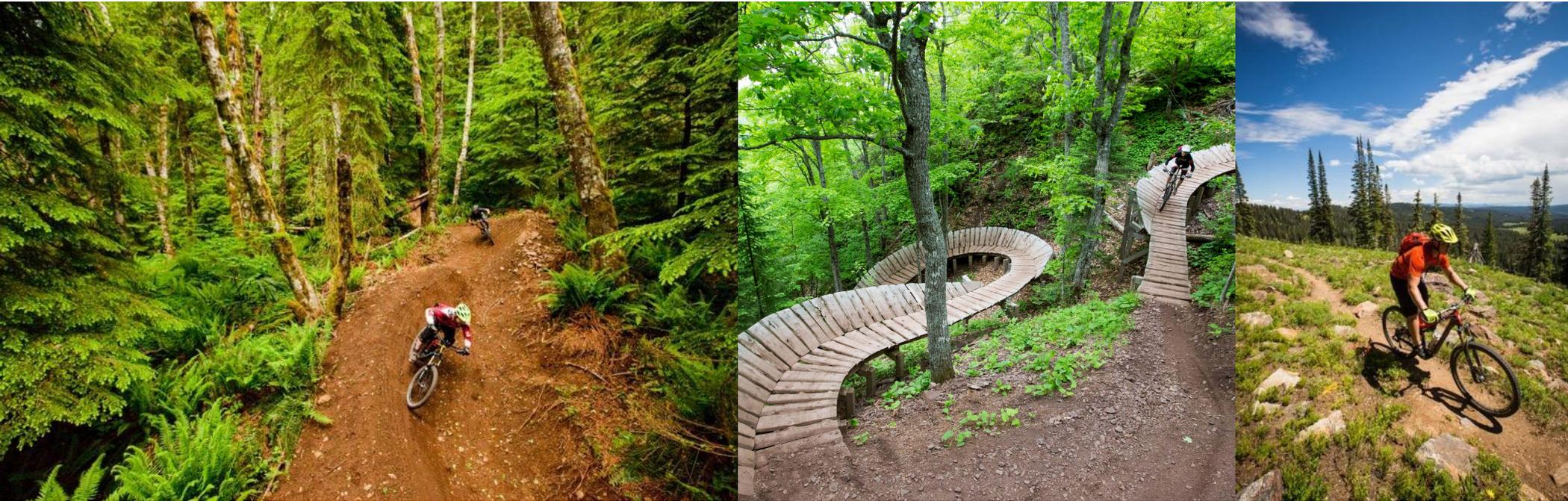


# 2025 RIDE CENTER APPLICATION





## 1. Introduction

### Who is IMBA?

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose mission is to create, enhance, and protect great places to ride mountain bikes. IMBA is the leader in mountain bike advocacy, education, and trail creation worldwide. Since 1988, IMBA has taught and encouraged grassroots advocacy, sustainable trail design, innovative land management practices and cooperation among trail user groups. IMBA U.S. is a national network of local groups, individual riders and passionate volunteers working together for the benefit of the entire community. IMBA is headquartered in Colorado, but the team is spread across the U.S., from California to Virginia and many states in between.

### What is an IMBA Ride Center?

The Ride Center™ designation represents IMBA's recognition for large-scale mountain bike destinations that offer something for every rider. Visitors can bring their full arsenal of bikes to these diverse areas to enjoy everything from backcountry adventures to shuttle-served gravity trails, while finding options for every skill level from expert-only to family-friendly.

IMBA Ride Center locations demonstrate best practices in mountain bike trail design and construction while prioritizing the variety that most riders seek in their travel experience. IMBA Ride Centers focus on providing enough variety that a rider can enjoy more than 3 days of riding without feeling like they have experienced it all. As part of the Ride Center criteria, destinations will be awarded Ride Center Badges for their accomplishments in four areas of trail development desired by both visitors and local riders:

- Frontcountry trails
- Backcountry trails
- Gravity trails
- Bike Park amenities

Using these badges to promote their destination's highlights, communities can attract riders looking for those specific experiences.

Ride Centers also ensure that visitors find quality options for bike-friendly lodging, bike rentals, quality maps, signage and pre/post-ride amenities.



### Designation levels:

IMBA Ride Centers contain 60+ miles of quality trails plus a minimum of three Badges.

IMBA Premier Ride Centers contain 100+ miles of quality trails plus all four Badges.

### **What are the benefits of becoming an IMBA Ride Center?**

1. Working with IMBA to receive the designation will provide your community with a focused road map to develop the ideal spectrum of trail amenities that will attract a broad base of visitation. Future trail development efforts can be guided by this plan to fill specific gaps.
2. Pursuing the designation can be used as an advocacy tool, persuading other stakeholders to align with the goal and its outcomes.
3. Ride Centers often bring significant economic benefits to their communities.

