

TRAIL TOWN STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM ACCESSIBLE OUTDOORS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

OUTDOOR **NC**

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Welcome to the Outdoor NC Trail Town Stewardship Program, a designation program that recognizes communities around the state for their diversity of trail experiences and celebrates stewardship efforts that champion accessible outdoors, responsible visitation, and sustainable tourism. Participants in the program receive access to the Trail Town Stewardship Toolkit to support their successful completion of all requirements to be eligible for designation and inclusion in the Trail Town Stewardship Visitor Guide.

People with disabilities make up the largest minority in the world. The accessible travel booking website, AccessibleGo, estimates accessible travel to be a \$60 billion market, contributing to the tourism economy locally and nationally. Additionally, according to MMGY, 56% of travelers are looking for off the beaten track destinations to immerse themselves in the outdoors, making a large portion of the travel industry directly related to outdoor recreation. A commitment to accessibility and inclusivity in outdoor recreation is more important than ever to make people with disabilities feel seen and heard with dignity. The goal of Outdoor NC Accessible Outdoors program is to better promote the available accessible and inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities that are offered throughout North Carolina. All communications should consider accessibility and inclusivity. Communicating about accessible outdoor recreation has become more important than ever to make the physical, mental, and experiential benefits of the outdoors more readily available to people of all abilities. Having accurate information helps people with disabilities plan their visits and be prepared for the resources and facilities available which can drastically improve their overall experience. This document provides an overview of how a TDA can gather and share visitor information that would be especially useful for people with disabilities.

TRAIL TOWN STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

As a Trail Town Stewardship Program participant, you are responsible for demonstrating your commitment to accessibility and inclusivity by providing the following visitor information via your website or a blog:

- Destination Introduction which includes an Accessibility Statement
- Destination Accessible Assets/Experiences
 - ADA Compliant Outdoor Spaces & Features
 - Adaptive Activities and Operators (optional)
- Destination Visitor Services (optional)

The Accessible Outdoor NC program is a part of the larger initiative of Outdoor NC. If you would like to be a part of the Outdoor NC Alliance for additional tools and resources on destination stewardship or participate in the Trail Town Stewardship program, please contact amanda.baker@visitnc.com. Participation in the Accessible Outdoor NC program assist destinations in working towards the trail town stewardship designation.



COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTIONS

As part of the Trail Town Stewardship Program, your destination will create a resource that provides people with disabilities high quality information that can create life changing experiences through outdoor recreation.

DRAFT AN ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

What is an Accessibility Statement?

An accessibility statement for a destination marketing and management organization outlines commitments to ensuring equitable and inclusive access for all visitors, detailing efforts to accommodate diverse needs. It should, at minimum, provide a statement on how the destination organization is working to promote initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive experiences and removing barriers for individuals with disabilities.

Why is it important?

Accessibility statements are important for several reasons. It shows your visitors that you care about accessibility, and you care about them. It demonstrates your ability to provide accurate accessibility information, and it demonstrates your commitment to social responsibility.

How to write your Destination Accessibility Statement?

- Use clear, simple language.
- This should be a “value” statement. It should be sincere.
- Explain your accessibility and inclusion commitment. Specifically mention people with disabilities, but also include other marginalized groups.
- Describe the accessible features of outdoor recreation in your destination. Examples may include: wheelchair ramps into a building, accessible parking and restrooms, accessible trails and parks, boat ramps and docks with accessibility features.
- Provide contact information for feedback, questions, and complaints.

For more information on writing an accessibility statement, including tools to generate a statement, visit the W3C website: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/planning/statements/>

COMPLETE AN INVENTORY OF ADA-COMPLIANT OUTDOOR SPACES

In order to build an ADA inventory, first create a list of local, county, state and national parks within your destination and within your region. Next, conduct partner and stakeholder outreach to gain as much information about facilities that support visitors with disabilities. Be sure to utilize the “ADA Asset Inventory” tab on the Outdoor NC Asset Inventory template.

COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTIONS

What is an ADA Asset Inventory?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which is a U.S. federal law that ensures equal access for people with disabilities. A destination ADA inventory will help your organization create a catalogue of accessible recreation and tourism attractions.

Why is an ADA Asset Inventory important?

An ADA asset inventory is a critical step to ensure improved user experiences and accessibility for all. It will align your destination with the principles of equality, accessibility, and non-discrimination, ultimately benefiting both visitors, residents, and the organization as a whole.

How to complete an ADA Asset Inventory

Create an inventory of public lands within your destination that includes:

- National Forests
- National Parks
- National Wildlife Refuges
- National Seashores and public beaches
- State Parks
- County parks
- City parks
- Historical sites (national, state, local)
- Greenways
- Bodies of water including lakes, rivers, waterfalls, wetlands, oceans

Reach out to Land Manager to identify ADA Compliant Features:

- Parking spots
- Restrooms
- Picnic areas
- Trails or pathways
- Interpretive information
- Fishing piers
- Boat / kayak launches
- Beach / water access
- Campgrounds
- Overlooks
- Pavilions
- Playgrounds

Suggested Language

Use the following language below to conduct email outreach with local Land Managers:

Dear [land manager name],

I write you on behalf of [name of TDA or destination] and we are committed to helping steward a more sustainable and inclusive travel and outdoor recreation industry for North Carolina.

In partnership with Visit NC through the Outdoor NC initiative, we are participating in the Accessible Outdoors. One of our goals is to collaborate with our public land managers to better promote our ADA compliant outdoor spaces.

We are building an Accessible Outdoors website inventory and would like to ensure we have the most accurate

COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTIONS

information from your organization on ADA-compliant outdoor recreation facilities for visitors.

Please answer the following questions and provide any additional details for supporting information. If you would prefer, we can arrange a short phone call or site visit if this is more convenient for you.

- What outdoor recreation resources are you responsible for at [insert asset]?
- Are there any ADA compliant facilities including but not limited to:
 - accessible parking and accessible restrooms
 - accessible visitor center
 - accessible picnic tables and/or pavilions
 - accessible outdoor recreation activities (e.g. trails, fishing piers, campsites, etc.)
- Is there a website that has more information available about ADA compliant facilities?
- Is there any additional information you would like to share?

CREATE YOUR ACCESSIBLE OUTDOORS WEBPAGE OR BLOG

When creating your Accessible Outdoors webpage or blog:

- Consider ways to make it stand out on your destination homepage and how visitors will find this information easily. Use an appropriate title for the page or dropdown menu with language to help visitors understand the content and menu items, such as including this section titled Accessible Travel under Plan Your Visit.
- Open the page with a welcoming statement about why your destination is considerate of travelers of all abilities.
- Include your destination's Accessibility Statement in a prominent location on the page to ensure users understand your commitment to their needs. Refer to examples below for help on drafting an accessibility statement.
- Create Destination Accessible Outdoors Assets/ Experiences content compiling visitor information gathered through your ADA asset inventory with the following categories of visitor information:
 - ADA Compliant Outdoor Spaces & Features
 - Accessible Trails (optional)
 - Adaptive Activities and Operators (optional)
 - Destination Visitor Services (optional)
- Other ideas you might consider including:
 - Provide a list of local and regional Disability and Affinity Groups that can provide travelers with communities to connect with.
 - Include a list of State Guides and Local Accessibility Resources for Visitors. These additional resources provide further information from North Carolina partners, as well as articles with travel tips for travelers with disabilities.
- Use appropriate images that show people with disabilities participating in activities or at locations. This helps them identify themselves and relate to the information.
- Update this page regularly and include a time-stamp on the page (*this page was updated September 2023) so visitors know this is the most up-to-date and reliable source of accessible travel information.
- Ensure your website or blog has an explanation of ensuring web-accessible content.

