Introduction

National Forest System trails bring physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and economic benefits to communities and individuals nationwide. These trails connect people with nature and their heritage and with the USDA Forest Service’s core values of service, conservation, interdependence, diversity, and safety and are used as tools to protect natural and cultural resources. With 159,000 miles of trails, the Forest Service manages the Nation’s largest system of trails, including more than 10,000 miles of nationally designated scenic, historic, and recreation trails. Their maintenance is dependent on the shared stewardship of Forest Service employees, partners, volunteers, Tribes and Tribal organizations, and communities—collectively known as the “trail community.” This interdependence reminds us in the trail community that we are reliant on one another and on people from all walks of life and diverse perspectives to steward trails for the benefit of all people.

This is a guidebook for the Launch & Learn phase of the 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge (Trail Challenge), available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/10YTC.

Key Points

• The Trail Challenge focuses the collective efforts of employees, partners, and volunteers during the next decade to develop efficiencies, increase capacity, remove roadblocks, and lead to more sustainable National Forest system trails that are socially valued, economically viable, and support ecological resiliency.

• It is not an initiative, but rather the Trail Challenge institutes an ongoing way of doing business. It shifts our collective focus on trails from being reactive to being strategic. It enables the agency to better serve the public and be proactive in capitalizing on opportunities, such as the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) of 2020.1

• The Trail Challenge consists of 3 implementation phases and 10 elements or focus areas, each element with corresponding outcomes and metrics to track progress and demonstrate accountability. Collective focus and effort will increase during each phase.

• Main outcomes of the Trail Challenge include a systematic assessment of trail workforce capacity and trail sustainability to identify gaps and take actions to close those gaps; engaging and sharing leadership with local communities and stakeholders in trail priorities; institutionalizing equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in all aspects of our collective work; developing online toolboxes2 with trail success stories, best practices, and reference documents; and improving Forest Service trail data and reporting systems.

• The Forest Service is leading out on methods and approaches that will benefit all trail managers and help to professionalize trail management. As a result of the Trail Challenge, the Forest Service will be widely regarded as a valued partner, conservation leader, and premier provider of exceptional trail opportunities.

1 Information about the Forest Service’s implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 is available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa#:~:text=The%20USDA%20Forest%20Service%20is,on%20national%20forests%20and%20grasslands.

2 The Trail Challenge online toolbox is under development and will be available in spring 2021. When completed, the toolbox can be accessed from a link on the Trail Challenge web site available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/10YTC.
• We are in this together! This Trail Challenge is about supporting one another in the agency and with partners and volunteers from the “bottom up” and from the “top down”, taking focused and strategic actions to improve trail management.

Why is the Trail Challenge needed?

There is more trail work each year than the Forest Service and current partners and volunteers can complete, more people are using National Forest System trails in many areas and changing technology and use patterns continue to strain trail programs. Employees on some units are unable to effectively engage partners and volunteers due to lack of capacity or other constraints. Current data collection methods and reporting processes are often resulting in inefficiencies and a lack of accurate and up-to-date information. Employees recognize that in many areas the demographic profile of employees, trail visitors, partners, and volunteers do not reflect local demographics, but are unsure how to make improvements.

How is the Trail Challenge structured?

• The Trail Challenge is composed of 10 elements or focus areas that are implemented in 3 phases, Launch & Learn, Hitting our Stride, and Peak Performance. The 10 elements or focus areas are a subset of the 26 actions outlined in the agency’s National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System\(^3\) Several of them also accomplish requirements from the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act of 2016\(^4\).

• Phase 1, scheduled from 2020 to 2023, focuses on two elements: Element A. Establish Trails Advisory Group and Element E. Meet Data Standards. The Launch & Learn phase is about taking action and learning together, getting organized, developing tools, and opening lines of communication within the agency, with partners and volunteers, and with communities.

• Although not required in Phase 1, taking action in element C. Achieve Sustainable Trails will support unit planning and implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act. Units are encouraged to use the Trail Challenge as a method to connect with communities, understand their needs for a sustainable trail system, and select and implement community supported deferred maintenance projects. Units are also encouraged to work on other elements as capacity and opportunity allow.

• The next two phases will be refined and standardized based on lessons from previous phases. Each phase is designed to progressively help the trail community successfully implement all national elements (A-B) and unit elements (B-E) and taking action on several additional unit elements (F-H). A national coalition of trail partners is leading implementation of the partner elements (I-J).

• Partners and volunteers are invited to engage with local units to establish shared priorities and take action on any element during any phase.

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What will be different at the end of 10 years?

**Increased capacity:** A workforce of highly skilled and empowered staff, partners, and volunteers will work together seamlessly to maintain and sustain trails, as well as collect and report information about trails and trail work.

**More sustainable trails:** The number of sustainable trails will appreciably increase on the landscape. These trails will be economically viable, support ecological resiliency, and socially relevant by reflecting the values, perspectives, interests, and diversity of the public.

**Common focus:** As a trail community, we will share leadership and work collaboratively, asking for help from others and giving them opportunities to lead. We will collectively know where we are, where we want to go, and agree on clear methods to get there.

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**A Message to Partners and Volunteers**

Hello valued trail partners and volunteers! The Trail Challenge is a challenge for all of us who care for and receive benefits from trails—including you—to achieve more sustainable trails. You are invited to help with any element of the Trail Challenge and there are many ways you can apply your dedication and skills. You could offer your assistance and skill in the traditional way of helping to maintain and improve trails on the ground or express your interest in becoming a certified sawyer to help with downed tree and brush removal. You could also offer to help coordinate the work of existing volunteer and partner groups, write grants to accomplish specific projects, or help increase outreach and education about sustainable trails. As you contact your local Forest Service recreation and trail managers to offer your support, you’ll likely notice that their capacity to engage with you varies from unit to unit. Many recreation and trail program managers have limited time to engage with individual volunteers. They might direct you to work with an existing partner organization or ask you to take a leadership role in bringing various partner groups together and build on successful examples of individuals and groups coming together following a [collective impact model].

Another way you can help is to share with local Forest Service leaders about how important sustainable trails are to you and help them find creative ways to integrate trails into other unit priorities.

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**Implementation Guides and Resources**

**About this Guidebook**

- This document is a technical guidebook for the Launch & Learn phase of the 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge. It supplements the [overview publication](#), which serves as the official summary of the Trail Challenge.
- This document provides guidance to Forest Service trail and recreation managers, trail partners, volunteers, and others implementing the Trail Challenge.

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[5] A collective impact model is the concept of gathering groups of people to achieve a common agenda. More about collective impact models is available on web pages such as the [Collective Impact Forum](#), available at https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/what-collective-impact.
• This guidebook contains specific directions for implementing each of the 10 Trail Challenge elements, including what, where, and when to report, as well as by whom. It contains ideas about how to get started, as well as how partners and volunteers can engage. There are several helpful appendices with links and information, such as frequently asked questions and a summary of all elements, expected outcomes, and metrics.

• This is a living document to be updated as lessons are learned from implementation.

• To learn more about the Trail Challenge, including access to training and other resources, visit the Trail Challenge website and online toolbox.

Supporting resources: Resources for implementing the Trail Challenge can be accessed from the Trail Challenge online toolbox when available. Some resources have already been developed, and many others are in progress.

Feedback: This guidebook was developed and is being maintained by the National Trail Board, National Scenic and Historic Trail administrators group, and the Trails Advisory Group. These groups of Forest Service trail program managers want to make the guidebook as helpful as possible through periodic updates, as lessons are learned during implementation. In addition to periodic updates, a new guidebook will be issued for each phase of the Trail Challenge. The phase, version number, and revision date are on the front cover. If you have comments or suggestions about improving this document, please email the Forest Service trail management program (mailto:<wo_trail_program@usda.gov>).

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6 The National Trail Board is made up of Regional Trail Program leads, WO Staff, and liaisons from other programs (including National Scenic and Historic Trail Administrators and the Trails Advisory Group).
Elements

The table below provides an overview of the Trail Challenge elements. Detailed instructions about implementing each element are in the following pages. The instructions include a description of the element, expected outcome(s), and tracked metric(s); it also contains information about how to report, how to get started, and how partners and volunteers can engage.

