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# NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL RECREATION IN IDAHO

## 2016

*This report contains a synthesis of information gathered during three regionally held non-motorized trail recreation summits.*

## Help For Our Non-Motorized Trails

Taking care of Idaho's trails is one of our most important functions. Idaho has one of the most effective motorized trails programs in the country, supported by user fees and gas taxes. On the other hand, finding adequate resources to maintain our non-motorized trails (NMTs) continues to be a challenge.

Over the past 22 years, several attempts to gain legislative approval for a dedicated funding source have failed. Each of these was attempted by a lone group, either equestrian or mountain bike trail users. In 2016, The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) convened a series of three "summit" meetings in an effort to bring together all types of NMT users: hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians. The object of the summit meetings was to ask whether there was:

- a provable need for a funding source?
- a consensus idea on what type of funding vehicle might work in Idaho? and
- sufficient resources to see the effort through?

The summit meetings were well attended by all types of trail users. It was very apparent that NMT recreation is important to Idahoans and that currently, there is a significant maintenance backlog, preventing safe access. Although there was strong support for seeking solutions to funding shortfalls, and many options and strategies were discussed, no clear consensus emerged.

This month, we are beginning a more focused effort to bring group representatives together and answer the three questions above. Conversations I've had with some of the thought leaders on this issue lead me to believe that there may be a multi-step strategy to solving the funding issue. A new tool with some potential has emerged from congress with the passage of H.R. 845, The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. Aside from providing avenues and incentives for increased NMT maintenance by volunteers and outfitters, it provides for a type of pilot project that could be a step toward building a more permanent Idaho program (with support for a financing mechanism) with IDPR in a coordination/administration role.

All of our current (motorized) trails programs came into being only after the users themselves organized and explicitly asked for fees to be required of them. For success in the NMT arena, leadership from the equestrian, mountain bike and hiking communities will need to step forward together with a solution that will sustainably meet Idaho's NMT maintenance needs. The Idaho Park and Recreation Board and staff stand ready to lend our expertise and administrative support to that effort.

David Langhorst  
Director, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation  
January 10, 2017

# Summit Summary – Questions Answered

## **How important is non-motorized trail recreation in Idaho?**

It was apparent at each meeting that non-motorized trail recreation is very important to Idahoans, statewide. It's often difficult for these enthusiasts to voice their concerns as an organized group, given the seemingly solitary, disbursed nature of non-motorized trail recreation. The necessity of continued access to non-motorized trails in Idaho was echoed in each of the three summit meetings. Additionally, maintained access is critical to the Outfitter and Guide industry in Idaho, whose recreational offerings contribute significantly to the rural economics of our state.

## **Are there issues or concerns pertaining to non-motorized trail recreation in Idaho?**

Every attendee at every summit meeting location agreed that there are issues and concerns pertaining to non-motorized trail recreation in Idaho. So much so, that these Idahoans who typically don't organize, did so to share their thoughts on the subject. The main concerns reiterated at each meeting were:


- Loss of trail miles
- Lack of maintenance, depleting recreation experience
- Lack of proper funding for maintenance, leading to loss of access
- Loss of access – even legally “open” trails are “closed” when they are impassable.
- Enjoyment and appreciation of public land is threatened
- Some estimate that only 25% of trails are passable within the Frank Church

## **Is maintenance on non-motorized trails in Idaho an issue?**

Lack of maintenance on non-motorized trails in Idaho is most assuredly an issue, as articulated by the attendees of all three summit meetings. It was shared sentiment that the lack of proper funding for maintenance results in loss of access. First because the trails become unsafe and impassable and second leading to Forest Service travel planning decisions that access isn't warranted due to lack of use, fire impacts, etc.

## **Is education important to non-motorized enthusiasts in Idaho?**

All summit attendees shared their appreciation for the organization of the three regional summits, feeling compelled to attend and share their thoughts on the matter that before now, “had never been discussed on such a large scale,” (shared attendees). Once the meetings were set and the questions posed, enthusiasts came out in record numbers to learn more about the topic and share their thoughts and ideas. Most reported that they learned a great deal about the issues facing the management of public land and current obstacles. Event organizers and land managers present learned a great deal from enthusiasts about



expectations. In all, the well-rounded discussion and education proved beneficial for all. Education and understand was a common theme throughout the summit meetings.

**Do you have ideas or suggestions on how to fund non-motorized trail maintenance in Idaho?**

Many ideas were presented at all three summit meetings. The three (3) ideas that gained the most momentum at all three and sparked the most general discussion amongst attendees were:

- Researching the viability of diverting a small, appropriate percentage of Idaho’s fuel tax to fund non-motorized trail recreation maintenance. It was noted that this diversion should not impact the current diversion of fuel tax utilized by Idaho’s motorized trails program. Additionally, the research should investigate the use of fuel by non-motorized enthusiasts on Federal roads in Idaho, used as ingress, egress to non-motorized trail access points in Idaho.
- Creating a sticker program or trails pass, similar to current motorized sticker programs in Idaho for non-motorized enthusiasts. This sticker would be a statewide mandate, enforced like the motorized program. There could be an agricultural exemption.
- Vehicle registration. An expanded version of the current Idaho State Parks Passport was discussed that could be utilized as a funding mechanism for several management needs. Such as state park funding, non-motorized trail recreation, deferred maintenance, etc.
- Better coordinated volunteer efforts.

**Are you familiar with successful funding programs in other states?**

Most attendees were in fact familiar with funding programs from other states. It was these frames of reference that began discussions during Idaho’s three summit meetings and set the table for active and engaged discussion on solutions for Idaho. The four suggestions above all grew from successful examples in other states.

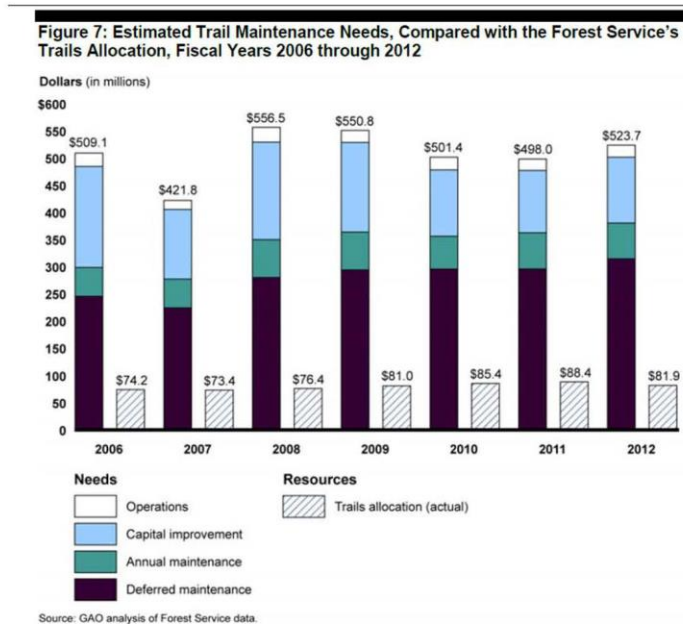
## U.S.D.A FOREST SERVICE BACKLOG

- 158,000 total trail mileage (20,000 in Idaho)
- Only 25% considered to meet agency standards
- Backlog of maintenance needs estimated at \$314 million nationally

## IDAHO'S NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS PROGRAM BUDGET

- General Fund
  - A portion of the state's Mountain Bike License Plate Fund
- Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Funds. Approximately \$700,000 - \$1 million available annually. By law, 30% of these funds must be allocated to non-motorized trail projects annually. Another 40% is set aside for diverse trail use. RTP funds are disseminated via a competitive grant process.

### Trail Maintenance Needs vs. Budget Allocation



## Solutions in Other States

The non-motorized trail maintenance issue is not isolated to Idaho. In fact, many states manage to a significant maintenance backlog and federal funding shifts. Below are two examples of how neighboring states have addressed their need.

| SURROUNDING STATE SOLUTIONS |                       |               |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| STATE                       | PROGRAM               | REVENUE       |
| <b>COLORADO</b>             | PERCENTAGE OF LOTTERY | \$1 Million   |
| <b>WASHINGTON</b>           | GAS TAX ALLOCATION    | \$1.7 Million |

### Colorado

Colorado funds their non-motorized trail program through the lottery: grants for non-motorized trail maintenance equal about 1 million per year. The caveat is that trail maintenance must be completed by youth corps. There is another (up to) 10 million dollars available per year through grants for new trails that connect to existing trails.

### Washington

Washington State grants out about 1.7 million per year to non-motorized trails. This is from the NOVA program, otherwise known as WA state gas tax.



## Recommended Next Steps

### ORGANIZE

Interested constituents will need to organize to meet the next steps in solving Idaho's current non-motorized trail maintenance needs.

### RESEARCH

Further research will need to be conducted to investigate the validity of the top three solutions presented above.

### SELECT PREFERRED OPTION

Consensus will need to be reached on a preferred option to solve Idaho's non-motorized trail maintenance issues.

### DESIGN YOUR APPROACH

If your preferred option includes legislation, it's important to note that all legislation is created and passed for and by the citizens of Idaho. Your organization will need to design your legislative approach to present your proposed solution to the Idaho Legislature.

### IMPLEMENT

Once your legislation passes, the implementation phase will begin. This will become phase II of your efforts. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) will offer support in all phases.



## Summit Materials

### SUMMIT PRESENTATIONS, IMAGES, ATTENDEES

The Non-Motorized Trail Recreation Summit PowerPoint presentation and a complete list of attendees is available online: <http://www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/activities/hiking> under the 'Non-Motorized Summit' tab.

### REGIONAL SUMMIT REPORTS

Individual meeting minutes are also available online, using the URL noted above. These reports include a list of all comments and suggestions made during each regional meeting.

### QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Please continue to share your thoughts, questions and concerns: [inquiry@idpr.idaho.gov](mailto:inquiry@idpr.idaho.gov).