



March 19, 2018

The Honorable Chris Stewart
U.S. House of Representatives
323 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY '19 Interior Appropriations, U.S. Forest Service Trails (CMTL)

Dear Congressman Stewart:

I write as a constituent who resides and works in St. George, Utah, and as the current Chairman of Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA). **I respectfully request that you consider a modest increase, to \$100 million, for the U.S. Forest Service trails budget in Fiscal Year 2019 (line item: CMTL-Trails).** Justification for this request follows.

BCHA is a Service Organization

BCHA is a national service organization who works partners, state and federal agencies to keep trails open for all public land visitors. Our mission is to perpetuate the common sense use and enjoyment of horses in America's back country and wilderness and to ensure that public lands remain open to recreational stock use. **In 2016 alone, BCHA volunteers documented in-kind contributions in the order of approximately \$13.3 million** for various service projects throughout the nation, with the vast majority of that work occurring on national forest lands.

Justification for Appropriations Request

Public recreational use of trails throughout the National Forest System is at an all-time high. More people are getting outdoors and exploring their national forests, be they on foot, horseback, bicycle, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, or 4-wheel-drive truck. This year, America celebrates the 50th anniversary of the National Trails System Act (October 1968), which established the Appalachian and Pacific Crest national scenic trails and set the stage for congressional designation of an additional 7 national scenic trails and 19 national historic trails.

Yet more national forest trails are being closed or growing in naturally as a result of neglect, the absence of resources to properly maintain trails, and increasingly severe natural events that either block trails or make them hazardous for travel (e.g., drought, fire, insect disease, wind throw, floods and hurricanes). In 2013, the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued a

report that documented **the trail maintenance backlog on national forests exceeded \$314 million** (GAO-13-618). Yet appropriations have remained stagnant.

In FY 2017, the enacted funding level for the U.S. Forest Service trails program (CMTL-Trails) was \$77.53 million. As you know, funding levels for FY 2018 have yet to be settled, but the House Appropriations Committee approved \$77.004 million for Forest Service CMTL-Trails. These represent significant reductions to the approximately \$85 million enacted in FY 2010 and FY 2011 and do not reflect the fact that more Americans are seeking to enjoy their national forests via trails that are safe, accessible and provide unforgettable recreational experiences.

Funding for Forest Service CMTL-Trails in excess of the FY 2017 appropriated amount is necessary in light of the recently passed **National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (PL 114-245)**. It requires the agency to develop a strategy, and the necessary procedures and oversight, in order to significantly increase the role of volunteers and partners in National Forest System trail maintenance. BCHA volunteers and our partners are up for the challenge. But we can't move the needle on the documented trail maintenance backlog if the U.S. Forest Service continues to experience either stagnant or declining appropriations.

The ambitious goal contained within **PL 114-245** to "increase trail maintenance by volunteers and partners by 100 percent" within five years (Sec.4(b)(5)) can only be realized if the agency is provided sufficient resources to plan, implement and monitor requirements of the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. Indeed, House Committee report 114-770 states: "CBO estimates that efforts to double volunteer participation in such activities would cost \$3 million a year over the 2017–2021 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts." The estimate reflects increased personnel costs associated with development of a national volunteer strategy, volunteer recruitment and training, processing of volunteer agreements, mobilization/transportation and oversight in the field, monitoring to ensure work performed meets agency/safety standards, recordkeeping and reporting to Congress on the effectiveness of the strategy.

Trails are an integral part of the outdoor recreation experience in America and stimulate business creation, influence corporate location decisions, increase property values, reduce medical costs by encouraging exercise, and generate tax dollars. The annual economic value in 2016 of outdoor recreation in America is estimated by the Outdoor Industry Association to be \$887 billion in spending (**with \$201 billion resulting directly from trail-related recreation**) and supporting 7.6 million jobs (1.8 million jobs from trail-related recreation). Additionally, each year outdoor recreation generates \$124.5 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue (**with \$28.3 billion in revenue resulting from trail recreation**). (Source: Outdoor Industry Association, 2017, The Outdoor Recreation Economy)

Conclusion

The National Forest System trail system has over 158,000 miles of motorized and non-motorized trails and serves more than 50 million visitors annually. Well-maintained trails are vital to the U.S. economy and the health and mental wellbeing of its citizenry. BCHA offers our service and expertise to you and Congress with the objective of ensuring that the National Forest trail system receives funding at a level commensurate with its increasingly high public visibility and public value. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Freddy Dunn". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Freddy (Barbara) Dunn, Chairman