

ALASKA STATE PARKS

TRAIL MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

MAY 2015

SECTION 2: TRAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM



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Section 2: Trail Classification System

The following *Trail Classification System* is a close adaptation of the National Trail Classification System that has been formally adopted by the USFS, and can be referenced in USFS TRACS course material. Utilization of this system is an important step towards enhancing partnerships with organizations and agencies that border and partner with Alaska State Parks. This system will help develop resource management efficiencies by using consistent trail management terminology and standards. The *Trail Classification System* is similar to other systems used in the past; the scale of trail development is defined by a particular trail class that identifies applicable design parameters and provides management intent for what maintenance standards apply. This new system differs in that the design parameters for a particular class are further refined by the *trail type* and *designed use* of the trail. The new system allows for more thorough assessments of trail conditions, an expanded means to record and communicate intended design and management guidelines, and will provide better planning potential for trail management and maintenance.

The following is a brief description of how the *Trail Classification System* is organized, as well as *Trail Class* tables.

2.1 Trail Type

Trails are classified by three types (see below). Only one type may be used to describe a given trail or trail segment per use season. It is possible to classify a single trail under multiple trail types. For example, a particular trail may have specifications for terra type and different specifications for snow type. Trails can be in the same physical location but described differently for seasonal purposes.

The three standard trail types:

Terra Trail

Snow Trail

Water Trail

2.2 Trail Class

Trail classes are an inventory convention used to identify applicable Design Parameters.

Five trail classes ranging from *least developed* (Class 1) to *highly developed* (Class 5), however, some trail classes may not be applicable to a trail type (such as a Class 5 water trail).

Trail Class 1: Minimal / Undeveloped Trail

Trail Class 2: Simple / Minor Development Trail

Trail Class 3: Developed / Improved Trail

Trail Class 4: Highly Developed Trail

Trail Class 5: Fully Developed Trail

Park area managers should identify the applicable *trail class* for each state park trail or trail segment that most closely matches a trail's managed objective. The appropriate *trail class* should be determined at the trail-specific level and recorded in a TMO document / form (as shown in Section 1). There is a direct relationship between *trail class* and *managed use*; one cannot be determined without consideration of the other. Actively managed uses, user preferences, setting, protection of sensitive resources, and other management activities should be taken into account. *Trail classes* describe the typical attributes but exceptions may occur. All exceptions should be adequately described in a trail's TMO.

The General Criteria on the following pages define each trail class and are applicable to all system trails and trail segments.

2.3 Trail Management Classes

Table 2.1 – Trail Management Classes (Adapted from USFS TRACS Trail Classes.)

Trail Attributes	Trail Class 1 Minimal / Undeveloped Trail	Trail Class 2 Simple / Minor Development Trail	Trail Class 3 Developed / Improved Trail	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail
General Criteria					
Physical Characteristics to be Applied to all State Park Trails					
Tread and Traffic Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread intermittent and often indistinct ♦ May require route finding ♦ Native materials only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread discernible and continuous, but narrow and rough ♦ Few or no allowances constructed for passing ♦ Native materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread obvious and continuous ♦ Width accommodates unhindered one-lane travel, occasional allowances constructed for passing ♦ Typically native materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Tread wide and relatively smooth with few irregularities ♦ Width may consistently accommodate two-lane travel ♦ Native or imported materials ♦ May be hardened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Width generally accommodates two-lane and two-directional travel, or provides frequent passing turnouts ♦ Commonly hardened with asphalt or other imported material
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles common ♦ Narrow passages; brush, steep grades, rocks and logs present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles occasionally present ♦ Blockages cleared to define route and protect resources ♦ Vegetation may encroach into trailway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Obstacles infrequent ♦ Vegetation cleared outside of trailway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Few or no obstacles exist ♦ Grades typically <12% ♦ Vegetation cleared outside of trailway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ No obstacles ♦ Grades typically <8%
Constructed Features and Trail Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Minimal to non-existent ♦ Drainage is functional ♦ No constructed bridges or foot crossings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Structures are of limited size, scale, and number ♦ Drainage functional ♦ Structures adequate to protect trail infrastructure and resources ♦ Primitive foot crossings and fords 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Trail structures (walls, steps, drainage, raised trail) may be common and substantial ♦ Trail bridges as needed for resource protection and appropriate access ♦ Generally native materials used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Structures frequent and substantial ♦ Substantial trail bridges are appropriate at water crossings ♦ Trailside amenities may be present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Structures frequent or continuous; may include curbs, handrails, trailside amenities, and boardwalks ♦ Drainage structures frequent; may include culverts and road-like designs
Signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Minimum required ♦ Generally limited to regulation and resource protection ♦ No destination signs present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Minimum required for basic direction ♦ Generally limited to regulation and resource protection ♦ Typically very few or no destination signs present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Regulation, resource protection, user reassurance ♦ Directional signs at junctions, or when confusion is likely ♦ Informational and interpretive signs may be present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Wide variety of signs likely present ♦ Informational signs likely ♦ Interpretive signs possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Wide variety of signage is present ♦ Information and interpretive signs likely

