TRAIL SURVEYOR HANDBOOK

PREPARED FOR THE

SISKIYOU TRAIL FINDER PROGRAM

SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN CLUB
Preface
Thank you for volunteering your time and effort for this important public service. It is the endless passion of our members and the tireless devotion to having boots on the ground by our volunteers that keeps the backcountry trails of Southern Oregon and Northern California alive.

GUIDANCE FOR TRAIL SURVEYORS
The purpose of this document is to prepare Siskiyou Mountain Club Volunteers to report trail conditions as Trail Surveyors. As trail users, our Trail Surveyors will obtain a critical connection between SMC’s trail network and the greater community of trail users that we serve. This publication is intended to cover the basic information necessary for first-time, and experienced trail navigators to observe, document, and report succinct and useful trail conditions reports. With clear comprehension of Tread, Brush, Logs, and Trail Signs our Trail Surveyors will return indispensable information that will update our Trail Finder program, and guide our Field Staff in placing Trail Crews where there is work to be done.

First Things First--All Things Trails--Introduction
When it comes to producing accurate and useful Trail Condition Reports it is important to posit your observations with the appropriate discretion for the trail itself. Many of the trails in our footprint are located in congressionally designated Wilderness Areas that are vast, rugged, and often difficult to reach. These conditions lend to trail characteristics that are distinguishable from trails networks in Urban Parks, State Parks, and National Parks.

Conventionally, trails are classified on a spectrum from minimally developed, to moderately developed, developed, highly developed, and fully developed. Highly developed and fully developed trails are typified by substantial trail development and grandeur (i.e. lodges, asphalt, etc.).

You won’t find a highly developed trail in our footprint. We specialize in primitive wilderness trails and routes that are minimally developed, moderately developed, and sometimes developed. Some trail sections in our footprint may be rough and require some route finding, and obstacles are not uncommon. Other trail sections may be continuous, obvious, and clear of obstacles. But each trail is unique, and ought to be considered so. Do keep in mind, however, it is not in the duties of the Trail Scouts to discern the classification of the trail, but is instead to inform other runners, hikers, backpackers, and users—as well as our trail crews—to actual trail conditions as they exist.

Trail Signs
Often times the first thing that greets you at a well kept trailhead is a Trailhead Sign. Our Field Staff is actively collecting information regarding Trailhead Signs, as well as Junction Signs for trails in our footprint. In addition to weathering the elements, Trailhead Signs are subject to vandalism and theft. We would like to know if a Trailhead Sign is present when you arrive...
at a trailhead, if it is dilapidated please make note. Along the trail, Junction Signs are utilized to mark the intersection of different routes. Ordinarily Junction Signs are fixed to trees, or signposts in treeless areas. They should be clearly legible. However, they are subject to extreme weather, wildfire, and even theft. **We ask our Trail Scouts to document missing or dilapidated Junction Signs with the Trail Names, and Trail Numbers of intersecting routes, this will help our Field Staff tremendously.**

![Junction Signs](image)

Well kept Junction Signs mark critical junctions of intersecting primitive trails.

**Tread**

The Tread, also referred to as the bench, is the actual surface over which you travel and where your feet hit the ground. In many ways, Tread shapes your experience on the trail. But well constructed Tread can be quickly undone by the violent forces of erosion, the unending growth of brush, and the obstruction of the trail by logs. It’s very important for our Trail Surveyors to have a good understanding of Tread and to record photos accompanied by detailed notes of major obstacles like flooded sections of trail, and landslides. **By documenting the Trail Name, Trail Number, approximate location and length of major obstructions to the Tread, like landslides, you will help our Trail Crews more efficiently address the problem.** If you feel there is a particular safety hazard associated with the tread, please include a photo accompanied by a brief description of the situation in your trail report.

Tread in **Excellent to Good** condition along primitive trails is typically single lane, 18 inches wide, continuous, and obvious. Tread has very few to no drainage problems because they feature a slight angle (5%) at the outside edge of the trail that allows for water to properly drain from the Tread, commonly referred to as Outslope. Tread may become narrow, and rough at times but this shouldn’t hinder your ability to run, hike or otherwise experience the trail. You should feel comfortable in the center of the Tread, without feeling like you are gravitating to the outside edge of the trail. Stock animals wouldn’t have a problem on this trail.
Tread in **Fair condition** may be less discernible, but still navigable with very little or no route finding required. You’re confident in your ability to follow the trail without a map or GPS. Sections of the Tread are narrow or rough and the outslope is causing your ankles to roll gently. Occasionally, but not frequently, you are most comfortable running or walking at to the outermost edge of the trail. Your ability to run, hike, or travel with stock animals is slowed as more than a few sections of Tread make travel uncomfortable.

**Poor** Tread may be intermittent, or indiscernible from animal trails. You’re not confident that you are on the trail without GPS. The outslope may be so extreme it rolls your ankles as you run or hike. There are significant drainage problems causing water to run down the trail, or to flood sections of trail. The Tread has hindered your ability to run, hike or move stock animals along the trail. Poorly constructed Tread is frequently moving you from the center of the Tread to the outside of the outermost edge of the Tread.

The Tread was **Unnavigable**. There were severe obstacles that prevented you from running or hiking. The Tread was completely indistinguishable in its present condition—you became lost, or encountered a landslide that obstructed your progress. Only remnants of the old trail remain. GPS is a must.

