



In Collaboration With:



NATIONAL WILDERNESS
STEWARDSHIP
ALLIANCE

American Trails
For those who build, maintain, use, and dream of trails...



American
Hiking
Society

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Back Country Horsemen of America



Updated 2.26.2023

National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Field Season 2023

Note: This version incorporates program changes developed during Hike the Hill.

Fact Sheet

The National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, in collaboration with American Trails, the American Hiking Society, Back Country Horsemen of America, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, and the American Motorcyclist Association, is pleased to announce the 5th round of the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partner Funding (Trail Stewardship Partner Funding) through the financial assistance of the USDA Forest Service for trail maintenance on National Forest System trails for the 2023-24 Field seasons - May 2023 through December 2024.

What Program Changes have just been Implemented?

During February's Hike the Hill the Forest Service and NWSA determined that there had been several program changes within the Forest Service that would benefit trail organizations and that could be implemented in the Trail Partner program this year. These changes include:

- The minimum partner cash and/or in-kind match could be reduced to 10% in most cases in line with recent Challenge Cost Share program changes announced by Forest Service Chief Randy Moore in Fall 2022.
- The size of project requests could increase to \$30,000 to encourage bigger projects and recognize that the cost of some projects is increasing with inflation.
- The length of time for project completion could be extended for two field seasons in order to ensure proper planning is completed and any NEPA requirements for more intensive trail maintenance projects could be completed. Projects will now terminate on December 31st 18 months following typical start in May-June of the previous year. This will allow two field seasons for project to be completed.

What is the Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program?

The Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program will award funds to trails and stewardship organizations for increasing trail maintenance accomplishments and reducing deferred maintenance (trail backlog) on National Forest System trails. Funding will be available for all types of terra trails (summer use trails), for both motorized and non-motorized uses. The focus with this funding is expanding trail maintenance on the National Forests.



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What trail work can be done?

Any qualifying trail maintenance work on a National Forest System Trail will be considered. Projects can include clearing, brushing, tread repair, structure repair or replacement, and installation of trail signs. Any activity that will reduce existing trail deferred maintenance is also acceptable. Any trail work that will meet National Quality Standards and is required under the Trail Management Objectives will qualify. Because the focus is on **trail maintenance accomplishment**, projects that are proposing trail improvement on limited sections of trail, may not score as well as projects that bring more miles of trail to meet standard.

Who qualifies to apply for this Trail Stewardship Funding?

Any current nonprofit organization (eg. 501 (c) (3), 501 (c) 7) in good standing with the IRS may apply for this funding. Organizations should have a sponsored volunteer or other agreement with their local Forest Service office for work performed under this funding program.

What is the role of volunteers with these grants?

A secondary objective of the Trail Stewardship Funding program is to encourage an increase in the number and hours of volunteer labor on trails in the National Forests. Projects that have a volunteer component are encouraged and preferred but are not required. Projects that rely solely on paid staff or interns are totally acceptable.

How much money is available in the Trail Stewardship Funding Program?

Total funding amounts for 2023 are waiting on final appropriations for FY2023. We anticipate a minimum of \$250,000 to be available. We anticipate splitting this amount into a pool for smaller projects and a pool for larger projects. This program is dependent on the FS depositing Challenge Cost Share Program funding with NWSA. A final federal budget is required prior to project awards. Last year (2022) delays in budget approval led to delays in start of the program. We hope this year not to have this problem, but because of the uncertainties around Congressional approval of this year's budget similar issues may occur. Agreements will not be issued until funding has been provided by the Forest Service. The two season time frame for projects will help if this budget year also sees delays.

What are the amounts of the Trail Funding?

Projects are anticipated to be a minimum of \$2,000 and a maximum of \$30,000 per organization. This year smaller projects in the \$2,000 - \$10,000 range will be pooled to compete against other smaller projects. Larger projects from \$10,000 - \$30,000 will also be pooled. Actual funding may vary depending on the needs of each project, the number of proposals, and the availability of funds. This funding is expected to help improve the amount of trail maintenance and reduction of trails deferred maintenance on National Forest System trails during the 2023 field season to help implement the Forest Service National Trails Strategy.



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Is there a dollar match requirement?

Yes, there is a matching contribution requirement, but based on recent changes within the Forest Service it is fairly easy bar to reach. The match must be a **minimum of 10% of requested funding** and may be accomplished through cash, contributed funding, and/or in-kind contribution. Cash matching will be encouraged and projects with some cash contributions will score higher than those without. Contributed funding in this context is where the member organization pays for a portion of the project through actual cash outlays for salaries, equipment, supplies or other expenses. In-kind contributions are generally for volunteer labor or use of existing equipment and vehicles. All cash and in-kind contributions should be attributable to the project proposed, not the organizations entire yearly budget or total program.

The NWSA CCS is under the “Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriation Act of 1991, Pub. L. 102-154” authority. This statute acts as a waiver or reduction in allowed match requirements and that by statute “there is no specific percentage required for match. However, the statute sets an expectation for cost-sharing under the Challenge Cost Share program.” With the direction that “there is no longer any requirement for partners to provide substantial cash contributions” as stated by Chief Moore we’re hoping the barriers to entry will be low enough to get a wider swath of applicants and organizations that are not as well-resourced to participate in this program.

What must be included in the Trail Funding Application?

