



# Ozark Trail Association Adopt-A-Trail Handbook

(Revised January 2021)

## **Welcome and thank you**

Welcome to the Ozark Trail Adopt-A-Trail (AAT) program as a trail maintenance volunteer! You are joining a group of dedicated folks who value the outdoor experience, not only for themselves, but for other trail users.

The OTA maintains over 400 miles of the Ozark Trail, which is currently composed of 14 distinct sections. Each of these sections has been divided into manageable segments for adoption. There are also a few side trails that are maintained by the program.

The OTA is a volunteer-run, nonprofit organization and the vast bulk of work is performed by volunteers such as yourself. The AAT program is very important in assisting the OTA in maintaining the trail for the enjoyment of all. Without your help, the trail would quickly become overgrown due to the temperate climate and long growing season in Missouri.

We thank you for being a participant in this program and want you to have an enjoyable experience. This AAT handbook is intended as a quick guide to outline trail maintenance basics, adopter responsibilities and related resources. Please contact us for any help and advice about maintenance issues whenever needed.

Thank you for all you do and for your volunteer service!

Sincerely,

*John Nies*

John Nies  
OTA Adopt-A-Trail Coordinator since 2021  
OT Trail Adopter since 2020  
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## **Trail maintenance basics**

### **Trail standards**

The Ozark Trail is maintained as a primitive, backcountry trail so people can enjoy the rugged, natural beauty of the Ozark region, while having an enjoyable trail experience. In particular, we want the trail to be in a safe condition for users, while blending the trail into the surrounding landscape. The goal is to leave the trail as natural looking as possible following maintenance.

The Ozark Trail traverses across a number of land management agencies and private property, so it is important to abide by any management guidelines set forth and respect related regulations. A majority of the trail exists on U.S. Forest Service/Mark Twain National Forest land, with segments also crossing Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, National Park Service/Ozark National Scenic Riverways, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/Wappapello Lake, L-A-D Foundation/Pioneer Forest and even some private land. Contact info for each agency and notes on regulations can be found on the section maps.

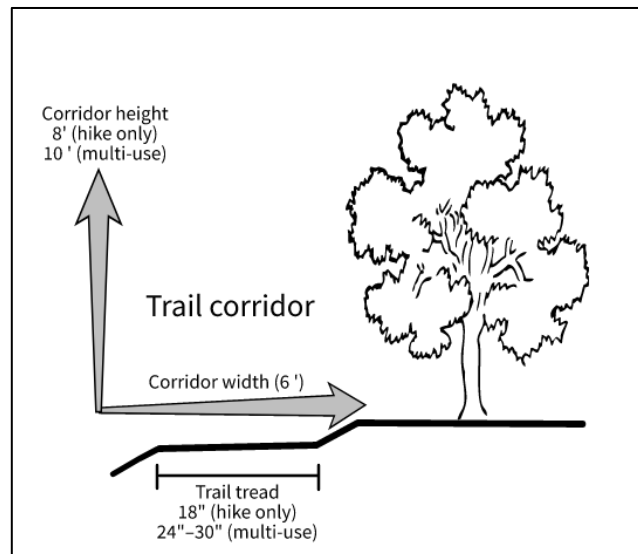
### **The trail corridor**

Trail adopters are primarily responsible for clearing vegetation and trail obstructions from the designated trail corridor. There are three variables to consider for trail maintenance. It may help to think of the trail corridor as a rectangle set on end through which you will pass.

**Height:** The height of the corridor should be about 8 feet for hike-only trail and 10 feet for multi-use trail because bicyclists and equestrians need more overhead room than hikers.

**Width:** Generally, the width of the corridor should be about 6 feet, which is approximately the width of both arms extended straight out from both sides of your body.

**Tread:** Within the width of the corridor and centered as much as possible is the tread area of the trail or the trail surface. The tread should be about 18 inches for hike-only trail or 24–30 inches for multi-use trail, except where slope, rock or other fixed conditions do not permit.



*Figure 1. Trail corridor dimensions*

There may be occasional stretches of trail where these dimensions cannot be accommodated. If not, consider the above measurements as suggested guidelines to ensure as uniform a trail as

possible. In general, the trail corridor (height x width) should be kept clear of encroaching vegetation, while the trail tread is additionally kept clear of most trail obstructions/debris.

As indicated, the trail corridor dimensions vary depending on which users are permitted on a given section of trail. Permitted users (i.e., hike/pedestrian, bicycle or pack/saddle) for your trail segment can be determined from a section map and are also indicated on the adopter agreement form.

