

DRAFT

Refuge Roads Program Trails Program Overview Project Procedures, Selection Criteria, and Priorities

The passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFTEA-LU) authorized the expenditure of up to 5% of the available Refuge Roads Program funds for the maintenance and improvement of existing recreational trails.

Funds that are made available are subject to the standard FHWA rules. Obligation and contract authority expire each fiscal year on September 30. During August redistribution, obligation authority that will not be used by FWS must be returned to FHWA.

Projects funded under the Refuge Roads Program are subject to legal limitations. The trails must:

- 1) Provide access to or within a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System and,
- 2) Title and maintenance responsibility are vested in the United States Government.

Similarly to the Refuge Roads Program, the funding of projects is constrained by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance document for refuge trails. That document provides general guidance as to what must be done, what can be done, and what cannot be done with the funds. As the trails funding comes from the Refuge Roads Program, construction of new trails is not an eligible activity.

It is estimated that approximately \$1.1 to \$1.2 million could be made available for trails related funding each FY from 2005 through 2009. The exact funding will vary from year-to-year due to fluctuations in obligation limitation imposed on the FHWA by Congress.

Unlike the roads, bridges, and parking lot portion of the Refuge Roads Program, the trails funding will not be allocated by formula to the Regions. For the cycle of funding eligible for trails funding under SAFETEA-LU, projects will be funded individually from the Washington Office using guidelines and criteria describe below.

The reasons for this are

- 1) There is not enough money to allocate to each region to have a significant impact on a regional trail backlog.
- 2) There are no reliable measures commensurate to the ones being used to allocate the roads portion of the RRP: road miles, parking lot square footage, public use, and road condition.

As the trails program matures, and if the RRP gets significant increases in the next reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act in 2009, this may change.

DRAFT

A significant majority of the trails money will be directed to projects on the ground, however some program support funds will be held back in the WO. These supports are described below.

Potential projects for the five year trail plan were selected from the Deferred Maintenance Five Year Plan by doing a search for projects involving trails, boardwalks, sidewalks, and pedestrian bridges. These projects were then rated using a matrix using the criteria below.

- 1) documented safety issues and/or documented resource impacts,
- 2) partnerships (byways, enhancements, or trails) involved with the trail,
- 3) designation status of the trail (is it a national, State, or regionally designated trail),
- 4) current use of trails at the field station (percent of visitors using trails),
- 5) annual refuge visitation level,
- 6) completeness and clarity of the project proposal,
- 7) inclusion of the project in the existing five-year regional deferred maintenance plan,
- 8) the current condition rating of the trail asset(s) based on the FCI [define].

A complete matrix of the Trail Project Grading Criteria is included as an appendix to the FHWA Guidance.

A full five year plan of trails projects was selected for this cycle of Refuge Roads Program Trails funding.

Funds for selected projects will be added to the regions' RRP program to be managed as part of the regional RRP. It is anticipated most projects will be done by the Service and not by the FLHD because of their relatively small size. The WO MMS coordinator will change the funding source of the projects in the five year trails plan from Resource Management to Refuge Roads. The RRP Coordinator will move the selected projects into the Regions' Five Year Plan. Regions with project funded from the RRP Trails funds will be able to fill in behind these projects with projects of any type they wish. Replacement projects do not need to be for visitor services or even for trails.

Trail projects in the DM Five Year Plan that are not selected for RRP Trails Funding will remain in the DM Five Year Plan and will be funded with Resource Management dollars as originally programmed.

Any funding not allocated to trails projects in a given fiscal year will be returned to the general refuge roads funding and allocated back to the regions as part of the following year's refuge roads allocation.

The funding for the Trails, Byways, Transportation Enhancements, and Alternative Transportation Coordinator's position will be paid from the general amount held back for the overall WO support for the RRP, not from RRPTrails funds.

DRAFT

In the initial two years of the program, funding will be set aside to accomplish a national inventory of recreation trails using the interagency trail data standards. The inventory will include condition assessments and GPS data collection. Information gathered during the inventory and condition assessment will be used in the interagency trails white papers being developed for the 2009 transportation bill reauthorization. The initial cycle is anticipated to cost \$1,000,000 over FY 06 and 07, paid out of WO RRP administrative funds.

The FWS participates in several national level trails councils and programs. Funds will be used to support these efforts commensurate with number of trails and mileage as compared to the other Federal Land Management Agency partners' trail assets and responsibilities. Approximately 10% or up to \$120,000 of the total funds eligible for trails in the RRP will be used to support training, conference attendance, and partnership activities. If these funds are not obligated by the end of any fiscal year, they will be used to fund trail projects or returned to the general refuge roads funding and allocated to the regions.

Funds will be set aside to support regional and field staff to attend trail related training and conferences. Eligible training would include the Trails Management Course held twice annually, the Universal Trails Accessibility Process trainings. Other eligible training courses can be found at the National Trails Training Partnership website: Eligible conferences would include the National Trails Symposium, organized by American Trails; TrailLink, the Rails to Trails/Greenways conference; National Scenic and Historic Trails conferences, organized by the Partnership for the National Trails System; and others found on the National Trails Training Partnership website (www.NTTP.net).

Funding will also be set aside to support American Trails for the administration of the National Recreation Trails Program, National Trails Training Partnership, and the biennial National Trails Symposium; Partnership for the National Trails System; the Public Health and Recreation MOU group; and the American Hiking Society to support National Trails Day. These are entities that currently have ongoing agreements with other agencies involved in trails management and administration. FWS's financial commitment to these groups will be commensurate with amount of trails it has relative to the other Federal Land Management Agencies.

Additional Trail Funding Resources

Additional trail funding resources are available to FWS units through the Recreational Trails Program (www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails) and through Transportation Enhancement Activities (www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te):

- The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funds to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses. Each State administers its own program, usually through a State resource or park agency. Each State develops its own procedures to

DRAFT

solicit and select projects for funding. [See the State contact list](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm) at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails/rtpstate.htm.

- Transportation Enhancement (TE) Activities offer communities the opportunity to expand transportation choices. Activities such as safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities (including trails), scenic routes, beautification, and other investments increase opportunities for recreation, accessibility, and safety for everyone beyond traditional highway programs. Each State administers its own program through the State Department of Transportation. Each State develops its own procedures to solicit and select projects for funding. [See the State contact list](http://www.enhancements.org/statecontacts_TE.asp) at www.enhancements.org/statecontacts_TE.asp.