



## KENTUCKY TRAILS COALITION

The Mission of Kentucky Trails Coalition is to:

- Promote a statewide trail system masterplan
- Work with groups to plan, design and facilitate trail projects
- Set standards for trail design and construction
- Partner with and advise land managers
- Promote trail stewardship
- Educate trail users
- Work to resolve root causes of user conflicts

Kentucky Trails Coalition is a multi-user, non-motorized service group dedicated to trails service and advocacy. When user groups join together to work on protecting trails and maintaining trails, we represent a larger voice, we have the mechanism to overcome differences of opinion between the groups before talking to land managers, and there are more volunteers to accomplish large maintenance projects.

At a workshop in February 2008, about thirty trail users, some representing each group, met to discuss key topics and identify common values. These topics are: Trail Access and Maintenance, Optimum Trail Experience, Infrastructure for Trails, Safety and Security, and Communications. For a copy of this report, or to become involved in the coalition, contact one of the following:

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Kentucky Trails Coalition  
Inaugural Meeting  
February 2, 2008  
Natural Bridge State Park

## Introduction

On Saturday, February 2nd, 2008, representatives from Kentucky-based hiking, equestrian and mountain biking organizations assembled at Natural Bridge State Park for the inaugural meeting of the Kentucky Trails Coalition; a multi-user, trails-advocacy organization charged with working collaboratively on trails and trail access issues around the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Recognizing the power of a combined “trail enthusiast constituency”, leaders from The Kentucky Horse Council, The Kentucky Mountain Bike Association and the Kentucky Trails Association began communicating in the summer of 2007 and by early fall, had laid the foundations for what would become the KTC. The following report will review the issues discussed at the inaugural meeting, outline some preliminary solutions to those issues and chart a course of action for the coming months.

## Meeting format

“Meeting Mission Statement – Representatives from the three primary, non-motorized user-groups have come together to discuss ways in which we can work together towards common goals. Those goals include improving existing trails, creating new, sustainable trails and leveraging our collective size to direct more government resources toward trails in the Commonwealth.”

Organizers opened the meeting with a brief discussion of the meeting mission and goals for the session and then introduced the format and topics for the workshop. Participants were presented with five different trail-related topics to be reviewed and discussed in smaller, mixed, sub-groups. Participants were asked to spend about 15 minutes on each topic, write down ideas in the “topic notebook” at that particular table and then rotate through both topics and groups until everyone had discussed each topic. This gave each participant the opportunity to develop solutions to each of the five topics with different representatives from each of the three user-groups.

The discussion topics and their descriptions are listed below:

### Access & Maintenance

Is the quantity and quality of trail currently open to your group acceptable? Would you like to have access to more or less? Does the maintenance and quality of the trail systems

you use meet your expectations? Would you be willing to pay a fee to improve maintenance?

As a group, describe the ways you might improve your access to trail systems and some ways trails might be better maintained.

### Trail Descriptions

Describe your optimum trail experience. This should include both a narrative description of the environment (woodland, prairie, treeline, overlooks) as well as technical features like the width of trail corridor, width of trail tread, trail length, distance between points of interest or rest areas, distance to water. (draw a cross section of your optimum trail if you can) What is the most desirable type of experience? Loop, day trip, overnight, multi-day?

### Infrastructure

Describe the types of infrastructure you would like to see at trailheads. This includes amenities like bathrooms, concessions and drinking water as well as technical needs like vehicle requirements, parking requirements, different types of shelter and different types of gathering spaces.

### Safety and Security

Describe the types of safety features, security and signage you would like to have at your trails. This include options for parking security, trail markings, trail patrols, police contact and enforcement protocols as well as types of signage, mapping/ gps techniques, map styles, etc.

### Communications, policies & timelines

Discuss possible methods for improving communication within user groups, with other trail users and more importantly - better communication with land managers. Also, discuss the variety of constraints facing land managers that impact project timelines and possible ways users can work more efficiently within those constraints.

After participants had completed their rotations through the topics, the facilitators reviewed the comments and ideas in each “topic notebook” and transcribed the key points for presentation and discussion with the afternoon session guests. Topics and comments listed below:

### Access & Maintenance

All users would like to see more trails, improved trail head facilities and more trail systems closer to urban areas/ population centers. Less travel time to trail heads (no more than 2 hours to a trail).

Trail maintenance should be performed by skilled, competent staff and volunteers. Training should be required and proper tools should be used.

Trails should be planned with input from all user groups and should be properly designed and sustainably built.

Managers should employ seasonal and weather-related closures of trails. Users also felt a “trail report” system was critical – either web-based or call-in – that would give users an opportunity to check trail conditions before heading out. It might also give users a place to report problems (i.e. trees down, wash out, etc.) or update conditions (trail wiki)

Volunteer maintenance days should be part of larger events and/ or make maintenance days regularly scheduled.

Fee-based or trail-pass system should be implemented as a way to increase funding for trail maintenance. All funds collected from sale of passes would go into a special trail fund and not back into the general fund. Users also discussed a “sliding scale” fee structure that would require hikers to pay less than mountain bikers or equestrians.