### **Notes on tread repair**

As mentioned above, trail adopters are primarily responsible for keeping the trail corridor clear and not for the repair of major tread issues. However, you should review the following information so you can report on trail conditions that require the work of a tread-repair crew. We also encourage you to read the OTA Crew Leader Training Manual to learn more about the sustainable design and maintenance of trails. A copy is available on the AAT webpage at <https://ozarktrail.com/adopt-a-trail/>.

The tread surface should slope out slightly from the uphill side/backslope to the downhill side/critical edge to allow for the drainage of water. On flat terrain, if there is no slope, water will pool. Trail use in wet conditions can cause rutting of the tread. If the trail is not properly sloped, water running down the trail can also cause tread erosion. Additional drainage issues can be caused by spring seepages and feral hog damage.

Other tread issues can occur on steep sections of side-slope trail where the hillside has eroded and has caused the tread to narrow. Rutting of the trail and buildup of debris on the downhill side/critical edge can cause a berm that blocks water flow. If you determine your trail segment needs tread work, report the location, approximate length and conditions of the needed repair.

Note: Volunteers are not permitted to construct trail reroutes without official approval from both the OTA and land manager.

### **Trail safety**

You are a valuable team member of the AAT program and your safety out on the trail is our number one priority. This section outlines a few safety recommendations to consider.

- Follow Leave No Trace guidelines as outlined on the LNT website (<https://lnt.org/>). These principles include: plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire impacts, respect wildlife and be considerate of other visitors.
- Plan ahead and prepare with a trip itinerary (i.e., planned route of travel, destination, estimated time of departure/arrival), check weather conditions and locate emergency phone numbers. Consider leaving the itinerary with a contact and check out/in with that person.

- Be familiar with the potential hazards of performing trail work in the backcountry and how to deal with any emergencies. These hazards include weather conditions, biting insects, contact with poison ivy or other irritating plants, and potential encounters with venomous snakes and spiders. Never attempt to cross streams in high water.
- Keep the 10 essentials in your backpack. Stay hydrated, take breaks as needed and pace yourself. A recommended list of the 10 essentials from the National Park Service includes:
  1. NAVIGATION – Map, compass and GPS system
  2. SUN PROTECTION – Sunglasses, sunscreen and hat
  3. INSULATION – Jacket, hat, gloves, rain shell and thermal underwear
  4. ILLUMINATION – Flashlight, lanterns and headlamp
  5. FIRST-AID SUPPLIES – First Aid Kit
  6. FIRE – Matches, lighter and fire starters
  7. REPAIR KIT AND TOOLS – Duct tape, knife, screwdriver and scissors
  8. NUTRITION – Food
  9. HYDRATION – Water and water treatment supplies
  10. EMERGENCY SHELTER – Tent, space blanket, tarp and bivy
- It is recommended that you wear long pants, long sleeves, sturdy work boots and leather gloves. Eye protection, ear protection and a hard hat are additional safety gear that may be required for some activities (e.g., use of power tools). Treat clothes/gear with permethrin or use other insect repellent according to manufacturer's instructions to reduce the risk of contracting a mosquito- or tick-borne disease.

## **Tools and equipment**

A good pair of loppers and a hand/folding saw constitute a starter tool kit for basic trail maintenance. Other tools that can be helpful include hand pruners, a pruning or bow saw for clearing small-diameter trees and branches, a manual weed whip or power trimmer for brushing heavy vegetation growth, and a metal rake or hoe for clearing trail debris and light tread repair. We can make arrangements if you need to borrow any tools or safety equipment.

Note: Adopters are not permitted to use chainsaws, unless they hold a current chain sawyer certification card from the U.S. Forest Service. Report any trail obstructions requiring a chainsaw in your adopter report. Also, no motorized vehicles are permitted on the trail.

## **Adopter responsibilities**

Trail adopters are expected to make regular trip outings to trim back vegetation growing into the trail corridor, clear trail obstructions and debris from the trail surface and submit reports on trail conditions and the work accomplished. Other tasks may include trash clean-up and replacing missing trail markers. The following information provides more guidance on each of these tasks.

## Number of outings

It is expected that you will perform at least three complete, walk-through maintenance outings during the calendar year. Of course, you are welcome to do as many outings as you wish, and monthly would be great if time allows! Timing depends on the maintenance needs of your segment. Ideally, work trips should be scheduled to coincide with the growing season to trim back vegetation when new growth is most prolific. Trail obstructions can occur any time of the year and especially after weather events (e.g., storms) when more blow-downs/deadfall occur.

