National Scenic and Historic Trails Training Needs Assessment Strategy and Recommendations Report

Recommendations to the Federal Interagency Council on Trails (FICT) on knowledge gaps identified from the final National Scenic and Historic Trails Needs Assessment

May 2009

Dear Reader,

The *National Scenic and Historic Trails Training Strategy Team* (NSHT) has completed a report outlining recommendations and a strategy for NSHT training development.

For a quick overview, please review the Executive Summary. The rest of the report is organized into the following Sections for your quick reference:

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For more information, please contact me at 602-906-5605.

Respectfully,

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Executive Summary

The National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHT) Training Strategy team is evaluating the knowledge and skill gaps among agency and non-government staff who work on NSHT. With land management agency budgets flat, NSHT is often a collateral duty of agency personnel or NSHT management is being assisted by non-government organizations. For this reason, training is critical to fulfilling the mission of NSHT.

To assist in this effort, the Trails Training Strategy team conducted a survey with over 200 participants. The respondents were employees, organization members, and volunteers who manage and administer NSHTs (primarily from Federal agencies, but approximately 30% from non-profits and state agencies).

By conducting this research and more future research and analysis, government training dollars will be maximized when training programs are developed. The National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHT) Training Strategy team has met to review the results of a survey assessment. The findings of the group are explained below:

General Findings

- Excellent training programs currently exist in most agencies. Further analysis should help NSHT determine how to best utilize existing programs into the trails training program.
- Volunteers need specific competencies that agency personnel may not need and agency personnel need specific competencies that volunteers may not need. More analysis is needed to determine volunteers' training needs and the best kinds of training to reach this group.
- No training currently exists for some tasks that are critical to trails management. This need is magnified by the low knowledge level of these tasks in the assessment.
- In addition to further analysis, a steering committee is needed to assist in designing, marketing, delivering and assessing the curriculum to address the competencies in the assessment.
- Partnership, Planning, Program Administration, Public Outreach and Environmental Education, Resource Management and Protection, Visual Resource Management are key focus areas that are detailed in this report.

Short Term Training Recommendations

To allow for some quick wins while restructuring or making policy decisions, the team discussed using the following existing methods:

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Knowledge Resource Center (KRC) should be linked to other agencies as desired or needed. Similarly, the existing data sites such as the Conservation District's web site should be marketed to all Department of the Interior (DOI) Agencies.
- Sharing courses across agencies should be increased by aggressive marketing efforts.
- Once a Steering committee is established, the FICT will setup a process to determine and build high priority courses.
- Agencies should be encouraged to examine the "Pivot Table" charts that were sent to them concerning their agency results from the needs assessment to determine their own specific needs and provide conclusions during future meetings.

Long Term Recommendations

- Policies may need to be examined to foster interagency application of skills learned in classes.
- A "centralized" administrative function should be created to guide all curriculum design and delivery efforts. This would provide for consistency across agencies, bring better 'accreditation' to the NSHT program and training, and reduce costs.
- A cadre of Subject Matter Experts from all agencies should be developed into an Adjunct Faculty for a "NSHT Training Delivery Team".
- A "Certificate Program" of organized training specific to capacity building and fundraising should be developed for NSHT volunteers and Not for Profits to include Board Development and Budgeting and Planning with Federal Agency Partners.

Limitations and need for Additional Analysis

• The groups supporting National Scenic and Historic Trails are more diverse than originally estimated. In order to gain an understanding of the groups and their specific training needs, more targeted research is required.

- Some general conclusions were found; however, the data gathered from the survey was not compiled in a statistical program which could show the relational deductions from the responses (i.e. Volunteers primarily are least experienced in *x* activity and need to gain *x* proficiency level in that activity. The kind of training volunteers would be most likely to utilize is *x*).
- Outside market research expertise maybe needed to analyze the data, and new data may need to be gathered to produce a more focused assessment.

