

Volunteer Tracking Instructions

Northern Green Mountains – Canada Linkage



First of all, thank you for volunteering! Your tracking will allow us to monitor important road segments throughout the Northern Green Mountains 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 Staying Connected Tracking 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, perhaps once each month!

Please wear blaze orange or another bright color 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 one side of the road 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, 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 and a pen/pencil
- A digital camera (optional, but recommended)
- A GPS unit (optional, but recommended)
- Tracking key (optional, but recommended)
- Lynn Levine's "Animal Tracks" (optional, but highly recommended)

Filling out the Report Form:

Before you begin:

Please fill out your name, the names of all volunteer trackers and guests present, the date and the time of your road visit. Please also enter the road name, the town that you are tracking in, and the road segment ID number. This ID number should have been given to you by the Staying Connected Initiative or Cold Hollow to Canada. 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:

Report Number: Is the date (MM/DD/YY) then the Road Segment ID, then a running total of animal observations on that tracking date. For example, the tracking group from Montgomery monitoring on 01/15/12 on the Hazen's Notch Road would record their first observation as 01/15/12MHN¹, the second observation as 01/15/12MHN², and so on.

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: Examine and measure 3 individual tracks, if possible, then record the length and width of one representative track.

Stride Width and Length: Examine and measure 3 individual strides, if possible, then record the length and width of one representative track.

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 digital photo improves our records as a confirmation of the identity of the tracks and sign found. If at all possible, please take a photo to go along with each track reported. Label the digital photo with the report number. Send digital photos to Charlie Hancock:

northwoodsforestry@gmail.com

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 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. Note: the map at the data upload site can also find the latitude and longitude.

Have fun, and be safe:

Walking some roadsides can be dangerous. 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!