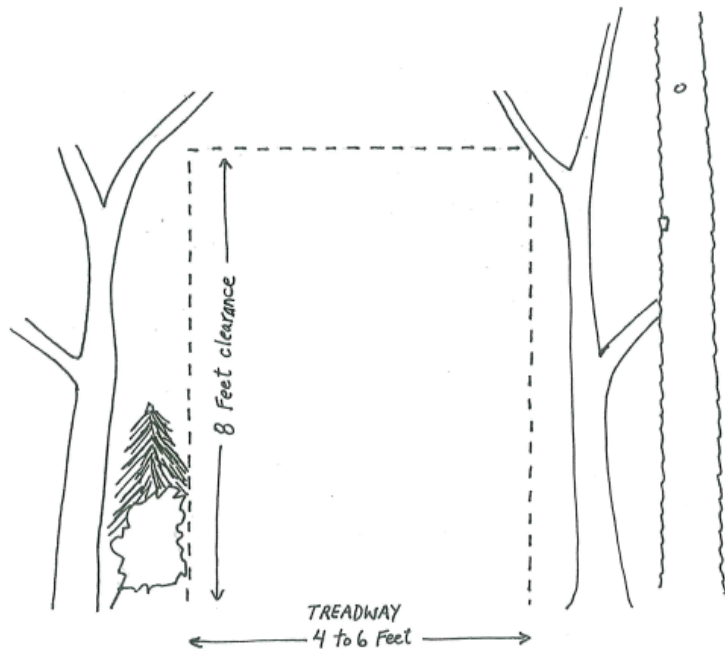
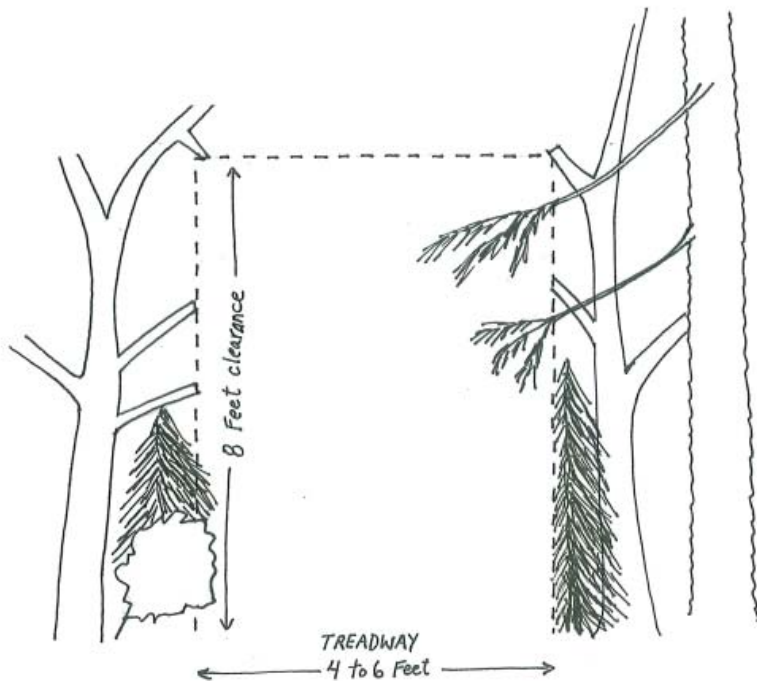


# RIGHT



# WRONG



## LITTLE TRAVERSE CONSERVANCY'S Trail Steward Guide



Andreae Preserve/Todd Parker

### Little Traverse Conservancy's **Trail Steward Program**

Since 1972, the Little Traverse Conservancy has worked with landowners to establish 134 nature preserves encompassing over 11,000 acres (as of early 2009). Not all of our properties are suitable for intensive visitor use, but the Conservancy does have formal trail systems on twenty-three of its preserves. These preserves have a parking area, trail maps, directional blazes or arrows, and the trails are consistently maintained by staff and volunteers. Another ten preserves have informal trails, which typically are old logging or agricultural roads. These trails are not regularly maintained, and aren't marked with maps or other signs. It is our goal to have a volunteer trail steward assigned to look after each of the formal trails.

