

# Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference Standards for Hike Leaders

## Thank you for volunteering!

The Long Island Greenbelt Trail Conference probably runs more hikes than any other local organization in the nation. As a hike leader, you are our public face. We deeply appreciate your sacrifice of time and your commitment to planning and leading successful, enjoyable hikes. We intend these standards as an aid to enhancing the safety and well-being of our leaders as well as participants on our guided walks.

### What we ask of hike leaders:

1. You *must* be a Greenbelt member. It's only right that if you lead hikes for us you be one of us. Also, the LIGTC's liability insurance cannot cover you if you are not a member!
2. Think about why the LIGTC leads hikes:
  - A. To provide a congenial activity for our regular members.
  - B. To provide opportunities for new hikers to learn about our trails.
  - C. For the enjoyment of the leader.

Notice the order. You are all volunteers, and we applaud your efforts, but always keep in mind that we have a mission. The impression you make as a leader is the impression most people remember when they think of the Green-belt Conference.

3. Do the bureaucratic stuff. Turn in sign-in sheets and trail reports. These are important to us for several reasons.

### Planning your hike:

1. First, know the trail you are hiking! If you are leading a walk in an unfamiliar area, get out there beforehand and "case the joint." Know your route, know what's to see, and know where you intend to make stops. (Refer to the trail mileages supplied to you.)
2. Decide on the purpose of your hike. Is it a slow-paced, interpretive walk? A fitness walk? An all-day exploration? Consider also the time of year. Many sections of our trails look great in one season and less so in others.
3. Determine what pace you intend to keep, so that hikers will know what to expect.
4. Decide whether you want a no-reservation hike (fewer phone calls to handle, but no control of the size of the group) or a reservation hike (more phone calls, more control). Remember that in Caleb Smith and Connetquot parks, you should limit the size of your group to 25 or so if using the parks' parking lots as meeting places.
5. Does rain cancel your hike? If so, is that a little rain, or a lot? You decide.
6. Run hikes that feel comfortable for you, but if you run more than one hike and don't have a "specialty," try offering a variety of distances and locations to ensure a good mix in the newsletter. We receive requests for hikes of all lengths and paces.
7. You will receive e-mail notices around the beginning of February, May, August and November asking you for hikes. You'll have at least two weeks to decide. Always include the meeting time, distance, pace and terrain. For hikes in areas managed by the DEC or Suffolk County, be as specific as you can in describing the route. We need this info when applying for group permits for our hikes. Decide also if you wish to have your hikes listed on Meetup. We attract many newbies through this website.
8. PLEASE submit your hikes by the deadline dates for each newsletter. There is a small "fudge factor" built into the dates, but only a small one! Assembling and formatting the schedule is a time-consuming

task, and late hikes complicate matters exponentially.

### **Promptness and reliability:**

1. If for any reason you cannot keep your hike date, call another *approved Greenbelt leader* and arrange for a substitute, or call the Greenbelt Office as far ahead of the date as you can.
2. Be early for your hike. You don't have to be the first person to arrive, but you should be *among* the first. Ten or fifteen minutes early is fine, and it gives you time to start signing in hikers.
3. Start your hike on time or within no more than ten minutes of the advertised hour. It's not fair to those who arrive on time to have to wait for latecomers. Use your judgment, especially if you are meeting in a location which is hard to find or in a congested area, but you are under no obligation to wait for anyone beyond ten minutes or so. Once you've signed in your hikers, go!
4. *Run the hike you advertised.* Unless you have the *unanimous* consent of your group, don't substantially change the length or degree of difficulty of your walk. Of course, you should use your judgment in inclement weather.

### **What you have a right to expect from hikers:**

1. People signing up for your walk should call at a reasonable hour. You are under no obligation to field calls at 7:00 AM or 11:00 PM—but don't be surprised if you get them!
2. When taking calls:
  - A. Discourage people from bringing pets.
  - B. Be sure to tell parents of small children the exact nature of the walk and remind them that the comfort and well-being of their child is up to them.
3. All hikers should stay with your group unless they specifically tell you they are going ahead or bailing out early.
4. Greenbelt hikers are generally concerned about their surroundings, but there's one in every crowd: tolerate no littering or other abuses of the land! We're strictly pack-it-in, pack-it-out. In fact, encourage people to take out at least one piece litter they find in the woods.
5. Hikers owe you as much courtesy as we expect you to show them. If you're trying to explain some feature on your hike and others are talking at the same time, gently ask them to listen.

