

The “Model Trail Community” Program

**A Vision and Strategy to Develop
El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail**



Prepared by
**El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail
Association (ELTEA)**

The National Park Service (NPS) and El Camino Real de los Tejas Trail Association (ELTEA) are partnering together to assist and support communities in developing this vision and becoming “A Model Trail Community” by completing their own piece of the Trail.

They have been looking at Abingdon, Virginia as the model of a trail community because of the extraordinary things they have accomplished on the “Muster Ground” historic site and the 1.3 miles of Trail within their corporate city limits. But, I don’t think we’ve ever asked the questions, “What does it take to complete the Trail?” “What does the Trail look like when it is completed?”

The answers to these questions are vital because they provide the “criteria” that can give all Trail communities a target or the “**vision**” to shoot for by showing what it takes to complete the Trail and helping them define a strategy that will take them there. The criteria also provide a basis for evaluation—to be able to track “where are we now”, and, “what still needs to be done”, and “what can we do next?”

Here are some criteria that start answering the questions. The criteria are grouped together in four logical categories that lead through the process of developing and completing the Trail. These are: 1) Building a Trail Constituency, 2) Partnering with the National Park Service, 3) Getting People on the Trail, and 4) Protecting and Preserving the Trail.

Building a Trail Constituency

The Trail or associated historic site is clearly identified and understood by the local community.

There are locally recognized grass-roots community leaders associated with the Trail.

There is a strong, known and active “constituency” of individuals and groups for the Trail.

There is every expectation the current level of local support for the Trail will continue into the foreseeable future.

The local governments, city council, county commission, etc., have demonstrated their support of the Trail.

There are local government advocates for the Trail.

The local government budgets funds for the Trail or for activities on the Trail.

There is an active ECNHT chapter in the community.

Partnering with the National Park Service

The National Park Service currently certifies the Trail segment and/or site.

The Trail has been marked as part of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail.

There is a minimum of a wayside exhibit or a kiosk with interpretive panels, etc., which inform the public about the Trail or site being part of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail and about the historic significance of that site or segment.

The National Park Service supports activities and events with Challenge Cost Share funds.

Getting People on the Trail

The site is open to the public on a regular basis throughout the year.

There are a variety of well-publicized, year-round activities planned on the site with at least some activities relating to or based in some way on the Trail's historical significance.

The community plans and conducts events associated with El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail throughout the year.

There is every appearance and expectation that currently conducted activities on the Trail will continue into the foreseeable future.

There is a strong connection between local schools and the Trail segment or site.

There is a strong relationship with local media to promote activities planned on the Trail.

Protecting and Preserving the Trail

The community has purchased or in some other way secured the protection and preservation of the Trail or historic site.

If in private or corporate ownership, is public use and access to the property allowed?

There is a use or preservation/protection plan for the Trail or site in place.

The Trail or site is maintained on a regular schedule.

The community is planning for future improvements or developments for the Trail or site.

NOTE: Is it necessary to work through the criteria as listed? No, of course not. It's a given that not every criteria can be taken on at once. They must be worked through building on the ones that have been achieved. They must be worked through based on the circumstances and the "strategic variables" that exist in your community. Some can be accomplished quickly. Others might take years to achieve.

One way of looking at the criteria is to understand that each one can be used as a tool to demonstrate that the Trail and its Story are worth investing. And that is really a fundamental building block. Without understanding the value the Trail can bring to your community, how can the people living there be expected to invest their time, energy, passion and money?

The Next Step In Becoming a “Model Trail Community”

The National Park Service and El Camino Real de los Tejas Trail Association invite you to join this partnership in working to complete the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail and becoming a “Model Trail Community”.

We will request the National Parks Foundation consider El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail as a candidate for the 2014 “Active Trails Program.” The Coca-Cola Foundation funded the 2009 program. There are eight National Parks on the list this year and this is the first time that a National Historic Trail has been considered.

The purpose of the “Active Trails” program is to provide funding to National Parks to bring people to trails. The full scope of the program is in Appendix 1. If selected, the ECNHT will receive a \$50,000 grant with the possibility of the National Parks Foundation matching up to another \$10,000 for a total of \$60,000 – Local contributions are expected.

The National Park Service and El Camino Real de los Tejas Trail Association will form a partnership to accept this grant. ECNHT will be developing a plan on how the grant will be used.

By this partnership, The National Parks Foundation Grant will be used to assist and support communities in starting new events and programs and to expand existing events and programs that will attract visitors to enjoy the recreational opportunities and learn the historic significance of the Trail in their community.

The anticipated benefits derived from employing the grant will include increased community awareness for the benefits of health derived from outdoor activities, an increased sense of ownership by the communities for their heritage, a stronger community willingness to expand and grow the events and programs in future years and increased membership in the ECNHT.

ECNHT will manage the grant and work with the communities to plan events that will bring people to the Trail.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The National Park Foundation Active Trails Grant criteria

(2009)

Appendix 2: Your own Criteria Check List

Appendix 1: The Active Trails Grant Requirements

(Provided by the National Parks Foundation)

ACTIVE TRAILS 2009

OVERVIEW

Land and water trails in our National Parks provide millions of people a year with opportunities to experience our Nation's immaculate natural beauty and its dynamic past. These trails offer recreational benefits that improve health, boost energy and lift the spirits of a sometimes over worked and over stressed population. They also allow public access to landscapes that reflect the rich cultural and natural diversity of our national heritage.

