



United States Department of Agriculture

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION TRAILS STRATEGY



Forest Service

Rocky Mountain Region

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INTRODUCTION	04
WHAT IS SHARED STEWARDSHIP?	06
THE NEED FOR A SHARED STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY	08
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	10
WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE TRAIL?	12
GOALS AND STRATEGIES	14
S.H.I.F.T. PRINCIPLES (Shaping How We Invest for Tomorrow)	18

The Rocky Mountain Region of the USDA Forest Service is developing a strategic approach for trails to provide valued recreational experiences, sustain wildlife and natural resources, foster economic prosperity, and inspire public health. The Rocky Mountain Region Trails Stewardship Strategy embraces the Forest Service values of service, interdependence, conservation, diversity, and safety, as well as the values of sustainability, commitment, access, inclusion, communication, and relationships.

The trails stewardship strategy will guide how we work together to share, steward, and enjoy a sustainable system of trails across the region. This strategy is not a decision document, but a springboard upon which all stakeholders in the Rocky Mountain Region can engage to collectively move forward. Simultaneously, the region and this trails stewardship strategy will tier and contribute to the achievement of larger nationwide initiatives of the Forest Service, including the *National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System*, the *10-Year Sustainable Trails Stewardship Challenge*, and the *Trails Stewardship Act*.



The Rocky Mountain Region manages more than 21,000 miles of motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized trails and provides administrative and recreation access to more than 28 million people annually on over 22 million acres of public land in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Moving forward, we want to embrace and build on the innovation and energy of partners, industry, volunteers, agency leaders, and employees, to seek out new relationships and new solutions. We will leverage the energy, talent, and resources of the trails community by sharing stewardship and making trails and trail management a collective priority.

Join us! Together, we can ensure a lasting trails legacy for generations to come.

“Shared stewardship can bring partners and stakeholders together across shared landscapes, capitalizing on existing tools and authorities, to set mutual goals and priorities, analyze tradeoffs, and help decide where to make the investments needed to achieve the cross-boundary outcomes desired by all.”

– Towards Shared Stewardship Across Landscapes, USDA Forest Service

Shared stewardship is about working together in an integrated way to make decisions and take actions on the land. The Rocky Mountain Region is making a purposeful and deliberate shift from a model of the Forest Service attempting to “do it all” to meet trail user and stakeholder expectations and needs to a model where the Forest Service, trail users, and stakeholders form a collective community of stewards who provide support to and receive shared benefits from trails. Everyone has a role in the success of the trails program.

