

# Trail Classification

## Copied from the MET Manual

The first five emigrant trail classification categories which follow are designed to assess the condition of trail segments at the time of mapping and establish a basis for protecting and preserving those trails on public and private lands. A sixth classification category has been added for altered or destroyed trail segments that have been reconstructed on their original location. These six categories are OCTA's standard classifications for all emigrant trail segments

### CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES

**Class 1:** Unaltered Trail Description: The trail segment retains the essence of its original character and shows no evidence of having been substantially altered by motor vehicles or by modern road improvements. There is visible evidence of the original trail in the form of depressions, ruts, swales, tracks, scarring, vegetative differences, rock alignments along the trailside, and eroded trail features.

**Class 2:** Used Trail Description: The trail retains the essence of its original character but shows past or present use by motor vehicles, typically as a two-track road overlaying the original wagon trail. There is little or no evidence of having been altered permanently by modern road improvements, such as widening, blading, grading, crowning, or graveling. In forested areas the trail may have been used for logging but still retains elements of its original character.

**Class 3:** Verified Trail Description: The trail route is accurately located and verified from written, cartographic, artifact, geomorphic, and/or wagon wheel impact evidence (as rust, grooved, or polished rocks). But due to subsequent weathering, vegetative succession, rodent surface digging, or logging, trail traces will not be visible on the surface. What does remain is a verified trail corridor that has not been directly altered by modern intrusion or development. Typically this includes trails that once passed through forests and meadows, across excessively hard surfaces or bedrock (such as on ridges), over alkali flats and sandy or gravelly soils, through ravines or washes, and other surfaces not conducive to trail preservation.

**Class 4:** Altered Trail Description: The trail location is verified but elements of its original condition have been permanently altered, primarily by road construction, such as widening, blading, grading, crowning, graveling, or paving. In some cases, the original trail has been permanently altered by underground cables and pipelines. In other cases, trail segments, whose locations are verified, may have been destroyed by natural events or modern developments, leaving no evidence of its original appearance.

**Class 5:** Approximate Trail Description: The trail is either so obliterated or unverifiable that its location is known only approximately. In many cases, trail segments have been destroyed entirely by development, such as highways, structures, agriculture, utility corridors or inundated beneath reservoirs. In other cases, natural causes have removed any remains of a trail. In both cases, there is not enough documentary or geomorphic evidence to locate the trail accurately. Thus, only the approximate route is known.

**Class 6:** Reconstructed Trail Description: A segment of Class 1, 2 or 3 trail no longer exists in its previous form due to alteration or destruction. Subsequently, this trail segment was replicated by design and construction in its previous verified location to appear as the trail class it was before the alteration or destruction occurred.

## **Additional Guidelines and Qualifications for Classifying Trails**

- Many emigrant trail segments still retaining evidence of wagon use—in the form of depressions, swales, ruts, scarring, or tracks—probably have undergone later 19th century use as freighting, mining, stage, or ranching roads. Therefore, visible trail remains may not be the result exclusively of emigrant wagon use. Also, because these wagon trails have had little or no use in the 20th century, their appearance has often changed due to erosion or natural restoration, and they no longer look as they did in the 19th century. Nonetheless, these trail segments still retain the essence of their original character and qualify as Class 1.
- When an emigrant trail segment has been deeply eroded, and its original visual character changed, it is still worthy of being protected and preserved as a Class 1 trail. Almost all Class 1 “unaltered trail” segments have been eroded to some degree over time. To assess a trail segment for classification purposes, based on the degree of erosion, would not be A-20 practicable. If a Class 1 trail segment is deeply eroded, a note explaining this condition should be made in the map margin or digital notes.
- Modern visual intrusions, such as freeways, power lines, or buildings situated near trails, normally do not affect trail classification. Only the condition of the trail itself, or the trail corridor in the case of “verified trails,” determines a trail’s classification. The classification categories describe the trail segment’s surface, not its surrounding landscape.
- Often a Class 1 “unaltered trail” will intermittently fade into and out of a Class 3 “verified trail.” In these cases, a Class 1 designation would be appropriate for the length of the intermittent trail segment. Conversely, a Class 3 “verified trail” may intermittently fade into and out of a Class 1 “unaltered trail.” In these cases and if the segment is short, a Class 1 designation would be appropriate for the length of the intermittent trail segment based upon the principle of coherence.
- Occasionally, a two-track road will have been abandoned for decades and reverted in appearance to a Class 1 “unaltered trail” and will be designated as such. However, if it is known that the trail was once used as a road for motor vehicles, this should be noted in the map margin or digital notes as an abandoned road now appearing as an “unaltered trail.”
- In other cases, a two-track road may have been lightly bladed at one time, therefore technically making it a Class 4 “altered trail,” but subsequent weathering and natural recovery have restored its appearance and profile to a Class 2 “used trail.” Therefore, as long as there is no apparent permanent alteration, the trail can qualify as Class 2. Also, water bars and barrier berms may have been placed across Class 2 “used trails.” Nonetheless, these short, impacted segments are recoverable and should not change the trail classification from a Class 2. In both cases, a note explaining the condition can be made in the map margin or digital notes.
- In the case of Class 3 “verified trails,” logging, forest fires, or tree mortality may have temporarily impacted the trail corridor, but over time new growth has or will have restored the natural setting of the trail corridor. Therefore, as long as the trail route is accurately known, these recoverable settings qualify as Class 3.
- A Class 3 “verified trail” segment, by definition, does not show visible surface characteristics of wagon travel (other than rock alteration or artifact evidence); however, this does not imply such a trail segment is any less worthy of protection and preservation than a Class 1 or Class 2 trail segment.

- A Class 4 “altered trail” segment no longer possesses elements of its original character, which have been permanently destroyed; however, there may arise a situation wherein it A-21 is desirable to retain a

protective corridor along the “altered trail” as a way of retaining the trail integrity of adjacent or connected Class 1, 2 or 3 segments.

- In most cases, Class 5 trails have been so obliterated by development that exact trail locations are impossible to determine. However, there will be situations where additional research and field verification may reveal the exact location of a trail segment which presently is known only approximately. Thus, where trail location has not been determined due to insufficient research data and field verification work, a trail corridor should be protected from disturbance until it has been confirmed that physical or other evidence of a trail segment no longer exists.

- Related to the problems of classifying trail segments is the challenge discussed previously of determining if a trail segment under investigation was originally an emigrant trail or a later wagon road (refer to the “Problem of Determining What Is an Emigrant Trail,” page 9). How is a one-time emigrant trail, later overlain by a stage, freighting, military, or early county wagon road, to be classified? In one sense, the original emigrant trail is altered permanently, thereby becoming a Class 4 “altered trail.” In another sense, what is being located and verified is an historic wagon road overlaying an earlier emigrant trail segment and thereby becoming a Class 1 “unaltered trail.” Because the trail segment under investigation is in a Class 1 “unaltered” condition and should be preserved, it should be classified as Class 1 with a margin note or digital note explaining the complexity of the situation.

- The Class 6 Reconstructed Trail was added to conform to the sixth NHT Condition Category (see the brief discussion in the next section). The intent of this Class 6 trail is not to disparage its reconstructed form. It is rebuilt to simulate the trail’s original character at its original location, as a Class 1, 2, or 3 trail. Therefore, a Class 6 trail segment should be treated as it was before alteration or destruction. The trail segment location is documented by previous mapping, surveys, archeological studies, aerial photography, or other historic documentation undertaken prior to the alteration or destruction of the segment. Indicate in the map margin or digital notes which form the Class 6 trail reconstruction took (Class 1, 2 or 3 trail) and when this restoration occurred. No trail classification scheme can cover all situations with equal uniformity. In most situations, the six classification categories will apply rather well. Nonetheless, we mappers must keep in mind that the natural world, and that includes any emigrant trail segment, is on an ever changing continuum which we try to artificially categorize for purposes of protection and preservation. Inevitably there will be situations where more than one trail category might apply. In such cases, where there is no clear determination, the trail classifier will have to make a subjective decision based on thorough observation and assessment. When in doubt, always go for a higher level of preservation (a lower classification number).