Recommended Trail Standards

You may need to consult with an environmental or engineering professional on some aspects of your trail design, but by following these standards you will be able to create a useful, enjoyable, environmentally-friendly trail in your woodlands.

Trail Layout
Design trails to cover a variety of vegetation, landforms, and sights. Trail patterns vary depending on the expectations of the user. Loop trails are most popular, but short spur trails may be used to access waterways and views. Frequently occurring curves and grade changes will add interest.

Clearing Width
Vary clearing widths to avoid the tunnel effect and promote a variety of trail environments such as woodland flowers, meadow openings, and woodland edges.

- Light Use – 4 to 6 feet
- Hillsides - 3 feet

Clearing Height

- 8 feet

Tread Width

- 2 to 3 feet

Trail Surface

- Light use – natural, with gravel in wet areas
- Heavy use – natural, with gravel and wood chips as needed

Turning Radius
Turning radius is not critical; however, gentle curves are aesthetically pleasing and easier to maintain. Straight sections usually should not exceed 100 feet.

Percent Grade
Grades exceeding 10% are difficult for hikers to traverse, and without additional protection, erosion problems often will develop. Steps, switchbacks, or water diversion devices may be needed on slopes over 25%. Occasional grade changes and dips should be incorporated into the trial layout to promote interest and to facilitate natural drainage.

- Desired - 0 to 5%
- Maximum -15% sustained
- 40% less than 50 yds
Water Crossings
Structures for crossing water depend on the flow and length of the crossing and the abilities of the hiker. If large structures are required for safe crossing, the expertise of a professional may be required.

   Bridges – Must be located above ordinary high water mark or secured to prevent washout.

   Width – 2 to 4 feet

Fords – Slow moving water less than 24 inches in depth may be forded. Rocks and stepping stones may be used to assist hikers.