
Section III

MANAGEMENT & COSTS

The management and maintenance philosophies recommended for the Cowboy Trail corridor are based on the premise that the trail user is a visitor into nature and that nature should not to be disturbed. If there is a conflict between the use of the corridor and nature, preservation of natural values should take precedence. The wildlife within the corridor shall be preserved and enhanced as the natural environment is allowed and encouraged to grow.

Vegetation

Plants and animals are valuable natural resources that should be protected and preserved within the Cowboy Trail corridor. The established native prairie grasses and forbs will require little maintenance. Tall and short grass prairie areas within the corridor, should be mowed once a year to reduce the potential fire hazard and to decrease competition of weeds much the same way that fire rejuvenated the prairie. In areas of shrubs and trees within the corridor, a wooded habitat should be maintained. Wooded areas provide good cover for wildlife.

Noxious weeds may encroach into the corridor in natural areas and spread to adjacent properties. The weeds will need to be monitored during each growing season and be kept under control.

At all roadway intersections, the wooded vegetation and grasses within the sight triangle of the trail user should be maintained to a height of 30 inches or below. See Figure 13. This will also provide open viewing of the trail to the approaching vehicular traffic at intersections.

Trail Surface

The crushed aggregate surface of the trail will need very little maintenance if the trail is not disturbed significantly by vehicular traffic, water, wind and hooved animals. If the trail surface is disturbed, it will require regrading to eliminate the low spots and to provide positive drainage. Compaction of the crushed aggregate surface into the soil base will also occur with time and use. When this occurs, another layer of crushed aggregate will need to be added to the trail surface.

The equestrian trail will require some maintenance of either mowing the path or regrading the surface when it becomes disturbed from heavy horse traffic. The equestrian trail crossings over the hiker/bicyclist trail will need regrading periodically if it is built as a soft surface. Stream bed crossings will require regular checking to assure that the rip rap has not been silted in and the approach to the stream is solid.

Adopt-a-trail programs, as described on page 89, can monitor the condition of both trail surfaces and the stream bed crossing. Program participants will inform NGPC when an area needs to be regraded.

Fences

The Cowboy Trail right-of-way boundaries are primarily defined by fences. One boundary of the right-of-way and one-third of the other side of the right-of-way contains a fence the majority of the 250 miles. The other boundary is shared with Highways 275 and 20 and therefore no fence exists between these two uses.

Fences were installed primarily to keep cattle out of the railroad corridor. The corridor's new use, as a trail, will use the fences primarily to identify the boundaries of the corridor and to deter trail users from going onto private property. Containing cattle, however, will also remain a priority for maintaining the fences in the right-of-way. Damage can occur on the trail and to wildlife habitat within the corridor from hooved animals. This damage may also be harmful to trail users. Therefore, it will be important to monitor the condition of the fences at least once a year.

Once again, Adopt-a-trail program volunteers can be trained to examine the condition of the fences and notify NGPC if repairs are needed.

Trash

Accumulation of trash may occur within the Cowboy Trail corridor. This trash is most likely to occur where the trail is adjacent to the highway. Again, using an Adopt-a-trail program, volunteers can be assigned to pick up trash that has accumulated in the corridor. Trash receptacle pickup will also need to be completed. However, it is recommended that trash receptacles be located only within the communities. Trail users will follow the concept of "pack it in and pack it out" between the communities.

For many agencies and organizations, managing trails is a new experience that doesn't quite fit into existing recreation or transportation policy molds. Agencies that are now being tasked to manage their linear trail resources will do well to learn from one another as they work to develop comprehensive policies that deal with the unique aspects of trails.

Since trails are a combination of recreation and transportation, some of the policies existing in each of those areas can serve trails quite adequately. Not all policies will be unique nor will they need to be written from scratch. Adaptation of current related policies will be key, but several new, trail-specific policies will need to be created.

The development of policies and standards for all trails managed by NGPC will be increasingly important over time. Adjustments and modifications to those policies will also be valuable as new information is acquired and as lessons are learned from the great teacher, experience.

As the Cowboy Trail is being developed, policies should also be under development. The following is a partial list of items that will need to be addressed and regularly readdressed. Others will occur over time and should be included as relevant.

1 Events on the Trail
Using the trail for organized group events, such as a race, a marathon, a stage coach ride, will require guidelines and procedures that can be easily followed by the requesting group. Criteria should be established along with a clear understanding of responsibilities before, during and after the event. As important as establishing a policy and procedure, is making that information available to the public.