### National Elements

- **Element A. Establish Trails Advisory Group** *(Trail Strategy Action 1.4)*
- **Element B. Evaluate Trails Program** *(Trail Strategy Action 2.2)*

### Unit Elements

- **Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems** *(Trail Strategy Action 4.1- 4.4)*
- **Element D. Promote Cross-Program Integration** *(Trail Strategy Action 5.3)*
- **Element E. Meet Trail Data Standards** *(Trail Strategy Action 6.3)*
- **Element F. Support Outdoor Recreation Economy** *(Trails Strategy Action 3.3)*
- **Element G. Increase Outreach and User Ethics** *(Trails Strategy Action 3.4)*
- **Element H. Expand Use of Service and Job Corps** *(Trails Strategy Action 3.5)*

### Partner Elements (invited)

- **Element I. Shared Partner Leadership** *(Trail Strategy Action 1.5)*
- **Element J. Trail Endowment** *(Trail Strategy Action 4.5)*

*Trail Challenge elements required in the Launch & Learn phase, although participation in more elements is encouraged.*
National Elements: Nationally and regionally led

**Element A. Implement Trails Advisory Group (REQUIRED during Launch & Learn phase)**

Implement a Trails Advisory Group of agency employees to advise and provide timely input to the Chief of the Forest Service on emerging trail issues (Trail Strategy Action 1.4).

**Description:**

The Trails Advisory Group is a chartered national advisory group made up of nine Forest Service trail professionals and technicians and a liaison from the national trail program. Members serve as communication conduits within and between regions, the Washington Office, and the broader trail community, about emerging trail issues, recommendations, and trends. The TAG routinely engages with agency leaders to give advice and input in decision making about trails. Each Forest Service region will select one representative to participate who reflects a “voice” from the field. Selected representatives and their home units should be willing to support a two- to four-year commitment to the group.

**Outcome 1: The Trails Advisory Group is made up of field-going representatives from each region.**

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<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metric 1: Name of the selected regional Trails Advisory Group member.</td>
<td>Units respond to regional requests for nominations every 2-4 years.</td>
<td>Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regions</strong> annually enter the name of the selected representative into the Trail Challenge dashboard.</td>
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</table>

**Key Terms**

- Trails Advisory Group: A group of field-going recreation and trail professionals representing each of the nine regions and a designated liaison from the Washington Office trails program.

**Getting Started**

- Reach out to regional Trails Advisory Group representatives to support building a network of trail managers to share ideas, resources, and expertise, as well as communicate issues.
- Seek out and mentor employees with different viewpoints to be future TAG members, such as those with different viewpoints because of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, generations, religion, sexual orientation, social class, or tenure in the organization, etc.

**Partners and Volunteers**

Do you know of an outstanding Forest Service employee who you think should be nominated to serve on the Trails Advisory Group? Someone who is passionate about trails and works on a district, forest, grassland, or other Forest Service administrative unit? Share your ideas with your local trail or recreation manager.

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7 The online Trail Challenge dashboard is under development and will be ready for data entry in FY21.
Element B. Evaluate the Trail Program (Workforce)

Evaluate trail program workforce at all levels to identify ways to increase field capacity and shift toward collaborative and inclusive trail stewardship (Trail Strategy Action 2.2).

Description:

Regional trail program leads work with units to complete evaluations of the local trail community workforce at least twice during the Trail Challenge to highlight critical skill and capacity gaps. The baseline trail community workforce, composed of Forest Service employees, partners, and volunteers, will be evaluated using a standardized process8. The evaluation process will also be informed by employee entries into the Trail Community Map (TCM)9.

Units should consider the results of identifying the desired trail system from Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems when completing this element. They should use the results to understand the workforce needed to manage the desired trail system and then document, the current workforce, the needed workforce, and steps to achieve that workforce in their Trail Stewardship Plans10. Regions should work with forests and communities to assist in identifying and addressing gaps between the existing workforce and needed workforce. See the element C description for best practices about how to determine the desired sustainable trail system.

Outcome 2: Unit trail programs are evaluated at least twice to understand the current trail workforce and determine minimum staffing levels needed for a sustainable trail system.

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<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
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<tr>
<td>Metric 2: # of employees per unit with trail skills represented in the Trail Community Map.*</td>
<td>Units populate and annually update the Trail Community Map with employee trail skills. Data steward11 annually enters # of trail staff per unit in the Trail Community Map.</td>
<td>Units: Trail Community Map  Data steward: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric 3: # of unit-level trail programs evaluated at the regional level.</td>
<td>Units participate in regionally led evaluations. Regions report the # and % of completed unit-level trail program evaluations.</td>
<td>Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric 4: # of units with 1 or more trail managers.</td>
<td>Units participate at least twice in a regionally led evaluation. Regions report the # and % of units with 1 or more trail managers.</td>
<td>Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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8 When available, a description of the standardized evaluation process and example tools will be posted in the Trail Challenge toolbox.

9 The Trail Community Map (TCM) will be available for data entry in Spring 2021 as a link from the Trail Management Tools webpage, available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/trail-management-tools.

10 Trail Stewardship Plans document a unit’s plan to achieve a sustainable trail system comprised of sustainable trails (see page 13 of this document for minimum plan components).

11 The Trail Challenge data steward is a designated Forest Service employee who is knowledgeable about Trail Challenge metrics and gathers unit-level data from existing reporting sources for sharing on the Trail Challenge dashboard.
Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

Key Terms

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

- **Trail community**: The general group of agency employees, partners, volunteers, and public who give to or receive benefits from trails, including other Federal agencies and tribal organizations, States, communities, academia, organizations engaging people of color, youth, and veterans, trail users and businesses.

- **Trail Community Map**: An online networking tool for trail professionals designed to help the Forest Service and the greater trail community leverage capacity, share resources, and better serve the public. Employees and the public can use the map to find and contact local trail professionals and others with trail-related skills and experience. At this time, data entry is open only to Forest Service employees.

Getting Started

- Invite employee trail managers and other employees with technical trail skills and experience to enter their information into the TCM. Examples of skills and experience include being a certified sawyer or a contracting officer’s representative, expertise laying out and designing walking trails, project management skills for overseeing partner and volunteer trail projects.

- Work with regional Forest Service trail and recreation program managers by taking part in an evaluation of the trail program workforce using a standardized evaluation tool. Trail program (workforce) evaluations should be completed at least twice; ideally, once at the start of the Trail Challenge to determine a “baseline” or starting point, and again later in the Trail Challenge to evaluate progress toward achieving an adequate trail workforce.

- Use the results of the workforce evaluation, ideally together with the results of Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems, to seek out new workforce arrangements and funding opportunities.

Partners and Volunteers

Your contribution to the trail program is important! Talk with your local trail or recreation manager to let them know about the skills and experience you can contribute to help steward National Forest System trails. Also be sure to document and share your volunteer time and contributions with them.
Unit Elements: Unit led

Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems

Trail users and communities’ value and support trail systems that are sustainably designed, well-maintained, socially relevant and used for their intended purposes (Trail Strategy Actions 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

Description:

Units accomplishing this element will be aiming to achieve trails and trail systems that are economically viable, support ecological resiliency, and are socially relevant by reflecting the values, perspectives, interests, and diversity of the public. Although not required in the Launch & Learn phase of the Trail Challenge, units acting on this element could leverage the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) funding opportunity to engage with partners and communities to achieve more sustainable trails. For example, units could engage the community, partners, and volunteers in strategic planning to identify project proposals for GAOA funding to address deferred maintenance needs on priority trails.

Outcome 3: All National Forest System trails are assessed at least twice to determine current sustainability and identify tasks needed to increase sustainability.

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<th>Annual Metric</th>
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</table>
| Metric 5: # of units having completed sustainability assessments on National Forest System trails. | **Units** report completed unit-level assessments. **Regions** report # and % of units with completed assessments. | **Units**: Annual Unit Progress Summary\(^\text{12}\)  
**Regions**: Trail Challenge dashboard |
| Metric 6: # of sustainable National Forest System trail miles.               | **Units** report # of sustainable National Forest System trail miles on the unit. **Regions** report # of and % of sustainable National Forests System trail miles on each unit. | **Units**: Annual Unit Progress Summary  
**Regions**: Trail Challenge dashboard |

Outcome 4: Partners and volunteers increase their support of the trail program.

