



The Staying Connected Initiative
Adirondacks–Green Mountains Linkage

Volunteer Tracking Instructions

First of all, thank you for volunteering! Your tracking will allow us to monitor important road segments throughout Rutland County and identify places where we can make our road system safer for wildlife--and for us!

General Instructions:

Where to go:

When you agree to be a WildPaths Project volunteer, you will be assigned a road segment, including a start and end point. Each time you go tracking, please return to this same road segment.

When to go:

Tracking is generally easiest several days after a rain or snow storm, because tracks are more visible in the mud or snow. Waiting until after a storm also allows us to “date” the tracks, since these storms often wipe away or cover any previous tracks. However, going *immediately* after a storm does not allow time for animals to move around and make tracks. We suggest that you visit your road segment 2-4 days after a rain or snow storm.

Depending on the substrate along the road, a rain storm may or may not improve tracking conditions. If, for example, your road segment is lined with grass or with gravel, tracks may really only be visible when there is snow cover.

How often to go:

The more often you are able to go, the more information we will be able to gather. Staying Connected asks that you go tracking a minimum of twice a winter, but we will certainly use additional information, if you are able to go more often! Once a month would be ideal.

Please wear blaze orange AND reflective gear during your road survey. We also ask that you walk against the traffic, for safety. Do not walk on any road if you feel unsafe.

General protocol:

From your starting point, walk along the road, facing on-coming traffic, until you reach your end point. Along the way, scan the roadside for any sign of wildlife. You may walk within the road right-of-way (25 feet from the center of the road), but please be conscious to avoid trespassing on private land, and please be especially sure to stay off posted land! When you reach your endpoint, cross the road and return, still looking for signs of wildlife, on the opposite side of the road. If there are sections of road in which walking on one side does not seem safe, please walk on the safer side of the road.

What to look for:

Tracks
Animal trails
Fur or other animal parts
Roadkill
Scat and urine
Scratches, digging, or other marks on trees and vegetation

Bridges and culverts:

If you come to a bridge or culvert, it is likely that an animal would travel *under* the road rather than across the road surface. If it is safe to do so, please search the ground around the bridge or culvert for signs of wildlife.

Materials needed:

Blaze orange or another bright color to wear while walking along the road segment
A ruler or measuring tape
The map provided by Staying Connected
The data form provided by Staying Connected
A pen/pencil
A camera (optional, but recommended)
A GPS unit (optional, but recommended)
Tracking key/card/book (optional, but recommended)

Filling out the Report Form:

Before you begin:

At the top of the page, please fill out your name, the names of any others joining you, the date of your road visit, and the time of your visit. Please also enter the road name, the town that you are in, and the road segment ID number. This ID number should have been given to you by the Staying Connected Initiative. If you do not know the number, please ask someone from Staying Connected.

The final bit of information needed before you begin tracking is information about past storms. Please enter the number of days since the last storm and circle whether this was a rain or snow storm. Estimate the average rain/snowfall in the area in general (this information can be looked up if it is not readily apparent where to measure). The pileup of snow directly next to the road can also be important. Please be sure to measure this snowpack during your visit.

While on your walk:

Data Point Number: For each monitoring session, every track observation will be given a unique data point number. This number should be recorded as the reporter's first and last initial, followed by a running total of animal observations during the monitoring session. For example, reporter John Smith would record his first observation as "JS1," his second as "JS2," and so on, on any given day. Numbers will begin again with each new tracking date.

Animal Species: Please record the species of animal observed. If you are unsure, please list your guesses, followed by a question mark. Please *always* list a question mark unless you are 100% sure of the animal's ID. Although our focus is on large mammals, please record signs of *any* mammal, reptile, or amphibian you find.

Track Width and Length: You may find that track width and length vary somewhat even on a single individual as it moves through the landscape, due to changes in substrate or speed. Please choose one track that appears representative of the animal you are observing and measure and record the length and width of this track.

Straddle and Stride: Similarly, you may find that stride and straddle vary somewhat even when following tracks from a single individual, depending on the size of the animal, the substrate, the speed at which it is moving, and whether it is going uphill or downhill. Please choose a stride that appears representative of the animal you are observing and measure and record the stride and straddle. Stride measures from the back of a footprint to the back of the next footprint *of the same foot*. Straddle is the measurement from the outside edge of the left footprint to the outside edge of the right footprint perpendicular to the direction of travel.

Other sign: Many times, you will not actually see tracks, but you may find something else indicating that an animal has been present. Please record any such signs that you find. Possibilities include: trails, fur or body parts, scat or urine, the animal itself (dead or alive), scratches on a post or tree, signs of digging, animal sounds, etc.

Crossing Road? Does the track or sign occur on both sides of the road, or is it only on one side? Since one goal of this project is to identify places where animals cross roads, please be sure to look across the road when you find a sign, and indicate whether the animal crossed.

Locational Landmark: This landmark will enable us to find the place where you found a track or sign for future reference. Please provide a note in this category *in addition to* placing a mark on the map and/or taking a GPS point. Examples include utility poles (especially with numbers), mailboxes, driveways, guardrails, culverts, bridges, steep slopes, etc.

Notes: Please note anything else that you think could be helpful.

In addition to the report:

Mark the map:

Please place a dot on the map at the location where you found a wildlife track or sign. Label the dot with the track's report number.

Take a photo:

While not required, a photo will go along with our records as a confirmation of the identity of tracks and sign found. If possible, please take a digital photo with each track reported. Label the digital photo with the report number, date, road segment ID number, and species.

Take a GPS point:

This is also optional, but if you have access to a GPS unit, it will greatly help us if you can take a GPS point (in decimal degrees) of the location of each track reported. Label your point with the track's report number. Even if you take a GPS point, please be sure to *also* place a mark on the map and provide a locational landmark in writing.

Upload your data:

This step is optional, but it would help us significantly if you enter your data online.

Once you have completed your field session, please visit our data-entry website, <https://sites.google.com/site/rutlandcountywildlifesightings>. The home page you will come to is a site where any individual can report locations where they have seen wildlife, and these are not restricted to roadside monitoring. We encourage you to enter any wildlife or signs of wildlife you find when *not* performing your roadside survey at this site. However, once you have been approved as a WildPaths volunteer, we hold your data in higher regard, and we have a separate page for you to upload your survey results. Please follow these steps:

1. Go to <https://sites.google.com/site/rutlandcountywildlifesightings>.
2. Near the top of the page, click on the tab labeled *WildPaths Tracking Volunteers*.
3. Find the latitude and longitude of each track you found by following the instructions listed above the map. You will need these values as you complete the data entry. If you get confused, skip this step, and we will fill it in later.
4. Click on the link that says *Click HERE to fill out the Volunteer Tracking Form*.
5. Copy the information from your data sheet onto the online form. You will need to fill out a new form for each track you encountered on your tracking walk.
6. Click the *Submit* button. Repeat the process for each track.
7. If you have photos to submit, please follow the link at the bottom of the page to the *WildPaths Picassa Album*. Click the *Add Photos* button, just under where it says *WildPaths Photos*. (Note: If you click the "Upload" button instead, the program default will upload photos to a new folder, where they will not be available to WildPaths administrators.)

Submit your original Report Form:

Please return forms to:

Monica Erhart
11 Mountain View Road
Tinmouth, VT 05773

Have fun, and be safe:

Walking some roadsides can be dangerous. Please minimize your risks by walking during full daylight hours, walking against traffic, and wearing bright colors such as blaze orange. If you feel unsafe on your assigned route, please be sure to let Staying Connected staff know, and we can assign you to a safer route. This should be fun, not scary!

Thank you for your help!