

**Town of Dryden
Parks and Trails Maintenance Guidelines
31 March 2015**

Prepared by an *Ad Hoc* Committee of the Town of Dryden Conservation Board
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and approved by unanimous vote of the Conservation Board.

BACKGROUND:

The Jim Schug Trail is a major asset to the Town of Dryden. It attracts a steady stream of visitors from the immediate area and the wider region. Uses include, but are not limited to: family strolling, fishing, courting, bird-watching, nature study, nature photography, exercise walking and running, horseback and bicycle riding, dog walking, and cross-country skiing.

An informal count of users of the Schug Trail over several years has produced an average of 9 users per hour. This average has held up at all times of the day and for all sections of the trail. It is possible that more than 25,000 individuals per year, including repeat users, visit the Schug Trail. The Schug Trail illustrates the value of public trails and is a good example for the Town of Dryden to follow when it expands and extends its system of public recreational trails.

In effect, public trails are linear parks and should be managed accordingly. The over-arching consideration for maintenance of parks, trails, and natural areas (e.g. Campbell Meadow) managed by the Town of Dryden should be to preserve and enhance, within safety limits, the natural diversity that makes these places the special attractions that they are.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

Although some cutting and clearing of trail sides is necessary to allow for passage of emergency vehicles, in the case of anything beyond the recommended width of roughly 12 feet, less cutting is better. Clearing trail sides and ditching exposes the view and may improve drainage, but such efforts are often at the cost of wildlife cover and food, valued and protected plant populations, or shade for runners and other trail users. Serious consideration should be given to the overall, long-term implications before any major widening or ditching of trails is undertaken. Extensive pruning and scraping of trees by heavy equipment damages them, leading to disease and death, and is unattractive, especially in a park or trail setting. Heavy pruning has the additional drawback of removing branches at or near eye level that could be used by outdoor educators for

teaching tree identification. It's worth noting that the trails and parks are used as outdoor classrooms by formal and informal educational groups of all ages.

Native flowering and fruiting trees provide wildlife food and are attractive to trail users. There are some Conservation Board members who know plants well and who could mark these and other special plants, as well as unique habitat along the trail, such as the Spring Pools that support populations of the Wood Frog. This could be done yearly, prior to regular trail maintenance.

Although beavers do dam watercourses along the trail, and at times require judicious management, they rarely, if ever, flood the trail. They provide great enjoyment to human visitors and should be allowed to remain whenever possible. Special devices, called "beaver deceivers," can be built and maintained to discourage beavers from blocking drainage pipes along the trail. Designs for beaver deceivers, e.g., provided by the U.S. Forest Service, may be found on the Web.

Although fill is necessary in persistent wet areas, large stone, crusher run, or bank run gravel makes walking, running, riding horseback, and bicycle riding difficult, and can be a hazard to both horses and people. When possible, fine crushed gravel is recommended to be used instead.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:

- A) Each year, prior to executing park and trail maintenance plans for that year, the DPW will inform the Conservation Board of planned park and trail maintenance. It then falls to the Conservation Board to identify, mark, map or otherwise inform the DPW of environmentally sensitive plants, habitats and other natural phenomena and special areas of concern, and to make appropriate recommendations for their protection and management. At the same time recommendations could be offered regarding the control of invasive species such as swallowwort, Japanese knotweed, phragmites, and non-native bush honeysuckles. Potentially contentious issues, such as ditching and brush removal, also should be reviewed and discussed.
- B) When the DPW has completed its work for the season, representatives from both the Conservation Board and the DPW should meet and review the season's efforts. This would allow for an exchange of ideas and aid in refining these guidelines in the future.
- C) Tree cutting and damage to trees by heavy equipment should be kept to a minimum; whenever possible likely den trees should be preserved for use by birds (e.g. Eastern Screech-Owl) and other wildlife.

- D) Ditching unnecessarily drains wet areas that serve as habitat for a variety plants, amphibians, insects and birds, including ducks. In the spirit of maintaining the trail as a nature trail and public park, these wet areas should instead be maintained and even increased where possible.
- E) Brush removal should be kept to a minimum, again in the spirit of a nature trail. Brush provides nesting habitat for birds and small mammals, shade for shade loving plants, and cover for larger mammals. It also often includes valued species of flowering and fruiting shrubs and trees.
- F) At Dryden Lake Park, the field on East Lake Road should be mowed every year after grassland birds have completed nesting and before goldenrod has set seed. The same applies to the fields at the Virgil Creek Flood Control Dam. In most years, the last 2 weeks in August or the first 2 weeks of September would be a suitable time. NYSDEC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have identified many different kinds of grassland birds as needing conservation attention. It also is against both state and federal laws to destroy nests, eggs, young, or adults of any migratory birds. After goldenrod has set its seed, mowing only distributes the goldenrod seed and makes cleaning of air filters and radiators on equipment difficult. Though attractive, goldenrod tends to exclude other plants once it is established, and the value of the fields to grassland birds and other wildlife is lost.
- G) Trails on the north side of Dryden Lake, northeast of the dam, should only be cleared to +/- 4 - 6 feet, because they are used only occasionally for fishing access and bird study.
- H) An advisory committee on management of parks, trails, and natural areas in the Town of Dryden (Parks and Trails Management Committee) shall serve to advise the Superintendent of Public Works and the Town Board. This committee will be a standing committee of the Conservation Board and will include at least the following members: Conservation Board Chair (who also will serve as Chair of the advisory committee), one member selected from the Recreation & Youth Commission, one additional member from the Conservation Board, and two at large members selected by the Conservation Board from interested citizens of the town, for a total of 5 voting members. One or more members of this committee should have substantial, demonstrable, in-depth knowledge in identification of local plants and animals in the field, in their broadest sense (i.e. natural history).

SPECIFIC LONG-TERM GOALS FOR MAINTENANCE OF TOWN OF DRYDEN TRAILS:

The primary purpose of this maintenance and management policy is to provide guidance for having trails that are safe and satisfying for all users. The following goals are listed in order of priority and their importance to maintaining the Schug Trail and all other Town of Dryden trails. Implementation of the recommendations should be carried out with this priority preference in mind. These goals and objectives are based, in part, upon a trail maintenance plan adopted and implemented by DuPage County, Illinois, in October 2003. It is expected that guidance can be provided by the Conservation Board in meeting the goals and objectives which follow.

Goal 1: Provide safe trails for all users.

The purpose of this goal is to be sure that the Schug Trail, and all other trails, are safe for all trail users. The Schug Trail, at present, is a multi-purpose pathway enjoyed by thousands of local residents and visitors annually. The mix of trail users includes walkers, joggers, bicyclists, equestrians, birdwatchers, botanists, naturalists, and photographers. Future Town of Dryden trails might be expected to be similar.

Important objectives for meeting Goal 1 include at least the following:

- Maintaining trails that comply with trail accessibility guidelines
- Maintaining safe trail surfaces
- Maintaining clearances at roadway intersections
- Improving roadway crossings
- Minimizing the Town's liability in providing trail facilities
- Maintaining unmowed trail buffer areas, within the original railroad right-of-way, either side of the trail
- Improving safety through signage and public education
- Developing a volunteer safety watch program by trail users

Goal 2: Protect and enhance our natural environment.

The purpose of this goal is to recognize, protect, and promote the function of the Schug Trail, and all other trails, as greenways, wildlife habitat, and park-like corridors. This includes providing ways to maintain and improve wildlife habitat and the natural variety of plant species. While not the primary purpose of trails, this goal is intended to recognize the role trails have in improving the natural environment of the Village and Town of Dryden. At the same time, efforts to achieve this goal need to include a public education component that informs trail users of work activities and management projects designed to meet this end, and ensures that the Town remains a good neighbor to surrounding property owners.

Important objectives for meeting Goal 2 include at least the following:

- Removing dead and diseased trees and shrubs that may be hazardous or infect other plants
- Maintaining a naturalistic look, that includes wetland and woodland remnants along the trail
- Removing non-native invasive species, such as European Buckthorn and bush honeysuckles, in selected areas, where effects on residential areas will be minimal, and with Conservation Board guidance
- Implementing recommendations in a cost-effective manner

Goal 3: Provide a pleasing trail experience.

The purpose of this goal is to be sure that users enjoy the Schug Trail and all other trails. This goal recognizes the attraction of trails as a way to experience our natural environment and provide connections to unique natural areas and open spaces adjacent to trails.

Important objectives for meeting Goal 3 include at least the following:

- Maintaining clean, well-kept, and comfortable trails (litter-free, vandalism-free, with comfortable benches for resting or observing Nature)
- Maintaining a mix of viewsapes that provide color and variety
- Encouraging stewardship efforts to increase clean-up, planting, and beautification projects, with guidance from the Conservation Board
- Maintaining and enhancing opportunities for viewing wildlife and plant life along trails

Goal 4: Accommodate multiple uses and users along the Schug Trail and all other trails.

The purpose of this goal is to ensure that trails serve the multiple uses and users they have had over time. In addition to the various uses and users named above, the trails serve as wildlife habitat, greenway corridors, drainage facilities, fishing access, and utility corridors (in some places).

Important objectives for meeting Goal 4 include at least the following:

- Providing sufficient and uniform trail widths
- Providing and maintaining signage to educate trail users about multiple uses and users
- Maintaining trail rights-of-way for utility and drainage purposes