

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 24, 2012

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office undertake a review and update of your 1989 report titled, "*Maintenance and Reconstruction Backlog on National Forest Trails.*" (GAO.RCED-89-182).

The GAO's 1989 report identified a nearly \$200 million dollar maintenance backlog that had already resulted in the loss of over 5000 miles of trails that had previously been available to the public. In the years since this report, visitation to the National Forest System has increased, demands on Forest Service personnel have grown, and the natural landscape has been altered by insects, disease and wildfire. It is important to understand the full scope of challenges facing the Forest Service and the national forest trail system so that our subcommittee can make important decisions on resource allocation.

We respectfully request that in updating the 1989 report, the GAO analyze the following questions:

- What is the current status of the trail maintenance backlog on national forests and within current Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas? Which regions face the most severe challenges?
- How effective is the Forest Service at maintaining trails in national forests, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas?
- How do disease and insect outbreaks affect the Forest Service's ability to effectively maintain trails?
- What options exist for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of trail maintenance activities on national forests, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas? Which of these options would require authorizing legislation?
- Do certain areas that have experienced a severe disease, insect or wildfire event warrant expanded authorities for effective maintenance?
- Have volunteer resources been used effectively, and what options exist to increase volunteer work and effectiveness?
- What sources of federal and non-federal funding have been used to maintain trails? Are there other options available to meet maintenance funding needs?

Recreation is a critical use of the nation's forests. Restricted, temporary recreation is the only connection to wilderness areas. Access to forests and wilderness is important to maintain a connection to these valuable ecosystems, and to foster the kind of attachment that leads people to

actively conserve these areas for future generations. It is in our best interests to ensure that the Forest Service uses every available tool to provide Americans access to our forests and wilderness areas.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. The contact for this request is Pete Obermueller in the office of Representative Cynthia M. Lummis (Pete.Obermueller@mail.house.gov, 202-225-2311). We look forward to your timely reply.

Sincerely,

  
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Michael K. Simpson  
Member of Congress

  
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James P. Moran  
Member of Congress

  
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Cynthia M. Lummis  
Member of Congress