

A Guide for CORE Trail Leaders

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CORE Trail Leader

The Trail Leader, or Trail Ride Coordinator as it's defined in the club bylaws (Article XVI), plays a key role in making a CORE off-road trip safe and enjoyable. There is a big difference between a Trail Leader and just an event organizer. The Trail Leader acts as a representative of the Capital Off Road Enthusiasts, host, guide, organizer, and supervisor for the event. On a trail ride the Trail Leader is the leader of the group even if club board members or other more experienced people are present. While others' opinions should be considered throughout the trip the Trail Leader is the one in charge.

Being the Trail Leader can be daunting at first. Especially if you are not familiar with all of the terrain to be encountered or don't already know everyone in the group. This guide should help you through the process, whether it's your first trip as Trail Leader or you've been doing it for years.

Personal safety is the primary responsibility of the Trail Leader. Having a fun and memorable trip is second! While it is impossible to completely protect a vehicle and its occupants in all the elements they are subjected to during off-roading, all participants must collectively do everything they can to prevent anyone or any vehicles from getting hurt or worse. Be flexible, but keep in mind you're in charge. Keep it safe!

You got this!!

Pre-Event Planning

The Trail Leader is also responsible for checking to ensure that the trails selected for the run are open and available. This is a planning tool and checklist to help Trail Leaders organize a Trail Ride. This is just the basics. There is no substitute for a detailed plan.

Trail Difficulty

- Every CORE Trail Ride *can* be rated from 1 (easiest) to 10 (most difficult). These ratings are based on the overall trail, not just on one or two tough obstacles. Rain can increase ratings on all trails by one or two points.
 - Numerically higher-rated trails are more likely to result in vehicle damage.
 - While you don't *need* to use the [CORE Trail Rating](#) system (*or see Appendix A*) it can be used to efficiently communicate to others what to expect and what level of vehicle modifications you think they should have to attend.
- Trail ratings as described by Trail Leaders are their best guess of trail conditions at the time of planning, however trail conditions change daily and therefore cannot entirely be predicted ahead of time.
- *See Appendix A for additional details.*

Pre-Trip Considerations

- Land: Public/Private:
 - Owner's Permission (if private land)
 - Use Fees
 - Where to buy passes if needed
 - Site or event specific liability waivers
 - [CORE Liability Waiver](#) is always required for all guests.
 - Point of Contact (name & phone)
- Site:
 - Meeting area location
 - Nearest gas station, convenience store
 - Nearest air source (if tires need to be aired down)
 - Directions to meeting location from major surrounding areas
 - Will GPS get people lost? Take them on non-legal roads/private land?
- Trail:
 - Have recent CORE lead events been to the same trail or area?
 - If so, consider choosing a different location
 - Directions from meeting area
 - Is there a convenient and legal/passable way to get from the meeting location to the trail head?
 - Overall trail difficulty (1-10) – See Trail Ratings (*Appendix A*)
 - Highest obstacle difficulty
 - Bypass routes for difficult obstacles
 - Obstacles requiring spotters
 - Total trail length
 - Estimated time required to negotiate trail or section

- Trail maps (if available)
 - Digital or paper maps that people can gain access to. Digital may require a pre-trip download.
- Logistics (if needed):
 - Local service stations and repair facilities
 - Local restaurants
 - Local lodging (locations, phone numbers)
 - Camping facilities (locations, fees)
 - Parking areas for breaks (lunch, etc.)
 - Local hospital
 - Procedures for contacting emergency services (ex: police, fire, EMS, or Park Ranger)

Event Planning Checklist

- Date of event: _____ (Does it conflict with local events or holidays?)
- Meeting time: _____
 - You can choose to start your event whenever you see fit. However, you are more likely to get others to attend when the meeting time is convenient for others. Keep in mind how far people will need to drive the day of the event (from home? Camping nearby?)
- Trail Ride Start Time: _____
 - How long will people need to prepare for the trail ride once on-site? Keep this in mind when suggesting a start time to hit the trail. Between the meeting time and start time people will likely need to air down, secure items in their vehicle, discuss areas of concern with the Trail Leader, fill out paperwork, complete event registration, buy passes, and other last-minute tasks.
- Special Details:

