

Brins Mesa Trail, Sedona, Arizona



American Trails

STRATEGIC PLAN PROSPECTUS 2015-2017

Photo: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, CVL Hike Club

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Celebrating over 25 years of American Trails

American Trails was born in 1988 from the merger of two groups, the American Trails Network and the National Trails Council, which sponsored the first National Trails Symposium in 1971. The Symposium is still our longest-running tradition.

American Trails advances the development of diverse, high quality trails, greenways, and blueways for the benefit of people and communities. Through collaboration, education, and communication, American Trails raises awareness of the value these trail systems offer. We connect people with the natural world by enabling those who build, maintain, use, and dream of trails. We serve in a leadership role in promoting trails training and education across the country.

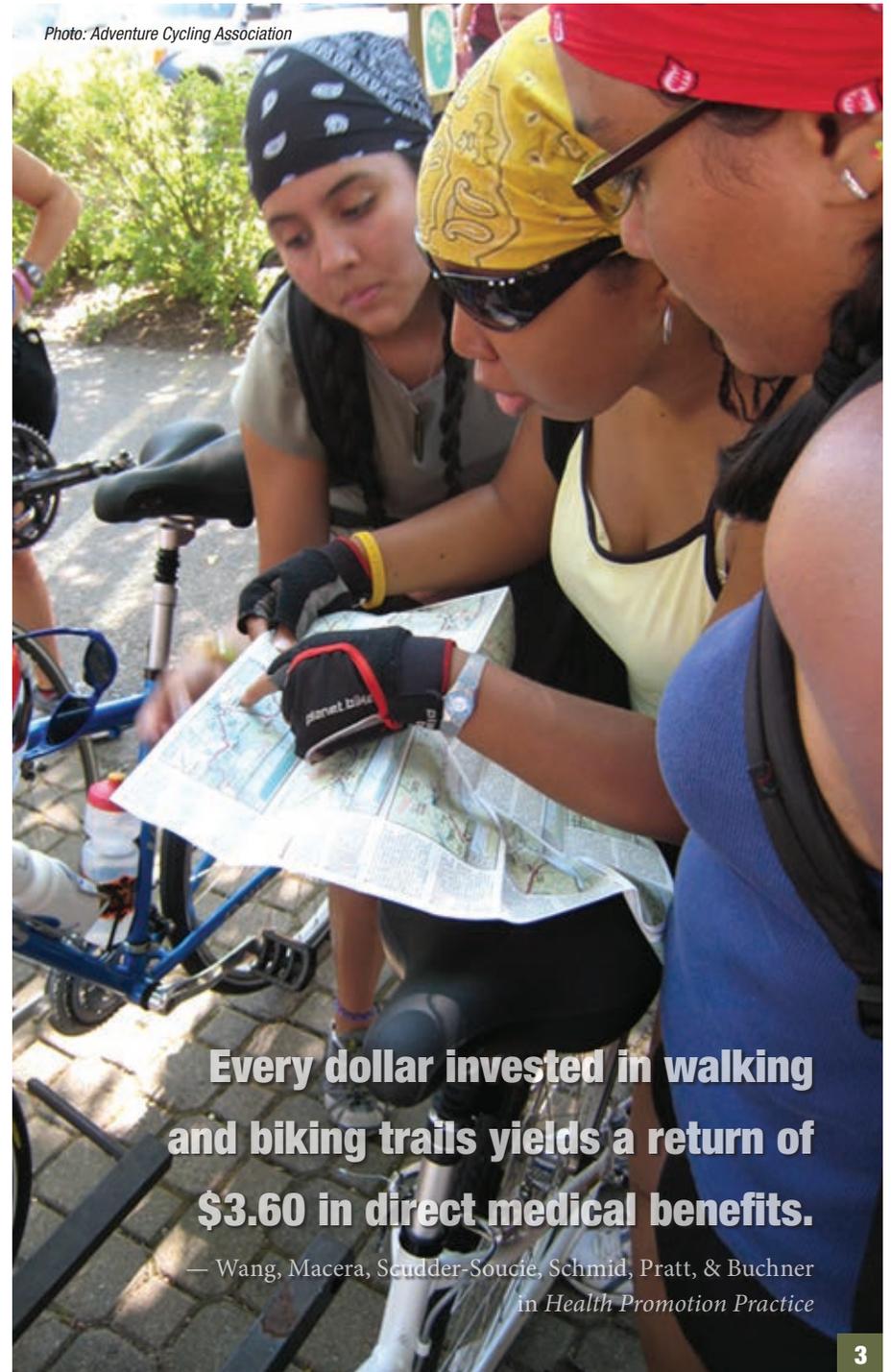
American Trails' work is like a bridge that links people as well as places. Our communications network bridges the many trail types and all those involved: we link organizations working for trails; we link neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces; we link states, cities, and small towns; we link the government agencies that manage our public lands; and we link to businesses that support trails as an important part of our economy. We support every kind of trail to promote healthier cities, create open space and parks, preserve nature, and provide recreation and transportation.

