



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



LAUNCHING THE USDA FOREST SERVICE'S 10-YEAR TRAIL SHARED STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE IN THE EASTERN REGION

*Strong partnerships, increased capacity,
and more sustainable trails*



Acknowledgements

This report was produced by American Trails in partnership with the USDA Forest Service USFS Eastern Region. The report and the engagement process that it chronicles represent the kind of cooperation that the 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship calls for. It has been a pleasure to share in this experience and launch the Trail Challenge in the Eastern Region!

This report was made possible by the generous efforts of the following people:

The partners and Forest Service staff members from the following National Forests and National Tallgrass Prairie:

Allegheny National Forest	Mark Twain National Forest
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest	Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie
Chippewa National Forest	Monongahela National Forest
Green Mountains and Finger Lakes National Forests	Ottawa National Forest
Hiawatha National Forest	Shawnee National Forest
Hoosier National Forest	Superior National Forest
Huron-Manistee National Forests	Wayne National Forest
	White Mountain National Forest

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We would like to give special thanks to Leon LaVigne, Trails & Dispersed Recreation Program Manager, Eastern Region (Retired), whose vision, patience, humor, and collaborative nature was the driving force for this effort.

Photo by Kristen Thrall



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Executive Summary

The 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge (Trail Challenge) evolved from the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System and the 2016 USFS Stewardship Act. It was initiated in 2020 by the Trails Program of the USDA Forest Service with the intent to engage partner organizations in two major stated goals:

- 1. Increase collective trail workforce capacity for all field units**
- 2. Increase trail sustainability on the more than 160,000 miles of National Forest System trails.**

The National Headquarters charged each region with supporting field units (National Forests and Grasslands and their Ranger Districts) with implementation of the Trail Challenge. The Eastern Region chose an innovative approach to initiate the first phase of the Trail Challenge, entitled "Launch and Learn", entering a partnership with the nonprofit organization American Trails. An agreement between the Eastern Region and American Trails identified four goals:

- Develop understanding and support of the Trail Challenge
- Build partner engagement across all Forests (and Prairie) in the Region
- Promote public awareness of trails to increase the appreciation, enjoyment, preservation, and use by all trail users
- Strengthen the capacity of nonprofit partners to assist Federal agencies in developing and sustaining the trails programs throughout the Region

This report has been developed to document the results of the region's Launch and Learn phase. It describes the process, recommended actions for agency managers and partners, a set of useful tools, and success stories within the region.



Photos

Green Mountain National Forest, courtesy of Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports • Allegheny National Forest
• Gilstad Fishing Pier on the Chippewa National Forest

Launch and Learn Process

American Trails, working together with Eastern Region Recreation and Trails leadership, engaged a broad spectrum of Forest Service employees at all levels and both current and prospective partners to launch the Trail Challenge. Key events, all virtual, were:

- **Kickoff webinar with Eastern Region leadership and all field units – November 1, 2021**

Regional Forester Gina Owens and Director for Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, and Volunteer Services Jonathan Heyl led off the meeting with their support of the Trail Challenge and their leadership intent for the field units. Athens District Ranger Jason Reed (Wayne National Forest) added local line officer perspectives regarding a community driven trails program. National Trails Program Manager Brenda Yankoviak then provided an extensive overview of the Trail Challenge.

- **Subregional meetings with Forest Service personnel to discuss the current Trail Program Status**

American Trails convened five subregional meetings in January 2022, with groupings of units informed by the Eastern Region Recreation Reimagined process. Following presentations on the Trail Challenge, each National Forest or Prairie presented information on the status of their trail programs and volunteer/partnerships. Open dialogue, questions, and sharing deepened the field units' understanding of the Trail Challenge and prepared them for partner meetings.

- **National Forest and Tallgrass Prairie meetings with 172 Partner Organizations**

Thirteen two-hour dialogues were then convened with each field unit and their existing and prospective partners during April-August of 2022. The primary purposes were aligned with the fourth goal of the agreement: to build awareness of Trail Challenge among partners; strengthen relationships and capacity between the USFS field units and partners; and create a network of existing and potential partners.

Current Successes

Many success stories surfaced throughout the Launch and Learn process. Ten stories are shared in the report to inform, inspire, and connect trails managers and their partners. Among the ten partnership success stories described in the report are: leveraging long distance trail organization capacity on the Ozark Trail (and others), creative Conservation Financing on the Baileys Mountain Bike System, involvement of the Outdoor Industry Office in Michigan, and extensive community collaboration on the Monongehela National Forest and other units.



Photo
Monongehela National Forest

Tools and Resources

In order to make this report as useful as possible to field units and their partners in moving the Trail Challenge forward, the project team worked to identify a set of tools that would address the primary goals of the Trail Challenge. This report will identify and explain the following tools and how they may be useful as possible in addressing:

Trail Challenge Goal 1: Increase shared trail workforce capacity for all field units

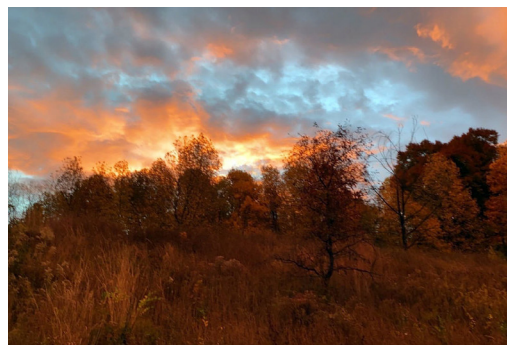
- Workforce Development Models developed by the National Trails Advisory Group (TAG) and Eastern Region Recreation Reimagined Strategy,
- Trail Skills Project,
- Nonprofit Partner Insurance Program.

Trail Challenge Goal 2: Increase the physical, social, and economic sustainability of the region's trails

- Slope Ratio Tool Pilots,
- Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project Pilots (STEW-MAP),
- Anonymized Mobility Data Analysis for Trails,
- Conservation Financing Program,
- Legacy Trails Grant Program, and
- Trail Funding Clearinghouse.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- A strong commitment at the National and Regional levels to advancing the trails program through the goals of the Trail Challenge.
- A high level of partnership involvement at many field units and several very innovative partnership efforts to serve as models across the region.
- Increased hiring, position creation, and transitioning from seasonal to permanent positions in Recreation, Trails, and Partnership/Volunteer specialists across the region.
- The Recreation Reimagined strategy which complements and reinforces the partnership elements of the Trail Challenge and brings additional resources to it.



Photos

*Hoosier National Forest,
photo by Mary Gehrum*

*Lumberman's Monument,
Huron-Manistee*

*Huron-Manistee National Forests
photo by Joshua Kilbourn*

Recommendations for Broadening and Sustaining Success

The Trail Challenge Guidebook for 2022 includes metrics and Phase I action items for field units and partners. In addition to those action items, the following recommendations have emerged from the Eastern Region/American Trails process:

Regional Leadership

- The Regional Forester and the Director for Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, and Volunteer Services (RWHV) establish in writing the clear expectation for field units to establish a culture of partnerships and collaboration to carry out the Trail Challenge.
- The Regional Forester establishes a performance element for the Trail Challenge to include, but not limited to: a) an annual meeting of all trail partners staff and volunteers within the unit's area; b) establishment of saw certification programs for partners, volunteers, and staff; c) annual trainings in support of trails for partners and agency personnel.
- Develop consistent training programs across the Region in collaboration with partners.
- Foster communication and learning among field units through regional sharing of expertise, success stories, and partner involvement in meetings as appropriate.

Field Units

- Continue to build staffing in accordance with Trail Challenge; continue to build capacity through staffing to meet partnership, volunteer, and agreement needs. Utilize the tools above to help expand capacity.
- Convene trail partner meetings annually, at a minimum.
- Collaboratively identify training needs with partners and carry out annual training sessions.
- Explore coalition development to advance the sustainability of the unit's entire trail system, reinforce expertise across the agency and within partner groups, forge relationships with local governments, and pursue funding opportunities.
- Leverage long-distance trail organizations' capacity and operations (i.e. Green Mountain connection to Appalachian Trail Conservancy) to provide leadership in trails coalitions and increase overall capacity.
- Build relationships with local government (leadership, planning, and parks & recreation departments) economic development organizations, and civic groups to advance integration of recreation and trails programs with the communities.

Partner Level

- Identify training needs and collaboratively work with Forest Service field units to deliver annual training.
- Develop appropriate agreements between partners and USFS field units (Volunteer/Partner agreement, Memorandums of Understanding, no-cost agreements) to officially establish relationships and clarify roles. Build into agreements an introduction meeting or exit meetings when there are changes in agency leadership.
- Explore establishment of Trail Coalitions or "Friends of" organizations at the field unit level to advance the sustainability of the unit's entire trail system, reinforce expertise across the partner groups, develop training, forge relationships with local governments, and pursue funding opportunities.
- Build relationships with local governments to connect trail opportunities to the economic base of communities, explore establishment of trailheads and trail linkages in communities, and make connections to trails easy for people.

Photos

Mark Twain National Forest campgrounds
• Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie,
photo by Veronica Hinke



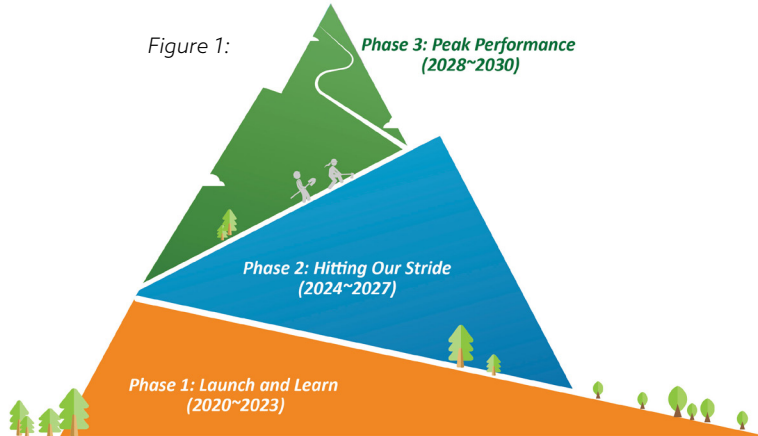
Introduction

The 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge (Trail Challenge) was initiated in 2020 by the Trails Program of the Forest Service with two major stated goals:

- Increase collective trail workforce capacity for all field units
- Increase trail sustainability on the more than 160,000 miles of National Forest System trails.

The National Headquarters charged each region with supporting field units (National Forests and Grasslands and their Ranger Districts) with implementation of the Trail Challenge. Forest Service Eastern Region an innovative approach to initiate the first phase of the Trail Challenge, entitled "Launch and Learn" (see Figure 1), entering a partnership with the nonprofit organization American Trails. Agreement between the Eastern Region and AT identified four goals:

- Develop Forest Service understanding and support of the Trail Challenge
- Build partner engagement across all across all field units in the Eastern Region.
- Promote public awareness of trails to increase the appreciation, enjoyment, preservation, and use by all trail users
- Strengthen the capacity of nonprofit partners to assist Federal agencies in developing and sustaining the trails programs throughout the the Eastern Region.



