



Working with Professional Trail Builders

While much can be accomplished with volunteers, professional trail builders can build high-quality, sustainable trails quickly and efficiently. Working with builders, however, requires careful consideration and planning to ensure costs are met and desired outcomes are achieved. The purpose of this document is to provide some basic guidance for those seeking to work with a professional.

Selecting a Builder

Preferred Trail Builders

VMBA curates a list of preferred trail builders who have successfully completed projects with Chapters in the past and meet an extensive set of criteria. See the [Preferred Builders](#) document for more details.

Other Builders

Given the recent surge in trail building demand, many individuals have recently gotten into the profession. Not all will deliver the same quality of trail and many lack experience working with Chapters in the past. See our [Preferred Builders](#) document for criteria to consider in your selection, with a bias towards prior successful projects, references, and ability to deliver on the specific type of trail envisioned in your project.

Contracting

Documentation

The more that is captured in writing prior to construction, the better. This should include but is not limited to positive and negative control points, timelines, milestones, review points, working with volunteer labor, and payment terms. See the Chapter Resource library for example contacts.

Retainage

It is customary to retain a certain portion of the project costs pending final inspection of the completed project. It is suggested that the final payment be at least 15% of the overall costs, and that disbursement of this payment be contingent upon a full and final inspection of the work, plus any necessary modifications at the builder's expense.

Specific language: References

Funding organizations often require references to accepted standards, and such references can also provide a good basis for resolving any disagreements as to trail

design. The following language is commonly used: "Trail construction shall follow standards for sustainable multi-use trails. Trail standards followed shall include the International Mountain Bike Association's publication Trail Solutions (2004), IMBA's Managing Mountain Bikes (2007), Bike Parks (2014), and most recent Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience (IMBA and Bureau of Land Management, 2017)."

Specific Language: Trail Tread

Most modern trails require a durable trail surface to withstand increasing user volumes and minimize future maintenance costs. When developing a trail that is expected to see significant use, the following language is suggested: "The top layer of organic material shall be removed to expose the mineral soil. The native mineral soil will be shaped and compacted to create a durable natural trail surface with frequent and strategically placed drainage features (i.e., grade reversals and side sloping). Locally harvested and crushed rock will be embedded into the tread in areas where seeps or natural contours of the terrain could limit the ability of the trail to shed water and remain durable."

Specific Language: Drainage

Most trail damage and associated maintenance costs result from poorly conceived or executed drainage. High-quality builders will focus their efforts on water management, and having contract language clarify design principles is a good idea. The following language is suggested: "The trail shall be built using constant drainage structures (to include side sloping and frequent grade reversals plus uphill ditching if necessary). All drainage features must be rock armored for low maintenance. Drainage areas including nicks, scallops, grade reversals and culverts must include stone enhanced aprons and check dams to reduce maintenance and minimize land/water quality impacts."

Construction

Working with a professional builder does not end once they begin work on the trail. Careful oversight of both costs and construction will help keep the project on track. Contract language above should include periodic checkpoints and milestones that empower adjustments to the plan as needed and ensure target outcomes and budget are met.

Feedback

Once your project is complete, sharing information about your experience and working with a specific builder is a valuable way to help other Chapters with their future projects and ensure high quality trail builders are recognized for their work. Please share your feedback with Nick (nick@ymba.org).