

Safe Recreation, Case Study: Inventory and Rehabilitation of Maine's Recreational Trails - The Eyebrow Loop Project

Maine Conservation Corps (Maine)

Safe Recreation National Benefit Description: As with all transportation programs, safety is a vital component. The sheer variety of trail types and recreation goals means that some trail activities do include strenuous efforts, journeying into remote country, and all the risks of the natural world. The goal for backcountry land managers is to reduce known hazards and to warn trail users of the unexpected.

Key Terms:

- Drainage Design
- Rock Work
- Trail Assessment
- Wilderness Stewardship

Project Partners:

- Grafton Notch State Park
- Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

DOT Strategic Goal Alignment:

- Accountability
- Safety

Best Practices:

RTP funding helped supplement the efforts of two AmeriCorps members who have backgrounds in data collection, statistics, GIS, trail construction, and outdoor stewardship skills. In partnership with an external evaluator and Corps staff, these AmeriCorps interns helped establish a system for assessing the current environmental condition and quality of Maine's recreational trail systems.

Inventory of Recreational Trail Attributes and Conditions Throughout Maine

Background

RTP funds – supplemented with funding from Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) and the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry – are supporting the efforts of two AmeriCorps Environmental Stewards. These individuals will serve in collaboration with MCC staff and an external evaluator to establish a system for assessing the current environmental condition and quality of Maine's recreational trail systems.

Project Work

MCC is hosting Molly Picillo and Raymond Menard as the 2019 Environmental Stewards. Ray and Molly offer a combined background in data collection, statistics, GIS, trail construction, and outdoor skills.

The Stewards' service will take place in two primary phases during year-one. The initial portion of their term will be dedicated to:

- Receiving applicable training (e.g. trail standards, Leave No Trace, data collection tools and systems, backcountry skills, and Wilderness First Responder)
- Connecting with land managers to inform them of the project and collect their feedback on priority areas
- Organizing an action plan for the initiation of trail assessments during the field season, and
- Researching, creating and testing measurement tools, assessment equipment and field protocols.

These activities will occur into spring 2019. The remainder of the term will be spent collecting data in the field. Specifically, the Environmental Stewards will gather both interval and event-based data, including documenting:

- General trail characteristics (e.g. grade, slope, corridor width/height, tread width)
- Structures (e.g. bridges, steps, etc.)
- Problem areas (e.g. erosion, standing water)
- Unique features (e.g. scenic overlooks, waterfalls), and
- Signage information

Historically, Maine's state trails have been constructed per the desires and experience of local individuals. Each system, from corridor and tread, to signage and mapping, may vary greatly from place to place. Similarly, funding and maintenance are often channeled to managers with personal interests in outdoor recreation. This leaves some trails behind. A systematic assessment of Maine trails will provide quantitative measures to test the effectiveness of trail construction and maintenance interventions; prioritize future rehabilitation needs; and create a data set of trail characteristics to form a statewide trail classification system. Data will be used by multiple agencies, including RTP, to guide future decisions and priorities. The overall goal of the project is to bring consistency and best practices to the forefront of Maine's recreational trails.

Eyebrow Loop Trail Rehabilitation Project

Background

Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) partnered with Grafton Notch State Park to complete a multi-year rehabilitation project using RTP funding to supplement state park funds. Funding has been awarded each year since 2015, and MCC is scheduled to continue the project this year (2019). For the past four years, MCC Field Teams were assigned six to eight-week projects focusing on the rehabilitation of the Eyebrow Loop Trail within the park.

Project Work

Project goals were to stabilize the trail with stone steps and add drainage structures to address erosion issues. In 2018, the team built 47 stone steps, two waterbars, and 30 feet of drainage

ditching. Members served on steep and rugged terrain and were trained in specialized equipment to overcome these challenges. Team members learned how to use the grip hoist and set up a highline system in order to safely move rocks over steep slopes. Members were also trained to use the rock drill.

Grafton Notch State Park lies within Maine's Mahoosuc Mountain Range and offers rugged terrain for back-country hikers, including five miles of the Appalachian Trail. The Eyebrow Loop Trail is located in the western mountains of Maine, and links to the Appalachian Trail and is known to be one of the most challenging sections of trail because of the rugged terrain. Grafton Notch State Park is a popular hiking destination and has over 60,000 visitors annually. Trail improvements have created a safer and more stable trail for years to come.

For More Information

Maine Conservation Corps

Address:
54 Independence Dr.
Augusta, ME 04333
Phone: (207) 624-6085