

The 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge

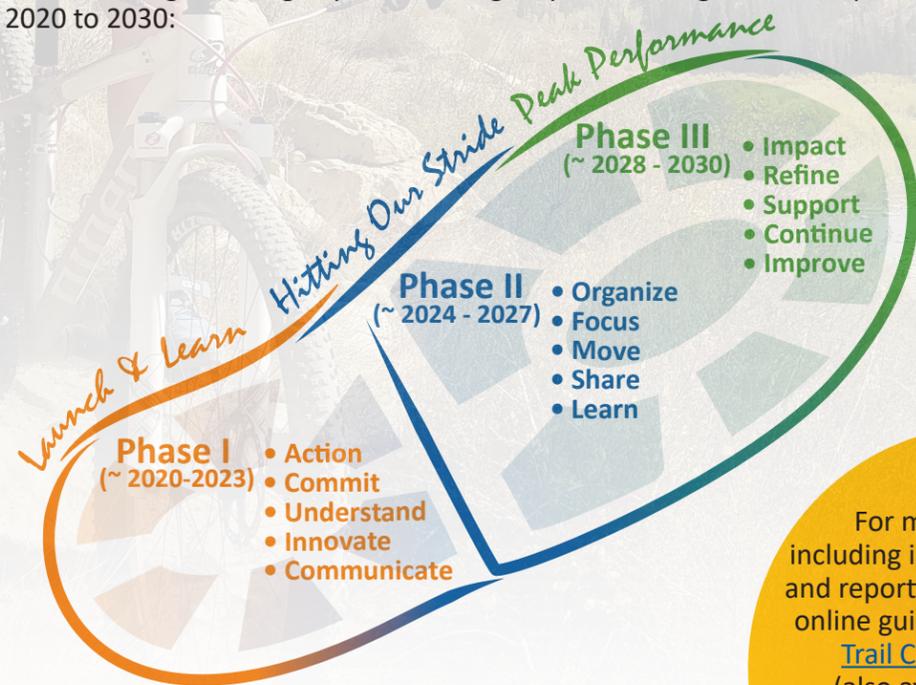
2020 - 2030

An Overview

Phases

Achieving a sustainable trail system requires a multiyear effort that is responsive to local needs and opportunities. The trails community must also have the support and flexibility to take action when and where it makes the most sense.

