

NAVAJO TRAILS INITIATIVE

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Navajo Nation Trails Initiative?

The Navajo Trails Initiative (NTI) is a grassroots effort to develop trails for the benefit of members of the communities and people of the Nation. It was established in 2015 and works with chapters and parks across the Nation.

Why trails?

Trails provide numerous benefits; hiking, running or riding on a trail is good for our physical, emotional and spiritual health. (See “Benefits of Trails”). If we want to fight obesity, diabetes and boredom in our communities, trails can be a big help! For some locales, there may be economic benefits through ecotourism, a clean and manageable source of jobs and revenue for local business.

Who is behind it?

The initiative was sparked by the Navajo nonprofit NavajoYES, 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 valuable support to the initiative. Engineers Without Borders (EWB), International Mountain Bike Association, Durango Trails 2000, American Conservation Experience, Gallup Trails and Arizona Trail Association have all played a role in supporting and furthering 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 three primary categories: Community trails, trails in the parks and long-distance routes.

- **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 10 or 15 miles, 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. Camp Asaayi, Four Corners, Little Colorado River Gorge and Monument Valley all provide examples of how these trails may develop.

How do I get a trail in my community?

Communities with an interest in trails may reach out to the Task Force, who will help walk you through the process. Before any construction can be done the project will go through a clearance process to ensure that local residents and land-users (e.g. people with grazing permits) see more positive benefits than negative, 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 with trails. We partner with a variety of organizations and trail advocates that can assist with design, layout and even construction. Again, once you connect with the Task Force, we will help you through this process.

In addition, a number of resources have indicated their willingness to consult in specific areas, including Bikepacking Roots (Kurt and his crew experts in plotting and promoting trails, and they love the rez!) and American Conservation Experience (a Flagstaff-based firm that can assist with trail design and layout.)

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.

How in the world do we pay for this?

The “junk food tax” is a huge benefit for chapters with an interest in trails and can be used for some of your trail project prep and design. Some chapter utilize summer youth workers, volunteers and PEP workers to assist with the construction. If there is a will, there is a way!

Where do we start?

You can contact the Trails Task Force anytime and we can get the conversation going! E-mail Tom at chuskaman@yahoo.com and he will connect with you about the first steps in bringing trails to your community.

