

Optimal Location Review Direction for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail

Summary

This document contains general direction guiding Optimal Location Review (OLR) use, and location decisions utilizing that tool, that are found in the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNNST) Comprehensive Plan signed in December of 2023. All page numbers refer to those in the Comprehensive Plan.

An OLR is an internal Forest Service process to determine the best location for the Pacific Northwest Trail given a variety of factors that are delineated in the following materials contained in the Plan. Some of the materials talk about very general direction about the PNNST location and objectives, like basic information about National Scenic Trails in the National Trails System Act (NTSA). Other direction is quite specific, like the list of human developments to be avoided found in the legislative history for the NTSA, or the motorized use provisions of the Act.

In the event that an OLR results in recommendations to move the location of the PNNST, that recommendation would then be analyzed through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance. All provisions of NEPA, including those regarding public involvement in such decisions, must be followed. This includes analysis of potential impacts for wide range of alternatives considered in making a decision. Alternatives would ideally be developed during the OLR, however additional alternatives may be developed, or alternatives in the OLR dropped during the NEPA analysis.

The majority of the following document is presented in the order in which it appears in the Comprehensive Plan, however the most specific guidance regarding OLRs from Chapter 4 of the Plan is shown here twice, both where it appears in the Plan, and again as the first reference, since it is the most detailed and specific direction for OLRs in the Comprehensive Plan.

This document was prepared by the Pacific Northwest Trail Association.

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All material below is taken directly from the PNNST Comprehensive Plan

Optimal Location Review p.76 - 78

Relocations must be based on the results of an optimal location review. The purpose of the optimal location review is to identify the trail location that best provides for the nature and purposes of the PNT into the future and satisfies other requirements of the National Trails System Act. The optimal location review is not a National Environmental Policy Act analysis or decision document. Rather, the optimal location review is a tool to inform and support administrative actions such as acquiring lands or interests in lands for the PNT and, where necessary, relocating segments of the PNT. The optimal location review helps the administering agency, managing agencies, and partner organizations direct efforts to plan, develop, and protect the PNT to the best long-term location and avoid misdirecting resources to temporary locations. Optimal location review has been used successfully to guide the development of other national scenic trails, such as the Continental Divide Trail and Pacific Crest Trail. The specific process and criteria are uniquely tailored to each trail, but the overall goal – to identify the best location to provide for the trail’s nature and purposes – is the same for all trails.

Optimal Location Review Process and Documentation

In the future, the Forest Service may collaborate with the partner organization(s) and managing agencies to develop additional guidance for the optimal location review process, such as a standard template for documentation. In the meantime, optimal location reviews should proceed using the guidance below.

At a minimum, the optimal location review team should include:

- the PNT administrator (or their designee),
- a staff member or volunteer representing the partner organization(s) (in accordance with the provisions of relevant cooperative agreements),
- a recreation / trails specialist from each of the managing agencies for the segment under review (or, for segments outside federally administered areas, a recreation / trails specialist from a nearby managing agency unit), and

- a landscape architect or other qualified scenery specialist.

The optimal location review team may include other participants as appropriate to the segment under review (e.g., lands and realty specialists, GIS specialists, and participants with expertise relevant to natural and cultural resources in the area). Questions about the composition of the optimal location review team may be decided by the lead regional forester. The PNT administrator provides coordination for the optimal location review team.

The optimal location review team will use a collaborative approach to agree on the optimal location for the segment of the PNT under review based on the principles below and the professional judgment of the team members. The optimal location review will likely make use of existing data and resources (such as maps, geospatial data, photographs, land ownership information, visitor use data, resource inventories and assessments, land management plans, special area plans, and guidebooks or other media) but should also be informed by field visits and on-the-ground knowledge of the segment and area concerned. Strive to incorporate knowledge relevant to the primary uses (see [chapter 3](#)), which may be provided through input from the partner organization(s), volunteers, or managing agency employees.

Documentation of the optimal location review should include:

- a detailed map and general description of the optimal location, as recommended by the optimal location review team;
- maps and general descriptions for other locations considered;
- a summary of the optimal location review team's evaluation of the optimal location and other locations considered based on the optimal location review principles in this section; and
- a summary or list of reference materials used in the evaluation.

The optimal location review document should be signed by the members of the review team. The optimal location review document should then be signed by the responsible officials or line officers for the local unit(s) of the relevant managing agency or agencies (for example, the district ranger and forest supervisor for National Forest System lands or the park superintendent for a national park). The approved document should be provided to the relevant managing agency or agencies and partner organization(s). It should become part of the administering agency's files.