#### **Regional Case Studies: Standout Examples:**

- **Kingdom Trails, Vermont:** Attracts ~94,000 visitors yearly, delivering **\$10.3 million** in local economic impact([Trust for Public Land](#)).
  - **Chattanooga, Tennessee:** Generates around **\$7.4 million annually** in economic activity from mountain biking tourism ([Bike Magazine+15Trust for Public Land+15https://www.imba.com+15](#)).
  - **Chequamegon, Wisconsin:** In some destinations, average spending reaches as high as **\$1,107 per trip** ([Bicycle Retailer and Industry News+3Bicycle Retailer and Industry News+3Singletracks Mountain Bike News+3](#)).
  - **Colorado's GMUG region (Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forests):** Out-of-area mountain bikers contribute around **\$30 million per year** ([Singletracks Mountain Bike News+1](#)).
  - **Washington State:** Natural-surface trail riders add approximately **\$435.7 million annually** to the economy ([americantrails.org+4Singletracks Mountain Bike News+4Trust for Public Land+4](#)).
  - **Hatfield–McCoy Trails, West Virginia:** A multi-use trail system that generated over **\$68 million in total economic impact** in 2021, with more than **\$80 million in out-of-state rider spending** and around **\$48 million retained in-state** ([Wikipedia+12Wikipedia+12Singletracks Mountain Bike News+12](#)).
4. More information from a recent report made in partnership between IMBA and the Trust for Public Lands is [available on our website](#)



and includes the following key findings, in addition to much more information:

- a. The average per-visit spending (across the studied destinations) for nonlocal mountain bikers was \$416.
  - b. The total employment supported due to spending by visiting mountain bikers ranged from 1,522 to 1,626 jobs per site, and the total labor income across all studies was worth \$50.4 million to \$54.1 million.
5. Trails in general offer many other benefits that can be improved through systematic planning of your destination:
- a. Attracting & Retaining Residents: Communities with robust trail networks are more desirable places to live, drawing in new residents and encouraging existing ones to stay.
  - b. Supporting Workforce Development: Employers are increasingly looking for communities that offer a high quality of life and recreational opportunities, making trails a factor in attracting and retaining talent.
  - c. Improving Quality of Life: Trails contribute to a higher overall quality of life by providing accessible spaces for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction.
  - d. Improving Public Health: Trails offer an easy and appealing way to get people of all ages outside and exercising.
  - e. Fostering Community Pride & Connection: Trails serve as common ground, bringing people together and fostering a sense of shared ownership and pride in community assets.
6. The process of applying for the designation will bring together many different stakeholders, cementing a coalition of people that can work together on trail development for years to come, while setting the stage for further collaboration in community development.
7. The designation provides a tool for marketing the quality of your destination, which can be used in many types of marketing campaigns — not only for trail tourism, but also for companies recruiting employees, municipalities enticing companies to locate their businesses, and conference/event planners seeking additional ways to attract attendees. Trails also complement or even amplify other recreational or tourism draws already working in your community.

### **Who should apply to become an IMBA Ride Center?**

Interested applicants can be land managers, IMBA chapters or local trail groups, tourism or convention and visitor bureaus, and any stakeholder group in an area that desires to develop their community and trails system into a mountain bike destination. We highly recommend that applications are submitted by one organization or individual who is the lead on the project, but is part of a larger community group or committee working to elevate the area's status and engage all aspects of the surrounding region. It is also required that the relevant land management agencies are supportive of the community seeking the Ride Center designation.



## 2. Ride Centers in Detail

### How long does the designation last?

Ride Centers will hold their status for five years from the awarding date. After that time, they may re-apply, or at any time prior if they wish to be considered for a higher level. Re-evaluating Ride Centers at regular intervals ensures that destinations are maintaining their trails to the intended level of quality and rider experience, and that their trail offerings stay current with trail evolution and rider desires.

### Is there a benefit to using the application without applying?

Yes! Any community looking to comprehensively improve their overall system of trails can use the application and trail inventory as a framework to guide their process. The criteria will reveal your gaps, opportunities and strengths, allowing you to prioritize your efforts. Your self-score can be used to:

- Make a plan to address gaps and opportunities
- Guide conversations with officials and stakeholders
- Support fundraising and grant applications
- Strengthen your case for trail development and stewardship

It's strongly encouraged to create a team of people, including land managers, tourism professionals and user groups to approach the process, because the relationships formed and strengthened through this effort are where the true benefits lie.

### What is the process of becoming an IMBA Ride Center?

This designation is designed to support and advise local stakeholders and land managers in their effort to create the ultimate mountain biking destination. As a result, this designation is just as much about the process as the award itself. The application criteria serves as the blueprint for creating or improving a destination trail system and addresses multiple factors with both trail experience and surrounding community amenities being considered.

The designation and rating (and potential delisting or demotion) of a Ride Center is based on clear criteria. These criteria are a combination of objective and subjective elements, but in all cases they will relate to providing great riding opportunities.

The Ride Center application process consists of:

- A self-evaluation using the criteria spreadsheet
- An in-person professional assessment and review
- An evaluation of the existing conditions, opportunities for growth, and recommendations on next steps for improvement.



- A report detailing the findings

Whether you are confident you will score well in the process or highly motivated to develop a road map, this process will provide great benefit to your mountain bike community and beyond.

