



# The Long Trail Back:

## The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, Three Years On

**International Trails Symposium**

**May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019**



Randy Rasmussen



We Keep Trails  
Open for You

Randy Welsh



Building a Wilderness  
Stewardship Community

Paul Sanford



We protect wilderness and inspire  
Americans to care for wild places

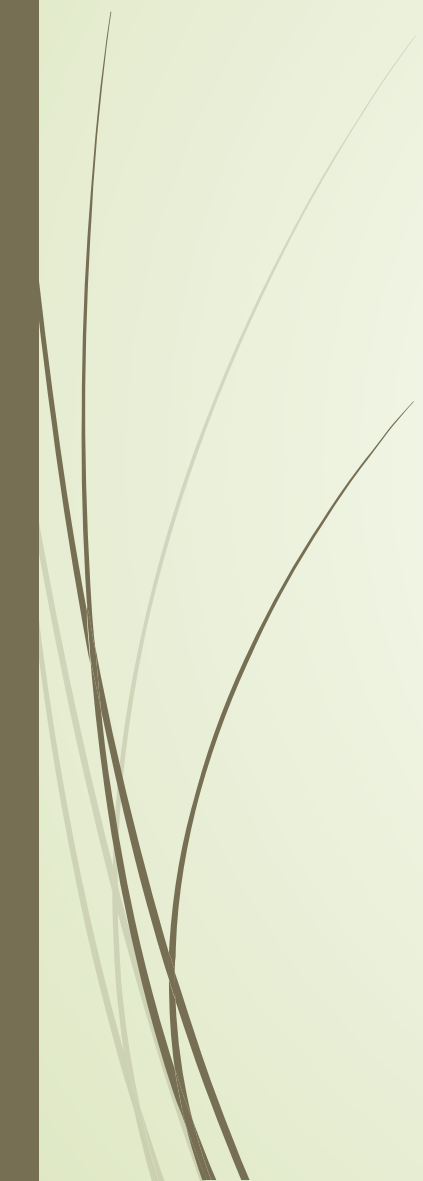
Deborah Caffin



Caring for the land  
and serving people



# Session Outcomes:

- ▶ Participants will understand challenges the agency faces maintaining the trail system.
  - ▶ Participants will learn about programs and strategies that have been explored at the national and regional level to engage volunteers and partners.
  - ▶ Participants will be asked to discuss their ideas for methods to better engage volunteers and partners in trail maintenance, and offer an assessment of whether the goals of the Act might be realized.
- 

# Trail Maintenance Crisis



Scapegoat Wilderness, MT

- Often created for purposes other than recreation (timber, fire, grazing, game trails, etc.)
- Flat or declining federal appropriations
- Increasing public recreational use
- Loss of “technical know-how” within the agency
- Agency competing priorities

# Challenges Created By Poorly Maintained Trails

- Accumulated downfall making trails impassible or resulting in trail braiding (work arounds)
- Eroded tread resulting in rilling, wash outs, etc.
- Failure of erosion-control structures, sedimentation
- Trail bridges becoming unsafe
- “Loss of trail” and public access as vegetation regrowth blocks and obscures the trail



Clearwater NF, Idaho

# Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report - Request



THE  
WILDERNESS  
SOCIETY

November 7, 2011

Honorable Mike Simpson, Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
H-307 Capital  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable James Moran, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Cynthia Lummis  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and Representative Lummis,

We are writing to request your assistance in addressing the serious decline in the condition of national forest trails that threatens access to America's public lands. Specifically, we would like you to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study the maintenance situation on national forest trails so that we may design a solution that ensures reliable, high-quality trail access for forest visitors, including in Wilderness and backcountry areas.



BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN  
OF AMERICA

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

February 24, 2012

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office undertake a review and update of your 1989 report titled, "Maintenance and Reconstruction Backlog on National Forest Trails." (GAO.RCED-89-182).

The GAO's 1989 report identified a nearly \$200 million dollar maintenance backlog that had already resulted in the loss of over 5000 miles of trails that had previously been available to the public. In the years since this report, visitation to the National Forest System has increased, demands on Forest Service personnel have grown, and the natural landscape has been altered by insects, disease and wildfire. It is important to understand the full scope of challenges facing the Forest Service and the national forest trail system so that our subcommittee can make important decisions on resource allocation.

We respectfully request that in updating the 1989 report, the GAO analyze the following questions:

- What is the current status of the trail maintenance backlog on national forests and within current Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas? Which regions face the most severe challenges?
- How effective is the Forest Service at maintaining trails in national forests, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas?