For some areas, processes similar to optimal location reviews were conducted prior to the completion of this comprehensive plan. These efforts may satisfy many of the steps for the optimal location review process. In that case, optimal location reviews may proceed toward completion from the steps that have already been taken.

Guiding Principles for the Optimal Location Review

The optimal location review is guided by the following 10 principles to evaluate location options:

1. Relocations are opportunities to improve the PNT and better provide for its nature and purposes and other trail values.
2. Relocations promote the seamless connectivity of the PNT and reduce the miles of the PNT on roads and motorized trails.
3. Relocations favor public lands and legal easements over areas where public access cannot be permanently secured.
4. Relocations highlight the outstanding scenery and physiographic features of the Northwest and realize opportunities to improve the overall visual quality and scenic attractiveness of the PNT.
5. Relocations provide high-quality settings and opportunities for the primary uses: hiking with an emphasis on long-distance backpacking and, where feasible to accommodate, pack and saddle stock use. In general, relocations should seek to improve the quality of the settings and opportunities for the primary uses.
6. Relocations generally favor natural-appearing wilderness and nonmotorized backcountry settings (including lands with wilderness characteristics) or other places with less development and a more primitive level of access.
7. Relocations allow for a trail alignment on the ground that can sustain the types and amounts of expected use and can be maintained to avoid unacceptable environmental or financial costs.
8. Relocations would allow the trail to be developed and managed in a way that would harmonize with established multiple-use land management plans for that area.
9. Relocations minimize adverse effects on adjacent landowners or land users and their operations.
10. Relocations do not adversely impact or impede access to treaty resources; usual and accustomed fishing, hunting, and gathering areas; or areas of critical tribal concern for affected tribes.³⁵

[Direction in the Order that it Appears in the Comp Plan]

Executive Summary p.v

The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (PNT) is early in its life and, like other early national scenic trails, much more work is needed to complete the optimal route from end to end.

Trail Location p. vii

Trail relocations must be based on the results of an “optimal location review” process outlined in [chapter 4](#). The purpose of the optimal location review is to identify the trail location that best provides for the PNT’s nature and purposes into the future and satisfies other requirements of the National Trails System Act. The optimal location review has been used successfully to guide the development of other national scenic trails, such as the Continental Divide Trail and Pacific Crest Trail.

Chapter 1. Background and Planning Framework

About the Pacific Northwest Trail p. 1

First proposed in the early 1970s, the PNT was designated by Congress as one of America’s 11 national scenic trails through the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009 (Pub.L. 111- 11), which amended the National Trails System Act. This authorizing legislation identifies:

a trail of approximately 1,200 miles, extending from the Continental Divide in Glacier National Park, Montana, to the Pacific Ocean Coast in Olympic National Park, Washington, following the route depicted on the map entitled ‘Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail: Proposed Trail’, numbered T12/80,000, and dated February 2008. [16 U.S.C. 1244(a)(30)]

The National Trails System Act states that national scenic trails will be located to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential as well as the conservation and enjoyment of the scenic, historic, natural, and cultural resources in the areas through which these trails pass (16 U.S.C. 1242(a)(2)).

National Trails System Act (NTSA) p. 6

The National Trails System Act established the National Trails System “to provide for addressing the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of an expanding population and 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.”

Executive Order (EO) 13195, Trails for the 21st Century p. 7

Executive Order 13195 was signed by President Clinton on January 8, 2001, with the intent of furthering the purposes of the National Trails System Act and other statutes related to establishing and operating the National Trails System. Among other important components, EO 13195 identifies the need to protect trail corridors surrounding national scenic trails to preserve the values for which each trail was established.

Special Considerations for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Temporarily Located on Roads Outside Federally Managed Areas p. 14

At this time, in order to provide an end-to-end travel opportunity for PNT users, about 33 percent of the PNT route is located on roads. These range from little-used dirt or gravel roads to busy state and interstate highways. The PNT route's location on roads should be considered a temporary **interim location** (see [chapter 4](#)). To meet the intent of the National Trails System Act that national scenic trails are long-distance, nonmotorized trails, segments of the PNT that are currently on roads will need to be realigned or relocated onto nonmotorized trails, as described in [chapter 4](#). Or, in limited situations, the road may be converted to trail, as appropriate.

Chapter 2. Roles and Responsibilities

Forest Service as Administering agency p. 19

The Forest Service is the **administering agency** for the PNT.

The administering agency provides leadership to ensure the requirements of the National Trails System Act are met for the national scenic trails and national historic trails it administers.

One of the primary responsibilities is leading the long-term, collaborative effort to complete the national scenic trail as a continuous, nonmotorized trail with secure public access and a protected trail corridor.

