

# COMMUNITY WINTER TRAILS PROGRAM

## PROGRAM GUIDE

### Introduction

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The Community Winter Trails Program is a federally funded, Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), administered program that provides funding and support to rural communities to mark public winter trails. The goal of the program is to facilitate connections between rural communities, public roads or highways, and public use areas through installation of high visibility trail markers. DOT&PF will maintain a public online inventory of rural winter trails that will be updated in collaboration with the communities participating in this program.

This guide has been developed to assist applicants and recipients of Community Winter Trail Program funding in applying for funding, executing the grant agreement, and implementing a local winter trails program.

### How does it work?

The federal funding for this program comes from the Federal Highway Administration with the intent to improve safety and mobility on winter trails. The program is administered in partnership with rural communities through local governments and non-profits so it can be implemented on a local level with guidance and oversight from DOT&PF. Recipients of this funding are expected to share trail information with DOT&PF to be used in a public online database. Applications may be submitted at any time of year and are reviewed by DOT&PF on an ongoing basis. The number of applications approved for funding will vary based on availability of funding.

### Partnering with DOT&PF

The Community Winter Trail Program is a collaboration between DOT&PF and rural communities to improve safety on winter trails. Here are the roles we envision for each member of the team.

DOT&PF's roles:

- Allocate federal funding to communities to improve safety of the rural trail system
- Maintain an online winter trail inventory\*
- Provide community support regarding installation and placement of trail markers
- Review and support development of project documents including mapping, project agreements, and general administrative support

Applicant's roles:

- Map trails and provide GPS trail information to DOT&PF\*
- Assemble, install, maintain, and remove trail markers as necessary
- Maintain good safety practices in implementing and maintaining the trail markers

- Obtain private land ownership permissions, local government resolutions of support, and other project support documents as necessary
- Support DOT&PF efforts to prepare environmental documentation
- Maintain appropriate accounting records of all activities

\*About the trail inventory: GPS coordinates will be used to create accurate maps of the trails. Eventually, trail maps will be produced and made available to community search and rescue organizations, Village Public Safety Officers, and community residents. Recipients of funding are expected to work with DOT&PF to gather GPS coordinates for marked trails.

## Application and Award Process

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In order to be eligible for funding through this program, applicants need to complete the application process, which includes filling out the application, submitting a budget, and providing all required information as described in this guidebook.

### Who is eligible?

Eligible applicants are rural Alaska governments (such as tribes, boroughs, and cities) and non-profit entities operating in rural Alaska.

### What trails are eligible?

Eligible trails are for public use, most commonly trails that run between communities, trails that connect to public highways or roads, or trails that provide access to public use areas. Trails that provide access exclusively to private property or are for individual use are not eligible.

### What types of markers are eligible?

DOT&PF's standard trail marker consists of three eight-foot-long fiberglass poles fastened to form a tripod that is placed on top of the ground. Reflective tape and sheeting is installed on each leg of the tripod to increase visibility when viewed from any direction. Unless a waiver of standard practices is approved, the legs of the tripod may not penetrate the ground nor may a tripod be connected to an anchor that is in the ground. It is acceptable to anchor a tripod to nearby vegetation or fasten reflective sheeting directly to a tree. For more details about what markers are recommended see the section on Assembly, Installation, and Removal.

DOT&PF's standard tripod trail marker is considered a land based marker. Land based markers may not be placed over portions of trails that cross water bodies such as lakes or rivers or areas prone to annual flooding. In such cases, non-permanent markers must be used. An example of a non-land based marker would be a cut willow branch with bio-degradable reflective survey tape or marking twine.

Applicants may propose an alternative marker to the standard DOT&PF tripod marker, subject to DOT&PF approval.

## Filling out the application

This section will guide you through each page of the application with recommendations on how to strengthen your submission.