American Trails has been a leader in defining the health, social, and spiritual benefits of trails to an increasingly disconnected world. The promotion of trails as a reconnection with the great outdoors serves as a simple and cost-effective means to achieve a healthier community.

We can only guess at the changes the next 25 years will bring. We can expect the politics to become ever more complicated and the debate over funding to become more contentious. But we can safely say that all of us who are deeply involved in trails have an abiding optimism about the value and longevity of trails. American Trails must be poised to address the challenges, rise to meet the ever-changing needs of the trails community, and continue to be a major leader in the trails movement.

Riders from the Bronx Lab School on the Underground Railroad Bicycle Route in Ohio

Photo: Adventure Cycling Association



Every dollar invested in walking and biking trails yields a return of \$3.60 in direct medical benefits.

— Wang, Macera, Scudder-Soucie, Schmid, Pratt, & Buchner
in *Health Promotion Practice*

Core Ideology

Mission

American Trails advances the development of diverse, high quality trails and greenways for the benefit of people and communities. Through collaboration, education, and communication, American Trails raises awareness of the value these trail systems offer.

Vision

American Trails envisions the nation's public trails and greenways being within reach of all people wherever they live, work, and play. This vision ensures that:

- we connect people with the natural world by enabling those who build, maintain, use, and dream of trails.
- we improve the nation's quality of life, health, and well-being with trails and greenways used for recreation and transportation.
- we invigorate communities financially by supporting trails that add valuable amenities that spur economic development.

Core values

At American Trails, we uphold a set of collective principles and ideals that guide our thoughts and work.

Teamwork—we understand we must work together as an organization and take an active role in serving the needs of trail communities.

Respect—we treat our staff, board members, colleagues, partners, and all members of the broader trails community with respect and dignity.

Fiscal Responsibility—we make sound economic decisions in order to generate the revenue that supports our work in service to our mission and vision.

Healthy Lifestyles—we understand the importance of health, fitness, and well-being, and reflect this understanding in our own lives.

Diversity—we promote diversity, as reflected in cultural background, age, gender, physical ability, and other factors, in the organization and its varied activities.

Inclusivity—we value the contributions each person makes, as staff, members of the Board and organization, delegates at the International Trails Symposium, and participants of American Trails programs.

Guiding principles

American Trails seeks trails and greenways that promote:

Accessibility: A national infrastructure of trails and greenways that are a part of everyday life and accessible to all people of varying abilities, ages, and backgrounds

Healthy lifestyles: Improved fitness, health, and well-being for all people through trails and greenways that offer opportunities for physical activity, recreation, rejuvenation, and preventative health care

Economic vitality: A trail system that contributes to the financial strength and attractiveness of a community by enhancing business opportunities, tourism, and property values

Sustainable development: A trail system that offers alternative transportation opportunities, contributes to the health and vitality of a community, and connects people to nature

Best practices: Innovative, sustainable, and technically sound guidelines that are understood and applied by decision makers in the planning, design, development, and construction of high quality trail systems

Experiences in the outdoors: Responsible and enjoyable opportunities that are afforded to all trail users and contribute to each community of trail recreationists

Appreciation for the outdoors: Inspiring trail experiences that cultivate an appreciation for our natural and cultural heritage

Learning in the outdoors: Educational and interpretive opportunities that promote understanding, skills development, and appreciation of the environment

Connectivity: Trail systems that link communities, natural areas, and people as a means of recreation and transportation

American Trails Today

For over 25 years, American Trails has served as a forum and catalyst to improve the quality of life for all Americans by pursuing, preserving, protecting, and providing access to a national infrastructure of trails, greenways, and blueways. Serving to benefit all trail users and activities, American Trails represents a collective voice for a diverse coalition of enthusiasts, professionals, land managers, conservationists, and friends of the outdoors and livable cities.

Through education, partnerships, and timely dissemination of information and resources, American Trails promotes the creation, conservation, and broad enjoyment of trails and greenways that offer places of solace, health, fitness, recreation, and transportation for all Americans.

