

NLCC Trail Adopters Guidelines

Consider what a trail is. In a forest it is a treadway and a corridor (in the sense of an opening or vista through the trees). In the winter, in unbroken snow, it is a white carpet and a corridor. Anything that disrupts this treadway and corridor, such as plants in leaf in the middle of the trail, down branches, down trees across the trail, tree branches reaching into the corridor so as to squeeze or narrow the corridor, all of these make the trail harder to follow.

A standard of maintenance used by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Appalachian Mountain Club suggests that the trail corridor should be at least four feet wide and eight feet high. In practical terms try to cut the branches and sprouts back far enough so that you could walk the trail without rubbing against the stems or foliage even after a season's growth. This is important when the plants are wet. Cutting the corridor four feet wide might assure that it won't become less than two feet wide before you return to clip.

Overhead branches may need attention, too. Consider their impact when wet or snow-laden. Be sure to cut blaze obstructions.

When could you reasonably leave a tree across the trail as a "stepover?" If the tree is more than knee height at the top, it is too difficult to step over reasonably. In all cases, cutting should flush to the ground or trunk so that there are no dangerous stubs.

You are asked to:

1 - Maintain your trail several times a year.

Late April or early May is an appropriate time to clean water bars, and clean up the branches and trees brought down during the winter. Most branches provide a potential threat to trip the hiker. Round, straight segments of branches could roll underfoot. Keep in mind that the plant sprouts that are ten inches long in April may become two feet tall in August and covered with foliage. Clipping could be done also. Try to improve drainage off the trail. Any puddles should either be drained or stepping stones should be placed.

Midsummer is a good time to cut back all the growth that is impinging on the trail. Particularly troubling are the sprouts from beech tree roots, hobblebush and blackberry briars.

Mid to late October is a good time to clear up the branches brought down by fall winds, and to clean out water bars and drainage ditches. Clipping could be done also.

2 - Paint blazes during dry weather, and tend to plastic blazes. See the NLCC Blaze Guidance. Blazes are usually painted every three years.

3 - Look for roots that loop into the air which might catch a hiker's foot. You may either cut these with loppers (both sides), or pile soil and rocks on either side.

4 - Report to the trail coordinator any inappropriate incursions onto Conservation Commission trails and any projects needed on your trail which require more person-power than you can muster. If you need someone to chainsaw a tree for you, let us know. Also report where signs are missing or otherwise needed, maps or Mutt Mitt bags need to be restocked.

5 - Pick up trash. You are not likely to find much. Occasionally there may be the remains of a party.

NLCC Guidance For Marking Trails With Blazes

Blazes serve two purposes, to show where the trail goes, and to confirm for the hiker that he or she is still on the trail. Blazes are needed on straight, well-defined trails about every 1 to 2 hundred yards. People wake from their reverie, or intense conversation, and suddenly discover that they have not seen a blaze in a long time. Their insecurity is removed once they see a blaze.

In marking the direction of the trail it is helpful to have blazes at the end of each vista or straight section of the trail. This way there will be a new blaze in view, or almost in view, as you reach the end of a straight stretch. Generally, there will only be one or two blazes in view at any one place on the trail. Seeing six blazes from one location is not always a satisfying experience. Where the direction of the trail is well defined by trees and brush, you need not have a blaze at every twist and turn.

The adopted trapezoidal blaze (6" tall x 3/4" at the top x 2 1/2" at the bottom) is intended to be tipped from the vertical to indicate the direction in which the trail turns. The angle that the blaze tips should be proportional to the change in direction. If the trail makes a 90 degree turn to the left, then the blaze should tip 90° to the left. If the trail turns 45° to the right, then the blaze should tip 45° to the right. The tipped blaze should be close to the corner, not some distance before. However, an agreement with the Trails Bureau of the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development says that the SRKG and its trail adopters may only orient the blazes vertically on state land. While New London does not have any state forests or parks, the NLCC has been maintaining the Great Brook Trail after it leaves New London, crosses land in Wilmot, and goes into the Gile Forest in Springfield. Similarly, the Kidder Trail is partly in the Gile Forest.