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<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
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<tr>
<td>Metric 7: # and % of National Forest System trail miles</td>
<td><strong>Units</strong> report in Infra.</td>
<td><strong>Units</strong>: Infra trails module(^\text{13})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{12}\) Units will use the Annual Unit Progress Summary form to share progress on Trail Challenge elements. The electronic form will be furnished from the Regional Trail Program leads in summer 2021 in time for reporting.

\(^{13}\) [Infra database trails module](http://fsweb.nrm.fs.fed.us/support/docs.php?appname=trails) is the agency’s official database about National Forest System trail infrastructure inventory and management available at (internal link).
Assessing Sustainable Trails

A trail is sustainable when it is economically viable, socially relevant and supported, and has little to no negative impact on the environment over time. In this element, National Forest System trails are assessed for sustainability at least twice during the Trail Challenge. The aim is to capture a “snap-shot” of trail sustainability at local, regional, and national scales and to show progress over time. Units are encouraged to work with the trail community and use the assessment results to collaboratively identify actions to improve trail by trail sustainability.

Assessments should be simple, repeatable, and completed by knowledgeable employees, partners, or volunteers using a standardized process that meets the minimum requirements for sustainable trail assessments. Results from sustainability assessments can help identify ways of repurposing, realigning, or decommissioning existing trails and identifying opportunities to increase the social, economic, or ecologic sustainability of a trail.

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14 The Volunteers & Service Reporting Database (VS reports) is available at (internal link) https://apps.fs.usda.gov/vsreports/. Instructions about how to gain reporting and view access is provided on the web page.

15 When available, the minimum requirements for a sustainable trail assessments and examples tools will be posted in the Trail Challenge toolbox.
Understanding Sustainable Trail Systems

A sustainable trail system is a network of sustainable trails that are ecologically and economically sustainable and meet the needs of current users without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Trail systems could cross unit and jurisdictional boundaries, such as with other Forest Service units, other Federal agencies and tribal organizations, States, and local communities.

Achieving sustainable trail systems relies on the interdependency of agency employees, community stakeholders, and others working side-by-side. Together with communities and stakeholders, units should identify a common vision for a sustainable trail system and the shared capacity needed to manage the system (as described in Element B. Evaluate the Trail Program). Results from sustainable trail system assessments\(^\text{16}\) should also address unauthorized trails, user-created routes, and potential new trails.

Getting Started

Read more in the Trail Challenge Toolbox about getting started assessing sustainable trails and trail systems.

Partners and Volunteers

There are many ways that partners and volunteers can help to carry out this element. Help is likely needed in the field stewarding the physical trail, but that isn’t the only way you can offer your assistance. For example, work with your trail or recreation manager to help organize other volunteers, start an adopt a trail program, co-host a local community stakeholders meeting to talk about the importance of sustainable trails and the Trail Challenge, or write a grant to fund a specific project.

Key Terms

- **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. Trail deferred maintenance includes repair, replacement, and decommissioning.

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\(^{16}\) A standardized trail system assessment tool has not yet been developed. For trail system assessment tips and tools refer to the Trail Challenge toolbox.
- **Infra trails database:** The agency’s official database about National Forest System trail infrastructure inventory and management.

- **Shared stewardship of trails:** 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.

- **Stakeholder:** A person or group with an interest or stake in trails.

- **Sustainable trail:** A trail that is economically viable, socially relevant and supported, and has little to no negative impact on the environment over time.

- **Sustainable trail system:** A network of trails that are ecologically and economically sustainable and meet the needs of current users without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Trail systems could cross unit and jurisdictional boundaries, such as with other Forest Service units, other Federal agencies and tribal organizations, States, and communities.

- **Unauthorized trail or route:** An unauthorized and unplanned linear route that is not documented as an established route in the national forest trail system and that has been created by the consistent use of trail users (also known as a “social trail”).

- **Volunteers and Service Reporting (VS Reports) Database:** The agency’s official database for volunteer and partner hours and activities.
Unit-Level Trail Stewardship Plans

Work with local partners and volunteers to develop a flexible and updatable trail stewardship plan that documents selected Trail Challenge elements and tracks progress. Units are welcome to develop additional or tiered trail stewardship plans if, for example, a unit were divided into management areas that might have different management approaches, such as a trail maintenance priority area. These trail stewardship plans, will also fulfill statutory requirements of the Trails Stewardship Act of 2016, which directs the agency to double trail maintenance accomplished by partners and volunteers by November 2021 and to develop unit-level partner and volunteer plans. Unit-level plans will correlate to the national trail volunteer and partner strategy that is being developed.

The unit-plan should address at a minimum the following points:

Communication:
- Document what elements the unit, local partners, and volunteers are working on in each phase.

Community:
- Describe the local stakeholders, how they are being engaged, how a sustainable trail system can support their needs, and how they can support the desired system.

Sustainable trail system:
- Include the results of the trail sustainability assessment from Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems. Describe actions planned to achieve a sustainable trail system, such as the construction of new trails, the reconstruction, relocation, or alteration of existing trails, the conversion of routes to accommodate new or different uses, and the decommissioning or obliteration of any trails deemed no longer necessary. Also indicate which actions lend themselves as meaningful opportunities for partners and volunteer assistance in carrying them out.

Workforce (employees, partners, and volunteers):
- Include the results of the unit-level workforce evaluation/gap analysis and any strategies for overcoming the gaps from Element B. Evaluate the Trail Program (Workforce). Describe your plan to steward the desired trail system with support from partners and volunteers; this could include recruitment and retention plans, as well as other innovative solutions to expand workforce capacity. Plans should also clearly define roles and responsibilities of Forest Service staff for ensuring sufficient coordination, assistance, and support for partners and volunteers.
Element D. Promote Cross-program Integration

Identify opportunities to actively integrate between agency program areas to meet trail restoration and stewardship objectives (Trail Strategy Action 5.3).

Description:

Units explore innovative ways to share existing and new agency, partner, and volunteer resources to meet mutual objectives across program areas. Where possible, units should emphasize the cross-program integration requirements of the Trails Stewardship Act, such as engaging outfitter and guide special use permit holders in trail maintenance through the Outfitter and Guide Trail Stewardship Credit Pilot Program. Units should also record trail improvements and maintenance accomplished by other agency program areas, such as the wildlife or timber programs. Trail accomplishments by other program areas should be captured in the Infra trails module by selecting “fire” or “other” from the accomplishment drop-down menu. Units should use the comment field to record the “other” program areas accomplished the work.

Outcome 6: Units increase their capacity to steward trails by identifying strategies and taking action on methods to increase cross-program integration.

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<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
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<tr>
<td>Metric 11: # and % of National Forest System trail miles maintained by other program areas, such as fire, wildlife, or timber programs.*</td>
<td>Units report in Infra. Data steward combines unit-level information.</td>
<td>Units: Infra trails module Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric 12: # and % of National Forest System trail miles improved by other program areas, such as fire, wildlife, or timber programs.*</td>
<td>Units report in Infra. Data steward combines unit-level information.</td>
<td>Units: Infra trails module Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric 13: # of units experiencing increased capacity to the trail program through cross-program integration.</td>
<td>Units describe, using examples, cross-program integration actions being taken and how they are or are not increasing the capacity of the trail program. Regions report # and % of units increasing their capacity.</td>
<td>Units: Annual Unit Progress Summary Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

Key Terms

- Cross-program integration: A practice to join personnel and funding resources from various programs and specialties together in implementing certain activities, strategies, and efforts, particularly where there are mutual benefits.

- Line officers: Forest Service employees who have designated decision-making authority. These include the Chief, regional foresters, forest supervisors, and district rangers.

- Performance measures: Identified actions and projects documented in the Forest Service Performance Accountability System that measure how annual outputs accomplished the desired outcomes.

Getting Started

- Discuss the intent and expectation of this element with the local line officer. Ask for help to identify and prioritize cross-program integration opportunities.

- Use the Trail Challenge as a way to form relationships or deepen existing relationships with other agency program areas.

- Demonstrate to other program managers how trails can benefit their program areas, such as by providing remote access for wildfire suppression efforts and fuel treatment projects.

- Model successful examples of cross-program integration projects and share the results.

