

News from Bear-Paw Regional Greenways
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* * * ARTICLE AND ANNOUNCEMENT * * *

Some Whys and Wherefores of Trails

DEERFIELD N.H., September 28, 2011 – By Michael Vecchiarelli, Program Director for the Student Conservation Association – NH Corps (www.thesca.org), based out of Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown.

Quote — Henry David Thoreau

“I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!”

Between the idiom in this title and the quote from Thoreau not much else needs be said about trails but it wouldn't make for much of a read if I didn't take this opportunity to expound. Why do we want to make trails and then; how do we make them? Creating and managing trails well is easier said than done. Many factors have to be taken into consideration. On one end of the scale there could be the approach of allowing folks to create their own paths and, by default, seeing how preference and conformity wears them in. This laissez faire approach is unacceptable to most land managers.

Intentional trails then attempt to consider such factors as the various potential user groups and corresponding accessibility; infrastructure accommodations and options (interpretive signs, benches, viewing shelters, trail grades and mobility provisions, etc.); the launching area (parking, shelter, kiosk, etc.). Then there are the actual routes to consider – an issue covered in an earlier newsletter article. Ok, so we have the land, we know its value and some characteristics of value and interest. What else should we consider in making and maintaining trails? A chemistry professor of mine once said, “You give me enough water and enough time and I can dissolve anything.” The geology and topography of our landscape is testament this fact.

This bears on one of the simplest adages of trail building: we need to get the trail out of the water or the water out of the trail. If we don't (and even if we do) the rain and gravity will work their magic on our trails; especially in temperate and dramatically seasonal areas of the Northeast.

How do we actually get it done? Here again there is a scale to consider. The grade of the trails and access points will be based many resources that will be applied such as the skills, experience, tools and supervision; not to forget time, material and other expenses available.

At one end of the scale you can go so far as to create relatively impermeable structures such as paving, heavy and high bridges, solid walls and large culverts. These are obviously expensive and require specialized skills, tools and equipment but they certainly do last; can be made to high aesthetic standard; and provide broad accessibility. At the other end you can inform the user groups of the location and let them at it (ouch!). You could flag or blaze trails and let the “soft and impressionable” earth respond as it will. This is not entirely unacceptable as a low cost means of providing access and (attempting) to control impact but these trails, as all, will be subject to wear and tear, one of the most significant coming from water. Step it up a bit and one may organize volunteer groups to “build” your trails. This option requires and eventually provides great public buy-in because the volunteers then feel ownership for the outcome but can be limited by the skills and availability of that support.

At another level along this scale there are trained, tooled, and supervised teams such as we provide at the SCA and similar conservation organizations. These “shovel ready” teams can be a most cost effective and positively impactful approach. Not only do they get the job done but their organizations can be brought to bear on marketing campaigns, leveraging further funds, and organizing and supervising additional volunteer support. An added bonus to the SCA program is that these Hitches (a term for a period and team working on a project) provide significant experiences to young men and women that foster their future in conservation and leadership in our communities (the SCA mission).

So here we have Some Whys and Wherefores of Trails. This is a curious and appropriate idiom because the “Wherefores” is often misinterpreted to mean something like where but actually could be translated to Whys and No-Really-Why! Wherefore means to look even more deeply at the question of why and how so as to not fall into conformity and, at the same time create a trail of thought for action – the curious paradox of trails. See you out there!

Trail Construction and Maintenance Fieldtrip
October 8 • 9-12am
Epsom Town Forest, Epsom

Please join Bear-Paw, Mike Vecchiarelli of the Student Conservation Association – New Hampshire Corps (SCA-NH), and the Epsom Conservation Commission on a fieldtrip to Epsom’s Town Forest to take a look at trail work recently completed there by the SCA-NH. The Epsom Town Forest lies at the edge of an 8,000-acre unfragmented forest that stretches from Old Center Road in Deerfield to Black Hall Road near the Suncook River in Epsom. Mike will present information on trail planning, construction, and stewardship. Please join Bear-Paw for this informative discussion.

The program is free and open to the public. Please pre-register at info@bear-paw.org, www.bear-paw.org, or 603-463-9400, so that Bear-Paw can provide adequate materials for everyone and notify participants in case of any last minute changes.

CAPTIONS:

A bridge on the new trail in the Epsom Town Forest provides a proper wetland crossing.

Photo by Mike Vecchiarelli

Boulders placed along a narrow path define a trail meant for foot traffic.

Photo by Mike Vecchiarelli

Bear-Paw Regional Greenways

Bear-Paw Regional Greenways is a non-profit land trust with a mission to permanently conserve a network of lands that protects the region’s water, wildlife habitat, forests, and farmland. Bear-Paw now

holds easements or land protecting 42 properties and 4,967 acres. Established by resident volunteers, Bear-Paw works to conserve open space in Candia, Deerfield, Epsom, Hooksett, Northwood, Nottingham, Raymond, and Strafford through outreach, education, and the completion of land protection projects.

For information about Bear-Paw events, how to become a member, land protection options for landowners or volunteering with the land trust, please contact Daniel Kern at Bear-Paw Regional Greenways, Post Office Box 19, Deerfield, NH 03037, 603-463-9400, or info@bear-paw.org. You can also visit their website at www.bear-paw.org.

Student Conservation Association – New Hampshire Corps

The SCA-NH Corps is based in Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown and specializes in environmental education and all forms of conservation service throughout New Hampshire. The mission of SCA-NH is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of our environment and communities. It accomplishes this by engaging young people in hands-on service to the communities and land of New Hampshire through conservation service projects that enhance and protect natural areas. SCA-NH is one of SCA's oldest residential programs. Interns are housed in historic cabins at Bear Brook State Park where they share the joys and struggles of rustic life while dedicating a year of their lives to performing direct service. Benefits to corps members include a living allowance, health insurance, an AmeriCorps Education Award and the development of their own leadership and team-building skills. SCA-NH partners with organizations across the state; including town conservation commissions, and more. The Epsom Conservation Commission has worked on several projects with SCA-NH and they are always looking for new partners so if you are interested in working with them, contact Mike Vecchiarelli, SCA-NH's Program Director, at mvecchiarelli@thesca.org or 603-485-2191.