Each Funding Application must include:

- The Application, which includes a description of the project, the specific accomplishments, the benefit of the project, timeline, a budget narrative, and description of matching funds.
- Proposed project budget
- A letter of Support from the District Ranger/Forest Supervisor that also identifies the areas or trail segments that will be improved by this grant.
- IRS letter of determination of non-profit status (eg. 501(c)(3), 501 (c)(7), etc...), if not already on file with NWSA.

When are Trail Funding Applications due?

The Trail Stewardship Funding application form must be returned to NWSA by April 15, 2023. E-Mail to: TrailGrants@wildernessalliance.org. This account is not monitored except during the submission period.

A new online Application form is in development and expected to be unveiled by mid-March. In the meantime, organizations may find it beneficial to draft their proposals using the current application form whose contents should be able to be cut and pasted into the new online form.

Where can I get additional information about these Trail Grants?

Additional information can be found on the NWSA website at www.wildernessalliance.org.

You may also call Randy Welsh, Executive Director, NWSA at 801-808-2167 or send questions to randy@wildernessalliance.org.



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When will Trail Grants be awarded?

Trail Funding project awards are expected to be announced by May 1, 2023.

When must projects be completed?

Projects are intended to support trail maintenance and backlog reduction projects during the next two field seasons, 2023-2024 (May 2023 – December 2024). Projects will terminate on December 31, 2024.

What reporting requirements come with the Trail Funding?

Awarded organizations will be expected to submit a final report of their accomplishments at the end of the project. This report will consist of 2-3 pages of narrative, photos, and final trail maintenance or backlog reduction achievements. Reports will be due prior to final reimbursement for the project. A reporting template will be provided to organizations receiving grants.

In addition, there may be several calls and emails during the life of the grants to monitor progress and report interim accomplishments.

What coordination is required with the local Ranger District?

All projects must be coordinated and approved by the local District Ranger/Forest Supervisor. **A letter of support from the District Ranger or Forest Supervisor is required in the application package.**

How will Trail Stewardship Grant proposals be rated?

NWSA has assembled a Review Team with representatives from the motorized and non-motorized trail communities representing the different types of trail uses found on the National Forests. This Review Team, composed of representatives from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, American Trails, the American Hiking Society, the BackCountry Horsemen of America, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, and the American Motorcyclist Association, will select projects based on:

- What will be accomplished – how many miles of trail will be maintained, or trail deferred maintenance reduced?
- Amount of matching funds and resources contributed to the project.
- Timeline for completion
- Assessment of project feasibility and success
- Approval by District Ranger/Forest Supervisor
- Number of volunteers and/or staff engaged in trail stewardship.
- How the project may contribute to trail maintenance needs in critical or priority areas
- Overall benefit to the National Forest Trail System

What are the specific criteria that will be used for ratings?

Groups should include information in their applications that address the following criteria.



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Area Factor	Criteria	Rationale
Trail Maintenance	Miles Maintained	Number of miles maintained (total of annual and deferred maintenance)
Deferred Maintenance - Miles	Miles of Trail Deferred Maintenance Eliminated	Number of miles of trail deferred maintenance eliminated
Trails Deferred Maintenance – Dollars	Estimate of Dollars of Trails Backlog Eliminated	Estimate of dollar amount of trail deferred maintenance eliminated
Volunteer Numbers	Number of Volunteers Engaged	Number of volunteers engaged in trail work
Volunteers Hours	Number of Hours of Volunteers Engaged	Number of volunteer hours engaged in trail work
Capability	Ability of Group to Complete Project	Assessment of the groups capability to do the proposed work in a timely fashion, based on past experience, skills, resources
Feasibility	Feasibility of the Project to be Completed in Time	Assessment of the project feasibility to be completed on time and with the proposed resources
Cash Match	Amount of Cash Match	Amount of cash match the group is proposing to use in completing the project
In Kind Match	Amount of In Kind Match	Amount of in kind match the group is proposing to contribute in completing the project
Important Trail Areas	Presence of critical trail issues and/or located within an area known for trail issues to be corrected	Assessment of how the trail project contributes to reducing or eliminating critical trail concerns and or being located within an area that has known trail issues to correct
Overall Assessment of Benefit	How this project will benefit the public	Assessment of how the National Forest Trail System will be improved by this project, including benefits to the user public, distribution of funding around the country and by trail type

How will the Trail Funding be awarded and managed?

These grants are part of a larger Forest Service Challenge Cost-Share Agreement and therefore are managed as reimbursable funds. This means that organizations must complete work first, then seek reimbursement, based on the approved budget and work plan provided as part of the grant. Awarded



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organizations will submit invoices, based on their actual project expenses, for reimbursement periodically.

How frequently will Trail Stewardship funds be reimbursed?

Typically awarded organizations submit invoices monthly, usually by the 15th for work completed during the previous month, during the life of these grants until awarded grant funds are expended. Organizations should plan for a 45-60 day window from time of submitting an invoice to receiving a reimbursement check from NWSA. All reimbursements are done through Direct Deposit with your bank.

Who is managing this grant program?

The National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance is the lead manager for the Trail Stewardship Partner Funding Program Challenge Cost Share with the Forest Service. NWSA is working collaboratively with American Trails, the American Hiking Society, the Back Country Horsemen of America, the International Mountain Bicycling Association, the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, and the American Motorcyclist Association to review and select projects that will provide an overall benefit to the National Forest System trails network.

Who will organizations coordinate with at NWSA during the life of these projects?

Questions can be forwarded to Randy Welsh, Executive Director, NWSA at randy@wildernessalliance.org.