

North Country National Scenic Trail  
“TAILGATE SAFETY SERIES”



**HIKE LEADER**

Most trail chapters offer sponsored hikes at various times and locations, and when doing so, it is important to identify a qualified hike leader. The hike leader is responsible for various aspects of the hike—all of which help ensure the safety and enjoyment of the participants.

- Hike leaders, in concert with chapter leadership, should address a number of pre-hike issues and decisions prior to advertising the hike:
  - Which trail segment will be hiked, and what are the current trail conditions? A pre-hike scouting mission may be in order if a particular segment has not been recently assessed for current conditions
  - Does the proposed trail segment offer special challenges (steep terrain, long distances, anticipated time commitment, etc.) which may exclude some participants? Be sure to inform the public of what to expect
  - Where will the meeting place and time be for hike participants?
  - Are vehicle shuttles or carpools required?
- At the start of the hike, hike leaders should introduce themselves, and facilitate introductions among the participating hikers
- Make last minute assessments of the hikers, ensuring that all participants are properly equipped to meet the anticipated conditions of the day (proper footwear, drinking water, rain gear, etc.)
- Utilize the “Tailgate Safety Series” materials to initiate pre-hike safety messages which are appropriate for current conditions (hydration, hypothermia, etc.). Continue to rely on these materials throughout the hike if conditions change (approaching thunderstorms, etc.)
- If the group is large, or the possibility exists for hikers to become spread out along the trail, the hike leader should plan in advance to work with a “sweep” hiker of known experience and ability
- Make it known to the group that this is a group activity requiring cooperation—hikers must stay behind the leader and ahead of the sweep

- The hike leader should set a pace to keep all hikers within a reasonable distance of one another
- Stop at prudent intervals to allow for rest, water stops, snacks, and so on
- The hike leader should stop at appropriate areas and allow hikers and the sweep to rejoin the group, especially at trail intersections, confusing areas, whenever trail hazards are encountered, or at areas of group interest (scenic vistas or places where informational talks are taking place)