

State of Vermont
Operations Division

Agency of Transportation
One National Life Drive
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001

Best Management Practice:

Rail Trails

[VTrans Owned, Operated & Maintained]

Effective Date:

12/22/08

VTrans Authorized Signature:


Director, Operations Division

Purpose Statement

The Rail Trail BMP guides activities only on VTrans owned, operated and maintained rail trails in order to:

- Maintain rail trails and rail trail bridges in reasonably good operating condition for their expected use;
- Prevent infrastructure deterioration;
- Conserve cost (energy, equipment and personnel costs) by performing timely maintenance;
- Protect the trail's surrounding natural ecology;
- Preserve the scenic qualities of the trail corridor;
- Maintain compliance with all applicable Federal and State Regulatory Programs.

Guiding Principles

The BMP's guiding principles are:

- Incorporate maintenance of state owned trail facilities into routine maintenance activities;
- Create consistent trail maintenance requirements throughout the state;
- Schedule maintenance to maximize benefit and minimize cost;
- Preserve the scenic qualities of the trails to the extent possible, while conserving resources and practicing environmental stewardship.

Standards

The following standards are applicable only to the rail trails owned and operated by VTrans. Exceptions are to be approved by the District Transportation Administrator.

1. Patrolling

- a) Patrolling shall occur, at a minimum, once every other week (excluding winter months) using equipment appropriate for access and shall include a routine visual inspection of the trail surface, litter, structures, signs, drainage and encroachments. Patrol vehicles shall be clearly marked and display flashing warning lights.
- b) Patrolling shall occur after major weather events when there is a likelihood that there is damage to the trail (excluding winter months).
- c) Minor repairs and corrective actions may take place during patrolling when feasible and cost effective.
- d) MATS shall be used for reporting of patrol activities.
- e) Additional patrolling and periodic inspection reporting shall occur as required by State Regulatory & Permitting requirements (where applicable).

2. Litter

- a) Litter will be picked up as necessary.
- b) Participation by trail supporters in a major litter cleanup in connection with Green Up Day is encouraged.
- c) Trash receptacles will not be provided along the trail, and users will be encouraged to dispose of their own trash.

3. Trail surface – The trail surface is to be kept in reasonably good condition.

- a) Trail surfaces shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) An annual assessment of the need for surface grading, repair and compaction of trail surfaces will be made after the winter and shall be funded by the annual district allocation for trail maintenance.
- c) More extensive trail maintenance of the surface may be required every 8-10 years. The cost of rehabilitation activities such as the application of additional surface material, shall be identified as part of the maintenance budget request to the legislature.

4. Bridges

- a) Bridge surfaces, railings and other easily visible bridge elements shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) Small repairs shall be funded by the annual district allocation for trail maintenance.
- c) Bridges shall be inspected by the VTrans Bridge Inspection Program on a five (5) year cycle unless conditions warrant a more aggressive inspection schedule. The cost of bridge rehabilitation activities shall be identified as part of the maintenance budget request to the legislature. Where possible, federal funds will be used for major rehabilitation.

5. Signs/Fences/Gates

- a) Signs, fences and gates shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) Small repairs shall be funded by the annual district allocation for trail maintenance.

6. Vegetation Control

- a) Control of grass, at a minimum, shall be by a once annual mowing of the trail covering two (2) feet on either side of the trail surface edge to maintain the required "recovery zone".
- b) In no instance should mowing occur outside the right-of-way without prior written landowner agreement.
- c) Increased mowing activity may be authorized by the VTrans District Transportation Administrator (DTA) if required for safety and visibility purposes.
- d) Steep Slopes greater than 2:1 shall not be mowed in order to help stabilize banks and avoid soil erosion unless grass, brush and/or small trees on these slopes constitute a hazard.
- e) Mowing may be postponed or restricted to protect an identified resource such as Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species, Natural Communities, Unique Natural Areas, and Habitats of Concern. For further direction, consult the Mowing BMP.
- f) Changes to prescribed mowing limits and frequencies may be necessary at crossings to decrease the risk to public safety and may be authorized by the VTrans District Transportation Administrator (DTA).
- g) Mowing in areas where invasive plant species communities are known or suspected to exist will be avoided and/or managed per consultation with the VTrans Landscape Coordinator.
- h) To the extent practicable and subject to the conditions and exceptions noted in the Mowing BMP and Riparian Tree and Brush Cutting BMP, all Riparian Areas will be avoided. Riparian areas provide necessary shade to lakes, rivers and streams, stabilize shorelines, prevent erosion and provide habitat for fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles and water-dependant mammals. Riparian areas are defined, for the purpose of implementing this BMP, as the area from the water's edge up the bank slope and typically 50 ft from the top of the water body slope inland.

7. Crossings

- a) Crossings shall not be altered without approval of the District Transportation Administrator. Any changes seen during patrol shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) Trail surfaces, signs (trail and highway) and vegetation at crossings shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor. Priority shall be given to correction of deficiencies at public road crossings. Coordination with the VTrans Operations Property Management Section may be required on issues involving private crossings which may come under the encroachments section.

8. Culverts, Drainage and Ditches.

- a) Culverts, drainage and ditches shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs such as clearing of debris that inhibits their function (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) Small repairs shall be funded by the annual district allocation for trail maintenance.
- c) An annual assessment of the need for rehabilitation of culverts, ditches and drainage will be made after the winter and shall be funded by the annual district allocation for trail maintenance.
- d) The cost of rehabilitation activities such as the replacement of large culverts or significant amounts of ditching shall be identified as part of the maintenance budget request to the legislature. Where possible, federal funds will be used for major rehabilitation.

9. Encroachments

- a) New Encroachments discovered during patrol will be reported to the Property Management section of the Operations Division.

10. Trail Head Parking

- a) Trailhead parking areas shall be viewed during routine patrolling. Needed repairs (if not able to be addressed during patrol) shall be reported to the Transportation Area Supervisor.
- b) Trail head Parking areas shall not be maintained during winter and if necessary shall be blocked off to protect damage during soft or muddy conditions.