2 Opening Hours of Trail
A concern of residents living alongside the trail was, "people will be out there all night long." Hours should be determined, posted and enforced at the outset. It is recommended that the trail be 'open' for daylight hours only.

3 Motorized Vehicles
It is recommended the trails be posted using the established terminology of NGPC: No Unauthorized Vehicles. There are fewer opportunities for misunderstanding than with the term 'motorized/ non-motorized.' However, unauthorized vehicles should be identified within the agency's trail policies.

4 Snowmobile Usage
A policy regarding the use of snowmobiles on the trail, or any portion of the trail, is recommended. Since statutory regulations do not allow for such use, any policy to allow snowmobiles under specified conditions would be an exception to the law. Many of the comments from the public participation meetings concerned snowmobiles. In particular, the questions were, if allowed, what are the hours of usage, snow cover minimums, speed, right-of-way for other snow activities on the trail, and enforcement.

5 Vendors
A policy of selling goods and services from the trail ROW should be in writing and available before the trail is officially opened. It is recommended that such business activities be limited to properties located off the ROW, but there may be an occasional exception. For example, the depots in Long Pine and O'Neill are likely to have items for sale. This policy would outline the criteria, standards and procedures for doing business on the ROW.

6 Emergency Assistance
Ideally, each community should be willing to participate in an emergency assistance program for the trail. It is recommended that an emergency communications line be established only for incidents on the Cowboy Trail. The number to call and the corresponding mile marker should be posted at all trail heads and at any rest stops established along the trail. Each fire, police and sheriff, hospital and ambulance system should become familiar with the trail and the mile markers along the way.

7 Trail Patrols
Trail users should be encouraged to report any damage or dangerous situations found along the trail. It is recommended that a policy and a procedure be defined to make it easy for these reports to be made and for staff to do necessary follow-up. Making the trail user a part of maintenance can save time and money for NGPC and the local communities, but a well-established mechanism will need to be created. Policies and procedures should be made practical for use by staff as well as the users and in line with existing policies regarding the use of state park areas.

8 Connections, Crossings, & Intersections
It is recommended that policies be established regarding both motorized crossings and intersections and non-motorized trail connections. Ideally the number of motorized crossings would be limited, but where necessary, the policy would cover signs, maintenance, costs, access and design. Connections with other trails and paths would need to establish design standards, maintenance responsibilities and access across the ROW. Procedures for requesting new crossings should be included.

The implementation of the Cowboy Trail has already begun. In September 1994, RTC contracted with professional salvage firms to remove the old rail, ties, and ballast from the corridor. The salvagers will remove the large ballast down to where ballast fines are mixed with soil. They will then grade this surface for positive drainage and to a condition suitable for hiking. This becomes the trail surface until money is available for a crushed aggregate surface. The salvagers have also been contracted to install safety signs and bollards once salvage has been removed and bridges decked. Bids have been let for installing decking and safety hand rails on all bridges, and this work is nearing completion. These items are important for the safety of the trail user and the protection of NGPC, and they should be completed prior to any official opening of the Cowboy Trail.

1 The first level of implementation will be to install the remaining safety signs along the entire length of the trail.

2 The second level of implementation is the trail surface. Three types of surface have been installed on the trail as separate 2½ mile test plots; crushed limestone, crushed-recycled concrete, and crushed ballast. Crushed limestone surfaces are fairly common on trails in many parts of the country, but all three will need to be monitored and evaluated by NGPC for durability, economy and maintainability as a trail surface. Trail users are also being asked to provide input.

An inspection of the condition of the existing ballast fines and soil surface will be necessary to determine the areas of highest need for additional surfacing. The areas of highest use, such as in the communities, may require a more durable and weather resistant surface of concrete or asphalt.

3 The third level of implementation will be to develop the information signs within the communities. These should include all elements — kiosk, directional and interpretive signs, benches, and horse/bicycle racks — completed in all of the communities. With all communities complete, this will strengthen the trail user's and community's perception and support for the entire project.

Communities must also become a part of the phasing plan. The information and amenities that will enhance the trail user's experience of the Cowboy Trail are essential and should be developed along with the phased development by NGPC. The elements outside of the trail corridor can also be accomplished by the community. The community elements outside of the trail corridor would include local park development such as restroom, drinking fountains, or horse fencing, and within the linear greenspace, plant material, picnic areas, benches, and horse/bicycle racks could be added.

