



## **Eno River Trail Steward Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

Greetings and thank you for your interest in being a Trail Steward at Eno River State Park, West Point on the Eno City Park, Penny's Bend, Panther Branch Natural Area or the Confluence Natural Area. The purpose of this packet is as follows:

1. To ensure that volunteers know what is expected of them.
2. To go over some basic safety aspects of being a trail volunteer.
3. To give a brief overview of our trail management guidelines.
4. To give trainees a chance to do some practical management on one of the park trails.
5. To thank you for deciding to help care for our natural recreational areas!

### **Overview of Facilities**

Eno River State Park (ERSP) and West Point on the Eno Durham City Park (West Point) officially opened in the 1970s. These parks were made possible through public outcry led largely by members of what is now the Eno River Association (ERA). These concerned citizens did not want the river made into a reservoir and instead worked to make it a part of the park system. Because of their ongoing efforts, over 15 miles of the Eno is now protected within state or city parks and many more miles are protected by other agencies.

ERSP has grown into a 4,500-acre state park with almost 30 miles of trails. Naturally, a park that protects a river is widespread and contains several access points. Currently ERSP has five gated vehicle accesses, a roadside access (Pump Station) and several neighborhood walk-in accesses. ERSP includes Occaneechee Mountain State Natural Area, a separate unit that is monitored and staffed by ERSP.

West Point is 404 acres in total and has roughly four miles of trails. Like ERSP, West Point is a linear park with three main entrances – two located on Roxboro Road, one on each side of the river, and another on Guess Road behind the ERA office. There are additional unofficial entrances from adjoining neighborhoods.

Penny's Bend Nature Preserve is owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers and managed by the NC Botanical Garden. This nature preserve is 84 acres in size and contains roughly 2 ¾ miles of trail. The

preserve is accessed from a parking area near the corner of Snow Hill and Old Oxford Roads in Durham.

The Confluence Natural Area is owned and managed by the ERA. This preserve was opened to the public 7 days a week from dawn until dusk in March 2020. The 270-acre preserve is located at 4214 Highland Farm Road in Efland. The Confluence has two completed trails, roughly 2 ¼ miles in length, with an additional 2-mile trail expected to be completed by June of 2024.

ERA opened Panther Branch Natural Area in early 2023. This preserve, located on Lebanon Road in Efland, is 56 acres in size and contains two hiking trails totaling 2 ½ miles in length.

The extensive use of these trails and the limited staff at each of these parks and preserves mean that assistance from volunteers is necessary to maintain high-quality trails. The Trail Steward program is designed to improve visitors' experiences, give volunteers a sense of ownership of these natural areas, and increase the effectiveness of park staff who oversee the maintenance of these preserves.

## **Overview of the Trail Steward Program**

The purpose of the Trail Steward program is to keep trail systems maintained and to assist preserve staff by alerting them to potential safety concerns as quickly as possible. The stewardship staff of the ERA oversee the reporting structure of the Trail Steward program, but each steward is an essential component of the system.

You will receive a monthly email to remind you to report your volunteer hours and any issues on your trail section via Jotform. Major issues requiring the immediate attention of park staff should be reported immediately following their discovery via Jotform. Reporting a major issue in Jotform will automatically notify the relevant park staff. If you report a major issue, park staff may reach out to you directly for more details.

## **Reporting Guidelines**

The following are examples of major issues which should be reported as soon as possible using Jotform:

- Vandalism, including missing or damaged signs.
- Potentially hazardous trees, including dead branches overhanging the trail.
- Hazards related to erosion, such as washed-out trails.
- Damaged, weakened, or rotting bridges, boardwalks, steps, or other structures.
- Large instances of trash dumping.

The following are examples of minor issues which can be submitted with your monthly report in Jotform:

- New or developing social trails.
- Faded or missing blazes.
- Observations of invasive plant species.
- Small amounts of trash, including dog waste bags.
- Off-leash dogs.

If you are uncertain about whether or how to report something, don't hesitate to reach out to your staff lead! Below is the list of staff members who should be contacted regarding questions for each area. If you are assigned to a section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, you will have a staff contact with both the Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail and the organization which manages the area where you are a steward.

