

NAVAJO TRAILS INITIATIVE

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Navajo Nation Trails Initiative?

The Navajo Trails Initiative (NTI) is a grassroots effort to develop non-motorized trails for the benefit of members of the tribe.

Why trails?

Trails provide numerous benefits; hiking or riding on a trail is good for our physical, emotional and spiritual help. (See Benefits of Trails. Trails can also bring economic benefits through ecotourism, a clean and manageable source of jobs and revenue for local business. Trails are also used by land managers to protect critical natural, cultural and historic resources by guiding people away from sensitive areas that could have negative impacts from human activity.

Who is behind it?

The initiative was sparked by the Navajo nonprofit NavajoYES but has quickly gained the interest and support of communities across Dine' Bikeyah, various tribal agencies, particularly the Division of Natural Resources and Navajo Parks & Recreation. Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez, an avid trail runner who knows first-hand the benefits of trails, has lent invaluable support to the initiative. Engineers Without Borders (EWB), International Mountain Bike Association, Durango Trails 2000, American Conservation Experience, Gallup Trails and Arizona Trail Association are partners in the effort.

Who decides where trails will go?

Each community will determine whether it wants to participate, and to what degree it will participate. Communities choosing to participate in the initiative will receive guidance and assistance from tribal departments and the Trails Task Force.

What kind of trails are being considered?

For the purpose of this initiative, trails are broken down into four primary categories: Community trails, trails in the parks, long-distance routes and ump tracks, skills parks and BMX tracks.

- **Community trails** can range from 5-10K loops to a “stacked loop” system with trails ranging in length from ½ to 12-15 miles. Size and configuration of these trails is determined by the wishes of the community, land available and topography.
- **Long-distance routes** will be sited in areas with high scenic values. They may range in length from to 100 miles or more. In addition to offering recreation and fitness opportunities to the people living in the Navajo Nation, these trails can become eco-tourism attractions, bringing visitors and providing jobs in the hospitality sector as well as for guides and outfitters.

- **Trails in the Parks** are trails and routes within the Navajo Tribal Park System. Four Corners, Little Colorado River Gorge and Monument Valley all provide examples of how these trails may develop.
- **Pump tracks, skills parks and BMX tracks** are well suited to schools because they require minimal space, perhaps on a school or chapter house grounds, and can be sited to avoid impacts on natural and cultural resources and grazing.

How do I get a trail in my community?

Communities with an NavajoYES is working with and through the Navajo Division of Natural Resources and Parks & Recreation Departments. Before any construction can be done the project first must go through a clearance process to ensure that stakeholders (e.g. people with grazing permits) are not impacted, and that natural and cultural resources are protected.

I don't know how to design or build a trail, but I want to be involved. Is there a way I can learn these skills?

One of the objectives of the NTI is to train and empower those people in the Navajo Nation who have a desire to become involved, and possibly make trail design and/or construction a career. Southwest Trail Solutions, a Tucson-based trail design firm, provides training in design, assessment, construction, project management, volunteer recruitment, management and retention, and “guerilla” marketing.

In addition, a number of resources have indicated their willingness to consult in specific areas, including the Arizona Trail Association (managing distance trails, stewardship programs, marketing); American Conservation Experience (construction, design, project management); National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (broad-based services including defining project vision and goals, community resource inventories, identifying funding sources, designing community outreach and planning trails and parks.)

Once a trail is built, who is going to maintain it?

Trails built to sustainability standards require minimal maintenance, primarily cutting back vegetation. Volunteer trail steward programs, such as that used by the Arizona Trail Association to monitor and maintain the 800-mile Arizona National Scenic Trail, break monitoring and maintenance into “bite size” chunks – usually around six miles – that require only a few half-day monitoring/maintenance trips each year.