### **Getting started:**

1. Be friendly, courteous and relaxed. We often get first-timers on our hikes who need reassurance that the leader is competent and that they can complete the hike.
2. Pass around the sign-in sheet. For a large hike, two clipboards speed things up.
3. Check for hikers who are not suitably equipped for your walk. You can and should turn away people who show up for long hikes in hot or cold weather without proper foot gear, water or clothing.
4. Especially for large hikes, explain how our blaze system works, and appoint a "sweep." Take a head count. Always know how many people you have on the walk. Recount periodically.
5. Especially for larger or faster-paced hikes, appoint a "sweep" who knows the trail.
6. If your hike requires a car ferry, know the directions, express them clearly, and form a convoy with yourself in the lead car. Stop at confusing turns or lights to be sure all other cars are behind you.
7. Tick check: Remind people to stay on the trail and avoid underbrush. Remind them to check themselves periodically during the hike and when they are about to return home. The best advice is to tell hikers to be aware but not be paranoid.
8. In warm weather or on any long hike, stress the importance of drinking fluids.
9. Tell the hikers not to play hero. Any person experiencing physical difficulty (from blisters on up) should feel free to stop the group and seek aid.

### Problems on the trail:

1. In the event of sudden foul weather, you may, for the safety of the group, cancel the hike *as late as the appointed starting time*. You are under no obligation to run a hike if you are not comfortable with the prevailing conditions.
2. Muddy or icy footing? Warn people in advance, and be loud about it. If trails are very icy, *cancel the hike*. We have had injuries in the past.
3. Lightning! If you're in the woods, you're probably OK as long as you stay away from the tallest trees. Avoid bodies of water and open fields. If you really get caught and lightning is close by, have the group stay on the trail and crouch down, NOT sit, on the ground until it's safe to continue. This is a rare occurrence, but you might have the experience on a long summer hike.
4. Very slow hikers are still your responsibility! If someone has real difficulty keeping up, you must slow your group. Whenever possible, find someone in the group you know and trust to stay with the person, or find someone to lead while you assist the slower people. This takes patience.
5. Remind people to drink water along the way.
6. Encountering animals: Unfortunately, we now have to be conscious of rabies. Hikers should avoid direct contact with animals along the trail, especially those which show no fear of humans, look unhealthy, or are acting unnaturally (e.g., nocturnal creatures wandering around in midday).
7. Encountering bikes and ATVs: You have a group behind you; for the safety of all, try to stand your ground and make the rider stop. Don't get into confrontations with illegal ATV riders.
8. Road crossings: at major crossings, wait for the entire group to be ready to cross at once. There's safety in numbers. Stress this to the hikers!
9. If the group gets strung out, stop now and then to re-form. Never take ambiguous or poorly marked turns until you are sure the entire group is with you.

### The end:

1. Be sure *everyone* is out of the woods before you leave.
2. Be sure *everyone* has transportation back to cars if you've ferried.
3. Hand out Greenbelt material to new hikers who request it.
4. Send the sign-in sheets and trail reports to our Office ASAP.

### Submitting Hikes on E-mail:

This is the info you'll receive each quarter. Please supply your information *in the order shown below* to ensure accuracy and clarity. (Check how the hikes are set up in the newsletter.)

Date:                      Location:  
Time:                      Distance:                      Pace: (easy, moderate, fast)                      Terrain: (flat, varied, hilly)  
Specify Info only or must call:  
Bring food and water: (Y/N)                      Bad weather cancels: (Y/N)                      List in our newsletter only: (Y/N)  
List on Meetup (Y/N)  
Directions and/or description:

**E-mail to: [2caseys@optonline.net](mailto:2caseys@optonline.net)**

### Suggestions:

1. Copy this information as a template so it is always handy on your computer.
2. Please do NOT send your hikes as an e-mail attachment. Send them as part of the main message.

**The Golden Rule of Greenbelt Hikes:  
"A hike isn't successful until the *last* person finishes."**