Publishing the event

See Appendix B for a Sample Trail Ride Announcement

- Send your event announcement on the club forum under the Trail Rides and Events section.
 - This is the only section of the forum that all users are automatically subscribed to be notified anytime a new event is made. By posting here everyone should get a notification about your event emailed to them.
- Work with the CORE system administrators to publish the event on CORE website and CORE Facebook calendars. Specific details will not be posted on the CORE website or CORE Facebook page. If you don't know who these people are ask the CORE President.
- In the event announcement thread subject include the following:
 - Event date, preferably to include day of the week
 - Trail or event to be visited
- In the event announcement description include the following at a minimum:
 - Event Date
 - Event Meeting Time
 - Event Meeting Location (directions)
 - Event or Access Fees
 - Trail Difficulty / Trail Rating (CORE Trail Rating Guide [on the website](#) or *Appendix C*)
 - Minimum vehicle requirements
 - Recommended vehicle equipment
 - Plan for meals (Food and Beverage Planning)
 - Location of closest gas station(s)
 - Trail Leader Contact Information (cell phone preferred)
 - Additional details to consider
 - Local lodging options
 - Are pets permitted
 - Bathroom access during the ride

Group list or manifest

- Number of vehicles in party _____
- Meeting location(s) (if caravanning)
 - Meeting point A - _____
 - Meeting point B - _____
 - Meeting point C - _____
- Amount and type of special/recovery equipment

Final Planning

- 3-7 Days prior to the event try to confirm who is still planning to attend
 - It is not uncommon for 30-50% of attendees to drop out in the last week
 - Consider making another post on the event thread highlighting who has and has not confirmed
- Consider making another post on the event thread highlighting key trip details
 - Any new details to include trail or weather advisories
 - Trail Leader Contact Information
- Print a few spare blank forms for people to fill out on-site:
 - [Trip Waiver](#)
 - [Medical Form](#)

Event Day Checklist

Once everyone has gathered either at the meeting location or trail head it is best to have a driver's meeting. This gives you an opportunity to highlight key event details as you see them, ask questions to everyone, and gives attendees a chance to bring up their questions and concerns.

Special attention should be given to club guests, especially those attending their first trail ride. These drivers may be nervous and not sure what to expect. Make sure to address their concerns and questions on a one-on-one basis if you can. Remember that guests are potentially future members and we're always recruiting! We only get one chance at a first impression.

Driver's Meeting (Event Day):

- Introductions
- General scheme of the event; overall trail(s) to be covered; bathroom breaks; and meal breaks.
- Collect [Trip Waivers](#) from all guests
 - The waivers help protect the club in the event the unthinkable happens
 - Not wanting to continue filling out waivers is often cited as a key motivator to become a full club member! Keep the pressure on those guests! 😊
- Have drivers fill out the sign-in sheet if being used (*Appendix C*)
- Mention that a Google Photos album link will be shared after the trip so people can share pics/video
- Reminder about emergency [Medical Forms](#) (Everyone should have a completed emergency [Medical Form](#) in their glove box)
- Emergency Procedures (who has equipment? / who has training?) Local hospital: _____
- Communication
 - CB Channel _____
 - Other methods of communication?
 - Does anyone need a radio? Have one to lend?
 - Consider putting people without radios in the middle of the group/between people with radios
- Safety inspection: (This is for the safety of the entire group and does not constitute animosity towards anyone deemed unable to participate due to safety violations.)
 - Fully operational four-wheel drive system, with low range or equivalent
 - Tow points / Recovery points
 - Undercarriage clearance (appropriate for the trail)
 - Condition/type of tires (appropriate for the trail) – size and tread/construction type
 - Spare tire(s), appropriately sized jack, lug wrench
 - Vehicles in good running order (brakes, clutch, fuel system, electrical system, etc.)
 - Suggested/required vehicle modifications or equipment (armor, winch, breathers, recovery gear, etc)
- Trail Preparation:
 - Air down (if needed)
 - Hook up tow straps to rear tow point (if needed)
- Designate Tail Gunner responsible for: (1) confirming convoy group past obstacles; (2) alerts group of rear approaching traffic; (3) informs other groups when your group has passed; and (4) assists Trail Leader.

- Line up vehicles in trail order (Trail Leader first (unless using a guide), tail gunner last)
 - Spread out the winch equipped vehicles
 - Consider putting less experienced drivers or less capable vehicles near more experienced drivers and more capable vehicles
 - Communications Check (CB Radios, GMRS Radios, etc.)

