

Outdoors for Everyone: What Makes a Better Park



The Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families impacted by paralysis; we believe everyone on this planet deserves to experience the beauty of nature.

Unfortunately, nature and accessibility are in conflict, making it difficult for the **nearly 5.4M people living with paralysis** in the U.S. to enjoy the great outdoors. From unpaved paths to eroding trails, people living with disabilities are deterred from outdoor experiences. We want to change that.

For Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month in September, we are launching the Reeve Foundation's 'Outdoors for Everyone' initiative, encouraging people to raise awareness of outdoor equity for people living with all forms of paralysis. Reeve is partnering with parks, trails and organizations around the U.S. to identify and implement accessible and inclusive areas and activities for all people, including those living with disabilities, their families, and caregivers.

As part of this initiative, the Reeve Foundation created an 'Accessible Outdoor Checklist' for parks, recreation centers, and others to ensure people living with paralysis and other disabilities can enjoy the outdoors because the outdoors is for everyone.

BEFORE ARRIVALS

For people living with disabilities such as paralysis or who require mobility devices, it is essential to plan ahead for the great outdoors. National parks, community centers, and other recreational spaces have an obligation to offer easily accessible and up-to-date information online and with staff to ensure safety. Here are items to consider as you plan or work with partners in this space:



WEBSITE AND MAP INFORMATION:

- Ensuring trail-accessible information is readily available to users can make or break the trail experience. Websites and resources should include:
 - Maps of accessible features (e.g. parking, ramps, restrooms, benches, charging stations, information on drinking water access, etc.)
 - Detailed trail information such as the length of trail, trail surface type(s) throughout the duration of the journey, typical and minimum trail width, typical and maximum running slope, typical and maximum cross slope and areas where there are obstacles over two inches high.
 - Photos and user reviews to inform visitors of what to expect.
 - Warnings about wild animals they may encounter.
 - Any safety information park users need to be aware of.



PARKING AND ARRIVAL/DROP-OFF AREAS:

- Accessible parking spaces and drop-off areas should be located on the shortest accessible route to an accessible entrance, relative to other spaces in the same parking lot.
- If there is more than one accessible entrance, accessible parking spaces should be dispersed to enable people to park near as many accessible entrances as possible.
- By the numbers:
 - Standard accessible parking spaces must be at least eight feet wide.
 - Accessible van parking spaces must be at least eleven feet wide.
 - The access aisle for both accessible car and van spaces is required to be a minimum of five feet.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Parking spaces, drop-off areas and trained staff are among a few items that help create a smooth and safe trip for people living with paralysis. Location and layout of park facilities should, at a minimum, meet ADA compliance. Other items to consider include:



PARKING SPACES:

- **At bare minimum**, the number of accessible parking spaces required by the ADA depends on the total number of parking spaces in the lot. For example:
 - Lots with 1-25 parking spots: Require one accessible parking spot that also works for vans.
 - Lots with 26-50: Two accessible parking spaces and one that is a van-accessible parking space.
- Consider increasing the number of accessible spaces beyond the ADA-required amount. Without parking, there is no access.



SIGNAGE FOR PASSENGER DROP-OFF/PICK-UP:

- When designing or considering the parking lot, think about signs and paint markings indicating accessible parking and passenger drop-off/pick-up areas (e.g., clearly marked access aisles, parking space dimensions).
- Making sure signage for passenger drop off/pick up is also in braille, to be inclusive of all communities.
- On online websites and resources that signage is visible upon arrival.



TRAINED STAFF ASSISTANCE:

- Consider professional training for onsite staff once a year or before they start. Staff should be trained in how to interact and accommodate park visitors living with disabilities in areas such as:
 - How to appropriately assist someone living with a disability (e.g., using identity-first language, seeking verbal permission first before helping).
 - Up-to-date knowledge of accessible trail features (e.g., number of benches on the trail and how frequently they are installed along the trail).
 - In-depth knowledge of each trail segment (e.g., if there are changes in trail surface).
- If professional staff assistance is not feasible, a detailed trail guide should be offered.
- Provide readily accessible park ranger contact information in case of emergency.

ON THE TRAIL

When physical or environmental considerations prevent a trail from being fully accessible, accurate information on trail features, like trailheads, help park visitors determine if the trail is right for them. When planning and designing trails, or identifying park partners for activities, consider the following:



TRAILHEADS WITH DETAILED INFORMATION:

- The trailhead is the first encounter a person has with the trail and it sets the tone for the entire experience. Adequate information needs to be front and center before one embarks on a trail. For example:
 - Including and disclosing what is available vs. what is not available, i.e., restrooms, water fountains, in addition to the benches/resting intervals already included.
 - The minimum width, maximum slope, and condition of the tread surface.
 - Whether there are benches/resting intervals along the way.
 - The types of restroom or break room facilities available along the trail.
 - Descriptions of trail surfaces and if it's consistent throughout the trail (e.g., paved, gravel, sand, rocky, etc.)