Chapter 3. Trail Values

Nature and Purposes p. 28-29

Section 3(a)(2) [NTSA] describes national scenic trails specifically as:

...extended trails 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. National scenic

trails may be located so as to represent desert, marsh, grassland, mountain, canyon, river, forest, and other areas, as well as landforms which exhibit significant characteristics of the physiographic regions of the Nation.

House Report No. 90-1631, which accompanied the National Trails System Act, clarified the intent of specific wording in the Act, and therefore the intent of Congress:

...selection of routes for National Scenic Trails – Such rights-of-way shall be (1) of sufficient width and so located to provide the maximum retention of natural conditions, scenic and historic features, and primitive character of the trail area, to provide campsites, shelters, and related public-use facilities, and to provide reasonable public access; and (2) located to avoid, insofar as practicable, established highways, motor roads, mining areas, power transmission lines, existing commercial and industrial developments, range fences and improvements, private operations, and any other activities that would be incompatible with the protection of the trail in its natural condition and its use for outdoor recreation. National scenic trails shall be administered, protected, developed, and maintained to retain their natural, scenic, and historic features; and provision may be made for campsites, shelters, and related public-use facilities; and other uses that will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trails may be permitted or authorized, as appropriate: Provided, That the use of motorized vehicles by the general public along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited. (1968 U.S. Code Cong. & Admin. News 3855, 3863-3864, 3867).

Nature

The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail is an east-west-oriented long-distance trail that traverses the extreme northern reaches of Montana, Idaho, and Washington from the Rocky Mountains, through the Cascade and Olympic mountain ranges, to the Pacific Coast. The trail invites travelers into the backcountry and wilderness areas, to seek the grandeur of glaciated peaks, tranquil lakes, boundless horizons of majestic mountains, deep canyons, broad river valleys, storm-carved coastlines, and the splendor of wild places. The lands along the trail are the homelands of many distinct indigenous nations. Since time immemorial, natural processes and tribal traditional uses... have shaped these places and continue to shape them, through exercising their tribal treaty and reserved rights. The trail sometimes passes near communities that are able to share with travelers their histories and connections to the land, evident in the legacy of working forests, farms, ranches, and maritime areas, and in beloved local parks and pathways.

Whether they experience one mile or 1,200 miles, the travelers and stewards of the PNT find year-round opportunities for inspiration and lifelong memories, challenge and personal transformation, the solitude of quiet places and kinship in being part of a larger legacy.

Purposes

National scenic trails are extended trails through iconic landscapes that 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 they go through. These premier trails provide visitors with profound experiences that not only create lasting memories but instill a stewardship ethic for generations to come.

Specifically, the purposes of the PNT are to provide for:

- conservation and enjoyment of scenic, historic, natural, and cultural resources and values along the trail that exemplify qualities of the Northwest (inclusive of the West, Inland Northwest, and Pacific Northwest regions).
- maximum outdoor recreation potential as a premier, nationally significant opportunity for (1) hiking, with an emphasis on long-distance backpacking including end-to-end thru-hiking, as a primary use; (2) pack and saddle stock use as a primary use; and (3) other complementary non-motorized recreation, including bicycling, where appropriate to the setting and allowed by local management.
- opportunities for self-discovery, self-reliance, and the satisfaction of making your own way.
- opportunities for community and for service to the trail, its surrounding landscapes, and others through environmental education, interpretation, partnerships, volunteerism, and stewardship that encourage inclusion of all people, cultures, and abilities.

Primary Use – Hiking p. 30 - 31

Hiking, with an emphasis on long-distance backpacking is one of two primary uses of the PNT. The PNT is administered and managed to ensure it provides a nationally significant opportunity for continuous end-to-end travel to complete the entire PNT on foot (**thru-hiking**). It also provides opportunities for shorter trips on foot, ranging from day hiking to multi-day backpacking trips on sections of the PNT. Some hikers complete the entire PNT by hiking different sections over the course of multiple trips and years (**section hiking**).

Thru-hiking use constitutes only a small fraction of overall use of the PNT relative to day-use and short multi-day trips. Currently, the Forest Service estimates that about 80 people attempt to thru-hike the PNT each year. However, the thru-hiking opportunity is central to the nature and purposes of the PNT. The opportunity the PNT provides to thru-hike from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean is the reason the PNT concept was originated and developed, and it was one of the values for which the PNT was designated a national scenic trail in 2009.

Protecting and enhancing this opportunity requires attention to the particular needs and constraints of thru-hikers in the context of the PNT. Thru-hiking is a trail use with unique logistical considerations and challenges, such as weather, permits for backcountry overnight travel in the national parks, the availability of campsites and other overnight accommodations, trail conditions, and the impacts of temporary trail closures.