Trail Attributes	Trail Class 1 Minimal / Undeveloped Trail	Trail Class 2 Simple / Minor Development Trail	Trail Class 3 Developed / Improved Trail	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail
General Criteria					
Physical Characteristics to be Applied to all State Park Trails					
Typical Recreation Environments and Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, unmodified Primitive setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, essentially unmodified Primitive to Semi-Primitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural, primarily unmodified Semi-primitive to roaded natural setting Transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be modified Typically roaded natural setting Transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be highly modified Typically rural to urban setting Commonly associated with Visitor Centers or high-use recreation sites
Trail Management Typically managed to accommodate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low level use Highly skilled users comfortable off trail Users w/ high level orienteering skills Some travel modes and ability levels may be impractical/impossible Water trail users require high level of navigation/orientation and paddling skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low to moderate use levels Mid-to-highly skilled users, capable of traveling over awkward conditions/obstacles Users w/ moderate orienteering skill Trail suitable for many user types but challenging and involves advanced skills Water trails: moderate to high level of navigation/orientation and paddling/piloting skills required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate to heavy use Users w/ intermediate skill level and experience Users w/ minimal orienteering skills Moderately easy travel by managed use types Random potential for accessible use Water trails: basic to moderate navigation and paddling/piloting skills required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very heavy use Users w/ minimal skills and experience Users with minimal to no orienteering skills Easy/comfortable travel by managed use types Has the potential to be made handicap accessible Water trails: basic to moderate navigation and paddling/piloting skills required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensive use Users w/ limited trail skills and experience Trail typically meets agency requirements for accessibility

Trail Attributes	Trail Class 1 Minimal / Undeveloped Trail	Trail Class 2 Simple / Minor Development Trail	Trail Class 3 Developed / Improved Trail	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed Trail	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed Trail
General Criteria Physical Characteristics to be Applied to all State Park Trails					
Maintenance Indicators and Intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Resource protection or safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience ◆ Infrequent or no scheduled maintenance, usually in response to reports of unusual resource problems requiring repair ◆ Typically not managed for Pack and Saddle and Motorized Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Resource protection or safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience ◆ Maintenance scheduled to preserve trail facility and route location or in response to reports of unusual resource problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ User convenience ◆ Resource protection or safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience ◆ Trail cleared to make available for use early in use season and to preserve trail integrity ◆ Maintenance typically in response to trail or resource damage or significant obstacles to managed use type and experience level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ User comfort and ease ◆ Resource protection or safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience ◆ Trail cleared to make available for use at earliest opportunity in use season ◆ Maintenance typically performed at least annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ User comfort and ease ◆ Targeted high level of accessibility to key recreational opportunities ◆ Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience ◆ Maintenance performed at least annually or as needed to meet posted conditions, major damage or safety concerns typically corrected or posted within 24 hours of notice ◆ Not managed for Pack and Saddle stock, or motorized use
Additional Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Typically not managed for Pack and Saddle and Motorized trails. 				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not managed for Pack and Saddle stock, watercraft, or motorized use.

2.3.1 Trail Management Classes: Examples

Figure 2.1 – Trail Management Classes: Examples

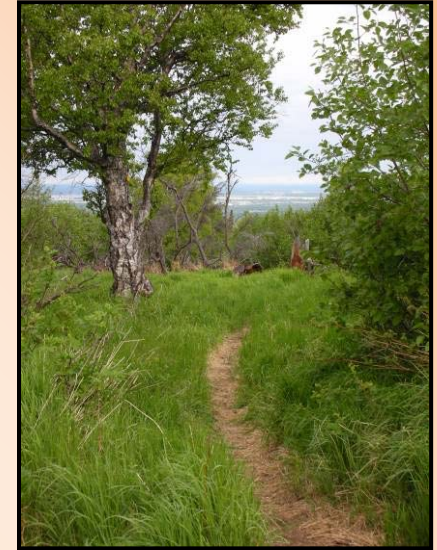
Trail Class 1

- Low level use
- Highly skilled users, comfortable off trail with high degree of orienteering skill
- Some travel modes may be impractical or impossible



Trail Class 2

- Low to moderate use levels
- Mid-to-highly skilled users, capable of traveling over awkward conditions/obstacles
- Trail suitable for many types but challenging, involving advanced skills



Trail Class 3

- Moderate to heavy use
- Users with intermediate skill level and experience
- Moderately easy travel by managed use types



Trail Class 5

- Intensive use
- Users with limited trails and skills and experience
- Trail typically meets agency requirements for accessibility



Trail Class 4

- Very heavy use
- Users with minimal skills and experience
- Easy/comfortable travel by managed use types

