

C. Conclusion

Multiple-use ("shared-use") trails are an efficient, economical, and increasingly common way to provide trail opportunities. Due to limited rights-of-way, multiple-use trails are sometimes the only alternative. Through thoughtful planning and diligent management, such trails can provide safe, high-quality recreation experiences without unacceptable damage to natural resources. However, the conflicts that sometimes accompany shared use of trails can be very emotional and are not issues that managers are likely to eliminate altogether. With time, patience, commitment, and cooperation among users and between users and managers (McCoy and Stoner 1992) as well as diligent and aggressive planning and management, shared-use trails can be an excellent way to accommodate many types of users with minimal conflict.

There is no one best way to accommodate multiple uses on the same trail while at the same time avoiding (or at least minimizing) conflicts. The best approach will always be dictated by local conditions and the resources available. However, the literature reviewed and the trail manager input received do provide considerable guidance. Based on this information, 12 principles are offered for minimizing conflicts on multiple-use trails.

1. Recognize Conflict as Goal Interference—Recreational conflict can best be understood as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (Jacob and Schreyer 1980, 369). Therefore, trail conflicts are possible among different user groups, among different users within the same user group, and as a result of factors (e.g., lack of tolerance for others) not related to a user's trail activity at all.

2. Provide Adequate Trail Opportunities—Offer adequate trail mileage and provide opportunities for a variety of trail *experiences*. This will help reduce congestion and allow users to choose the conditions that are best suited to the experiences they desire. As in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), this will require a focus on trail *experiences* as opposed to trail activities. Opportunities for different trail experiences can be maximized by providing trails that vary in terms of terrain, difficulty, access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities and site management, social encounters, visitor impacts, and visitor management.

3. Minimize Number of Contacts in Problem Areas—Each contact among trail users (as well as contact with evidence of others) has the *potential* to result in conflict. So, as a general rule, reduce the number of user contacts whenever possible. This is especially true in congested areas and at trailheads. Disperse use and provide separate trails where necessary after careful consideration of the additional environmental impact this may cause. Recognize that separating trail users may limit opportunities for communication, understanding, and eventual cooperation among different user groups.

4. Involve Users as Early as Possible—Identify the present and likely future users of each trail and involve them in the process of avoiding and resolving conflicts as early as possible, preferably before conflicts occur. For proposed trails, possible conflicts and their solutions should be addressed during the planning and design stage with the involvement of prospective users (Ryan 1993, 79). New and emerging uses should be anticipated and addressed as early as possible with the involvement of participants. Likewise, existing and developing conflicts on present trails need to be faced quickly and addressed with the participation of those affected.

5. Understand User Needs—Determine the motivations, desired experiences, norms, setting preferences, and other needs of the present and likely future users of each trail. This "customer" information is critical for anticipating and managing conflicts. This process must be ongoing and will require time, patience, effort, and sincere, active listening.





6. Identify the Actual Sources of Conflict—Help users to identify the specific tangible causes of any conflicts they are experiencing (e.g., “teenagers partying and littering at Liberty Campground,” “horses fouling the water at Peabody Spring,” “mountain bikers speeding down the last hill before the Sills Trailhead,” etc.). In other words, get beyond emotions and stereotypes as quickly as possible, and get to the roots of any problems that exist.

7. Work With Affected Users—Work with all parties involved to reach mutually agreeable solutions to these specific issues. Users who are not involved as part of the solution are more likely to be part of the problem now and in the future. For example, the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council is considering “full and balanced representation” of key user groups on its county committees as it plans sections of its new trail (Isbill 1993).

8. Promote Trail Etiquette—Minimize the possibility that any particular trail contact will result in conflict by actively and aggressively promoting responsible trail behavior. Use existing educational materials or modify them to better meet local needs. Target these educational efforts, get the information into users’ hands as early as possible, and present it in interesting and understandable ways (Roggenbuck and Ham 1986).

9. Encourage Positive Interaction Among Different Users—Trail users are usually not as different from one another as they believe. Providing positive interactions both on and off the trail will help break down barriers and stereotypes, and build understanding, good will, and cooperation. This can be accomplished through a variety of strategies such as sponsoring “user swaps,” joint trail building or maintenance projects, filming trail-sharing videos, and forming Trail Advisory Councils.

10. Favor “Light-Handed Management”—Use the most “light-handed approaches” that will achieve area objectives (Hendee, Stankey, and Lucas 1990). This is essential in order to provide the freedom of choice and natural environments that are so important to trail-based recreation. Intrusive design and coercive management are not compatible with high-quality trail experiences.

11. Plan and Act Locally—Whenever possible, address issues regarding multiple-use trails at the local level (Keller 1990; Kulla 1991). This allows greater sensitivity to local needs and provides better flexibility for addressing difficult issues on a case-by-case basis. Local action also facilitates involvement of the people who will be most affected by the decisions and most able to assist in their successful implementation.

12. Monitor Progress—Monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the decisions made and programs implemented. It is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions designed to minimize conflicts; provide for safe, high-quality trail experiences; and protect natural resources. Conscious, deliberate monitoring is the only way to determine if conflicts are indeed being reduced and what changes in programs might be needed. This is only possible within the context of clearly understood and agreed-upon objectives for each trail area. Two existing visitor impact management frameworks do consider area objectives and offer great potential for monitoring trail settings and trail use impacts:

- Visitor Impact Management System (VIM)—This model, developed for the National Park Service by the National Park and Conservation Association, assists managers in setting objectives, selecting impact indicators, and monitoring impacts against measurable standards set for each area (Graefe, Kuss and Vaske 1990).
- Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)—This system was developed by and for the USDA Forest Service and operates much like the VIM framework (Stankey, Cole and Lucas 1985).