The evaluation criteria is comprised of key aspects that make an amazing mountain bike destination and include:

1. Trail Experiences
2. Trail Variety
3. Trail Quantity and Quality
4. Services
5. Community Involvement

### **What are the key elements of the Ride Center Assessment?**

The Ride Center application process consists of a self-evaluation, an in-person professional assessment and review, an evaluation of the existing conditions, opportunities for growth, and recommendations on next steps to improving the community and its trails, and a report detailing these findings.

**Defining the Geographic Area/30-Minute Drive Radius:** A Ride Center is defined as a given area around a specific community, and this geographic area is defined as all the legal trail facilities within a 30-minute drive time radius (as determined by Google Maps) from a determined center point. The applicant will select the center point from which the Ride Center radius will be defined. This point should be located within the community, but can be adjusted to find the most advantageous location for including key trail systems or bike park amenities.

If a given trailhead falls within the radius, all trails originating from that trailhead may be included in the assessment.

**Self Evaluation:** The first step in the process is for interested applicants to review all materials and perform a self-evaluation following the scoring matrix and criteria. This process entails applicants self-assessing their community's trails based on the Ride Center criteria to determine if they are a potential candidate and want to take the next step.

**Professional Review and Assessment:** Applying for Ride Center status will provide an analysis of the completeness of a community as a destination Ride Center. Throughout the process, an exploration of gaps or areas of improvement will allow the community to focus on elements that prevent them from attracting larger visitation, broader demographics of riders, and identify what might limit a potential designation or upgrade.



The Badges will allow a community to highlight areas where they have invested significant effort, and bring those to the forefront of their marketing efforts.

**Final Report and Decision:** Our staff will compile the in-person assessment details, complete any further desktop research, and calculate the final score. If the minimum score is achieved for the given level of Ride Center and appropriate Badges, those will be officially awarded. If the minimum score is not achieved, no award will be given. All applicants will receive a final report that outlines the strengths, opportunities and gaps of every destination, so that all communities have a road map for further progress. Awardees will receive further support through marketing materials and additional consultation.

### Application Timeline

1. The application and criteria will be available year-round for communities to use at their leisure, with no commitment to apply.
2. IMBA staff are available for introductory calls to discuss a community's readiness to apply, also with no commitment.
3. IMBA will accept applications for Ride Center assessment year-round, although staff travel to a destination will be dependent on availability and seasonality at the destination.
4. Once ready to apply, a community's process will begin with an initial visioning meeting and further instructions for completing the self-evaluation.
5. Once the self-evaluation is submitted, the in-person assessment will be scheduled based on the ideal timeline for both IMBA and the local stakeholders. Applicants must be prepared to host a full stakeholder meeting with the assessor in person.
6. Before the assessor arrives onsite, the applicant will be invoiced and must pay for the assessment fee.
7. After the completion of the destination review, the assessor and IMBA's Ride Center committee will complete any further evaluation and supply a report and decision.
8. Ride Centers will be publicly announced as they are awarded, through the media channels of both parties.
9. New Ride Centers will be added to IMBA's website and other relevant materials, including the Ride Center page on Trailforks.

### Fees

The application form and criteria (coming soon) will be free to use on [IMBA.com](http://IMBA.com). Once a community begins the formal process with IMBA, fees will be applied.

- **Application Fee:** Once an applicant determines they are a candidate for a Ride Center designation and wishes to proceed, they can submit their application with a fee of \$250, which covers the administrative cost of review and set up.



- **Professional Review Fees:** Each new Ride Center applicant will be paired with a coordinator and reviewer who will work with them through the evaluation process, which will include a multi-day professional assessment of the trails in the system and the surrounding amenities. The final report and recommendations provided will be extremely valuable in not only the Ride Center scoring and designation process but to help stakeholders evaluate next steps and continued improvement. This review fee of \$15,000 (plus expenses) is paid at the time of scheduling the in-person assessment.
- **Renewals** of current designations will take place at the five-year mark. These will include a fee of \$7,500 (plus expenses), paid at time of scheduling, for an in-person review. The purpose of this renewal process is to ensure that destinations are maintaining their trails to the quality standard that allowed them to receive their initial designation. If a current designation lapses more than 24 months from the initial award expiration they will be required to perform a full new designation review process.
- **Upgrades** to the Premier Ride Center status can take place at any time, including at the time of renewal, and will require an in-person assessment of the new trail mileage and/or bike park. Ride Centers will be asked to update their original application to reflect the additions, with the application fee of \$250, followed by a fee of \$7,500 (plus expenses), paid at the time of scheduling, for the onsite assessment.
- **Ride Centers awarded before 2025** will receive a 12-month extension to evaluate their current conditions based on the new process and develop steps necessary to achieve a designation under the new process and scoring. During that time, they will be considered a standard IMBA Ride Center, but no Badges will be awarded. At any time during the 12-month extension, these destinations can apply under the new criteria at the cost of the \$250 application fee followed by the \$7,500 (plus expenses) fee for an onsite assessment. After 12 months of no activity, the destination will be dropped from the program.