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18 The Forest Service’s geo-enabled Performance Accountability System [gPAS] reports are available at (internal link) http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/results/xfst/local-resources/scripts/pullContent.php?directory=/results/pdb/Reports/&pagename=Reports.
Element E. Meet Trail Data Standards *(REQUIRED during Launch & Learn phase)*

Meet minimum standards of trail information on all Forest Service units, including accurate and readily available trail spatial data (Trail Strategy Action 6.3).

**Description:**

Units meet data standards and publish trail data, in part, to share information about National Forest System trails with the public. Sharing trail information widely can make these public spaces known to a larger, and presumably more diverse audience. Greater awareness has the potential to lead to more trail stewards as well.

As part of meeting annual minimum trail data standards\(^{19}\), units will enter enough information about National Forest System trails into the Enterprise Data Warehouse to meet “management-level”\(^{20}\) standards for trail data. Publishing to management-level includes many of the annual minimum trail data standards and also enables sharing important information about our trails to the public through the interactive [Visitor Use Map]\(^{21}\). Improving physical trail information, such as trail signs, reassurance markers, and trailhead kiosks will likely be emphasized in the next phase of the Trail Challenge.

**Outcome 7:** All units have fully populated and accurate data for National Forest System trails.

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<tr>
<td>Metric 14: # of units having published trail data to “management-level”*</td>
<td>Units work with GIS managers to publish trail data to management-level.</td>
<td>Units: Infra trails module and the <a href="https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-cio-edwts/SitePages/NEW-EDW-Trails-Publication-Guide.aspx">Enterprise Data Warehouse</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

**Key Terms**

- Data standards: Identified annual requirements for National Forest System trail inventory, maintenance, and management reporting, as well as annual accessibility accomplishment reporting.

- 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.

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\(^{19}\) Forest Service [trail data standards](http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/rhwr/ibsc/tr-cost-mi.shtml) are available at (internal link).

\(^{20}\) Unit trail data summary publication status is available at [https://data.fs.usda.gov/geodata/webapps/DataStatusTable/](https://data.fs.usda.gov/geodata/webapps/DataStatusTable/). [Detailed information about unit trail data publication status](https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-cio-edwts/SitePages/NEW-EDW-Trails-Publication-Guide.aspx) is available at (internal link).

\(^{21}\) The Forest Service’s interactive [Visitor Use Map](https://www.fs.fed.us/ivm/index.html) is available at [https://www.fs.fed.us/ivm/index.html](https://www.fs.fed.us/ivm/index.html).
• Basic: “Centerline” attributes, plus general descriptive information (for example, 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 (for example, mountain bikes, horses, and off-highway vehicle use).

Getting Started

• Share and take advantage of new and existing online and in-person trail data training opportunities for agency employees, partners, and volunteers. Trail training opportunities are available on the Forest Service’s Trail Management Tools web pages or through national trail partners, such as American Trails.

• Work with GIS specialists and others to achieve at least the minimum annual national trail program management and reporting requirements.

Partner and Volunteers

Coordinate with your local trail or recreation manager on how to assist with trail data collection and reporting.

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23 Other trail training resources are also offered through national trail partners such as American Trails, available at https://www.americantrails.org/training.
Element F. Support Outdoor Recreation Economy

Work with local communities, partners, and industry to understand and leverage how trail systems can support rural and urban economic health and growth, where appropriate, and through strategically targeted investments (Trail Strategy Action 3.3).

Description:

No unit-level reporting requirements for this element exist during the Launch & Learn phase. Data from the National Visitor Use Monitoring program is used to estimate the economic impact of trail-based visitation. During the Launch & Learn phase, the economic impact of trail-based visitation will be estimated for each unit by measuring the spending of visitors who are primarily participating in trail-related activities. Although not tracked as part of the Launch & Learn phase, units are encouraged to reach out to local stakeholders to plan and leverage investments in stewarding sustainable trails in a way that provides local economic benefits.

Outcome 8: Local recreation economies increasingly benefit from National Forest System trail use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metric 15: Value of trail visitor spending.*</td>
<td>Units participate in normally scheduled National Visitor Use Monitoring protocol. <strong>Data steward</strong> gathers annual National Visitor Use Monitoring results.</td>
<td><strong>Data steward</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

Key Terms

- National Visitor Use Monitoring Program: The agency’s program charged with estimating visitation to national forests, grasslands, and other administrative units. By surveying a statistical sample of visitors, the program estimates recreational activities, demographics, visit duration, measures of satisfaction, and expenditures connected to the visit. Visitors to national forests and grasslands are surveyed every five years.

- Outdoor recreation economy: Businesses and organizations who financially benefit from the wealth and resources resulting from the consumption of outdoor recreation related goods and services.

Getting Started

- Participate in the National Visitor Use Monitoring Program in accordance with the national schedule.

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• Take advantage of partnership trainings through the Forest Service’s Partnership Resource Center\(^{25}\) and through the National Forest Foundation\(^{26}\).

• Engage with volunteers and partners to see what ideas they have about supporting local recreation economies.

**Partners and Volunteers**

Are you associated with a business or group that benefits from outdoor recreation? Consider partnering with the Forest Service to increase your customers’ awareness and support of trails. Your innovation and creativity are encouraged! A good first step is visiting the agency’s online Partnership Resource Center or contacting the National Forest Foundation for more information about partnering with the Forest Service. Check out this story of a local brewery promoting long distance hiking trails in New England (available at https://www.moon.com/travel/outdoors/new-england-breweries-hiking-pairing).


\(^{26}\) National Forest Foundation website available at https://www.nationalforests.org/collaboration-resources/learning-topics/collaborating-with-the-forest-service.
Element G. Increase Outreach and User Ethics

Build upon successful outreach and user ethics programs, including work done by partners and foundations, to engage and motivate future stewards of public lands (Trail Strategy Action 3.4).

Description:

Units increase the number and diversity of people receiving trail-related user ethics messages, such as #recreateresponsibly, and “pack-it-in, pack-it-out”. Promoting outdoor user ethics helps trail users understand their role in managing natural resources for the benefit of everyone. It can also increase their desire to become public land stewards.

As a trail community, we value everyone’s desire for opportunities to care and advocate for trails in a culturally relevant way. We know that people with different backgrounds have different ways that they connect to land, water, wildlife, and trails. It is important for us to understand and respect the ways in which people connect to these spaces and for all these connections to be reflected in our advocacy, trail planning, outreach, and education.

Outcome 9: More visitors to national forests receive trail-related outreach and user ethics messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Data steward</strong> combines unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Data steward:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome 10: All people feel welcome to realize the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and economic benefits provided by National Forest System trails.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metric 17: # of units using equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in how they work with individuals and communities.</td>
<td>Units describe, using examples, how they are incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in how they work with individuals and communities.</td>
<td>Units: Annual Unit Progress Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Regions</strong> report # and % of units increasing use of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles.</td>
<td><strong>Regions:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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27 The [NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education](https://apps.fs.usda.gov/nice/f/welcome) (NICE) database is available at ([internal link])(https://apps.fs.usda.gov/nice/f/welcome). Instructions about how to gain reporting and view access is provided on the web page.
*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

**Key Terms**

- NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education database: The agency’s official database about outreach and education activities and attendance.

- Outreach and user-ethics programs: Nationally, the terms refer to a suite of existing programs promoted by the Forest Service, such as Leave No Trace\(^{28}\), Tread Lightly!\(^{29}\), #RecreateResponsibly\(^{30}\), and youth and veteran’s programs. Locally, the terms refer to strategies used to attract employees and volunteers and to influence the behavior of trail users regarding responsible land and trail use. Strategies to influence desired trail user behavior could include the use interpretive signs and posters.

**Getting Started**

- Increase consistent use of conservation education and interpretation messages in order to increase trail users’ awareness about things such as preventing resource damage, reducing user conflicts, and even how to become a Forest Service trail volunteer. #RecreateResponsibly, Leave No Trace, and TreadLightly! are examples of partners offering standardized conservation education and interpretation material.

- Explore opportunities to work with partner and volunteer coordinators and other program areas leading conservation education efforts to increase participation in conservation education activities related to outdoor recreation and trails.

- Maximize the number of people exposed to the message by providing information in multiple languages. Documents and web pages can be translated for free through the Forest Service’s Limited English Proficiency Program\(^{31}\).

