

Policy: Trail Maintenance on Monhegan Associates' Trails

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This policy supersedes all prior policies or statements related to trail maintenance on Monhegan Associates' land with the exception of any that may be contained in the Monhegan Associates Bylaws.

Objective

The objective of this policy is to articulate in a clear manner the philosophy and degree in which trails will be maintained on Monhegan Associates land. The aim of the Monhegan Associates' Trails Committee shall be to preserve the natural state of Monhegan's wildlands. When trimming trails it is important to remember that each foot of the way is a place of wild natural beauty. We are not just cutting an easy highway from the trail beginning to a place of beauty and peace at the end. In its work on the trails the Committee shall strive to leave as little evidence as possible of human activities.

Scope

The scope of this policy will be primarily for in-season maintenance of the trails on Monhegan Associates lands. This said, some maintenance of the trails is done during the off-season and the guidelines set in this policy would still apply.

Definitions:

In-Season - This is the time from Memorial Day to Columbus Day.

Trail Tread - The worn trail is the part of the trail that is most worn - typically, it is dirt or grass that is so short that it perpetually does not need trimming.

Cairns - These are stacked rocks that in the past were used to mark trails. MAI no longer uses these to mark trails.

Flammable Material - This includes dead woody plant matter including sticks and branches that are less than a 3" diameter.

Implementation

1. The trails should be cleared of any **flammable material** 2.5 ft out from either side of the centerline of the trail as well as 4 ft high off of the ground. (see fire mitigation box diagram at end of document).

- Any **flammable material** removed from the trail should be discarded at least 6 ft away from the edge of the trail.
- Any woody materials that are within the fire mitigation box (see diagram below) and greater than 3" in diameter are considered to be logs. Logs that are not laying in contact with the forest floor should be cut so the logs are touching the ground.

2. Where trails are bordered by grass or other vegetation, the vegetation should be trimmed back only as needed where deemed necessary for hiker safety based on the following guidelines:

- If the **trail tread** is narrow (roughly 12" or less), then vegetation should be trimmed back roughly 12" on each side.
- If the **trail tread** is between 1 and 3 feet, then the vegetation should be trimmed back between 12" and 1" on each side at a decreasing rate as the trail gets wider.
- If the **trail tread** is wider than 3 feet, then the vegetation bordering the trail should either not be trimmed or trimmed very minimally (less than an inch).

3. Vegetation within the **trail tread**, around roots and rocks, should be trimmed low for safety reasons. Roots and rocks within the trail are potential tripping hazards, therefore, every effort should be made to make these objects visible to hikers.

4. On worn trails, watch for small loops formed by roots exposed by traffic. They should be clipped and removed for safety.

5. If feasible, cut thorny fronds (ie blackberry, barberry, and multiflora) at the base, as opposed to clipping at the trail's edge.

6. When removing small trees or shrubs, always saw them off level to the ground. If a young tree near the trail needs extensive trimming, it is better to saw the tree off level to the ground (or pull the tree) than to trim it and leave it in a disfigured condition. The following provides a guideline to be used when considering the removal of young trees or shrubs near the trail:

- If the young tree or shrub is within 2 feet of the worn trail, then it should be removed.
- If the young tree or shrub is between 2 and 3 feet of the worn trail, then it might be possible to avoid removal with selective trimming. However, as stated previously, if extensive trimming leaves the tree or shrub unnaturally disfigured, then removal is likely a better option.

7. When trimming branches, saw or clip them close to the trunk of the tree (just outside the branch collar), provided that the branch can be trimmed without disfiguring the tree. Do not leave 4 or 5 inches sticking out from the trunk. (See addendum for illustrations of how to prune a tree.)

8. Where false paths intersect trails, Trails Committee Members may block the false trail with brush and the correct trail be indicated with an approved trail sign.

9. When found, cairns should be removed from trails.

10. No existing trails will be closed nor new trails established without the approval of the Trustees. Minor modifications to existing trails may be made at the discretion of the Trails Committee Chairperson(s).

11. The trails committee will strive to remove poison ivy that is within 2 ft. of the trail tread. It should be noted that poison ivy grows very quickly and thus it may encroach upon the desired 2 ft. Designated volunteers or paid staff, as opposed to general volunteers working on the trails, will be tasked with the responsibility of trying to keep poison ivy away from the trails. MAI has a specific policy regarding poison ivy should you desire to read more regarding this issue.

The above criteria are not exhaustive. It is probable that the Trustees and Trails Committee, jointly, will want to add to them as experience warrants. As a protection both for the Trails Committee and for the Monhegan Associates, Inc., the trails policy ought to be set by the Trustees in consonance with the Monhegan Associates' statement of purpose.

Internal References

These internal references are among the Monhegan Associates' documents that have been consulted when writing this policy:

Certificate of Organization, Monhegan Associates Bylaws:

<http://monheganassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/bylaws2008-complete.pdf>

2004 Forestry Management Plan:

<http://monheganassociates.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/monheganplan.pdf>

2016 Proposed Forestry Management Plan:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4W8M1JJHy9dU1FfcHk2TVdZbTk0azAzZ2kxNUdrSmEtbHI0/view?usp=sharing>

External References

In August of 2020, Forest Ranger Specialist Kent Nelson with the Maine Forest Service, Forest Protection Division made a visit to the island to help assess the fire safety of our wildlands and trails. Mr. Nelson was accompanied by the Wildlands Coordinator as well as a few members of the Board of Trustees and MAI trail committee. Much of the information specific to trail maintenance employed to optimize fire safety came directly from this visit. During the summer of 2021, as this policy was being updated, Mr. Nelson also met with several members of the MAI trails committee to offer further advice and to review this document.

