

## ONE-PAGE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Trails for People and Wildlife – Town of Rye, NH (2026)

#### Purpose

This report evaluates the Town of Rye's conservation land trail network (~650 acres; 13+ miles of trails) and provides guidance to **balance public access with long-term ecological health.**

#### Key Findings

##### 1. Trails Have Broader Impacts Than Visible

Human presence affects wildlife well beyond the trail itself—up to **400 feet for mammals**—creating a much larger ecological footprint than typically assumed.

##### 2. Habitat Fragmentation Is the Primary Risk

- ◆ Trails divide otherwise continuous habitat into smaller, less viable areas
- ◆ Sensitive species decline while generalist species increase
- ◆ Large, undisturbed habitat blocks are critical for biodiversity

##### 3. Many Trails Are Located in Sensitive Areas

- ◆ Significant portions of the trail network are within **wetlands or critical buffer zones**
- ◆ Recommended wildlife buffer: ~330 feet
- ◆ Current conditions often fall short of this standard

##### 4. Not All Conservation Lands Should Serve the Same Purpose

A strategic framework is recommended:

- ◆ **"Ambassador Properties"** (higher use, recreation-focused):  
Brown Lane Farm, Rand Forest, Town Forest (West)
- ◆ **"Low-Impact Properties"** (wildlife-focused):  
Cedar Run/Raynes Forest, Town Forest (East)

This approach **concentrates activity where impacts are lowest** while protecting sensitive areas.

##### 5. Fewer, Better Trails Are More Sustainable

Consolidating trail networks:

- ◆ Reduces ecological impact
- ◆ Improves maintenance efficiency

- ◆ Enhances user experience

## 6. Recreation Management Requires Greater Clarity

Key issues identified:

- ◆ Inconsistent dog leash compliance
- ◆ Unclear hunting boundaries
- ◆ Growing pressure from bikes and horses
- ◆ Trails crossing private property

## 7. Nearly All Lands Have High Ecological Value

- ◆ ~90% of evaluated land is classified as significant wildlife habitat
- ◆ Reinforces the importance of **careful, intentional stewardship**

### Strategic Recommendations

#### 1. Adopt a Tiered Land Use Strategy

- ◆ Designate properties for **high-use vs. conservation priority**

#### 2. Reconfigure Trail Networks

- ◆ Close or reroute trails in sensitive habitats
- ◆ Prioritize routes in lower-impact zones (“follow the blue”)

#### 3. Strengthen Wildlife Protections

- ◆ Establish wetland buffers
- ◆ Consider seasonal trail closures

#### 4. Clarify and Enforce Use Policies

- ◆ Standardize dog, bike, and hunting regulations
- ◆ Improve signage and communication

#### 5. Invest in Infrastructure & Access

- ◆ Focus resources on fewer, well-maintained trails
- ◆ Expand accessible (“All Persons”) trail opportunities where appropriate

### Bottom Line

Rye has an opportunity to become a **regional model for conservation-based trail planning**—delivering high-quality outdoor experiences while preserving the ecological integrity that defines the community.

## TALKING POINTS MEMO

**For: Town Leadership, Conservation Commission, Stakeholders**

**Subject: Trails for People and Wildlife – Key Messages & Policy Direction**

### Opening Framing

- This report is not about limiting access—it is about **protecting access long-term**.
- The goal is to ensure residents and visitors can enjoy Rye's landscapes **without degrading the very resources that make them valuable**.

### Core Messages

#### 1. The Current System Is Not Sustainable as Is

- Trails are more extensive and impactful than they appear
- Many are located in ecologically sensitive areas
- Without intervention, wildlife habitat quality will continue to decline

#### 2. Small Changes in Planning Yield Significant Gains

- Rerouting or closing select trail segments can **dramatically reduce impact**
- Concentrating use is more effective than dispersing it
- Strategic decisions now prevent more difficult trade-offs later

#### 3. A "Right Use, Right Place" Approach Is Essential

- Some properties should be **welcoming, visible, and highly used**
- Others should remain **quiet, less promoted, and minimally disturbed**
- This balance is standard best practice in conservation land management

#### 4. Wildlife Protection and Recreation Are Not Competing Goals

- Well-designed trail systems **enhance both user experience and ecological outcomes**
- Poorly located trails compromise both

## 5. Clear Policies and Consistent Messaging Are Critical Dog

- ◆ management is currently inconsistent and widely ignored
- ◆ Hunting boundaries are unclear in places
- ◆ User expectations must be **simple, visible, and enforceable**

## 6. The Community Will Benefit from Thoughtful Investment

- ◆ Focused maintenance reduces long-term costs
- ◆ Improved trail design enhances safety and accessibility
- ◆ Opportunities exist to create **signature “All Persons” trails**

### Anticipated Stakeholder Concerns (and Responses)

#### “Are we losing trails?”

→ The goal is not reduction—it is **optimization**. A better system, not just a smaller one.

#### “Will this limit public access?”

→ Access is being **protected and improved**, not restricted—especially in designated ambassador areas.

#### “Why now?”

→ Increasing usage pressures and ecological sensitivity make proactive planning essential.

### Recommended Next Steps

1. Adopt guiding framework (ambassador vs. conservation properties)
2. Prioritize trail reconfiguration plan (phased approach)
3. Develop clear, town-wide use policies and signage standards
4. Engage community through education and outreach
5. Align future land acquisitions with connectivity and habitat goals

### Closing Position

Rye is uniquely positioned to lead with a **thoughtful, balanced model**—one that respects both its natural resources and the community’s deep connection to them.