The mantra of the real estate profession, "location, location, location," applies to blazing. The species of the tree is less important. Preferably, the blaze should be on the righthand side and/or inside of the curve at the end of a straight stretch. That is, it should not lead you off the trail at the corner. Certainly, it should not be on a tree well off the trail. However, in most cases suitable trees for blazing will limit the choices, and a tipped blaze on the outside of a corner should define the trail direction. Keep in mind that hikers new to our blazes may not understand the significance of the tipped blaze. We have met such hikers. Therefore, careful placement of blazes is important.

Blazes should face the direction from which they are approached. This is important at corners. It is also helpful in winter hiking. Blazes should be at head height (5 ft.).

Double blazes may be used at points where the change in direction of the trail is not obvious, however their use should be quite limited, or their significance is lost.

Plastic Blazes

Plastic blazes should not be painted.

Each year the maintainer should observe the length of nail shank still exposed. As the tree grows it may pull the nails through the blaze leaving a hole the size of the nail head. When there is only ¼ inch or less of shank visible the nails should be pulled and re-driven with only about ½ inch of shank into the tree. These nails typically break instead of coming out whole. Place new nails next to the shanks of nails already in the tree. Aluminum nails are used, because they pose no problem for chainsaws and saw mills.

Painted Blazes

In painting blazes with a stencil and a spray can, hold the stencil as close to the tree as possible. The spray can should be held 12 to 18 inches away. Spray with short, moving strokes. The more paint you put on, the more likely you are to have paint runs.

So, try to achieve complete coverage without excess paint. It helps to spray an initial blaze and then re-spray after a minute or two. Before painting consider spraying a new stencil with a spray used in frying (eg: Pam), so as to limit the adhesion of the spray to the stencil, which must ultimately be cleaned. Use a glove to keep the spray off the hand that holds the stencil.

Do plan to paint all the blazes going in one direction, and then do the blazes in the other direction. Trying to do blazes for both directions in one pass will result in some blazes for the opposite direction being too close together, and some being missed.

When re-spraying older blazes an assistant could help by locating the next blaze ahead so that you can judge whether an intermediate blaze is needed. Also, you might want to avoid re-painting every blaze you see.

If there are only saplings where you believe a blaze is required, you could nail a piece of wood shingle (perhaps 3" x 8") to the sapling and paint the blaze on the shingle. Drill a hole in the shingle for the nail so it will not split. Making a stencil for smaller blazes is an option. In general, you should choose trees at least 3 inches in diameter.

Avoid painting blazes on dead trees. Also avoid painting blazes on short lived trees, like mountain maple and striped maple.

While some experts tout smooth barked trees as the only ones to paint, I find that the blazes that show up best are those painted on rough-barked, dark conifers. Up close the blazes may not look neat, but from a distance they are prominent.

Before painting a blaze try to remove any loose bark. In re-painting it is also important to remove loose bark or flaky paint. A wire brush is helpful.

When you are through painting for the day, turn the spray can upside down and spray for 3 seconds to clear the nozzle of paint.

Trail Monitoring Report

Town of New London Conservation Commission

Trail Name and Location: _____

Adopter Name: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Did you walk all of the trail? Yes___ No___

What is the overall condition of the trail (give details)?

Are there manmade structures on your trail (eg bridges, boardwalks, benches, etc.)?
Yes___ No___

If yes, what is the condition?

What is the condition of trail markers and blazes?

Are there trail signs (points of interest, etc.)? Yes___ No___

What is the condition of the signs:

Are mowed areas adequately maintained? Yes___ No___

Is brush cutting needed? Yes___ No___

Recommended maintenance (please indicate items that you will take of):

Comments:

Contact information:

Address:
Phone:
Email:

*Return this form to:
New London Conservation Commission
375 Main Street
New London, NH 03257*