

USFS Trails Strategy

July 6, 2016

Joe's Talking Points for National Equestrian Trail Conference

GENERAL INTRO INFO:

Thank you!

- Partners, advocates & trail stewards-- we appreciate all you and the broad equestrian trails community done and are doing...

(Your passion and energy! Your efforts have long been, are, and increasingly will be essential to providing a fantastic and much-loved system of trails here in the Southeast and nationwide!)

- **We're excited**— Convergence of interests, acute needs, key timing, and key opportunity... the time is now!

High 5:

High 5 / 5 Shifts... (refer to talking points for '5 Shifts'...)

TRAILS:

Trails: which brings us to Trails!

1. **Largest managed system of trails in country, from AK to FL** (over 157,000 miles!)

- Highly valued, well-loved and used by many...

2. **We have a huge opportunity!**

- Trails connect people with each other, their heritage, their public lands... foster citizen stewards... (we believe trails serve as one of the greatest means of connecting people with their public lands)
- Tremendously talented, dedicated & energized partners, volunteers, advocates and employees

3. **And we also have a big responsibility...**

- 10-year budget and staff reductions
- 26% trail miles meet standard
- Fire suppression costs
- No new appropriated funds anticipated...

TRAIL STRATEGY:

Trail Strategy:

1. **Context:** Driven by this convergence of need, interest and opportunity...

- Over the past 2 years the FS has been working together with partners, advocates and employees across the agency to develop a 'National Strategy for a Sustainable System of Trails'.
- Most recently, this involved a series of 12 virtual 'focus session's hosted throughout March, where partners, trail advocates and employees from across the country and all levels of the agency joined in to share idea and input for shaping a Sustainable Trail Strategy.
- Today, the draft Strategy is undergoing final preparation for executive level and Departmental reviews prior to its final publication and implementation beginning in Fiscal Year 2017.

2. **Intent of the Strategy:**

- Provide a national-level document that's crisp, clean and concise-- a catalyst for change across the agency and among partners, volunteers, recreation industry, and others— outlining a series of aspirations and corresponding actions that will move us toward a sustainable system of trails.
- Based on a frank and candid look at our current situation and challenges we face...
- Identifying strategies we aspire to achieve and amplify, an actions we intend to implement...
- Setting the course for a major, agency-wide all-hands collaborative shift toward achieving, caring for, and providing a sustainable system of trails.

3. Main Components of the Strategy:

- Sustainable Trail System:** What is it? Defining what a 'sustainable trail system' really means, in terms of being socially desired and relevant, and economically and environmentally sustainable.
- Core Values:** Outlining a series of core values that we, and our collective partners and friends, can embrace and adopt as we work collaboratively toward a sustainable trail system. These include:
 - Safety:** Valuing and committing to the safety of trail users, volunteers, partners, and employees
 - Sustainability:** Valuing the land and stewarding a sustainable trail system
 - Commitment:** Valuing and fostering the strong traditions, skills, and dedication of our partner, volunteer, and employee workforce
 - Access:** Valuing the ability of everyone to connect to the outdoors and providing quality access through a variety of trail settings and opportunities.
 - Inclusion:** Valuing everyone – trail users, partners, volunteers, employees, and friends - regardless of age, ability, or cultural background.
 - Communication:** Valuing the exchange of quality, up-to-date and readily available information that's relevant to trail users and also for sustainable trail planning, design, and maintenance.
 - Relationships:** Valuing collaborative relationships with other trail partners, enthusiasts and managers... that cross jurisdictional and cultural boundaries to draw on diverse skill sets and mobilize alternative funding sources.
- Challenges, Aspirations and Actions:** We've identified 6 main areas of focus (challenges and corresponding aspirations and actions), where we plan to actively engage innovative thinking and creative approaches to increase our collective capacity and successes in moving toward a sustainable system of trails. These 6 areas include:
 - Leader Intent:** Cultivate leadership desire and commitment for a sustainable trail system.
Actions include:
 - Shared Leader Commitment:** Inspire shared commitment among agency and partner leaders, employees, volunteers, and trail users;
 - 10-Year Trails Challenge:** Invite implementation of a 10-Year Sustainable Trails Stewardship Challenge to achieve a sustainable system of trails, using the 50th anniversary of the National Trails System Act in 2018 as a catalyst;
 - Performance Incentives:** Develop incentives for demonstrating and championing leader intent at all levels of the agency, including carrying out associated performance expectations.
 - Trails Advisory Group:** Establish a Trails Advisory Group comprised of agency employees to give advice and timely input to the Chief of the Forest Service on emerging trail issues.

