

Hanover Conservation Commission Trails Committee

Minutes, February 16, 2012

Present: Ron Bailey, Tom Linell, Doug McIlroy, Peter Shumway, John Taylor, John Trummel

Short items

Aggie Kurtz Trail. Nicole Cormen did light maintenance on this trail and has agreed to continue monitoring it. About six downed trees need chainsaw attention. McIlroy and Shumway will do that February 23, weather permitting.

Rinker Tract Bike Trail. The Mountain Bike Association has adjusted its layout to exit town property as agreed by the Conservation Commission. Work on the new trail should complete on or before Trails Day, June 6, after which the "bandit trail" will be closed. Notices will be posted to warn of this closure and recruit help in building the replacement.

Tanzi Tract. A social trail from the Storrs Road neighborhood is well graded and maintained. We will try to find out whether it is open to more than the owners of the immediate properties it leads to. If it is not, it should probably be shut down.

The "forest loop" trail crosses over an often wet swale and back. Users have placed logs and sticks in the upstream crossing, which is sometimes ponded. Taylor has identified a need for puncheons there. Bailey said the spot has grown wetter over the years. McIlroy said that the trail could be moved about 50 feet to the nearer side of the swale. It would then lie on flat land instead of clinging to the hillside as at present. Youth in Action has expressed interest in doing the job. The Conservation Commission has approved a rerouting. Bailey thought the old trail could be left for use at dry times.

Trails day. Further ideas for trail-day activities were floated.

Bailey suggested clearing glossy buckthorn from the upper end of Highway 38.

Bailey said buckthorn is also a problem in the bouldery wet section of the Indian Ridge Trail north of Trout Brook. He thought that both removal and rerouting of that unpleasant section might be done. McIlroy said that we hadn't found a good alternate way around the swamp, but that an escape to Medical Center Drive might be possible.

Taylor recalled puncheon opportunities that need hemlock logs. McIlroy said that Cal Felichetti has said that Chippers will donate logs that are cut near enough to make it economic to deliver them rather than chip them. Taylor wondered whether we could agree to pay for delivery. McIlroy will look into that.

Taylor said the Cardigan Mountain school, where students do three hours of community service weekly, would welcome trail-work opportunities. The Ridge Trail was suggested as convenient to the school.

General trail conditions. Taylor and Ben Harris improved eroded benching on the River Trail. Near one of the staircases a new edging timber had been anonymously (and ineffectively) installed.

Signs

Taylor said the UVTA's trail-sign forum the previous evening attracted representative from 19 different trails groups, including four people from the Hanover Conservation Commission. The following discussion was informed in part by the evening's proceedings. Consensus principles are set off in short indented paragraphs

Clutter. There was general agreement that both signs and blazes are often overdone. One prevalent sin is to tack up extra signs when new rules are found to be necessary. Bad local examples are the four-level signpost at the north entrance to the River Trail, and the hodge-podge of notices at the entrance to Mink Brook Nature Preserve.

When more information is needed, revise or replace old signs; don't add new ones.

Location. Signs are appropriate at trailheads and intersections. It was noted in the forum that trailhead signs may need to include parking directions when that isn't obvious. In some well-structured trail networks, intersections are numbered and mapped, as convenient you-are-here indicators. Linell thought this was overkill. It was also pointed out that the notion is less likely to work well when different trail networks interconnect.

Signs at trailheads may need to include parking information.

Signs at intersections should tell little more than where trails go.

Directions and distances. Most signs should tell where trails go. Distance is very useful information. Sometimes distance is told in hours, but this measure varies too much among people. A difficulty rating may help, but terms like "easy", "steep", "rough" may mean different things to different people. One possible objective descriptor is total vertical climb.

Distances to important destinations are desirable; total vertical climb may be useful.

Trail name. Many of our trails have names that do not reflect their destinations, and indeed some trails have no identifiable destination other than "the woods". Are the names important? If the names are distinctive, yes--it makes them easy to talk about among friends or when calling for emergency help. This may be a consideration in naming: avoid generic names like "Lowland", "Mountainside", and "Loop". Moreover, destination alone may not identify a trail; no fewer than seven trails go to Balch Hill, for example.

