



April 5th Lander Non-Motorized Trails Charrette Washakie Ranger District Presentation





South Zone Trails Program Overview



- Staff: 1 permanent Trails Coordinator, 6 seasonal Trails Technicians, 1 SCA Trails Intern
- Teams:
 - (2) Volunteer and Service/Frontcountry Projects
 - (2) Washakie Ranger District Backcountry- Foot Based
 - (2) Wind River Ranger District- Foot Based
 - (2) Wind River Ranger District- Stock Based
- Field Season: May 1st through October 15th (backcountry- June 25th- Sep 24th)
- Area of Operations:
 - Zoned program- 1 Trail Crew manages all non-motorized trails on Washakie RD and Wind River Ranger District
 - Eastern Wind River Range- South Pass to Union Pass
 - Southern Absarokas- East Fork Drainage to Togwotee Pass
 - Trail Mileage- 500 miles of non-motorized trail
 - 150 non-Wilderness
 - 350 Wilderness



3 Priority Tasks



- **Backcountry trail log out**



**East
Fork
Drainage**



- **Backcountry trail rehabilitation projects**
(stock hazard and resource damage mitigation)



**Bears
Ears
Trail**



- **Front country trail improvements**
and new trail construction



**Upper
Brewers
Trail**

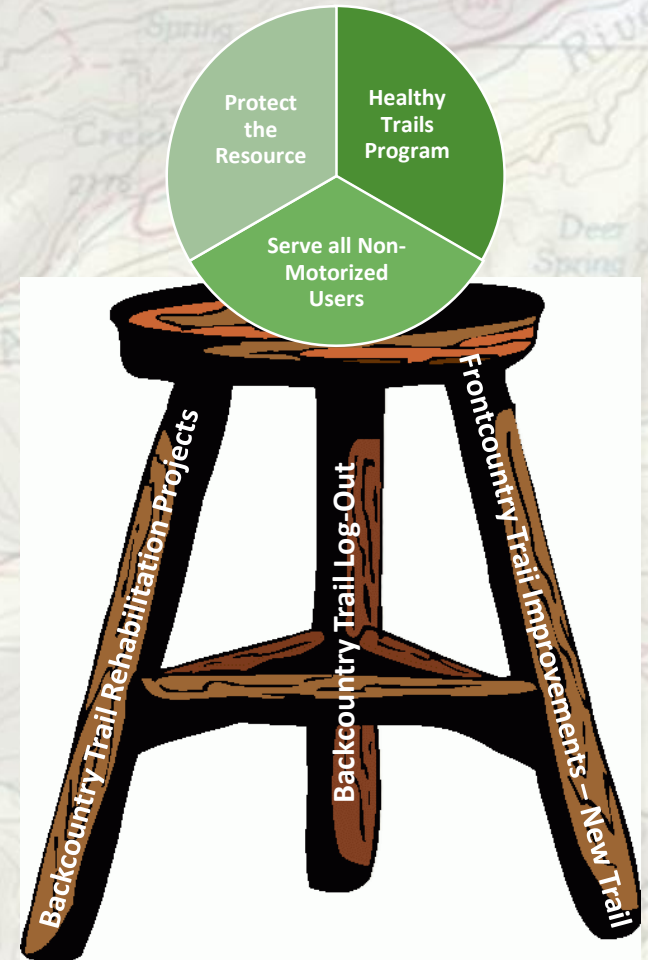




Interconnected



- Successful execution of all three priority tasks supports:
 - A healthy trails program
 - Service to all non-motorized trail user groups
 - Resource protection
- Currently at maximum staffing and work load capacity
- An increase in any one priority task will require a decrease in others

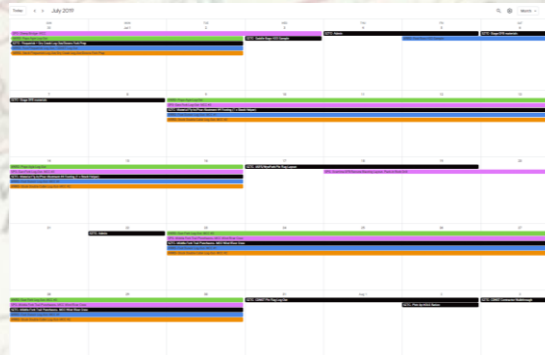
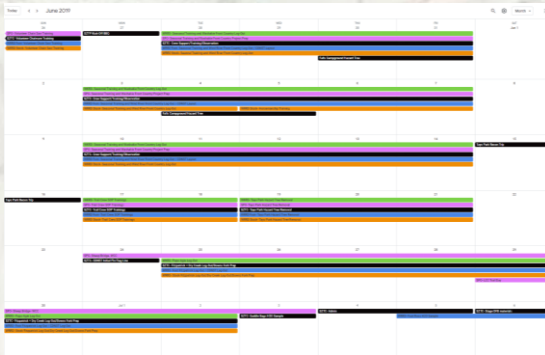




