Chapter 6
POLICY AND PROCEDURE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SRRA

Below are seven policy elements that should be considered for adoption by the Southwest Regional Recreation Authority of Virginia:

1. Develop strategies to ensure positive interaction and cohesiveness between trail user and land owners.
2. Address trail user safety and maintain trail corridor security.
3. Promote trail connectivity and functionality.
4. Promote intergovernmental coordination and trail system integrity
5. Protect and maintain trail investments
6. Promote public health
7. Encourage both entrepreneurship and community buy-in for greatest return on investment and positive economic impact on the SW Virginia region.

> *In the nineteenth century we built the railroad system and in the twentieth century we built the highway system. In the 21st century we will reconnect America with a network of trails and greenways. My vision is to change the map of American.*
>
> *–DAVID BURWELL, President, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2000*

RECOMMENDATION TO AUTHORITY:

1.   First and foremost, work with the landowners.

 This trails initiative cannot happen without the support and cooperation of the landowners.   Case in point, the six trails that make up the Hatfield & McCoy Trail System in West Virginia are located on property owned by 300 different landowners.   Less than 5% is on public land.   It is the private land-owners who have made it possible to develop the trails.

The majority of the trails within the Spearhead Trail System will also involve multiple private properties. (See Appendix C for samples of Land Use Agreement Forms). Forming strong working relationships with these landowners is crucial to the success of the initiative. *See Appendix N: Large Land Owner Maps*

    1.1   Contact landowners at least once a year to check out potential problems and ensure they have current contact information.
    1.2   Provide planted buffers or no trespassing signs as needed to keep trail users on designated paths.
    1.3   Invite landowners to all trail events. Offer recognition as appropriate.

2.   Promote the safety and security of all who use, operate, and maintain the trail system.

    2.1   Use a combination of education, enforcement, design features, maintenance, and investment in infrastructure to mitigate existing dangers and avoid potential hazards.
    2.2   Use Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to define useable spaces physically or symbolically to control access to property.
    2.3   Coordinate a consistent mile post marker system region-wide for all trails so that users may readily identify their location to emergency responders.

2.4 Encourage collaboration between public works, parks, police and fire department for trail access, response, command and control of emergency situations.

2.5 Clearly include in trail publications and at trailheads the safety rules and regulations for that particular trail with reminders periodically along the trails.

2.7 Foster a culture of trail civility and responsibility by organizing trail clean-up days, safety demonstrations, and by including and encouraging trail etiquette at all times.

2.8 Provide emergency management staff with maps of trails and keys to gates.

3. Promote trail connectivity and functionality:

3.1 IMMEDIATE ACTION BY AUTHORITY: Acquire all railroad right-of-way (ROW) through Public Use Condition under 49 U.S. C 10906 and Interim Trail Use under Section 8(d) National Trails System Act in the event any railroad company files a Letter of Intent to Abandon with Surface Transportation Board.

3.2 Design and construct trailheads at locations that maximize the visibility of trails in order to increase the traveling public's awareness of the existence of trails.

3.3 Whenever possible, try to locate trailheads in areas that provide the users with opportunities to spend money for greater economic impact. Ideally, trails should begin and end within the communities themselves although this may not always be possible.

3.4 When possible, provide seamless connectivity between the trail network, sidewalks, bike lanes and other transportation facilities including transit centers and park & ride lots.

3.5 Design trails for use and accessibility for trail users of all levels of experience and ability. Different trails may have different levels of difficulty but all should be clearly marked so anyone traveling that particular trail will know the skill level required.

3.6 Design trails and associated facilities to accommodate varying modes including walking, running, bicycling, skating, equestrian, OHV, etc.

3.7 Design trail widths to accommodate future capacity demands for more popular trail segments or highly used trail junctions.

3.8 Design all shared-use trails (Class I) to meet the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) standards and guidelines to ensure trails are accessible to people with physical and sensory disabilities and provide benches for trail users to rest.

3.9 Provide frequent on- and off-trail wayfinding signage and mile post markers to orient users to destinations, distances, and junctions.

3.10   Utilize public and private railroad ROW, utility easements, easements from new development, and old timber and coal roads as much as possible for creating new trails or creating connections between existing trails.

4.   Intergovernmental Coordination and Trail System Integrity

4.1   SRRA will serve as the umbrella organization for numerous other trail groups and provide an entity:

4.1.1   To exchange ideas, information and issues among landowners, local jurisdictions, clubs, state & federal transportation authorities and other organizations and groups.

4.1.2   To facilitate informed, reasoned decision-making processes.

4.1.3   To assist in the marketing and promotion of the trail system.

4.2   Foster collaboration between the jurisdictions, landowners and transportation providers for the planning, financing, and development of trail facilities.

4.3   Create an interdisciplinary approach to trail planning by capitalizing on the combined expertise of transportation, parks, public health and public safety officials.

4.4   Commit to uniform trail design standards for signage, waysides, gates, and associated trail facilities.

4.5   Develop good relationships with law enforcement personnel to ensure swift, effective and well-publicized punishment of offenders.

5.   Trail Maintenance, Repair and Community Stewardship

Goal: Protect trail investments that have already been made and keep overall life-cycle costs as low as possible.

5.1   Ensure trails planning consider life-cycle costs of maintaining trail infrastructure including pavement, bridges, and tunnels in perpetuity.

5.2   Develop a plan to manage and control the spread of noxious and invasive weeds within trail system.

5.3   Use native plant species as much as possible, where practical, and landscape with low maintenance, non-invasive plant species that will thrive within any given trail segment's environmental conditions.

5.4   Seek opportunities for inter-departmental or inter-jurisdictional maintenance agreements to distribute the long-term cost trail maintenance under the umbrella of SRRA.

5.5   Use preventive maintenance programs like site visits and checklists to maximize the life-cycle of existing facilities.

5.6   Ensure trail surfacing materials and repair work is compatible with the planned use for that particular trail. For example, concrete and asphalt are not preferred surfaces for equestrian use.

    5.7   Promote the development of and foster on-going programs to involve public participation and community group participation in trail development, maintenance and stewardship programs.

    5.8   Develop a volunteer plan to encourage, protect and reward trail volunteers.

6. Health Promotion

Goal: Increase community and individual awareness that trails are safe, affordable, fun and attractive places for physical activity. *(See Appendix A - Health of Southwest Virginia for more on this subject)*

    6.1   Advance the visibility of trails, trailheads and access points through on-street and neighborhood way finding signs, distribution of trail maps, and recreation brochure and guides throughout the region, posting information on local government agency websites, tourism and chamber organizations and through health fairs and outdoor public events.

    6.2   Explore opportunities to implement permanent or temporary interpretive fitness stations within trail corridors to diversify physical activities, provide exercise, fitness and health tips and provide users convenient off-the-path spaces for stretching and performing calisthenics where practical.

    6.3   Foster dialog between local public health officials and local health practitioners to find effective means to educate health consumers about the location and availability of trail facilities and their proximity to recreational and other destinations associated with activities of daily living.

7.   Encourage both entrepreneurship and community buy-in for greatest return on investment and positive economic impact on the SW Virginia region.

Trail managers are responsible to a large extent for providing safe facilities with limited control and conditions that minimize risk while promoting positive use experiences. *(See Chapter 7 - Maintenance of the Trails for more on this subject).* Establishing these conditions initially through good trail design and infrastructure is crucial but this is only the beginning.   One must maintain the trails and auxiliary facilities with routine and long-term trail maintenance, education and outreach, user involvement, regulations and enforcement.   People come to expect safe, reliable and quality user experiences. Trails that are improperly maintained discourage use and encourage vandalism.   This is especially important considering the size and potential magnitude of the proposed Spearhead Trail System. It is important that each trail is properly maintained and managed because, if not, people always have the choice of going somewhere else.

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