

Wisconsin Natural Areas Preservation Council

GUIDELINES

Guidelines for Maintenance, Modification, and Establishment of Trails, Roads, and Parking Lots in State Natural Areas

Introduction

A primary objective of State Natural Areas is to preserve whole natural communities and their inherent natural processes. Trails, roads, and parking lots are not part of the natural order, and ideally, should not be permitted to affect the communities and their processes. However, trails, roads or parking lots may exist at the time of State Natural Area purchase or establishment.

Many State Natural Areas have trails, roads, or parking lots. These facilities can provide improved access to, and mobility within, a natural area. They can serve to protect larger areas by focusing activities to specific locations, thereby removing intensity of use from dispersal patterns of visitors. The effects are to sustain most natural processes by encouraging human activity to remain within a smaller area.

Rationale

Guidelines are needed because, trails, roads, or parking lots may:

- * act as pathways for introduction of exotic plant and animal species into the interior of a natural area.
- * lead to erosion and/or compaction of the soil.
- * if placed in forested areas, open portions of the canopy, thereby leading to areas with different microclimates -- often lighter, windier, and drier than the forest interior. Such areas may reduce the habitat for interior species.
- * either impede or enhance the movement of animals -- in either case, acting as a human-caused disturbance.
- * increase the visitor (or human) use of an area which may be detrimental to some species.
- * in certain specific cases, be the best way to preserve natural communities or features.

Safety and maintenance rules vary with different trail designations or under different governing bodies and may lead to damage of the natural feature that a natural area has been created to protect.

Guidelines

1. Generally, trails, roads, or parking lots are not allowed on State Natural Areas. When sites are purchased or established, preexisting trails, roads, or parking lots should be abandoned and restored, if necessary, at the first opportunity unless they are needed to channel use, to provide resource protection, or needed for management purposes.
2. Proposals to establish, reroute, or retain pre-existing trails, roads, or parking areas in State Natural Areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Bureau of Endangered Resources' Natural Areas



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Program and the Natural Areas Preservation Council.

3. Any approved or retained trail, road, and parking lot must be designed for minimal impact to the natural values for which the State Natural Area was designated. Existing trails should be designated to discourage intensive use and managed in accordance with the Department of Natural Resources standards for the designation. Occasionally, the management for minimal impact to a natural area may require developing trails to high standards. For example, a paved trail with a low, defining fence will tend to keep people on the trail.
4. Proposals for the establishment, modification, or expansion of trails, roads, or parking lots will include:
 - a. Identification of the State Natural Area, type(s) of natural community(s) involved, and quality of the community(s).
 - b. A statement of need for the trail, road, or parking lot.
 - c. A detailed plan which includes:
 1. The location(s) of existing trails, roads, or parking lots, if any.
 2. The layout of proposed changes in relation to topography, important site features, etc.
 3. A description of specifications as per Department of Natural Resources Design Standards Handbook with particular attention to width, clearing height, and surface materials.
 4. A description of maintenance requirements.
 5. Provision for adequate control of access.
 - d. A description of the expected environmental impact and a procedure to correct adverse impacts, including removal of the development and site restoration.
 - e. A description of the expected visual/aesthetic impact.
 - f. An environmental impact monitoring procedure.
5. Proposals should be submitted to the Bureau of Endangered Resources' Natural Areas Program which will process the proposal through the Natural Areas Preservation Council.

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