Area or Trail	Managing Organization	Staff Lead	Contact Information
Eno River State Park	Eno River State Park	Alexander Tyson	<a href="mailto:alexander.tyson@ncparks.gov">alexander.tyson@ncparks.gov</a> , 984.250.1370 (park office)
Occonechee Mountain State Natural Area			
West Point on the Eno City Park	Durham Parks and Recreation	Kimberly Oberle	<a href="mailto:kimberly.oberle@durhamnc.gov">kimberly.oberle@durhamnc.gov</a> 919.937.7622
Confluence Natural Area	Eno River Association	Indigo Roper-Edwards	<a href="mailto:indigo@enoriver.org">indigo@enoriver.org</a> 919.695.6672
Panther Branch Natural Area			
Penny's Bend Nature Preserve	NC Botanical Garden	Neville Handel	<a href="mailto:nhandel@email.unc.edu">nhandel@email.unc.edu</a> 919.962.2380
Mountains-to-Sea Trail (Orange County)	Friends of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail	Bill Boyarsky	<a href="mailto:bill.boyarsky@gmail.com">bill.boyarsky@gmail.com</a>
Occonechee Speedway			
Mountains-to-Sea Trail (Durham County)		Fred Dietrich	<a href="mailto:dietrich@duke.edu">dietrich@duke.edu</a>

## **Trail Steward Expectations**

Have fun! You are a volunteer and we have an expectation that you will have fun and help out the park/preserve while doing so. As a volunteer, you are expected to comply with all North Carolina State Parks and Recreation, Durham Parks and Recreation, NC Botanical Gardens, or Eno River Association area rules and policies.

Sometimes volunteers are treated as employees by preserve visitors. Whenever possible, volunteers should be familiar with preserve facilities and rules and regulations in case someone inquires about them. **Volunteers are not responsible, under any circumstances, for enforcing preserve rules or for informing visitors of rule violations.** Violations should be reported to your staff lead.

Remember that you also represent the preserve, so it is important for each steward to be courteous to everyone they encounter. If you do not know the answer to a question, politely say so, and offer to give the person asking for assistance the telephone number to the relevant preserve office.

You will be given an Eno Trail Steward hat that you are expected to wear while conducting your volunteer work to help identify you as someone conducting official business.

Volunteers will be expected to keep accurate records of the time spent monitoring their trail, and to report their hours using the online hours tracker. **In order to remain a Trail Steward, you must submit a report at least once per month.**

Each Trail Steward adopts a specific trail or section of a trail. The basic expectations for each Trail Steward are as follows:

1. Walk your trail at least once per month, and preferably twice per month during the peak growing season (June through September). Using simple hand tools, clear the trail corridor such that a 4-foot-wide area is always clear, and remove large brush on the trail. Report issues you are unable to address yourself to your staff lead.
2. Report the need for re-blazing trails. Trails will typically be blazed and re-blazed by preserve staff.
3. Clear out water bars twice per year or as needed. Late fall is the most important time to do this, as that is when leaf build-up makes water bars less effective and may create a slip hazard.
4. Report issues with steps, bridges or signs as needed.
5. Where feasible, cover up social trails that develop. Some social trails will require large groups to cover up effectively.

## **Safety Information**

Bear in mind that as a volunteer you are not eligible for worker's compensation. It is expected that each volunteer will always operate in a safe manner. Some of the hazards you may encounter include, but are not limited to:

- Tripping or fall hazards.
- Bodies of water (including a river).
- Thorny or poisonous plants, including poison ivy.
- Stinging or biting insects or spiders, especially mosquitos, ticks and chiggers. Wear insect repellent and check your body for ticks when you are done with any trail work.
- Venomous snakes, particularly copperheads.
- Inclement weather, including extreme temperatures - volunteer work should not be done during inclement weather and should always take place during park open hours. Sunscreen is highly recommended, including during sunny days in winter.
- Wild animals - if you are approached by a wild animal, it may be sick. Do not approach wild animals, and if you suspect an animal is sick, contact your staff lead as soon as possible.
- Domestic animals - you may encounter off-leash dogs in the preserve. If you encounter an off-leash dog, alert preserve staff. While staff may not be able to directly address the issue, it is important that they are aware of it.

