



National Forest Trail Stewardship Act

Introduction

On February 10, 2015, Congresswomen Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) and Tim Walz (D-MN) re-introduced the National Forest Service Trail Stewardship Act of 2015 (H.R.845). On April 28, 2015, Senators Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) introduced the Senate version of the bill (S.1110). The bill would direct the Forest Service to take several actions to help address the current trail maintenance backlog that is adversely impacting all trail users on many national forests, including equestrians. The bill was first introduced during the last Congress. The American Horse Council, Backcountry Horsemen of America, and the Wilderness Society were significantly involved in the creation of this bill.

Background

A June 2013, study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the Forest Service has deferred trail maintenance needs that exceed half-billion dollars, and only one-quarter of the agency's 158,000 miles of trails meets agency standards for maintenance. This maintenance backlog is causing access and safety issues for equestrians and all trail users on national forests.

Bill

The National Forest Service Trail Stewardship Act would direct the Forest Service to develop a comprehensive strategy to more effectively utilize volunteers and partners to assist in maintaining national forest trails and increase the use of volunteers by 100% in the next five years. The bill would also address a liability issue that has discouraged some national forests from utilizing volunteers and partner organizations to help perform trail maintenance.

Additionally, it creates a pilot program to allow outfitters and guides the ability to perform trail maintenance activities in lieu of permit fees. Lastly, it would direct the Forest Service to identify and prioritize specific areas with the greatest need for trail maintenance in the national forest system.

In the current fiscal environment it is unlikely Congress will appropriate additional funds to directly address the trail maintenance backlog. This bill will help improve trail maintenance without the need for additional funding.

Congressional Action

The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Agriculture and House Committee on Natural Resources and Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

AHC Position

The bill is supported by the AHC and many other recreation organizations.