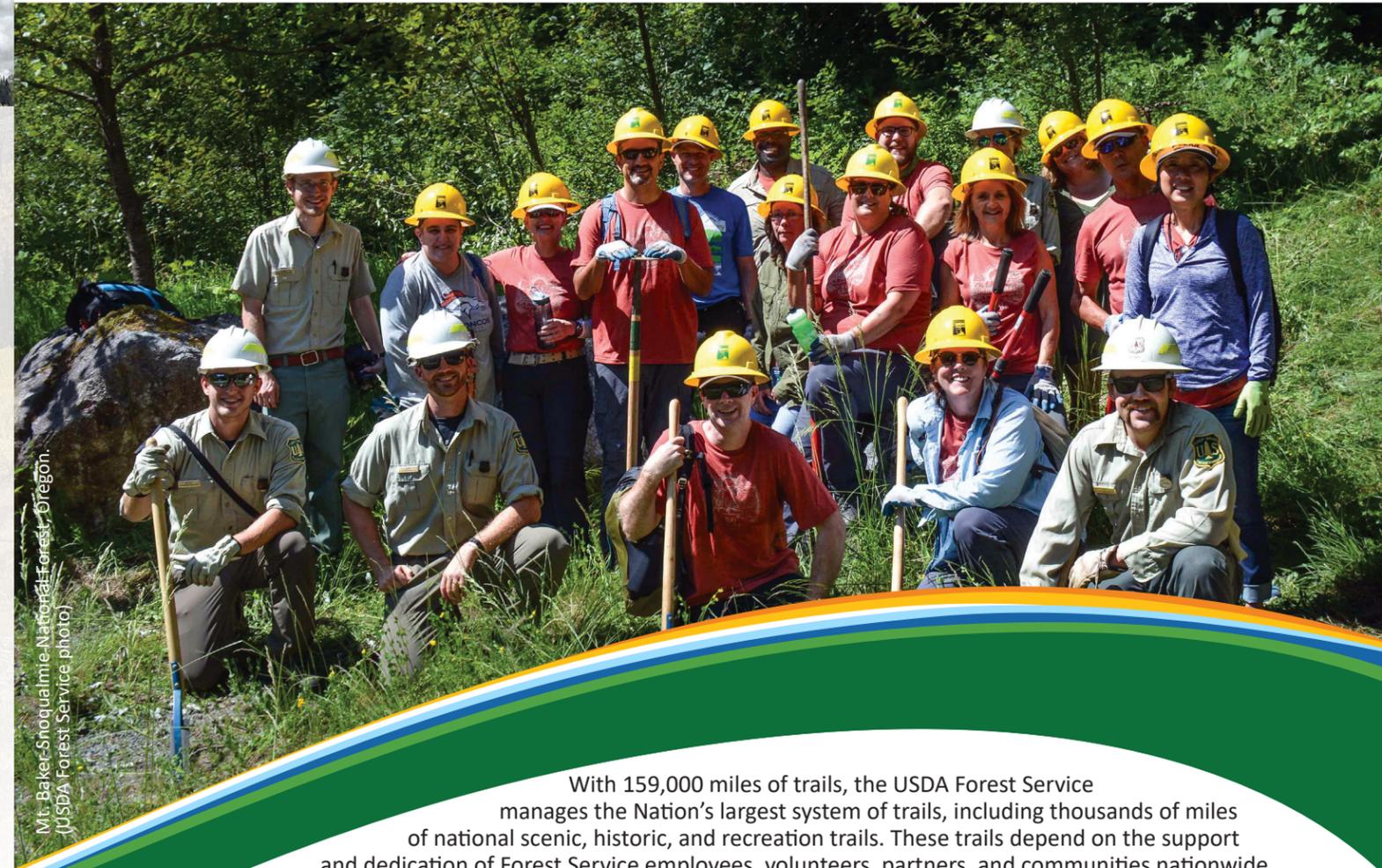
As such, the Trail Challenge is being implemented agencywide through three adaptive phases over the next 10 years, from 2020 to 2030:



Lessons learned during the Launch and Learn phase and each successive phase will be used to refine subsequent phases.

For more information, including instructions, examples, and reporting details, refer to the online guidebook posted on the [Trail Challenge webpage](https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/trails/10YTC) (also available at: <https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/trails/10YTC>).

Manti-La Sal National Forest, Utah (USDA Forest Service photo by John Odle)



Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Oregon (USDA Forest Service photo)

With 159,000 miles of trails, the USDA Forest Service manages the Nation's largest system of trails, including thousands of miles of national scenic, historic, and recreation trails. These trails depend on the support and dedication of Forest Service employees, volunteers, partners, and communities nationwide.

The Forest Service's National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System, released in 2017, outlines 26 actions toward achieving a sustainable trail system. Trail strategy **Action 1.2, Implement 10-Year Trail Challenge**, calls for the Forest Service to launch a bold challenge, together with our partners, that improves our collective capacity to care for trails and increases on-the-ground results.

We are moving in the right direction toward shared stewardship of trails, and together we can go farther. Forest Service employees, working in collaboration with other Federal partners, States, communities, Tribes and Tribal organizations, volunteers, partners, and others (collectively known as the trails community), are encouraged and challenged to prioritize, innovate, and invest to achieve a more sustainable system of trails.

The Trail Challenge is a call to action to increase our collective capacity to care for trails and increase on-the-ground results. **Trails need our help, so let's go!**

Call to Action

The 10-Year Trail Shared Stewardship Challenge puts into motion the primary intentions of the [National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act](#) and USDA Forest Service [National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System](#). It provides a framework for national forest and grassland units, together with the broader trails community, to improve the sustainability of National Forest System trails.

Sustainable trails are ecologically resilient, socially relevant, and economically viable.

