



## VOLUNTEER ADOPTER PROGRAM HANDBOOK

Adopters should perform all field work in a manner that does not damage the natural resources, aesthetics or recreational experience of hikers. Your efforts as a trail adopter or shelter/site adopter will enhance the working partnership between the GMC and its local sections, the Green Mountain National Forest, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Appalachian Trail Conference, and private landowners.

Perspective adopters are required to apply to the GMC as a volunteer. After receipt of an application and upon being assigned a site, all adopters are asked to sign an initial agreement with the GMC detailing adopter responsibilities. The agreement carries forward into future years, but can be terminated by the adopter at any time.

Each year the GMC contacts adopters to confirm their participation in the Volunteer Adopter Program for another season. If GMC receives no reports during a full season from any adopter and/or is unsuccessful in contacting the adopter to confirm their participation in the Volunteer Adopter Program that adopter's section, shelter, or site will be considered 'orphaned' and another volunteer will be asked to fulfill adoption duties for that area.

### TRAIL ADOPTER EXPECTATIONS

The Green Mountain Club (GMC) expects volunteers to maintain their segment of adopted trail so that it meets the criteria in the Long Trail System Construction and Maintenance Standards. These standards state: "although primitive footpaths, the Long Trail and its side trails should be cleared sufficiently to allow passage during summer and fall without undue difficulty or confusion while maintaining a natural appearing trailway."

The GMC and its management partners maintain the Long Trail System in a manner which strives to preserve its primitive character. This does not mean that trails are unimproved, but that tread way improvements are subtle, and enhance, rather than detract, from a backcountry setting. The goal is to preserve the quality of this experience, while providing for public safety, soil and vegetation protection, and a minimum level of hiker amenity.

Trail adopter duties include:

1. Perform basic trail maintenance which includes:
  - a. Cleaning out leaves and debris in drainage structures;
  - b. Keeping the trail clear of blowdowns, brush, and annual vegetation;
  - c. Maintaining well-defined paint blazes;
  - d. Blocking in unofficial trails and campsites with brush;
  - e. Making an assessment of the condition of the trail and listing problems that need attention;
  - f. Reporting on signs that are missing, inaccurate, or damaged.
2. Perform a walk-through of my assigned stretch of trail in the spring, summer, and fall of each year and perform additional work outings as necessary.
3. Submit trail reports following each visit.
4. Report any major trail problems to the GMC field Programs office.

## SHELTER & OVERNIGHT SITE & ADOPTER EXPECTATIONS

The GMC expects volunteers to inspect their adopted site and/or shelter and make improvements following the guidelines established by the GMC. You will need to visit the shelter in the spring, summer and fall, with additional visits if the shelter receives heavy use or is a frequent destination in the winter.

Shelter adopter duties include:

1. Perform basic site maintenance which includes:
  - a. Cleaning and completing minor maintenance on the shelter/tent platforms, bunks, doors, windows, and outhouse;
  - b. Checking the foundation and sill logs for problems;
  - c. Cleaning and maintaining the site's water supply and wash pit;
  - d. Inspecting the outhouse or composter;
  - e. Keeping paths around the site clear of vegetation;
  - f. Making an assessment of the condition of the structures and listing problems that need attention;
  - g. Maintaining registers and log books. Old registers and log books are to be passed on to the GMC office so that they may be properly archived.
  - h. Reporting on signs that are missing, inaccurate, or damaged.
2. Perform a spring, summer, and fall inspection with additional visits if the site receives heavy use.
3. Submit inspection reports following each visit.
4. Report any major structure or trail problems to the GMC Field Programs office.

## WORK SCHEDULE

Volunteers can do maintenance work on their own schedule and at their own pace. GMC does expect adopters to visit their trail or shelter three times (minimum) each year - spring, summer, and fall - so please plan accordingly.

Spring Visit: (Before Memorial Day weekend!)

- Conduct a spring walk-through and/or inspection;
- Clean waterbars and clear blowdowns;
- Check shelters and associated structures, water sources, etc.;
- Clean and prepare trail/site for hiking season;
- Report issues to GMC.

Mid-Summer Visit:

- Conduct a general walk-through and/or inspection;
- Clean waterbars and blowdowns if necessary;
- Check shelters and associated structures, water sources, etc.;
- Keep up with general maintenance and seasonal/use growth issues;
- Report issues to GMC.

Fall Visit: (Ideally after leaves fall and before the first snow.)

- Conduct a general walk-through and/or inspection;
- Clean waterbars and clear blowdowns;
- Check shelters and associated structures, water sources, etc.;
- Clean and prepare trail/site for winter season;
- Report issues to GMC.

## ADOPTER REPORTS

Reporting on the work that you have completed is as important as doing maintenance work. Your reports give GMC Field Staff and other volunteers valuable knowledge about trail & shelter conditions. The information volunteers provide also helps track volunteer efforts and is essential to secure funding for future seasons and projects!