The Region is a geographically widespread and complex region. Its 14 administrative units and National Tallgrass Prairie occur within 13 states from New England through the Allegheny Region, along the Ohio River, to the Great Lakes states, and southwest to the Ozark Mountains. The broad extent of the region implies great diversity not only in landscapes and ecosystems, but in cultures and relationships as well. For example, recreation and trails programs, economic development, and environmental regulatory structures occur at the state or sub-state levels, requiring coordination and relationship building by each field unit within each state. Similarly, nonprofit partners are generally localized, although there are a few large-scale trail-oriented organizations that span multiple states. The North Country Trail Association is particularly noteworthy in this regard.

The complexity of relationships underscored the utilization of American Trails as a boundary-spanning partner uniquely qualified in the nexus between knowledge of trails technology and relationships. Its skill set of convening trail practitioners and enthusiasts across the country enabled an accelerated and deeper initiation of the Trail Challenge with the Eastern Region units and its partners than would have otherwise been possible.

Discussion of partner involvement in the Trail Challenge inherently involves a variety of terms that are generally understood within Forest Service circles, but may be less understood for partners. Where possible, this report has attempted to avoid Forest Service jargon, however, it was impossible to remove these terms completely. Therefore, we have include a *Glossary of Terms* to aid in clarifying these terms for all partner organizations and individuals.

Our Process

American Trails, working together with the Eastern Region Recreation and Trails leadership, engaged a broad spectrum of Forest Service employees at all levels and both current and prospective partners to launch the Trail Challenge. Key stages are illustrated below.



Kickoff meeting with Eastern Region leadership and all field units - November 1, 2021

Regional Forester Gina Owens and RWHV Director Jonathan Heyl led off the meeting with their support of the Trail Challenge and expectations for the field units. Key points included:

- Recreation and Trails are a high priority to the Regional Forester. Trails connect everyone to the National Forests – they are the single most impactful facility in the Recreation program.
- The Trail Challenge is not just one more thing to do. It presents a huge opportunity to improve trails and relationships with partners and communities.
- The Regional Forester expects all units to embrace the Trail Challenge with enthusiasm, and positivity. Work with and through others!
- The Director emphasized that the Forest Service’s “Can-do attitude” is a two-edged sword, sometimes undermining acceptance of others who offer assistance. He charged the field with embracing a “can-do” attitude which includes the skills and resources of partners, tribes, and local communities.
- Both leaders emphasized the complementary relationship between the Eastern Region Recreation Reimagined strategy and the Trail Challenge and encouraged field units to utilize that strength.

Athens District Ranger Jason Reed of the Wayne National Forest spoke to fellow field line officers about the impact he has seen from the planning and implementation of the Baileys Trail System. He stated that *“Baileys has been culture-changing for the communities and the Ranger District. It has really brought home how the National Forest fits into Southeast Ohio, culturally and economically.”*

Deliberative steps, planning, and coordination with local and state officials have been essential to make this an enduring effort.

[See related success story here](#)

National Trails Program Manager Brenda Yankoviak then gave an extensive overview of the Trail Challenge, noting its origins in the [National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System and the 2016 National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act](#) and the launch of the [Trail Challenge for USFS Chief Vicki Christianson in February 2020](#). She noted five key points.

The Trail Challenge is:

- *A framework for thinking strategically with partners*
- *A phased approach to be implemented deliberately on solid foundations*
- *Measurable, with established metrics*
- *Useful and impactful to those we serve*
- *Supported at the national and regional levels with toolboxes, success stories, training plan, and model organizations, among other tools*

Subregional meetings with USFS personnel - January 2022

To increase understanding and support of the Trail Challenge among USFS personnel and obtain information about the Trails Program status on each field unit, five subregional meetings were held in January 2022. The following subregional grouping of field units was informed by the Recreation Reimagined process:

- Northeastern – White Mountain, Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests
- Appalachian – Allegheny, Monongahela, and Wayne National Forests
- Michigan – Huron-Manistee, Hiawatha, and Ottawa National Forests
- Great Lakes – Superior, Chippewa, and Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests
- Southern Tier – Hoosier, Shawnee, and Mark Twain National Forests and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

The prevailing themes that emerged from the field units' presentations on the state of their Trails Programs were:

- **Staffing capacity has declined and limits the units' ability to capitalize on partnership and volunteer opportunities.** *This includes trails personnel and others needed to support program work, such as Recreation Planners, Volunteer & Partnership Coordinators, and Grants & Agreements specialists.*
- **Partners are highly valued and appreciated.** *They are engaged on nearly all units and there is a desire to utilize them more effectively through better planning and coordination of projects. It was recognized that partners may have issues of recruitment in more rural areas, an aging cohort, and funding.*
- **A collective effort is needed to sustain the entire trail system on a unit.** *While nearly all trail interests embrace the concept of sustainable trails, they tend to focus on those specific trails that meet their needs over sustainability of the system.*
- **More Regional Office support or subregional coordination may be needed** *to address trail assessments and plans, data management, and training for staff and partners.*
- **Success stories abound** *and include local partner and volunteer groups, state Departments of Natural Resources, and long-distance trail organizations, among others. See the Success Stories*

National Forest and National Tallgrass Prairie meetings with Partner Organizations

Meetings were then convened with each field unit and their existing and prospective partners during April-August of 2022. The primary purposes were to build awareness of the Trail Challenge among partners, strengthen relationships between the USFS field units and partners, and create a network of existing and potential partners.

646 participants and USFS staff were invited from across the Region.

13 two-hour meetings were held over five months.

172 partners participated in total (not including Forest Service staff)

These partners were all polled at the beginning of each meeting. Of these, on average:

52% of the attendees said it was their first meeting with the USFS.

76% of partner attendees were "Not at all" or only "Slightly Familiar" with the Trail Challenge.

Following an overview of the Trail Challenge and the themes that emerged during the subregional meetings, select partners shared success stories. Most of the meeting time consisted of open dialogue between partners and USFS employees about keys to success, potential pilot projects, and remaining concerns and challenges.

Many participants were positive about the meetings and remarked that they would like to continue talking with the local USFS unit and with each other. To conclude sensing of field unit issues, concerns, and opportunities a debrief dialogue was convened between the units, Regional Office staff, and the American Trails Team on October 25, 2022.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)

A key element of this project is improving the capacity and comfort of unit staff and existing partners in inviting participation from new, non-traditional partner groups. As a result, Rachel Hailey with DEI Outdoors was contracted to consult on the improving the outreach process, and to provide two diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) webinars. All 646 participants in this effort were invited to attend.

The first online webinar was titled *Understanding of History - Exclusion of BIPOC people on public land*, and focused on the history of exclusion for underserved communities in the outdoors. This was an important session to set the stage and create broad understanding of why Black, indigenous, people of color, and the disabled may not feel welcome on Forest Service lands. In order to better understand how this invitation can be most effective on the unit level, we need to recognize how the benefits associated with outdoor activities have accrued primarily to certain groups, and much less so to others. This understanding illuminated what actions we can take to bridge that gap.

The second, more interactive meeting was titled *Listening Session - How do I make my invitations as a forest service employee to invite marginalized communities to engage in stewardship?* This session was intended to provide a toolkit for building and sustaining effective stewardship. Participants learned strategies for creating authentic partnerships, relationship building, and tools for offering a powerful invitation to historically marginalized communities to engage (or re-engage) in land stewardship.

Ms. Hailey was an effective and empathetic instructor and presenter and will remain involved in future DEIA efforts related to the Trail Challenge.

Tribal Strategy Development

Considerable involvement with Forest Service Tribal Liaisons at the Regional and Supervisor's Office levels resulted in outreach to the tribes to engage in both the Recreation Reimagined strategy and the Trail Challenge. The outreach was initiated by a letter and email from the Regional Office on September 29, 2022. Every field unit is being asked to carry forward the spirit of the letter through deeper-level conversation, exploration, and 1-to-1 relationship building with interested tribes in their areas. Conversations center around five key areas: access, information, recreation & trail infrastructure, investments and engaging youth. However, any area of interest is open for discussion.

To date, one Regional meeting has been held between the Chickasaw Nation and Regional Office staff. After that meeting, and in subsequent discussions, this effort has moved to a national scope with consistent tribal outreach being planned in the coming years. With new Forest Service Tribal Relations Specialists now in place, a re-assessment is underway to determine how the Region can broaden its tribal engagement and align with other emerging national efforts.

Coordination with the Eastern Region Recreation Reimagined Strategy

The Eastern Region Recreation Reimagined Strategy has been an integral part of the Region's response to the 10-Year Trail Challenge. Finalized in October 2021, Recreation Reimagined sets forth a 20-year vision for the Eastern Region's opportunities more welcoming, collaborative, and sustainable.

Recreation Reimagined covers the "full portfolio" of RHWV resources including recreation sites, dispersed recreation opportunities, wilderness and other congressionally-designated areas, historic properties, trails and more. While trails represent only one segment of the overall portfolio, they provide, perhaps, the single greatest leverage point to advance the strategy's goals and objectives.

There are four primary reasons for this that are worth noting:

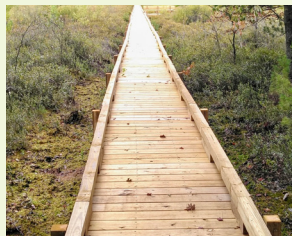
- **First**, trail opportunities connect more visitors to National Forest System lands than any other program or resource, both within RHWV and in consideration of all resources managed by the USFS. In fact, National Visitor Use Monitoring survey results (data collected 2015 through fiscal year 2019), show that nearly two-thirds of all visitors participate in trail-related activities when they come to national forests and tallgrass prairie the Eastern Region.
- **Second**, there are incredible opportunities to improve ecological conditions related to trails. The Eastern Region trail portfolio includes more than 17,000 miles of motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities and nearly 1,400 trail bridges. With only 30% of trails meeting National Quality Standards (July 2020) and \$34 million needed for trail bridge replacements or repairs (as of January 2023), there is opportunity to improve ecological health and resiliency through improving, relocating, and redesigning trails and their supporting infrastructure.
- **Third**, the Trails program has a long and successful history collaborating and co-stewarding with partners, volunteer organizations, non-government organizations, and others. According to the FY19 Volunteers and Service Performance Outcomes report, the Eastern Region reported that 7,559 miles of trail, or approximately 21%, were maintained with volunteer support. In reality, this is a conservative estimate. The Region can embrace shared stewardship more fully by focusing additional resources and staffing to support trail stewards and supporters.
- **Fourth**, trails provide physical connection to communities and thereby have the opportunity to link National Forest System lands to new and diverse audiences. With the exception of roads, no other resource creates a better bridge between public lands and people. While the Forest Service has traditionally focused on locating trails on the National Forests and Grasslands, it can turn its attention to creating systems of trails that cross boundaries to better link natural lands to all communities.