**Partners and Volunteers**

Share your ideas with your local trail or recreation manager about how to increase the use of outreach and user ethics messages to further engage and motivate future stewards of public lands. Examples include offering to make a video, host a contest, or serve as a trail ambassador at popular trailheads or on popular trails. Get creative to help build a trail community of responsible and ethical trail users!

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\(^{28}\) Leave No Trace website available at [https://lnt.org/](https://lnt.org/).

\(^{29}\) TreadLightly! website available at [https://www.treadlightly.org/](https://www.treadlightly.org/).

\(^{30}\) #RecreateResponsibly website is available at [https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/](https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/).

\(^{31}\) Forest Service internal translation services available at (internal link) [https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-cr-lep/SitePages/Home.aspx](https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-cr-lep/SitePages/Home.aspx).
Element H. Expand Use of Service and Job Corps

Expand integration of 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Job Corps, and similar youth and veteran programs to increase the benefits of trail stewardship (Trail Strategy Action 3.5).

Description:

Units will pursue ways to meaningfully increase engagement with 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Job Corps, and similar youth, veteran, diversity, and ability programs in trail maintenance. Increasing the number and types of people exposed to the benefits of trail stewardship fosters appreciation of public lands, the environment, and public service. Units should record trail improvements and maintenance accomplished by these entities in the Infra trails module by selecting “other” from the accomplishment drop-down menu and using the comment field to describe which type of entity accomplished the work (for example, describing the entity using key words such as “Job Corp”, “Service Corp”, “youth program”, “veteran program”, “Tribal program,” or “programs advancing diversity and inclusion of underrepresented identities”).

Outcome 11: More National Forest System trail miles are stewarded with the assistance of Service and Job Corps-type partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Metric 18: # and % of National Forest System trail miles **maintained** by Service- and Job Corps-type partners.* | **Units** report in Infra by selecting “other” from the accomplishment menu and using the comment field to describe who did the work. **Data steward** enters unit-level information. | **Units**: Infra trails module  
**Data steward**: Trail Challenge dashboard |
| Metric 19: # and % of National Forest System trail miles **improved** by Service and Job Corps-type partners.* | **Units** report in Infra by selecting “other” from the accomplishment menu and using the comment field to describe who did the work. **Data steward** enters unit-level information. | **Units**: Infra trails module  
**Data steward**: Trail Challenge dashboard |

*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

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Key Terms

- Service- and Job Corps-type programs: Organizations that engage and employ youth, veterans, and young people. Examples include the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps and Job Corps programs.

Getting Started

- Consider ways 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Job Corps, and similar youth, veteran, diversity, and ability programs representing underrepresented identities are currently engaged in trail maintenance. Coordinate with existing and new partners to develop more ways to engage.

- Contact local partners to investigate and act on ways to increase meaningful and mutually beneficial projects.

Partners and Volunteers

Do you work with or lead a group representing underrepresented identities? Consider coordinating with your Forest Service trail or recreation manager to investigate, identify, and remove barriers to participation and ways to further engage in meaningful and mutually beneficial projects.
Partner Elements: Partner led

Element I. Shared Partner Leadership

Encourage establishing of a multi-partner group—championed by non-governmental organizations, academia, Tribes, and other agencies and entities—to contribute shared leadership in carrying out the trail strategy (Trail Strategy Action 1.5).

Description:

This element invites multi-partner groups to form at various geographic scales (nationally, regionally, or locally) and to reach out and work with the Forest Service on implementing the National Trail Strategy, Trail Challenge, and National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. At a local level, multi-partner groups are invited to engage in locally focused efforts that support a unit’s sustainable trail system. The role of Forest Service employees in this element is to encourage formation of, and engagement with, such groups, but they are limited in how much direction or leadership they can provide in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.34

Area of Focus 1: Create a Partner Coalition

- Focus 1: Establish a coalition structure and communication channels; ensure coalition members reflect underrepresented identities as well as a broad range of trail-user types.
- Focus 2: Coordinate development of agreed upon multi-agency and partner trail training core competencies.
- Focus 3: Support development of professional trail certification standards.
- Focus 4: Support development of a public-facing online portal or “community of practice” website to share trail-related information, including standardized trail training.
- Focus 5: Coordinate and support an integrated approach to collecting and sharing trail information that better serves the public, emphasizing open data, citizen science, and other contemporary approaches.

Area of Focus 2: Support Local Partners Working Together

- Focus 6: Explore opportunities supporting local trail partners in working together in support of sustainable trail systems.

Key Terms

- Online trail community of practice: An online platform where people who share an interest or profession in trails can access and share information and training.
- Partner coalition: A coalition of partners representing diverse trail-user group perspectives, including motorized and nonmotorized interests, as well as representing underrepresented identities, such as cultural, gender, and ability identities who work together with the Forest Service to leverage skills and resources to advance common goals.

Element J. Invite Trail Endowment

Advocate with the non-governmental organization and partner community to establish a national trail endowment, pursue nontraditional funding sources, and invite contributions to help leverage resources to carry out the trail strategy (Trail Strategy Action 4.5).

Description:

This element invites partnering organizations and others to set up a national trail fund or endowment to help the agency conduct work on sustainable trails. Similar local funds, endowments, and other fundraising efforts are also encouraged. Dividends from an endowment or fund could be made available through competitive grants that increase maintenance, improvements, designs, and construction of National Forest System trails. A variety of companies and businesses, in and out of the outdoor recreation industry, could be instrumental in helping set up, grow, and maintain the endowment or fund. The role of Forest Service employees in this element is to encourage partner groups to work together and with others to establish and lead the effort. The agency cannot solicit participation or funds in accordance with the Hatch Act. For more information about how to collaborate and partner with the Forest Service, refer to the online Partnerships Resource Center or the National Forest Foundation.

Area of Focus 3: Support Trails Through Innovative and Non-traditional Funding Sources

• Focus 7: Explore innovative, nontraditional sources for national-level funding to support National Forest System trails.

Key Terms

Nontraditional funding sources: Any funding source outside of regularly appropriated dollars, such as grants, agreements, endowments, or other sources.

Appendix A—Frequently Asked Questions

Version 2020.1 (2/1/2021)

Not finding an answer to your question? Please contact your regional trail program lead with your questions or email the Forest Service trail management program (wo_trail_program@usda.gov).

General Questions and Answers

• **What is a “sustainable trail”?**
  A trail is sustainable when it is in a state of being economically viable, socially relevant and supported, and having little to no negative impact on the environment over time.

• **What is a “sustainable trail system”?**
  A sustainable trail system is a local network of trails that are ecologically and economically sustainable and that meet the needs of current users without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Trail systems could cross unit and jurisdictional boundaries, such as with other Forest Service units, other agencies, Tribes and Tribal organizations, and municipalities.

• **When does the Trail Challenge start?**
  The Chief launched the Trail Challenge in 2020. Units, together with partners and volunteers, will continue implementing Trail Challenge elements through 2030.

• **What is the purpose of the Trail Challenge and who developed it?**
  The purpose of the Trail Challenge is to focus the collective efforts and resources of employees, partners, and volunteers on actions that will make the most difference in helping to increase the agency’s capacity to manage and maintain trails and move towards a more sustainable trails system.

  The Trail Challenge implements portions of the national trail strategy and the Trails Stewardship Act of 2016, both of which direct the agency to increase its collective capacity to maintain trails and increase on-the-ground results toward achieving a sustainable trail system. Learn more about these two efforts on the national trail web page.

  Hundreds of Forest Service employees from all levels of the organization, partners, and volunteers contributed to developing of the Trail Challenge by taking part in many listening and working sessions, online webinars, and document reviews.

• **How are equity, diversity, and inclusion principles integrated into the Trail Challenge?**
  These important principles are a “lens” through which the Trail Challenge was developed and is being implemented. They connect to the Forest Service’s core values of service, conservation, interdependence, diversity, and safety. These principles influence hiring practices and outreach to partners and volunteers, how we collaborate with people and communities, and how we provide high quality trail experiences to the public.

  Units, together with existing and new partners and volunteers, are encouraged to innovate and find opportunities to incorporate these principles into every element of the Trail Challenge. For example, under Element G. Increase Outreach and User Ethics, a unit could focus on helping all people feel welcome so they can realize the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and economic
benefits provided by National Forest System trails. Several helpful reference documents about communicating and putting into action equity, diversity, and inclusion principles are being developed and will be posted in the Trail Challenge online toolbox.