Safety advisory:

- No Drinking and Driving / No Drinking and Off-roading / No Drugged Driving
- Keep your thumbs out of the wheel
- Secure all loose items inside the vehicle
- Always wear a seatbelt when the vehicle is in motion
- Communicate any significant actions or obstacles along the trail
- Do NOT walk or stand directly downhill of any vehicles when possible
- Use safe winching/ tow strap procedures
- Maintain safe distance between vehicles and always keep an eye on the vehicle behind you
 - Do not get too close to the vehicle in front of you especially when going uphill

Tread Lightly Advisory:

- Pack out more than you packed in
- Don't blaze new trails
- Don't harass the wildlife
- Share the trail (backpackers, motorcycles, horse riders, etc.)
- Alert the group of oncoming trail-users
- Control the travel speed

Writing a Trail Report

Members often ask why we do Trail Reports or if they have to write one after a trip. A Trail Report is not required. However, a Trail Report is one of the biggest ways a club member can support the club. Trail Reports are actually our most effective recruiting tool for new members. Each year the club loses about 20% of its members (people move, sell their vehicles, etc) and so recruiting is *always* an ongoing effort for the club. Trail Reports help in the following ways:

- The primary way people find out about CORE is when searching online for information about a trail they learned about. Our Trail Reports are some of the top results for many of the trails and events we frequent.
- Trail Reports show that the club is active.
- Trail Reports show that the club is diverse in both its membership and what they drive. This is a big draw for many people, especially those that own less common vehicle brands or models.
- Trail Reports help show a personable group that might be less intimidating than the most “exciting” pictures commonly associated with our hobby. This makes us more approachable.

There are also non-recruiting benefits of writing Trail Reports.

- Trail Reports are also one of our best gifts back to the community at large. They act as a resource for information about trails, trail conditions, locations, and what type of vehicles they are passable for.
- We often share links to Trail Reports to people visiting the area temporarily such as groups overlanding through the area.
- Trail Reports are an easy way for the Secretary to keep track of membership and guest participation and engagement, important for determining membership eligibility among other things.
- Trail Reports are a resource for future Trail Leaders when they (or you) are planning future trips to the same or similar areas.
- Trail Reports capture details about areas that otherwise might be forgotten with membership turnover.

So now that you know why we write Trail Reports let’s cover what the best trail reports include.

- Event date and location
- Description of event
 - Types of trails and difficulty
 - Interesting obstacles
 - Funny stories or anecdotes
- List of participants (first and last names) including vehicle make/model
 - All this information is on the Driver Sign-in form if you use it! (See *Appendix C*)
 - You can also look back to the forum thread for this info, and link back to people’s welcome threads for more info, but this can be cumbersome and time consuming
 - Trip Waivers also should have all this information for the guests that attended
 - Member vehicle information is listed on the [CORE Members page](#) if you need to look it up
- Lessons learned (things to remember for future trips to this location)
- Description of conditions

In addition to the written report it helps to also do the following:

- Submit a gps track (.gpx file preferred), ask if others recorded it if you did not
- Encourage attendees to add their media to the Google Photos album created for the trip

- Request a Google Photos album be made for your trip if the Google account system administrator does not make one for you. Ask the President for this if you don't know who the system admin is.
- Add/submit links to online videos (YouTube) created by someone that attended
 - Consider making a video yourself if enough footage was taken to document the trip that way
 - For bigger events sometimes the event shares a video or other groups at the same event share a video. Submitting links to these videos with the Trail Report is also helpful and results in a more engaging Trail Report.
- Create a gif or two that can be embedded into the trail report
 - You can create free gifs on hosting sites like giphy.com
 - Use video clips from the trip, select especially noteworthy or unique clips

The finalized Trail Report, including additional media mentioned above, should be submitted to the CORE President and/or website administrator at your earliest opportunity.

Here are some examples of especially good Trail Reports. Note that not all of them are very long. But all of these reports capture all the key details of the trip!

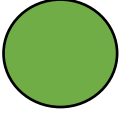
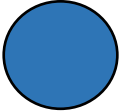
- [Assateague National Seashore by Niels Vilstrup](#)
- [Green Ridge State Forest by Jendra Rambharos](#)
- [George Washington National Forest by Andrew Taylor](#)
- [Fredrick Watershed by Buzz Vogel](#)
- [Wolf Den Run State Park by Andrew Taylor](#)

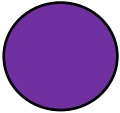

Finally, the filled-out Trip Waivers should be submitted to the club Secretary at the earliest convenient opportunity so that they can be kept on file.