### Page 1

#### *Applicant and Co-Applicant Information*

Fill in all requested contact information for the applicant. This is the primary group applying for funds (see “Who is eligible” on page 2). The contact person should be the person who is most knowledgeable about and can directly answer questions about this application. You may or may not have a co-applicant. If so, completely fill in all requested information.

#### *Project Information*

Check box that best describes the type of trail for which you are applying for funds. In the questions below, provide enough information about the location, distance, and terrain of the trail for DOT&PF to understand how members of your community use the trail and what they may encounter on the trail. For example, trail marking in forested areas present a different set of challenges than a trail that crosses open tundra.

### Page 2

#### *Safety Information*

Improving trail safety is one of the primary goals of this program. Describe past safety incidents so we can evaluate how installation of trail markers would improve safety on the trail.

#### *Community Contributions*

Applicants who secure all land access permissions or contribute funding or resources may rank higher, however these documents are not required in order to apply. If you do not have the requested information, let us know on your application.

### Page 3

#### *Administrative Contributions*

In this section, we are looking for information about your experience and capacity to implement a trail marking program. Understanding how your current program works, if you have one, will help us understand how you will use the funds. Although applicants are not required to complete any of the activities listed on this page, applicants who have the staff and resources available to do this work may rank higher.

#### *Budget Information*

The information in this section will give us an estimate of the amount of funds you need to successfully mark your trail. We receive a limited amount of funds from the federal government for this program. We will make grant awards based on the budget information we receive from you and the amount of funding we receive from the federal government.

If an alternative trail marker design is proposed, sufficient detail should be provided to allow us to evaluate how well the alternative marker will meet the requirements for visibility, maintenance, and cost-effectiveness described in the section on Assembly, Installation, and Removal.

## Page 4

### *Additional Information*

The only required attachment is a map of the trail. This map can be in print or electronic form. Depending on the resources available to you, the map can be anything from an electronic map with GPS coordinates to a printed map with the trail marked in pen. Please also mark public shelter cabins, points of interest or landmarks, areas with safety hazards, areas near the trail to avoid, and land ownership information. If you need to attach additional pages to answer the questions in the application, please feel free to include those as attachments.

If available, an electronic GPS log of the trail can be emailed to [dot.wintertrails@alaska.gov](mailto:dot.wintertrails@alaska.gov).

### *Submission Information*

You can submit an electronic or hard copy of your application to the contact information provided on page 4. You can submit your application at any time throughout the year. If you have any questions on how to fill out the application or whether or not you're eligible to apply, please contact us at the email or phone number listed. Don't hesitate to contact us!

## Criteria for selecting projects

DOT&PF will review and score each application based on completeness of the information provided and the following criteria.

### Safety

Applicants should provide a narrative and documentation of safety hazards and incidents on the trail. Trails with documented hazards will rank higher. Data from local search and rescue organizations, the Alaska State Troopers, and Village Public Safety Officers are good sources of documentation.

### Land Ownership

While not required to apply, the applicant is required to obtain written permission from private landowners prior to placing trail markers on privately owned property. Applications that include written permissions for all privately owned lands crossed by the trail will rank higher.

### Resolution of Support

Applicants should provide resolutions of support from local governments or other organizations. Applications with resolutions of support will rank higher.

## Cost Estimate

Please fill out the budget form in the application packet completely. An accurate and complete cost estimate will rank higher.

## Timing and schedule

Applicants may submit an application at any time for consideration. DOT&PF will select applications to be funded based on availability of funding within that federal fiscal year.

## Post Award Process

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This section explains what will happen if your application is funded.

## Final Budget / Cost Estimate

After your winter trail marking project is selected for funding, DOT&PF staff will work with you to finalize your project budget.

## Memorandum of Agreement

A memorandum of agreement, or MOA, must be signed by the applicant and DOT&PF in order for DOT&PF to release federal funding to the applicant. This is a legally binding document outlining the roles and responsibilities of each party. A limited waiver of sovereign immunity is required for a Native Village or Tribe when receiving federal funding. This waiver is limited to activities arising out of, or in connection with, the relevant trail marking project.