### 3. How to Apply

Communities interested in becoming a designated IMBA Ride Center should first review the self-evaluation to determine their viability as a candidate. They may also schedule a consultation call with IMBA staff to discuss further.

Once they have decided to pursue the designation, they will need to fully complete the self-evaluation and submit it to IMBA. The following steps and instructions will help stakeholders better understand the process.

1. *Step 1: Thoroughly review this Application Guide*
2. *Step 2: Download the .xls file of the evaluation criteria scoring matrix (coming soon)*
3. *Step 3: Thoroughly review all of the criteria and tabs in the scoring matrix*



4. *Step 4: Assemble a group of stakeholders who have intimate knowledge of the trail systems within the geographic area, as well as an understanding of trail design, construction, promotion, marketing, etc*
5. *Step 5: Gather all pertinent information and complete the self assessment, while also updating all the necessary trail information on [Trailforks.com](https://www.trailforks.com).*
6. *Step 6: Submit the self-assessment with application fee to IMBA*

Each applicant who decides to engage in the professional review process will be investing in a thorough assessment of the strengths, opportunities, constraints, and quality evaluation of the trails in the proposed Ride Center. Throughout the process, identifying potential weaknesses or room for improvement will allow the community to focus on areas and issues that prevent them from attracting larger visitation or broader demographics, as well as determine what might limit a designation or upgrade.

## **4. Ride Center Application and Scoring**

Ride Center scoring is multi-faceted. Here we will go over each qualifying category and how it is calculated. Please note that scoring is based on cumulative points, not on mileage alone. This means that a given destination may fail to achieve Ride Center status — even if the area contains the minimum required mileage — if the total score falls short. Below we will explain the elements that factor into scoring of the criteria.

### **Location Name and Center Point**

You'll be asked to provide an address or GPS coordinates for your desired center point. This point should be located within the community proper, but can be adjusted to include key trailheads or bike park amenities within the Google Maps-defined 30-minute driving radius around this point. The trails included in this radius will comprise the Ride Center destination.

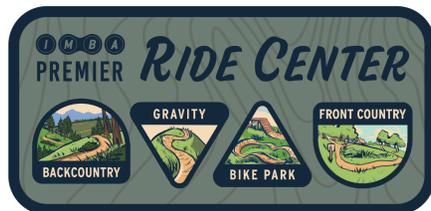
### **Mileage**

The first qualification is for total singletrack trail mileage within the proposed Ride Center's 30-minute drive radius. **All trails submitted to be considered must be natural surface singletrack trails. Double-track, roads or paved pathways are not eligible.** You'll be asked to complete a trail and bike park inventory of everything that exists within the 30-minute drive radius. This inventory will take time to produce, but will be extremely valuable to you whether you apply for the designation or simply use it to form a complete picture of your strengths, opportunities and gaps.

**IMBA Ride Center: 60+ miles of trails and three Badges**



**IMBA Premier Ride Center: 100+ miles of trails and all four Badges**



### Trail Types and Experiences:

Successful destinations rely on the variety of their trail experiences to attract more visitation or to encourage repeat visitation. It's essential that your location focuses on providing variety combined with progression. This means that you'll want to develop amenities in all four categories if possible: *Frontcountry trails*, *Backcountry trails*, *Gravity trails*, and *a Bike Park*. These categories define the Ride Center Badges that will be awarded to qualifying destinations; you can read about them in detail below. Within those categories, you'll want to have options for every skill level from beginner to expert, so that every rider has a trail that not only suits them, but allows them to improve their skills. Within these categories, further variety can be provided through a mix of traditional singletrack and bike-optimized singletrack (also defined below).

As part of your trail inventory, you'll be asked to place each of your trails within these types. Knowing that not all trails perfectly conform to a single type, choose the type that best reflects the trail's characteristics and intention.

With the growing popularity of electric mountain bikes, many riders will seek out destinations that allow Class 1 e-bike access (Class 1 is pedal-assisted only, no throttle, with a maximum speed of 20 mph). Since not all land managers can allow e-bikes, this access isn't required to receive a Ride Center designation, but will allow a destination to showcase their e-bike legal trails. You will be asked to indicate any trails in your inventory that are legally open to Class 1 e-bikes.

### Quality Trail Experience (QTE)

A desirable destination doesn't just have a lot of riding opportunities — it has trails designed and built to a high standard of quality. Quality is difficult to define but easy to identify. In the context of mountain bike trails, excellence is realized when a trail design merges the desired experience and difficulty level that a rider seeks. This process allows the reviewer to add some subjectivity into the process and measure more than just whether or not you have a required trail type.

This QTE score will be counted toward the overall score and has the potential to help or hinder a community's scoring based on the quality of the riding experience. The "Quality Trail Experience" evaluation will be performed **only by the professional reviewer** during onsite evaluation and is not included in the applicant self-evaluation.

### Badge Scoring

The total points in each Badge category will determine whether that Badge is awarded. Destinations must achieve at least Ride Center status to receive Badges. Again, Ride Center scoring is based on cumulative points, not on mileage alone. This means that a given destination may fail to achieve Ride Center status — even if the area contains the minimum required mileage — if the total score falls short.

