

NY-NJ Trail Conference

Conservation and Advocacy Policy

Approved by Board on June 22, 2010

Charge:

Identify, prioritize, and permanently protect the non-motorized trails managed by the Trail Conference, through landowner outreach, advocacy, and where necessary, the direct acquisition of land.

Secondarily, assist other groups in advocating for the preservation of land within the viewsheds of Trail Conference-maintained trails, where development of said lands would negatively impact the trails and the trail experience.

Principles:

1. Engagement with the owners of land whose properties Trail Conference trails cross, or have the potential to cross, is a top priority.
2. Focus on securing agreements with landowners at no cost where possible, through terminable right of way agreement, or preferably perpetual trail easements.
3. Facilitate the purchase of land by others, or hand-off projects to other land trusts or agencies if possible.
4. When necessary, lands could be acquired outright, preferably with external funding and partner involvement.
5. Hold property as briefly as possible, or not at all, and never permanently; avoid debt.
6. Use other people's (agencies') money; seek donations and bargain sales of land whenever possible.
7. In appropriate cases, conduct parcel-specific fundraising to achieve our goals.
8. Avoid conservation easements because of long-term requirements for maintenance, stewardship, defense, and reporting.
9. Avoid parcels with possible or confirmed environmental damage or liability.

Approach:

1. Maintain a database of owners and parcels along all four long-distance trails, organized by trail segment.
2. Buy from willing sellers, and except in extreme and unique circumstances offer landowners no more than fair market value as defined by a qualified independent appraisal.
3. When contacting landowners, strive for no-cost agreements, seek permanence where possible, going "up the ladder" where necessary from revocable agreement for access, and handshake agreement for trail crossing, to permanent trail easements and, if absolutely necessary, outright purchase.
4. With existing trail agreements, seek to renew them/make them permanent as appropriate and as opportunities present themselves.
5. Use of limited development/subdivision for open space is acceptable as a last choice vs. full development of a site, provided that the viability of trails and ecological integrity of the site is left intact.

6. Consult with Trails Council regarding volunteer network's ability to manage new trail on a potential acquisition before approaching the landowner.

Criteria -- Factors to consider when evaluating land conservation opportunities:

1. Long-distance trail (AT, LP, HT, SRT) runs through the property.
2. Potential to accommodate or extend a long-distance trail by eliminating a road walk or filling a gap in the trail.
3. Buffers or improves access to a long-distance trail.
4. Connecting trail (Hewitt-Butler, Iron Belt Trail, etc.) runs through the property.
5. Potential to accommodate a connecting trail by eliminating a road walk or filling a gap in the trail.
6. Buffers or improves access to a connecting trail.
7. Willing seller at fair market value.
8. Meets state agency standards for takeout (contiguous to existing state, county, or local parkland).
9. Linear distance (potential trail) of a half-mile or more.
10. Size of the parcel. Vulnerable to development pressure; at risk