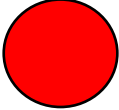
Appendix A. Trail Rating Guide

This guide is also on the club website: http://core4x4.org/downloads/CORE_Trail_Ratings_022018.pdf

CORE Trail Rides are rated using this scale developed for our use. It ranges from 1 (easiest) to 10 (most difficult) or more generally by color such as Green (easiest) or Red (most difficult). These ratings are based on the overall trail, not just on one or two tough obstacles. Rain can increase ratings on all trails by one or two points. Numerically higher-rated trails are more likely to result in vehicle damage. Trail ratings as described by Trail Leaders are their best guess of trail conditions at the time of planning, however trail conditions change daily and therefore cannot be entirely predicted ahead of time. *Use this guide at your own discretion.*

 GREEN 1 – 2	<p>Rating of 1: Almost any passenger car can complete this trail. However, we'd suggest cars with a bit more clearance than a sport coupe, and possibly one with All-Wheel Drive or 4-Wheel Drive. These trails are often easy dirt roads with little or no rocks in them. Passing is usually easy.</p> <p>Rating of 2: Almost any Crossover/SUV can complete this trail. A passenger car might not do as well because of clearance issues or lack of All-Wheel Drive or 4-Wheel Drive. 2-Wheel Drive is usually fine for the entire trail, but mud or snow could make things more difficult. These trails are often dirt roads that may have rocks buried in them in places or cracks where the trail has eroded. Passing may be difficult and you may need to back up to a wide spot.</p>	<p>Recommended Vehicle Specs: None</p>
 BLUE 3 – 5	<p>Rating of 3: Almost any SUV with higher ground clearance can complete this trail. You probably won't need 4-Wheel Drive, but it would be good to have just in case. Because of rocks in the trail, an SUV with lower clearance might have issues and might hit something on the undercarriage. May include water/mud up to 12in deep, small rocks/shelves up to 6in tall.</p> <p>Rating of 4: A good challenge for a stock Jeep Wrangler. There will be smaller rocks that might make 4-Wheel Drive necessary, so be sure you have it. There may be mud, hills or water that could pose additional challenges. These trails are probably the top end for standard SUVs. May include water/mud up to 18in deep, rocks/shelves up to 9in tall.</p> <p>Rating of 5: The highest challenge for a stock Jeep Wrangler without body damage, winching, or</p>	<p>Recommended Vehicle Specs: For a rating of 3, recommended ground clearance at the belly of 8+ inches.</p> <p>For a rating of 4 & 5, recommended ground clearance at the belly of 10+ inches.</p>

	<p>possible breakage. You may have to work on some of the bigger rocks and challenges, but you should make it through everything without too much trouble. You will need 4-Wheel Drive and you should not go alone. May include water/mud up to 20in. Rocks/shelves up to 12in tall common.</p>	
 <p>PURPLE 6 – 7</p>	<p>Rating of 6: Probably too much for a stock Jeep Wrangler, but perfect for one on 33" tires. These trails will provide challenges and fun for mildly modified vehicles as well as the bigger rigs, so they are perfect for mixed groups. There may be obstacles with many lines from easy to difficult. Generally, trails are closer to 1-1.5 times vehicle width. May include water/mud up to 24in. Rock/shelves up to 16in.</p> <p>Rating of 7: Experienced drivers only. Drivers new to wheeling a modified vehicle may want to learn on easier trails before moving up to ones with this rating. The obstacles may not be tougher if the right line is found, but a wrong line could be extremely difficult or dangerous. The possibility of rollovers and body damage is present, though almost all experienced drivers with modified vehicles should get through these trails without any issues. Trails at this level and above are generally very tight. May include water/mud 24+ inches deep, and rocks/shelves up to 20in.</p>	<p>Recommended Vehicle Specs: For a rating of 6, recommend rock sliders/skids, 33" tires minimum, 12+" clearance at the belly. Locking differentials recommended.</p> <p>For a rating of 7, recommend rock sliders/skids, 35" tires, 14" clearance at the belly, locking differentials and/or a winch.</p>
 <p>BLACK 8 – 9</p>	<p>Rating of 8: Experience is a must. You may experience some body damage, and there is a high possibility of breakage. You may need to use a bit of momentum in an obstacle, and that often means a broken axle shaft or drive shaft. Expect deep water and/or mud, rocks/shelves up to 30in.</p> <p>Rating of 9: You will probably get some body damage or breakage. At least one of the obstacles will push you against a rock or test your vehicle and your driving skills to the point that something could easily give. Only the luckiest and most skilled drivers will make it through these trails in the same condition in which they started. Expect deep water and/or mud, rocks/shelves up to 48in.</p>	<p>Recommended Vehicle Specs: For a rating of 8, recommend rock sliders/skids a must, 35" tires minimum, 16-18" clearance at the belly, locking differentials and a winch.</p> <p>For a rating of 9, rock sliders/skids a must, 35" tires minimum, 37" tires recommended, 16-18" clearance at the belly recommended, locking differentials and a winch required.</p>