Branding. Who owns this trail? Who manages it? How can I reach them? Generally such questions are more important to the owners than to the users the signs are intended to inform. At the sign forum there was quite a bifurcation in opinion about how much of such information is appropriate and how prominent it should be. Except possibly at the main entrance to parks or park-like areas, this is secondary information. It should definitely not stand out as the most eye-catching feature of the sign. Another issue is the form of branding: logo? name? URL? A straightforward URL like www.hanovernh.org or www.hanoverconservancy.org at the bottom of a sign serves both to identify and provide contact information, while consuming a very modest amount of sign area. It can be jazzed up with capital letters, as in www.HanoverNH.org, but this may seem affected.

Ownership, if indicated, is better put at the bottom of a sign than the top.

URL branding is unobtrusive and informative.

Color. The MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices) specifies brown for recreational trail signs and green for transportation routes such as bike-to-work trails, with white letters and symbols. Both colors were generally endorsed at the sign forum and in the trails committee. Hanover's traditional blue is seen as out of keeping with the natural settings of many of our trails. The flip side is that it's easy to find. McIlroy liked the yellow lettering on Adirondack signs, but this position garnered little support.

Brown is recommended instead of blue.

Usage rules. Should usage rules normally be expressed positively or negatively? In words or pictures? In Hanover negative signs predominate, peaking with the long list of No's on the Grasse Road trail. In general positive signs were preferred at the sign forum, but it was pointed out that "foot travel only" or "footpath" is more concise than a string of icons for hiking, skiing and snowshoeing or against bikes, ATV's and snowmobiles. Icons, however, have another advantage: they can be pasted on the sign and easily changed as rules evolve. Taylor said that he saw no degradation in adhesive icons over five years.

Signs with a blank area for adhesive icons are revisable.

Rules in words are effective for more abstract ideas.

Materials. In contention are routed wood, metal, and multilayer engraved plastic. Wood is attractive, unobtrusive, and biodegradable, but limited in expressive potential--ideal for simple direction signs at intersections ("Storrs Pond 0.4 mi"). There are some in place at Balch Hill and Rinker. It may be possible to have them made in shop classes. Metal signs made at the state prison have a long history of use here.

Attractive and distinctive plastic signs are in wide use in France. Their high contrast allows relatively small lettering; this and limited content (destination and distance only) makes them unobtrusive yet easily recognizable. No strong sentiment for plastic was voiced in the meeting. [Note added by McIlroy after the meeting: Plastic signs can easily look very stark. I hesitate to go that way without good artistic advice.]

Encourage routed wooden signs at intersections.

Rely on metal for more complex signs.

Mounting. Our signs are mostly mounted on galvanized fence posts, but occasionally on trees. They are typically about 7 feet from the ground. No one thinks they are beautiful. For tree mounting, allowance for growth should be made, either by using extra-length screws or by loosening them periodically (a task that's likely to be forgotten).

One faction at the sign forum favored kiosks instead of some trailhead signs. Others thought kiosks should be tucked away so as not to dominate the entrance. An example is the Hanover Conservancy's kiosk at the Mink Brook Nature Preserve, which is inside the Brook Road gate, not out front.

There is little committee support for kiosks as primary trailhead signage.

The French signs mentioned above are placed significantly lower than Hanover's signs, usually against a bank, wall, or foliage, on wooden or plastic poles. Plastic poles, often seen in Washington and Oregon look less industrial than galvanized fence posts or treated

wood. They cost about \$10, but probably must be dug, rather than driven, into the ground.

If possible, mount trailhead signs differently from roadside traffic signs, but consistently.

Shape and content. The best shape for destination/distance signs is horizontal. Signs with more information seem to work better in portrait orientation. It has already been noted that signs at intersections internal to a trail network are best limited to destination/distance with no branding.

One size doesn't fit all.

In some trail networks location maps are posted at many or most intersections and trailheads. (Boston Lot is a local example.) Regardless of whether one thinks the scheme is helpful or excessively coddling, it poses a maintenance problem: unless expensively mounted, maps are subject to theft and weather damage.

You-are-here maps are best confined to kiosks.

An emerging possibility is QR codes (pixellated square to be scanned by a smartphone), not for identification, but for access to further information--much more economical than a kiosk and potentially much more flexible.

QR codes may be the next wave.

The consensus of this discussion will be presented to the Conservation Commission for their consideration. McIlroy will circulate a summary for comment and correction.

Landowner relations

A spreadsheet of all private owners and abutters to mapped trails has been developed, but contact information (especially phone numbers) remains to be filled in. It is posted on the committee's (nonpublic) Google website.