

# landscape architecture

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PRACTICE



**A**NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP between a small federal technical-assistance program and ASLA delivers pro bono planning and design assistance to selected community projects dealing with rivers and trails. The federal program, the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program—better known as Rivers & Trails—can serve as a catalyst for projects such as trail systems, riverfront parks, greenways, water trails, and land and river conservation.

Based on the success of a seven-year collaboration with its Washington state program and the Washington State ASLA Chapter (WASLA), Rivers & Trails formalized a relationship with ASLA on the national level in 2000 and renewed it in 2005 for a second five-year term.

The partnership, which operates locally through ASLA chapters and Rivers & Trails regional and field offices, provides chapters with an easy, practical means to sponsor community service, offer professional development, mentor students in the field, and gain visibility for the profession at the community level. Yet many landscape architects and their rural and smaller municipal clients are not aware of the program.

Armed with information about the mutual benefits of Rivers & Trails part-

## A HELPING HAND FOR COMMUNITIES

How the National Park Service can provide free design assistance for your town.

By Don Benson, ASLA, and Alexandra Stone, ASLA



Rivers & Trails has been working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CH2M Hill, Jensen Belts Landscape Architects, and other organizations to design a project to daylight and restore the natural habitat of Indian Creek, *top*, as it passes through the center of Caldwell, Idaho. The daylighted area originally was covered by a car wash building (shown being demolished, *above*) that completely entombed the creek. The total project, consisting of several phases, will cost more than \$9 million and will uncover the entombed, 150-cubic-feet-per-second creek to create more than six acres of new habitat and greenbelt through the center of downtown Caldwell.

DEB WILLIS, U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, TOP; DENNIS CANNON, CITY OF CALDWELL, BOTTOM

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nerships, landscape architects can help educate their clients about the program and its opportunities.

### How It Works

Rivers & Trails partnerships typically involve projects—such as building a regional trail system or developing a series of put-ins and takeouts for paddlers along a stretch of river—that require the cooperation of several public, nonprofit, and private parties. A partnership begins when a community invites Rivers & Trails to get involved. Rivers & Trails staff members help pull together government agencies (local, state, and/or federal), key nonprofit organizations and businesses, landowners, and citizens—all the parties needed to get the project done. Rivers & Trails technical assistance helps coalitions develop concept plans, establish their conservation or recreation goals, assess resources, set priorities, and engage the public. Although Rivers & Trails doesn't fund projects, it does help community partnerships identify funding sources.

Rivers & Trails invites local ASLA chapters to help with planning and logistics on mutually agreed-upon projects. The chapters then alert their members to see who would like to participate. Landscape architects volunteer pro bono services for associated charrettes or other up-front planning meetings. Once the planning groundwork has been completed, landscape architects may find opportunities to propose additional work for fees on these projects.

### Recent Success Stories

In 2005, Rivers & Trails reported that the program's assistance helped build more than 902 miles of new trails, protect more than 381 miles of river shoreline, conserve more than 44,982 acres, and tap more than \$40 million in funding from a variety of sources. The program helps launch about 125 new projects every year and has assisted with various sections of now

well-established projects, including the East Coast Greenway (*Landscape Architecture*, July 1999 and April 2001), the Confluence Greenway in Saint Louis, and the Los Angeles River Greenway (*Landscape Architecture*, November 1997). These successes include examples of ASLA involvement.

In Florida, for instance, the Florida chapter and Rivers & Trails partnered with the city of Sarasota and Sarasota Memorial Hospital to develop a conceptual plan for a number of linear parks and trails connecting neighborhoods that would serve as a model for larger master planning for a city-wide network. Members of the Northern

following repeated 500-year floods along the Greenbrier River in East Cass.

The Idaho/Montana ASLA chapter and Rivers & Trails launched their partnership in Caldwell, Idaho, in 2003. Community leaders in Caldwell, a city of 31,000 west of Boise, were exploring the feasibility of daylighting a section of Indian Creek that passed through downtown, where it was buried in pipes under five blocks of roads and buildings. The community recognized the potential for the creek restoration to jump-start the revitalization of the historic business district. A community-based charrette prepared site plans to demonstrate daylighting and restoration of Indian Creek and framed a community trail system plan. Caldwell completed the first restoration demonstration two years after the charrette, in time for the annual creek festival, and has been awarded \$225,000 in grant funding to construct the first 3.2 miles of trails and bike lanes connecting the downtown library, six schools, and the new YMCA.

WASLA and the Seattle Rivers & Trails office have the longest-standing partnership (formally established in 1998) and have collaborated on five projects in different communities—more than any other state ASLA chapter. For WASLA, nearly annual charrettes with Rivers & Trails have become a cornerstone of WASLA's community-service program. The communities have all used charrettes to promote broader participation and get their projects built.

For example, the Chinatown—International District neighborhood group in Seattle used the results of its charrette to address culture and economy, housing, public spaces, and accessibility, and to finalize a neighborhood strategic plan that was incorporated into Seattle's Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

The communities of Liberty Lake, Moses Lake, and Wenatchee, Washington, either have received or are in the process of acquiring funds to begin work on portions of their regional trail systems. Skagit County has used its charrette to plan phased projects for the Northern State Recreation Center, such as re-establishing an alluvial fan on Hansen Creek, widening an approach road, and building recreational fields on

## How to Apply For Rivers & Trails Assistance

**WHO MAY APPLY:** Nonprofit organizations such as ASLA, community groups, tribes or tribal governments, and local, state, or federal government agencies.

**TERM OF ASSISTANCE:** One year, and may be renewed for a second year if warranted.

**ANNUAL DEADLINE:** August 1, although applications may be submitted year-round.

**FORMAT:** Application letters of one to three pages should include the following information:

1. Project title and description
2. Resource importance
3. Anticipated results
4. Support for the project
5. Rivers & Trails role
6. Contact information
7. Support letters from elected officials, community leaders, and cooperating organizations (optional but strongly recommended)

Contact information, selection criteria, and more detailed application instructions are available at [www.nps.gov/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/rtca).

California chapter collaborated with Rivers & Trails on a charrette in Santa Cruz in 2003, and the resulting concept plan became part of the San Lorenzo Urban River Plan that was adopted by the city.

In West Virginia, the Rivers & Trails project manager helped get the state ASLA chapter involved in preparing a conceptual plan for a community park, reusing property bought out by the Federal Emergency Management Agency

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lands received from the state. Future phases involve planning for a tourist destination equestrian center and pedestrian links to other portions of the Northern State area.

“By the end of the charrette,” says Liberty Lake volunteer Tim Gavin, ASLA, “I was impressed to see community members speaking the same language as the designers and thinking in terms of creative solutions.”

The charrette results helped establish a Transportation Benefit District, a community-approved property tax to raise matching funds to develop the trail system. Less than seven years after the charrette, all but one piece of the trail master plan have been completed, including a pedestrian overpass across Interstate 90 that cost \$1.5 mil-

lion—an amount that includes \$220,000 from the Transportation Benefit District and \$550,000 in city funds.

### **Professional and Community Benefits**

In addition to shaping the chapter’s goals, WASLA has used the partnership work to support other initiatives, including ASLA’s 100 Years/100 Parks and Active Living projects. In a funding climate that makes it difficult for a project’s planning phase to receive support, Rivers & Trails also has enabled many communities and partnering land managers to prepare plans that gain broad support, receive funding, and lead to contract work for landscape architects, as has occurred on the Liberty Lake and Northern State Recreation Area charrette projects in Washington.

On the community side, the backing and prestige of the partnership enable

communities to leverage financial commitments from funding agencies. A Rivers & Trails collaboration that involves landscape architects also enables small towns and rural areas to imagine and realize projects they otherwise would not have been able to undertake. Finally, the partnership can help surmount conflicts within communities. In the words of Skagit County (Washington) Parks and Recreation Director Bob Vaux, “The team-oriented nature of the charrette provided us with a single concept plan by achieving consensus among stakeholders who appeared to be at odds with one another.”

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### **Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program** **Community Assistance Arm of the National Park Service**

[www.nps.gov/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/rtca)