Filling in a simple form is all that is necessary – please see sample paper reports. At the start of each season volunteers receive blank reporting forms. GMC also has an online reporting system incorporated into our website [www.greenmountainclub.org](http://www.greenmountainclub.org). Instructions for how to find these forms and submit them can be found at the end of this packet.

## TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Volunteers are expected to supply the common basic tools like clippers, a small bow saw, shovel, paint brushes and paint if you become a trail adopter; or saw, hammer, screwdriver, pliers, weed whacker, and broom if you become a shelter adopter. If you do not have the tools it is possible to borrow some from the GMC for short-term use.

## VOLUNTEER ADOPTER ASSIGNMENTS

Adopter assignments are made on a first come, first served basis. Choose a particular trail, section of trail, or shelter from the enclosed list. Please select additional possible sites when applying as some may be adopted when your materials are received.

## INVOLVING OTHERS

Yes! Please involve other willing volunteers. Many hands make light work. The GMC asks one person or contact to be the assigned adopter and take responsibility for seeing that work is done and that reports are filed. This contact will also receive any adopter program mailings and communication from the Green Mountain Club. Please be sure to report the names of all volunteers who work with you on your work report.

## VOLUNTEER ADOPTER BENEFITS

Please remember that adopting a section of trail or overnight site is a voluntary opportunity and the work you do is extremely important! Green Mountain Club adopters can look forward to the following benefits:

- GMC Volunteer T-shirt. (Help us spread the word that the Green Mountain Club maintains the Long Trail System as a public resource. Volunteers are our best PR!)
- Space at GMC shelters and campsites where a user fee is charged is free (if space is available) to volunteers on work trips.
- Discounts on selected workshops, courses, and trainings through the GMC Education Program.
- Reasonable out of pocket expenses while giving voluntary services, such as travel, and the cost of repairs to equipment and tools used in such pursuits may be tax deductible.
- Satisfaction and enjoyment of being a volunteer on one of the nation's finest natural and recreational resources, the Long Trail System!

## TRAINING, INSTRUCTION, AND SUPPORT

Once your sign up sheet is returned to the GMC you will receive an adopter agreement along with the GMC Trail and Shelter Maintenance Manual which explains many adopter tasks in more detail. Other excellent resources are available through the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Several of these can be viewed or printed in pdf format from [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org) for free. Other publications are available to AT trail maintainers at a reduced cost. (GMC also has these materials to reference in our Waterbury Center office and for sale at reduced rates to Long Trail System adopters.)

The GMC also offers trail and shelter maintenance workshops through our Education Programs. Adopters are sometimes eligible for reduced class or workshop fees. In addition, participating in local section outings/work days or signing up for a week on the Volunteer Long Trail Patrol are great opportunities for additional training and experience.

Many portions of the Long Trail System also receive loving care from Section Trail & Shelter Chairs and Regional Trail Coordinators. These contacts are provided with your introductory information and they are volunteers like you. They expect to help mentor and answer questions that adopters have. As time permits these volunteers may also be available to help you become familiar with your site, assist with issues, or help provide additional people power for larger projects.

GMC's Field Program staff are always a resource to volunteer adopters. Please contact us at any time with questions, concerns, or suggestions! During the hiking season our offices can become very busy so please be patient with us. You are always welcome to leave multiple messages or send additional email, etc. to remind us that you are waiting for an answer or to let us know that your need is urgent.

## SAFETY

Trail maintenance can be challenging and rewarding work. It's crucial that this work be done safely too. We'd like to get folks to do it again! And it's important that our agency partners, the U.S. Forest Service and Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation know we're being safe out there.

First, consider the work to be done and the goals of the day. Always carry enough food, water, and extra clothing. Take the tools necessary to get the job done and ensure that people have the proper training and safety equipment if chainsaws or crosscut saws are being used. Maintenance groups should conduct a "tailgate" safety talk before starting work.

In order to minimize the risk of injury and increase your safety consciousness, here are some things to consider:

1. Hazard trees - Always be aware of what is overhead. Our agency partners are actively involved in removing hazard trees where hikers congregate, such as campsites and trail junctions. These hazards, commonly referred to as "widow-makers" from an earlier era, can be whole trees or loose branches hanging overhead by the natural equivalent of a thread. Even a small branch dropping from a great height is cause for serious concern. Take the time to look up before doing work, even with the most benign trail jobs. Don't work under a widow-maker. Remember, we want you to continue maintaining trails for many years.