Primary Use – Pack and Saddle Stock Use p. 31 - 32

Along with hiking, stock riding and packing is a primary use of the PNT. While it is not possible to “thru-ride” the entire PNT using stock, segments of the PNT provide outstanding opportunities for day and overnight trips using stock for riding or packing.

Pack and saddle stock are allowed on almost all the PNT

For some segments that are impassable to stock or where stock are restricted or prohibited, there may be alternative stock-friendly routes in the area that would allow for continuous travel.

Other Potentially Compatible Uses p. 32 - 33

The PNT offers diverse and superlative nonmotorized recreation opportunities on one trail, including hiking and trail running, horseback riding and mountain biking; and in winter, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. It connects communities to the outdoors and invites recreationists to explore some of most remote and rugged landscapes in the Northwest. Near gateway communities, the PNT serves as a “backyard” asset for residents’ everyday activities such as getting exercise, spending time with family and friends, walking dogs (where allowed by the managing agency or landowner), relaxing, and connecting with nature.

Bicycling p. 32

Along with other nonmotorized modes of travel, bicycling is a potentially complementary mode of travel that is allowable on the PNT, where appropriate to the setting, at the discretion of the local managing agency or landowner.

The PNT provides opportunities for day and overnight trips (“bikepacking”) by bicycle. Due to terrain, resource protection, or other local conditions, some sections of the PNT are either impassable to bicycles, or the managing agency prohibits bicycle use in that location. Federal regulations prohibit bicycles in wilderness areas (36 CFR 4.30, 36 CFR 261.16, 43 CFR 6302), and in wilderness study areas and recommended wilderness areas, bicycles may be restricted by the managing agency. Bicycles are prohibited on most of the PNT in national parks.

Bicycles are allowed on many segments of the PNT, including about 236 miles of the PNT that is on trails. The eastern half of the PNT provides opportunities for long rides through backcountry areas

Significant Natural, Historical, and Cultural Resources to be Preserved p. 34 - 37

Significant natural, historical, and cultural resources and values are those determined to warrant special consideration in trail management and planning processes because they are essential to achieving the nature and purposes of the PNT.

The Trail Itself

Exceptional Scenic Beauty and Variety
Wilderness and Backcountry Settings
Diverse Ecological Communities and Valued Plant Species
Iconic Wildlife and Fish Species
Places of Importance to Tribes
Traces of the Past
Rivers and Shorelines

Chapter 4. Trail Location p. 39, 41

The National Trails System Act established national scenic trails as one of four types of trails that compose the National Trails System (16 U.S.C. 1242):

National scenic trails ... will be extended trails 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. National scenic trails may be located so as to represent desert, marsh, grassland, mountain, canyon, river, forest, and other areas, as well as landforms which exhibit significant characteristics of the physiographic regions of the Nation. [16 U.S.C. 1242(a)(2)]

In designating the PNT in 2009, Congress described it as:

...a trail of approximately 1,200 miles, extending from the Continental Divide in Glacier National Park, Montana, to the Pacific Ocean Coast in Olympic National Park, Washington, following the route depicted on the map entitled 'Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail: Proposed Trail', numbered T12/80,000, and dated February 2008... [16 USC 1244 (30)].

After the PNT was designated in 2009, the Forest Service coordinated with managing agencies and partner organizations to match the legislative map to the actual trails, roads, and cross-country routes on the ground that comprise the PNT as designated by Congress. This is referred to as the **congressionally designated route**.

At this time, the Forest Service administers only the congressionally designated route as the “official” PNT for the purposes of implementing the National Trails System Act. In the future, as segments of the PNT are relocated, they will become part of the official PNT route, replacing the previous location for those segments

National Trail Planning Corridor p.68 – 69

Section 7(a)(2) of the National Trails System Act requires selecting a national trail right-of-way and publishing a notice of the availability of appropriate maps or descriptions of

the trail right-of-way in the Federal Register (16 U.S.C. 1246 (a)(2)). For the national scenic trails and national historic trails administered by the Forest Service, selecting a national trail right-of-way is an administrative action undertaken by the Chief of the Forest Service (FSM 2353.04b).

In the context of the National Trails System Act, the national trail right-of-way is the area selected for the general location of a national scenic trail or national historic trail and published in the Federal Register. The national trail right-of-way does not constitute a land use allocation (which occurs through land management plans, congressional designations, and presidential proclamations) nor does it carry the legal rights and privileges typically associated with the term “right-of-way” outside of the National Trails System Act context.

