

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior
Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

As you draft the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, we request that you add language supporting the United States Forest Service Trails program under the Capital Improvement and Maintenance (CIM) account.

Routine trail maintenance is essential for post-fire and non-fire related risk mitigation efforts. Burned areas are subject to soil erosion, flooding, and highly destructive debris flows that endanger nearby homes and civilian lives. Further, non-fire related challenges such as the sheer volume of backpackers that exceeds the trails' carrying capacity daily pose long-term problems for trail sustainability and safety.

Workforce and capacity issues have compounded the roughly \$541 million backlog in deferred trail maintenance and postponed efforts to safely reopen public trails. For example, in the Cleveland National Forest's Trabuco District, the 2018 Holy Jim Fire forced shutdowns across several popular trails, including the Trabuco Trail, Holy Jim Trail, and West Horsethief Trail; these trails remain closed due to persistent erosion and infrastructure-related concerns.¹ Concerningly, there are only 3 non-fire USFS personnel in the field and 7 to 8 trail-specific volunteers that actively manage trails across 138,971 acres of the Trabuco area.

In addition to meeting its wildfire detection and suppression goals, the USFS must have the financial and human resources to address post-fire related and other risks affecting trails in a timely manner. Specifically, I request you to include the following language in the Fiscal Year 2024 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill:

“Forest Trail Maintenance Activities and Prioritization— Funds appropriated by this Act under the heading “Capital Improvement and Maintenance” shall be made available for deferred trail maintenance activities and the necessary tools and staffing to carry out such activities. Funding shall be prioritized for trails that have been damaged and shut down by wildfires in the last 5 years and with high levels of foot traffic exceeding carrying capacity daily.”

¹ US Forest Service. (2022, May 12). *Holy Fire Burned Area Closure*.
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cleveland/home/?cid=FSEPRD590615>

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Young Kim
Member of Congress



Melanie A. Stansbury
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress