



Pacific Northwest Trail

Questions and Answers

1. What is the Pacific Northwest Trail (PNT)?

website: www.fs.usda.gov/pnt

The Pacific Northwest Trail is a continuous route from the Continental Divide in Montana to the Pacific Ocean in Washington. First proposed in the 1970s as a long-distance non-motorized route, it provides access through some of the most spectacular and diverse landscapes in the United States. In 2009, Congress designated the PNT as a National Scenic Trail and gave administrative responsibility for the trail to the USDA Forest Service.

2. What is a National Scenic Trail (NST)?

Congress designates National Scenic Trails under the National Trails System Act of 1968. Section 2(a) of the Act explains Congress' intent for these trails:

In order to provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and in order to promote the preservation of, public access to, travel within, and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, outdoor areas and historic resources of the Nation, trails should be established ... within scenic areas and along historic travel routes of the Nation which are often more remotely located.

Section 3(c) further defines National Scenic Trails as *so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass.*

3. How long is the PNT?

The PNT is approximately 1200 miles long. It starts at the Continental Divide in Montana and travels west to the Pacific Ocean in Washington. It passes through seven National Forests, three National Parks, a BLM resource area, lands managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Idaho Department of Lands, Washington State Parks, Idaho State Parks, and small sections of private land.

4. Do people thru-hike the PNT?

Yes. Approximately 60-65 people have completed a thru-hike of the PNT in each of the past three years (2015, 2016, and 2017).

5. Won't use increase over time? Will there be a limit to the number of people who can thru-hike the trail?

Current long-distance use of the PNT is approximately 65 people a year, but it could increase. The Forest Service is currently partnering with the University of Montana to monitor and evaluate use patterns both on and near the PNT. We'll use this information as we develop a user capacity for the trail as required by the National Trails System Act to provide for the conservation and enjoyment of significant resources along the trail like grizzly bears, alpine tundra, or sensitive cultural resources. There's more work needed to determine what the right capacity is but early indications suggest a long distance/thru-hiker capacity of about 400 people per year.

6. The National Trails System Act says that the PNT is non-motorized – why is 400 miles of it on motorized routes?

The National Trails System Act establishes National Scenic Trails to provide long distance recreational opportunities with the understanding that sometimes making this happen can take a long time. To provide a 1200 mile opportunity at the time of designation, Congress selected a route that utilizes about 400 miles of roads. Most of these roads are quiet, dirt roads on National Forest lands. Unfortunately, some segments of the PNT are on higher use roads such as state highways. The Forest Service will work with partners to identify which segments of the PNT on roads should be moved as soon as possible, and which are less of a priority.

Ideally, one day the entire PNT will be on non-motorized trails. But in some areas, we may choose for the PNT to stay located on a quiet forest road if that helps limit potential impacts to other significant resources along the trail.

7. Will roads be closed because of the PNT? What if it's moved?

The National Trails System Act was written to promote non-motorized recreational opportunities but that doesn't mean that motorized opportunities aren't also important, and no roads must be closed because of the PNT's designation as a National Scenic Trail. In areas where the PNT is located on a motorized route, the road stays open, and it's our responsibility to find a non-motorized alternative for the trail. In some cases like where the PNT is on a lightly used forest road, it's not a priority. But in other areas, the PNT may be located on a busy highway and we'd like to change that as soon as possible.

8. How will the PNT affect existing management of National Forest System lands? Will this reduce timber sales or fire management or grazing?

There is no authority in the National Trails System Act to change existing uses of National Forest System lands and the PNT is one of many multiple uses we manage for. Existing uses of National Forests will continue and be guided by direction from local forest plans. The PNT comprehensive plan will provide best management practices to manage the trail

in addition to these other multiple uses, but local land managers and private land owners retain decision-making authority for the PNT in their area.

9. What about border security? Is it safe to have a trail so close to the international border?

Several segments of the PNT are close to the border. All of these segments are on previously existing roads and trails. The Forest Service meets regularly with the US Border Patrol along the entire length of the PNT and has not received reports of any border incidents involving the PNT. In most cases, better maintenance of trails that are part of the PNT near the border provide improved access for the US Border Patrol which may increase border safety and security.

10. What is the PNT like? What do people see and experience along the trail?

The Pacific Northwest Trail is a unique pathway that travels through some of the most spectacular and scenic terrain in the United States and connects people and communities of the Pacific Northwest. The Pacific Northwest Trail offers a diverse experience, from wilderness to working landscapes to downtown Main Streets in small communities. Along its east-west route, the trail climbs major mountain ranges and comes back down into pastoral river valleys and small rural communities. The trail includes a ferry crossing of Puget Sound (the only saltwater ferry crossing on a National Scenic Trail) to reach the Olympic Peninsula and the final climb, over the Olympic Mountains, and descent through temperate rainforest to the Pacific Ocean. Hikers experience the best of the Pacific Northwest: panoramic views of the Rockies, rolling grasslands in the Okanogan Highlands, volcanoes and high-country meadows in the North Cascades, farming and fishing communities on Puget Sound, and mossy trees and sandy beaches on the Olympic Peninsula.

