t is a common scenario: friends or relatives are coming for the weekend and you’re looking for a good place to take a hike or bike ride. Maybe you’re just longing for some fresh air and looking for a new trail to experience.

For those situations, and many more, www.ExplorePAtrails.com is a good place to get up-to-date information about how to navigate to those trails and what to expect when you get there.

Initiated, in part, by the award-winning Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2013, ExplorePAtrails.com serves as the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources’ (DCNR) one-stop trails website, a community resource for searching, mapping and sharing information about trails of all kinds anywhere in Pennsylvania.

The website displays much of the results of the state’s more than 30-year effort to fund and support partnerships and the planning, construction and maintenance of recreational trails. Not surprisingly, today’s trail enthusiasts are using the online tools at ExplorePAtrails.com to consume and share information about those trails like never before.

DCNR’s partnership with Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Keystone Trails Association, and more than a thousand trail stewards and volunteers has helped power ExplorePAtrails.com by uploading photos, descriptions, maps and events for sharing with others about the state’s rich network of trails.

**Numbers Tell the Story**

Launched two and a half years ago with 5,500 miles and 191 trails, the website today contains 10,552 miles and 446 trails, and those numbers are growing. The increase is due mostly to participation of 1,100 “reporters” who have voluntarily registered with the site, and added content such as new trails, trail updates, reviews, photos and calendar events such as those taking place on National Trails Day, June 2.

The growth in the number of website users searching and sharing trails information at ExplorePAtrails.com – 15,000 unique visitors since its launch in late 2009 – is reflected in the demand for outdoor recreation as many local communities and “trail towns” strive to attract tourism dollars to stores and businesses. DCNR estimates that more than 60 miles of new trails were constructed in Pennsylvania in 2011.

Today, ExplorePAtrails.com displays more than 900 trail photos and more than 500 trail maps, descriptions and reviews. Users can query lists of trails by county or they can launch a statewide map and zoom in for a closer view. They also can request trails of specified lengths or distances from home.

For each trail, users will find a printable map showing parking areas and other details. Just click
on a destination for detailed driving directions. For GPS users, the maps display longitude and latitude coordinates. Zooming in or out on maps, users can choose from road maps, satellite views, or topographic images that display the trails’ terrain.

DCNR has posted its own trails in state parks and state forests on ExplorePAtrails.com, but descriptions, reviews and photos continue to come in from individuals, clubs, nonprofit organizations and municipal trail builders.

“The hope is that every land and water trail in Pennsylvania will find its way onto the site,” said DCNR Deputy Secretary Cindy Dunn.

A Trail in Every Community

This year, DCNR announced the formation of the Pennsylvania Trails Advisory Committee. Assembled to help inform and guide statewide trail program decisions, the Committee works in concert with local partnerships to reach its ultimate goal of a trail in every community throughout the state. ExplorePAtrails.com is being used to track progress and report accomplishments in achieving this goal.

In 2011, 86 trail projects throughout Pennsylvania were completed, representing more than $29 million in state and local grant funds under the DCNR’s Community Conservation Partnerships Program. These projects represent significant accomplishments in trail planning, development, construction, maintenance and promotion. Achievements have included:

- Organizing trail work crews;
- Constructing additional trail miles;
- Improving trail access; leading trail sojourns; posting signage for trail users; and building user-friendly applications (apps) and web resources like ExplorePAtrails.com.

“In a year when economic stresses continued to affect communities nationwide, many individuals and organizations in Pennsylvania stepped forward to lead significant advances in trail building and advocacy,” said the trail advisory committee's 2011 annual report. “This speaks to the dedication and enthusiasm of the hundreds of people that led trail building efforts in 2011.”

For a copy of the report, visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/recreation/trails/index.htm.

Trails on the Go

Increasingly, trail users who own smartphones are trying to access ExplorePAtrails.com while on the go. More than 4,000 visits to the site last year were made by people using mobile phones and tablets. iPads accounted for almost a third of all the traffic on mobile devices. Optimizing the website for smaller handheld devices or creating native applications (apps) for them will be a significant focus in the near future.

Whatever the platform or device used, ExplorePAtrails.com will continue to be a starting place where users can find simple, easy-to-use tools to visualize the trails in one centralized, community-driven location designed specifically for collecting and sharing information about trails.

To find out more about how to participate or to locate trails in your area, visit and register online at www.ExplorePAtrails.com or contact c-ketaylor@pa.gov.

About the Author

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