TOURISM ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENTS



Visit Lexington Kentucky: <https://www.visitlex.com/lex-for-good/accessibility/>

Lex For Good / ACCESSIBILITY

Share

EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE LEXINGTON.

Lexington is a great city, with so many unique and beautiful experiences to offer— but we can only call it great if it's great for everyone. LEX for Good Accessibility Partners do their part in making that goal a reality by providing accommodations and services for people of different abilities.



ACCESSIBILITY

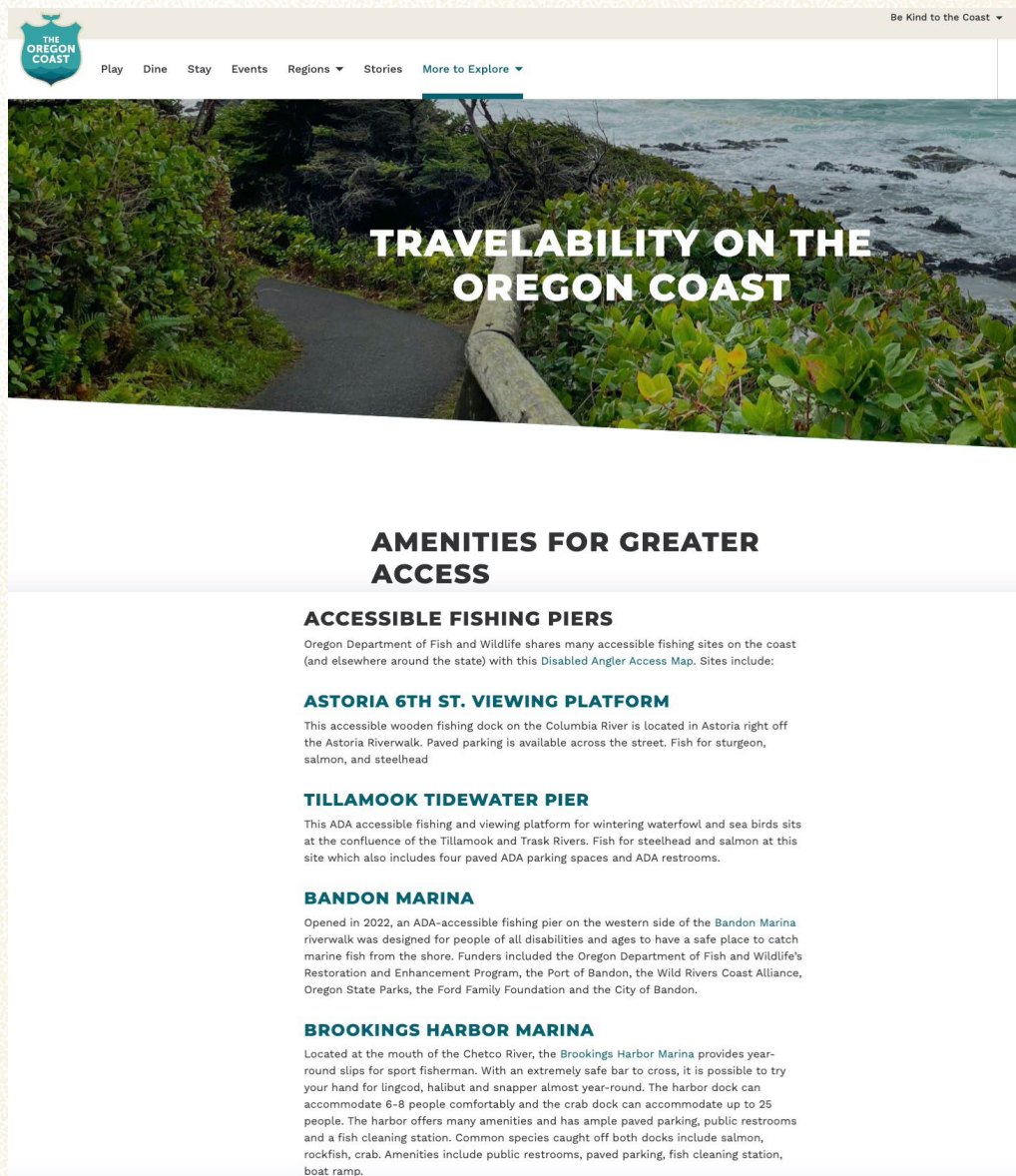
We've partnered with Wheel the World to bring you the best information possible on accessibility. Check out Lexington's options on the [Wheel the World](#) site and peruse through our listings to find the best fit for you.