### Definitions of Badges and Trail Types:



**Frontcountry Badge:** Excellent trails close to the community that are ideal for an arrival-day lap, a family excursion or a group ride.

- Minimum 20 miles to achieve the Badge
- Self-support not required; help is close by
- Relatively near urban development
- Shorter trails, farthest point still close to vehicle parking
- Looped trail layout is predominant
- Must have Green/Blue/Black abilities to receive badge





**Backcountry Badge:** Interesting trails farther from civilization that create an all-day adventure and immersion into that destination's landscape.

- Minimum 30 miles to achieve the Badge
- Self-support required; help not close by
- Relatively distant from urban development (very little urban or suburban development visible from the trail).
  - Longer trails, farthest point not close to vehicle parking, more than 1 hour back to parking
- Connected but non-looped, linear, point-to-point trail layout is acceptable
- These trails may also include an IMBA EPIC



**Gravity Badge:** Covers two types of gravity experiences:

**Sessionable Gravity:**

- Can be lift-served, shuttled, or pedaled
- Descending is the primary, preferred use
- 95% of the trail must be descending - no pedaling - for the majority of riders
  - Must contain at least 400 feet of vertical
    - Must contain at least 6 trails
    - Must contain progression from green to black



**Iconic Downhill:**

- Can be lift-served, shuttled, or pedaled
- Trail(s) must be at least 7 miles long
- Descending is the primary, preferred use
- 75% of the trail must be descending - no pedaling - for the majority of riders



**Bike Park Badge:** A contained, skills-based amenity that shines as a second-outing-of-the-day option or a place for youngsters to let off steam and build their abilities.

To qualify for the Bike Park badge, you must have 3 or more of these options:

1. **Skills zone** - Description of elements:



- Trail(s) with progressive skill-building features.
- Could include ramps, drops, rock features, wall rides, etc.

**Criteria:**

- Need features for beginner, intermediate and advanced riders.
- Requires a focus on progression with a minimum of 5 features for each ability level.
- Features ideally built from rot-resistant wood, stone, or steel/wood prefabs.
- Ride-arounds, clear fall zones and good visibility provided.

**2. Pump track - Description:**

- Looped course with rollers, berms, and optional jumps.
- Designed for momentum via “pumping,” minimal pedaling.
- Suitable for all skill levels.
- Must demonstrate history of regular maintenance or be hard surfaced.

**Criteria:**

- Minimum size: ~6,000 sq ft on flat land, or enough to hold a rider’s interest.
- Asphalt or concrete surface recommended.
- Dirt not recommended due to maintenance/weather issues.



**3. Progressive Jump Zone - Description:**

- Progressive jumps for entry-level to expert level riders. May utilize wood kickers, purely dirt or asphalt.
- If purely dirt, must demonstrate a history of regular maintenance
- 2.5’–8’ jumps with flow, tabletops, landings appropriate to jump size and takeoff angle.

**Criteria:**

- 3–5 independent jump lines, 3 jumps per line.
- Surface: Regionally demonstrated durable tread, high-clay tread, asphalt or Trail Armor
- Physics of jump takeoffs and landings must be appropriate to designated skill level



**4. Slopestyle/Gravity/Flow Trail/Zone - Description:**

- Dynamic, gravity-fed trails, may include jumps, hips, step-ups/downs, wall rides.
- Designed for any skill level, with progression.

- Paved or manufactured surfaces can be used for durability and all-weather use.

*Criteria:*

- Width: 6'–10'; minimum length: 400'.
- Minimum one line/trail for each skill level; 3+ bike-optimized features per line, which are constructed or natural elements within the trail designed to enhance enjoyment, challenge, or rider progression

**Trail Definitions:**

*Traditional Trail:*

- Natural-surface trails
- Trail does not generally have bike -specific enhancements or man-made technical features.
- Overall complies with IMBA Trail Rating guidelines.

These natural surface trails are built using sustainable trail construction techniques. Routes are typically constructed and maintained using techniques that will minimize user conflict and maximize a natural surface texture and trail corridor. All user types will use these routes, so care should be taken to avoid obstacles that might exclude an allowed user type such as jumps, rollers, or waterbars. Turns will be constructed sustainably but will not be cambered to optimize cornering traction.

*Bike Optimized Trail:*

- Purpose-built or modified trail that maximizes the fun and efficiency of riding a mountain bike.
- Trail includes features to enhance the rider experience and provide challenge, such as bermed turns, rollers, consistently wide turn radii, technical features..." and to further clarify what a mtb-optimized trail isn't: "designed to avoid pinch points and obstacles that are unrideable on a mountain bike.
- Enhancements may include bermed turns, rollers, consistently wide turn radii, technical features, rock gardens, jumps, drops, etc.
- Complies with IMBA Trail Rating guidelines.

IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System				
				
	EASY GREEN CIRCLE	MORE DIFFICULT BLUE SQUARE	VERY DIFFICULT BLACK DIAMOND	EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DBL. BLACK DIAMOND
TRAIL WIDTH	36" (900 mm) or more	24" (600 mm) or more	12" (300 mm) or more	6" (150 mm) or more
TREAD SURFACE	Firm and stable	Mostly stable with some variability	Widely variable	Widely variable and unpredictable
AVERAGE TRAIL GRADE	Typically 5% or less	Typically 8% or less	Typically 12% or less	Typically 15% or less
MAXIMUM TRAIL GRADE	Max 15%	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater
NATURAL OBSTACLES AND TECHNICAL TRAIL FEATURES (TTF)	Unavoidable obstacles 2" (50 mm) tall or less  Avoidable obstacles may be present  Unavoidable bridges 36" (900 mm) or wider	Unavoidable obstacles 8" (200 mm) tall or less  Avoidable obstacles may be present  Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or wider  TTF's 24" (600 mm) high or less, width of deck is greater than 1/2 the height	Unavoidable obstacles 15" (380 mm) tall or less  Avoidable obstacles may be present  May include loose rocks  Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or wider  TTF's 48" (1,200 mm) high or less, width of deck is less than 1/2 the height  Short sections may exceed	Unavoidable obstacles 15" (380 mm) tall or less  Avoidable obstacles may be present  May include loose rocks  Unavoidable bridges 24" (600 mm) or narrower  TTF's 48" (1,200 mm) high or greater, width of deck is unpredictable  Many sections may exceed criteria

These natural surface trails are built using sustainable trail construction techniques. They should be purpose-built for MTB users. This type of MTB-optimized trail is constructed with features such as rock areas, larger grade reversals, wider cambered turns and skill level appropriate jumps. These trails should make use of gravity and are managed primarily for descending riders to provide a more enjoyable experience. This type of trail should be narrower than 100cm (~39in)

**Difficulty Rating:** The difficulty rating of each trail should be a reflection of what is marked on the ground. If it is not marked on the ground or does not have an official rating, please use the IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System to best estimate the trail difficulty.

**Trailforks Mapping Requirements:** All trails submitted within the assessment must be mapped and rated on [Trailforks.com](https://www.trailforks.com). You do not need a paid subscription to the site in order to do this. The assessor will use this information to familiarize themselves with the trails and facilities within your geographic area.

**All trails submitted to be considered must be approved for mountain biking. Roads or paved pathways are not eligible.**

### Trail System Characteristics:

This criteria examines additional elements that provide a safe, enjoyable and consistent experience for visiting riders. Note that without effective signs and wayfinding, sufficient quantity and variety of trails to provide 3 or more days of riding, and a structured maintenance plan that is being followed, it will be impossible to achieve the minimum quality score for the Ride Center.

You'll be asked to provide information showing how well your destination meets these criteria.

**Signs and Wayfinding:** A well-signed trail system ensures that visitors unfamiliar with the trails can navigate easily and confidently. A destination-level trail system should include:

- Trailhead Signage

Signage placed at primary trailheads and parking areas. These signs include a detailed map of the entire trail system. Additionally, they should provide information on



trail difficulty and mileage, essential guidelines for trail use, local rules and regulations, safety information, and contact details.

- Main Intersection Signage

Additional signage installed at major trail junctions or hubs, providing an additional view of the trail system map and offers directional guidance as well as emergency contact information.

- Trail Markers

Installed at the entry and exit of each trail segment, clearly indicating the trail name and difficulty rating. These markers provide reassurance and directional clarity, helping trail users confirm their route and stay confidently oriented within the network.

*Recommended Additional Maps & Signage (but not required)*

- Take-away printed maps for trail users
- An online map platform (e.g., TrailForks) or QR code link to trail map
- Interpretive signage that showcases historical and/or cultural information, vegetation relevant to the area, and/or guidance on local conservation efforts.

Trail signage should be consistent, kept up to date, and effective in providing guidance to all trail users. During evaluation, reviewers will assess on-site whether these wayfinding elements and additional signage materials are present and reliable.

**Trailhead Amenities:** Major trailheads possess key support elements that provide a quality experience for trail users and mountain bikers. Major trailheads must have defined parking, bathroom, water, and mountain bike-appropriate signs (that indicate trail system info, rules, trail system map, and EMS info). The reviewer will assess this category onsite.

**Trailhead Access by Bike:** Ease of access by bicycle from bike shop/food & beverage to trailhead. Factors to consider include: easy grades (5% or less); distance (less than 3 miles/5 km); presence of a bike lane, path, trail, or wide striped shoulder; traffic volume on shared routes. Is the trail



system in a designated “Bicycle Friendly Community” and provide a well-signed and supported bicycle route to and from surrounding amenities? The reviewer will assess this category onsite.

**Shuttle / Uplift Options:** There are opportunities to hire a shuttle or use uplift services to access trails. Includes established vehicle shuttle services, chairlift, gondola, public transport, or helicopter shuttle. Shuttle hire/uplift options must cover at least 90% of the accessed trail vertical and allow access to 50% of the trail system. These options must provide regular, scheduled services.