## Environmental Document

DOT&PF will work with your organization to complete all the necessary environmental documents. This will be a collaborative process that will help us understand the impact trail marking will have on the environment.

## Right of Entry/Land Use Authorizations

Private land owners' permission to install trail markers on their land must be obtained and provided to DOT&PF. DOT&PF staff will work with your organization to ensure all the proper paperwork is in place before the MOA is signed.

## Implementing the Program

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After the MOA has been signed by your organization and DOT&PF, you're ready to start purchasing supplies and making a plan to mark the trail. We ask that you keep the following in mind as you implement your trail marking program.

## Safety

Safety for participants in this program is a top priority for DOT&PF. There are some basic safety precautions your team can take to minimize risk while installing winter trail markers:

- Install trail markers in a team of two or more people. Never do this work alone.
- Wear reflective vests or clothing while installing trail markers. This will help your team members find you in an emergency.
- Always let multiple people know where you are going and when you plan to be back. Take a satellite phone or SPOT tracker with you if possible.
- It is your responsibility to monitor the thickness of the ice and warrant when conditions are safe.

## Marker Assembly, Installation, and Removal

It is generally good practice to assemble the markers before they are taken out in the field to be installed.

Markers should be placed approximately at the interval that was agreed upon in the MOA, with the understanding that the spacing may need to be adjusted for different circumstances, including in higher-risk areas. The markers do not need to be removed at the end of the winter season.

Communities have the option of proposing a different trail marker design from the one recommended by DOT&PF, as long as they meet the follow criteria:

- Markers must provide a high level of visibility when viewed from any angle
- Markers must be constructed and installed in such a way that they require minimal maintenance and can withstand high winds and frost jacking
- Markers must be constructed from durable, cost-effective materials
- Markers need to be affordable and readily available in large quantities
- Markers must be free-standing without requiring anchoring into the ground. Unless a waiver of standard practices is approved, the legs of the tripod may not be buried in the ground nor may a tripod be connected to an anchor that is in the ground. It is acceptable to anchor a tripod to nearby vegetation, or fasten reflective sheeting directly to a tree.

## Trail Markers Placed on Land

DOT&PF's standard trail marker consists of three eight-foot-long fiberglass poles fastened to form a tripod that is placed on top of the ground. Reflective tape and sheeting is installed on each leg of the tripod to allow visibility when viewed from any direction. These markers are designed to be visible in almost all winter conditions and from the air for search and rescue efforts.

The trail markers are freestanding and movable, and are not designed to be staked into the ground. Trail markers are designed to be spaced so the trail users can reasonably be expected to see the next marker along the trail. The spacing between each marker should be approximately 100 feet. Spacing will vary with terrain, wind, and trail conditions. Markers can also be placed at the edges of rivers, lakes, and the coast to alert travelers of potential ice danger.



The online trail database will contain the following information about each trail:

- Trail name
- Total trail distance
- Trail contact
- Date trail was added to database
- Source of data about trail
- Type of trail marker
- Known Hazard points, including:
  - Steep trail sections
  - Documented open water areas
  - Low visibility areas
  - Snow drift areas
  - Confusing trail intersections
  - Narrow trail sections

## Reimbursement and Invoicing

Reimbursement and invoicing details will be agreed upon by DOT&PF and the organization receiving funding, and will be specified in a project agreement to be signed by both parties.

## Maintenance

Maintenance of the trail markers is the responsibility of the organization that received funding from this program. The responsible organization is required to make a good faith effort to ensure that trail markers are visible and spacing is appropriately maintained. This program cannot provide funding for the replacement or maintenance of trail markers.

## More Information

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If you have questions or comments about this program, please email us at [dot.wintertrails@alaska.gov](mailto:dot.wintertrails@alaska.gov).

The Community Winter Trails Program is administered by DOT&PF's Commissioner's Office located in Anchorage at 550 W 7<sup>th</sup> Ave, Suite 295, Anchorage, AK 99501.