- **Who is participating in the Trail Challenge?**
  The main participants in the Trail Challenge are Forest Service staff with trails responsibilities and partners and volunteers who help with trail maintenance activities. Others who share in supporting and benefitting from National Forest System trails are also invited to participate, including Forest Service employees from all program areas, other partners and volunteers, other Federal agencies, Tribal organizations, States, communities, academia, organizations engaging people of color, youth, veterans, and organizations of traditionally underrepresented identities, and businesses that benefit from trails and outdoor recreation.

  When available, visit the Trail Challenge online dashboard for the list of participating Forest Service administrative units. Elements I and J are being tracked by national trail partners, and progress will also be shared on the dashboard.

- **Where is the Trail Challenge being carried out?**
  All National Forest System trails are included in the Trail Challenge. Units are encouraged to collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions who manage adjoining trails systems, such as other Forest Service units, and Federal, State, and county entities.

- **How are national and regional agency leaders supporting the Trail Challenge?**
  Forest Service executive and regional leaders understand the importance of trails in connecting people with public lands and in engaging the next generation of public land stewards. They also recognize trails as tools in supporting other agency priorities, such as supporting fire, timber, and watershed restoration objectives. In February 2020, Chief Vicky Christiansen expressed the agency’s commitment to implementing the Trail Challenge across landscapes “in order to achieve a trail system nation-wide that contributes to ecologic resiliency, meets the needs of current and new users and communities, and that is stewarded by adequate resources.”

- **How does the Trail Challenge support other priorities such as implementing the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 and the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act of 2016?**
  Trail Challenge implementation will help units maximize the benefits of the [Great American Outdoors Act](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/api/serialset/sgmlглавная/information/US-Congress-116th-Congress-HR-1726-GA-2020.pdf). Units, together with partners, volunteers, and communities will determine the locally desired sustainable trail system and be better prepared to prioritize deferred maintenance needs and leverage shared resources to attain that system. Implementing the Trail Challenge is also maximizing benefits of the Trail Stewardship Act, such as studying fire program involvement in trail maintenance, developing unit-level trail stewardship plans, and leading units to double trail maintenance accomplishments by partners and volunteers.

- **How is success of the Trail Challenge being measured?**
  Unit progress toward achieving element outcomes is tracked through quantifiable metrics and some narratives. Metrics are tracked mostly through regular upward reporting. A few metrics require additional reporting by units (see the Appendix B for a summary of element outcomes and metrics).

- **Where is progress reported and displayed?**
Employees, partners, volunteers, and the public can view unit and regional progress on an online dashboard (when available in FY21). Regional trail program leads, and the Trail Challenge data steward can enter accomplishment data through a Survey 123 application.

The Trail Challenge dashboard is under development and will be ready for data entry in FY21. At that time, the dashboard will be available as a link from the Trail Challenge web page.

• **Is extra funding available?**
  
  In past fiscal years, priority allocations supporting the Trail Challenge have been distributed to regions in addition to appropriated funds. Partner and volunteer grants have also been available for increasing trail maintenance and reducing deferred maintenance on National Forest System trails, for example through the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program[^36] and an agreement with the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance. Leveraging the Great American Outdoors Act is another way to make progress. Pursing additional funding for Trail Challenge implementation will continue, although specific annual appropriated funding is not guaranteed.

• **How do I account for related work that I’m already doing or have done?**
  
  The Trail Challenge is intended to build on the work units are already doing to increase capacity and on-the-ground results supporting trails. For example, units who select to work on Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems and who are already conducting trail sustainability or trail system sustainability assessments, are not asked to recreate the assessment; they only need to ensure their assessment meets the minimum requirements. The minimum requirements will be posted in the online Trail Challenge toolbox when available.

• **What trainings and resources are available to help units implement Challenge elements?**
  
  This Trail Challenge technical guidebook is the primary resource for understanding the elements. Each element is described in the guidebook, including ideas about how to get started, how partners can be involved, and definitions of important terms. Existing and additional resources supporting each element, such as standardized trail and workforce assessment processes and tools will be made available in the toolbox.

### Involving Partners and Volunteers

• **How were the partner-led elements developed?**
  
  The same group of Forest Service employees, partners, and volunteers who contributed to the other element outcomes also informed the partner focus areas. National trail partners representing a range of trail users and advocacy organizations, such as the Trails Move People Coalition[^37], took the lead in developing the associated focus areas and are supporting implementation and tracking accomplishments. Partner accomplishments in the focus areas will be shared on the Trail Challenge dashboard.

[^36]: Information about the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program is available on the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance web page available at https://www.wildernessalliance.org/trail_funding.

**I am interested in helping as a trail partner or volunteer. Who do I contact?**

Contacting a regional or local Forest Service office for partner and volunteer opportunities is the best place to start. Also visit the “Working with Us” web page for more information about jobs, partnering, and volunteering opportunities.

**Challenge Framework**

**How does the Trail Challenge work?**

The Trail Challenge is being implemented in three phases from 2020 to 2030. Unit employees in close collaboration with partners and volunteers will take action in each phase. The requirements and expectations in each phase will become more standardized as we learn from each other.

**What is the difference between national, unit, and partner elements?**

Elements are divided into categories based on who is taking the lead in accomplishing them and by their implementation scale (or at what level of the agency they are being accomplished). Regions are leading implementation of national elements with direct support from the Washington Office. Forest Service units in collaboration with local partners and volunteers are leading unit elements. Partners are leading implementation of partner elements.

**What should I do in the Launch & Learn phase?**

A main focus during the Launch & Learn phase is engaging with partners, volunteers, and communities to select and implement trail maintenance projects that leverage Great American Outdoors Act funding. The two elements required in this phase are, Element A. Establish Trails Advisory Group and Element E. Meet Data Standards. Units are also encouraged to begin working on elements B, C, and D, as those will be required starting in phase 2.

**What should I do in the Hitting Our Stride phase? (2024~2027)**

In the second phase, or the “Hitting Our Stride” phase, focus will be on standardizing processes, learning from others, and increasing capacity to successfully implement Trail Challenge elements. In this phase, units will be required to implement all national and unit elements (elements A-E).

**What should I do in the Peak Performance phase? (2028~2030)**

In the third phase, or the “Peak Performance” phase, focus will be on continuing to make progress on national and unit elements, including additional unit elements F-H.

**Selecting Elements to Work On**

**How do I select elements to work on?**

Units should select elements by communicating with their regional trail program lead about their choices by November 15. Units, working together with regional offices, are encouraged to annually revisit their priorities and update their selection if necessary. During the Launch & Learn phase, regions and units are encouraged to begin working on Element B. Evaluate the Trail Program (Workforce), Element C. Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems, and Element D. Promote Cross

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38 [Contact information](https://www.fs.usda.gov/organization) for Forest Service regional and unit offices available at [https://www.fs.usda.gov/organization](https://www.fs.usda.gov/organization).

Program Integration, as these will be required elements during the next phase starting around 2024.

- **If I select an element in any phase, am I “locked in” to working on that element for the remainder of the Trail Challenge?**

  Continued progress on national and most unit elements is important to make a system-wide impact. Units can, however, change their selection of unit elements F-H from year to year.

### Reporting Progress and Accountability

- **Is the Challenge supported by performance measures?**

  Executive, regional, and recreation program leaders are committed to supporting units in fully implementing Trail Challenge elements with the help of partners and volunteers. At this time, no formal performance measures are associated with the Trail Challenge. However, specific performance measures being pursued to promote cross-program integration as part of Element D. Promote Cross Program Integration.

- **How much time does reporting take?**

  Reporting accomplishments for some metrics takes little time, such as when entering a value. Other metrics will require more time, such as when providing a narrative. Every effort has been made to make reporting as simple and meaningful as possible to reduce the impact on field units and to also show progress toward increasing capacity and achieving sustainable trails and trail systems.

- **How is progress being reported and by when?**

  Units should meet all regularly scheduled upward reporting deadlines, such as annual data entry into the Infra trails module, the Volunteer Services database (VS Reports) and the NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education database.

  By October 31 of each year, units should report their progress on metrics that require unit-level data entry using the Annual Unit Progress Summary form. Information about reporting will soon be available in the Trail Challenge toolbox as a link from the Trail Challenge web page.