# GAO Report - Results



GAO-13-618

- ▶ Significant backlog exists.
  - ▶ Only one-quarter of trails maintained to standard
  - ▶ Two-thirds receive no regular maintenance
  - ▶ \$314M long term backlog + \$200M in annual need
- ▶ Backlog expected to grow (beetle-kill, wildfire, wind-throw)
- ▶ Agency needs to do a better job of managing volunteer and partner resources



# GAO Report - Factors Complicating Trail Maintenance Efforts

- ▶ Origin and sustainability of existing trails
- ▶ Agency policies and procedures, including lack of standardized training in trails field skills
- ▶ Management of volunteers and other external resources
  - ▶ Burden of managing volunteers
  - ▶ Lack of training on volunteer management
  - ▶ Failure to establish volunteer management as a clear expectation for US Forest Service staff



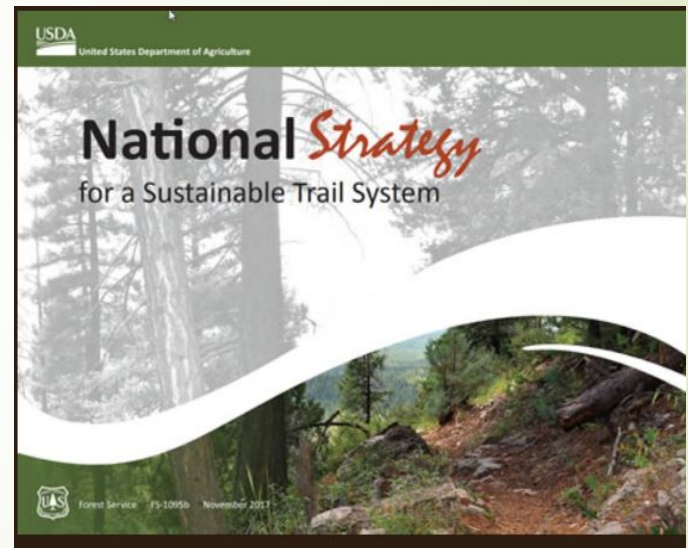


# GAO Report – Recommendations

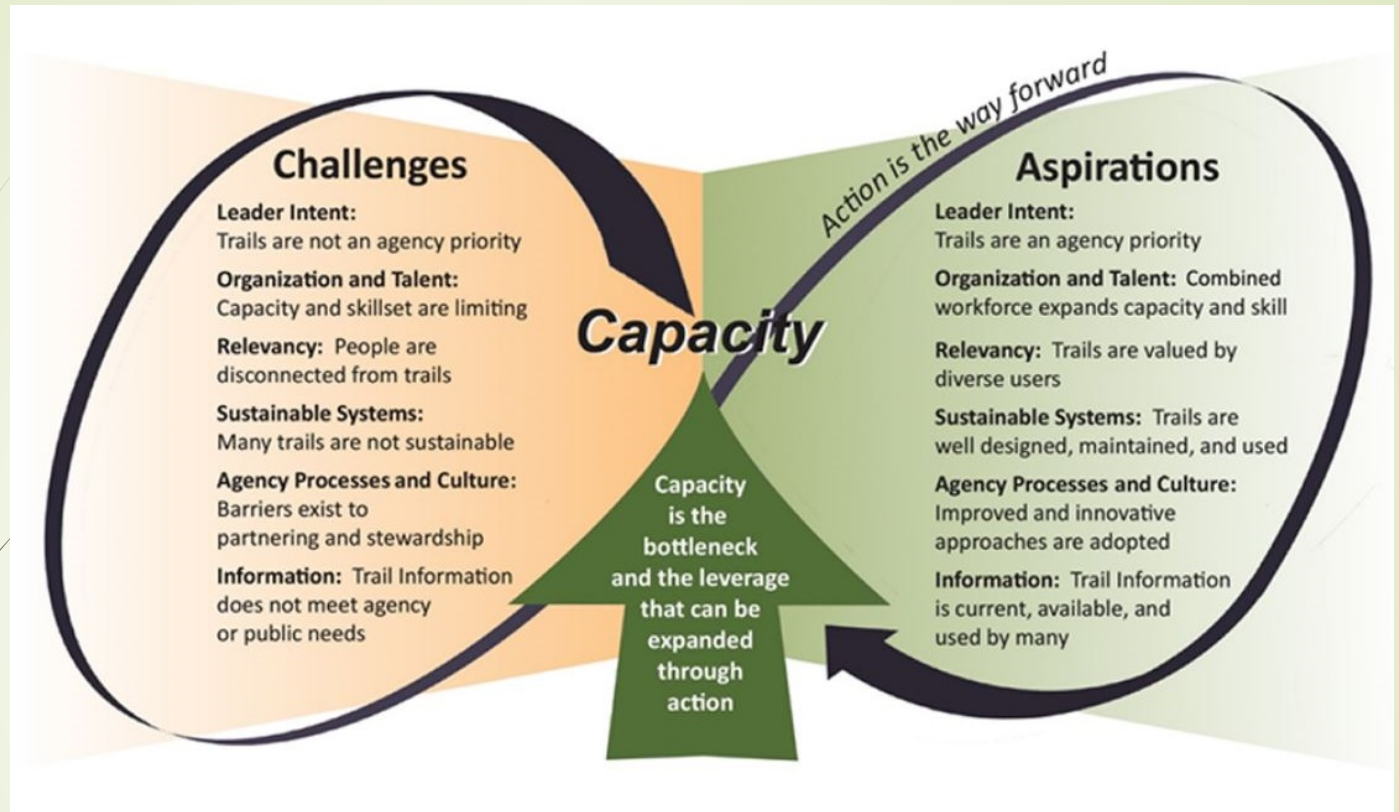
- Evaluate the long-term sustainability of the trails network; Develop options for closing the gap between resources and system size
- Increase training on sustainable trail management
- Improve recruitment/retention of trail staff
- Improve management of volunteers; Create volunteer management expectations for trails staff