Federal Interagency Council on Trails Preliminary Next Steps

The Federal Interagency Council on Trails will take the next steps to develop oversight for the training program after reviewing the recommendations from this report. FICT is a group comprised of national trails leads for the Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration, National Park Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In discussions regarding funding opportunities, the FICT has explored some of the following ideas:

- Steering Committee. Instituting an interagency NSHT Training Advisory Board comprised of training leaders and/or coordinators to provide oversight for NSHT training, and guidance to the Federal Interagency Council on Trails regarding training needs, course development, funding, and course delivery. The Partnership for the National Trails System would ensure additional technical expertise and guidance to the Council in addition to this committee.
- Application of this Report. This report will be used to prioritize course development, select existing training courses that fulfill the competencies, and determine what further analysis or surveying is needed by the Council and Steering Committee.
- The Federal Interagency Council on Trails will consider developing or contracting an Interagency Strategy for NSHT Training based on report priorities and recommendations, competencies, various agency capabilities, existing training that fulfills priority competencies, funding scenarios, and partnership contributions to ensure systematic implementation.
- The Federal Interagency Council on Trails will coordinate with American Trails regarding
 the National Trails Training Partnership (NTTP) to ensure that training opportunities for
 NSHT volunteers, staff, members, line officers, and others have direct and proactive
 access to competencies, training, conferences, meetings, and other resources related to
 NSHTs on the website: www.trailtraining.net.

Report of the Training Needs Assessment and Analysis

Objectives, the Assessment, and Resulting Strategy

The purpose of conducting a needs assessment was to identify the most significant knowledge and skills gaps so a training strategy can effectively focus the appropriate resources, time, and effort toward solutions. The team had the following objectives:

- To determine whether any training is needed.
- To determine the areas in which training is needed.
- To determine the knowledge gaps to be bridged.
- To determine desired training outcomes.
- To provide a bas monitoring and evaluation.
- To determine which (if any) policies may need considered in curriculum development.
- To find efficiencies in design, development, funding, and application of training programs and events.
- To prepare all DOI agencies for changes in land use and management philosophy that may currently exist or in the future.

History and Methodology

In January of 2007, representatives of Federal and State agencies, and organizations (Trails Training Strategy Team) that are engaged in National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHT) management met in Phoenix, Arizona. They created a comprehensive task list, which was then focused to 76 tasks that were most critical to NSHT management (after a review by a 40-person peer group). These tasks were the basis of the survey that was conducted Aug-Oct 2007. The electronic survey asked the respondents to rate each task by:

- percent of time spent on each task,
- how critical the task is for a successful job performance, and
- current proficiency on the task.

In June 2008, a team (many of the original members) was convened to analyze data from the NSHT Needs Assessment, and concluded that the data resulted in some good general recommendations, even though it did not have as high a return rate as had been hoped from the volunteer population. A high response from the supervisory level was noted.

The 76 tasks were analyzed to determine the following:

- Existing training for each task
- Individual agency training need for each task
- Target audience for each task
- Policy need and/or and impact of each task
- Potential new course design (or redesign of existing formats) opportunities for distance learning.

About 200 people responded to the survey and the demographics of this group (experience, job title, etc.) are shown in Appendix A.

After reviewing the results, team was in agreement that there is a good amount of existing curriculum that could be used as it is through interagency course offerings, some that would need minor revisions to broaden the current single agency perspective, and some that do not exist but should.

Training Competencies Needed

The assessment identified a number of competencies where training is needed. They are outlined below:

Partnerships and Collaboration:

- Collaboration with private land owners within and outside the trail corridor.
- How to work with users, public, communities, trail organizations, agencies, or tribes
 with interest in trails.

Planning (Land Management and Trail Corridor):

- Management of trails for a variety of uses and visitor experiences while meeting trail objectives.
- How to analyze natural resources, cultural resources, or visitor needs to develop trail systems or project plans.
- How to work collaboratively with agencies or organizations to develop or amend trail plans.

Program Administration:

- Administration of trail agreements or contracts.
- How to write or manage grants and accounting records for projects.
- How to analyze proposed legislation that would affect trails and related lands.
- Assisting partners in developing proposals for cost share or other alternative funding techniques.
- How to research and/or use a variety of funding sources.
- Development of trails policy or implementation strategies.
- How to review development proposals for potential impacts on trails and trail corridors.
- Understanding or applying the National Trails System Act (NTSA) and related legislation,
 agency regulations, or policy to trails management.

Public Outreach and Education:

- Development of consistent interpretive strategies across local, State, or Federal boundaries.
- Marketing the trail according to its purpose and goals.

Resource Management and Protection:

- Conducting visual resource management assessments for proposed land use projects.
- How to inventory, monitor, or evaluate historic trails, cultural properties, artifacts, traditions, or heritage features.
- How to develop or communicate best management practices to protect trail resources.
- Integrating trail management and administration with other resource programs.

Visitor Use Management and Monitoring:

 Monitoring visitor or other land uses to determine impacts on natural, historic, or cultural resources.

