

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

BRUSHING



TRAIL PRISM: DEFINITION & STANDARDS

The word corridor is often used to describe the area cleared for trails, but is also used to refer to the protected lands that exist along the length of the A.T. The term trail prism can be less confusing.

The clearing standard for the A.T. is 4-feet by 8-feet.

Visualizing 4x8 feet:

- Instructor can have students extend their arms like a T and walk down the trail. Anything woody that falls roughly below or rises above that, up to 8', should be removed.
- A full-sized sheet of plywood is 4x8 feet, which might be a meaningful comparison for some.
- If applicable, note alpine zone brushing prioritizes leaving woody growth undisturbed to protect it from the harsh cold and wind and only pruning to the width of the trail, which may be less than the 4-foot standard.

FREQUENCY & INTENSITY OF BRUSHING

Help participants think about the varied circumstances each trail section offers since some sections will require more frequent brushing, or more vigorous brushing, than others. Quiz participants on the likely number of times they will need to come specifically to address brushing the following trail in these conditions:

- dense spruce forest;
- mixed forest canopy with strong ample dappled sun and annual growth that includes blackberries, jewel weed, nettle, poison ivy, etc;
- a south facing, arid slope with abundant mountain laurel;
- open area;
- utility corridors;
- alpine zone;
- Wilderness;
- wetlands; and
- grassy balds

Leave time for discussion around instances when a maintainer might need to be more aggressive than a 4'x8' corridor in taking into account snow load or type of plant and growth before next planned visit.

INSTRUCTION MATERIALS FOR COURSE

- **Field work and hand tools JHA**
- **Loppers, hand pruners, folding saw**
- **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **Demo Copies of JHAs for brush cutters/ string trimmers, mowers**
- **Local Management Plan or other resources that document known invasive plant populations or species of concern**



"One of the most frequently overlooked maintenance and construction tasks is the removal of stubs. Stubs, for those who do now know them by this name, are the stubs of saplings, branches, and twigs left after trimming out the A.T. either during annual maintenance, or during Trail construction."

Morgan Sommerville,
From The Register, May 1986



Put it Into Practice

Participants brush sections of trail using tools provided, with appropriate training. Instructor circulates to inquire about decisions, reminds about hazards of stobs, reinforces (or encourages) decision making around sapling removal, points out trees bare on half side that have lost what looks natural due to past pruning and discussion of options.

Point out sidehill locations where selectively brushing the uphill more than the downhill can reduce trail creep down the outside edge. Discuss situations where lack of brushing causes trail widening or braiding, such as on grassy balds (where vegetation makes it difficult to see where to step in a gullied trail) or visitors bypassing briars growing into the trail.

If you observe other tread issues that are also contributing to diminished trail conditions that should be addressed, point those out, too.

Monitoring for Blowdowns

If the opportunity exists to prep a blowdown that is stable, do so. Demonstrate how to capture a GPS point from a smart phone or how to provide the mile marker from Guthook app.

Discuss how capturing sufficient photos and details on location to describe the blowdown matters for sawyers to have enough information in advance to plan for appropriate equipment and reaching it quickly.

BEST PRACTICES

Hazards & Safety

Help participants identify hazards associated with brushing such as ticks, risk to eyes from debris and pokey things, loud power equipment, snakes, heat, risk to visitors, briars, poison ivy, etc. Discuss PPE and actions to reduce the risk for each. Review check-in/check-out procedures and the improved safety of working with at least one other person.



Invasives Lookout

Common near trailheads, utility crossings, and near roads are invasive species that can aggressively take over. ATC's natural resource staff have resources for identifying invasive plant species, and they can recommend best practices to maintainers to either (a) work to eradicate them and/or (b) reduce their spread by certain management actions at particular times of year (such as not being too aggressive with string trimming and swing blades early in the season so that natives have a chance to grow/flower/seed).



Sensitive Plants Need Special Care

ATC's natural resource staff have information on species of importance that might be found near the trail. Maintainers should consult with the local management plan for their area, ATC, or agency partners for areas or species that have special considerations that could limit or eliminate brushing.