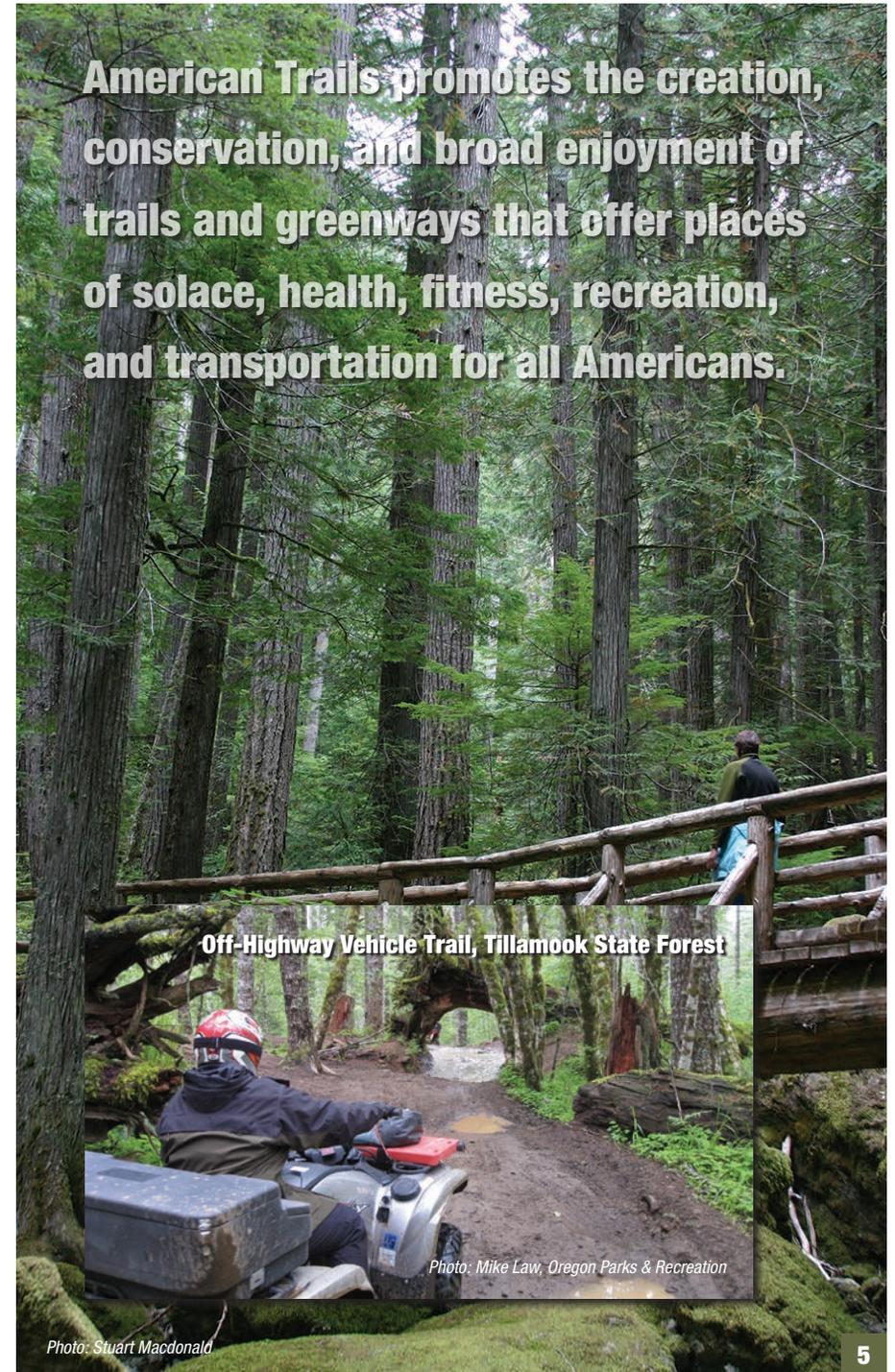
Our goal is to support America's trails by finding common ground and promoting cooperation among all trail interests. We are involved in everything from training trail managers and advocates to providing increased trail opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

American Trails' success lies in having a well-established communications network. We coordinate the [International Trails Symposium](#) every two years, sponsor the [American Trails' National \(and International\) Trails Awards Program](#), oversee the [National Trails Training Partnership](#) host the [Advancing Trails Webinar Series](#), serve as the lead nonprofit for the [National Recreation Trails Program](#), produce the [American Trails Magazine](#) and monthly *Trail Tracks* e-Newsletter, [advocate for trails and more trail funding](#), and foster cooperation and communication among all trail users.

American Trails provides endless resources to provide trail professionals and advocates tools to do their jobs better and ultimately, develop and maintain more sustainable trails to better serve trail users of all types, ages, and abilities. Our website, americantrails.org, is one of the world's most comprehensive online sources for planning, building, designing, funding, managing, enhancing, and supporting trails, greenways, and blueways.