 <p>RED 10</p>	<p>Rating of 10: An extreme trail for rock buggies only. Only the most modified vehicles will be able to complete these trails with experienced drivers. Vehicle damage is extremely likely, and vehicles could be too damaged to finish the ride. Expect deep water and/or mud, rocks/shelves 48+in.</p>	<p>Recommended Vehicle Specs: For a rating of 10, rock sliders/skids a must, 37" tires minimum, 40+in tires recommended, 18+" clearance at the belly recommended, locking differentials and a winch required.</p> <p><i>Let the carnage begin, bring a trailer to bring your buggy home on!</i></p>
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IMPORTANT: If you're unsure if you and your vehicle can handle a given trail rating (some vehicles are more susceptible to vehicle damage on trails rated 5 or higher) please contact the Trail Leader.

Appendix B. Sample Trail Ride Announcement



CORE Trip to Rausch Creek – Green/Blue Trails – Saturday, 18 February

CORE,

I'm planning a trip to Rausch Creek on Saturday, 18 February and plan to ride the **green** trails and some **blue** trails (if people are up to it). That puts these trails in the 1-5 range on the [CORE Trail Ratings Guide](#). Be aware that you cannot get into or out of the park without going through puddles that are rocky. However, a stock 4x4 should be fine for this trip. Please note that that February weather conditions may increase the difficult of the trails.

Rausch Creek is located in Pine Grove, PA and is a pay-to-play off-road park. For more information about Rausch Creek including cost and rules for pets go to: <http://rc4x4.org/>

The following items are REQUIRED for the trip:

- All participants must have a completed CORE Emergency Medical Form which can be found at <http://core4x4.org/core-forms/>
- All guest must have a completed CORE Trip Waiver Form which can be found at <http://core4x4.org/core-forms/>
- Vehicles must be equipped with a fully operational four (4) wheel drive system, with low range.
- Vehicles must be in good condition, with good tires, steering and brakes.
- Front and rear tow points are required and must be properly mounted.
- A matching full size spare tire that must be in good condition, a lug wrench and a jack capable of lifting the vehicle off the ground.
- Seat belts for all occupants. Seatbelts must be worn at all times.
- We will be airing down for the trial. There are air compressors on site for people without portable compressor or air tanks.

The following items are RECOMMENDED for the trip:

- First Aid Kit
- CB Radio – We will be operating on Channel 22. We may have some portable CB radios for sharing but I can't guarantee that we will. I encourage everyone to bring a CB if they have one, it helps during the day to communicate what is coming up, you have a weird sound you need to stop for, or anything else.
- A heavy duty recovery strap with looped ends (no hooks) should be in good condition.
- A fire extinguisher that is accessible in an emergency.

(ALL ITEMS MUST BE PROPERLY SECURED)

For more information about required and recommended equipment go to the CORE website at <http://core4x4.org/core-forms/>

You have the option of caravanning with us up to Rausch Creek or meeting us there. Below are the meeting times and location options:

- 1000 West Patrick Street, Frederick, MD 21703 - GetGo - Leave at **6:30am**
- 10 Molleystown Rd, Pine Grove, PA 17963 - Exxon - Leave at **8:35**
- Rausch Creek - 453 Molleystown Road, Pine Grove, PA 17981 - Be there by **8:45**

If someone wants to suggest another starting location for people coming from DC area or elsewhere feel free. Just plan on topping gas off near Rausch Creek so you show up with a full tank, and making it to the park for the **Drivers Meeting at 9:00am**.

If you'd like to follow along where we are during the day Rausch Creek has a map in the Maplets App for your phone or tablet, which will show where we are in real time throughout the park during the day!

Finally, make sure to bring plenty of drinks, snacks and lunch. We'll be eating on the trail for lunch so consider packing a camping chair.

RSVP Instructions: If you are interested in participating, please let me know the number of people in your party, type of vehicle and where you plan to meet us.

Appendix C. Driver Sign-In Sheet

V #	Make / Model / Color	Name of Driver	Number of Passengers including driver	CORE Member (Yes or No)?	Waivers Collected? (Yes, No, N/A)	First CORE Trail Ride (Yes or No)?
1						
2						
3						
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Total Number of Vehicles: _____ Total Number of CORE Members: _____ Total Number of Guests: _____

Notes: