



2023 Annual Report

Payette National Forest

Central Zone Trail Crew



Welcome

As the 2023 trails season draws to a close, we are excited to share the Central Zone Trail Crew's accomplishments and recognize those who helped make this season excellent.

Over the course of the season, the force account crew completed a remarkable array of projects, including annual and deferred maintenance of several key trail sections, the installation of erosion control measures, and the construction of a new bridge. The crew also remained dedicated to tackling long-term issues and reducing the immense backlog of deferred maintenance on our Districts.

Introduction

The 2023 force account crew serving the McCall and New Meadows districts consisted of Adam Larson (GS-7 Supervisor), Connor Augspurger (GS-6 Lead), Emily Kucharski (GS-5 Technician), and Avery Roos (Idaho Conservation Corps (ICC) Intern).

We were fortunate enough to host four critical hires to round out our crew during the peak season: Piper Bandera, Aidan Behling, David Svanda, and Matthew Nicholes. Having these excellent folks and their extra hands around at such a crucial point in the season proved to be invaluable, allowing the crew to execute projects that would otherwise have been out of reach for our team of three, such as the Granite Mountain bridge replacement and the intensive tread/drainage work we accomplished at North Fork Kennally Creek.

Moreover, we were privileged to work closely with the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) crew stationed at the Burgdorf Guard Station. MCC was an indispensable asset this season, tackling annual maintenance projects with gusto and providing the force account crew with much-needed assistance during technical projects. Though the crew was comprised entirely of members with little-to-no experience in trail work, they quickly learned the fundamentals of dirt and saw work and contributed greatly to our mission over the course of the season.

Accomplishments

Big Creek Logout

In an incredible display of inter-district cooperation, the force account crew joined forces with wilderness rangers from the Krassel District to log out a 25-mile trail stretching from Cabin Creek Airstrip to Big Creek Guard station. A brief plane ride from McCall took the crew deep into the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness for a nine-day hitch of crosscut and tread work action. With relatively few trees down on the trail this year, we were able to turn our attention toward the tread, executing several much-needed erosion control and drainage feature projects, including a sizeable rock wall. What an excellent way to open the season

Loon Lake Restoration

At Loon Lake, we collaborated with several other McCall District departments and YCC to execute a much-needed restoration and closure of sensitive lakeside campsites and

day-use areas. The restoration efforts included scarification, armoring, and revegetation of a trail junction that had been heavily impacted by motorized use. Additionally, an information kiosk previously located at the restoration site was relocated down the trail to a more durable area.

Further improvements were made to multiple dispersed campsites to redirect camping traffic away from the lakeside and into more sustainable and durable locations. These changes included felling hazard trees in campsites, clearing debris and vegetation from those campsites to increase tent space, improving trail access to campsites, and human waste management.

Due to the popularity and mixed-use nature of Loon Lake, these improvements will help to ensure the sustainability of the area in the short-term. However, more work is needed to restore the heavily used lakeside campsites, improve access to the popular bomber wreckage site, and to manage future human waste accumulation.

Bear Basin Reroute and Signage

We partnered with MCC to deliver signage improvements and a 1/4-mile trail reroute at the Bear Basin trail system, in addition to annual maintenance. These improvements included the installation of updated signage to improve user navigation and traffic flow. Additionally, we constructed a 1/4-mile trail reroute to divert user traffic away from an environmentally sensitive area. MCC also completed many miles of corridor clearing and tread maintenance. Many thanks to MCC for diligently chipping away at this project throughout the season!

Granite Mountain Bridge

We also partnered with MCC to rebuild a bridge adjacent to the Granite Mountain trailhead that had fallen into disrepair. Our work entailed removing and disposing of the pre-existing bridge materials, diverting a meadow drainage away from the bridge approaches, and constructing the replacement bridge itself. For building materials, we sourced native timber stringers and sills from a conveniently located Engelmann spruce stand and moved them into place by hand before installing dimensional lumber decking. With this new bridge in place, user access—especially stock users—to destinations such as Twin Lakes and the historic Granite Mountain Lookout is greatly improved.



Central Zone Trail Crew and MCC crew members collaborating on the Granite Mountain Bridge stringer installation.

Annual and Deferred Maintenance and MORE!

Throughout the 2023 season, the force account crew completed a variety of scheduled and deferred maintenance projects across the Central Zone. Notably, deferred logout and corridor maintenance on the Crestline Trail #109, North Fork Kennally Creek Trail, and Rapid River Ridge Trail #178. Across the zone, we observed trends among the trails we performed maintenance on this season; namely, slough, tread creep, and drainage issues—especially on motorized trails. Moreover, non-motorized trails almost universally displayed signs of motorized use, highlighting the necessity of keeping trailhead and on-trail signage current, correct, and visible (and armoring entrances when possible).

Photos



Lifting a stringer into place at the Granite Mountain Bridge



Making an invisible trail visible again at Rapid River

By The Numbers

The following statistics are estimates and only scratch the surface of the work that was done on our trail system and its associated facilities this summer. They also do not include the excellent work done by our project partners!

Miles of Trail Worked	133
Cars at TH (Morning Average)	1
Cars at TH (Afternoon Average)	2
Trees Removed from Trails	544
Drainages Maintained	124
Drainages Constructed	33

Cairns Built (the big ones!) 5

Feet of Tread Repaired 1200

The Future

The Central Zone Trail Program looks forward to another successful field season in 2024! Our department, along with much of the agency, is transitioning much of our staff to Permanent Seasonal positions. This move, it is hoped, will allow for better opportunities for career growth and will help to build an experienced team that can maintain its institutional knowledge over the ensuing seasons.

Next season is likely to see the completion of a number of long needed bridge projects near popular locations like Loon Lake and Upper Payette Lake Campground! Annual and deferred maintenance will be completed as usual with special attention to Loon Creek Trail and the Rapid River Drainage. Forest Service crews, with the help of several partner groups, have been doing incredible work in these two areas over the last few seasons—likely cutting over 1,500 trees in total! —and we hope to have them fully open within the next couple of years.

In an effort to further increase efficiency and access, the trail crew plans on making better use of partners (like Idaho Trails Association and Back Country Horsemen of Idaho) with the ability to pack tools and gear into backcountry project sites. We also hope to schedule more 8-day hitches to increase our ability to tackle work in further out trails and project sites.

Acknowledgements

To our partner organizations—Montana Conservation Corps, Idaho Trails Association, Central Idaho Trail Riders Alliance, Central Idaho Mountain Bike Association, Back Country Horsemen of Idaho, and others—you have doubled, if not tripled, the capacity of our program to maintain our trail system. Thank you!

To our District leadership, your continued support means the world to us! Thanks for showing that you care about your employees.

To the unknown members of the public that cut many logs off our trail system—keep up the good work! Just make sure you're cutting a full 8' corridor ;)

And finally, to our crew! We made the work happen and we had fun doing it. We worked safely and learned a lot from each along the way. Best job I ever had!

Happy Trails!