Limitations of the Assessment

The advisory team agreed that the National Scenic and Historic Trails Training Needs
Assessment is limited in some respects to the amount of information it can provide in
developing a National Scenic and Historic Trails Training Strategy. The identified limitations are:

- The response rate was less than 20 percent.
- Volunteers are underrepresented in the needs assessment pool (may not have had access to PC or been in the office during time of the assessment).
- The assessment and analysis was done for a very diverse population of agency and organizational leaders.
- Respondents admittedly have a narrow set of knowledge about the NSHT since they spend less time serving those functions than other job responsibilities.
- NSHT are so large and often complex that they are administered by Federal agencies but often managed on the ground by others. This can cause an under-valuation of the competencies required.
- Policy gaps may affect training need perceptions.

National Scenic and Historic Trails Training Strategy

From the information that was collected in the NSHT Training Needs Assessment and the experience of the NSHT Team, the following strategy has been created. These recommendations will be forwarded to the Federal Interagency Council on Trails (FICT) to show the knowledge gaps of trail professionals and volunteers among government agencies and trail partners, and how these gaps can be bridged (through training development and non-training solutions (e.g., policy modifications, institutional strengthening, financial support, etc.)).

Centralized Trail Training Recommendations

The Advisory Team examined the possibility of using centralized training. Such an approach offers many benefits. By focusing on overarching needs outside of organizational boundaries, the NSHT can be strengthened as a whole. This would promote a more standardized, high-quality experience on all NSHT trails. It would also consolidate disciplines into a comprehensive program (similar to the competencies found in the NEPA, 'Planning,' and 'Leadership' programs). Subsequently, training and knowledge of NSHT functions would have more accreditation within DOI.

Cost effectiveness of a centralized program is also a compelling consideration. All agencies and groups need NSHT training; however, budget and workforce priorities would severely limit individual agencies ability to build and deliver their own training for NSHT. An administrative function set up to guide the NSHT issues for all DOI agencies would provide high quality training to all agencies regardless of size or training budgets.

While a centralized approach has many benefits, it also presents some potential issues. Centralizing coursework may also generalize material too much so it is not as beneficial. Setting up the centralized program would require a steering committee to coordinate it and determine funding. The Federal Transportation Program is up for reauthorization in 2009. There are proposals to eliminate funding for programs that support trails, and there are also proposals to increase funding for programs that support trails.

Overall, the group was very positive about developing a centralized approach. It would minimize differences in agency interpretations and build interagency cohesion and community in NSHT agencies and partners who support it.

Partnership and Collaboration Recommendations

The team determined the tasks that support Partnership and Collaboration are essential in the development of a National Trail Training Strategy. Although federal land management agencies, universities, and vendors offer many courses, workshops, and seminars, they do not address trail issues that are relevant to partnership and collaboration.

- Significant Knowledge Gaps: (needed by all agencies/groups and levels)
 - Work with users, public, communities, trail organizations, agencies, or tribes with interest in trails. (Entry level competencies needed)
 - Develop and maintain cooperative relationships with Federal, State, regional and local agencies, trail organizations or supporters. (Entry level needed)
 - Coordinate with other agencies in the administration and management of trails.
 (Expert level needed and no training currently exists for this competency)
 - Work with agency partners or organizations to address use conflicts on a local, regional, and national scale. (Expert level is needed; only mediation classes exist currently)
 - Collaboration with private land owners within and outside the trail corridors. In addition, continuing collaboration with trail user groups, local communities and nonprofit organizations is fundamental.
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery (for any revisions or newly developed classes)
 - o Instructor led primarily due to the need for strong communication and relationship building.
 - o Some form of distance learning could shorten the length of the face-to-face need.

Nonprofit Organization Development Recommendations

The recommendations for this cluster were very similar to Partnership and Collaboration cluster. The team identified many organizations that provide training on how to construct and manage the infrastructure of volunteer organizations; however, existing training opportunities are fragmented, and not specific to working with federal agencies. The recommendation for this cluster is that training needs to be developed specifically for nonprofit trail organizations.

- Significant Knowledge Gaps:
 - o Recruit or orient new members for the trail organization (entry level needed)

- Serve on the Board of Directors of a trail organization or as an agency lead or advisor to organizations. (Expert Level needed)
- Effectively participate in trail organizations meetings or agency meetings and events (No training currently exists; Entry Level needed).
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD Web-links)
 - o Instructor led if done by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in field.