Another Example Accessibility Statement

Visit Mesa, Arizona: <https://www.visitmesa.com/travel-accessibility/>

DESTINATION ACCESSIBLE ASSETS/EXPERIENCES

Oregon Coast, OR: <https://visittheoregoncoast.com/travelability-on-the-oregon-coast/>



Other Example Accessibility Pages

Jackson County, NC: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/attractions/accessibility/>

Explore Brevard, NC: <https://explorebrevard.com/land-of-waterfalls-for-all/>

Visit Colorado Springs, CO: <https://www.visitcos.com/blog/accessible-trails-in-colorado-springs/>

For more examples of accessible destination website content, visit Travel Ability and Wheel The World online resources:

<https://travelability.net/accessible-destinations/united-states/>

<https://wheeltheworld.com/accessible-travel/usa>

DESIGN NOTES

In terms of look and feel of the landing page it is important that the design is consistent with other pages in your website. We do not want visitors who land on this page to have the impression that they have navigated to another site based on the visual identity. There are several key points to follow, when developing the layout, in order to ensure the Outdoor NC brand is presented accurately:

- When utilizing the Outdoor NC logo:
 - Ensure there is a sufficient level of contrast between the logo design and the background to maintain legibility. There are three versions of the Outdoor NC logo: Color (Carolina Teal - Hex #004f59), Black, and Reverse (white). All of these can be downloaded in the [Partner Toolkit](#). The “Reverse” (or white) version of the logo can be overlaid on imagery, however sufficient size and contrast should be present in order to maintain legibility. Examples:



- Avoid distorting the logo, rearranging the elements in the logo, placing the logo over the main subject in the photo, or using the logo with stock photos or illustrations.
- Always consider legibility with text content. Make sure there is a high level of contrast between body copy and background colors. Avoid using anything smaller than 16px for body copy.
- Do not convert text content to images. This can adversely effect both accessibility and presentation of the content on different platforms or devices.
- Consider different screen sizes and device orientations when developing your page. Most sites will present the same information differently on desktop, tablet and mobile devices.
- Incorporate Alt Tags that describe the visual content of imagery with any images to assist screen readers which help users with visual impairments.

ACCESSIBLE OUTDOORS WEBPAGE TEMPLATE

Below is an easy template of boilerplate language you can copy and customize to build your visitor information webpage and other digital platforms such as blogs or e-newsletters with visitor information about accessible outdoors.

Use the Destination Accessible Assets and Experiences section to detail the local national and state parks, county or neighborhood parks, greenways, and/or natural trails in your area, and what accessibility facilities are available at each. Below are sample descriptions of information you might include according to information researched or provided by partners including land managers. It is recommended that you only include accessibility descriptions that have been provided by the land manager and/or content that has been reviewed or created by a reputable source.

Example Introduction Statement

{Destination, county} welcomes ALL visitors to enjoy the {fill in the blank} of our destination. As an organization we strive for accessibility and inclusivity of all destination assets, experiences, and services.

{Destination} is home to outdoor spaces and recreational opportunities including parks, rivers, and trails, many of which are partially or fully accessible. To plan your trip and learn more about accessibility, read on.

Example Destination Accessibility Statement

{TDA/ destination organization} believes that travel should be accessible to all, regardless of disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, or religion. We are continually working to improve the accessibility of our destination offerings and more effectively share this information through our various platforms including our website.