  By December 15 of each year, the Washington Office trail program will develop and share an annual progress report summarizing unit, regional, and partner progress on Trail Challenge elements.

- **How are Trail Challenge data being used?**

  Data trends will help demonstrate progress made towards achieving Trail Challenge goals. Progress will also help inform and refine each phase of the Trail Challenge. In addition, the national trail program, regions, and units will use the data to find opportunities to reward success and understand and help improve performance.
## Appendix B—Element Outcomes and Metrics Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A—Establish Trails Advisory Group</strong></td>
<td>Outcome 1: The Trails Advisory Group is made up of field-going representatives from each region.</td>
<td>Metric 1: Name of the selected regional Trails Advisory Group member.</td>
<td>Units respond to regional requests for nominations every 2-4 years. <strong>Regions</strong> annually enter the name of the selected representative into the Trail Challenge dashboard.</td>
<td><strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | Outcome 2: Unit trail programs are evaluated at least twice to understand the current trail workforce and determine minimum staffing levels needed for a sustainable trail system. | Metric 2: # employees per unit with trails skills represented in the Trail Community Map.* | Unit populate and annually update the Trail Community Map with employee trail skills. **Data steward** annually enters # of trail staff per unit in the Trail Community Map. | **Unit**: Trail Community Map  
**Data Steward**: Trail Challenge dashboard |
<p>| <strong>B—Evaluate Trails Program</strong> | | Metric 3: # and % of unit-level trail programs evaluated at the regional level. | Unit participate in regionally led evaluations. <strong>Regions</strong> report the # and % of completed unit-level trail program evaluations. | <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard |
| | | Metric 4: # and % of units with 1 or more trail managers. | Unit participate at least twice in a regionally led evaluation. <strong>Regions</strong> report the # and % of units with 1 or more trail managers. | <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Annual Metric</th>
<th>How to Report</th>
<th>Where to Report</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C—Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems</td>
<td>Outcome 3: All National Forest System trails are assessed at least twice to determine current sustainability and identify tasks needed to increase sustainability.</td>
<td>Metric 5: # of units having completed sustainability assessments on National Forest System trails.</td>
<td>Unit report completed unit-level assessments. <strong>Regions</strong> report # and % of units with completed assessments.</td>
<td><strong>Unit:</strong> Annual Unit Progress Summary  <strong>Regions:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metric 6: # of sustainable National Forest System trail miles.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report # of sustainable National Forest System trail miles on the unit. <strong>Regions</strong> report # of and % of National Forest System sustainable trail miles on each unit.</td>
<td><strong>Unit:</strong> Annual Unit Progress Summary  <strong>Regions:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcome 4: Partners and volunteers increase their support of the trail program.</td>
<td>Metric 7: # of National Forest System trail miles maintained by partners and volunteers.*</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report in Infra. <strong>Data Steward</strong> enters unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Unit:</strong> Infra trails module  <strong>Data steward:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Metric 8: # of National Forest System trail miles improved by partners and volunteers.*</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report in Infra. <strong>Data Steward</strong> enters unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Unit:</strong> Infra trails module  <strong>Data steward:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>Metric 9: # of volunteer hours spent conducting trail-related activities.*</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report in <strong>VS Reports database</strong>. <strong>Data Steward</strong> enters unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Unit:</strong> VS Reports database  <strong>Data steward:</strong> Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>Element</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Annual Metric</td>
<td>How to Report</td>
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<td>Outcome 5: Units develop, use, and update their trail stewardship plans.</td>
<td>Metric 10: # and % of units with trail stewardship plans.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> document and share completed trail stewardship plans. <strong>Regions</strong> report # and % of units with completed plans.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong>: Annual Unit Progress Summary <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>D—Promote Cross-Program Integration</td>
<td>Outcome 6: Units increase their capacity to steward trails by identifying strategies and taking action on methods to increase cross-program integration.</td>
<td>Metric 11: # of National Forest System trail miles <strong>maintained</strong> by other program areas, such as fire, wildlife, or timber programs.*</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report in <strong>Infra</strong>. <strong>Data Steward</strong> combines unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong>: <strong>Infra</strong> trails module <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>Metric 12: # of National Forest System trail miles <strong>improved</strong> by other program areas, such as fire, wildlife, or timber programs.*</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> report in <strong>Infra</strong>. <strong>Data Steward</strong> combines unit-level information.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong>: <strong>Infra</strong> trails module <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>Metric 13: # and % of units who are experiencing increased capacity to the trail program through cross-program integration.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong> describe, using examples, cross-program integration actions being taken and how they are or are not increasing the capacity of the trail program. <strong>Regions</strong> report # and % of units increasing their capacity.</td>
<td><strong>Unit</strong>: Annual Unit Progress Summary <strong>Regions</strong>: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>E—Meet Data Standards</td>
<td>Outcome 7: All units have fully populated and accurate data for National Forest System trails.</td>
<td>Metric 14: # of units having published trail data to “management-level”*</td>
<td>Unit work with GIS managers to publish trail data to management-level.</td>
<td>Unit: Infra trails module and the Enterprise Data Warehouse</td>
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<td>Outcome 9: More visitors to national forests receive trail-related outreach and user ethics messages.</td>
<td>Metric 16: # of people taking part in Forest Service interpretive programs related to outdoor and user ethics (any “outdoor recreation subject area” in the NatureWatch Interpretation, and Conservation Education database).*</td>
<td>Unit report program attendance. Data Steward combines unit-level information.</td>
<td>Unit: NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education database Data steward: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>G—Expand Outreach and User Ethics</td>
<td>Outcome 10: All people feel welcome to realize the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and economic benefits provided by National Forest System trails.</td>
<td>Metric 17: # and % of units using equity, diversity, and inclusion principles in how they work with individuals and communities.</td>
<td>Unit describe, using examples, how they are incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion principles into how they work with people. Regions report # and % of units increasing use of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles.</td>
<td>Unit: Annual Unit Progress Summary Regions: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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<td>Element</td>
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<td>How to Report</td>
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<td>H—Expand Use of Service and Job Corps</td>
<td>Outcome 11: More National Forest System trail miles are stewarded with the assistance of Service and Job Corps-type partners.</td>
<td>Metric 18: # of National Forest System trail miles maintained by Service and Job Corps-type partners.*</td>
<td>Unit report in Infra. Data Steward enters unit-level information.</td>
<td>Unit: Infra trails module</td>
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<td>Metric 19: # of National Forest System trail miles improved by Service and Job Corps-type partners.*</td>
<td>Unit report in Infra. Data Steward enters unit-level information.</td>
<td>Data steward: Trail Challenge dashboard</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Metrics are being tracked through regular agency reporting requirements and will be displayed on the Trail Challenge dashboard, even if the unit doesn’t select the element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Area of Focus</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I—Invite Shared Partner Leadership</td>
<td>Create a Partner Coalition</td>
<td><strong>Focus 1</strong>: Establish a coalition structure and communication channels; ensure coalition members reflect underrepresented identities as well as a broad range of trail-user types.</td>
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<td><strong>Focus 2</strong>: Coordinate development of agreed upon multi-agency and partner trail training core competencies.</td>
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<td><strong>Focus 3</strong>: Support development of professional trail certification standards.</td>
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<td><strong>Focus 4</strong>: Support development of a public-facing online portal or “community of practice” website to share trail-related information, including standardized trail training.</td>
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<td>Element</td>
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<tr>
<td>I—Invite Shared Partner Leadership</td>
<td>Focus 5: Coordinate and support an integrated approach to collecting and sharing trail information that better serves the public, emphasizing open data, citizen science, and other contemporary approaches.</td>
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<td>Support Local Partners Working Together</td>
<td>Focus 6: Explore opportunities to support local trail partners in working together for sustainable trail systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>J—Invite Trail Endowment</td>
<td>Support Trails Through Innovative and Non-traditional Funding Sources</td>
<td>Focus 7: Explore innovative non-traditional sources for national-level funding to support National Forest System trails.</td>
</tr>
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Appendix C—Glossary

**Annual Unit Progress Summary form**: A fillable form that units use to describe accomplishments and progress on Trail Challenge elements. Units will use Annual Unit Progress Summary form to share progress with their regional trail program lead. The Annual Progress Summary form will be available in the online Trail Challenge toolbox under “Reporting”.