TRAIL DESIGN:

- Simple features to improve access with sensitivity to the natural environment. For example:
 - Widened trail barriers: Many trails would be accessible if entrances were wider or gates were adjusted to make maneuvering easier when navigating tight corners.
 - Removing barriers at sitting height: Visual barriers at sitting height are a common problem on wheel-chair accessible trails. Have at least one area with a lower barrier or install a barrier you can see through for both safety and scenery.
 - More frequent seating marked on maps: Install more benches so people can sit and recharge. Mark seating options on the park map so people can plan.
 - Access to drinking water for visitors and service animals.
- Develop a trail map that includes emergency plans for first responders who can support people living with paralysis.

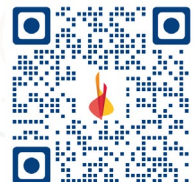


TRAIL MAINTENANCE:

- Regular trail maintenance allows increased safety for all park-goers, regardless of whether they are living with paralysis or not. Be sure to consider the following factors when planning regular maintenance, or partnering with a park. Also, prepare for post-inclement weather maintenance.
 - Removing fallen trees, broken branches or tree roots, filling and/or block off potholes.
 - Maintaining trail beds and repairing trail surfaces using wheelchair-friendly materials.
 - Repairing tread obstacles.
 - Conducting erosion control and drainage work.
 - Working with people who use mobility aids/wheelchairs to check trails and get their feedback.

For more information, visit ChristopherReeve.org or call our Information Specialists at 1-800-539-7309.

Our Information Specialists are available
Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. ET - 8 p.m. ET.
You can also leave a message if you are calling after hours.



GLOSSARY

Alteration: A change in the original purpose, intent, or function of a trail that could also affect usability.

Clear Tread Width: Width of traveled surface between obstacles on the ground and above the ground. Must be a minimum of 36 inches and maintained the entire distance of the trail.

- Two people using wheelchairs need a 60-inch clear tread width to pass comfortably and safely on an outdoor recreation access route.

Constructed Features: Commonly found along trails or as part of trails (e.g., overnight shelters, toilets, fire rings, picnic tables, and tent pads)

Cross Slope: Side-to-side slope of a trail tread. Cross slopes are necessary to provide drainage for water and prevent damage to the trail surface, especially on unpaved or natural surfaces.

Firm Surface: Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) defines a firm surface as one that resists deformations by indentations.

Openings: Gaps in the surface of a trail such as spaces between the planks on a bridge or boardwalk. Must be less than ½ inch in diameter ensuring nothing can pass through.

Outdoor Recreation Access Routes: Unobstructed path designed for pedestrian use that connects constructed features in a campground, camping unit, picnic area, trailhead, or other recreation site where modifications are provided for visitor convenience and comfort according to the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines.

Passing Space: A trail tread with a minimum of 60 inches to ensure greater access for people using mobility devices to turn around.

Protruding Objects: Hazardous objects (such as signs) that protrude into the trail clear tread width, passing spaces, and resting areas and that are between 27 inches and 80 inches above the travel surface. Do not allow constructed features to extend into the clear width area more than 4 inches.

Running Slope: A grade and the lengthwise slope of a trail, parallel to the direction of travel.

Resting Intervals: Level areas that provide a place for people to take a break and rest before continuing on the trail.

Slope: The incline of a surface.

Surface: Trail surfaces, passing surfaces and resting intervals that are firm and stable.

Stable Surface: A surface that's not permanently affected by expected weather conditions and can sustain normal wear and tear from the expected use(s) of the area between planned maintenance cycles according to the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines.

Trailhead: Outdoor space designated by the entity responsible for administering or maintaining the trail to serve as a primary access point to the trail.

Trail Constructed Feature Examples: Trail bridges, boardwalks, waterbars, and switchbacks.

Tread Obstacle: Anything that interrupts the evenness of the tread surface.

OUTSIDE SOURCES

U.S. Department of [Agriculture's Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails](#)

U.S. Department of [Agriculture's Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines](#)

U.S. Access Board's [Outdoor Developed Areas Guide](#)

U.S. Department of Transportation's [Rail with Trails: Best Practices and Lessons Learned](#)

Yosemite National Park's [2022 Accessibility Guide](#)

Access Recreation's [Guidelines for Providing Trail Information to People with Disabilities](#)

The National Park Service Accessibility Task Force's [All In! Accessibility in the National Park Service](#)

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