The goal of the National Park Foundation's Active Trails program is to connect the American public to their National Parks by making them aware of the variety of land and water trails that can be found at their local National Park units.

Site locations and active recreation opportunities include:

Site Locations	Active Recreation Opportunities
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (Atlanta, GA)	Hiking, biking, walking, equestrian, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, tubing, and rafting
Golden Gate National Recreation Area (San Francisco, CA)	Hiking, kayaking, swimming, natural resource education, historic and cultural interpretation, walking, biking
George Washington Memorial Parkway (Washington, DC)	Walking, biking, cultural interpretation, and natural resource education
Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Porter, IN)	Hiking, walking, swimming, horseback riding, kayaking, bird watching, and natural resource education
Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Gatlinburg, TN)	Hiking, biking, walking, birding, fishing, cultural and historic interpretation
Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (Blacksburg, SC)	Hiking, biking, cultural and historic interpretation
Olympic National Park (Port Angeles, WA)	Hiking, backpacking, bird watching
NYC NPS Site (New York, NY)	Walking, biking, cultural and historic interpretation

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The *Active Trails* program promotes healthy lifestyles using the National Parks as a venue for communities to engage various forms of recreation and service-learning on land and water trails.

Project Goals

The *Active Trails* program will attain the following goals:

- Benefit young and old alike through volunteer hands-on service learning projects and enhancement of related recreation amenities.
- Implement a culminating community event at the end of the program that focuses on the trail recreational opportunities available at the park site.
- Develop and strengthen relationships between community groups and the National Parks.
- Enhance visitor experience through involvement in innovative recreation, fitness, and educational opportunities.
- Leverage partnerships to promote and protect land and water trails in the National Parks.
- Demonstrate tangible linkages between human health, environmental quality, service learning and volunteerism.
- Provide an innovative means for engaging the public in active recreation in our National Parks.

Project Objectives

The *Active Trails* program will attain the following objectives:

- The project shall demonstrate innovative, captivating, and creative approaches to project design and community engagement.
- The projects shall demonstrate benefits to diverse community groups utilizing varied types of active recreation on land and water trails.
- The project shall demonstrate involvement from key stakeholders with expertise in the area of physical fitness and education; recreation; environment/natural resources; business; diversity; youth, and senior citizens.
- The project shall engage communities in the value and stewardship of recreational access to National Parks.
- The project shall demonstrate the ability to empower communities through volunteerism and place-based service-learning.
- The project shall demonstrating tangible linkages between human health and environmental quality.
- The project shall incorporate, where appropriate, citizen science.

Together, these goals and objectives provide a way to engage the public in active recreation in our National Parks.

Timeframe

The National Park Foundation *Active Trails* program reflects a timeframe spanning from July to June. Throughout the year there should be numerous touches with the community that focus volunteering, service learning, and active recreation opportunities on land and water trails. At the end of the year, a culminating large-scale community event should be implemented.

Additional Support

The National Park Foundation provides seed grants, incentives pool, and in-kind support for the *Active Trails* program described below. The National Park Foundation and partners will conduct an evaluation of the project's effectiveness. The results will be used to refine ongoing implementation.

- *Seed Grants* – The National Park Foundation will provide a base grant of \$50,000.00 to eight parks to enable the launch of the project.
- *Incentives Pool* –The National Park Foundation will also provide an incentive pool up to \$10,000.00 to eight parks to be used exclusively for assisting Parks in leveraging monetary contributions from business and civic partners, helping to expand the project and sustain its impact.
- *Capacity Building* – The National Park Foundation provides assistance to parks by identifying strategic community partners; helping develop projects; administering grants; providing multi-media media outreach to engage stakeholders and support fundraising efforts; and leveraging philanthropic donations to parks.

Appendix 2: Your Own Criteria Checklist

Building a Trail Constituency

____ The Trail or associated historic site is clearly identified and understood by the local community.

____ There are locally recognized grass-roots community leaders associated with the Trail.

____ There is a strong, known and active “constituency” of individuals and groups for the Trail in that community.

____ There is every expectation the current level of local support for the Trail will continue into the foreseeable future.

____ The local governments, city council, county commission, etc., have demonstrated their support of the Trail.

____ There are local government advocates for the Trail.

____ The local government budgets funds for the Trail or for activities on the Trail.

____ There is an active ECNHT chapter in the community.

Partnering with the National Park Service

____ The National Park Service currently certifies the Trail segment and/or site.

____ The Trail has been marked as part of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail.

____ There is a minimum of a wayside exhibit or a kiosk with interpretive panels, etc., which inform the public about the Trail or site being part of El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail and about the historic significance of that site or segment.

____ The National Park Service supports activities and events with Challenge Cost Share funds.

Getting People on the Trail

____ The site is open to the public on a regular basis throughout the year.

____ There are a variety of well publicized, year-round activities planned on the site with at least some activities relating to or are based in some way on the historical significance.

____ The community plans and conducts events associated with El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail annual March.

_____ There is every appearance and expectation that currently conducted activities on the Trail will continue into the foreseeable future.

_____ There is a strong connection between local schools and the Trail segment or site.

_____ There is a strong relationship with local media to promote activities planned on the Trail.

Protecting and Preserving the Trail

_____ The community has purchased or in some other way secured the protection and preservation of the Trail or site.

_____ If in private or corporate ownership, is public use and access to the property allowed?

_____ There is a use or preservation/protection plan for the Trail or site in place.

_____ The Trail or site is maintained on a regular schedule.

_____ The community is planning for future improvements or developments for the Trail or site.