

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

RECREATION TRAIL AND WALKWAY

(Ft.)

CODE 568

DEFINITION

A pathway for pedestrian, equestrian, bicycle, and other off-road modes of travel through or to recreation resources.

PURPOSE

This practice may be applied as part of a resource management system to support one or more of the following purposes:

- Provide or improve recreation access
- Provide travelways for recreational activities such as walking, horseback riding, bicycling, cross country skiing, and hiking
- Direct travel away from ecologically sensitive and/or erosion-prone areas
- Minimize on-site and off-site damage to resources during periods of access

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On land areas where prepared paths, trails, and walkways are needed for effective and safe access to or through recreation resources.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

All planned work shall comply with federal, state, local, and tribal laws and regulations.

Plants, landscaping timbers, traffic control measures, wooden walkways, grades, etc., shall be evaluated for effectiveness, aesthetics, and accessibility.

The trail or walkway shall be conducive to the overall recreation area and aesthetically blend

with the general landscape and surroundings.

The trail or walkway shall be configured to minimize adverse on-site and off-site impacts such as accelerated erosion, riparian zone degradation, stream channel and streambank damage, hydrology modification, and other water resource damage. Wildlife habitat and movement should not be adversely affected.

Grades. Grades shall be determined by the intended use, location, and topography.

Pedestrian and equestrian trails shall not exceed 10 percent in sustained grade. Grades up to 15 percent for distances of 200 feet or less are acceptable.

Steps may be needed to overcome extreme grade, prevent erosion hazard, and permit access that would otherwise be very difficult. A handrail should be provided if more than 3 steps are involved.

Bicycle trails shall not exceed 4 percent in sustained grade. Grades up to 8 percent may be used for short distances where there are adjoining sections of flat or reverse grade.

Alignment. Curves are desirable in trails and walkways. However, switchbacks should be avoided wherever practical. If they become necessary, a stone wall or row of shrubs should separate the segments above and below the curve. They should be designed to prevent cross cutting and to provide protection from dislodged stones.

Width. The minimum trail or walkway width shall be 4 feet. The width for pedestrian trails may be reduced to a minimum of 3 feet in areas where greater width would adversely affect environmentally sensitive areas.

Side slopes. Cut and fill slopes shall be stable for the soil material.

Drainage. Drainage measures shall be of sufficient size, intervals, and gradient to ensure adequate drainage.

Erosion control. Plans shall include provisions for control of erosion. Distributed areas shall be established to vegetation as soon as practicable after construction. If soil or climatic conditions preclude the use of vegetation and protection is needed, non-vegetative means (such as mulches or gravel) may be used. Seedbed preparation, seeding, fertilizing, and mulching shall be according to Conservation Practice Standard 342, Critical Area Planting. Use vegetation adapted to the site that will accomplish the desired purpose. Preference shall be given to native plant species. If native plant materials are not adaptable or proven effective for the planned use, then non-native species may be used.

Bridges and elevated walkways. Bridges and elevated walkways shall be designed for the expected loading.

Surfacing. If surfacing is required for a firm, stable trail, the surfacing material shall be appropriate for the anticipated traffic and operational conditions. Where aggregate-type material is used, the diameter should not exceed 1 inch.

Safety. Safety of the users shall be incorporated into the design. Adequate directional and warning signs, handrails, bridges, and culverts shall be placed as dictated by the site and intended use. Protection from slides and falling rocks shall be provided, where needed.

CONSIDERATIONS

Assure safe ingress and egress to the trail or walkway. Access trails to hunting, fishing, camping, and picnic areas should usually be located to provide the most direct route but should take advantage of attractive natural sites and scenic views whenever possible.

Nature trails are usually indirect and are more desirable if they lead through a variety of interesting conditions. These trails are usually one-way, ending in the same general location as

they started. Rest areas and sanitary facilities may be needed.

Consider requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, where appropriate.

Assure adequate parking for users and an operation and maintenance staging area. Provisions should be made for parking vehicles at the beginning of trails. The beginning and ending of a trail should be marked with a sign identifying the trail with a picturesque and interesting name. All construction should be of native materials and present a natural appearance.

Consider saving and maintaining key trees and other vegetation that have scenic value, provide shade, reduce erosion and runoff, provide habitat for wildlife, and/or add to the visual quality of the area.

Consider adjoining land uses and the proximity to residences, utilities, cultural resources, threatened and endangered species of plants and animals, wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas, important farmlands, and areas of special scenic value.

Consider potential ecological and human impacts when planning a trail for use by motorized vehicles.

If the purpose of the trail or walkway is improvement of water quality, the trail or walkway should be located (or relocated) as far away from the water body or watercourse as possible. Any work in and/or discharges near streams, wetlands, or water bodies may require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state water quality (permitting) authority, or local authority.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications for recreation trails and walkways shall be in keeping with this standard and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. Plans and specifications shall include construction plans, drawings, job sheets, or other similar documents. These documents shall specify the requirements for installing the practice, including the kind, amount, and quality of materials to be used.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

An operation and maintenance (O&M) plan shall be prepared for and reviewed with the landowner or operator. The plan shall specify that the treated areas and associated practices are inspected annually and after significant storm events to identify repair and maintenance needs.