We invite visitors to visit our Welcome Center at {address} to learn more about the different opportunities available throughout the area. Currently, our Welcome Center provides accessible parking, a ramp into the building, accessible restrooms, and information in alternative formats.

{list any specific obstacles a visitor with disabilities may encounter} e.g. We are aware that our dining area may not be accessible to visitors who use wheelchairs due to the size and placement of our tables. We plan to implement more accessible seating this year, but in the meantime can accommodate visitors on the outdoor patio, accessed by an exterior ramp.

We welcome your feedback, questions, and concerns. Please contact {name of person} at {contact information email/ phone}.

Destination Accessible Assets and Experiences

ATTRACTIONS

{Name of attraction, location, address. include an image}

{Sample description of ability suitability. e.g. Ideal for persons who use mobility devices, including manual and power wheelchairs, walkers, or canes. Families with mixed mobility will find this an ideal location.}

{Sample description of the experience. e.g. This one-mile, out-and-back trail starts by crossing an arched footbridge, then winds along a scenic stretch of the Tuckasegee River. This trail is a local favorite and offers accessible restrooms and parking. The grade along the whole path is gentle—with the exception of the incline onto and off of the bridge that crosses the Tuck—and the mixed hardwoods that line the trail provide enough shade to offer a relaxing and cool route any time of day.}

FISHING

{Name of river/ lake, location, address. include an image}

{Sample description of the location and suitability for accessibility. e.g. Bear Lake is known for its fishing, boating, kayaking, and scenery. However, many people are not aware that Bear Lake is also a great attraction for people with limited mobility. Located at the main dock is a fishing pier with an accessible ramp that's large enough to comfortably host both a wheelchair user and an additional person. Bear Lake also offers fully ADA-compliant restrooms, making it an attractive option to those with limited vision or mobility.}

Please note, that conditions in outdoor areas change quickly so be sure you plan ahead and prepare.

WATERFALLS

{Name of location, address. include an image}

{Sample description of the suitability for accessibility. e.g. Whitewater Falls is famously known as one of the highest waterfalls east of the Rockies. But the beauty of this national attraction is not reserved for those who possess strenuous hiking abilities. The parking area offers fully accessible parking spaces and ADA-compliant restrooms. The trail up to the first viewing platform is paved, wheelchair accessible, and located less than a quarter of a mile from the falls. This viewing area showcases a large portion of the falls and serves as an excellent vantage point for photos. The lower viewing platform is not accessible to wheelchair users as it requires a 124-step climb.}

Please note, that conditions in outdoor areas change quickly so be sure you plan ahead and prepare.

PREPARING FOR ADVENTURE

{Destination} provides attractions and adventures that are suited for all visitors. Request our visitor guide to get your NC adventure started! While the guide includes a Handicap Accessible column, please call your specific accommodation in advance to discuss your needs. We can't wait to see you in {Destination}!

Please note, that conditions in outdoor areas change quickly so be sure you plan ahead and prepare.

LOCAL ADAPTIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION OPERATORS AND ACTIVITY PROVIDERS (OPTIONAL)

{Name of organization, address and location, website, image. Sample description of accessibility services and experiences, equipment provided, seasonal availability}

LOCAL DISABILITY AND AFFINITY GROUPS (OPTIONAL)

{Name of organization, address and location, website, image. Sample description of accessibility services and experiences, equipment provided, seasonal availability}

DESTINATION VISITOR SERVICES (OPTIONAL)

STATE GUIDES AND LOCAL ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES FOR VISITORS (OPTIONAL)

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services: ACCESS North Carolina A Vacation And Travel Guide for People with Disabilities

Visit NC: Accessible Adventures: NC Fun for Travelers of All Accessibilities

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission: Disabled Access and Opportunities

Accessible Nature: North Carolina Accessible Easy Trails

EXAMPLE PAGE LAYOUT

Here is an example of a proposed page layout which will present the information clearly in a visually interesting way. Each website is different and consistency with design is key, so please use this visual guide as a reference only and keep the design of your page consistent with other landing pages on your site.