With headquarters in Redding, California and members throughout the world, American Trails is in a strong position to fulfill its mission. At the same time, however, we recognize that we are at a crossroads, needing to increase its capacity financially and strategically. A pivotal next step is development of a strategic plan.

Lena Lake National Recreation Trail, Olympic National Forest, Washington



**Active outdoor recreation contributes
\$730 billion annually to the US economy.**

— Outdoor Industry Foundation



Photo: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, CVL Hike Club

American Trails Tomorrow

While American Trails has achieved notable accomplishments during the past 10 years, in some respects it has reached a plateau. Without an opportunity to strategically plan for the future, the organization could stagnate. The executive staff and board of directors of American Trails recognize the need for an infusion of energy, innovative thinking, and financial support to fund a strategic plan and hire a development consultant.

While the organization will benefit from a comprehensive evaluation of all of its programs and resources, five areas are in immediate need of review.

Membership—American Trails need to identify new strategies to attract, retain, and engage members, and strive to be culturally relevant to all members of the professional trails community. These strategies need to resonate with the emerging millennial generation.

Publications—The next generation of American Trails members increasingly will rely on electronically transmitted information. American Trails needs to be nimble and savvy in its use of social media, its design and maintenance of the website, and its production of print materials.

Webinar series—As trail planners and builders, landscape architects, and advocates, members of the board of directors have offered their professional services gratis to develop a series of webinars anyone can register for and attend. While the quality of this series is superlative, attendance remains relatively low.

International Trails Symposia—Like the webinar series, the biennial conference is highly successful in many respects. It is a dynamic forum to reunite with colleagues, exchange ideas, glean new information and learn solutions for success, and “professionally recharge.” At the same time, it requires the full-time attention of nearly the entire American Trails staff for many months. Further, attendance, while healthy, should be higher relative to the investment of time and energy.

Grants and contracts—Most of the grants and contracts currently held by American Trails are Federal and therefore subject to Congressional shifts in policy and funding. The organization recognizes the need to seek new and diverse sources of revenue to sustain its programs.

Camp Creek Falls, Cave Creek, Arizona

Key Strategic Issues

- Build capacity within our board of directors and staff.
- Cultivate and retain new members who represent the full spectrum of society.
- Sustain current members by engaging them and helping them find relevance and benefit in American Trails.
- Nurture the professional growth of members by continuing to offer webinars, hold biennial International Trails Symposia, and provide access to tools and resources through print, web presence, and electronic media.
- Grow our communications network for more effective advocacy efforts.
- Strengthen the viability of American Trails by ensuring that revenue sources are reliable and stemming from a wide range of partnering organizations and agencies, as well as foundations and corporations, beyond the Federal level.

In retrospect

Urban trails will materially assist in the re-creation and enhancement of our urban living environment.

—Hulet Hornbeck, American Trails Board Member

At the heart of our work, we are about advancing trails through education and communication and providing a positive voice for the trails community.

—Pam Gluck, American Trails Executive Director

Trails are being viewed as significant, vibrant laboratories for outdoor learning.

—Roger Bell, American Trails Board Member

The U.S. and Canada have been the recent leaders in the trails movement, and now there are opportunities with many nations to exchange knowledge, share trail solutions, and continue advocating for the benefit of all humanity.

—Bob Searns, American Trails Board Member

American Trails has assisted in defining trails as a critical asset in our communities that enhance our collective quality of life. The future of trails is toward enhanced mobility offering multiple options for recreation, transportation, and education. As we move ahead, American Trails will continue to be an important voice for positive engagement through the political and economic processes.

—David Larsen, American Trails Board Member

Trails have become the souls of our communities— landmarks that define character and meeting places that beckon outdoor enthusiasts.

—Jenny Rigby, American Trails Board Member

My 13-year journey with American Trails has provided me a window. When I look out the window one way I see trails connecting me to my neighborhood, my community, my state, my region, my country, my world. When I look in through the window, I see personal growth, health, wellness, and recreation all provided by trails.

—Joe Taylor, American Trails Advisory Committee Member

Trail advocates are the optimists who refuse to give up, who believe that every problem has a solution, and that every community deserves a trail. We can only guess at the changes the next 25 years will bring. But I can safely say that all of us who are deeply involved in trails have an abiding optimism about the value and longevity of them.

—Stuart Macdonald,
American Trails Magazine Editor

America's trails community has matured, become smarter, and documented its impact more profoundly on the American landscape.

—Steve Elkinton, American Trails Advisory Committee Member

John Muir once said, “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home.” This is more true today than ever before and American Trails is the legacy that promotes trails to get people to that mountain.

—John Favro, American Trails Board Member



American Trails is a tax-exempt, nonprofit charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax-deductible.

Learn more about American Trails by visiting AmericanTrails.org



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