2. Blowdowns – Trail maintainers should always anticipate how a tree will shift when you cut it to clear it off the trail; talk about it with a partner when possible to sort out different opinions and see all angles. If you have any doubt about the safety of cutting a blowdown, don't hesitate to walk away and let GMC know you need help. One of the most important parts of trail maintainer safety is knowing when to walk away. Better to not risk injury or tool breakage. Consider wearing a hard hat and even safety glasses to ward off stray branches and unexpected results. Branches are also a potential puncture source, and can poke you in the eye.

3. Fatigue - Simply put, don't work tired. Obvious things get missed when you're fatigued, like footing. It's easy to bump into companions or complete strangers while carrying a bucket of paint, an event that could wreak havoc on your wardrobe. And spilling blazing paint isn't exactly Leave No Trace.

4. Communicate with fellow workers. Always let people around you know what you're doing. Be aware of how your work can affect others, whether you're rolling rocks, cutting trees, or swinging tools. Maintain a safe distance, but don't assume distance alone can prevent accidents. Let people know what you are doing. You should wear a hard hat when swinging tools like axes or pick mattocks or wielding rock bars, and you should consider wearing a hard hat when you're near folks using heavy tools to protect against unexpected consequences.

5. Minimize abrasions. Long pants, long-sleeve shirts, and especially work gloves will limit your exposure to rough surfaces like rocks, tree bark, and tool handles. Work gloves will protect your fingers from pinching and your hands from blisters. Always wear sturdy hiking boots when performing trail maintenance.

6. The Weather. Know your limits. Don't overdo on hot days or cold rainy days. Footing can be compromised by wet weather. Tool handles get slippery. Fatigue and dehydration are accentuated when the thermometer pushes beyond 90F. Blackflies and mosquitoes always seem more numerous (and bigger) in hot weather. Try to arrange trailwork on nice days, especially when bringing friends along.

## WILDERNESS

### Wilderness Trail Maintenance

The Long Trail and Appalachian Trail in Vermont passes through Wilderness Management Areas in the Green Mountain National Forest:

Glastenbury Wilderness

Lye Brook Wilderness

Peru Peak Wilderness

Big Branch Wilderness

Joseph Battell Wilderness

Breadloaf Wilderness

One of GMC's promotions of the Long Trail is, "A footpath through the wilderness." While some of the primitive values cherished in wilderness can grate on trail maintainers, designated wilderness areas provide the best protection for the trail experience in this age of competing uses and development sprawl.

For trail maintainers in Wilderness, there are three guidelines to adhere to:

1. Use the minimum tool needed to do the job (we generally already are);
2. Don't use motorized equipment (no chainsaws, no weedwhackers, no power drills, etc.) or mechanized equipment (no wheelbarrows, no bicycles, etc.);
3. Retain the primitive aspects of the trail
  - Minimize human intrusion by not clipping brush as much; keep the trail corridor just wide enough for a hiker with a large pack when clearing vegetation (24 inches wide by 7 feet high)
  - Don't cut blowdowns that can be stepped over or ducked under by someone with a backpack
  - Only blaze where you might wander off the trail or to reassure hikers; no more than a single blaze should be visible along the trail from any one point
  - Minimize signage; directional signs in Wilderness do not have mileage to enhance the opportunity for self reliance and adventure
  - Introduce improvements (water bars, steps, and route adjustments) only when there is actual damage and only after seeking guidance from field staff who will check in with Forest Service Wilderness managers.
  - When in doubt, check with GMC field staff.

## SIGNS

Trail signs are necessary to provide hikers with a clear indication of the trail route and highlight trail junctions, overnight facilities, and points of interest. In addition, signs convey information important for safe and proper use of the area. And they represent the land manager and the trail maintaining organization, and should be of quality construction, with neat lettering and attractive composition.

While signs are important for the enjoyment of hikers and effective trail management, they should not detract from the primitive nature of the Long Trail System. Sign pollution is a potential problem at trailheads, shelters, and major trail junctions.

There are three kinds of signs:

### 1. Directional Signs

Directional signs are constructed of wood and list direction, destinations, and distances along the trail. They are posted at trailheads, trail junctions, and overnight facilities. Directional signs should indicate the name of the trail (e.g., Long/Appalachian Trail, Green Mountain Trail, etc.) and no more than two points along the trail in either direction. On the LT or AT, the direction (north or south) also should be included. The points listed can be summits, road crossings or other features. At shelters and tenting areas, directional signs should list the next overnight facility in each direction. Overnight facilities should not be listed on directional signs at trailheads or road crossings. Directional signs along the Long/Appalachian Trail will reference both trails as Long/Appalachian Trail or LT/AT.

Generally directional signs are made by the land managing agency, however some signs are made by volunteers to GMC specifications. Volunteers' sign proposals should be reviewed by GMC staff prior to construction. GMC staff will work with agency partners to ensure quality sign coverage from district to district.