11. What activities are allowed on the trail?

The Pacific Northwest Trail is managed for non-motorized recreation.

Hiking: The entire Pacific Northwest Trail can be hiked. This is the most popular trail use.

Pack & Saddle: Horses can use most of the trail; in some places where the trail may not be passable for horses, alternate routes may allow for continuous travel.

Mountain biking: Bicycles are allowed where already permitted by the local land manager; bicycles are not permitted National Parks or Wilderness and may not be permitted in recommended wilderness. Check before you go.

Motor vehicles, motorcycles, and OHVs are not allowed trail uses on National Scenic Trails. For now, there are some sections of the Pacific Northwest Trail that are on roads rather than trail; in these segments, hikers and horse or mountain bike riders may be

sharing the road with vehicles. Where the Pacific Northwest Trail makes use of roads or motorized trails it does not close those roads/trails to motorized use.

A long-term objective of National Scenic Trail designation for the Pacific Northwest Trail is to relocate the route to move it off roads and onto non-motorized trails wherever practicable. Many miles of the PNT follow quiet forest roads where there isn't much conflict between uses and there are no significant safety concerns. In other areas, the PNT follows a paved highway where a safety hazard may exist. This may mean building new sections of trail in the future, or in some areas the PNT may stay on a dirt road to mitigate impacts to other resources.

12. Do you need a permit to hike on the PNT? Is there a fee?

No, there is no permit or fee for hiking the Pacific Northwest Trail. However, permits are required for overnight stays in the backcountry of Glacier National Park, the North Cascades National Park Complex, and Olympic National Park.

At this time, there is no coordinated permit available for Pacific Northwest Trail thru-hikers like what is offered for the Pacific Crest Trail. Hikers must contact each of the parks directly to arrange permits for overnight stays.

Entrance fees may also be required for National Parks and Washington State Parks. Fees (or passes) may be required for vehicles at some Forest Service (Northwest Forest Pass) and Washington State Parks (Discover Pass) trailheads and recreation sites.

13. Does the PNT go across private land?

The Pacific Northwest Trail provides a 1,200-mile continuous route from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean. Most of the trail, about 80%, is on public lands. In some areas, particularly in cities and agricultural valleys, land is primarily in private ownership and a connection on public lands is not possible. In these sections, the trail may be along the right-of-way for a public road or highway. In other cases, such as on some private timberlands, landowners have entered into voluntary agreements to allow passage for the Pacific Northwest Trail.

The National Trails System Act (the legislation that designated the Pacific Northwest Trail as a National Scenic Trail) includes a willing-seller clause that prohibits use of eminent domain to acquire private land for the trail. We respect the wishes of private landowners who do not want the trail on their land, and in those cases we find routes to avoid it.

14. How does management change when a trail becomes a National Scenic Trail?

When designating a National Scenic Trail, Congress directs federal agencies to manage the PNT as one linear route rather than individual pieces of trail, but it does not require

that all miles of the PNT be managed the same way. National Scenic Trail designation requires federal agencies to manage the PNT as one of many multiple uses of public land. It doesn't preclude other uses like fire management, timber harvesting, grazing, or mineral development.

15. What is the difference between administration of a National Scenic Trail and management of a National Scenic Trail?

Administration of a National Scenic Trail is trailwide responsibility assigned to the Forest Service by the Secretary of Agriculture since Congress named the Department of Agriculture as the lead agency for the PNT. This means the Forest Service is responsible for providing trailwide coordination, guidance, technical assistance, and consultation with other agencies or private landowners who manage sections of the PNT.

National Scenic Trail administration includes leadership in the development of the statutorily required trailwide Comprehensive Plan which provides strategic direction for administration and management of the PNT.

Management of the PNT takes place locally; on a National Forest or Ranger District, or on state or private lands where the PNT physically lies. For example, the Colville National Forest manages 120 miles of the PNT. The Washington Department of Natural Resources manages 80 miles of the PNT, and the North Cascades National Park Complex manages about 55 miles of the PNT. Managers of these areas are responsible for making local decisions about how the trail is managed as one of many multiple uses while the Forest Service provides trailwide administrative support to all of them.

16. What is a National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan?

The National Trails System Act requires that the Forest Service, as administering agency for the PNT, lead the development of a Comprehensive Plan for future administration and management of the PNT. By law, the comprehensive plan must include objectives and practices for managing the trail, a trail protection plan to ensure safe access to the PNT, and it also must establish a user capacity for the trail that provides for the conservation and enjoyment of significant resources along the trail.

The plan will provide strategic direction and best management practices to help land managers provide outstanding recreational opportunities on the PNT while also managing for other uses along the trail.

The comprehensive plan will describe desired future conditions for the trail, establish the process to follow to evaluate and approve adjustments to trail corridor to better meet the requirements of the National Trails System Act, and identify how side and connecting trails may be designated to improve access and connections to communities.

The plan will also identify opportunities for education, interpretation, and other visitor services along the trail, establish trail signing and marking guidelines, and prioritize future work along the trail.

