

## I. Background

Every year, Forest Service staff receives numerous requests to alter the National Forest Trail System. Proposals include desires to: 1) construct trail relocations; 2) repair or relocate trails; 3) add trails; or 4) add/remove uses to existing trails. These proposals often address concerns such as: resource damage or improper trail construction; new trail issues, such as demand for a new or growing use; or ongoing desires, such as providing trails to improve the economic base of a community or provide links to other trail networks.

When a user-group or individual would like to request to relocate, repair, reconstruct, add/remove uses, or add trails, it is incumbent on the Forest Service to ensure that the proponent understands the process for making this request. This document outlines the process for proposing a change to the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) or Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) trail network.

## II. Proponent Process for Developing and Presenting a Proposal

- a. User Group Organization
  - i. Power in numbers: The Forest Service recreation staff relies heavily upon partners and their volunteer labor force to maintain our trail network. Organizing volunteers into a user group provides more capacity and shows greater commitment for assisting with long-term trail adoption and maintenance. Individuals proposing new trails will not have the volunteer labor necessary to support long-term maintenance requirements. GMNF and FLNF Forest Plan direction identifies the need for staff to maintain trails with partners and to ensure trail proposals are supported by an organized partner group.
  - ii. Concurrence: The Forest Service frequently meets with trail proponents only to find that the user group is conflicted on what they would like to request. For example, are you seeking access anywhere you can get it or are you seeking access to new/existing trails built specifically for your user group? Reach concurrence among your user group about what you will propose to the Forest Service.
- b. Familiarity with the existing National Forest Trail System
  - i. Why is your proposal needed within the context of the existing trail network?
  - ii. Are there existing trails in the area of interest that could meet your need?
  - iii. Could this need be met on other public or private lands?
  - iv. Would this proposal be in competition with resources that are provided locally in the private sector?
- c. Proposal Development
  - i. What change are you proposing to the trail network?
  - ii. Does your proposal align with Forest Service management direction (GMNF Forest Plan, FLNF Forest Plan, GMNF Comprehensive Trail Strategy)?
    1. Does the Forest Plan Management Area(s) allow the activity?
    2. Does the activity work towards achieving Forest-wide or Management Area Forest Plan direction for Desired Future Condition?
    3. Does the activity align with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines?

- iv. Consider the economic, environmental and social sustainability of your proposal
  - 1. What are the anticipated use levels and can the proposal support those levels considering: sustainable trail design/location as well as support infrastructure (such as parking)?
  - 2. Are there safety concerns? Are there potential user conflicts?
  - 3. Maintenance concerns: do you have enough volunteer labor to commit to long-term maintenance?
  - 4. Short and long-term financial needs: how are you proposing to fund the project (donated dollars, grant funds, Forest Service expense)? If you are relying on grants, does your group have grant writing capabilities?
- d. Presenting a Proposal: Proposals should be presented to the District Recreation Program Manager for the unit where the proposal is located (Hector Ranger District (RD), Manchester RD, Middlebury/Rochester RDs).

### III. Forest Service Proposal Review

- a. Once a fully developed proposal is presented, District Staff will review the merits of the action moving forward. The Forest Service will review the same considerations identified in section II.c. of this document in addition to:
  - i. What is the purpose of the proposal (is the trail needed to: meet new/greater demands; connect users to services or other attractions; create a loop?)
  - ii. Are there duplicate trail opportunities (including analysis of trails on State, federal or private land)?
  - iii. Would the proposal require or benefit from a Special Use Permit?
  - iv. Does the proposal identify the five components of trail fundamentals including trail type, use, managed use, designed use and design parameters and will the trail be able to be managed to meet Forest Service Trail National Quality Standards?
- b. The District Ranger will make the final determination regarding a proposal moving forward or not.
- c. If the District Ranger agrees that the proposal should move forward, the Forest Service will outline the process for trail development, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis process, funding options, construction timeframes, and long-term maintenance agreements. This is an opportunity to clearly define Forest Service and partner roles.
  - i. The Forest Service is responsible for conducting a NEPA analysis if the project is proposed to move forward. This process can take from 6 months to multiple years depending on the complexity of the proposal, the public response to initial scoping efforts and the availability of funding to complete the NEPA.
- d. Project Proponents will be notified in writing if their proposal is not moving forward, and the reasons why.