

Threats to Trails

Understanding the threats to trails & the hiking experience.

Every year, trails are at risk due to a wide variety of factors. Knowledge of these threats is the first step towards protecting the places you love to hike.

1. Encroaching urban development.

As the population of the US increases and as businesses seek less expensive rural real estate, sometimes America's treasured places and wilderness areas can be marred by development. By thoughtfully locating development, we can usually protect the places Americans love to visit while still providing the necessary human conveniences.

2. Proliferating human infrastructure.

Population expansion leads to new roads, new sources of power, and communications. Trees are cut down and in their place power lines are erected. While sometimes necessary, we must be careful to preserve places where people can retreat to and enjoy a truly natural backcountry experience.

3. Human misuse and overuse.

Odds are that if you love to visit a place for its beauty or tranquility, someone else does as well. Traveling gently through these landscapes and following Leave No Trace principles are vital and nearly effortless ways to preserve trails.

4. Diminishing air quality.

Air pollution from human activity affects not only hikers, but plants and animals as well. Our energy choices off the trail can certainly impact our experience on the trail.

5. Increased user group conflicts.

As the human population grows and open space shrinks, conflicts can sometimes erupt. Hikers, bikers, equestrians, and off-highway vehicles each use trails differently. Managing user conflicts and balancing new uses against ecosystem damage must be addressed for each trail system.

6. Natural resource extraction.

Mining, logging, grazing, and water diversion for human use have a definite impact on natural landscapes. These potentially destructive practices can diminish landscapes and destroy habitats if improperly managed.

7. Water degradation.

We all live downstream, as the saying goes. Everything humans place on the land, including pesticides, fertilizer, and waste, can also end up downstream.



Making good choices about how we use land will help preserve good quality water for both humans and wildlife.

8. Losing the trail experience and solitude.

If you've ever reached a vista or stunning waterfall, only to be greeted by someone chatting away loudly on a cell phone, you know how disconcerting this problem can be. Aircraft over-flights, light pollution, new technologies, and crowding can devalue the spiritual quality of outdoor adventure.

9. Reduced wildlife in trail corridors.

Increased human impacts are blocking wildlife corridors, fragmenting forests, and bringing destructive invasive species into our ecosystems. Climate changes caused in part by human pollution are causing native species to disappear in some areas.

