



50th Anniversary of the National Trails System Act

Fact Sheet

Discover. Connect. Explore.

ABOUT

In his 1965 “Natural Beauty Message” to Congress, President Lyndon B. Johnson inspired a national “system of trails” for the American people. Congress passed the National Trails System Act, signed into law by President Johnson on October 2, 1968.

Today, the National Trails System (NTS) includes 11 National Scenic Trails and 19 National Historic Trails authorized by Congress, and more than 1,200 National Recreation Trails (including 21 National Water Trails). Preservation and development of Rail Trails is also fostered in this act.

These trails provide outdoor recreation opportunities, promote resource preservation and public access, and encourage the appreciation of the great outdoors and America’s history and cultural diversity.

National Scenic and Historic Trails

- 11 National Scenic Trails and 19 National Historic Trails authorized by Congress
- Over 55,000 miles through 49 States in wild, rural, suburban, and urban areas
- Connect and travel through 70 wildlife refuges, 80 national parks, 90 national forests, 100 Bureau of Land Management field office areas, over 120 Wilderness areas, numerous State and local parks, trails, other protected areas, and 100 major urban areas
- Over 1 million hours of volunteer labor to build and maintain annually

National Recreation Trails

- Over 1,200 trails, including 21 National Water Trails designated by the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture through regional foresters to recognize exemplary trails of local and regional significance
- Total over 26,000 miles
- Run through all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico

Rail Trails

- 22,000 miles of completed rail-trails and 8,000 miles of projects in progress
- Over 2,000 rail-trails exist in 50 states, crossing rural, suburban, and urban communities
- 1983 amendment to National Trails System Act allowed unused rail corridors to be preserved for future use by converting them to trails
- Enjoyed by millions of people for recreation, physical activity, and active transportation each year