# GAO Report – Forest Service Response

- Statement of Action (formal response to GAO report)
- **Trails Connect!** Dialogue held by Chief with stakeholders
- National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System
- 10-Year Sustainable Trail Stewardship Challenge

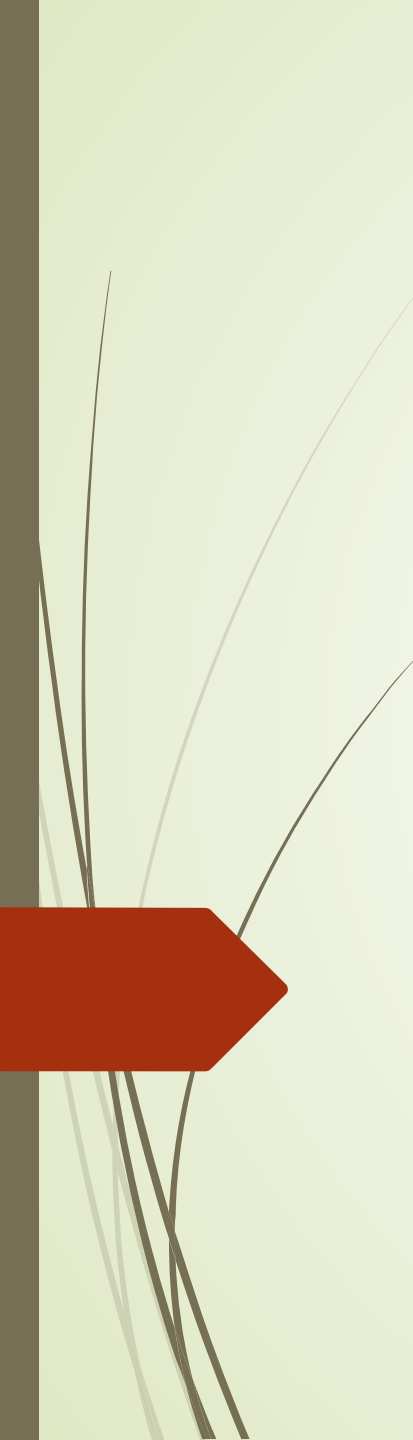


<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/trails/10YTC>



# National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System

Capacity is the bottleneck



# Volunteer-based solutions are only one component of comprehensive reform

Volunteers are additive, but should not be seen as a replacement or intended to supplant professional agency trail crews



# Campaign Goals



1. Elevate Priority of U.S. Forest Service Recreation and Trails Program
  - ▶ Within the agency/Department of Agriculture
  - ▶ Within the eyes of Congress
  - ▶ Among regional/national trails community
2. Begin to reverse the trail maintenance backlog
3. Demonstrate the linkage between a robust trails infrastructure and the nation's expanding recreation economy
4. Make the case before Congress for increased trails-related appropriations for the Forest Service

# Unifying the Trails and Recreation Community



## NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM TRAILS STEWARDSHIP ACT "The Most Bipartisan Bill in Congress"

### SUPPORTERS

#### GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Western Governors' Association  
National Association of Counties

#### RECREATION ORGANIZATIONS

American Council of Snowmobile Associations  
American Motorcyclist Association  
American Whitewater  
Blue Ribbon Coalition  
Carolina Mountain Club  
High Country Hikers  
International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Mazamas  
Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association  
Team Dirt  
The Access Fund  
The Mountaineers  
Tread Lightly!  
Winter Wildlands Alliance

#### OUTFITTERS AND GUIDES

America Outdoors Association  
Montana Outfitters and Guides Association  
Professional Wilderness Outfitters Assn.

#### EQUESTRIAN ORGANIZATIONS

American Endurance Ride Conference  
American Horse Council  
American Quarter Horse Association  
Back Country Horsemen of America  
Back Country Horsemen of Alabama

Back Country Horsemen of Arizona  
Back Country Horsemen of Arkansas  
Back Country Horsemen of California  
Back Country Horsemen of Colorado  
Back Country Horsemen of Florida  
Back Country Horsemen of Georgia  
Back Country Horsemen of Idaho  
Back Country Horsemen of Kansas  
Back Country Horsemen of Michigan  
Back Country Horsemen of Mississippi  
Back Country Horsemen of Missouri  
Back Country Horsemen of Montana  
Back Country Horsemen of Nevada  
Back Country Horsemen of New Mexico  
Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina  
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon  
Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee  
Back Country Horsemen of Utah  
Back Country Horsemen of Washington  
Black Hills BCH of South Dakota  
Central Kentucky Back Country Horsemen  
Equine Land Conservation Resource  
Hoosier Back Country Horsemen of Indiana  
Iron Mountain BCH of Virginia  
Kentucky Back Country Horsemen  
Minnesota Horse Council  
Minnesota Trail Riders Association  
North Carolina Horse Council  
Oregon Equestrian Trails  
Pigeon River and Beyond (BCH-Michigan)  
Show-Me Missouri BCH – Tri-Lakes Chapter



#### Wyoming Back Country Horsemen

Wild South  
Wyoming Outdoor Council

#### HUNTING AND FISHING ORGANIZATIONS

Montana Wildlife Federation  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
National Wildlife Federation  
NM Back Country Hunters and Anglers  
New Mexico Sportsmen  
New Mexico Wildlife Federation  
North Carolina Wildlife Federation  
Oregon Council Trout Unlimited  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Trout Unlimited

#### CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

American Rivers  
Audubon North Carolina  
California Wilderness Coalition  
Columbia Mountain Land Conservancy  
Central Coast Wild Heritage  
Friends of Columbia Gorge  
Highland Cachiers Land Trust  
Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition  
Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance  
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center  
Montana Wilderness Alliance  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
New Mexico Wilderness Alliance  
Oregon Natural Desert Association  
Oregon Wild  
Southern Appalachian Highlands Cons.  
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards  
Southern Environmental Law Center  
The Wilderness Society

#### TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS

American Hiking Society  
Applegate Trails Association  
Arizona Trail Association  
Big Foot Trail Alliance  
Continental Divide Trail Coalition  
Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail Partnership  
National Coast Trail Association  
Pacific Crest Trail Association  
Pacific Northwest Trail Association  
Partnership for the National Trails System  
Siskiyou Upland Trails Association  
Washington Trails Alliance

#### OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Assoc. of Outdoor Recreation and Education  
Columbia Forest Products  
Ecological Services and Markets  
Mountain True  
Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership  
Root Cause  
Southern Appalachian Mineral Society  
Special Permit Holders  
Sustainable Footfalls  
Tuleyome



# National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

H.R. 845

S. 1110

114<sup>th</sup> Congress



# An Act of Congress:

*To direct the Secretary of Agriculture to publish in the Federal Register a strategy to **significantly increase the role of volunteers and partners** in National Forest System trail maintenance and for other purposes.*

Public Law 114-245 16 USC 583k et seq.





# Trails Act Requirements

- Develop and publish Volunteer/Partner Trail Maintenance Strategy
- Aim to double trail maintenance by volunteers and partners
- Explore and study approaches to increase trail maintenance:
  - Fire Crews
  - Trail Maintenance Priority Areas
  - Outfitter/Guide Pilot Program
- Report on findings and recommendations



# Trails Act Findings – Sec. 2

- ▶ 158,000 miles of trail within the FS trails system
  - ▶ All types – hiking, biking, horseback riding, water, motorized
  - ▶ GAO – only ¼ to standard, \$314 million backlog and annual backlog of \$210 million
  - ▶ Threats to access, environmental damage and public safety from backlog
  - ▶ **Budget limitations require more efficient use of existing resources**
  - ▶ Volunteers, partners, outfitters and guides play important role – **Strategy needed**
- ▶ Note emphasis on no new funds, but improved efficiency



# Volunteer & Partner Strategy

## – Sec. 4

- ▶ Within 2 years, Forest Service must publish a strategy to significantly increase use of volunteers and partners in trail maintenance
- ▶ Strategy must do the following:
  - ▶ Augment agency employee capabilities
  - ▶ Provide volunteer opportunities in all USFS regions
  - ▶ Address barriers to volunteerism
  - ▶ Prioritize volunteerism in regions with severe need.
  - ▶ **Goal:** Increase volunteer maintenance by 100% in 5 years