**Three or More Days of Riding:** A rider should be able to spend three or more days riding the trail system and enjoy a different ride each day. Each ride does not necessarily need to be on completely different trails but should provide a unique experience.

**Adaptive Bike Access:** As equipment has evolved, it is increasingly common for adaptive riders to seek access to natural surface trails. Many of these riders are pursuing the same experiences as traditional mountain bikers, and many are very skilled riders. Providing opportunities for them does not require adaptive-specific trails, rather it requires clear signage that informs riders of the trail's specifications and features, giving them autonomous decision-making regarding their ability to ride the trail. For a trail to be rated adaptive accessible, it must inform the rider of the trail's width, presence of unavoidable obstacle ride-arounds, radius of turns, and cross slope. Using that information, adaptive riders can decide if their equipment and skill will allow them to proceed. You can learn more about adaptive trails [here](#).

**Mountain Bike Club:** A local or regional mountain bike club or other trail-supporting nonprofit exists in the community. The local club must be engaged in supporting the stewardship of the trail through regular trail work.

**Maintenance plan:** The quality of a riding destination hinges on how well the trails are maintained. The applicant should supply evidence of a maintenance plan or structure that is consistently followed by land management staff or a local organization. Riders should be able to rely on a positive experience every time they visit.



## Amenities/Services:

Points will be awarded based on the presence of the following:

The applicant will list amenities and services that are available to visitors within the same 30-minute drive time radius. These represent many of the amenities that riders seek when they visit a destination. There is not a quality evaluation of these amenities and services by IMBA, but their existence is important to the MTB visitor.

## Retail:

**Bike Shop Goods and Services:** Bike shop(s) within the community that have a significant stock of mountain bike-based merchandise and can service mountain bikes.

**MTB Guide Services / Outfitters:** Availability of free or fee-based guide services. These services can be valuable to new visitors to the area who are not comfortable navigating new areas on their own.

**Bike Rental:** Availability of mountain bike rental services. Bike rentals are a great way to get visitors out on trails. Not everyone can travel with or owns their own bike. Rental services should provide modern bikes suitable for the trails in the area.

**Shopping:** There are opportunities to shop for general merchandise. Pharmacy, department store, hardware store, automotive supply shop, etc. Visitors rely on area shops for supplies for their vehicles, kids, equipment repairs, health and general needs.

## Lodging:

**Primitive Camping:** There are primitive camping locations within 5.0 miles/8.0 km of the trail system. Primitive camping is a campsite with few or no basic creature comforts that is farther away from civilization and charges a nominal fee for tent camping. Creature comforts could include potable water, electricity, picnic table or fire ring, showers, firewood, etc.

**Camping with Potable Water and Showers:** There are camping sites with potable water and hot showers within 5.0 miles/8.0 km of the trail system. After a few days on the trails, many visitors will be ready for a hot shower before they head out to the local brew pub. Campsite should have more creature comforts available including:



- o Potable water, restroom and showers
- o Picnic table and fire ring
- o Paved or graded drive

**Camping with van/RV hookup:** There are camping sites with van/RV hookups within 5.0 miles/8.0 km of the trail system. Mountain bikers love to take time off work or work remotely, load up the Camper with gear and bikes and explore new territory. Making camping available to this subset is key to them returning. They want to wake up, brew some coffee beans from the local coffee shop and get ready for a day of riding. When they get back, they want to shower, check their email, post on social media and either cook up some food they bought at the grocery store in town or go out to a restaurant and come back to their comfy camper bed and rest up for another day on the trails. This type of camping should include:

- o Potable water, restroom, sewer, electrical power and showers
- o Picnic table and fire ring
- o Paved or graded drive that will accommodate a van, RV, camper and a trailer

**Hotel / Motel:** There are hotels and/or motels within 5.0 miles/8.0 km of the trail system that will accommodate mountain bikers, meaning that there is safe storage for bikes in the rooms or other secure area. Visitors appreciate it if the lodging is within walking distance to shops, restaurants and trails.

### Food:

**Quality & Variety of Restaurants:** Mountain bikers love to eat. It takes a lot to fuel them for a day of riding and they will come back hungry. There should be a variety of eating establishments in town, with typical options including pizza, Mexican, various quick-serve restaurants, and healthy options as well. The better your food, the more riders will want to return, since good trails and good food are an irresistible combination.

**Brew Pub:** Brew pubs add significant value to a locale in the mind of most mountain bikers! A good local draft and a big plate of food after a full day of riding is typically sought out.

**Coffee Shop:** Mountain bikers love a good cup of coffee to start their day. A high-quality coffee shop is a must for any kind of visitor destination.



**Grocery Store:** A grocery store is very important for the purchase of snacks, beverages and supplies for a meal cooked while camping or renting a house with a kitchen.

**Natural / Organic Food:** Mountain bikers tend to be healthy eaters and will appreciate the availability of local, organic and natural foods being available at the grocery store or other natural food retailer or restaurant.