Levy fines commensurate with damage and develop incentive programs to prevent abuse – increase patrol/ enforcement & support hike/ horse patrol groups. Tie enforcement to education initiatives.

Trails should be better marked/ trail markings should be better maintained and current.

Should be some separation of uses

#### Optimum Trail Descriptions

Loop trails or trail systems with a central spine connecting several smaller loop systems are the preferred type of layout. Central “feeder trail” might provide access to smaller or more remote trails with less use. Loops are good, backtracking is not good.

Trail systems should include a variety of skill levels, ride lengths and durations.

Experienced mountain bikers prefer 15-20 + mile trails, endurance horseback riders prefer 20 - 30 mile trails while hikers and less experienced riders would like trails closer to 10 miles max.

All users like access to natural features or points of interest such as overlooks, bluffs, rock outcrops, hemlock cliffs, streams, water features, etc.

All users like a variety of topographic changes, multiple opportunities for more advanced skill levels and a mix of environments and features.

All users liked the idea of locating trail-heads near commercial or retail areas/ combining with economic interaction in local communities. Trails could begin or pass through small towns, which could become “trail towns” or trail-friendly tour destinations.

Trails should be considered as part of larger connections to greenways, etc. Trails near/ adjacent to vehicle thoroughfares should follow/ use “complete streets” model.

Trails should be well designed (good flow), sustainable (built to drain properly) and built to last. Trail design should help prevent user conflict.

Trail corridor width/ "sphere of impact" varies from group to group: hikers = 6', bikers = 8' to 10', horses = 10' to 12'. Trail tread varies also: hikers/ bikers want less than 20" tread, horses closer to 60", although some want narrow. All users like wider areas for passing.

Some users like use user separations for part or all of trail systems. Periodic separations around sensitive/ technical areas.

Trails should be built and maintained with proper equipment (i.e. dingo or ditch witch, not a dozer)

Trail treads should be natural surfaces like soil, not imported gravel or other geotech "stabilizers".

Trailhead parking should be adequate size and should provide for trailers.

Horses need water along trails – every five miles on average – and hitching posts at regular stopping areas (protects trees).

Signage is very important to all users. A rating system for trail difficulty should be employed where possible (mileage, descriptions, etc). Possibly part of an information/ interpretive center.

All users agreed they would pay for trail passes if it would improve trail conditions.

#### Infrastructure

All users would like to see more general information at trailheads. This includes signage, maps, topo information, trail ratings, trail etiquette/ leave not trace/ rules of the trail postings, safety and emergency contact information, announcements, etc. Central information center of some sort (could be tied into web-based info)

Parking should be close to trail-head, be of adequate size and properly designed for users. (i.e. trails that allow horse use need room for parking and turnaround for trailers)

Drinking water and toilets at or near the trail-head is very desirable.

Proximity to concessions and "technical outfitters" is helpful (i.e. camping store, tack & feed, etc)

Proximity to camping/ lodging also desirable.

Trailer clean out area, hitching posts and/ or highline is helpful to equine groups. Cleaning/ rinsing areas also helpful for mountain bikes.

Trash, recycling & manure receptacles.

Chutes/ gates/ choke points to limit access to non-motorized.

Possible pay area/ pay-to-park area to help offset maintenance costs.

#### Safety & security

Signage, rating and information systems should be standardized across all trail systems (whether state, federal or other) and well-maintained info kiosks should be at each trail head

Trail head signage should include information about things like not leaving valuables in cars as well as information about wild animals, fire hazards and potentially dangerous conditions on the trails.

Trail intersections should be very well marked

Trail difficulty should be very clear at the trail head

“Quickest way out” signage should be included on trails

Trail signage should include numerically coded gps coordinates for emergency/ extraction needs

Volunteers and staff should be wilderness first aid certified.

Law enforcement contact info should be prominently displayed and trail groups should have enforcement liaisons that they are in regular contact with.

Tie enforcement of trail rules, etc to trail pass numbers, back country permits, etc. as well as to educational programs.

Education programs should be ongoing and should include outreach to associated vendors.

Pets should always be on leash

Better cell coverage in more remote areas

#### Communications, policies and timelines

A central trails communication (web-based clearinghouse) source is needed for the state. This would include forum areas, trail conditions updates, user meetings & trail work dates, etc. Many participants suggested the KRTA or other Commerce Cab/ Econ Development agency become home to this resource.

Communications between user-groups & user-groups/ land managers is key. Should also include other users that aren't "trail users" – i.e. rock climbers.

Need for daily info on trail conditions, closures and other trail related information. Could be linked to 800 number or other type of reporting system – makes users aware but also makes land managers aware/ accountable. KDFWR already has something similar 800 858 1549

Need for a "white paper" accessible to all user groups that conveys timelines, constraints, budgets and all general info regarding working on public lands. Make it accessible - public/ users shouldn't have to search for info.

Need more "historical data" on individual trails, trail uses, etc – so all users know why some are open or closed to certain users.

Standardize flow of information between users and managers.

Tie communication strategy back to larger economic development initiatives for better marketing/ dissemination.