As the Region moves forward with implementation of the Recreation Reimagined Strategy, it must recognize and take advantage of the unique potential within the Trails program to achieving its three goals:

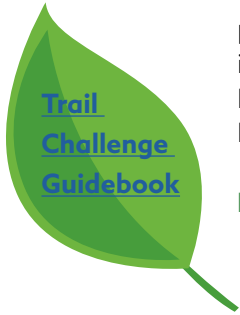
1. Creating Inclusive & Welcoming Opportunities
2. Building Collaborative Relationships
3. Sustaining Benefits Through Sustainable Practices

Photos

Mark Twain National Forest
• North Country Trail in Huron-Manistee National Forests, Credit Kenny Wawsczyk
• Green Mountain National Forest courtesy of Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports



Program and Partnership Development Recommendations



Metrics and required reporting items are described in elements A. and B. located on pages 7-8 of the Trail Challenge Guidebook for 2023. Phase I action items have been consolidated for field units on page 15 and for partners and volunteers on page 16 of the Guidebook. Attention to those action items should continue to be the focus of field units and their partners through Fiscal Year 2023. In addition to those action items, the following recommendations have emerged from the Eastern Region process.

Regional Leadership

- The Regional Forester and Director of RHWV establish in writing the clear expectation for field units to establish a culture of partnerships and collaboration to carry out the Trail Challenge.
- The Regional Forester establishes a performance element for the Trail Challenge to include, but not limited to: **a)** an annual meeting of all trail partners staff and volunteers within the unit's area; **b)** establishment of saw certification programs for partners, volunteers, and staff; **c)** annual trainings in support of trails for partners and agency personnel.
- Develop consistent training programs across the Region in collaboration with partners. Foster communication and learning among field units through regional sharing of expertise, success stories, and partner involvement in meetings as appropriate.

Field Units

- Continue to build capacity through staffing to meet partnership, volunteer, and agreement needs. Utilize the tools above to help expand capacity.
- Convene trail partner meetings annually, at a minimum.
- Collaboratively identify training needs with partners and carry out annual training sessions.
- Explore coalition development to advance the sustainability of the unit's entire trail system, reinforce expertise across the agency and within partner groups, forge relationships with local governments, and pursue funding opportunities.
- Leverage long-distance trail organizations' capacity and operations (i.e. Green Mountain connection to Appalachian Trail Conservancy) to provide leadership in trails coalitions and increase overall capacity.
- Build relationships with local government (leadership, planning, and parks and recreation departments) economic development organizations, and civic groups to advance integration of recreation and trails programs with the communities.

Partner Level

- Identify training needs and collaboratively work with USFS field units to deliver annual training.
- Develop appropriate agreements between partners and USFS field units (Volunteer/Partner agreement, MOU's, no-cost agreements) to officially establish relationships and clarify roles. Build into agreements an introduction meeting or exit meetings when there are changes in agency leadership.
- Explore establishment of Trail Coalitions or "Friends of" organizations at the field unit level to advance the sustainability of the unit's entire trail system, reinforce expertise across the partner groups, develop training, forge relationships with local governments, and pursue funding opportunities.
- Build relationships with local governments to connect trail opportunities to the economic base of communities, explore establishment of trailheads and trail linkages in communities, and make connections to trails easy for people.



Photos
Allegheny National Forest, photo courtesy of Willow Creek Snowmobile Club • Keown Lincoln Woods, photos by Nicolette Keown.

Advancing the Goals of the Trail Challenge

The stated goals for the US Forest Service and its community partners:

- Increase collective trail workforce capacity for all field units
- Increase trail sustainability on the more than 160,000 miles of National Forest System trails

Overview of Tools and Coming Resources

In the course of this effort, the project team identified a variety of very specific tools that could be used by Forest Service staff and partners alike to meet these desired outcomes. These are outlined in the table below and described in detail in the following section.

Tool/Resource	Trail Challenge Goals			Potential Partners	
	INCREASE WORKFORCE CAPACITY	INCREASE TRAIL SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY			
		Physical	Social	Economic	
<i>USFS Workforce Development Model</i>	✓				<i>Partner with Washington Office</i>
<i>Trail Skills Project</i>	✓				<i>Professional Trail Builders Association, American Trails</i>
<i>Nonprofit Partner Insurance Program</i>	✓				<i>American Trails, Conservation United</i>
<i>Slope Ratio Tool</i>		✓			<i>American Trails, Virginia Tech</i>
<i>STEW-MAP</i>			✓		<i>Northern Research Station</i>
<i>Anonymized Mobility Data Analysis for Trails</i>			✓		<i>American Trails, Appalachian Trails Conservancy</i>
<i>Conservation Financing Program</i>				✓	<i>National Forest Foundation</i>
<i>Legacy Trails Grant Program</i>				✓	<i>American Trails</i>
<i>Trails Funding Clearinghouse</i>				✓	<i>American Trails, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy</i>

GOAL

#1 Increase Collective Trail Workforce Capacity

Increasing collective workforce capacity means both the Forest Service and its partners attain adequate well-trained staffing and supporting resources to manage a sustainable trail system now and in the future. The staffing, training, and support resources may be shared in a complementary fashion between the agency and the partners so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Analysis of Existing Program - Findings

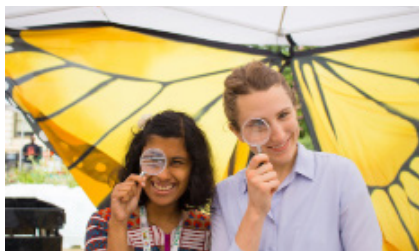
The Eastern Region has an amazing diversity of populations, landscapes, and stakeholders. This can be both a strength and a potential weakness. Through this effort, American Trails has identified the following:

Strengths:

- A strong push for hiring and staffing of personnel in Recreation, Trails, and Partnership/ Volunteer specialists across the region. This has included the conversion of seasonal positions to permanent appointments in the Trails program.
- A high level of partnership involvement at many field units and several very innovative partnership efforts to serve as models across the region.
- The Recreation Reimagined strategy which complements and reinforces the partnership elements of the Trail Challenge and brings additional resources to it.
- A strong atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation between USFS and partners. This allows open, respectful dialogue about issues, concerns, needs, and opportunities by all parties.
- The national Chief's Trails Advisory Group (TAG) has professionalized the workforce through creation of a job series for trails professionals.

Challenges

- **Capacity.** Staffing capacity has declined and limits the units' ability to capitalize on partnership and volunteer opportunities. This includes trails personnel and others needed to support program work, such as Recreation Planners, Volunteer & Partnership Coordinators, and Grants & Agreements specialists.
 - Both partners and USFS units struggle with capacity
- **Turnover.** USFS Staff turnover is detrimental to maintaining momentum on trail projects, ongoing relationships, and agreements.
- **Recruitment.** Many partners have difficulty recruiting new participants, struggle with retention, and may have aging issues.
- **Training.** in technical aspects of trail management and partnerships is needed for both staff and partners. Sometimes the partners can bring the expertise, sometimes it is USFS staff.
 - Partners would like more available training opportunities.
 - The Regional Office could be very helpful in developing training programs for partners and USFS staff.



Photos
Forest service photo by Kelly T. Chang
• Hoosier National Forest



Tools and Strategies to Improve Collective Workforce Capacity:

Forest Service Workforce Inventory

The purpose of the effort is to use a data driven model to create a starting point for discussing workforce needs and gaps. The process will articulate the current trail workforce, the workforce needed to complete trail management work, and identify capacity gaps. The analysis is designed to be used as a starting point for conversations and not as a budget tool.

Trail Skills Project

The Eastern Region continues to play a key role in developing and piloting the Trail Skills Project. Trail professionals generally acquire their skills through training provided by a network of trail organizations and on-the-ground experience. This serves many people well, but a clear, cohesive path of skill and professional development is lacking. At the same time, trail work often requires training and skill that is not consistently recognized.

With this context, in the past year, a group of nationwide trail professionals representing federal agencies, trail nonprofits, and the private sector initiated this project to develop the Trail Skills Project as a common trail training competency framework. American Trails, the coordinating organization, had identified the need for structure and methodological rigor in the approach and ultimately brought the opportunity to the attention of Indiana University's Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands. The result was a project focused on enhancing professionalism as well as a higher level of skill for those working in trails through shared language around trail skills and expertise.

The purpose of the Trail Skills Project is to codify a competency framework that would create opportunities to align, integrate, and coordinate trail trainings nationwide, communicate needs for technical trail expertise, and increase the overall skill level of the trails workforce.

This project envisions:

- A widely understood and agreed upon set of training core competencies to ensure consistency and quality of existing and future trainings, while allowing the flexibility for regional variations.
- Increased opportunities to connect trail volunteers, stewards, agency staff, and professionals.
- Increased opportunities for trail stewards and professionals to find and develop the trainings that will better serve our trails and public lands.
- Connecting stewards and professionals with the resources that support ongoing expertise in trail construction, maintenance, design, planning, management, advocacy, stewardship, and leadership.



Nonprofit Partner Insurance Program

Anticipated to be available to small, new, or emerging nonprofit trail stewardship organizations in September of 2023, this advancement in insurance availability is intended to solve a persistent problem of small trail organizations—being unable to find appropriate and affordable insurance for their volunteer trail stewardship activities.

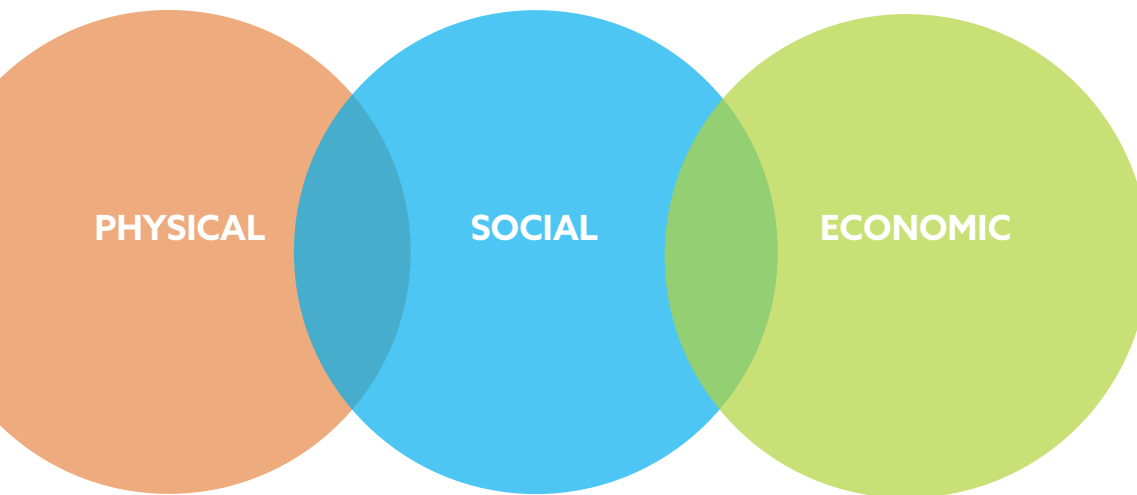
Historically, trail companies and stewardship organizations have not had a category that describes their insurance needs well. This lack of understanding of the industry has caused insurance agents and underwriter to put groups in varied and often expensive policies that don't represent the true liabilities of groups. Conservation United and American Trails have been working with a large insurance provider to better understand the trail building and maintenance world and to develop a policy program that:

- Covers the industry's unique liability exposures without over-reacting and over-charging.
- Creates a program that allows groups to find affordable insurance almost instantly, without a lengthy underwriting research effort. Generally, policies can be in place within two days.
- Creates policies that are much more affordable and practical for all volunteer organizations and professional companies alike.