- e. **Invite Shared Implementation** Encourage establishment of a multi-partner group to provide shared leadership for implementation of this Strategy that is championed by NGOs, academia, Indian tribes, and other governmental agencies.
2. **Organization and Talent:** Leverage a combined workforce of skilled technicians and conveners - composed of agency employees, partners, and volunteers - to expand stewardship capacity.

Actions include:

- a. **Career Development:** Offering recruitment and career development opportunities and pathways for trail program managers, technicians, and returning temporary employees to collectively sustain and maximize talent within the trails community.
 - b. **Evaluate & Reorganize the Trail Program:** Evaluate and reorganize the trails program at all levels to both increase physical field capacity and make trail stewardship more collaborative and inclusive.
 - c. **Essential Skills:** Identify essential skills and core competencies for technical trail management and partnership facilitation for employees and volunteers.
 - d. **Integrated Training:** Champion a collaborative approach to develop and offer training for leaders, practitioners, managers, and volunteers that includes three basic elements: trail program and information management; trail maintenance and field skills, including traditional and emerging skills and techniques; and volunteer/partner management, coordination, and certifications.
3. **Relevancy:** Connect with diverse communities and trail users to ensure that trails are widely valued, enjoyed, used to access public lands, and recognized for their health benefits. Trail users and partners have a strong unified voice and reflect the demographics of the nation.

Actions include:

- a. **Communicate Benefits:** Collaborate with public, tribal, and private partners, including academia and industry, to identify and communicate the economic, health, and wellness benefits of trails and to encourage broader use and collective support of trails.
 - b. **Engagement Tools:** Use trails to engage and foster future stewards of public lands by building upon successful outreach and user ethics programs, including work done by partners and foundations.
 - c. **Service & Job Core:** Expand integration of 21st Century Conservation Service Corps, Job Corps, and similar youth and veteran programs to increase the benefits of trail stewardship.
4. **Sustainable Systems:** Collaboratively create and achieve a common vision resulting in trail systems that are sustainably designed, well-maintained, and used for their intended purpose.

Actions include:

- a. **Develop Shared Understanding:** Invite national/regional/local trail groups to create a shared understanding of how to better balance the desire for more opportunities with the need for a sustainable trail system.
- b. **Sustainable Trail Systems:** Collaboratively identify socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable trail systems across unit and jurisdictional boundaries, including the potential construction of new trails and the repurposing, realignment, or decommissioning of existing trails.

- c. **10-Year Maintenance Plan:** Establish and carry out a 10-year plan to steward the majority of trails with assistance from partners and volunteers.
 - d. **Assess Proposed Trails:** Evaluate new trail proposals to ensure they are sustainable and supported by adequate stewardship resources.
 - e. **Trail Endowment:** Help the NGO and partner community establish a national trail endowment, pursue non-traditional funding sources, and invite contributions to help carry out this Strategy.
5. **Agency Processes and Culture:** Leverage opportunities for effective partnering and trail stewardship. Agency leaders, employees, and partners understand the intent and latitude of laws, regulations, and policy. They use streamlined processes to achieve and collectively steward a sustainable system of trails.

Actions include:

- a. **Remove Process & Perception Barriers:** List and overcome real and perceived barriers to effective partnering and using non-traditional funding sources, including improved communication and associated training.
 - b. **Share Successes & Solutions:** Collaboratively share successes, innovative solutions, best practices, and tools through a trails community of practice and network of shared knowledge.
6. **Information:** Provide readily available, up-to-date, and credible trail information that's useful and used by many.

Actions include:

- a. **Shared Data Collection & Use:** Championing an integrated approach, together with partners and trail users, to collecting and sharing trail data and information that better serves the public—emphasizing open data, citizen science, and other innovative approaches.
- b. **Improve Data Tools:** Update and streamline agency trail databases, requirements, and management tools to efficiently meet public, partner, and agency trail information needs.
- c. **Implement Data Standards:** Implement minimum standards of trail information that should be available on each unit, including accurate and accessible spatial trail data.

Looking toward final development & launch of the Strategy...

As I mentioned— the time is now! ...as so many innovative partners and Forest Service units are demonstrating agency-wide through very creative, inspiring and collaborative solutions.

We're looking forward to shepherding the Trail Strategy through its final reviews and publication within the next few months, and launching into the real collaborative and create work of making it happen!

Thanks again.