Standard Program of Work



- See provided 2019 calendars and spreadsheet
 - 500 miles of early season log-out (touch every mile of trail once)
 - 120 miles of late season log-out (Washakie Wilderness + Dunoir)
 - 11 major projects involving significant funding, partners, and logistics
 - 4 Volunteer and Service Trail Days / Trainings
 - 2020 - ? Projects specialist site visits, NEPA, design, and layout
 - Collateral duties (hunter patrol, air quality sampling, outfitter and guide inspections)





Recent Significant Trends



- 2017/2018/2019 decrease in Forest Recreation Budget: ~ 25%
(funding diverted to Fire, Fuels, and Timber)



Funding

- Increase in public requests for improved or increased non-motorized trail mileage on Washakie RD non-Wilderness trails

(Middle Fork Stock Bypass, Upper Brewers Trail, North Country Trail)



Front Country Pressure

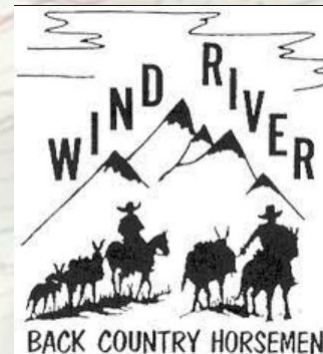


South Zone Recreation Response



- **Funding:**

- Replace 1-3 seasonal employees yearly with less expensive Student Conservation Association interns
- Capitalized on the high visibility of the Trail Stewardship Act and piloted the Volunteer and Service initiative to help compete for “soft money funding”
- Partnered with non-profit trails organizations with independent fundraising ability
- Strategically employed workforce multipliers (youth conservation corps, volunteers) that came at no cost to **ALLOCATED FOREST SERVICE FUNDS**





South Zone Recreation Response



- **Front Country Pressure:**

- Zoned Trails Program for efficiency and mutual support
- Refocused traditional backcountry partners to front country projects (Sierra Club, Wilderness Volunteers)
- Established dedicated 2 person Volunteer and Service team- design, layout, and lead majority of Front Country projects
- Purchased and outfitted Volunteer Tool Trailer
- Invested in mechanized trail building tools and skill development: chain saws, micro blaster, forestry winch, debarker, motorized wheel barrow
- Authorized private mechanized Trail Contractor- more cost effective and better quality construction under specific circumstances





Benefits



- **Funding:**

- **2018 South Zone Trails Program operating costs: \$406,560.00**
- **2018 non-allocated funding awarded: \$325,218.00**
- **2019 South Zone Trails Program anticipated operating costs: \$449,928.00**
- **2019 non-allocated funding awarded: \$384,100.00**
- **In two years competed for and awarded \$709,318.00 which subsidized 83% of the programs operating budget**

- **2 Year Volunteer and Youth Conservation Corps Augmentation:**

- **15 Trail Days**
- **22 volunteer and youth conservation corps crews employed**
- **20,217 volunteer and service hours x \$24.69/hr = \$499,158.00 of value**



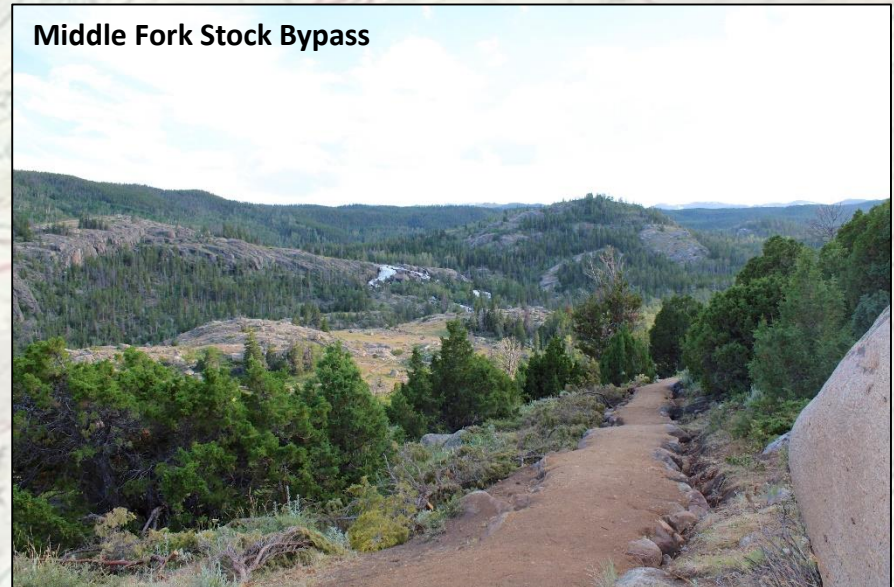
Benefits



• Work Accomplishments (Washakie Front Country):