Private development within each community is also important and can occur simultaneously with NGPC. These can include bicycle shops, restaurants, snack shops, shuttle services, etc.

4 The fourth level of implementation are the points of interest. All points of interest, including the interpretive structures, benches and horse/bicycle racks, should be completed.

5 The fifth level will include installation of the directional structures. These structures will identify side trips from the trail.

6 The sixth level of implementation will include building the decks over the wetlands. The points of interest identifying these areas will have already been identified with an interpretive struc-

ture. The deck will provide a quiet area away from the trail as well as more informational panels.

Equestrian Trail Development

The development of the equestrian path is separate and unique from the hiker/biker trail, and should be implemented by regions. The region developed first must have facilities to support the equestrian. These facilities include large parking/unloading areas for horse trailers, facilities to stable horses overnight such as rodeo corrals, fairgrounds or private facilities, water for horses a maximum of 10 miles apart, a surfaced path if required and streams with solid crossings. The number of active horse clubs within a region will also help determine the region to be implemented first. The remaining Cowboy Trail for equestrians would be a primitive trail with very few or none of the amenities listed above.

An area with many of these facilities already existing, either private or public, will assist the NGPC in developing the first region of this equestrian trail. Establishing one region at a time will then allow the NGPC to assess the use and need for further development, as well as determine and evaluate maintenance requirements.

After review and analysis, a 68 mile region from Ainsworth to O'Neill, or one fourth of the Cowboy Trail, stands out as the first region that should be developed. This region contains equestrian amenities, such as possible stabling areas for horses, that are approximately 20 miles apart — Bassett, at the Fairgrounds; Stuart proposed horse pasture near White Horse Museum; Emmet, proposed private horse pastures; and O'Neill, rodeo corrals.

The trail within this region intersects with approximately 30 small streams and their bridges. The small bridges or stream crossings can be easily maneuvered by the equestrian. One large bridge occurs in this region, the bridge over Long Pine Creek. An alternate path should be explored for the inexperienced trail equestrian. The equestrian path will be concentrated within part of this region and open to the corridor in another part. With both examples of equestrian trails in this region, NGPC will be able to monitor if the two types of uses are compatible with the soils and the equestrian use of the region.

Currently public water is available in all of the communities within this region. The distance between communities is approximately 8 to 11 miles with 11 miles being the greatest distance. Water is also available in numerous streams and wet areas between communities. This region is significant to equestrian use because 34 miles of the 68 mile region, or one-half, is away from the highway. Also significant about this region is the community of Stuart, home of the White Horse Museum. The museum tells the story of White Horse Ranch and the Thompson White Horse Troop. The ranch is a short distance from Stuart and is listed on The National Register of Historic Places. It is currently being restored.

Some Horse Clubs are also active within this region. The community of O'Neill has a Boot and Saddle Club. Several 4-H clubs in the O'Neill area are primarily horse oriented. A buggy club, rodeo clubs, as well as families that have horses, are also able to use and promote the trail in this region.

Phased Development/Priorities

Cost figures presented in this plan are estimates, not final construction costs. These figures are presented to assist in the development of budgets.

Estimated costs are based on experience with similar projects, industry standards and information provided by NGPC from current projects. Figures are stated in terms of today's dollars (1996).

<u>Item</u>	<u>Unit Cost</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
Surfacing		
Crushed limestone - 4" thick	\$ 15,000 - \$20,000/mile	- trucking long distances will increase price
Crushed ballast - 4" thick	\$ 20,000 - \$25,000/mile	- trucking long distances will increase price
Wood chip path - 3" thick	\$ 10,000 - \$15,000/mile	
Brick on sand	\$ 8 - \$10/S.F.	
Asphalt - 5" thick	\$ 80,000 - \$100,000/mile	- proximity to an asphalt plant
Concrete - 5" thick	\$150,000 - \$200,000/mile	- proximity to a concrete plant
Stream bed rip rap - horse path - 1' deep	\$ 50 - \$75/S.Y.	- access to river bed important
Amenities		
Interpretive Structure	\$ 750 each	
Horse/Bicycle rack	\$ 150 each	
Kiosk	\$ 1,000 each	
Deck over wetlands	\$ 25 - \$35/S.F.	- based on deck shown in Figures 18 & 19
Bench	\$ 500 - \$750 each	
Picnic Table	\$ 500 - \$750 each	
Park Grill	\$ 250 each	
Safety signs	\$ 100 - \$150 each	- quantity will lower price
Area light - 12' height	\$ 1,500 - \$2,000 each	- proximity to electricity
Toilets		
City Sewer - Wood construction	\$ 7,000 - \$10,000 each	- if sewer is close to toilet site
City Sewer - CMU construction	\$ 10,000 - \$15,000 each	- if sewer is close to toilet site
Polyethylene vault toilet	\$ 15,000 - \$20,000 each	
Concrete vault toilet	\$ 18,000 - \$35,000 each	
Composting toilet	\$ 25,000 - \$40,000 each	
Parking Area		
Crushed limestone	\$ 0.20 - \$0.30/S.F.	
Asphalt	\$ 1.50 - \$2.00/S.F.	
Plant Material		
Trees - 2" cal. deciduous w/ warranty	\$ 250 each	
6' height conifer w/ warranty	\$ 200 each	
Shrubs	\$ 30 - \$40 each	
Seeding native plants	\$ 0.10 - \$0.15/S.F.	- depending on quantity
Seeding turf	\$ 0.08 - \$0.12/S.F.	- depending on quantity
Perennials planted, mulched	\$ 2.00 - \$3.00/S.F.	

Partnership programs should aim to assist and provide a means to extend the capabilities of NGPC in the development and management of the Cowboy Trail. A successful trail will be built with a broad range of public and private partners working together. In creating partnerships, NGPC must demonstrate a desire to:

1. incorporate volunteers of all ages and skills into the trail's work plans;
2. provide training, supplies and equipment when needed; and
3. explore new and innovative ways to overcome limitations and challenges.

It is recommended that NGPC encourage and authorize the establishment of "Friends of the Cowboy Trail" groups in each community and in conjunction with the Nebraska Trails Council and the Nebraska Trails Foundation. The Friends groups should include individuals of all ages, communities, civic and service groups, schools, churches, and businesses. For NGPC they will become the extra work hands, the extra eyes and ears to monitor the trail needs, the public voice of advocacy to the governmental process, and a resource for raising funds, for ideas for making improvements and setting priorities.

An Adopt-a-Trail program, as referred to throughout this plan, is very strongly recommended. Similar in nature to the Adopt-a-Highway programs, groups, families, or businesses are recruited to be responsible for making sure the trail is free of hazards, free of litter and that signs or amenities are in good repair along a specific segment of the trail. Repairs requiring special knowledge or equipment would be reported to NGPC for correction.

A second type of partnership used by many trail managing agencies and strongly recommended is a Trail Crew or Trail Ranger program. Volunteers in this program are trained in such things as basic first aid, trail maintenance and grooming, tree and brush trimming, and safety. Crew members would be trained by NGPC to the agency's standards and specifications and then assigned tasks appropriate to their training. Many trails using this type of program give certificates and an official badge upon completion of the training. In this manner, the volunteer can be recognized by both NGPC and trail users. CPR and basic first aid will become more important with the increased volume of trail use. Trail Crew or Ranger programs could be created in conjunction with already formed groups such as Lions, FFA, scouts, church youth, or 4-H groups.

The plan specifies each community along the Cowboy Trail as a trailhead and a potential partner in the trail's success. It is strongly recommended that NGPC create a program of partnership with Cowboy Trail communities in which each community commits to actively maintain the segment of trail within their community as well as their trailhead facilities. With few exceptions, communities are already equipped and staffed for general maintenance of existing public facilities and should be recruited to provide mowing, cleaning of grounds and facilities, trash removal, and policing of the corridor within town limits.

Other partnership programs with local citizens and businesses should be sought and welcomed. Volunteers would work with NGPC staff to identify, plan and work on an activity or project of interest or need that would incorporate local expertise, energy and citizen commitment.

Costs involved in partnership programs are minimal when measured against the value of the services performed. Expenditures of tax dollars can be greatly eased in trail development when multiple partners exercise 'ownership' responsibilities by giving their time, skills and efforts to the work of the trail. At the outset, the NGPC should initiate such programs by providing a cooperative willingness, leadership, appropriate training and assistance that will aid in achieving the objective of sound trail development and management. Once community involvement becomes the norm, NGPC's role may change to more of a support role.

Funding sources are available everywhere, but it takes time and hard work to raise the money. No single source should become the sole source for revenue. Instead, there should be a mix and blend of federal, state, local, private and public funds. The five dollar gift from the preschool child is just as important as the million dollar gift from the corporate giant or a government program.