We believe that this effort will solve some of the most pressing needs of small trail organizations. Contact American Trails for updates on the roll-out of this program in 2023.

GOAL

#2 Increase Trail Sustainability



Increasing sustainability of Eastern Region trails and trail systems means addressing the three spheres of sustainability: physical, social, and economic. Physically sustainable trails fit the landscape in such a way that there are minimal environmental impacts and maintenance requirements. Social sustainability means the trail is meeting the purposes for which it was built and is supported by the users and nonusers.

Economically sustainable trails and trail systems benefit the communities served and have the resources and means to maintain them to established standards over the long term.

Analysis of Existing Trails Program Findings:

The Eastern Region has over 17,000 miles of trails across a broad diversity of terrain and physical environments. These support the full range of recreational uses from hiking and backpacking, to equestrian, bicycle, and motorized vehicles during all seasons of the year. Many partner organizations and individual volunteers contribute to the ongoing care and maintenance of this trail system.

Even with the current level of focus and partnership involvement, only 25% of the trails in the Region are maintained to established standards (based on a 2013 GAO Report on [Forest Service Trails](#)).

On many units, data maintenance is not complete and some user groups desire expansion of the trail system. Yet there are many strengths to leverage to meet this goal of the Trail Challenge.

Strengths:

- A strong commitment at the National and Regional levels to advancing the trails program through the goals of the Trail Challenge. At the regional level this is evidenced by:
 - Involvement of the Director of Recreation, Trails Program Manager, Recreation Planner/Landscape Architect and the regional representatives to the National Trails Advisory Group and National Trails Board
 - The innovative agreement with American Trails to accelerate awareness of and involvement in the Trail Challenge among field units and partners
- **Economic development and community development** initiatives were highlighted at most meetings. The outdoor economy and tourism are on everyone's minds. Many examples of innovative approaches were provided.
- **Eastern Region Field Units are embedded in many rural communities** that are looking to outdoor recreation as a primary growth engine and a replacement for extractive industry.
- The Eastern Region has the second highest visitation density in the agency: One person per acre. This offers access to key partner and corporate headquarters and offices.
- **National Forests and the National Tallgrass Prairie in many cases offer the majority of public lands available** in the Region and can provide opportunities to connect long distance trails and offer remote experiences to residents.
- The Eastern Region tends to be less susceptible to annual **wildfire response impacting recreation staffing and resources**. However, the recreation program has a stake in addressing the wildfire crisis because recreation depends on the conservation of forests and intact environments. This Region is not part of (but can learn from) the 30% of Forest Service units that are priority landscapes to understand needed process improvements as related to wildfire response.
 - Opportunities to streamline grants and agreements, contracting, NEPA and HR processes which would benefit other program areas in the Region.
 - Integration with the wildfire strategy provides opportunities to strengthen relationships among partners and with tribal communities.



Photos
Ottawa National Forest
• Allegheny National Forest



Challenges:

- **A collective effort is needed to sustain the entire trail system on a unit.** While nearly all trail interests embrace the concept of sustainable trails, they tend to focus on those specific trails that meet their needs over sustainability of the system.
- **More Regional Office support or subregional coordination** may be needed to address trail assessments and plans, data management, and training for staff and partners.
- **Funding** is needed for partners as well as the USFS. Many of the groups can't keep up with all the funding opportunities, don't have the capacity to meet the requirements (GAOA, LWCF, LR&T), or don't have the time to go after the funding. Reliable streams of funding are needed to support planning, maintenance, and post-disaster rehabilitation.
- **Partnership and Grant Coordination is needed.**
 - USFS Partnership Coordinators are needed and have been identified as a priority for many units but hiring them and getting them on board and up to speed has been slow.
 - Regional and subregional partnership agreements need to be considered carefully. They have strong potential to streamline workload for both the USFS and partners but it's important to maintain local unit involvement and oversight of projects and relationships.
- **Climate change** is increasingly impacting public lands frequent extreme weather events as well as the impacts of insects and disease on forest health, wildlife, infrastructure, public health, and safety.
- **Landscape-level and cross boundary planning is increasingly required** in order to make the connections required to fully realize local and regional trail systems. Staffing and practices are seldom in place to address this need.
- Damage from flooding, erosion, wind, and extreme temperatures are likely to **impact infrastructure.**
 - Warmer temperatures could extend the period of recreation activities; water-based activities are likely to see an increased demand.
 - Increased site closures may be required to protect visitors and infrastructure from certain impacts of climate change.

Tools to Improve Physical Sustainability:

Slope Ratio Tool:

The Trail Challenge has a key metric to conduct assessments on all trails in the US Forest Service system. This is an excellent opportunity to engage partners in conducting assessments and validating the results. One emerging pilot that has the potential to provide support to both unit staff and partners in this area, is a new tool that has been developed by researchers at Virginia Tech called the Slope Ratio Tool. This tool will quickly provide a baseline assessment of all trails on Forest Service land. This initial assessment will then be ground-truthed by staff and partners to modify the initial assessment based on real world conditions. The result is intended to provide land managers with a tool to identify trails that are in need of attention in order to improve their overall physical sustainability.

A Slope Ratio is the Trail Grade as compared to the Landform Grade (slope ratio=trail grade/landform grade). When applied, a user gets results that range from 0 (side sloped trail) to 1 (fall line trail). Although there are many factors that go into trail sustainability, slope ratio as an indicator represents the most rapid way to geospatially compare large networks of naturally surfaced trails. It will require two inputs: a trail line shapefile and a digital elevation model. This tool will allow end users to view their network in segments based on predefined criteria for sustainability rooted in recent recreation ecology research.

Tools to Improve Social Sustainability:

STEW-MAP: The Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project Pilots

The [Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project \(STEW-MAP\)](#) is a research tool, community organizing approach, and partnership mapping platform developed by scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station that answers the question, “Who takes care of the local environment?” STEW-MAP provides insights that local government and civic groups can use to enhance the capacity of local trail stewardship activities. This tool can foster civic participation, increase neighborhood social cohesion, and support requests for funding and programming. A better understanding of trail stewardship in urban and rural areas can lead to less duplication of efforts and better coordination of land and resource management.

The data collected in STEW-MAP pilot studies produce a publicly available online tool that allows users to visualize and query data on a region’s civic trail and environmental stewardship resources. Scientists, planners, funders, and other civic stewards can use the data to better understand and support networks of stewards and help communities, governments, and nonprofits understand the social fabric of a landscape. STEW-MAP helps public land managers make more informed decisions with local partners in mind and can accelerate coordination, collaboration, and synergies across mixed ownerships and among diverse groups.

STEW-MAP can also help support agency aims around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as it was designed to identify active agents of change working in vulnerable communities, to acknowledge the work of informal and grassroots groups, and to extend potential partnerships “beyond the known knows”. It can also be used to identify “stewardship gaps” -- areas that are underserved by active trail stewardship and engagement.

STEW-MAP is currently being piloted in the Mark Twain National Forest in partnership with the St. Louis Urban Connections Office.

*Nordhouse Dunes, Lake Michigan
photo by Kristen Field*



Anonymized Mobility Data Analysis for Trails

American Trails, the Forest Service, and RS21, a data science company that uses artificial intelligence, are undertaking research to pilot test the efficacy of Anonymized User Data—data provided through cell phone use of people on trails—which will help to inform trails across the country. This effort is intended to result in a program that will allow trails of all types (especially those that cannot afford trail counters) to get access to the following types of insight into their users and potential benefits to trail management:

Trail Utilization - Understand trail use through visit and visitor analysis. Metrics include visits, occupancy, frequency, and duration of visits along with the visit density in different areas of the trail over time.

Amenities - Drill down into visit and visitor metrics for each amenity on the trail, such as trail heads, water bodies etc.

Social Equity - Estimate visitor demographics and determine if the trail is serving a population representative of the community. Identify and evaluate initiatives that promote equitable trail use.

Community Impact - Identify the impact a trail has on the nearby community by estimating the proportion of visitors by distance from the trail. Use mobility data to measure the economic contribution of trail visitors to nearby communities

Grants & Funding - Evaluate grant proposals based on the potential impact on visitors and the community. Use visitor metrics and community impact to bolster funding requests and proposals.

Event Analysis - Evaluate visitor metrics and trail occupancy during special events to judge their success. Identify mobility patterns during high occupancy periods and plan for future events.

Portfolio Analysis & Comparison - Perform periodic analysis of all trails in your portfolio. Compare your trail with another trail in a similar area. Compare impact of amenities of other trails on visitor metrics and justify their inclusion within your park

Visitor Analysis - Analyze visitors to your trail based on demographics, origin location areas, before and after visit locations, social vulnerability index, date and time of visit and more.

Before and After Analysis - Analyze trail visits before, during and after disruption events, such as COVID-19 and other events. Use the analysis to plan initiatives to implement.

Weather & Climate based impact analysis - Analyze and identify changes in park utilization due to seasonal weather patterns, specific weather events such as heatwaves, rain, and snowstorms. Use historical mobility data from 2019 onwards to map the impact of climate change on park and trail visits

The pilot study will last through 2023 with an intended usable product available to trails by the end of 2023.

Tools to Improve Economic Sustainability:

Conservation Financing Program

The Forest Service [Conservation Finance Program](#) is developing innovative finance models that engage private capital by creating investment opportunities that align environmental, social, and financial outcomes. Working with experience partners like [Quantified Ventures](#), this program has had proven success on the [Baileys Trail System](#) on the Wayne National Forest in Ohio.

Housed in the USDA Forest Service National Partnership Office, the Conservation Finance Program's mission is to increase and unlock new sources of funding and financing for agency priorities. While the Forest Service broadly defines conservation finance as the practice of raising, managing, and deploying capital for conservation outcomes, the program focuses on developing innovative finance models that engage private capital. This is done through models that set up return-driven investment opportunities that align environmental, social, and financial outcomes. These models support the USDA Secretary's Agriculture Innovation Agenda, which promotes innovative solutions designed to maximize results while ensuring accountability.

Legacy Trail Grant Program

The Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trail Remediation program (LRTP) was authorized and funded to direct work towards urgently needed road decommissioning, road and trail repair and maintenance, and removal of fish passage barriers. The program emphasizes areas where Forest Service roads may be contributing to water quality problems in streams and water bodies that support threatened, endangered, and sensitive species or community water sources.