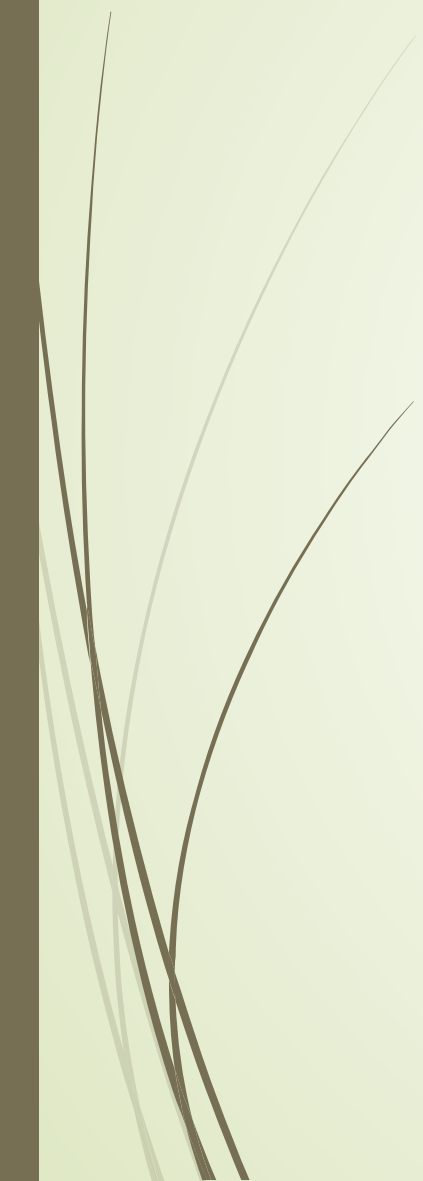


# Strategy Sec. 4 (cont'd)

- ▶ Study the use of fire crews in trail maintenance; If feasible, incorporate
- ▶ Extend coverage of Volunteers in Forest Act to volunteers **of partner organizations**
  - Effect = treats volunteers as federal employees for purposes of:
    - ▶ Liability claims against the volunteer
    - ▶ Workers compensation claims by the volunteer
    - ▶ Loss of property claims by volunteers incidental to volunteer service
- ▶ Share the cost of claims arising out volunteer trail maintenance across all Forest Service units
  - ▶ Costs previously borne by local units (national forests)
  - ▶ Created a strong disincentive to recruit volunteers



# Strategy Sec. 4 (cont'd)

- Consult with stakeholders in developing the strategy
  - Require units (national forests) to develop local strategies
  - Report to Congress within 3 years on the impact of the strategy in reducing the backlog
- 



## Priority Maintenance - Sec. 5

- Select 9-15 **priority areas** for increased maintenance accomplishments (with at least one in each USFS Region)
- Develop an approach for substantially increasing maintenance accomplishments in each priority area



# Priority Areas – Sec. 5



## Criteria:

Well-defined area on National Forest System land where lack of trail maintenance has led to:

1. Reduced **access** to public land
2. An increase, or risk of increase, in harm to **natural resources**
3. Jeopardized **public safety**
4. Resulted in trails being **impassable** by the intended managed users
5. Increased future deferred trail **maintenance costs**



# Priority Areas



## Additional criteria after Public Input




## National Selection Considerations:

- A. Urban-proximate & remote areas
- B. Motorized & non-motorized trails
- C. Provide underrepresented communities greater opportunities to connect with NFS lands
- D. Identified trail maintenance backlog
- E. Damage from catastrophic events
- F. Variety of areas & approaches, including volunteers/partners available to assist



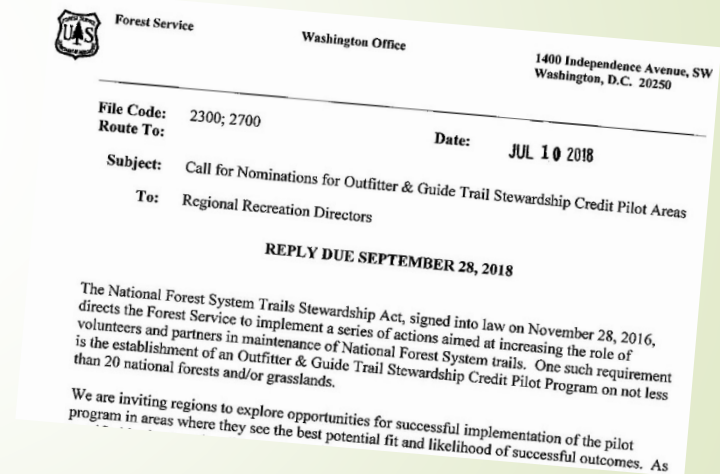
# Cooperative Agreements - Sec. 6

	USDA, Forest Service	OMB 0596-0217 FS-1500-15
FS Agreement No. <u>16-MU-11132424-233</u>		
Cooperator Agreement No. _____		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING</b> Between The <b>BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF AMERICA</b> And The <b>USDA, FOREST SERVICE</b></p>		
<p>This MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) is hereby made and entered into by and between the Back Country Horsemen of America, hereinafter referred to as "BCHA," and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, here in after referred to as the "U.S. Forest Service."</p>		
<p><u>Title:</u> Equestrian Trails Maintenance, Education, and Public Outreach</p>		

