

Forest Service teams up with crowd-share foundation to raise \$1M for trail maintenance

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With only a quarter of its trails meeting standards, the U.S. Forest Service has teamed up with the National Forest Foundation to raise \$1 million for trail maintenance this summer.

The foundation has started a crowd-funding campaign to bring in \$500,000 in donations by September. The Forest Service has pledged to match that figure, which will then go out through competitive grants for trail repair work.

“Millions of Americans use the trail system, and recreation is a big deal for lots of communities,” said National Forest Foundation President Mary Mitsos. “We’re trying to find multiple ways we can get the American public involved in their trail system on national forest system land.”

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the National Scenic Trails Act that helped produce the 158,000 miles of national scenic trails, national recreation trails, and connecting and side trails programs for the Forest Service.

It’s also two years after Congress passed the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, which ordered the agency to get busy on its maintenance backlog. That workload would take an estimated \$300 million to completely finish.

A federal inventory of the Forest Service trail system found about three-quarters of the trail system could not meet standards for regular upkeep, safety or repair of infrastructure like bridges and water bars.

Forest Service Region 1 has 23,000 miles of trail for its national forests in Montana and parts of Idaho and the Dakotas. As part of the 50th anniversary commemoration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture designated 15 trail systems for priority attention, two of them in Region 1.

The National Forest Foundation intends to divide the money equally across the nine Forest Service regions. The funds will then go through a competitive grant process to support priority projects. Those can be for motorized, nonmotorized and wilderness trails as well as Forest Service front-country facilities.

“It’s an experiment for us,” Mitsos said of the social media attempt. “We know from experience crowd funding efforts usually work best if they’re local. We hope trail groups share it within their networks.”

To learn more about the campaign and America’s trails, visit www.NationalForests.org/SummerOfTrails. To directly support the crowd-funding campaign, simply visit www.CrowdRise.com/SummerOfTrails.