The Forest Service has for the first time, set aside a portion of the larger LRTP funding to be awarded directly to partner organizations working cooperatively on Forest Service lands. American Trails has partnered with the Forest Service to roll out this funding as the new [Legacy Trails Program](#). This program is funded at \$1.5 million per year for five years.

The goal of this new program is to support trail projects that restore, protect, and maintain watersheds on our National Forests and National Tallgrass Prairies. American Trails is administering this grant program, and is annually soliciting applications for funding, with awards up to \$100,000 per project. This funding is intended to be awarded to nonprofit, State and local agencies, and for-profit companies that work as key partners of forest system units throughout the country.

Trail Funding Clearinghouse

American Trails and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy launched a joint effort to create a Trail Funding Clearinghouse covering existing trail funding opportunities for recreation trails within the Departments of Transportation, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and Defense. Research for this effort is underway by both organizations and will build upon the efforts of agencies like the [FHWA Funding Resources](#) spreadsheet and others to establish a user-friendly, updated, and ongoing source for Federal trail funding opportunities. Future iterations will include State, local, and foundation funding opportunities as well. This tool is intended to be available for partner use by late 2023.

Eastern Region Partnership Success Stories

Many success stories surfaced throughout the Launch and Learn process. Ten stories have been highlighted in this report to inform, inspire, and connect trails managers and their partners, as well as demonstrate the myriad ways to connect to the primary goals of the Trail Challenge. These stories are summarized in the table below and described in detail in the following section:

Success Stories	Trail Challenge Goal			Focus	
	INCREASE WORKFORCE CAPACITY	INCREASE TRAIL SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY			
		Physical	Social	Economic	
<i>Ozark Trail's Largest Maintenance Upgrade on Record</i>		✓		✓	<i>Leveraging the expertise of partners</i>
<i>Including "EveryBODY" in the Green Mountain National Forest</i>			✓	✓	<i>Looking to the future with diversity, equity, and inclusion</i>
<i>The Airport Becomes the Trailhead</i>			✓		<i>Community and Economic Development</i>
<i>Dropping the Jargon in Courting New Partners</i>		✓	✓		<i>Untraditional partnerships</i>
<i>Getting the Outdoor Industry to the Table in Michigan</i>				✓	<i>Planning and Partnership with Industry</i>
<i>A Conservation Finance Success Story in Southeast Ohio</i>			✓	✓	<i>Conservation Financing and Community Development</i>
<i>From Detroit to Syracuse: Next Gen Stewards Making a Difference</i>	✓		✓		<i>Looking to the future with diversity, equity, and inclusion</i>
<i>A Paradigm Shift in the Ottawa National Forest</i>			✓		<i>An inclusive effort to engage partners</i>
<i>Going the Distance with the Eastern Region's Longest Trails</i>	✓		✓		<i>Leveraging the expertise of partners</i>
<i>Monongahela National Forest Preparing for Visitors and the Outdoor Economy</i>	✓		✓	✓	<i>Community development and integration with USFS programs</i>

Ozark Trail's Largest Maintenance Upgrade on Record

In a typical year, the all-volunteer Ozark Trail Association (OTA) tends to 364 miles of multi-use trail within the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) on a modest \$13,000 budget. When their partners at the forest approached them in the fall of 2020, the OTA was asked whether they could handle an influx of funds made possible through the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). OTA's response to the request? OTA President Kathie Brennan said, "We told them, 'Give us two days and we'll come up with an action plan.'"

Ultimately, the OTA was awarded \$149,000 for the largest maintenance and upgrade project effort ever undertaken on the Ozark Trail. The OTA and the forest staff are working collaboratively on the multi-year improvement project. The OTA provides substantial volunteer assistance while planning, coordinating, and executing deferred maintenance projects in collaboration with forest staff. With goals for tread restoration, erosion control, and added signage to increase safety and accessibility, the project aligns well with the Trail Challenge.

In the first year alone, the OTA assessed and maintained 94.5 miles of the Ozark Trail. In addition to trail work consisting of 161 work days that brought out 172 volunteers, the OTA incorporated kiosk repairs, sign installations, and a "Trail Skills College" training. More than 60 people participated in the training at no cost. The program included crosscut saw training, ATV certification, tool maintenance, sawyer certification, and packstock training. More than 30 people received their sawyer certifications; another 20-25 people earned ATV certifications.

Together, the OTA and MTNF have been able to make the trail more sustainable, improve trail alignments, and steward areas that hadn't been improved in decades. They also report that users have observed the improvements to the trail, the ultimate end goal!



✓ Keys to Success

- A long-standing, high-trust relationship between the MTNF and the OTA positioned the forest to take advantage of the GAOA funding opportunity. Having an existing cost share agreement in place made it possible to mobilize quickly.
- Having a large volunteer base, as well as involving forest staff and AmeriCorps crews, enabled the OTA to maintain and assess 94.5 miles of trail in a single year. In all, the trail labor (volunteers, AmeriCorps, and staff) was valued at \$117,544.
- Incorporating additional training – thanks in part to partnerships with the L-A-D Foundation and the Backcountry Horsemen of Missouri – improved the overall volunteer capacity and set the stage for the next phase of the project.

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Photo: Courtesy of Ozark Trail Association

Including “EveryBODY” in the Green Mountain National Forest



Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports empowers people of all abilities through inclusive sports and recreation; they offer their services regardless of people’s ability to pay. This is how Jeff Alexander found himself in the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) one day sharing a heartfelt moment with a D.C. cyclist. The cyclist and his friend, both of whom use wheelchairs, had seen a photo of one of Vermont Adaptive’s mountain biking trips. They made the trip to Vermont and joined Jeff for a ride.

As Alexander tells it, “I’m in the woods with one of the guys and we pause for a few seconds and I’m like, ‘Are you alright man?’ He starts to well up a little bit and got me starting to well up.” The man went on to tell him that he hadn’t been deep in the woods since his accident. He thought he would never be able to experience that again.

Alexander added, “I hadn’t cried tears of joy in a long time. Everyone deserves to be deep in the woods.” This is the reason Vermont Adaptive does the work that it does, and the GMNF provides the ideal setting. Although not all trails are conducive to adaptive cycling, paddling, or hiking (Vermont Adaptive offers all three), the organization has partnered with the USFS and non-profit recreation organizations to assess and improve accessible opportunities. Vermont Adaptive takes on both smaller projects, such as retro-fitting trail bridges to allow for adaptive bike access in the Blueberry Lake trail network on the GMNF, and larger projects such as partnering to plan for new accessible features at four recreation sites on the Forest (funded through Senator Patrick Leahy’s Congressionally Directed Spending request).

“Bringing together the collective knowledge of many partner organizations has enabled the Forest Service to further our commitment towards expanding access to the outdoors for everybody,” said Alexander.

Vermont Adaptive’s partnership story expands statewide. When Alexander recounted the story about the two cyclists during a meeting with the Vermont Department of Tourism, they asked him to work with them on an accessible tourism initiative. Together, the organizations are creating accessible tourism videos to highlight Vermont’s outdoor playground. Through a partnership agreement with the USFS, additional footage was shot to highlight a success story featuring youth from the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community.

“We’re going to tell those stories,” Jeff promised. And beyond sharing these stories, they continue to be committed to partnering on infrastructure improvements. One such improvement is working with the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) and its 29 Chapters to assess the trails around the state and work together to make improvements. Aggregating the Accessible Biking Trails into the VMBA website will provide a solid resource so “everyBODY” has the opportunity to bike in Vermont.

✓ Keys to Success

- Having an inspirational and motivational story that rallies partners around a common cause, in this case accessible trails
- Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports having relationships with federal and state agency partners, creating an in-roads and pairing purpose with budgets and funding sources
- Working in a collective impact model with engagement among state and federal partners and other nonprofit partners such as the VMBA and Vermont Huts Association



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Photos: Courtesy of Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports

The Airport Becomes the Trailhead

You may have heard the term “the community becomes the trailhead” – the idea being that when trails are adjacent to communities, people can step out their front door and walk or ride to their local trails. In the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), the trail community has taken it a step further in the Bradford Ranger District. It’s here that ANF partnered with the Willow Creek Snowmobile Club to build the 11.4-mile Bradford Airport Snowmobile Connector Trail. Roughly three miles of the new trail is located within the forest, while the remainder traverses private properties.

The airport’s proximity to local communities has made it possible for residents to access the forest without driving there. Justin Woldt with the ANF has heard people say, “It’s the first time in 20 years we got to ride right from our house.” Not only this, but trailhead parking is limited in other locations. The airport trailhead offers nearly unlimited parking, on other access points.

Another benefit to this connection is that both locals and visitors have ready access to dining opportunities and, eventually, fuel. Obtaining food and fuel have traditionally been challenges for longer sled trips in and around the ANF. As for visitors, the ANF Visitors Bureau is already promoting the connection to out-of-town visitors. It markets low fare flights to nearby markets, and the ability for visitors to rent vehicles directly from the airport.

A trailhead need not be located at a location as epic as an airport. In the WNF, the village of Chauncey is utilizing its local park as a trailhead for the popular Baileys Trail System. The upshot is people planning to use the forest can begin their adventure from within the bounds of a gateway community. For this project, more than \$14 million in grant funds are being invested in the trail system and adjacent infrastructure, which includes installing restrooms, a pump track, shelter house, amphitheater, playground, sidewalks, and a connector trail to the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway, which ties into the cities of Athens and Nelsonville. The project also has attracted support from local impact investors and spurred local entrepreneurs to develop new ventures.

“The Chauncey-Dover Park has transformed from a small community park lacking accessible parking and restrooms to a bustling community center where residents and visitors alike make use of the trails and park facilities,” said Dawn McCarthy of the WNF, “The installation of the new pump track has been a really popular feature with the kids, and we are also seeing new businesses investing in Chauncey.”

Whether at your local airport or a location more central to your community, thinking creatively about where people can access trails is bound to result in trail use taking flight.

✓ Keys to Success

- The Willow Creek Snowmobile Club secured permission for the trail from multiple private landowners along the route prior to the forest agreeing to the connector trail on public land. Additionally, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation approved “snowmobile crossing” sign requests from two local municipalities. The project included cooperation by state and federal agencies, local municipalities, private landowners, and a nonprofit trail organization.
- The entire route utilizes existing roads and an old railroad grade, requiring no new construction.
- With the trail complete, the ANF Visitors Bureau is marketing the trail as an asset, one that can be reached directly from the regional airport.
- For the Chauncey-Dover Park trailhead, a willing community that was eager to embrace outdoor recreation resulted in successful grant applications for transforming a community park to a regional asset. Including amenities like restrooms and a pump track has improved the quality of life of area residents.