Conservancy trails vary in length and the topography they cover. They meander through upland woods, meadows, and even wetlands where boardwalks provide passage without muddying feet while protecting sensitive habitat. Trails enhance visitor use, but also add to required preserve maintenance. Due to the cost of creating and maintaining trails, trail and boardwalk projects are considered with great care. We are continually seeking the balance between access and protection.

LITTLE TRAVERSE CONSERVANCY  
3264 POWELL ROAD  
HARBOR SPRINGS, MI 49740  
231.347.0991 [www.landtrust.org](http://www.landtrust.org)

## THE TRAIL STEWARD'S RESPONSIBILITIES

The role of a trail steward is to actively assist the Conservancy with preserve trail maintenance. Tasks include monitoring the trail, picking up large twigs and branches that have fallen into the path, cutting back encroaching vegetation, and clearing large trees that come down onto the trail. Typically, LTC staff mows the trails where needed, replaces trail markers and maps, repaints trail blazes, and repairs boardwalks and other structures. We count on the trail stewards to let us know when these repairs need to be done.

Ideally, a trail steward lives near his or her preserve, visits it regularly, has trail maintenance tools, and is willing and physically able to do the trail maintenance work, possibly including using a chainsaw. The trail steward should be responsible and motivated to maintain the trail independently throughout the year. In addition, if the Conservancy gets a report from a preserve visitor that maintenance is needed, or if a storm blows through, the steward may be called to check out the trail and clear it if necessary. We encourage trail stewards to contact us anytime by phone or email if a trail needs urgent attention or structural repair, or if a job is too big or involved and assistance is needed.

## THE REPORTING PROCESS AND RECORDKEEPING

At the end of each calendar year, we ask for an annual report which summarizes the trail steward's findings and any work performed. This annual report form is available on our website at [www.landtrust.org](http://www.landtrust.org). If you don't have internet access, we can mail you a paper copy of the report form. We review the reports, follow up on any questions or concerns, and then store the report in the permanent preserve file. Your reports, over time, create a record of the cumulative maintenance required on the trail, and will help us to make future management decisions.



Holland Preserve/Todd Parker

## STASHING THE CUTTINGS

Cuttings should always be removed from the treadway of the trail, and whenever possible, branches, limbs, and especially small trees should be stashed out of sight of the hiker on the trail. Often a small clearing behind a tree or shrub will suffice to stash several armloads of cut limbs. Take special care that the cut, butt-end of a tree or limb is not visible from the trail.