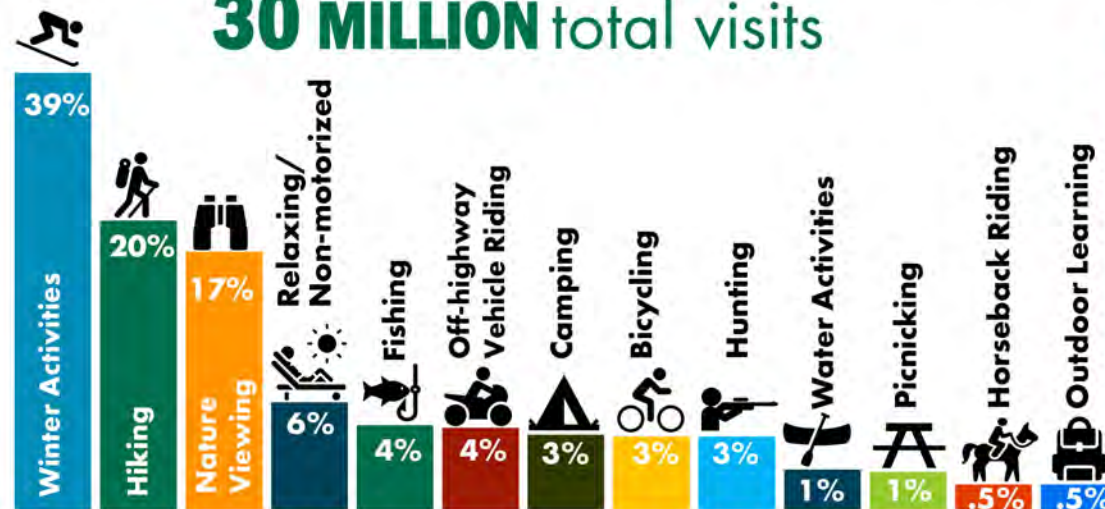


RECREATION VISITATION

World-renowned **recreation!**

The Rocky Mountain Region hosts more visits annually than any other region in the National Forest System.

30 MILLION total visits



Generating jobs and income

Visitors to the Rocky Mountain Region spend money in local communities on lodging, fuel, food, and groceries. Visitor expenditures contributed to:

Almost **\$900 million** in labor income
Over **26,400 jobs**

Sustainable trails are vital for improving responsible access and connections to the outdoors, adapting to and accommodating an increasing population, minimizing the impact to wildlife and natural resources, and reducing user conflict through active management methods. Our employees and partners have helped identify the following purposes of a shared stewardship trails strategy:

- Strengthen the trails community around a common foundation of shared roles and goals in managing a sustainable trail network for current and future generations.
- Enhance public connection to, and enjoyment of, the outdoors through raised awareness of trails as a collective priority.
- Address challenges to maintaining and enhancing a sustainable trail network across the region and find new ways to increase the pace and scale of trail maintenance and restoration.



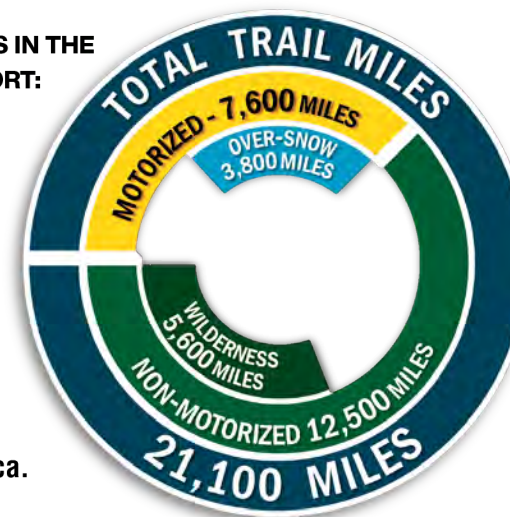
TRAILS

TRAILS ALLOW ACCESS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ON NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS



NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM TRAILS IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION SUPPORT:

- Connections between communities and public lands,
- Healthy lifestyles,
- Clean water,
- Habitat protection,
- Backcountry access,
- Outfitter guide operations, and
- Sustainable jobs in rural America.



Almost as many miles as driving across the country 7½ times!

Several iconic trails, including the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, the Colorado Trail, and the Nez Perce, Santa Fe, and Old Spanish Nations Historic Trails.

- We provide a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone is valued regardless of age, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, cultural background, ability, and recreational preferences.
- Input and feedback from partners serve as the foundation for the trails stewardship strategy, as well as the Forest Service mission, rules, regulations, guidance.
- Multiple-use trails, including a range of motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized routes can foster a shared trail stewardship ethic and make us better stewards, unifying different trail-use interest groups around a shared value of public land access and a purposeful, legally-created trail network.
- Social, ecological, and economic sustainability serve as the foundation for ensuring sustainable recreation opportunities and as the guide for year-round trail stewardship and use.



- We will work collectively across boundaries with community partners, state agencies, and trail users to share stewardship of a sustainable trail network, aligning our work to support other agency's current and ongoing sustainable trail programs.
- The trail system of the past shall not define the trail system of the future; we must adapt to changing ecological, social, and economic conditions by considering new ideas and ways of managing a sustainable trail network resilient to changes in the climate.
- We strive to ensure the safety of visitors and those implementing trail improvements.

We invite partners, volunteers, and friends to join us in shared stewardship!