Program Administration and Leadership Recommendations

The team acknowledged this cluster is very dependent upon agency policy. Little policy exists in any federal agency for NSHT. To facilitate training around this cluster of tasks would be very difficult without development or clarification of policy. In addition, this training would need to be agency specific or developed in a more interagency policy perspective. The team emphasized that many nonprofit organizations are often deficient in understanding the National Trails System Act and related legislation, agency regulations, or policy for trail management. There is currently training in a number of scattered places but it is mostly done in conference formats or in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) training and does not address specific impact on trails but rather general legislation. (Expert Level needed)

Significant Knowledge Gaps:

- Understand and\or apply NEPA, Historic Preservation Act, and related legislation, regulations, or policy to trail management. (Volunteers only need awareness, Federal employees need expert level)
- Comply with the National Trails System Act requirements for trail management plans, certification of sites, high potential sites, high potential segments, carrying capacity, and marking trails.
- Maintain a public relations program which consists of contacts with members of Congress; State and local government officials, administrators and professionals; and planning agencies, including regional planning development commissions, State parks, State departments of natural resources, State historical societies, university systems, and others.
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery

- o BLM's Knowledge Resource Center (KRC)
- Workshop\Seminar
- Use ongoing training opportunities (universities\vendors)

Public Outreach, Education, Marketing and Interpretation Recommendations

The team emphasized the need for a *unified* and *consistent* interpretive strategy across local, State, and Federal boundaries. Incorporating this cluster of tasks into the National Trail Training Strategy is essential to the success of national scenic, historic and recreation trails. The team emphasized that this outreach strategy must market the trail according to the purpose and goals.

- Significant Knowledge Gaps:
 - Develop consistent interpretive strategies across local, State, and Federal boundaries. (Entry Level needed)
 - Work with tourism interests to market the trail in harmony with interpretive or historic preservation goals.
 - Develop interpretation, education, or outreach as a management tool for national trails management.
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD) Web-links)
 - Instructor led. Use ongoing training opportunities (Fish and Wildlife Service, NAI (National Association for Interpretation, universities, vendors, etc...)

Planning (Land Management and Trail Corridor Planning) Recommendations

Develop a systematic process that would educate nonprofit organizations on how to engage in the public land use planning process at the county, State, and regional levels.

- Significant Knowledge Gaps:
 - Develop a trail protection plan for non-Federal segments. (no training exists now)
 (Journey Level needed)

- Develop historic contexts or resource studies for NSHTs. (Expert Level needed; No training exists.)
- Work collaboratively with agency or organizations to develop or amend trail plans.
 (Journey Level needed; Plans exist, but there is no training)
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD Web-links)
 - o Instructor led\Workshops\Seminars

Resource Management and Protection Recommendations

The team agreed that there isn't a major deficiency with regard to resource management and protection training. The challenge is to have land management agencies incorporate scenic and historic trails issues into the management plan. Another knowledge gap seems to be with the lack of inventory, monitoring and evaluating scenic and historic trails for cultural, artifacts and heritage features. Additionally, they suggested that there be a more integrated approach for interagency training with maximum group cohesion.

- Significant Knowledge Gaps:
 - Integrate trail management and administration with other resource programs.
 (Expert Level needed)
 - Inventory, monitor, or evaluate scenic and historic trails, cultural properties, artifacts, traditions, or heritage features. (Journey Level needed)
 - Acquire land or easements for trail protection, collaborating with other agencies or organizations. (Journey Level needed)
 - Develop or communicate best management practices to protect trail resources. (No training exists for this now; Journey Level needed)
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - o Instructor led
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD Web-links)
 - Workshops\Seminars

Tread and Facility Design, Construction, and Maintenance Recommendations

More so than any other cluster, current training for this cluster is widely available. Therefore, this cluster generated little discussion among team members.

- Knowledge Gaps Identified in the NSHT Training Needs Assessment :
 - Use or apply GIS or other mapping technology to trail work (Training exists but needs to be marketed more extensively across agencies. Entry Level competency is needed)
 - Review proposed features and structures for compatibility and potential impact on mission specific programs
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - o Instructor led
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD Web-links)

Visitor Use Management Recommendations

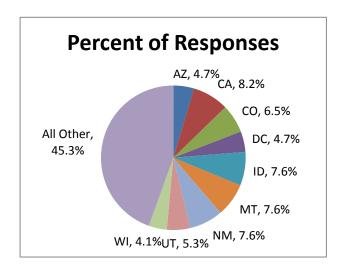
The needs assessment showed respondents spent less time on this set of skills, but since it has high visibility to the public and the potential for legal issues if mismanaged, it is important these Visitor Use Management is accurately and actively performed. The team agreed that recreation visitor services training is available from many sources (i.e. BLM Trails 101) and could be customized for NSHT.

- Knowledge Gaps Identified in the NSHT Training Needs Assessment :
 - Develop coordinated search, rescue, or public safety plans with local law enforcement agencies. (Counties usually have this kind of training and we could potentially tap into it. Entry Level needed)
 - Develop or distribute information on trail conditions, permit requirements, or trip planning. (Entry Level needed; tie to Policies, web pages, manuals, etc.)
- Suggested Method of Training Delivery
 - Instructor led
 - Some form of distance learning (i.e. video\DVD Web-links) especially the Develop and Distribute Information task

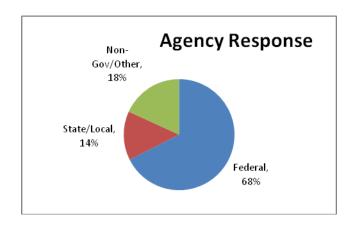
Appendix A

Characteristics of Respondents and their Responsibilities

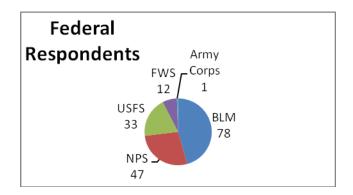
Following is an overview of the characteristics of respondents. Percentages shown are relative to the entire group of 232 respondents.



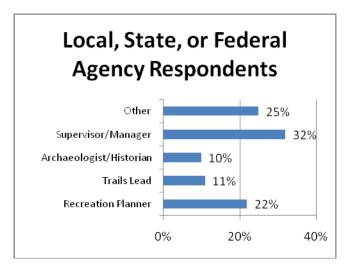
• **Response by State:** Majority of the respondents represented in the needs assessment are from western States: California representing 8.2 percent; and Idaho, Montana, New Mexico each representing 7.6 percent. [



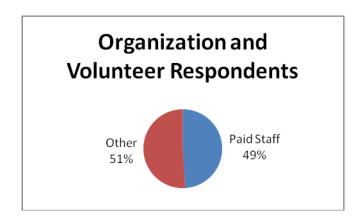
• **Agency Response:** Over 68 percent work for Federal agencies and 14 percent for State agencies.



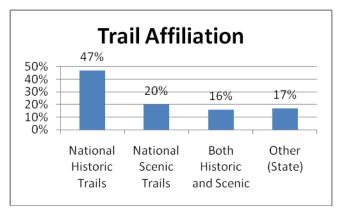
 Response by Federal Agency: Top groups responding are Bureau of Land Management with 31 percent, National Park Service with 19 percent and State agencies with 14 percent of the potential respondents participating.



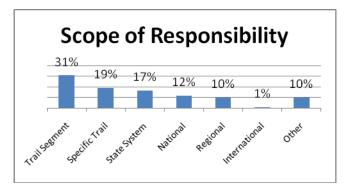
 Response by Job Position among Local, State, or Federal Agency Response: For agency respondents, 32 percent are supervisors or managers and 22 percent are recreation planners.



• **Response Rate by Organization:** For organization or volunteer respondents, 49 percent are paid staff.



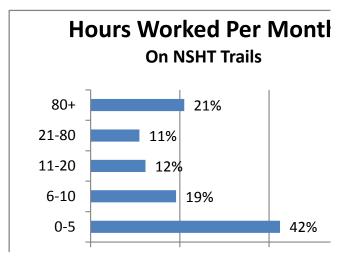
• Response Rate by Trail Affiliation: Specific trail category: 47 percent administer National Historic Trails, 20 percent administer National Scenic Trails; 16 percent administer both. Over 17 percent selected the "other" categories which probably represent State trails leaders.



 Response Rate by Responsibility: Scope of responsibility: 31 percent are responsible for a specific trail segment, 19 percent for a specific trail, 17 percent for State system, 12 percent for national.



• Response Rate by Years of Experience: Years worked on NSHT trails: 30 percent have worked 2-5 years, 21 percent have worked 6-10 years, and 22 percent have worked 16 or more years.



• Response Rate by Hours Worked Per Month: Average hours each month worked on NSHT tasks was fairly low, with 42 percent working 5 hours or less each month, and 19 percent for 6-10 hours.

Attendees - Scenic and Historic Trails Needs Assessment Meeting

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