To avoid confusion with other ways the term “right-of-way” is used outside the National Trails System Act context (such as in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Title V) and to avoid any implication of a right to use or access non-federal lands, the PNT will instead adopt the term **national trail planning corridor**. Throughout this comprehensive plan and in implementation of the plan, the national trail planning corridor indicates the area referred to as the “right-of-way” in Section 7 of the National Trails System Act (16 U.S.C. 1246). Use of the term “corridor” here is consistent with its use in EO 13195.

- On Federal lands, the primary consideration is the managing agency’s responsibility to provide for the PNT’s nature and purposes and to protect trail opportunities, settings, and values (e.g., instances of the significant natural, historical, and cultural resources along the trail). Federal agencies are responsible for ensuring the values for which the trail was designated remain intact (EO 13195). The primary opportunity for the national trail planning corridor is to inform the managing agency’s identification, through its land management planning processes, of the area (e.g., management area, geographic area, mapped corridor, or similar) where it will establish and implement management direction to provide for the PNT’s nature and purposes and other trail values. The national trail planning corridor provides a starting guideline for the managing agency to use in its land management planning. (See discussion of the national trail management corridor below.)
- On non-federal lands, the primary consideration for the national trail planning corridor is the opportunity to use tools identified in Section 7 of the National Trails System Act to achieve the objectives of completing the PNT as a continuous and connected nonmotorized trail, to secure public access, to safeguard the trail settings and values, and to cooperate with non-federal managing agencies and private landowners to provide for the PNT’s nature and purposes and other trail values. The National Trails System Act includes provisions and tools that may be used outside the boundaries of federally administered areas within the national trail planning corridor such as acquisition of lands and interests in lands from willing landowners and use of voluntary cooperative agreements to coordinate management of the trail across land ownership (16 U.S.C. 1244(a)(30), 1246). In most cases, the width of

lands or easements acquired – or the width of any area voluntarily maintained to provide access for the PNT by the managing agency or private landowner – will be less than the width of the national trail planning corridor. The national trail planning corridor is the broader area where, under the National Trails System Act, there is the *opportunity*, with willing landowners, to apply the provisions and tools in Section 7 of the Act.

*Recommended National Trail Planning Corridor for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail
p. 70 - 71*

The recommended national trail planning corridor for the PNT is generally a minimum of one mile in width (0.5 miles on either side of the PNT).

The actual width of the selected national trail planning corridor can vary across the trail. To provide for the nature and purposes and other trail values, while considering effects upon adjacent landowners or land users, and other resource concerns, the national trail planning corridor should be wide enough to allow flexibility to identify an optimal location for the trail.

Responsibilities and Processes for Non-Substantial Relocations

Identifying the location of the PNT route and the corresponding national trail planning corridor is an administrative action. Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and provisions of other laws (for example, the National Historic Preservation Act, Endangered Species Act, and the Wilderness Act) may be necessary for actions that would *implement* a relocation (for example, trail construction). The administering agency and managing agency will need to coordinate to identify the appropriate legal compliance required depending on the specific proposal.

Optimal Location Review p.76 - 78

Relocations must be based on the results of an optimal location review. The purpose of the optimal location review is to identify the trail location that best provides for the nature and purposes of the PNT into the future and satisfies other requirements of the National Trails System Act. The optimal location review is not a National Environmental Policy Act analysis or decision document. Rather, the optimal location review is a tool to inform and support administrative actions such as acquiring lands or interests in lands for the PNT and, where necessary, relocating segments of the PNT. The optimal location review helps the administering agency, managing agencies, and partner organizations direct efforts to plan, develop, and protect the PNT to the best long-term location and avoid misdirecting resources to temporary locations. Optimal location review has been used successfully to guide the development of other national scenic trails, such as the Continental Divide Trail and Pacific Crest Trail. The specific process and criteria are uniquely tailored to each trail, but the overall goal – to

identify the best location to provide for the trail's nature and purposes – is the same for all trails.

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The optimal location review team may include other participants as appropriate to the segment under review (e.g., lands and realty specialists, GIS specialists, and participants with expertise relevant to natural and cultural resources in the area). Questions about the composition of the optimal location review team may be decided by the lead regional forester. The PNT administrator provides coordination for the optimal location review team.

The optimal location review team will use a collaborative approach to agree on the optimal location for the segment of the PNT under review based on the principles below and the professional judgment of the team members. The optimal location review will likely make use of existing data and resources (such as maps, geospatial data, photographs, land ownership information, visitor use data, resource inventories and assessments, land management plans, special area plans, and guidebooks or other media) but should also be informed by field visits and on-the-ground knowledge of the segment and area concerned. Strive to incorporate knowledge relevant to the primary uses (see [chapter 3](#)), which may be provided through input from the partner organization(s), volunteers, or managing agency employees.

Documentation of the optimal location review should include:

- a detailed map and general description of the optimal location, as recommended by the optimal location review team;
- maps and general descriptions for other locations considered;
- a summary of the optimal location review team's evaluation of the optimal location and other locations considered based on the optimal

location review principles in this section; and

- a summary or list of reference materials used in the evaluation.

The optimal location review document should be signed by the members of the review team. The optimal location review document should then be signed by the responsible officials or line officers for the local unit(s) of the relevant managing agency or agencies (for example, the district ranger and forest supervisor for National Forest System lands or the park superintendent for a national park). The approved document should be provided to the relevant managing agency or agencies and partner organization(s). It should become part of the administering agency's files.

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The optimal location review is guided by the following 10 principles to evaluate location options:

11. Relocations are opportunities to improve the PNT and better provide for its nature and purposes and other trail values.
12. Relocations promote the seamless connectivity of the PNT and reduce the miles of the PNT on roads and motorized trails.
13. Relocations favor public lands and legal easements over areas where public access cannot be permanently secured.
14. Relocations highlight the outstanding scenery and physiographic features of the Northwest and realize opportunities to improve the overall visual quality and scenic attractiveness of the PNT.
15. Relocations provide high-quality settings and opportunities for the primary uses: hiking with an emphasis on long-distance backpacking and, where feasible to accommodate, pack and saddle stock use. In general, relocations should seek to improve the quality of the settings and opportunities for the primary uses.
16. Relocations generally favor natural-appearing wilderness and nonmotorized backcountry settings (including lands with wilderness characteristics) or other places with less development and a more primitive level of access.
17. Relocations allow for a trail alignment on the ground that can sustain the types and amounts of expected use and can be maintained to avoid unacceptable environmental or financial costs.

18. Relocations would allow the trail to be developed and managed in a way that would harmonize with established multiple-use land management plans for that area.
19. Relocations minimize adverse effects on adjacent landowners or land users and their operations.
20. Relocations do not adversely impact or impede access to treaty resources; usual and accustomed fishing, hunting, and gathering areas; or areas of critical tribal concern for affected tribes.³⁵

Chapter 5. Objectives and Practices for Trail Management

Trail-wide Objectives p. 82 – 83

The trail-wide objectives for managing the PNT are:

1. Complete and maintain the PNT as a continuous, nonmotorized trail from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean.
2. Safeguard the PNT's nature and purposes and other trail values.
3. Maximize the outdoor recreation potential of the PNT by providing premier settings and nationally significant opportunities for hiking, with an emphasis on long-distance backpacking; pack and saddle stock use; and, where appropriate to the setting and allowed by local management, other compatible non-motorized trail uses. Minimize conflicts between different modes of travel.
4. Support and contribute to the conservation of the scenic, historic, natural, and cultural qualities of the lands along the PNT, and improve conditions on the ground. Minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other natural resources.

General Management Approach and Practices p.84

Seek options that best provide for the PNT's nature and purposes and other trail values (see [chapter 3](#)) over the long run. Develop and sustain the PNT as a legacy for present and future generations.

- a) **National Trails System Act Requirement:** Other uses along the PNT shall not substantially interfere with the PNT's nature and purposes (16 U.S.C. 1246(c)).
- b) **National Trails System Act Requirement:** Reasonable efforts shall be made to avoid activities incompatible with the PNT's purposes (16 U.S.C. 1246(c)).
- c) Prioritize actions that will complete the PNT as a continuous, connected

nonmotorized trail with protected public access and a seamless visitor experience across jurisdictions (see [chapter 4](#)).

- i. **National Trails System Act Requirement:** Reasonable efforts shall be made to provide sufficient access opportunities to the PNT (16 U.S.C. 1246(c)).
- ii. **National Trails System Act Requirement:** General public use of motorized vehicles along the PNT shall be prohibited (16 U.S.C. 1246(c)).

Motorized Uses p. 86

Strive to limit the PNT's interaction with motorized uses and the impacts of motorized uses on the PNT's nature and purposes and other trail values. Consider and minimize the cumulative impacts of motorized uses across the trail. Ensure travel management decisions safeguard the PNT's nature and purposes and other trail values.

Motorized crossings of the trail, if necessary, should be limited.

Provide sufficient separation between the PNT and motorized routes or areas to avoid substantial interference to the PNT's nature and purposes.

Realign or relocate segments of the PNT off open roads or motorized trails. Information on realignment is in the Trail Alignment and Design section, and information on relocation is in the Relocating Segments of the Trail section.

Trail Setting p. 86

National scenic trails are to be "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" (16 U.S.C. 1242(a)(2)).

The PNT represents a connected landscape that encompasses some of the most scenic and remote areas of the Northwest (inclusive of the West, Inland Northwest, and Pacific Northwest). Trail users' opportunities for experiences on the PNT are influenced by the surrounding landscape beyond the trail travelway.

Desired Conditions p. 88

1. High-quality recreational settings and opportunities befitting a national scenic trail are maintained across the PNT.
2. The PNT is predominantly located in settings consistent with the primitive or semiprimitive nonmotorized recreation opportunity spectrum classes.

Management Practices p.86

- Consider recreation setting characteristics in locating and managing the PNT and other uses on or along the PNT.
- Changes to recreational settings and opportunities on the PNT should generally move the trail toward the more primitive, less developed end of the recreation opportunity spectrum.
- Favor providing access to gateway communities, developed areas, and amenities by trails that intersect the PNT rather than the PNT itself.

Trail Alignment and Design

Desired Conditions p. 90 - 91

1. The alignment and design of the PNT travelway provide for the PNT's nature and purposes and other trail values.
2. The PNT travelway is primarily a moderately developed or developed nonmotorized trail (equivalent to National Forest System trail class 2 or 3) with an unpaved surface.
3. The PNT route makes maximum use of trails and minimizes use of roads to the greatest extent possible.
4. The trail travelway exhibits high quality permanence and sustainability and is designed to create minimal disturbance to the environment while accommodating the volume and types of expected use.

Management Practices p. 91

- On the whole, favor alignment and design options that appear more natural and less modified with limited constructed features. Protecting the predominantly natural-appearing settings along the PNT is paramount. The trail alignment and design should not detract from the setting.
 - Blend the trail into the surrounding landscape by taking full advantage of the natural topography and vegetation.
- Align and design the PNT travelway to present the greatest variety of natural beauty and panoramic scenery.
 - Include access to the most favorable and impressive views of scenic features.
 - Avoid views, where possible, of heavily developed or industrialized areas. Incorporate topographical screening of such views when and where possible.

- In general, avoid or protect cultural resources and sensitive natural resources.
 - Avoid archaeological sites and districts to the extent practicable. Incorporate sites that are appropriate for interpretation if they can be protected.
 - Avoid alignments following stream channels to minimize impacts to banks and reduce damage from floods; align trail on side-slope in these cases.
 - When feasible, fall line sections that exceed grade standards or create erosion should be realigned.
 - Trail alignment and design should be compatible with management objectives for threatened, endangered or sensitive species habitat or populations.
- Based on government-to-government consultation with affected tribes, trail alignment should avoid areas of critical tribal concern.
- Make road, railroad, or utility crossings as safe, quick, and aesthetically pleasing as practicable.
 - Give special consideration to safety concerns for pack and saddle stock.
 - Consider crossings using bridges or underpasses that provide greater safety and avoid breaking the continuity of travel on the PNT.
 - Consider right-angle crossings with constructed features, where practicable and safe, to minimize the visual effect.

Realignment of the PNNST Travelway within the National Trail Planning Area p. 92

The managing agency should review the relevant land management plan(s) for the area to ensure management direction (particularly any management area, geographic area, or mapped portion of the national trail planning corridor) is sufficient to protect the PNT and its nature and purposes in the new alignment.

Visitor Use Management and Carrying Capacity p.99

National scenic trails are different from most other trails because they are specifically managed to provide opportunities for long-distance travel. In the case of the PNT, it is the opportunity to travel 1,200-plus miles through many different types of settings in one long trip. The opportunity the PNT provides to thru-hike from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean is the reason the PNT concept was conceived, and it is one of the values for which the PNT was designated as a national scenic trail in 2009. Thru-hiking is the primary experience the PNT is

managed for because that opportunity is identified as the core experience, and central to the nature and purposes of the PNT.

Scenery p.106 – 107

Preservation of scenery is one of the most important management challenges on a national scenic trail. This section is intended to guide the management of scenery resources and the mitigation of land uses that diminish scenic quality. Although scenery management is focused on landscapes seen during the day, dark skies provide inspirational nighttime viewing opportunities. Guidance for dark skies resources and natural sounds are also provided below.

