effect on whether or not a person with vision loss chooses to be physically active.¹²⁴

Trail planning and design should include trail signage as *part of the planning process*, not as an afterthought. Objectives should include:

- **Attracting more users** by making the trail more appealing;
- **Educating users** about the trail by way of the trailhead kiosks;
- **Reassuring users** that they are on the right trail and will not get lost; and
- **Controlling trail usage** and creating a safer, more enjoyable, environmentally friendly experience.

With the above in mind, trail signage should incorporate accessible features that are commensurate with the needs of the particular user. For example, signage that features tactile maps, raised characters, or audible information creates a more enjoyable and safe recreational experience for people who are blind or have vision impairments.¹²⁵

Trail Access Information

Signs, maps, and other trail guide products can provide potential users with the information needed to determine which trails can best meet their desired experiences and abilities. According to the *Pennsylvania Trail Design Manual*:

Signs identifying trails and trail segments that have been officially assessed and designated as accessible to persons with disabilities should be placed at the trailhead and at all designated access points. Display the official symbol designating that the trail or trail segment is accessible, include the total distance of that trail or trail segment that is compliant, and the distance to the location of the first point of exception to those accessibility standards. Use marker posts to display accessibility information at access points without trailhead signs. Decals are readily available to attaché marker points. The size of the trailhead sign



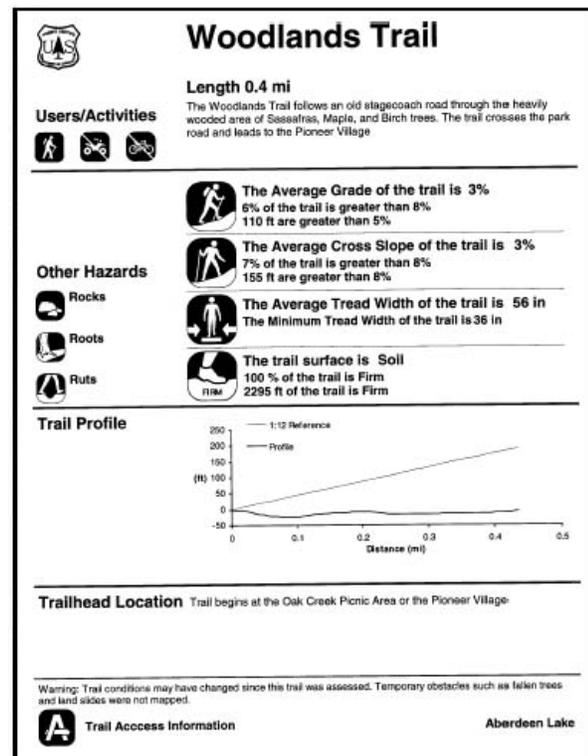
should be such that both text and graphics are easily readable. The minimum size should be 12" x 18." Background colors, margins, and sizes of text and images are subject to change.¹²⁶

The following BMPs for signage are from the Outdoor Guidelines. The five components addressed below are information that most, if not all people would enjoy knowing *regardless* of disability:

- **Length of the trail or trail segment;**
- **Surface type;**
- **Typical and minimum tread width;**
- **Typical and maximum running slope; and**
- **Typical and maximum cross slope.**

To convey the above information, a system of symbols and trail signage layouts has been developed to convey Trail Access Information ("TAI") in attractive and easy-to-use formats. Providing the information in multiple formats, such as large print or audio, will benefit people of all abilities. The following are examples of how TAI can be disseminated:

- **Trailhead signage**— A trailhead map containing text, grade profiles with surface information, a top view map with symbols showing the location of major obstacles, and other critical information.
- **TAI strip**— A trail map summarizing TAI with symbols and measurement numbers formatted as a slim strip that can be attached to trail posts and located at trailheads or trail intersections.¹²⁷
- **Trail information sheets**— An informational flier that can be provided at the trailhead or visitor center summarizing TAI with symbols and measurement numbers, trail grade profile, description of the trail, and location of trailhead.



- **Audio descriptions**—A short audible narrative with descriptions of trail conditions and details about the trail environment. This format may benefit individuals who have vision impairments or who have limitations reading in English.
- **Pocket map**—A trail map featuring trail descriptions, TAI, and a grade profile that folds up to fit into a pocket.
- **Guidebook**—A trail manual containing TAI, interpretive information, scenic photographs, directions to the trailhead, and other information about trails within a given recreational area.
- **Computerized visitor kiosk**—An interactive accessible computer display at a visitor center providing trail selection tools, TAI, and visual and audio descriptions of images at selected destinations. Guidelines for making kiosks accessible to people with mobility and vision impairments are available through the U.S. Access Board.

Trail managers are encouraged to consider other information and details for their trails that may be useful to users to know before they set out on a particular trail. The *Pennsylvania Trail Design Manual* (pages 133-141) provides much information with regard to required and or recommended trail and shared use path signage and markings. This includes good graphic examples of common warning and regulatory signs, as well as blazing and markers, use of colors, and construction elements.