Trails Stewardship Initiative

Maggie Cawley
on behalf of the OSM US Trails Working Group
Dear OpenStreetMap...

“I oversee visitor use within the backcountry of the parks of the Southeast Utah Group of the National Park Service. As with many other parks and public lands this spring we have seen unprecedented visitation. …

In a time when land stewards including agency employees are struggling to keep up with the mandate to preserve and protect these areas, we face a seemingly insurmountable challenge when unofficial and false information is spread widely through digital sources. I am not sure if you have any ability to make this happen, but we do feel OpenStreetMaps needs to take some responsibility in supporting and promoting responsible recreation.”

Utah Backcountry Coordinator, National Park Service, June 28 2021
A Second Email

“ I understand the global nature of OSM and that your mission statement and core values do have impacts on your ability to address these issues. From our perspective, there are also concerns that it shouldn’t be the responsibility of the NPS using tax payers’ resources to manage and monitor the status of OSM data on our lands in order to keep our visitors safe when we already manage, produce, and make available service-wide authoritative datasets of these features within our jurisdiction.” Data Architect National Park Service, August 2021- (A member of the OSM US Government Committee)
Canyonlands National Park
Digital Trail Data and National Park Resource Protection and Visitor Safety

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Southeast Utah Group

OpenStreetMap Mappy Hour
September 22, 2021
Keith Nelson, Backcountry Coordinator
The Challenge

- Hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts in the United States have come to rely on mobile applications to navigate our public lands. While this makes the outdoors more accessible, visitors can be led to dangerous or environmentally sensitive areas when these apps can’t visually distinguish between official or unofficial, unmaintained, and social trails.
- Many navigation applications amalgamate this trail data from multiple sources and rely heavily on OpenStreetMap data.
- OSM has very sparse data on which trails are official and which aren’t, which means these apps aren't able to show that distinction to end users.
More Challenges

- In order for park trails to render in the desired way, they must be accurately tagged so that renderers can decide which trails to show, which trails to not show, and which trails to emphasize or de-emphasize.
- Even if trails are appropriately tagged, it may still be required to work with the individual developers of these products to achieve the desired user-facing outcomes.
- Even with good data, and good rendering, each application sets its own frequency for how often the map is updated.

https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/United_States/Trail_Access_Project
The OSM US Trails Working Group

Convening a diversity of perspectives on trail mapping practices, trail safety, and protecting the environment, this group of stakeholders has been working to address on-the-ground challenges, tagging schemes, authoritative data, and other topics related to mapping trails in OSM. Through these efforts, navigation apps will be able to better display OSM data, helping users make informed decisions while out on trails.

**Participation since Dec 2021**

- 59 folks invited to each meeting
- ~46% Public participation - community mappers
- ~26% Private companies & nonprofit organizations
Phase One: September ‘21 - September ‘22

- Investigating tagging practices
- Conducting pilot project in Washington
- Assessing app rendering
- Feedback from Land Managers on pilot
- Complete mapping pilot
- Share updated trail renderings with Land Manager group for feedback
- Update process and make changes based on feedback

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Phase Two

- Expand stakeholder group and grow partnerships
- Develop the resources necessary to launch a national campaign including educational and outreach materials.
- Testing on tagging and rendering recommendations
- Development or changes identified to any technical resources or tools

Phase Three

Support a national mapping campaign across the US - one region at a time - while monitoring trail renderers, obtaining feedback from land managers and working with local groups.
Special thanks to the OSM US board members, the participants in the trails working group, & everyone supporting this effort
Discussion - Questions for you

● Are you seeing the same problems?
● What apps are used outside of the US?
● How have you approached trail tagging in your areas?
● Any case studies of collaboration around this elsewhere?
THANK YOU SOTM FIRENZE!

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Email: trails@openstreetmap.us
Twitter: @OpenStreetMapUS
Slack: slack.openstreetmap.us #trails