The PNT provides a nationally significant opportunity to experience scenic landscapes and natural- appearing settings that predominate across much of the trail

Land uses and facilities that contrast with natural settings, however, may diminish scenic quality. Development such as high-voltage transmission lines, energy developments, communications towers, and associated access roads are often visible from long distances, especially in western landscapes, and can detract from the naturalness of the trail setting and the experience of trail users, especially when these types of developments are located near the trail

Desired Conditions p. 108 – 109

1. The PNT showcases the exceptional scenic beauty and variety of the Northwest and provides for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic qualities of the areas through which the trail passes.
2. Scenic integrity of the PNT is managed for the equivalent of the Forest Service Scenic Integrity Objectives of High and Very High through land management or, as appropriate, realignment of the trail travelway (see the [Trail Alignment and Design](#) section in this chapter) or relocation of the trail (see [chapter 4](#)).
3. As appropriate to the setting, views along the PNT highlight ecological processes, cultural practices, and/or their interplay in shaping the landscape.
 - a. Across most of the PNT in federally administered areas, ecological processes appear to be the dominant forces shaping the foreground viewing zone. Development or modifications to the natural environment are subordinate to the natural landscape.
 - b. Cultural features such as historic structures add elements that support scenic character and contribute to scenic quality.
 - c. In those segments of the PNT where a more primitive experience is not possible, and land uses such as forestry,

farming, ranching, working waterfronts, and commercial areas occur, they are in the appropriate locations and complement the trail's visual variety and sense of place.

4. PNT management protects and enhances opportunities to experience dark skies free from artificial light pollution and experience natural sounds free from anthropogenic noise.

Management Practices p. 109

In developed areas and locations where preservation (SIO of Very High) or retention (SIO of High) is not possible, minimize visual impacts to foreground views.

Scenery in Land Management Planning p. 110

Where a segment of the PNT is in an interim location on an open road or motorized trail and where existing land uses preclude a higher scenic integrity objective, a scenic integrity objective equal to moderate may be appropriate. However, managers should prioritize relocating the segment of the PNT to a location where the scenic integrity objective will be equal to high or very high.

Cultural Resources

Management Practices p.113

Trail realignments, relocations, and optimal location review processes should avoid disturbance to eligible cultural resources, sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, areas of critical tribal concern, traditional gathering areas, and areas of reserved treaty rights.

Water Resources

Management Practices p.115

1. Identify and prioritize segments of the PNT that are on unstable soils or in sensitive wetland, riparian, or shoreline areas and take appropriate management actions (such as modifying visitor use or redesigning, realigning, or relocating the trail) to protect water resources.
2. Identify and prioritize segments of the PNT where extensive and/or recurring erosion or drainage problems are degrading the trail and take appropriate management actions (such as redesigning, realigning, or relocating the trail or modifying visitor use) to protect the trail and water resources.

Biotic Resources

Management Practices p. 118

Follow managing agency direction and implement best practices to ensure trail management activities and recreational use, realignments, and relocations are compatible with land management plans and managing agency objectives for threatened, endangered or sensitive species habitat.

Appendix D. Acquisition and Protection Plan

Guiding Principles and Prioritization Criteria p. 174

Optimal Location Review will be used as a guide to assist with acquisition and protection efforts for the PNT. The purpose of the optimal location review is to identify the trail location that will best provide for the nature and purposes of the PNT into the future; in many places the optimal location is the Congressionally designated route but in others the optimal location may be elsewhere and would require moving the trail (refer to point number 2, above). [Chapter 4](#) describes the optimal location review process as it pertains to the PNT. Utilizing the optimal location review helps the administering agency, managing agencies, and partner organizations coordinate effectively to plan, develop, and protect the PNT in the best long- term location and avoid misdirecting resources to transitory locations. The optimal location review process will generally be completed before acquiring lands or easements along the PNT.

Strategies for Roads p. 209

As described in the PNT Route on Roads section, about one-third of the PNT route (roughly 431 miles) is located on roads. This diverges from National Trails System Act direction for national scenic trails as non-motorized trails and the proximity of pedestrians to motor vehicle traffic is a potential public safety concern. The guiding principles and prioritization criteria address the need to move segments of the PNT that are currently located on roads onto non-motorized trails.

Following are the primary strategies the Forest Service and cooperating agencies and other entities should use for the segments of the PNT located on roads:

1. **Roads are temporary locations.** To meet the intent of the National Trails System Act that national scenic trails are non-motorized trails, the Forest Service and cooperating entities should consider all segments of the PNT currently located on roads as temporary locations for which long-term solutions will need to be purposefully sought and implemented.
2. **Relocate or re-align segments of the PNT.** The Forest Service should actively work with the responsible federal agencies, tribes, states, counties, and municipal governments, and with the private trail organization(s), in cooperative efforts to realign (see [chapter 5](#)) or relocate (see [chapter 4](#)) all segments of the PNT onto

non-motorized trails.

3. **Consider conversion of roads to trails.** In some limited cases, conversion of roads to trails, and similar approaches, may be used by the relevant managing agency, in accordance with its policies and applicable plans, to meet the goal that all segments of the PNT are on non- motorized trail.