Sustainability is achieved at the junction where trails are socially relevant and supported, ecologically resilient, and economically viable. Thoughtful consideration of trail design and managed use to meet user expectations; assuring trail sustainability on the ground; and maximizing opportunities for funding, grants, partnerships, and volunteers will foster our success. If any of the essential elements are missing or broken, a trail is not sustainable.

1. Social sustainability: A sustainable trail system should meet the desired experiences of the various user groups and the communities the trail system supports; it should also be managed adaptively to serve future expectations and needs.
2. Ecological sustainability: A sustainable trail system requires planning, design, construction, and maintenance, and generally conforms to the USDA Forest Service National Quality Standards for Trails.
3. Economic sustainability: A sustainable trail system is an investment. Forest Service staff and partners must work together to prioritize funding and resources, leverage partnerships, develop a robust volunteer program, share expertise, and pursue alternate and creative funding sources to meet trail priorities.



Vision Statement

We work together as a collective community of employees, partners, and volunteers to maintain and enhance access for a diversity of trail opportunities and users, conserve natural and human environments, set priorities, and actively accomplish critical work.

ACCESS

› Goal 1: Access to high-quality recreation settings and opportunities is maintained, increased, and/or enhanced.

- Strategy 1.1: Identify, plan, connect, and align trails across unit and jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., Forest/District, State, county, municipal, private); coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions to ensure consistent signage and messaging.
- Strategy 1.2: Using a multi-disciplinary approach, work with local communities, partners, and agencies to plan and provide sustainable trails for a diverse array of traditional and emerging foot, stock, mechanized, and motorized uses and accommodate different interests and abilities. Development of a sustainable trails system (wilderness and non-wilderness) could include trail decommissioning, adoption of non-system trails, trail construction, establishment of flexible trail standards, and acquisition of land or rights-of-way. Where appropriate, consider redesigning or re-routing existing trails, and/or incorporating alternative decent lines and other optional trail features in order to better accommodate a diverse range of user abilities and reduce wildlife habitat fragmentation.

- Strategy 1.3: Strive to maintain and keep trails passable, especially in areas of beetle-kill and after fires and other natural disasters.
- Strategy 1.4: Adapt to increasing population and trail use through experimentation and innovative approaches while continuing to protect ecological and cultural resources (e.g., seasonal restrictions, directional trails, allowed uses on specific days, etc.); prioritize efforts on “front country” and other high-use trail segments.
- Strategy 1.5: Provide and use data and information that is current, accurate, relevant, and available in multiple formats. Work with partners to develop new and relevant data resources and encourage new applications for its use.



› Goal 2: Equitable, diverse, and inclusive trail programs are encouraged and supported.

- Strategy 2.1: Support youth and underserved populations by providing trail stewardship employment opportunities and experiential development.
- Strategy 2.2: Proactively communicate and coordinate with underserved communities to better understand the unique barriers limiting their access to trails; connect them to forests through a variety of appropriate means (e.g., trails, public transportation, outfitters and guides, rideshare, etc.).
- Strategy 2.3: Provide trailheads and associated facilities that are easy to locate, welcoming, safe, maintained to accessibility standards, and are relevant to, and accommodating for, a diversity of users from different backgrounds and with differing abilities.

SUSTAINABILITY

› **Goal 3: Sustainable trails are planned, designed, developed, and maintained to promote wildlife and ecological integrity, community prosperity, and social well-being.**

- Strategy 3.1: Design, build, and maintain high-quality trails to minimize or prevent soil erosion and sedimentation, preserve water quality, and minimize wildlife impacts. Relocate trails where the best available science indicates recreation is having a significant and unavoidable negative impact.
- Strategy 3.2: Integrate trail planning, design, construction, and management with other resource and stewardship activities (e.g., wildlife, grazing, timber, mineral, vegetation, heritage resources, etc.).
- Strategy 3.3: Leverage current and future trail systems to support the economic health of rural and urban communities.
- Strategy 3.4: Share and amplify outdoor ethics programs (e.g., Leave No Trace, Stay The Trail, Tread Lightly!) that encourage visitors to practice informed, courteous, and responsible recreation.
- Strategy 3.5: Identify and pursue a variety of sustainable funding sources (both internal and external) to assist the trails program, including those that support coordination with partners who focus on the maintenance and construction of existing and new trails.