**Trail Challenge dashboard**: A cloud-based interactive map that tracks and displays accomplishments of each element by Forest Service unit. The data is sourced in several ways, including reports from the Infra trail module, Volunteer Services database, NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education database, and through direct entry by regional trail leads and the Trail Challenge data steward. The dashboard is currently under development and will be ready for data entry in FY21. At that time, the dashboard can be accessed from a link on the [Trail Challenge webpage](https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/10YTC). Contact the [Forest Service trail management program](mailto:wo_trail_program@usda.gov) for more information about the dashboard.

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

**Community of practice**: A group of people who share an interest, such as a craft or a profession. The group can be supported through shared stories and examples, such as those shared through a website.

**Cross-program integration**: A practice to join personnel and funding resources from various programs and specialties together in implementing certain activities, strategies, and efforts, particularly where there are mutual benefits.

**Data standards**: Identified annual requirements for National Forest System trail inventory and maintenance reporting and annual accessibility accomplishment reporting.

**Data steward**: A Forest Service employee designated by the Forest Service national trail program who gathers and enters unit-level data from existing reporting sources into the Trail Challenge dashboard.

**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.

**Great American Outdoors Act of 2020**: Enacted legislation that enables the agency to aggressively address deferred maintenance and other infrastructure projects on administrative units.

**Infra trails database**: The agency’s official database about National Forest System trail infrastructure inventory and management.

**Line officers**: Forest Service employees who have designated decision-making authority, such as the Chief, regional foresters, forest supervisors, and district rangers.

**National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act of 2016**: Enacted legislation that focuses the agency’s efforts in increasing the role of partners and volunteers in trail maintenance.

**National leaders (Forest Service)**: Washington Office leadership includes the executive leadership of the Chief and his or her staff, as well as the Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources directorate area.
**National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System:** The agency’s strategic plan published in 2017 about trails. The plan describes 26 actions for the agency to take with partners and volunteers to achieve a more sustainable trail system.

**National Trail Board:** Full-time membership includes the national trails program lead, national trail information coordinator (typically the assistant national trail program lead), regional recreation director liaison, national OHV program lead, regional trail program leads (trail managers from each of the nine agency regions), a national scenic and historic trail administrator’s representative, and a Trails Advisory Group representative.

**National Visitor Use Monitoring Program:** An agency program with two concurrent goals: (1) estimating the volume of recreation visitation to national forests, grasslands, and other administrative units, (2) producing descriptive information about that visitation, including activity participation, demographics, visit duration, measures of satisfaction, and trip spending connected to the visit.

**NatureWatch, Interpretation, and Conservation Education database:** The agency’s official database about outreach and education activities and attendance.

**New trails:** Newly constructed National Forest System routes or adopted portions of unauthorized or user-created routes.

**Nontraditional funding sources:** Any funding source outside regularly appropriated dollars, such as grants, agreements, endowments, or other funds.

**Outdoor recreation economy:** Businesses and organizations who financially benefit from the wealth and resources resulting from the consumption of outdoor recreation related goods and services.

**Outreach and user-ethics programs:** Nationally, the terms refer to a suite of existing programs supported by the Forest Service, such as Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly!, and youth and veteran’s programs. Locally, the terms refer to strategies used to attract employees and volunteers and to influence the behavior of trail users about responsible land use. Strategies to influence desired trail user behavior could include the use interpretive signs and posters.

**Partner:** Typically refers to groups or organizations with a formal relationship with the Forest Service, for example through a challenge cost share agreement.

**Performance measures:** Identified actions and projects documented in the Forest Service Performance Accountability System that measure how annual outputs accomplished the desired outcomes.

**Regional leaders (Forest Service):** Includes regional foresters and staff, including regional recreation directors, and the nine regional trail program leads.

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

**Service- and Job Corp-type programs:** Organizations that engage and employ youth, veterans, and young people. Examples of these programs are the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps and Job Corps programs.

**Shared leadership coalition:** A national partner group representing diverse trail-user group perspectives, including motorized and nonmotorized interests, as well as representing cultural, gender, and ability diversity.
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.

Stakeholder: A person or group with an interest or stake in trails.

Sustainable trail: A trail that is in a state of being economically viable, socially relevant and supported, and having limited negative impact on the environment over time.

Sustainable trail system: A local network of trails that are ecologically and economically sustainable and that meet the needs of current users without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Trail systems could cross unit and jurisdictional boundaries, such as with other Forest Service units, other agencies, Tribes and Tribal organizations, and municipalities.

Toolbox: An online toolbox of helpful resources such as templates, “how-do” documents, and communication material that support implementation of the Trail Challenge. The Trail Challenge online toolbox is under development and expected in spring 2021. When completed, the toolbox can be accessed from a link on the Trail Challenge web site available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/10YTC.

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 agency employees, partners, and volunteers who give to or receive benefits from trails, including Forest Service employees, partners, volunteers, other Federal agencies and Tribal organizations, States, communities, academia, organizations engaging people of color, youth, and veterans, and businesses who benefit from trails and outdoor recreation.

Trail Community Map: An online networking tool for trail professionals designed to help the Forest Service and the greater trail community to leverage capacity, share resources, and better serve the public. Employees and the public can use the map to find and contact local trail professionals and others with trail-related skills and experience. The Trail Community Map (TCM) will be available for data entry in Spring 2021, as a link from the Trail Management Tools webpage, available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/trails/trail-management-tools. At this time, data entry is open only to Forest Service employees.

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 (for example, 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 (for example, mountain bikes, horses, and off-highway vehicle use).

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 serve as
communication conduits within and between regions, the Washington Office, and the broader trail community about emerging trail issues, recommendations, and trends.

**Trails Move People Coalition:** Trails Move People is a coalition of trail-related organizations that represent diverse trail interests, including motorized and nonmotorized trail groups and users.

**Unauthorized trail or route:** An unauthorized and unplanned linear route that is not documented as an established route in the national forest trail system and that has been created by the consistent use of trail users (also known as a “social trail”).

**Unit:** Centers of management of the physical land managed by the Forest Service. In this guidebook, the term “unit” refers to the administratively defined boundary of a forest, grassland, or special management area. There are currently 154 forests and 20 national grasslands that are subdivided into 559 “districts” in the United States, including Puerto Rico. There are also several special management units, such as national recreation areas.

When available, the Trail Challenge dashboard will feature a list of participating Forest Service administrative units.

**Volunteer:** Volunteers are 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.

**Volunteers and Service Reporting (VS Reports) database:** The agency’s official database about volunteer and partner hours and activities.
Appendix D—Crosswalk of National Trail Strategy Actions

The 13 trail strategy actions italicized in the list below are included in the Trail Challenge as elements to act on. All 26 actions described in the national trail strategy are also important and are being included in the agency’s program of work over the next decade. Units and regions are invited to engage in any of the trail strategy actions that support their progress in the Trail Challenge and that support the overall needs of the local trail program.

**Leader Intent:**
- Inspire Intent and Commitment (1.1)
- Implement 10-Year Trail Challenge (1.2)
- Apply Leader Intent Incentives (1.3)
  - Establish Trails Advisory Group (1.4)
  - Encourage Shared Partner Leadership (1.5)

**Organization and Talent:**
- Sustain and Maximize Talent (2.1)
  - Evaluate and Reorganize Trail Program (2.2)
- Identify Essential Skills (2.3)
- Champion Integrated Training (2.4)

**Relevancy:**
- Identify and Communicate Benefits (3.1)
  - Foster Cultural Relevance (3.2)
  - Support Outdoor Recreation Economy (3.3)
  - Build Upon User Ethics Program (3.4)
  - Expand Use of Service and Job Corps (3.5)

**Sustainable Systems:**
- Create Shared Understanding (4.1)
- Identify Sustainable Trail Systems (4.2)
- Implement 10-Year Stewardship Plans (4.3)
- Assess Proposed Trails (4.4)
- Invite Trail Endowment (4.5)

**Agency Processes and Culture:**
- Remove Barriers (5.1)
  - Provide Efficiency Tools (5.2)
  - Apply Cross-Program Integration (5.3)
  - Establish Community of Practice (5.4)

**Information:**
- Integrate Shared Data Collection and Use (6.1)
- Improve Data Tools (6.2)
  - Meet Data Standards (6.3)
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