

From the New Jersey Herald.

Hikers can learn trail maintenance

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BYRAM — Outdoor enthusiasts ready to take a hike will have a chance to kick off the spring season with a free introduction to trail maintenance at Salt Gastropub from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturday, March 28.

The workshop, which will be taught by instructors from the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, will provide attendees with the skills necessary to maintain a hiking trail with a focus on assessing trail conditions, clearing, blazing, proper use of tools and proper ways to report trail problems.

According to New York-New Jersey Trail Conference membership and development director Don Weis, the workshop is an excellent opportunity for veteran hikers and newcomers to determine whether they'd like join the conference as trail maintenance volunteers.

"This course is a great way to figure out if (trail maintenance) is for you," Weis said. "The course will give you a really good background of what the job entails and what you need to know. It's a great way to get your feet wet and learn the basics and learn what the job is going to be about and decide if it's for you."

Those planning to attend are encouraged to wear hiking boots and work gloves and come equipped with water, a bag lunch and garden shears, Weis said.

Jennifer Easterbrook, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference membership and development associate, said the workshop is an important tool in training new volunteers to maintain the vast network of trails overseen by the conference.

"We have 2,125 miles of maintained hiking trails all the way from central Jersey to the Catskills at the bottom of Albany that are all maintained by volunteers," Easterbrook said.

"We're a small staff of 18 and many of us volunteer ourselves, but we rely on our volunteers to help keep up the trails. The course is important because if people weren't aware of how to maintain the trail, they could severely damage the trail's integrity and layout."

Easterbrook said maintainers are encouraged to be an active presence on their trails.

"We recommend that if people are going to maintain a trail, they, one, take this course and, two, get out on their trail at least twice a year," she said.

"We do ask maintainers to track their hours and after every visit they make to their trail to provide a description of what they did, so another part of the course is what's expected of you as a volunteer maintaining a trail."

According to Weiss, who was a trail maintainer for seven years, trail maintenance duties extend beyond just clearing brush.

"When I maintained I was responsible for maintaining those sections of trail that were mine, keeping them clean and free of brush, but also tracking things like soil erosion and monitoring the trail for any danger to make sure there were no illegal uses of the trail going on like illegal fires or riding ATVs on the trail," he said.

Weis said the work put into the trails makes many maintainers extremely proud of what they do.

"Volunteers tend to take a great deal of pride in their work and find joy when people are using the trail," Weis said.

"It's very fulfilling work and a lot of people take real ownership of sections of trail once they're a maintainer. It really becomes your section of trail."

Though trail assignments can include any trails covered by the conference, Weis noted most maintainers in Sussex County don't have to go far to reach their stretch of trail.

"We have pretty close to 700 miles of trails in northern NJ," Weis said. "If you're hiking in the Appalachian Trail, or up at High Point, Stokes, Worthington in the Delaware Water Gap, Allamuchy or Waywayanda, you're pretty much hiking on conference trails. If you live in Sussex County in particular, you've got a ton of trails to choose from depending on what's open and available."

For more information or to register, contact Peter Dolan at 201-512-9348 ext. 25 or PDolan@nynjtc.org, or visit <http://www.nynjtc.org/workshop/introduction-trail-maintenance-trail-u-934>.

For a full schedule of trail maintenance workshop, visit the "Get Involved" tab at nynjtc.org.

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