Please keep the following safety tips in mind while on the trail:

- Bring water and stay hydrated.
- Wear work gloves when using hand tools.
- Wear proper socks and footwear and appropriate clothing for the weather conditions.
- Travel in pairs or groups where possible. If this is not possible, carry a cell phone and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Carry the preserve office phone number with you. If you are injured during volunteer work, you need to report it. In the event of any medical emergency, call 911 first and then call the preserve office, or the on-call Ranger for Eno River State Park or Occoneechee Mountain Natural Area. **The Eno River State Park on-call Ranger number is 919.616.2959, Occoneechee Mountain on-call Ranger number is 919.616.1832, West Point on the Eno Durham City Park office phone number is 919.471.1623, Penny's Bend Nature Preserve office phone number is 919.962.0522, and the Confluence Natural Area and Panther Branch Natural Area office phone number is 919.695.6672.**
- If you are marking a trail with blazes, you should wear eye protection. Do not mark trails unless specifically instructed to do so by your staff lead.

## **Tools of the Trade**

Volunteers are not allowed to utilize power tools of any kind unless they have been approved to do so by preserve staff and are utilizing all proper protective equipment. Because of liability issues, we do not usually allow volunteers to use power equipment like weed trimmers and leaf blowers. The primary tools you will use as a Trail Steward are hand saws, loppers, shovels, and hatchets.

In general, it is expected that you will provide your own tools. This is primarily because the preserve does not have enough tools available to provide to the volunteers that may be working on any given day. If you need to borrow hand tools to complete a task, contact the preserve or ERA staff and tools will be loaned to you.

## **Trail Guidelines**

There are two types of trails in the Eno trail system: hiking trails (referred to as “single use” from here on) and equestrian/hiking trails (referred to as “dual use” from here on). The dual use trails are the Ridge, Shakori, Piedmont and Knight trails, all of which are within Eno River State Park. All the other trails are strictly single use (hiking) trails. Since the vast majority of Trail Stewards will be working on single use trails, most discussion of trail guidelines will be in reference to these trails.

### **Trail Tread Width**

All the new single use trails in the preserve are designed to have a two-foot-wide tread and one foot of cleared corridor on either side of it, for a total of a four-foot trail corridor. Branches and limbs should be cleared to a height of eight feet within the trail corridor when possible. Many older single use trails were originally built on old roadbeds that are considerably wider than four feet. This is acceptable, but the complete width of these trails does not need to be kept clear. Trails should rarely be less than two feet wide.

The tread for dual-use trails should be between four and eight feet wide with an additional 24 inches of corridor open on either side. Branches and limbs below ten feet in height should be cleared as well.

When clearing trail corridor:

1. Cut off branches and limbs as close to the tree trunk as possible, perpendicular to the branch. This is better for the tree and reduces the risk of injury to passing hikers by minimizing sharp protrusions.

2. If branches obstruct the view of a trail blaze, they should be trimmed even if they are outside the trail corridor.
3. If you encounter a root that is a trip hazard and you can remove the root with the tools you have at hand, please do so.
4. Remove and dispose of all large branches, limbs, and saplings at least 15 feet away from the centerline of the trail. Small cuttings can be left to decompose.

## **Blazing**

Generally, preserve staff are responsible for blazing and re-blazing trails. It is expected that you will report trails that need re-blazing to preserve staff. Trail blazes are designed to serve as occasional reminders of what trail you are on, not constant reminders. Depending on the trail, staff may ask you to update the blazes. Note that in ERSP, only park staff are permitted to apply blazes. You can get a blaze board and spray paint from your staff lead. If you are applying blazes unaccompanied by a staff member, only refresh existing blazes. Do not apply new blazes.

Be careful when applying spray paint. You should wear eye protection while spray painting and take care not to get paint on your skin or in your eyes.

## **Water Bar Maintenance**

Twice per year or as needed you should take a shovel with you along the trail and clean in and around all existing water bars to be sure that the bars are diverting water as intended.

## **Social Trail Concealment**

A 'social trail' is a trail that is not part of the designated trail system but that is traveled by preserve visitors often enough that it takes on the appearance of a trail. While walking off-trail is allowed in some preserves, we would prefer that visitors use only designated trails. Social trails can confuse visitors and increase erosion.

If you discover a social trail that joins in with your assigned trail, do your best to cover it up. Some social trails are so well developed that an individual or a small group may not be able to effectively block access to the social trail. If this is the case, please report the social trail and staff will gather a larger group to conceal it.

## **Invasive Species Management**

In many of the preserves along the Eno, there are a variety of invasive plant species, which interfere with the ecological function of our native ecosystems. While Trail Stewards are not expected to manage invasive species, we encourage you to document those you observe along your trail. If you are interested

in learning more about identifying and managing invasive plants, contact Indigo Roper-Edwards at [indigo@enoriver.org](mailto:indigo@enoriver.org) or 919.695.6672.