## REMOVAL AND TRIMMING OF YOUNG TREES

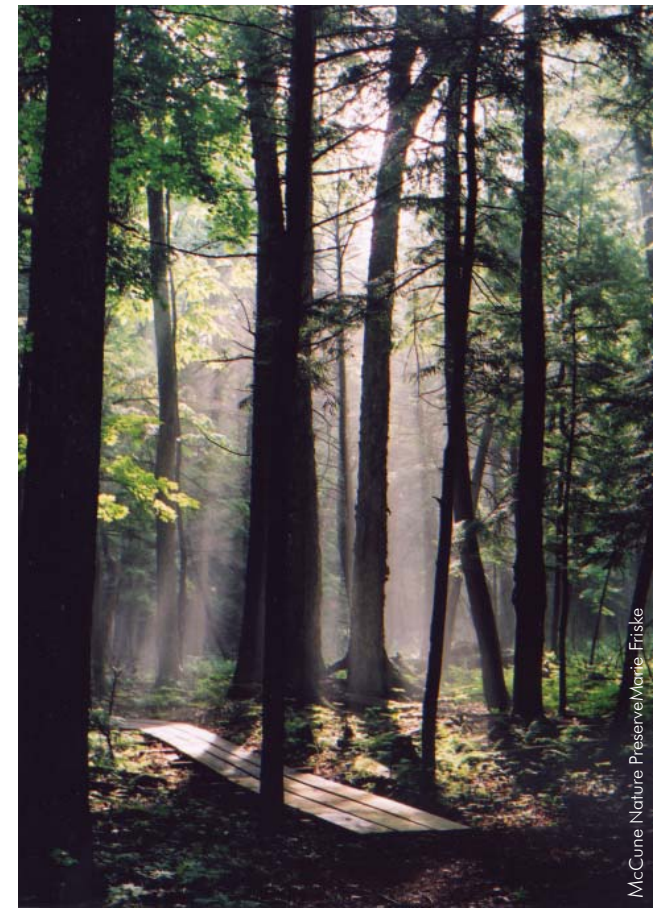
Young trees up to four feet tall will often grow along the sides of trails and invade the trail corridor. It is best to clear these trees when they are small, cutting them down entirely (see "Brushing a Trail" above for information on how best to do this.) If a small tree is just outside the trail corridor, but has limbs reaching into the trail, consider removal of the entire tree rather than pruning the limbs. The small tree will not be missed, and is a better alternative to leaving a denuded half of a tree which is unnatural and unsightly in appearance, and is unhealthy for the tree. If you decide to trim the tree, follow the "Limbing" practices above.

## THE BIG STUFF

If you are experienced using a chainsaw, cut downed trees and large limbs out of the trail corridor. They should be cleared back to the width of the trail corridor, four to six feet wide. Roll the logs off the trail to the downhill side.

## WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

If trail conditions are too much for you to handle, if you feel a situation is dangerous, or if you need advice on how best to clear a trail, give us a call at 231.347.0991 for assistance.



McCune Nature Preserve/Marie Friske

# TRAIL TRIMMING GUIDELINES

Little Traverse Conservancy

## BRUSHING A TRAIL

Brushing refers to the removal of (living or dead) limbs, bushes, and small trees from the trail corridor. The trail corridor should be clear four to six feet wide and at least eight feet overhead. When you are brushing or limbing, look with an eye to the future and ask yourself, “Is this small tree or limb going to be a problem 10 years from now?” If it is, cut it now while you have the chance. If you must cut down an entire tree, cut the stump as close to the ground as possible to avoid leaving dangerous spikes next to the trail. If the stump is in the treadway of the trail, dig out around it with a shovel, axe, or mattock, cut it below the grade of the trail, and cover the roots with soil. This will remove the stump as a tripping hazard.

Basic brushing tools are hand pruners, long handled loppers, bowsaw, a pole saw, and possibly a chainsaw if available. Shovels, axes, or mattocks are useful for removing stumps.

**NOTE:** Chainsaw operation is dangerous. We request that trail stewards only use chainsaws if they are experienced and follow all safety precautions. A chainsaw safety and maintenance DVD is available from Stihl online at <http://stihldealer.net/videolibrary/>. The DVD can also be purchased for \$5.00 plus shipping.

## LIMBING

When removing limbs from a tree, cut the limbs off flush with the tree trunk whenever possible. This prevents dangerous spikes next to the trail which can hurt hikers. It is also better for the tree, is standard good pruning practice, and leaves a more attractive trail. When cutting with a saw, make a shallow cut on the underside (or weight bearing side) first, then follow with the top cut. This prevents the limb from peeling bark off the tree as it falls. If a limb is too high or too large to cut at its base, try to cut it at a fork of the branch as close as possible to the trunk.

## TRIMMING UP

Many limbs that clear the trail corridor in the summer will get weighed down with snow and block a trail in the winter. This is especially true of coniferous trees. When you are trimming a trail, try to imagine three feet of snow on the ground and a load of snow on the branches. (Or better yet, go out to inspect the trail after a heavy snowfall!) Use a pole saw to trim high limbs in the trail corridor, following the same limbing guidelines as explained above (also see diagram back page).