As has been discussed in other parts of this plan, major funding for planning and development of the Cowboy Trail has already come from the federal ISTEA Transportation Enhancement Program. Many of the community parks along the trail that have been identified as amenities to serve trail users were built with funds from the Federal Land and Water Conservation program. These two federal programs have made significant investments along the corridor, but as with most federal programs, they are periodically reviewed for reauthorization, revision or revocation. It will be important to keep the appropriate agencies and departments apprised of the benefits derived from this funding, especially during the review periods, and citizens and communities can become a very active voice in this process.

Further funding programs at both the federal and state levels should be carefully and extensively explored. As new programs come on line, look for possible linkages between funding objectives and trail goals. Funds acquired from government programs are citizen dollars being returned to communities for projects deemed to be a priority.

Friends of the Trail groups can be important fund raisers for both the general support of the trail and for specific projects or amenities. People can become very creative in their fund raising efforts when they are motivated and committed and, especially, when they are recognized for their hard work.

Four general categories of funding sources should be considered: sales/rentals; trail events/activities; licenses, permits and leases; and donations.

Merchandise carrying the name and logo of the Cowboy Trail should be developed by NGPC for resale through the agency and in each community. Revenue in excess of costs that are generated from these sales should go directly into the Cowboy Trail Fund for use in maintenance and development. As with other state parks, the copyright should be maintained by NGPC to assure product quality and control of name use. Items for resale could include t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, patches, water bottles, picture post cards, poster for framing (including postage to mail), trail maps and books. To encourage local communities to handle the merchandise, a commission might be offered to the vendor.

In addition to merchandise sales, items such as bicycles, horses, trailers or wheelchairs could be made available for rent. However, with the up-front and maintenance costs required and the trail goal of stimulating local economies, rentals might well be left for a community business.

Fund raising events and activities held specifically on the trail and for the Cowboy Trail can provide both a source of revenue and an increased level of awareness of the Trail. Planning major events are very labor intensive. However, people who tend to participate in these events are also eager volunteers to work on all phases of planning and managing the event. Funds raised by each individual participant through either entry fees or sponsorships and the sale of special merchandise should be directed to the Cowboy Trail Fund. The money can be either for maintenance and development or for a specific amenity or trail project but participants should be kept informed. Costs are kept to a minimum by using volunteer help and seeking donations for the major items such as food or beverage.

Many trails allow for a short term, exclusive use by an organized group for a fee that helps cover costs of extra wear and tear, administration and support for the trail. Fees are based on factors such as the duration of the use, the impact on the trail, amount of trail being used, plus damages beyond normal use. It is recommended that NGPC discuss the pros and cons with other trail managers, review existing policies for special events to be held within state parks, and then establish policies that are specifically directed to such special events on the trails. Fee schedules should be established with NGPC having at their discretion the authority to deny exclusive use as well as to adjust the fees downward.

Licenses and permits are granted for a specified period of time for the use of existing structures or the installation in any portion of the ROW of items such as drainage and sewer pipes, utility lines, fiber optics, and private and public road crossings. Generally, the purpose of administering such fees is to recover all costs and expenses directly attributable to the project and incurred by the agency. The costs recovered usually include staff costs, overhead and any out-of-pocket expenses. The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority can be used as one example of successful policies and procedures for non-park uses of their trails.

The North Virginia Regional Park Authorities Manual on Policies and Procedures Governing Easements and Licenses and Non-Regional Park Uses (dated December 15, 1988 and revised and adopted January 19, 1989) was the result of "...an explosion of requests from agencies, corporations and individuals, both public and private to...encroach upon park property (the W&OD rail-trail corridor) for road improvements and other park projects which impact adversely upon the parks, the park users and the Authority." (Page 1)

The policies, procedures and fee schedules established by the Authority assist them with both the physical and the financial maintenance of this heavily used trail.

Donations come in the forms of cash, materials, or labor. The amounts can be small or large. The sources can range from an individual to a philanthropic foundation to a corporate gift to a community trust with each contributor becoming a partner in making the trail a reality.

Solicitation of funds is most successful when the prospective donor can clearly and easily understand the purpose for which the money is needed and can readily see some advantage to them. Recognition is extremely important and no gift should go unrecognized. Whether a personal letter of thanks or a public plaque of appreciation, recognition in some tangible form will strengthen both building partnerships and raising funds.