Rationale

The Monhegan Associates Mission calls for us to preserve for posterity the natural wild beauty of the wildlands as well as the simple, friendly way of life that has existed on Monhegan as a whole. The trails on Monhegan have long been used by islanders and visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of the wildlands and the breath-taking vistas of the Monhegan coast. Along with providing a pathway to tranquility and inspiration, the trails add to the economic health of the Monhegan community by attracting visitors to the island. However, the trails on Monhegan are differentiated from trails in state or national parks in that they are not intended to be highly groomed footpaths through the forest or along the water's edge. Our primary concern when maintaining the trails on Monhegan is to preserve the natural beauty while also creating a safe pathway for visitors to enjoy this natural beauty.

With respect to trimming vegetation, the policy reflects a goal of maintaining the trails in a manner in which a hiker can traverse the trail while having clear visibility of the ground. The reasoning for this is safety. The safety issue at hand is that the vegetation on and along side of the trail can hide tripping hazards such as rocks and roots as well as, Poison Ivy, ticks, etc.

Regarding Fire Safety measures:

Having spoken with a Maine state Forest Ranger it has been made clear that there is no way to maintain the trails on Monhegan in a way that will allow them to act as completely functional fire breaks without changing their appearance significantly. However, the trails can be maintained in a manner that would make them resistant to the spread of ground fire, temporarily slowing the spread of any bigger ground fires.

Anything larger than 3" in diameter is not a concern unless suspended off of the forest floor because these larger logs have very high moisture content as well as burn times that surpass that of any ground fire that is likely to occur out here. When suspended off the forest floor, these logs can dry out much faster. By cutting these to the ground their moisture content is increased significantly and decomposition will also occur at a much greater rate.

The Forest Ranger who assisted in the process of making this policy, Kent Nelson, said that if there was a ground/forest fire on Monhegan island, it would almost certainly be caused by a manmade structure due to a house fire spreading to the wildlands or sparks coming off of wires connected to a house. This is why the most important areas to maintain will be those that are near to houses.

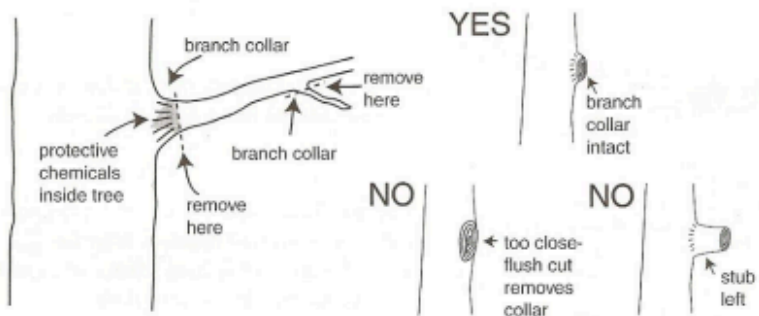
The entire idea behind this policy is to mitigate the likelihood of a fire getting out of control. While these fire resistant trails might not necessarily stop a fire, they will slow it down and give fire containment crews working corridors to surround a fire to assist in the containment. Slowing a fire down could greatly reduce the damage done by giving more time for a manned response.

It is important to note that there was concern about further fire mitigation efforts being proposed and/or adopted that would expand the measures stated in this policy by widening / clearing the trails and adjacent area even more with the objective of turning them into “fire breaks”. The committee felt that the fire mitigation measures in this policy are both reasonable and effective with regard to slowing a fire in the wildlands while maintaining the wild nature of the land. Although additional clearing of the area adjacent to the trails might improve fire mitigation efforts, such clearing would not be in keeping with the mission of Monhegan Associates.

Addendum: Illustrations for Pruning Trees adjacent to trails

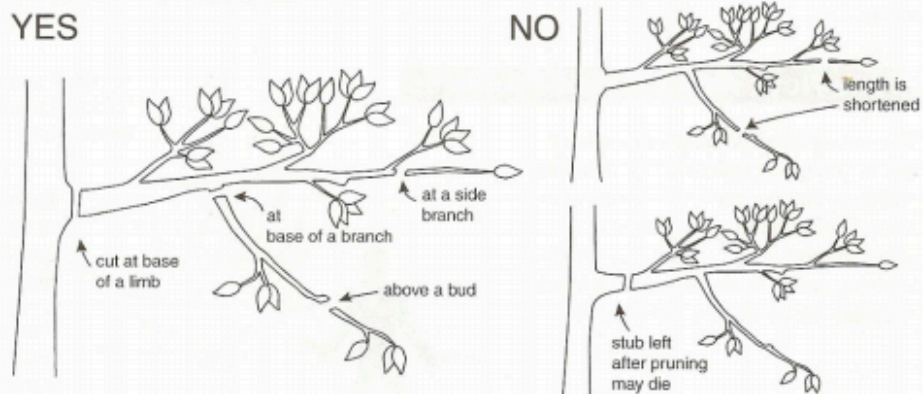
Save Branch Collars

Trees produce natural chemicals to prevent decay from entering the tree at the base of each branch or limb. To preserve this chemical zone, leave the slight swelling, or branch collar, at the branch base. The resulting wound will be smaller than if the branch were cut flush. This rule applies to large limbs and small branches.



Remove Whole Limbs or Branches

It is preferable to remove an entire limb or branch rather than to shorten its length. Branches may be cut back to a twig, or twigs to a bud, where new growth will resume. This technique respects natural growth patterns.



Addendum: Fire Mitigation Diagram