## Clearing vegetation and trail obstructions

The following table lists common trail obstructions that you may encounter on the trail, along with tips on how to properly clear these obstructions. You are not being asked to correct all these conditions, because some may require special equipment and expertise. However, you are asked to report those impediments you are not equipped to handle on your adopter report.

Type of Trail Obstruction	Tips for Clearing Obstruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Growth of vegetation alongside the trail (e.g., canes, briars), especially those extending into the trail corridor.</li><li>• Roots on the tread that are high above ground (&gt;3") and that present a trip hazard.</li><li>• Vines hanging over or onto the trail from above.</li><li>• Open/wet areas with fast-growing grasses and other vegetation.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canes, briars and small vegetation should be lopped at ground level when possible.</li><li>• Roots should be lopped/cut off at ground level or dug out.</li><li>• Hanging vines should be cut off as high overhead as possible.</li><li>• Report areas of grassy overgrowth that may require a crew to brush out with power tools, if you are unable to do so.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Live branches from trees and shrubs growing into the trail corridor.</li><li>• Deadfall/blow-downs of twigs, limbs, branches and whole trees lying on or across the trail tread.</li><li>• Trees leaning low enough over the trail (i.e., leaners) to impede bicyclists or equestrians.</li><li>• Snags (dead, standing trees) near enough to the trail to produce deadfall at any time (i.e., "widow-makers").</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For tree health, trim back live branches as close to the trunk as possible.</li><li>• Drag deadfall, cut branches, etc. up the hill and off the trail, with the cut ends facing away from the trail.</li><li>• For trees across the trail, hand saw a section out, just wide enough for trail use.</li><li>• If a tree is alongside the trail but not across it, trim impeding branches at the trunk.</li><li>• Report the location of overhead hazards and obstructions that you can't safely resolve or require a chainsaw.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Loose rocks and other debris on the trail tread that could provide a trip hazard for trail users.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rocks and other debris should be rolled off the trail to the downhill side.</li><li>• Do not line the side of the trail with rocks or debris, as that impedes proper drainage.</li></ul>

## OT reassurance marker standards

The most commonly used marker throughout the Ozark Trail system is the white and green OT reassurance marker. However, because the OT traverses land owned by different management agencies, it may be marked with additional land manager signage. Standards for the use of markers were set by the Ozark Trail Council and are available on the OTA website. Here is a summary:



- When the corridor ahead is not clearly discernible, post as **few markers as possible** but sufficient to identify the trail without a navigational device (e.g., map, compass, GPS).
- Place markers at **eye level** (5–6 feet high), using only **aluminum nails**. Do not drive nails all the way in, to allow for tree growth and expansion.
- Post markers on the **right side of the trail** (in either direction, coming or going).
- Affix **two OT markers at an abrupt turn** or switchback and slanted in the direction of the turn.

All trail adopters are asked to follow these guidelines to ensure consistency, preserve the primitive nature of the trail and reduce costs associated with markers. OT markers and aluminum nails can be requested by email to [OTAadoptatrail@ozarktrail.com](mailto:OTAadoptatrail@ozarktrail.com).

Note: The Upper Current section is marked with both OT markers and solid orange markers. We have a supply of both markers to send Upper Current section trail adopters upon request.

## How to submit an adopter report

Soon after completing a trip outing, please submit an “adopter report” on the OTA website at <https://ozarktrail.com/submit-a-report/>. The report contains data fields for location, date, names and work/travel hours for each volunteer, a general description of the work completed and additional work that still needs to be done. Be accurate in specifying the location and description of unresolved problems, so work crews can reach the area as efficiently as possible.

These reports are important to track trail conditions, what work has been done on the trail and number of volunteer hours. This information is used for work planning purposes and to communicate with the land managers. If you need help with report submissions, let us know and we can help find a way that works best for you to submit a report. We can also work with your group to certify service hours once a report has been submitted.

## OTA website resources

The OTA website (<https://ozarktrail.com/>) is your one-stop shop for general trail info, maps and other updates. You can download GPS files to use with any map apps/GPS units and there's a downloadable PDF version of each section map. Additional copies of printed section maps can be ordered on the website as well. For trail adopter resources, check out the AAT webpage on the OTA website at <https://ozarktrail.com/adopt-a-trail/>. Additionally, be sure to bookmark the link at <https://ozarktrail.com/submit-a-report/> to submit your regular adopter reports.