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Photos: Courtesy of Willow Creek Snowmobile Club

Dropping the Jargon in Courting New Partners

National Forests and Grasslands tend to have strong partnerships with organizations that help to build and maintain trails, employ service corps, and the like. These are the kinds of longtime partners that attended meetings held during the Eastern Region's Launch and Learn phase.

Sometimes, though, other sorts of partners took part. Tourism organizations, community colleges, economic development agencies, and municipal employees brought fresh perspectives to the conversation. One such instance was when an employee of the American Association of Retired Persons attended the MTNF partner meeting. Sheila Holm with the St. Louis chapter offered someone honest feedback, stating that trail world jargon and acronyms were difficult to follow. She ever so kindly shared that she had to look up a lot of acronyms during the meeting and that speaking in plain language will bring more people to the table – and keep them there. It was the kind of reminder that the trails community certainly can use. If we invite a broader mix of prospective partners to the conversation and thoughtfully include them in the conversation, any outcome might be possible.

In the case of the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) meeting, Holm shared that AARP St. Louis operates a Trail TrekkersSM program in which participants explore a different trail each month. The program encourages trail use, physical activity, and socialization among older adults, something that others in the meeting seemed to be unaware of. Holm also proposed the possibility of her chapter adopting a trail and covering fuel and other costs for her volunteers. There's a great partnership in the making at the MTNF because one person showed up, leveled the conversation, and offered a resource. As Holm put it, "You must speak up to open doors."

✓ Keys to Success

- Eastern Region field units are broadening how they think about their partnership needs and potential partners
- Facilitating jargon-free conversations that are not overly focused on the technical aspects of trails when possible
- In the case of the budding partnership between the MTNF and AARP, one person showing up, speaking up, and offering resources In addition to the Trail TrekkersSM program, AARP manages the AARP's Community Challenge grant.

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Photo: Daniel Schwen



Getting the Outdoor Industry to the Table in Michigan

Not all states have State Offices of Outdoor Recreation. And among those that do, there isn't always a working relationship between the office and public land managers. In Michigan, however, a strong relationship brings value to all the parties.

When planning a Trail Challenge partner meeting with the Huron-Manistee National Forest (HMNF), Kristen Thrall of HMNF suggested inviting Brad Garmon of the Michigan Outdoor Recreation Industry Office to give a presentation. This was a thrilling proposition to the project team, as it would represent the only time in a series of 13 meetings across the region that an outdoor recreation office would be present – and presenting.

Created in 2019 through a memorandum of understanding between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, the outdoor industry office works to expand the state's outdoor recreation economy. The office also promotes outdoor recreation activities and creates support for the stewardship of Michigan's natural resources. Hearing from this office would be informative being that "shared stewardship" is one of the key components of the Trail Challenge.

As we learned from Garmon, state-level decisions are driven by planning, data, and relationships. For example, early in the pandemic, having established relationships in place made it easier for his office and affected public land managers to navigate policy decisions that would impact on-the-ground management. Strong relationships also resulted in more robust planning processes. Garmon was invited to take part in planning for the Huron-Manistee's 2021 Sustainable Recreation Plan. And he, in turn, engaged the Huron-Manistee (and others) as his office led Michigan's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan update.

"The more relationships we have, the more communication we have in this space, and the more planning processes we can weave together, the more successful they're going to be," said Garmon. He considers the staff at all three of Michigan's national forests as leaders and thought partners. And while the solutions may be complex, the starting point often is not.

"At the end of the day, it's about planning and relationships and knowing each other well enough to pick up the phone," he said.

✓ Keys to Success

- State agencies collaborating to create an outdoor recreation industry office, one of just 17 in the country. While the Michigan Department of Natural Resources houses the office, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation worked with them to establish it. Michigan DNR's close involvement with the national forests is another example of effective collaborations.
- Forest staff as well as National Park Service Recreation Trails and Conservation Assistance program staff reaching out to initiate a relationship with the new office.
- Weaving planning processes together and leaning in on relationships.

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Photo: MI-TRALE



A Conservation Finance Success Story in Southeast Ohio



The USFS utilizes the “conservation finance” model to advance its conservation goals. Conservation financing attracts private capital by setting up return-driven investment opportunities that align with environmental, social, and financial outcomes. In simple terms, conservation finance supports competitive projects designed for social good.

One place conservation financing has been particularly effective is in southeast Ohio, where the Wayne National Forest and its partners put the model to work to build the Baileys Trail System and related investments. Envisioned as a 90-mile system of mountain bike trails upon completion, it would become the longest contiguous mountain bike trail system east of the Mississippi River. Currently, the Baileys include 49 miles of completed trail and another seven under contract for completion. The system adds to southeast Ohio’s vast network of trails and, importantly, has introduced beginner level trails to the mix. Located on a 9,000-acre wooded parcel, 18 percent of the total system is designed for beginners.

Such a massive trail system requires vision, funding, and supporting infrastructure. In 2017, the WNF successfully competed to be the Forest Service’s conservation financing pilot for recreation. The USFS’s National Partnership Office, in partnership with the National Forest Foundation, contracted with the firm Quantified Ventures to complete a feasibility analysis for the Baileys. More than just a financing package, the project included everything from the initial feasibility analysis to capacity building, strategic planning, and fund development.

Out of this planning grew the Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia (ORCA), a council of governments (COG) that manages the Baileys Trail System and envisions managing recreation across boundaries throughout Appalachian Ohio. ORCA hired an executive director, Jessie Powers, in 2020 to seek funding and manage development and operations in coordination with a multi-sector advisory board. Powers also operates a nonprofit partner organization to deliver economic, health, social, and environmental benefits to COG member jurisdictions and their residents. The nonprofit arm captures revenue through grants, donations, voluntary membership, private impact investments, and social enterprises, like mountain bike rentals. The mountain bike fleet and maintenance tools will benefit the community by offering rental discounts to area residents and free community bike maintenance trainings at the trailhead. Bike rentals also enhance the visitor experience while capturing visitor spending to reinvest in operations maintenance and development.

“Conservation finance provides a critical need to rural communities, with outcomes that align with rural development and asset-based economic diversification best practices,” said Powers. It’s a tool that can be used by rural communities across the country. Powers added, “ORCA fills a regional capacity gap by focusing on recreation asset development and enhancement. ORCA utilizes a holistic approach to sustainable development and is able to tailor assistance for communities to plan, seek funding, maintain, and promote their outdoor recreation opportunities.”

ORCA’s aim is to diversify and stimulate southeast Ohio’s economy, leveraging a regional asset (the trail system) to attract targeted investment that builds local wealth. ORCA has received funding to develop a 5,000 square foot visitor facility that would include a turnkey restaurant available for immediate occupation. This is just one example of how new trails can spur other development that enhances both the visitor experience and local quality of life. This is a success story in progress, one that is expected to unlock economic opportunities while also deepening community connections to trails.

Keys to Success

- Leadership at the WNF embracing innovation, a culture of risk-taking, dedicated staff, and shared decision making through the conservation financing approach. This high level of collaborative planning and shared decision-making with local communities is why The Baileys project stands out in a crowd. A ready-to-go program (Conservation Finance) operated through the National Partnership Office made it possible for changemakers in southeast Ohio to pursue the Baileys as an investment that could help transform rural Appalachian Ohio. An external feasibility analysis and business planning validated the predicted/intended project outcomes.
- Being mindful of all (economic, social, health, environmental) the benefits of their project and the partners that could collaborate to maximize grant funding to support the project overall, not only the priorities of any one organization. Ensuring as many individuals as possible, agencies, communities, the state, and leaders benefit from the project’s success made for a project that was embraced by many.
- Citizens engaging with the government by advocating for proactive solutions in a persistent poverty county. The Baileys Trail System project started with citizens and quickly evolved to include government staff and stakeholder agency partners in strategic planning.
- Creating a new COG, ORCA, that would work across boundaries in tandem with multiple sector advisory board, a nonprofit, and the WNF.

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Photo: Doanville Trailhead Dedication, courtesy of Jasmine Facun

From Detroit to Syracuse: Next Gen Stewards Making a Difference

YouthWork Industries is a program of Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan. As a social services nonprofit, YouthWork primarily serves youth in foster care as well as those who have aged out of foster care. The organization is a member of The Corps Network and has well over 100 partnerships around the state. Among those partners are the Ottawa, Huron-Manistee, and Hiawatha national forests, where YouthWork corps help to improve trails, create re-routes, and build new trails.

In 2021, YouthWork took steps to expand the youth audience it serves. Being located in northern Michigan, they have traditionally served rural, white youth from low-income families. To diversify their participants and expose other teens to the trails of northern Michigan, YouthWork partnered with SER Metro-Detroit on a “youth exchange.” Some of YouthWork local members went to serve on Detroit-area service projects, while Detroit teens served on crews in the national forests. The partners continued the partnership in 2022, with 24 participants taking part in the exchange.

The forests support the initiative by providing accomplishable projects, equipment, staff interaction, and technical direction. Bill Watson of YouthWork says of the program, “In many ways we’re a workforce development program, but in addition to that, we are a social justice program creating opportunities for disenfranchised youth to serve together in each other’s community. The goal is to prepare students for careers in conservation.” With three national forests in Michigan, conservation careers are a real possibility for program participants.

Engaging the next generation of stewards continues beyond high school. A few hundred miles east in New York a few years ago, the trails program staff at the Finger Lakes National Forest reached out to the Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) to forge a youth-involved partnership. The USFS employees, graduates of FLCC’s Environmental Conservation degree programs, believed that current students would have a lot to offer to the forest while also gaining valuable hands-on experience.

As FLCC professor Maura Sullivan explained it, “It was an overall ‘win-win’ from my perspective: the forest got a lot of work done with students who were super eager to gain experience. They got paid \$13.50 an hour and were ecstatic to get that experience.” Two FLCC students completed summer internships in 2021 and went on to be hired as seasonal technicians and are applying to further their education in the natural resources field. Another student participated in the program in 2022 and gained a variety of experience in trails stewardship and recreation management.

Both the YouthWork program in Michigan and the internships in the Finger Lakes create much needed in-roads to the USFS and the trails it stewards. Sullivan noted that there had been a lot of logistics to figure out in reaching agreement with the forest, but now that they’ve gotten through it, the potential is limitless. Having two interns advance to seasonal employment is just the beginning.



✓ Keys to Success

- For the YouthWork program, the exchange exposes urban youth to the forests, and rural youth to city neighborhoods. The exchange aspect makes the program more impactful than if just one group of youth were sent to work in an unfamiliar area. The program brings diverse youth together to serve on a common goal for their community and the communities of others. The program breaks down stereotypes for both urban and rural youth and creates conversations and friendships between them.
- For the professionals initiate a partnership enabled the forest and the college to design a program that would benefit both partners. A thoughtfully designed program exposed students to a diversity of skills and real career pathways that resulted in their placement in seasonal tech positions.