## 2. Identification Signs

Identification signs are constructed of wood and mark points of interest along the trail, including summits, natural features, water supplies, vistas, etc. They may be posted at the feature itself (e.g., on a summit) or they may indicate a short spur trail leading to a feature such as a vista. Identification signs can be quite small and contain a single word (e.g., vista), or at most a few lines of text.

## 3. Informational Signs

Informational signs, which are printed on durable materials, convey stewardship information that helps hikers protect Long Trail System resources, safety messages, and local information. These signs are posted at trailheads and overnight facilities. They are developed by the GMC and its management partners and will be provided to maintainers by the GMC. Agency partners may have specialized informational signs for posting (e.g., water not tested). The GMC will inform maintainers of any such signing requirements. Informational signs are posted on trailhead bulletin boards, signboards, or inside of shelters. When a single informational sign is used at a trailhead, it should be mounted on a back board. The number of informational signs should be limited so that hikers are not subjected to information overload. Overnight facilities should have a site map, which is an informal type of informational sign that may be developed by the maintainer. The map should clearly show the location of all features associated with the facility: shelter, tent platforms or tent sites, privy, water supply, wash pit, etc. The map should be mounted inside the shelter or at an entry location at a tenting area. At trailheads informational signs should be posted on a bulletin board, if available.

Sign placement should follow the guidelines in the latest edition of the ATC's *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*.

Signs should be mounted on posts when possible to avoid damaging trees. In areas where a post cannot be used (e.g., on ledge), signs should be mounted on a stand constructed of pressure-treated wood and weighted down with rocks.

The minimum signage at a trailhead or road crossing will be a directional sign and an informational (stewardship) sign attached to a signboard. At overnight facilities, the minimum signage will be a directional sign, stewardship sign, and site map.

Signs on public land must be approved by the agency partner prior to installation.

Additionally there are wilderness rules:

1. No distances on directional signs
2. No identification signs
3. Preferably no finish on the wooden signs at all
4. Minimize signs wherever possible

### Wooden Sign Specifications

Wooden signs will be made of material at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick. Two-inch milled stock is best. Lettering will be routed and all capital letters.

Signs may be unfinished if made of a long-lasting wood (cedar or oak), but should be painted with brown-colored solid stain if made of less durable material (spruce/fir tends to be cheapest). The stain should be applied after letter routing is completed so the letters absorb stain to stand out.

AMC uses a  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch veining bit for 1 &  $\frac{1}{2}$ " letters and  $\frac{3}{16}$ " bit for 1" letters. In addition, a bit shaped like an arrow cuts a v-shaped groove that allows water to drain.

Sign size guidance from AMC:

- 2x6: one line signs
- 2x8; two line signs
- 2x10: three line signs
- For really big signs, biscuit join two pieces of 2x8 or 2x10

Organization or agency logos should not be included on Long Trail signs.

There should be a 1½ inch border between the edge of the sign and the lettering. The lettering of the first line of text (e.g., Long Trail North) may be 1 & ¼ to 1 & ½ inches high. Other lines of text should be 1 inch high.

There should be a 1 inch space between lines of text. The location of the mounting hardware should be considered when designing the lettering so the message is not obscured. Pilot holes for the mounting hardware should be drilled prior to staining.

Signs should be mounted on cedar (ideal) or pressure-treated (if necessary) posts at least 4 x 4 inches square or 5 inches in diameter, or on the outside of a shelter. The signs should be mounted approximately 5 & ½ feet above ground. Posts should be buried 2 & ½ feet. To prevent the post from being turned, a deadman should be imbedded near its bottom. The sign should be attached to the post with at least 3/8 x 4 inch galvanized lag bolts and washers.

**TO ACCESS GMC'S ONLINE TRAIL REPORT SYSTEM:**

1. Visit the GMC website: [www.greenmountainclub.org](http://www.greenmountainclub.org)
2. Click 'Volunteer' on the left-hand tool bar (You should arrive at the main Volunteer page: <http://www.greenmountainclub.org/page.php?id=9>)
3. Click 'Adopter Trail Report' or 'Adopter Shelter Report' on the list of links (You should arrive at the online trail report form: [https://www.greenmountainclub.org/maintenance\\_report.php](https://www.greenmountainclub.org/maintenance_report.php) or the online shelter report form: [https://www.greenmountainclub.org/smaintenance\\_report.php](https://www.greenmountainclub.org/smaintenance_report.php))
4. Fill in the blanks
5. Click on 'Proceed' at the bottom of the form
6. Review the information entered on the form
7. Click on 'Proceed' at the bottom of the page
8. Look for an email response generated by a correctly completed and submitted form.

**THANK YOU!**

GMC encourages you to provide feedback about the current online reporting system.

We have tried to create like a friendly and expedient reporting process.

If you do not find the process helpful or easy to use we want to know so changes can be made!