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Date: January 18, 2017

Ms. Anne-Marie Fennell
Director, Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Fennell:

Please find the enclosed copy of the Forest Service's "National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System." We developed this document in accordance with the Department of Agriculture's statement of actions taken on recommendations in the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report "FOREST SERVICE TRAILS: Long- and Short-Term Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog and Enhance System Sustainability" (GAO-13-618, June 27, 2013).

The strategy establishes a bold vision for a sustainable trail system achieved through collaborative stewardship. It identifies core values to guide implementation and outlines a series of strategic actions to leverage critical investments in agency and partner leader intent and resources toward achieving a 10-year action plan. The strategy was developed between 2014 and 2016, based on a body of knowledge gathered during more than 20 facilitated listening and dialogue sessions, which included Forest Service leaders and agency employees, partners, and representatives from other agencies, academia, and industry.

During the same timeframe, Congress also approved the new National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act last November, a measure which earned bipartisan support. It aims to address findings identified in the GAO report and requires the Forest Service to develop a strategy that significantly increases the role of volunteers and partners in trail maintenance.

In developing the National Strategy for Trails, the Forest Service worked to engage and incorporate input from trail partners and Agency employees, while ensuring alignment with the intent of the newly-approved Act. Workforce capacity and resource limitations, however, have resulted in a year's delay in finalizing the trail strategy. We previously shared these limitations with representatives of GAO. Despite the delay in the timetable, our active engagement with trail partners, agency employees, and other stakeholders, along with alignment to the Trail Stewardship Act results in a substantially improved strategy.

We have also enclosed for your reference an overview of the trail strategy, which provides a synopsis of its main components. Both the overview and the trail strategy are posted on the Forest Service Web page at <https://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trail-management/strategy/index.shtml>. The Agency is working to complete final design layout and printing of the strategy as an official publication, including incorporation of graphics and photos, and will post and share the publication once it is available.



The trail strategy, designed to serve as an overarching framework that guides Agency efforts over the next decade, addresses each statement of action items the Secretary identified. While the strategy itself has been under development, several of the action items have been initiated or completed. The enclosed Statement of Action Implementation Status Summary provides a current status of each identified action item.

As the trail strategy is implemented, we intend to fully incorporate, adapt and complete each of the actions the Secretary identified to maintain trails, in accordance with availability of Agency capacity and resources. If you have any questions, please contact Antoine (Tony) Dixon, Chief Financial Officer, at (202) 205-0429.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas L. Tidwell
THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief

Enclosures (3)