SHARED STEWARSHIP

› **Goal 4: A collective community of employees, partners, volunteers, and tribes actively engaged and committed to the shared stewardship of sustainable trail systems.**

- Strategy 4.1: Develop, maintain, nurture, and strengthen new and existing partnerships that support the shared stewardship of sustainable trail systems.
- Strategy 4.2: Increase capacity and expertise (e.g., training, certification) of volunteers and partners to accomplish trail work; ensure availability of Forest Service personnel to effectively manage partnerships.
- Strategy 4.3: Work with existing and new partners to identify innovative funding mechanisms and opportunities in support of sustainable trail systems.
- Strategy 4.4: Identify and overcome barriers to effective partnering and streamline processes to accomplish shared goals.
- Strategy 4.5: Encourage feedback-loops to learn from prior trail stewardship experiences and adapt to increased effectiveness in achieving shared goals.

Partners can help identify impartial arbitrators of interests that might be involved in evaluating trail proposals, ranging from the Forest Service to States and local governments to expert facilitators. The SHIFT (Shaping How We Invest For Tomorrow) principles can serve as a tool for finding common ground in difficult trail-use conversations and resolving potential conflicts among users. The principles, which Forest Service staff helped develop with industry and other partners, define some nearly universal goals in recreation management.

- › Principle 1: All benefit from working together to steward trails
- › Principle 2: All recreation has impacts
- › Principle 3: Look across and respect boundaries
- › Principle 4: Connect people to the outdoors and foster economic prosperity
- › Principle 5: Use science to inform management decisions
- › Principle 6: Innovate to ensure long-term stable funding and staffing
- › Principle 7: Welcome all visitors to public lands





PHOTO CAPTIONS & CREDITS

Cover: Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming, Forest Service photo

PG-2 (4 hikers) National Forest Foundation photo

PG-4 *Top:* Family enjoying the outdoors.
Bottom: Pike & San Isabel National Forests & Cimarron & Comanche National Grasslands, Colorado, Forest Service photo (Bierstadt)

PG-5 *Top:* Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota, Forest Service Photo
Bottom: Young child playing outside during Get Outdoors Day. Forest Service Photo

PG-6 *Top:* Rio Grande National Forest, Colorado, Forest Service photo
Bottom: Pike & San Isabel National Forests & Cimarron & Comanche National Grasslands, Colorado, Forest Service photo

PG-7 Recreation Info Graphic

PG-8 Deposit Photo photo (jeep)

PG-9 National Forest Foundation (NFF), Kellon Spencer photo

PG-10 *Top:* Black Hills National Forest, South Dakota, Forest Service photo
Bottom: Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland, Wyoming, Forest Service photo

PG-11 Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming, Forest Service photo

PG-12 *Top:* Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests, Colorado, Forest Service photo
Bottom: iStock photo

PG-13 Trails Info Graphic

PG-14 *Top:* Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming, Forest Service photo
Bottom: istock photo

PG-15 No images

PG-16 *Top:* Volunteers of Colorado (VOC), Forest Service photo
Middle: Pike & San Isabel National Forests & Cimarron & Comanche National Grassland, Colorado, Forest Service photo
Bottom: San Juan National Forest, Colorado, Forest Service photo

PG-17 Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests, Colorado, Forest Service photo

PG-18 Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland, Wyoming, Forest Service photo

PG-19 *Top:* Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre & Gunnison National Forests, Colorado, Forest Service photo
Bottom: National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), Forest Service photo

PG-20 *Top:* Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming, Forest Service photo
Bottom: Arapaho Roosevelt National Forest & Pawnee National Grassland, Colorado, Forest Service photo



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