- North Country Trail- 1 mile new trail construction (Aspen Glades- Limestone Mountain)
- Upper Brewers Trail- 3.5 miles new trail construction (2 engineered bridges)
- Sheep Bridge Trail- 2.5 miles major trail rehabilitation (erosion control, reroutes)
- Lower Middle Fork Trail- 6 miles major trail rehabilitation (6 puncheons/water crossings)
- Middle Fork Stock Bypass- 2 miles new trail construction (major blasting)

Middle Fork Stock Bypass





Benefits



- **Work Accomplishments (non-Washakie Front Country):**
 - Smith Lake Trail- 1 mile rock removal and turnpiking (stock hazards)
 - High Meadow Connector Trail- 1 mile rock removal and erosion control (stock hazards)
 - Lizard Head Meadows ford- .25 mile reroute, 2 footbridges, turnpiking (wetlands)
 - Bear's Ears Trail- 2 miles heavy rock removal and slab mitigation (stock hazard)
 - Washakie Trail- .25 mile high meadow reroute and erosion control (resource damage)
 - Down's Fork Bridge- .6 mile reroute and 32 foot wilderness crossing (public safety)
 - Washakie Wilderness/Dunoir- 10 year deferred tread maintenance (resource damage)
 - Continental Divide National Scenic Trail- 7 mile relocation/new trail construction
- **1,246 miles of trail log-out**



Continental Divide
National Scenic Trail



Costs



- **Inflexibility:**
 - Trails Program schedule and program of work RIGID
 - Deconfliction of numerous partners, projects, and deadlines (all tied to “soft money”) requires strict adherence to advanced scheduling
- **Unresponsiveness:**
 - Slow reaction time, or inability to make in-season adjustments for:
 - Large spring snowpack/early fall snows
 - Flood events
 - Wildfires
 - Major slides/erosion events
 - Staffing challenges/losses
- **Large Administrative/Supervisory Oversight**
 - Only long term, permanent employee occupied with administrative functions
 - Daily site management, technical instruction, and quality control falls to seasonal, temporary workforce sourced through a complex hiring format
- **Funding Sources Drive Work Prioritization**



Anticipated Future Challenges



- Regional Trails Strategy and Forest Plan directs maintenance of existing over construction of new
- Washington Office and Regional Office targets- Fire, Fuels Reduction, Timber Sales
 - Targets drive budget allocations and staffing prioritization
- Unsustainability of current South Zone Trails Program funding strategy
 - Disproportionate ratio of allocated funds to “soft money” funds
 - High probability that luck will run out eventually
- Unsustainability of administrative oversight with current permanent staffing situation
- Over prioritization of Sinks Canyon trail network / recreational opportunities by local user groups- “Loving it to death”
 - Watershed concerns with excessive trail and road densities
 - Wildlife and winter habitat concerns
 - User conflicts with hunters, equestrians, pedestrians
- Inexistence of long term “Washakie Front Country Recreation Strategy”



Anticipated Future Challenges i.e.



- **Watersheds:**

- Five watersheds outside of Lander have been identified as “functioning at risk”
- One rating factor- elevated road and trail densities greater than 1 mile per square mile
 - Middle Popo Agie Watershed road/trail density 2.7 miles/mile²
- At risk watersheds prioritized in Watershed Restoration Action Plan (WRAP)
- WRAP’s identify projects critical to improving condition classification
 - Reduce road and trail densities
 - Improve the condition of existing roads and trails
 - Relocate roads and trails >300 feet from streams or waterbodies



Lander City Park



Washakie RD Perspective



- Improved or increased recreational trail opportunities in the Sinks Canyon area will come from improvements to existing non-motorized trails
 - Warming Hut, Brewers, Upper Brewers, Sheep Bridge, Lower Middle Fork, Fairfield Hill
- Any “new construction” non-motorized trail project proposals more feasible if spread out to other non-Sinks Canyon areas
 - Willow Creek, Beaver Creek, Limestone Mountain, Fiddlers/Christina/Louis Lake triangle, Pete’s Lake, Dickinson Park
- Explore and prioritize the development of a long term Washakie and Wind River RD Front Country Recreation Strategy
- Explore options to fund a full time Volunteer and Service Coordinator