Over the next decade, we are incorporating 10 “challenge elements” into our collective efforts. We are sharing experiences and reporting progress—learning from each other about how to best care for trails in a way that benefits the environment, people, and communities now and into the future.

Trail Challenge Goals



To improve our collective capacity to care for trails over the long term.



To directly increase on-the-ground results benefitting trails.



Who Participates?

Everyone. The Trail Challenge emphasizes working together at local and broader scales—learning from each other and adapting to different needs and opportunities. Forest Service units are encouraged to work with volunteers and partners, as well as diverse stakeholders, such as local chambers of commerce, businesses, schools, universities, and the outdoor recreation industry.

Why a Trail Challenge?

The Forest Service manages the largest trail system in the country—159,000 miles of trails connecting people to their public lands; supporting spiritual, mental, and physical health and well-being; and contributing to community health and economic prosperity. Trails are powerful economic generators, supporting the more than \$11 billion that recreation on National Forest System lands contributes to the national economy each year and supporting 148,000 jobs in outdoor recreation and tourism. National Forest System trails also offer people opportunities for shared experiences across shared landscapes by connecting to trail systems in other jurisdictions, including local, State, Tribal, nongovernmental, and Federal. Trails also support Forest Service programs such as forest health, fire prevention and suppression, wildlife and watershed management, and heritage resource protection through access to field projects and distributing recreation use.

In 2019, **only 24%** National Forest System trails met agency standards for safety and high-quality recreation.

Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Washington (USDA Forest Service photo by Matthew Tharp)

Trail Challenge Elements

The Trail Challenge is composed of 10 elements that are a subset of the 26 actions outlined in the agency’s national trail strategy.

National Elements (Nationally Led)

- (A) **Establish Trails Advisory Group:** Implement a Trails Advisory Group composed of agency employees who give advice and timely input to the Chief on emerging trail issues. (Trail Strategy Action 1.4)
- (B) **Evaluate Trails Program:*** Evaluate trail programs at all levels of the agency to identify refinements/improvements needed to increase field capacity and to shift toward collaborative trail stewardship. (Trail Strategy Action 2.2)

Unit Elements (Unit Led)

- (C) **Achieve Sustainable Trail Systems:*** Make sure that trail systems are sustainably designed, well maintained, used for their intended purpose, and valued and supported by trail users and communities. (Trail Strategy Actions 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)
- (D) **Promote Cross-Program Integration:** Identify opportunities to integrate agency program areas to meet trail restoration and stewardship objectives. (Trail Strategy Action 5.3)
- (E) **Meet Data Standards:** Meet minimum standards of trail information on all Forest Service units, including accurate and readily available spatial data. (Trail Strategy Action 6.3)

Optional Unit Elements (Unit Led)

- (F) **Support Outdoor Recreation Economy:*** Work with local communities, partners, and industry to understand and leverage how trail systems can support rural and urban economic health and growth where appropriate and through strategically targeted investments. (Trail Strategy Action 3.3)
- (G) **Increase Outreach and User Ethics:*** Build upon successful outreach and user ethics programs, including work done by partners and foundations, to engage and motivate future stewards of public lands. (Trail Strategy Action 3.4)
- (H) **Expand Use of Service and Job Corps:*** Expand integration of 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Job Corps, and similar youth and veteran programs to increase the benefits of trail stewardship. (Trail Strategy Action 3.5)

Partner Elements (Invited)

- (I) **Invite Shared Partner Leadership:*** Encourage establishment of a multipartner group—championed by nongovernmental organizations, academia, Indian Tribes, and other agencies and entities—to contribute shared leadership in carrying out the trail strategy. (Trail Strategy Action 1.5)
- (J) **Invite Trail Endowment:** Advocate with the nongovernmental organization and partner community to establish a national trail endowment, pursue nontraditional funding sources, and invite contributions to help leverage resources to carry out the trail strategy. (Trail Strategy Action 4.5)

*Trail Challenge elements collaboratively implemented by Forest Service units/employees with partners, volunteers, and other stakeholders.