## NEWSLETTER AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

When you sign up as a trail steward, you'll receive maps of your preserve and trail system. Someone from the stewardship staff will also visit the preserve with you in order to go over trail trimming techniques and to answer any questions about the property. A Volunteer Steward Newsletter is sent to all monitors and trail stewards every spring. This newsletter provides updates on preserve projects and maintenance activities, program changes, new monitors, volunteer profiles, and other information. If a special project is planned for your preserve, we will let you know about it ahead of time. Email is the most efficient communication method for us, so please make sure to keep us updated if your email address changes.

## PRESERVE MONITORING PROGRAM

Separate from the Trail Steward program, LTC has a Preserve Monitoring program to help us with monitoring and general management of our preserves. Ideally, a preserve monitor lives near his or her preserve and visits it regularly. At a minimum, we ask that monitors visit their preserve and then submit a monitoring report to us twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall. The monitor should note the condition of the preserve's parking area, signs, markers, structures, natural features, and anything unusual, and look for any violations of our rules. The monitors are not asked to do any physical maintenance of trails or structures, although it is a great help to us if they perform basic maintenance tasks as needed, such as cleaning up dumped garbage or litter, or removing fallen twigs or limbs from the trails. Please ask for more information if you are interested in being a Preserve Monitor.



## SIGNS AND MARKERS

The trail may include informational items like trail maps, guide markers, interpretive information, or dedications/memorials. Trails are marked with one or a combination of the following: paint (circular spots or triangles) or colored 3” circular aluminum arrow markers mounted on trees or posts. Different colors are typically used for each trail loop for those preserves with multiple trails.

*Check for the following:*

- fading or otherwise poor legibility
- vandalism
- inaccurate or obsolete
- poorly secured
- improperly positioned
- correct trail route or corridor unclear

## ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES

Most trail systems have at least a few associated structures. These may include boardwalks, platforms, bridges, stairways, vehicle barricades, brochure boxes, and posts for signs.

*Check for the following:*

- rotten wood
- broken or splintered boards
- inadequate supply of brochures
- vandalism
- leaning structures
- loose fastenings
- unsafe conditions (slippery surface, loose railings, etc.)
- water inundation

## OTHER STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Special work days, such as trail building, cleanup of new preserves, tree planting, and other preserve tasks take place throughout the year, but especially between April and October. If you are interested in helping us out on these projects please let us know and we will put you on our Project Volunteer list. We will send you email updates to let you know about these events. We also post them on our website and in our quarterly newsletter.

### **For more information, please contact:**

Little Traverse Conservancy  
3264 Powell Road  
Harbor Springs, MI 49740  
231.347.0991  
www.landtrust.org

Stewardship staff:

Doug Fuller, Stewardship Director: [doug@landtrust.org](mailto:doug@landtrust.org)  
Charles Dawley, Stewardship/GIS Specialist: [charles@landtrust.org](mailto:charles@landtrust.org)  
Cindy Mom, Stewardship Specialist/Volunteer Coordinator: [cindy@landtrust.org](mailto:cindy@landtrust.org).

## GUIDELINES FOR TRAIL MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

### TRAIL SURFACE AND SPACE

Little Traverse Conservancy trails are naturally surfaced, and created wide enough for people to walk along in single file. The trail surface and space through which visitors are walking needs to be kept reasonably clear and free of debris or objects to help prevent tripping, eye poking, or other injuries. Any obstructions or hazards found must be removed. This may involve trimming/removing branches or cutting/removing trees that have fallen over the path or that are near the path and are posing a safety hazard. The trail surface is typically around 3 feet wide and the cleared corridor should be 4 feet wide and 8 feet high.

*Check for the following:*

- major obstructions (fallen logs, etc.)
- minor obstructions (small branches, twigs, etc.)
- encroaching branches or other vegetation that needs trimming
- hazardous sharp branch ends that poke into the trail from the sides or from the ground
- leaning or hanging trees or large branches over the trail
- poor footing (loose gravel, erosional ruts, tripping hazards, etc.)
- mud holes