---

**Brush**

Over the course of just a few years, woody and non-woody herbaceous plants can encroach upon Trail Corridors, and consume them entirely. It is not uncommon for primitive trails to have at least a small amount of encroachment from brush into the Trail Corridor. However, prolonged and severe encroachment of brush into the Trail Corridor is a major threat to our trail network. Just keep in mind brush in the Trail Corridor is relative. In other words, you may think it is bad where you are now, only to find it much worse 100 yards ahead. **But it’s not all bad.**

Our Trail Crews are primarily concerned with keeping woody vegetation—trees and shrubs—clear of the Trail Corridor and more seldom concerned with clearing grasses and
herbaceous plants— wildflowers, and ferns. However, for example, a thick grove of ferns may become a nuisance if it hides the center of the Tread causing runners, hikers, and pack stock to travel along the outside edge of the tread, this would instigate removal. By documenting the Trail Name, Trail Number, approximate location and length of major obstructions to the Trail Corridor we can more effectively plan for our Trail Crews to reestablish the Trail Corridor.

A Trail Corridor in Excellent to Good condition is generally clear of obstacles and is free of major obstacles. Vegetation is cleared outside of the trailway. You are able to run, hike, and move pack stock without impediment from vegetation. Any vegetation that is making contact with you while on the Tread is below the knees. Standing in the center of the Tread you can extend your arms over your head and not contact vegetation above you. On level ground with your feet centered in the Tread, and your arms extended outward you do not contact vegetation on the side of the trail. Standing on a trail over sloped ground, with your feet centered in the Tread, and your uphill arm fully extended into the slope your fingertips do not make contact with trailside vegetation. If you are saddled on a horse you are infrequently contacting branches.

A Trail Corridor in Fair condition has many obstacles, and a few substantial blockages. Riparian areas are especially bad. You had to slow your pace to a walk. You were able to get through with a large pack on. Your ability to run, hike, or move stock was slowed but still possible. The brush is waist high along the trailway, and you’re having to move brush with your hands in front of you. It’s annoying but not going to stop you. The trail is still very navigable.

A Trail Corridor in Poor condition has many substantial obstacles. Vegetation has grown overhead. There are generally only narrow passages between the vegetation, rocks and logs. Riparian vegetation are major blockages. You’re no longer running, or hiking, you’re swimming through a sea of brush. Stock users turned around. The Tread is hidden and the route is hard to identify. You get to your destination bruised and bloodied but your map and GPS skills are sharp as ever.

Unnavigable Trail Corridor: The trail is unnavigable. Are we sure there’s a trail here? No user would consider the trail to exist in this state. Reaching the destination was out of the question.
Logs
Downed logs can create major obstacles for all trail users and we expect winter storms to produce blowdown across the entirety of our trail footprint each year. Especially in areas that have been impacted by wildfire. For this reason early season scouting—scouting done throughout the winter (where accessible) and early spring is hugely important for our Field Staff to get our Trail Crews into the worst affected areas during the spring and summer. Most often logs will fall separate from one another. Sometimes, however, falling logs will pile on top of one another in what we refer to as a jackstraw. Jackstraws can be very precarious, a well captured photo and written description will go a long way in preparing our crew for what lies ahead of them. Rather than prescribing a rating to the trail we ask that our Trail Surveyors hold a count of each log passed, and document an approximation of their size. If you feel there is a particular safety hazard associated you believe to be associated with a downed log, or a jackstraw, please include a photo accompanied by a brief description of the situation in your trail report. Very large logs, and logs suspended over the trail (where you can walk underneath) present unique challenges for our crews, please note these logs in your report.

There were _____ (# of logs) down along Trail_____ No. ______

A generalization based on the size of logs on the ground will suffice:

- ≤ 6 inches in diameter
- 6-36. inches in diameter
- ≥ 3 feet in diameter
- If greater than 5 feet in diameter you can bet we want to hear about it.
If Trails have not been surveyed for over **18 months** we change the line to dots showing us and the public on the map that the trail needs to be surveyed.

**Trail ratings:**

**Excellent to Good:** Trail conditions are as good as pristine and as bad as the following definition: Some small issues, light brush up to knee high, some logs, less than 10 per mile, tread mostly good, some areas of thin tread, ruts, or outsloped trail.

**Fair:** A number of issues. Intermittent brush up to waist high, having to move brush with your hands on occasion to pass through, logs down some large in size, 10-50 per mile. Trail can still be found pretty easily with only occasional stopping to find the route. Tread has moderate sections of thin, outslopped or rutted condition.

**Poor** Many issues. Significant brush covering more than 50% of the trails length. Over head height, closing over the trail often, having to use hands often to push through brush, likely that users will come out of the trail bloody, many logs, 50-300 per mile, can still find the trail but there will be numerous stops to search for it. Tread is often deteriorated, thin to non existent, serve ruts. Trails of this rating would be classified unrunnable and unusable by stock users. Better characterized as bushwhacking on an established route.

**Unnavigable** Unable to find trail more often than not. Users would need GPS and a good pair of eyes to often find remnants of the old trail. No users would consider the trail to exist in this state. Will be marked by XXXXX pattern on the live Cal Topo Map.