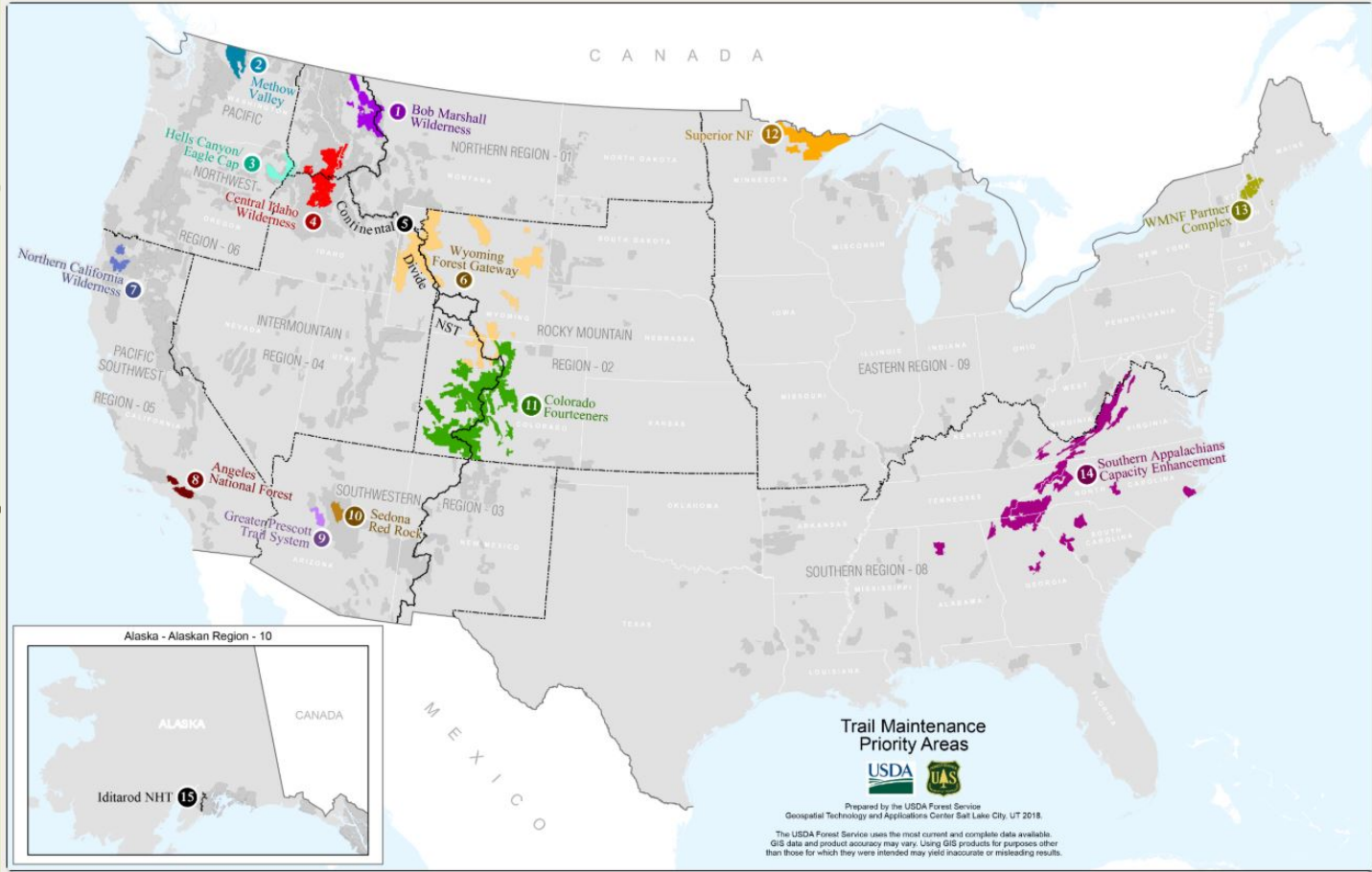
- Authorizes Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements to carry out the legislation

# Stewardship Credits for Outfitters & Guides - Sec. 7


- ▶ Establish a pilot program on 20+ units to offset permit fees with costs of trail work performed by an outfitter or guide
- ▶ Includes safeguards:
  - ▶ Select units where pilot program will increase maintenance
  - ▶ Establish terms to ensure work meets national quality standards and trail maintenance objectives



# Priority Areas



<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/trails/priority-areas>



# Developing comprehensive and lasting solutions to trail maintenance backlog

- Enhanced volunteerism and partnerships
- Finding new ways to do business
- Administrative reforms that place a high priority on training and retaining professional line staff
- Finding new funding mechanisms for trails and recreation
- Enhanced appropriations—Congress must do its job in supporting land management agencies

# New Funding Mechanisms

## National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance

## National Forest Foundation




3.1.2018

News Release

Announcing the:

**National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partnership Funding Program For Field Season 2018**


The National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, in collaboration with American Trails, the American Hiking Society, Back Country Horsemen of America, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the Blue Ribbon Coalition, and the American Motorcyclist Association, is pleased to announce the second round of a trails granting program in partnership with the USDA Forest Service for the National Forest Trail Stewardship Partnership Funding for National Forest System trails for the 2018 Field season – May 2018 through December 2018.



THE SUMMER OF TRAILS

What do trails mean to you?

Get involved » The Summer of Trails



It's All Yours - Why Do Trails Matter To You?

WATCH LATER

Support Trails on our National Forests Today!

PRESS COVERAGE

- "Forest Service Trails are Where Adventures Begin" - USDA blog, July 20, 2018
- "Help the National Forest Foundation Restore Our Trails" - 5280 magazine, June 27, 2018
- "Our National Forest Trails Need Your Help" - Teton Gravity Research, June 26, 2018
- "Forest Service teams up with crowdsource foundation to raise \$1M for trail maintenance" - Missoulian, June 24, 2018



15-minute break





# Trail Stewardship Act

## Deliverables and Accomplishments

- Input on Priority Areas
- Selection of Priority Areas
- Develop Approach in Priority Areas
- Pilot Program for O&G Trail Stewardship Credits
- Volunteer and Partner Strategy for Trail Maintenance\*
- Study the Use of Fire Crews\*
- Adopt Volunteer and Partner Regulations – Liability Issues
- Report to Congress
- Received input on Priority Areas
- Areas were selected by the Department and Regions have moved forward with strategies and approaches
- Pilot Program for O&G Trail Stewardship Credits is currently being developed
- Completed the Volunteer and Partner Regulations – Liability Issues
- Report to Congress
  - Annual reporting on accomplishments
  - Formal Report @ 5 YR

# Welcome to the Southern Region Y'all!!!

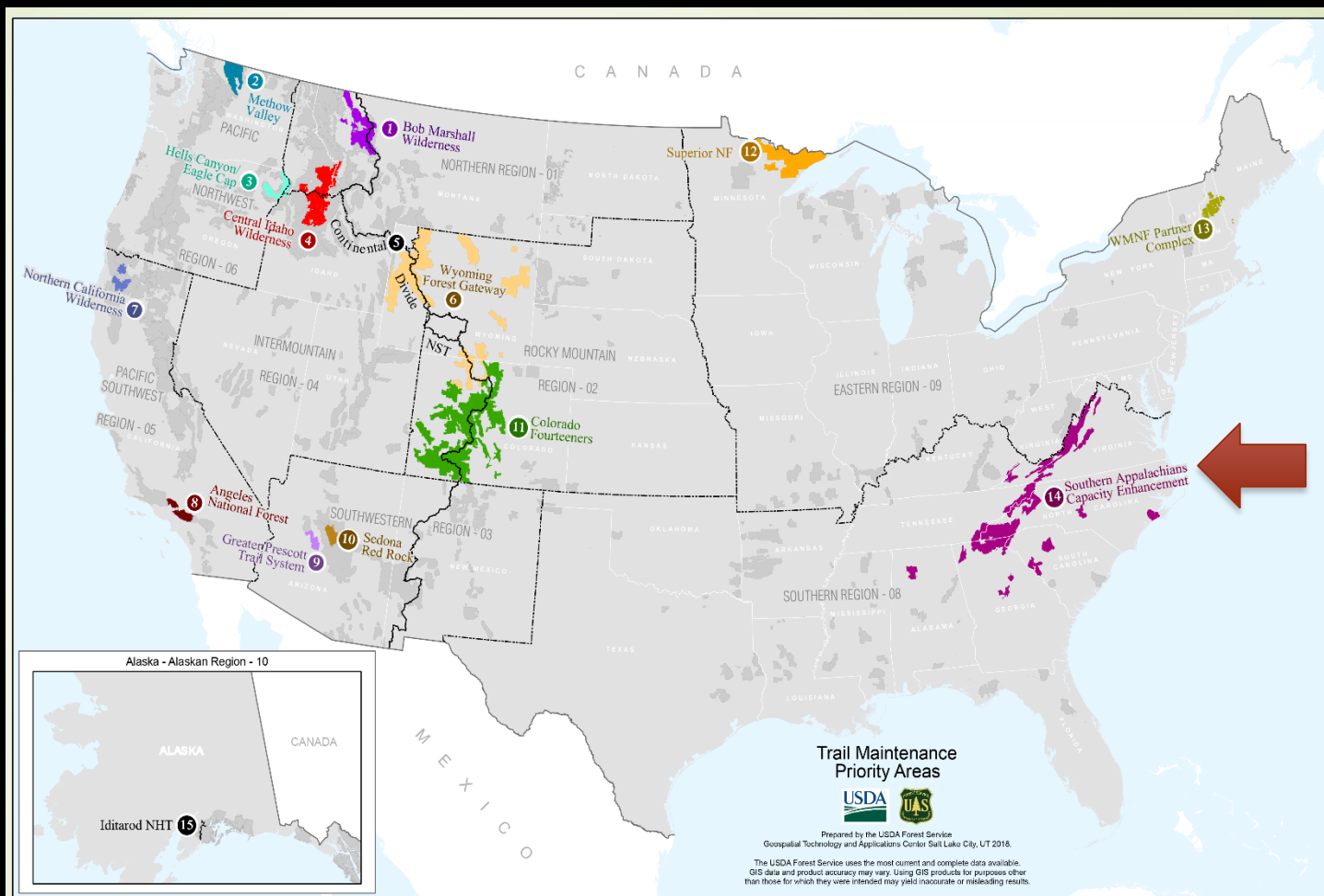


## Southern Region

- #2 visited region, over 25 million visitors
- Population base = 110 million
- Urban Centers – Atlanta, Houston, Washington DC, Charlotte, NC, Dallas/Ft. Worth



# Southern Appalachians Priority Area



6 National Forests, 1,756 Trails = 6,347 miles  
28.8% Meeting Agency Standards



# Priority Area Strategy and Shared Stewardship



- Volunteer Capacity Enhancement
- Southern Apps Collaborative
  - Engaging Partners in the Solutions
    - Trails Training
    - Community Engagement
    - Shared Stewardship
- Integrated Fire and Resource Interns
- SCA Traveling Trail Crew
- Continued Support of our Partners

# R8 Capacity Enhancement: Heart of our Priority Area Strategy

## 6 Sub-Regional VSP Coordinators

- ▶ 3 FS GS-12 NTE (3 years)
- ▶ 3 Greening Youth Foundation GS-12 Equivalents (3 years)
- ▶ Focused on Creating the Relationships Necessary to Place Partner Employees as Volunteer Coordinators on Every District
- ▶ Skilled and Able to Provide Expertise in VSP Partnership Development and Management

Military Groups  
Corporate  
Volunteers

### **Forest/ District Volunteer Programs**

Community  
Volunteers  
Nonprofit  
Volunteers

### **Regional Office PLC Program**

Wildlife  
Crews  
Planting  
Crews  
Prescribed  
Burn  
Crews  
NNIS  
Crews



**Integrate  
d Project**

### **Internships (RAP, ACES, PLC)**

Universities

FS  
Regional  
Office  
and Field  
Staff  
State and  
Federal  
Partners

Select  
Nonprofit  
Partners

Archaeologist  
s and  
Biologists

Public Affairs  
Specialists

Engineers  
Timber  
Markers

Fire Specialists

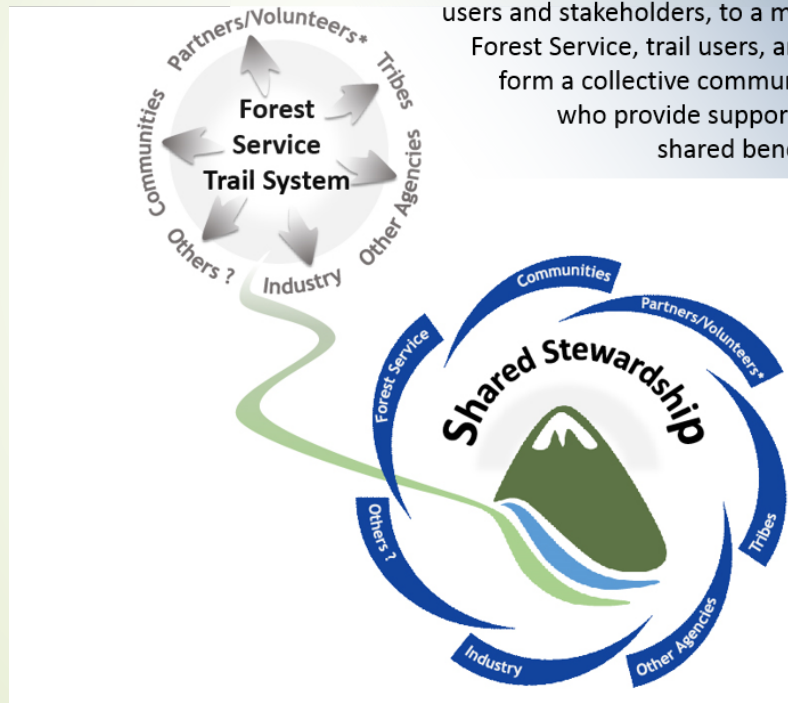
Planners

### **Traditional Approach**

# Shared Stewardship

## Shifting to a Model of Shared Stewardship

Shifting from a model of the Forest Service attempting to “do it all” to meet the expectations and needs of trail users and stakeholders, to a model where the Forest Service, trail users, and stakeholders form a collective community of stewards who provide support to and receive shared benefits from trails.



\*Including nongovernmental organizations

Congress provides the Forest Service an average of \$80 million/year (CMTL budget line item)



# Contacts

Randy Rasmussen

Director, Public Lands and Recreation  
Back Country Horsemen of America

[WildernessAdvisor@bcha.org](mailto:WildernessAdvisor@bcha.org)

Paul Sanford

National Director of Recreation Policy  
The Wilderness Society

[Paul\\_Sanford@twc.org](mailto:Paul_Sanford@twc.org)

Randy Welsh

Executive Director

National Wilderness Stewardship  
Alliance

[randy@wildernessalliance.org](mailto:randy@wildernessalliance.org)

Deborah Caffin

Trails Program Manager

U.S. Forest Service, Southeast Region

[dcaffin@fs.fed.us](mailto:dcaffin@fs.fed.us)