

National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System

An Overview



A Need for Change

The Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is committed to caring for the land and serving people by connecting them with their public lands. Well-located and well-cared-for trails are a vital way for visitors and communities to reach and explore these lands and enjoy the multiple health, wellness, and economic benefits of outdoor recreation. The agency embraces its leadership role as a community member, shared steward, and key provider of access to public lands.

Together with partners, volunteers, and friends, the Forest Service manages more than 158,000 miles of nonmotorized and motorized trails—the largest managed system of trails in the country. More than 84 million people recreate on National Forest System trails annually, and more than 230 million people live within 100 miles of a national forest or grassland. National Forest System trails also connect with many miles of trails managed by local, State, Federal, and tribal governments and by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Drawing from these valued partner resources now and into the future, the Forest Service will increasingly embrace a shared-stewardship approach in providing and managing a sustainable system of trails.



World Class System of Trails:

- 158,600 miles of trail
- 84 million people annually enjoy Forest Service trails
- 143,000 jobs annually supported by recreation and tourism spending
- More than \$9 billion in annual visitor spending

Strategic Intent

The strategic intent of the strategy is to embrace and inspire a different way of thinking—and doing. The strategy builds on the many examples from across the country where the Forest Service, its partners, and the greater trails community have successfully embraced a community-driven and locally sustainable trail system model. Leaders, employees, partners, volunteers, trail users, and friends can use the strategy to strengthen stewardship and dedication to improve a world-class, diverse trail system as one of America’s greatest legacies.

Areas of Action

In achieving a sustainable trail system, the Forest Service faces six areas that require action. Each of these can be scaled and adapted to inspire change at all levels of the agency, as well as with partners, volunteers, and friends.

Leader Intent: Cultivate leadership desire for and commitment to a sustainable trail system.

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

Organization and Talent: Leverage an expanded and combined workforce to increase stewardship capacity.

- 2.1 Sustain and Maximize Talent
- 2.2 Evaluate and Reorganize Trail Program
- 2.3 Identify Essential Skills
- 2.4 Champion Integrated Training

Relevancy: Connect with diverse communities and trail users.

- 3.1 Identify and Communicate Benefits
- 3.2 Foster Cultural Relevance
- 3.3 Support Outdoor Recreation Economy
- 3.4 Build Upon Outreach and User Ethics Programs
- 3.5 Expand Use of Service and Job Corps Programs

Sustainable Systems: Collaboratively create and achieve a common vision.

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

Agency Processes and Culture: Maximize opportunities for effective partnering and trail stewardship.

- 5.1 Remove Barriers
- 5.2 Provide Efficiency Tools
- 5.3 Apply Cross-Program Integration
- 5.4 Establish Community of Practice

Information: Provide readily available, up-to-date, and credible trail information.

- 6.1 Integrate Shared Data Collection and Use
- 6.2 Improve Data Tools
- 6.3 Meet Data Standards

Sustainable Trail System

A sustainable trail system is a holistic network of diverse physical and social resources comprised of actual on-the-ground routes and associated community health and economic benefits.

It is a resilient system consisting of a wide array of well-planned, well-designed, well-constructed, and well-managed trails that are supported by a mosaic of public and private interests. The system inspires stewardship and invites people of all ages and abilities—and from all backgrounds—to enjoy trails and use them to connect to their public lands while protecting and conserving natural and cultural resources.

Core Values

At the Forest Service, we are embracing seven core values and invite our partners, volunteers, and friends to join us in adopting these values to guide our collective efforts.

- Safety
- Sustainability
- Commitment
- Access
- Inclusion
- Communication
- Relationships

The Forest Service is currently working to complete final design layout and printing of this strategy as an official publication. For a manuscript copy of the trail strategy, visit the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System Web site:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/trail-management/strategy/index.shtml>