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Photo: Courtesy of YouthWork

A Paradigm Shift in the Ottawa National Forest

Working with Partners New and Old to Make it Happen

Talk with Spring Rosales of the Ottawa National Forest (ONF) and you will quickly learn that she envisions a future in which the Recreation programs within the National Forest system operate in service of surrounding communities. Each unit would add socioeconomic value to its region, working in support of larger objectives that are values-based and public-informed. Spring is talking about a paradigm shift.

She recounts a story about how the ONF's trail inventory skyrocketed from 400 miles to 2,400 miles of trails "overnight" when some closed roads were converted to trails and opened to ATVs in 2007. An understandably overwhelmed staff was not easily able to manage all the new trails. Spring observes that the ONF wasn't able to serve the broader community in the way that she had hoped. This is beginning to change. She shared that Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) funds and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law have allowed the forest to "put some skin in the game." The ONF started to develop an external engagement plan in 2022.

Spring also recognizes the importance of involving emergent groups and unexpected partners. When your eyes are set on affecting socio-economic change, the partners become more diverse than with typical trail groups. "The groups involved make trails more meaningful in how they are used," she said, adding, "We're trying to figure out how to build our own patchwork quilt here." Part of that patchwork involves hunter walking trails, used by local tribes and others to access hunting spots. Maintaining the trails hasn't always been a priority regionally, but doing so is an important part of stewarding public land in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

While new partners are being invited to collaborate with the ONF, some long-standing partners continue to make a difference. One of those is MI-TRALE, which formed in 2001 to bring together motorized and non-motorized trail enthusiasts to responsibly build trails in Michigan's Western Upper Peninsula. MI-TRALE's story demonstrates that a single project can create momentum and lead to all sorts of successes. Club Secretary and Trail Manager Linda Schulz said, "We started out just hoping to get one trail through the Ottawa National Forest and now we care for hundreds of trail miles that are designated with the state of Michigan. It makes us take a big step back and think, 'Wow, look at what we've done on the forest!'"

Linda added, "We've got this great partnership now and we have this amazing trail system." She said that when they ask the Ottawa questions the unit is always responsive. In turn, the Ottawa staff approaches MI-TRALE for feedback on trail plans. A forest once saddled by overwhelm is heading closer and closer to the sought-after paradigm shift.

Keys to Success

- The forest's willingness to change how it partners and developing an engagement plan that will operationalize this gives the ONF a jumpstart in pursuing paradigm shift. Working in service of the larger region is a key component and guiding principle.
- MI-TRALE built momentum early with a single success and has continued to manage more and more trails. A club of 300 people consists of primarily motorized users, but has grown to include paddlers, equestrian, and bicyclists. Their current free map app (Michigan UP Trails) has detailed trails for all trail users.
- Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds have enabled the ONF to fund projects that are important to its trails program – and to the community. One example of how the GAOA funds have been used was hiring the Great Lakes Climate Corps to work on deferred maintenance on the North Country Trail. The goal of bringing the trail back up to standard aligns with the Trail Challenge. "The Ottawa really went out of their way to go after the GAOA funds and on really

Going the Distance with the Eastern Region's Longest Trails

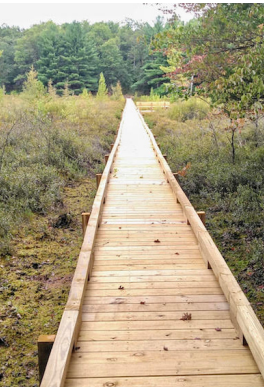
National forests and long-distance trails often share in a symbiotic relationship. The trails provide ribbons of opportunities to engage with the outdoors, while the forests offer large swaths of protected public land. The scenery offered within the bounds of the forests adds significantly to the trail experience. It's the partnership of all partnerships.

The nonprofits that manage the trails work closely with the field units through which the trails pass. They tend to have a skilled staff, strongly functioning local chapters, and well-trained volunteers, resulting in mutually beneficial professional relationships. This is the case for the North Country National Scenic Trail, which passes through EIGHT Eastern Region forests, one of them being the WNF. Focused on the WNF, a volunteer trail builder offered this keen insight: it's important to create an environment in which the USFS views partners as "part of the workforce regardless of which uniform they are wearing." He was speaking of a shared stewardship approach to caring for trails.

Continuing with the North Country Trail example, the nonprofit North Country Trail Association's strong trail management and volunteer training program has demonstrated the kind of increased collective capacity – no matter which uniform someone is wearing – that the Trail Challenge calls for. One place in which that strong staff and volunteer workforce has made a difference is in the HMNF, eliminated a dangerous on-road section. A 3.17-mile re-route of the Echo Drive section allowed the trail at this location to remain on forest land and resulted in 57 miles of contiguous trail.

Back in Ohio, the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) works with the WNF to build, maintain, and relocate portions of trail. One big success for the BTA was partnering with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to apply for a \$2.4 million Abandoned Mine Lands grant that enabled them to complete the Buckeye Trail through the Athens Unit of the forest. This spurred other trail connections, resulting in a 100-mile connected trail network. Andrew Bashaw, Executive Director of the BTA, attributes these big wins to "60 years of working with the chapters and crews. They were even able to leverage this long-standing partnership to help the village of Shawnee build a half-mile trail around a local lake. BTA got the WNF on board, raised the funds, and managed the project.

Other long-distance trails within the Eastern Region include the Ozark Trail, Allegheny Trail, Ice Age Trail, the Long Trail, and Appalachian Trail – all of their nonprofit trail organizations working closely with local field units to ensure improved trail experiences.



Keys to Success

- Relationships built upon a foundation of professionalism, trust, and respect enable the nonprofits and the field units to approach trail maintenance in a collaborative, solutions-oriented manner.
- For the North Country Trail Echo Drive re-route, NCTA obtained a Michigan Department of Natural Resources grant as well as a private grant to support planning and construction. The funds supported the cost of a USFS engineer's time to build two specialized boardwalks through sensitive wetlands as well as the cost of materials and USFS staff time during the construction phase. Staff, volunteers, and youth conservation crews came together to construct the new trail.
- For the Buckeye Trail projects, Andrew Bashaw said, "Signing a cost share agreement with the Wayne National Forest paved the way for a lot of this partnership." A long-standing partnership, strong grant writing, and a formal agreement enabled them to achieve what local groups could not on their own.

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Photo: Echo Drive section of the North Country Trail in HMNF, courtesy of Kenny Wawsczyk

Monongahela National Forest Preparing for Visitors and the Outdoor Economy

Recognizing that a successful recreation economy depends on quality trail experiences, the Monongahela National Forest (MNF) works closely with its partners on trail improvements and visitor readiness. In the Gauley Ranger District, for example, the forest partners with the Monongahela Outdoor Volunteers (MOV), which recently used an Appalachian Regional Commission grant to plan for development of a volunteer program. Brenda Korte of MOV says having a skilled, knowledgeable, and motivated volunteer base is a critical element in sustaining trail-based recreation. Not only would MOV's new program focus on preparing trails for visitors, but it would also work to prepare local communities for the transition to a local outdoor economy. MOV's business plan includes a Volunteers-to-Careers program that would train participants on a variety of skills needed to support a thriving outdoor economy.



Talk to Korte and she can run down a list of recent accomplishments. They worked with ranger district staff to complete a trail bridge and structure inventory, using the USFS's structure identification conventions and template for gathering basic trail bridge data. They're working with the district to identify needed connectors and re-routes. They even hosted a series of volunteer outings to test the potential of local volunteerism in the MNF. Korte says that MOV has felt the support of the Gauley District staff, saying, "A high-level theme of our collaboration was working together jointly to provide comprehensive trail maintenance across all seasons with the goal of delivering a consistently positive trail user experience." She added that for remote areas to be competitive, they have to deliver a consistently positive trail user experience.

Preserving wilderness character is one way of providing a positive experience. That's why the MNF has been collaborating with the Southern Appalachia Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) to preserve wilderness character within the forest. SAWS is a nonprofit that works with various agencies and forests to preserve wilderness character (an outcome of the Wilderness Act of 1964). In 2021, SAWS completed its wilderness monitoring in eight wilderness areas within the MNF.

Elsewhere in the MNF, the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association (WVSTA) has been deepening its longtime relationship with the forest. WVSTA President, Jeff Byard, reports that their group rehabbed a number of shelters and bridges along the Allegheny Trail in 2022, an outcome of developing a 10-year plan focused on improving trail amenities. MNF staff worked with the group to offer sawyer trainings, resulting in having eight volunteers with sawyer certifications. Byard says that continually showing up as a reliable partner allowed WVSTA to deepen its relationship with the forest. The MNF, as a result, is approving volunteer projects that "had been only a wish for so many years."

On the community front, the Monongahela Forest Towns Partnership recognizes and promotes communities near and within the forest. It's the first program of its kind within the national forest system, linking multiple gateway communities that share the forest as a primary asset. The partnership is supported by Woodlands Development & Lending, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). As a CDFI, Woodlands is able to operate the Mon Forest Business Initiative, which offers business coaching and funding assistance.

In collectively pursuing the benefits of the outdoor recreation economy – while also tending to trail quality and wilderness character – the communities of the MNF are linking community vibrancy and quality trail experiences.

✓ Keys to Success

- MOV secured an Appalachian Regional Commission's technical assistance grant and was able to do so through a fiscal agent, the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area. That grant source enabled MOV to plan for development of a structured volunteer program. As for the bridge and structure inventory, MOV used the USFS's tools for gathering basic trail bridge data, resulting in an inventory that identifies which structures are most in need of attention.
- The Wilderness Act of 1964 positions federal agencies to work with partners like SAWS to preserve wilderness character. Specifically, the Wilderness Character Monitoring Program, a nation-wide, multi-agency initiative, provided an avenue for the MON to work with SAWS.
- For the WVSTA, improving their own reliability as a partner organization has resulted in a stronger partnership with the MNF and more approved projects within the forest bounds. They recommend that other trail groups commit to hosting volunteer events – no matter how many people show up – and stay committed to projects. Basically, stay the course and trusting relationships will follow.
- The Mon Forest Towns initiative was able to look at a number of existing "trail town" and "gateway community" models in designing their program. Like the first known trail town initiative (on the Great Allegheny Passage), Mon Forest Towns is hosted by CDFI (Woodlands), which offers startup and business expansion loans within the communities.

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Photo: Glady Fork Shelter along the Allegheny Trail, courtesy of Jeff Byard

In Conclusion

The Trail Challenge has presented, and continues to present, an amazing opportunity to engage partners across the Region in accomplishing a very clear set of goals and objectives. This project has explored the challenges and opportunities that Forest Service Staff and partners see before them, identified existing and future tools that can be used to address our challenges, and inspired local action through a wide variety of success stories spanning the Region. This report is only the beginning. Act now and engage with local forest staff and partners to build the relationships that are necessary to collectively address the goals of the Trail Challenge. We have the tools we need to make this happen. All it takes is dedicated and ongoing communication and a willingness to partner. Thanks to all of you for your time and energy in making this report and our collective future efforts successful!

