

# THE NEED FOR NATIONAL FORESTS TRAIL MAINTENANCE LEGISLATION

September 2013

## KEY POINTS

- National Forest trails benefit everyone and receive more public use each year, but our trail system is increasingly stressed and trail maintenance can't keep pace with the growing demand. The lack of maintenance threatens public access to national forests.
- The Government Accountability Office found that only a quarter of national forest trails are maintained to agency standards and the Forest Service faces a half-billion dollar maintenance backlog on our trail system.
- Congress and the Forest Service should provide additional funding to maintain trails, but should also look for creative solutions to help supplement limited funds.
- Congress can help address the trail maintenance crisis by—
  - Directing the Forest Service to develop a strategy to more effectively utilize volunteers and partners to assist in maintaining national forest trails.
  - Providing outfitters and guides the ability to pay permit fees in trail maintenance activities instead of dollars.
  - Study other creative solutions that could help address trail maintenance issues, including—
    - Addressing the liability issue that hampers volunteer and partner trail maintenance activity in national forests;
    - Utilizing, on a more widespread basis, fire crews to assist in trail maintenance.
- This approach is supported by an array of conservation and recreation organizations—including TWS and BCHA—as well as outfitters and guides, sportsmen, and other trail users.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS OF GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE STUDY ON NATIONAL FOREST TRAIL MAINTENANCE – JUNE 2013

- The Forest Service trail system faces a \$314 million backlog in trail maintenance and an additional \$210 million backlog in annual maintenance, capital improvements, and operations. Combined, the Forest Service trail maintenance backlog exceeds a half-billion dollars.
- Only one-quarter of the agency's 158,000 miles of trails meets agency standards for maintenance and nearly two-thirds receive no maintenance at all.
- The trail maintenance backlog inhibits trail use, poses safety hazards, harms natural resources, and increases annual maintenance costs.
- Nearly a quarter of Forest Service trail maintenance comes from volunteers and partners, state funding, and other federal and non-federal sources.
- The Forest Service can do a much better job effectively utilizing volunteers and partners to maintain the trail system.