#### Other:

**Medical Services / EMS:** This is a must, and it's important to think through what is available to visitors and how they will find it. While we hope that visitors ride safely, accidents and injuries do happen. Visitors will feel more comfortable if there is a hospital emergency room or clinic within 40 miles of the trails, or backcountry EMS providers are established in the area. These EMS providers can be trained land management agency staff, organized volunteer search and rescue teams, etc. Personnel need to be familiar with the trail systems and have an understanding of access points and evacuation routes. The applicant should list the contact information on the application and include any additional information on a separate sheet with their submission if desired.



#### Destination Best Practices:

These elements are not scored within the Ride Center assessment, but are practices we recommend to help your location succeed.

**Recreation Variety:** Having additional recreation opportunities will multiply the draw for people to visit your location. These can include rock climbing, skiing, snowboarding, mountaineering, kayaking, kiting, rafting, hiking, running, surfing, etc. Having other interesting options to engage riders on a rest day are excellent as well — music venues, museums, local attractions, etc.

**Online Presence:** You'll want to market your destination on easily accessible mediums (e.g., website and social media), so riders can quickly find information such as details about where to ride, where to stay, where to eat, the local MTB organization, etc. When possible, it can be very helpful to create a recognizable brand and website around your trail systems, such as [OZ Trails](#) in northwest Arkansas and the [Northwoods Trails](#) in Hot Springs, AR. Using

**Ride Center / Trails Marketing and Promotions Group:** You'll get a lot more value out of your Ride Center by leveraging a local community group that has made a commitment to promoting and marketing the Ride Center. The group can be composed of the local trails organization, the chamber of commerce, visitors' council, government agencies, land manager/owner, marketing alliance, etc. With all these entities promoting your destination in the same way, the effort will be far more powerful.



**Broad Community Support:** The Ride Center's development and maintenance should be supported by the local trail organization, government entities, businesses, stakeholders, and the general community. If only one community entity is working to keep your destination vibrant and relevant to trail visitors, the effort may struggle or fall flat. You can use this [list of benefits](#) that most communities experience from trail development to get more stakeholders involved.

**Events:** Many riders enjoy getting to know a destination through an event such as a race or festival, and if they enjoy themselves, they may return every year. These work best if you can leverage unique elements of your destination to make visitors feel part of your local culture and community.

**Data Capture & Evaluation:** Trail related data usually includes trail usage reports separated by user type, and whether users are locals or visitors. This data is invaluable for multiple purposes. Not only will it allow you to measure the success of your trail infrastructure (with both locals and visitors) and be incorporated into economic impact reports, it can also be used to justify support for additional development and/or maintenance. Additionally, it can be used to find gaps in your offerings or inform management decisions. This information can be captured by a variety of methods including trail counters, intercept surveys, Trailforks or Strava data, etc.

## 5. Next Steps

### Submitting the Application

1. The Ride Center application will be available soon to interested communities. Once it is launched, applicants will use it to complete a full self-assessment and trail inventory.
2. Once you have completed the self-assessment, submit it to [marty.caivano@imba.com](mailto:marty.caivano@imba.com).
3. We will set up an initial phone call with you to discuss your application and schedule your assessment. At that time, we will issue an invoice for the assessment fee that must be paid before the assessment date.
4. After your assessment is complete, we will bill you for travel expenses. We will begin producing your finished report, which may take up to 8 weeks to complete.
5. If the criteria is met, your designation will be awarded and announced via our communication channels and website, as well as through Trailforks.
6. Even if you don't receive the designation, the finished report will provide you with a detailed gap analysis that can prioritize your future efforts. Whether you receive the designation or not, this can be the start of a great relationship! Let's keep working together on your trail destination goals. Ways we can help you:

- a. We can assist you with access challenges that prevent you from developing further amenities
- b. We can help you plan, design, construct and sign new trails and trail systems
- c. We can provide a Trail Care School to educate land management staff and volunteers on the latest maintenance techniques to keep existing trails in great shape
- d. We can support you with fundraising strategies for your next project
- e. We can support your local trail organization with resources and education to improve their work
- f. Consider us your trail consultants. We're here for any questions you may have.

## 6. Additional Resources

The below resources can be helpful to your work in trail and destination development.

- [Economic Benefits of Mountain Biking Report](#) from the Trust for Public Lands and IMBA
- [Additional information](#) on the economic benefits of trails
- [Mountain Bike Trail Development Guidelines](#) - a free downloadable resource that explains every step of trail development
- [Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience](#) - this free e-book, done in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, details the types of trails and experiences that riders are seeking. This book demonstrates quality bike optimized trail features.
- [Trails are Common Ground Guidebook](#) - Although mountain bikers make great visitors, trails aren't just for them. This guide offers best practices to optimize shared-use trails
- [Trail Solutions Statement of Qualifications](#) - see how our team can help you with your next trail project
- [Building a Successful Trail Organization](#) - A guide to increasing your nonprofit organization's effectiveness
- [Trail Care Schools](#) - IMBA's modern, in-person training for trail maintenance
- A toolkit for conducting and using [visitor/recreation user research data](#)
- How Small Towns Can [Build a Strong Outdoor Economy](#) Without Selling Out