

Maine Appalachian Trail Club

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Waterbar Tips for Trail Maintainers

submitted by Richard Fecteau

With all the heavy rain events in Maine this year it seems like a good time for a reminder of how important waterbar maintenance is to the trails. The most important item for long term trail stability is to get running water off the trail as soon as possible to prevent erosion. Many steep trail sections in Maine may have as many as 25-30 waterbars per mile and they need annual maintenance to be effective. These tips for waterbar maintenance was created by Julian Wiggins several years ago and it has been shared many times over the years with individual maintainers. Thank you Julian!

Tips for Annual Waterbar Maintenance

Uphill Side: The trail should ramp smoothly down into the trench.

Rocks/Brush: Hikers may decide to bypass the waterbar to one side or the other if there is an inviting path to do so. If people are bypassing the waterbar close the area with brush or a pile of loose rock.

The Berm: Mineral soil cleaned from the trench can be placed behind the waterbar. The trail surface should be level or above the tops of the waterbar rocks.

Downhill Side: On the downhill side of the waterbar the trail should smoothly ramp up to the top of the stones. The trail should form a smooth ramp with a step down into the trench.

Ensure that water is unable to flow back onto the trail below the waterbar.

Tools for the Job:

If the waterbar is maintained on a regular basis a shovel can be used to clear leaves and soil. However if a waterbar has not been cleaned for a few seasons heavier tools may be required such as a pick mattock or a pulaski, a pair of loppers, and a folding saw.

Sideview of Drainage Trench

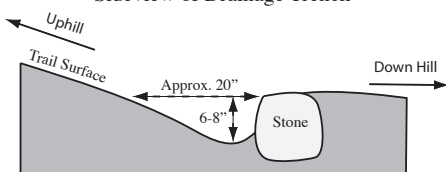


Figure created by Julian Wiggins

The Trench:

The trench (on the uphill side of the waterbar) should be 6-8 inches deep and 12-20 inches wide. The trench should have a clear uninterrupted path all the way from one side of the trail to the other and beyond. Most properly placed waterbars require only a 2 or 3 ft long trench beyond the edge of the trail but some sites could require a longer drainage trench.

This figure was created by Julian Wiggins for use by the Maine Appalachian Trail Club