Glossary of Terms

Accessibility: A facility is defined as accessible if it was in compliance with accessibility guidelines or standards when it was built or altered. The Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) apply to new or altered trails that are designed for pedestrian hiking and which connect directly to a trailhead or to another trail that currently complies with these guidelines. The goal is to maximize accessibility while not changing the character or experience of the trail setting.

Appalachian Regional Commission: The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a United States federal–state partnership that works with the people of Appalachia to create opportunities for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life. Congress established ARC in 1965 to bring the region into socioeconomic parity with the rest of the nation.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) was signed in 2021. Among other investments, the BIL provides funds to restore, prepare, or adapt recreation sites where visitation demands are impacting safety, environment, and the visitor experience. The BIL authorizes the USFS to receive a one-time total of \$35 million as Recreation Site funding and \$20 million as Cabin funding, with additional funding in future years.

Capacity: Ability to accomplish something. May be limited by time, staffing, funding, and/or the availability of other resources.

Community Development Financial Institution: A Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) is a lender with a mission to provide fair, responsible financing to rural, urban, Native, and other communities that mainstream finance does not traditionally reach. CDFIs specialize in lending to individuals, organizations, and businesses in under-resourced communities, offering clients financial education, business coaching, and low-interest rate loans intended to increase economic potential and build wealth.

Conservation Service Corps: Service corps programs facilitate skills-based national service through organized short- or long-term volunteer opportunities, typically as part of a project team. The Forest Service and other Federal agencies collaborate with nonprofit partners such as the Corps Network and ServiceCorps™ to create service opportunities. In turn, participants earn Public Land Corps (PLC) noncompetitive hiring authority. Job Corps, Youth Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps are the most known programs.

Conservation Finance: Housed in the USDA Forest Service National Partnership Office, the Conservation Finance Program's mission is to increase and unlock new sources of funding and financing for agency priorities. While the Forest Service broadly defines conservation finance as the practice of raising, managing, and deploying capital for conservation outcomes, the program focuses on developing innovative finance models that engage private capital. This is done through models that set up return-driven investment opportunities that align environmental, social, and financial outcomes. These models support the USDA Secretary's Agriculture Innovation Agenda, which promotes innovative solutions designed to maximize results while ensuring accountability.

Challenge Cost-Share Agreement (CCS): Authorized through the Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriation Act of 1992, Pub. L. 102-154, a CCS is a partnership agreement that is used when there is mutual interest, mutual benefit and cost sharing. The USFS cooperatively develops, plans, and implements a project with a cooperater that is mutually beneficial and enhances USFS activities. Recipients are required to provide matching funds, labor, materials, equipment, or parcels of land and water of not less than 20 percent of the project value. Related forms of partnership agreements utilized by the Forest Service for trail projects include Cooperative Agreements and Volunteers Agreements. A concise overview of partnership agreements can be found at [prc-agreement-instruments_0.pdf](#) ([usda.gov](#)).

Councils of Governments (COG): Councils of Governments (COGs) are voluntary associations that represent member local governments that seek to provide cooperative planning, coordination, and technical assistance on issues of mutual concern that cross jurisdictional lines.

Deferred maintenance: Maintenance that was not performed when it should have been or when it was scheduled and was put off or delayed for a future period. Deferred trail maintenance includes repair, replacement, and decommissioning.

Field Units (National Forests and National Tallgrass Prairies and their Ranger Districts): The Forest Service organizations directly responsible for the management of the National Forests and Grasslands and their associated public services. The 154 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands and their 559 Ranger Districts throughout the United States and Puerto Rico are regarded as field units. Special management areas such as National Recreation Areas, National Monuments under the Forest Service jurisdiction, and Wilderness areas are also managed under the national forest/ranger district structure.

Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA): Enacted into law on August 4, 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) continues to provide new opportunities for the USDA Forest Service to deliver benefits to the American public through major investments in infrastructure, recreation facilities, public lands access, and land and water conservation. The GAOA has two components: (1) establishment of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) and funded it for five years to address the maintenance backlog for five land management agencies (USDA Forest Service, National Parks Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Education) in fiscal years 2021-2025, and (2) permanent full funding of the Land and Water Conservation fund (LCWF) which provides for federal land acquisition and Forest Legacy grants to states under existing programs. These investments in Forest Service infrastructure, recreation facilities, and public lands access demonstrate the agency's commitment to caring for the land and serving people.

Infra database for Trails, Trail Bridges, and Access and Travel Management: The agency's containing data for all National Forest System trails, trail bridges, and designed, allowed and prohibited uses.

Line officers: Forest Service employees who have legal responsibility and decision-making authority for their unit. The Forest Service has four levels of organization, each with a line officer: The Chief for the entire agency, Regional Foresters for each of the nine Forest Service regions, Forest or Grassland Supervisors for the National Forests and Grasslands, and District Rangers for the Ranger Districts. The line officers at each level oversee and direct the work of their professional and technical staffs and have primary public engagement responsibilities.

National leaders (Forest Service): Washington Office leadership includes the executive leadership of the Chief and staff, as well as the Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources program.

National Forests and Grasslands: The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of public lands established as a system of 154 national forests, 20 national grasslands and one tallgrass prairie for the public good. The Forest Service Eastern Region consists of 17 National Forests and one National Tallgrass Prairie.

National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program: The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) assists communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. RTCA staff are located throughout the country working on community assistance projects.

National Partnership Office: The National Partnership Office (NPO) of the USFS helps to build capacity and communities of practice on engaging in public-private partnerships across the agency. They also work to cultivate national-level partnerships with the private sector for the benefit of the agency. Finally, the staff work to empower and enable a culture of innovation to help the Forest Service achieve its mission and serve its various stakeholders, and work to augment the agency's relationships with citizens, communities, non-governmental organizations, and others.

National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System: The agency's strategic plan about trails published in 2017. The plan describes 26 actions for the agency to take with partners and volunteers to achieve a more sustainable trail system.

National Trail Board: A group of Forest Service trail leaders made up of regional trail program leads, Forest Service Washington Office staff, and liaisons from other programs (including National Scenic and Historic Trail Administrators group, the Trails Advisory Group, and regional office recreation directors).

New trails: Newly constructed routes or adopted portions of unauthorized or user-created routes that are officially added to the National Forest System.

Partner: Typically refers to groups, organizations, Indian Tribes, and other Federal agencies with a formal relationship with the Forest Service, such as through a signed agreement other than a general volunteer agreement.

Pumptrack: A pumptrack is a circular loop consisting of rollers and berms, that when ridden correctly, requires no pedaling or pushing. Typical surfaces include dirt, wood, concrete, and fiberglass. People take bikes, scooters, skateboards, and rollerblades onto pumptracks.

Regional leaders (Forest Service): Includes regional office foresters and staff, including recreation directors and the trail program lead from each of the Forest Service's nine administrative regions.

Reporting: Entering accomplishment data into official databases about annual activities.

Shared stewardship: A management model where the Forest Service shifts to be an integrated part of a community of stewards who are supporting and receiving shared benefits from trails.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP): A SCORP is a five year strategic planning document that directs state and local investment in priority outdoor recreation. All 50 states have a SCORP, which is required for grant eligibility through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

State Offices of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism: Some states manage Offices of Outdoor Recreation and tourism, which work to bolster the outdoor recreation economy; promote outdoor recreation, health, and wellness; ensure conservation and stewardship of public lands and waters; and more. Some state offices serve as a point of contact to businesses within the outdoor recreation industry, working to encourage further growth within the outdoor economy.

Sustainable trail: A trail that is well-designed, well-maintained, and well suited to support recreation use today and into the future.

Sustainable trail system: A network of trails that are well-designed, well-maintained, and well suited to support recreation use today and into the future. Sustainable trail systems are well managed and could cross unit and jurisdictional boundaries, such as with other Forest Service units, other agencies, Tribal organizations, and municipalities.

Trail (National Forest System trail): A trail identified in the Forest Service official database of record (Infra) that is wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System and that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of National Forest System lands and the use and development of its resources.

Trail community: The general group of employees, partners, and volunteers who give to or receive benefits from trails. These include Forest Service employees, partners and volunteers, other Federal agencies, Indian Tribes, State governments, communities, academia, organizations engaging people of color, youth, and veterans, and businesses that benefit from trails and outdoor recreation. Visit the Administrative and Legal Information website for details about partnering with the Forest Service, also available at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/working-with-us/partnerships/legal-administrative-information>.

Trail data publishing: The process of entering tabular and spatial data into the Forest Service's Enterprise Data Warehouse database. This database populates the agency's websites pertaining to National Forest System trails. Trail information within the database is categorized by the level or specificity of data recorded.

Centerline: Trail name, number, centerline location, and length. • Basic: "Centerline" attributes, plus general descriptive information (e.g., accessibility status, trail class, and typical trail surface). • Management: "Centerline" and "basic" attributes, plus how the trail is managed, as well as allowable and prohibited trail uses (e.g., mountain bikes, horses, and off-highway vehicles).

Trails Advisory Group: A chartered national advisory group made up of nine Forest Service trail professionals and technicians and a liaison from the National Trail Program. Members help communicate within and between Forest Service administrative regions, the Washington Office, and the broader trail community about emerging trail issues, recommendations, and trends.

Trail Towns and Gateway Communities: A Trail Town is a community through which a trail passes that supports trail users with services, promotes the trail to its residents, and embraces the trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated. Similarly, gateway communities are located near trails, forests, and other public lands and share a relationship with those assets. A community may have been officially designated a "Trail Town" or "Gateway Community," or it may simply espouse the characteristics of an outdoor-oriented community.

Training and Certification: In trail management the use of specialized equipment including chainsaws, crosscut saws, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, and other mechanical tools requires training and certification. Training emphasizes efficient use, maintenance procedures, and safety practices.

Unauthorized trail or route: An unauthorized and unplanned linear route that has been created by the consistent use of trail users or by unauthorized construction (also known as a "social trail").

Underserved communities: Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Volunteer: Individuals and groups with varying levels of skills and abilities. They contribute by conducting maintenance and construction activities and helping to plan and coordinate activities. VS Reports: The agency's official database that records volunteer and partner hours and activities.

The Wilderness Act (and "wilderness character"): Passed in 1964, The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System, which protects more than 100 million acres of wilderness. The landmark legislation provided the means to protect unspoiled natural areas. The Act mandates the preservation of wilderness character in designated Wilderness Areas. Wilderness character is defined as having sufficient size, naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation.

Washington Office: The Washington Office, often referred to as the "WO," is the national headquarters of the USFS. National level staff are located in this office. Similar abbreviations used within the USFS are "RO" (Regional Office) and "SO" (Supervisor's Office within a single field unit).



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



HELP US GROW

The 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge is not possible without you. To learn the many ways you can help us continue to create partnerships, increased capacity, and forge more sustainable trails, contact kristen.thrall@usda.gov



Photos

Chippewa National Forest, photos by Melissa Rickers.

• Leon LaVigne, photo by Kristen Thrall • Owl, Midewin, photo courtesy Mark Korosa