17. How can I get involved? How can I help develop the PNT Comprehensive Plan?

The Forest Service established the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Advisory Council in 2015. This group was created under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and met three times over two years in Sandpoint, Idaho, Port Townsend, Washington, and Whitefish, Montana. As of July, 2018, the Forest Service is working to reauthorize the Advisory Council for another term. In addition to the PNT Advisory Council, you can also get involved with the PNT Comprehensive Plan by commenting during public scoping periods or attending a virtual or in person meeting. Check out the PNT website at www.fs.usda.gov/pnt for more information. Comments about the PNT are also accepted at any time at pnnstcomments@fs.fed.us.

The Forest Service anticipates releasing a proposed action for public scoping/comment in 2019.

18. How can I learn more about hiking, riding, or biking the PNT? Are there opportunities to get involved as a volunteer?

The Forest Service has a long-standing partnership with The Pacific Northwest Trail Association, or PNTA. The PNTA's mission is to protect and promote the PNT and to enhance recreation and educational opportunities along the trail. Check out their website (www.pnt.org) for recreation information and current conditions.

The PNTA can also help you get involved on the trail. They contributed more than 14,000 hours of volunteer service to the PNT in 2017 doing trail work or hosting educational events. Overall, PNTA contributed more than \$650,000 of work on behalf of the PNT last year.

19. Was the Pacific Northwest Trail recognized before it gained National Scenic Trail Status?

Yes. The PNT was recognized as a Millennium Trail in 2000 by the White House Millennium Council under the Clinton Administration. In subsequent years, more than 300 miles of the PNT were designated as National Recreation Trails, also under the National Trails System Act. These sections include all of the miles in Olympic, North Cascades, and Glacier National Parks as well as the Vinal-Mt Henry-Boulder section of the PNT on the Kootenai National Forest.

20. How was the PNT designated as a National Scenic Trail?

The *Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Act of 2008* was introduced into both houses of Congress on April 30th, 2008 (H.R. 5926 and S. 2943). The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources heard testimony on the PNT on June 17th, 2008 and in January, 2009 the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 was introduced with language to designate the PNT as a National Scenic Trail. The bill was approved by both the House and Senate in March, 2009 and was signed into law by President Obama on March 30th, 2009.

21. How did the route get selected?

Ron Strickland first proposed the idea of a Pacific Northwest Trail in 1970 and began consulting with residents in all three states to develop a preliminary route. The first route was proposed in 1974 and an article about the PNT was published in Backpacker Magazine that same year. The first thru-hikers walked the route in 1977 and subtle changes were made over time. In 2009, Congress selected the official route of the PNT and authorized it under the National Trails System Act.

22. Was there a feasibility study for the PNT?

Yes. Congress asked the Forest Service and the National Park Service to complete a feasibility study for the PNT. The study analyzed several different potential routes and concluded that the PNT “would have the scenic and recreational qualities needed for designation as a National Scenic Trail” but the study recommended against designation, citing factors that are present in other national scenic trails that have been designated under the National Trails System Act. Concerns identified included potential impacts to wildlife, fragile natural areas, and cultural resources from overuse. The study also looked at the cost of acquiring land for the PNT and determined it to be cost-prohibitive.

The feasibility study was revisited during the 2008 Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources hearing after which the Committee advanced PNT legislation to the full Senate. In 2009, Congress determined that the PNT should be designated as a National Scenic Trail and that the Forest Service should use existing management tools and the legislatively-required user capacity to mitigate impacts to other resources.

23. Can the trail be moved?

Yes. Congress retained sole authority to approve significant relocations of the route they selected for the PNT and designated under the authority of the National Trails System Act. Congress gave the Secretary of Agriculture limited authority to approve minor relocations of the route to increase compliance with National Trails System Act requirements. Managers can also authorize short term reroutes to avoid areas closed due to fire or other hazards.

24. Is NEPA required for the PNT?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. Using the NEPA process, the Forest Service evaluates the environmental and related social and economic effects of its proposed actions. Agencies also provide opportunities for public review and comment on those evaluations.

The proposed action of the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan will be collaboratively developed with other federal agencies, partners, stakeholders, and communities and the effects of that action will be analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act.

25. The National Trails System Act says the Secretary of Agriculture must select the final rights-of-way for the PNT. What does that mean? What is a National Scenic Trail Right-of-Way?

When federal agencies use the term right-of-way they are often referring to a right-of-way issued under authority given to the Secretary by the Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA, 1976). These generally authorize another government agency or private party to build a road, reservoir, powerline, pipeline, livestock driveway, or other facility on public land.

When used in the context of the National Trails System Act, the National Scenic Trail rights-of-way are different from a FLPMA right-of-way. It includes an area of land that is of sufficient width to encompass National Trail resources, qualities, values, and associated settings. Selection of the PNT right-of-way does not preclude other multiple uses from happening within the area; rather, it's the area in which managers should consider the PNT in future decision-making.

26. How can I get more information about the PNT?

For information about administration of the PNT, including development of the Comprehensive Plan, visit the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Trail website at www.fs.usda.gov/pnt.

For recreation information, information about current conditions, or volunteer opportunities, visit the Pacific Northwest Trail Association's website at www.pnt.org.