

Working with Landowners  
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Introduction:

Trails, whether land or water, require the use of someone's property either owned by a private or government entity. Thus, the landowner is the key to the success of your trail.

1. Landowners:

- A. They are very important
- B. They call the shots
- C. If they say no, they mean no-usually-and you must accept that fact
- D. Each is different, so no single approach has all the answers.

2. Getting your act together:

- A. Know what you want in a trail
  - What is its purpose?
  - Draw a trail corridor on a map (a wide swath, not a specific route)
  - Have a beginning and an end- THINK BIG
  - How permanent do you want it to be?

3. Approaching a landowner:

- A. One person should do it all
  - Diplomacy is important
  - One person can sense the many differences among owners
  - DO NOT approach through a third party
  - DO NOT start with a phone call-this is telemarketing, and person can say no too easily
- B. Check town tax maps
  - Get photo copies of the tax maps
  - Cover all the properties in your proposed trail corridor
  - When in doubt about property lines, include both parties
  - Get names, addresses and phone numbers of owners-perhaps set up a database
- C. Write a letter
  - Try to get all of your information on one page; ask if you can explore their property with the possibility of building a hiking

trail

- Letter should cover specifics and conclude with promise of a phone call to answer any questions
- Assemble a "packet" of relative information
  - (1) A short piece on goals and history of trail
  - (2) Sketch map
  - (3) Liability brochure
  - (4) Page of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) with answers
  - (5) Additional material if appropriate
  - (6) Place in separate folder
  - (7) Attach calling card or similar information

- D. Mail and wait 5 to 7 days before calling

4. Talking with landowner in follow-up call:

- Call in evening between 7:30 and 8:30
- Introduce yourself
- Ask if they have questions

- If they say no to your request, don't argue
- Offer to meet

5. Exploration following landowner's permission
  - A. Scout in detail
  - B. Pick potential route carefully
  - C. If property is suitable, ask owner if you can build trail
6. Permission granted:
  - A. Ask about limitations, if any
  - B. Flag route
  - C. Go over proposed route with landowner, either on map or the ground
  - D. Tell owner when you expect to start work and how it will be done
  - E. Construct trail
  - F. Go over finished trail with owner

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#### Follow-up

1. Work out form of agreement with landowner:
  - A. Handshake (simple letter of understanding)
  - B. Easement (usually permanent, but can be for limited time)
  - C. Right of way (may be temporary or permanent)
  - D. Memorandum of understanding (MOU) (more formal than handshake; common with government agency or large corporation)
  - E. Purchase
2. Recognition of Cooperating Landowners:
  - A. Annual token gift and handwritten letter of thanks
  - B. Recognition party (often in conjunction with trail volunteers)
  - C. Discussion, if needed
3. Do what you say you will do
  - A. Maintain trail to a high standard
  - B. Respond quickly to problems