RI Land & Water Summit
Worksheet: Resolving Trail Use(r) Conflict
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In one sentence, please describe a trail conflict that you now face as a trail manager, user or landowner.

Who is **involved in** and **affected by** this conflict?
- Different user groups, including landowner(s).
- Users within a group, including landowner(s).
- Is the conflict felt mutually, or is it felt by one but not the other(s) (asymmetrical)?

What **exactly** is the problem?
- Whose behavior is interfering with another person's expectations?
- Is there direct contact between/among conflicting users?
- Is the problem due to:
  - mode and technology of travel?
  - measurable resource impact?
  - perceived resource impact?
  - attitudes toward nature?
  - attitudes toward desired outdoor experience?
  - interpersonal or social friction?
  - one or just a few people, or a small group?
  - user expectations?
  - factors completely separate from trail activities?
  - age?
  - illegal activity?
  -
- How might **you, or your group,** be contributing to this conflict?

What is the root of the problem?

- ▫ **Why** is that a problem?

- ▫ **Why** is that a problem?

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- ▫ **Why** is that a problem?

Who needs to **agree** (be happy even) for a solution to work?

What is the **documented trail intent**?

What **outside resources** might be helpful to bring into this situation?

How could you surprise other parties in the conflict by doing something **responsive and responsible**?

What **assumptions** might you be able to change about this situation?

Which aspect(s) of the conflict can you
- ▫ **change unilaterally**?
- ▫ **influence directly**?
- ▫ **influence indirectly**?

How hard and **for how long** are you willing to work toward a solution?

Federal Highway Administration
Conflicts on Multiple Use Trails
by Roger Moore 1994
http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/conflicts/index.htm

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Recreational Trails Advisory Committee identified trail-user conflicts on multiple-use trails as a major concern that needs resolution. The Advisory Committee recognized that there is a significant amount of literature and expertise on this topic, but no one source that summarizes the available information. The Committee asked the Federal Highway Administration to produce a synthesis of the existing research to foster understanding of trail conflicts, identify promising approaches for promoting trail sharing, and identify gaps in our current knowledge. This synthesis is intended to establish a baseline of the current state of knowledge and practice and to serve as a guide for trail managers and researchers.

The challenges faced by multiple-use trail managers can be broadly summarized as maintaining user safety, protecting natural resources, and providing high-quality user experiences. These challenges are interrelated and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. To address these challenges, managers can employ a wide array of physical and management options such as trail design, information and education, user involvement, and regulations and enforcement.

Past research has consistently found that most outdoor recreationists are satisfied with their recreation experiences. Likewise, most trail experiences on multiple-use trails are probably enjoyable and satisfying. Conflicts among trail users do exist, however, and these conflicts can have serious consequences.

Conflict in outdoor recreation settings (such as trails) can best be defined as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (Jacob and Schreyer 1980, 369). As such, trail conflicts can and do occur among different user groups, among different users within the same user group, and as a result of factors not related to users' trail activities at all. In fact, no actual contact among users need occur for conflict to be felt. Conflict has been found to be related to activity style (mode of travel, level of technology, environmental dominance, etc.), focus of trip, expectations, attitudes toward and perceptions of the environment, level of tolerance for others, and different norms held by different users. Conflict is often asymmetrical (i.e., one group resents another, but the reverse is not true).

The existing literature and practice were synthesized into the following 12 principles for minimizing conflicts on multiple-use trails. Adherence to these principles should help improve sharing and cooperation on multiple-use trails.

1. **Recognize Conflict as Goal Interference -** Do not treat conflict as an inherent incompatibility among different trail activities, but goal interference attributed to another's behavior.
2. **Provide Adequate Trail Opportunities -** Offer adequate trail mileage and provide opportunities for a variety of trail experiences. This will help reduce congestion and allow users to choose the conditions that are best suited to the experiences they desire.
3. **Minimize Number of Contacts in Problem Areas -** Each contact among trail users (as well as contact with evidence of others) has the potential to result in conflict. So, as a general rule, reduce the number of user contacts whenever possible. This is especially true in congested areas and at trailheads. Disperse use and provide separate trails where necessary after careful consideration of the additional environmental impact and lost opportunities for positive interactions this may cause.
4. **Involve Users as Early as Possible -** Identify the present and likely future users of each trail and involve them in the process of avoiding and resolving conflicts as early as possible, preferably before conflicts occur. For proposed trails, possible conflicts and their solutions should be addressed during the planning and design stage with the involvement of prospective users. New and emerging uses should be anticipated and addressed as early as possible with the involvement of participants. Like wise, existing and developing conflicts on present trails need to be faced quickly and addressed with the participation of those affected.
5. **Understand User Needs -** Determine the motivations, desired experiences, norms, setting preferences, and other needs of the present and likely future users of each trail. This "customer" information is critical for anticipating and managing conflicts.
6. **Identify the Actual Sources of Conflict -** Help users to identify the specific tangible causes of any conflicts they are experiencing. In other words, get beyond emotions and stereotypes as quickly as possible, and get to the roots of any problems that exist.
7. **Work with Affected Users -** Work with all parties involved to reach mutually agreeable solutions to these specific issues. Users who are not involved as part of the solution are more likely to be part of the problem now and in the future.

8. **Promote Trail Etiquette -** Minimize the possibility that any particular trail contact will result in conflict by actively and aggressively promoting responsible trail behavior. Use existing educational materials or modify them to better meet local needs. Target these educational efforts, get the information into users' hands as early as possible, and present it in interesting and understandable ways (Roggenbuck and Ham 1986).
9. **Encourage Positive Interaction Among Different Users -** Trail users are usually not as different from one another as they believe. Providing positive interactions both on and off the trail will help break down barriers and stereotypes, and build understanding, good will, and cooperation. This can be accomplished through a variety of strategies such as sponsoring "user swaps," joint trail-building or maintenance projects, filming trail-sharing videos, and forming Trail Advisory Councils.
10. **Favor "Light-Handed Management" -** Use the most "light-handed approaches" that will achieve area objectives. This is essential in order to provide the freedom of choice and natural environments that are so important to trail-based recreation. Intrusive design and coercive management are not compatible with high-quality trail experiences.
11. **Plan and Act Locally -** Whenever possible, address issues regarding multiple-use trails at the local level. This allows greater sensitivity to local needs and provides better flexibility for addressing difficult issues on a case-by-case basis. Local action also facilitates involvement of the people who will be most affected by the decisions and most able to assist in their successful implementation.
12. **Monitor Progress -** Monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the decisions made and programs implemented. Conscious, deliberate monitoring is the only way to determine if conflicts are indeed being reduced and what changes in programs might be needed. This is only possible within the context of clearly understood and agreed upon objectives for each trail area.

The available research on recreational conflict is helpful for understanding and managing conflicts on trails. There is a great deal we do not know, however. This report concludes by identifying many conflict-related research topics that have not been adequately explored. Some of this suggested research is theoretical in nature, and some is suggested for applied experimentation by managers in the field.

Trail managers recognize trail conflicts as a potentially serious threat. Many are optimistic, however, and feel that when trail conflict situations are tackled head on and openly they can become an opportunity to build and strengthen trail constituencies and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for all users.

Tools & Suggestions

o Formalize, or update, your **Trail Intent and Rules**:
- □ Consider resource protection and visitor experience objectives.
- □ Consider all potential users, desired and prohibited.

o Establish a **working relationships** with representatives of all current and potential user groups and vendors of relevant gear and equipment (*if it's a new trail*, early in the trail development process) to:
- □ Describe your trail intent
- □ Ask for observations about current trail use and trends, description of problems, suggestions for solutions and improvements to consider
- □ Invite ongoing involvement

o Establish a **trail management committee** as a permanent committee
- □ Meet on a **schedule**
- □ Establish clear and enforced **ground rules** for meetings, develop good facilitation practices
- □ Put the committee to work on specific and **important questions**
- □ Spend more than half of your time **defining the problem and root causes** before grabbing the most familiar tools and solutions
- □ Hold committee workshops to **address specific issues in depth**, possibly with outside speakers or assistance
- □ Begin with a **light touch** before resorting to a heavy hand
- □ Present committee **recommendations** to the board of directors for review and action
- □ Formalize resolution of trail conflict as a **budgeted priority** and **raise money** to maintain a fund for action
- □ **Implement** board-approved recommendations swiftly and decisively
- □ **Monitor** activity to measure results in terms of resource condition and user satisfaction

o **Review** signage, website, brochures, maps and unaffiliated websites and publications for:
- □ **Consistency**
- □ **Clarity** of etiquette messages and reasoning
- □ **Positive** tone and opportunities to do the right thing

o **Learn and get ideas and support** from national or regional organizations such as RI Trails Advisory Committee, New England Mountain Bike, International Mountain Bike Association, equestrian groups, Appalachian Mountain Club, Connecticut Forest & Park Association,