

Trail Development Triumphs & Pitfalls

*What can we learn from the development
process of natural-surface trails in Oregon?*

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A Note From the Author

Firstly, a disclaimer must be made: I am not a researcher or statistician by trade. I have tried to be impartial throughout the study and have learned a lot along the way. That being said, we all carry emotional biases that impact our decisions and understanding of the world around us. After having worked in the trails development sector in Oregon for the past 8 years, I've noticed recurring themes that I navigate myself and see other professionals and organizations navigating as well. These anecdotal experiences piqued my interest and led to the creation of this study.

My hope is that this report is useful for people in all the stakeholder roles of trail development, and that we can use it to better serve the growing number of people seeking out trail-based experiences.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study and report is to better understand the challenges and successes that new trail projects experience throughout their development lifespan in Oregon, and use this information to make the process more efficient and effective at achieving project goals.

The study found that there is a large, unmet demand for more trails; especially trails designed for mountain biking. Trail projects take about 5.6 years on average from concept to completion, with the majority of the roles executed by volunteers. The most apparent impediment to trail development is lack of a clear process—58% of respondents indicated there was none.

Primary challenges include accountability, professionalism, inconsistent timelines, individual biases, staff turnover, environmental review, and community support. Primary areas of success are sustained interest, collaboration, hired roles, long-term relationships, and trail construction and maintenance.

One high-level strategy for improving these working relationships is developing a strategic plan and aligning organization goals with those of other project stakeholders and their plans.

SUCCESSES

Collaboration
Trail Construction & Maintenance
Sustained Interest
Hired Roles
Long-Term Relationships

CHALLENGES

Professionalism
Environmental Review
Accountability
Individual Biases
Staff Turnover
Community Support
Inconsistent Timelines

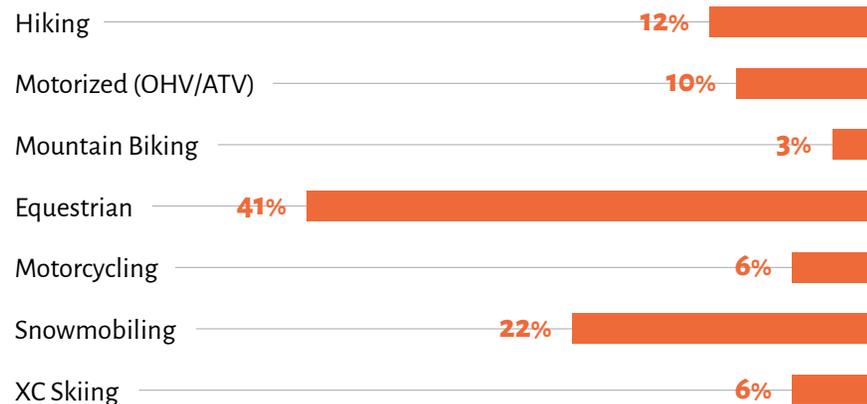
Understanding the Setting

Trails have existed in what we now call Oregon since time immemorial. One astute observer from the US Forest Service notes that “Trails are the oldest form of communication known to humankind.” We know that humans have lived here for at least 14,300 years¹ and have traveled on trails throughout that period. Many of the roads and trails we cherish today were

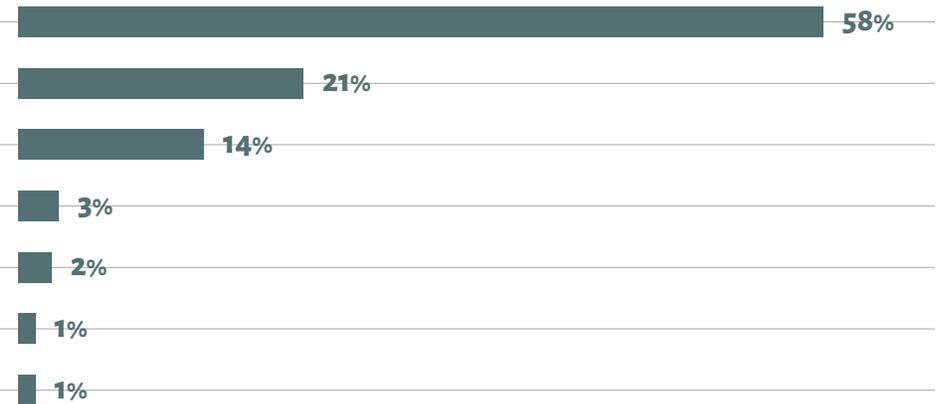


Current Trail Infrastructure Does not Reflect Its Users' Desired Experience

Percentage of USFS trail mileage in Oregon and Washington designed for:



Percentage of trail use in Oregon by type of user:



US Forest Service Region 6

2019-2023 SCORP

¹"Paisley Caves." Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paisley_Caves

originally created by indigenous people. In 1905—after most of these native people had died of colonially-introduced diseases, been killed outright, or forcibly moved to reservations—the Forest Service was founded and began building a robust network of trails in these same landscapes. Initially, these trails were the only means of transportation through the mountainous regions of Oregon and served as access points for fire suppression efforts. As the 20th century progressed, the use of trails for recreation grew and evolved to include the many varied types of recreation we enjoy today.

We have only recently begun to understand the positive impacts trail-based recreation can have for communities, individuals, and the natural landscape itself. Trail-based

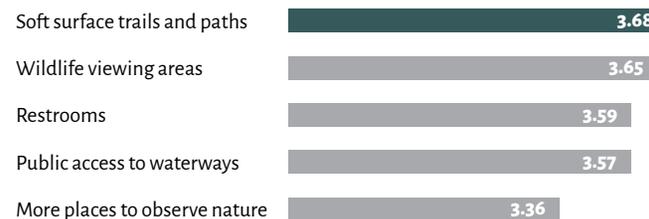
recreation has seen steady growth in recent decades, and since the 2020-22 pandemic, outdoor recreation has grown even faster—6.7% on average each year since 2018.² This is an exciting trend—we see people prioritizing healthy activities, tourism economies booming, and a surging interest in conservation and stewardship activities. But there are negative impacts from increased recreation traffic as well: user conflict, trail damage, compromised trail experience, and disruption to wildlife to name a few.

Strategically developing more miles of trails to adapt to the evolving demands along the recreation opportunity spectrum is one solution to soften the negative impacts, as well as ensuring the positive impacts are more equitable and widespread. This



Oregon Resident Need: Dispersed-Area Priorities

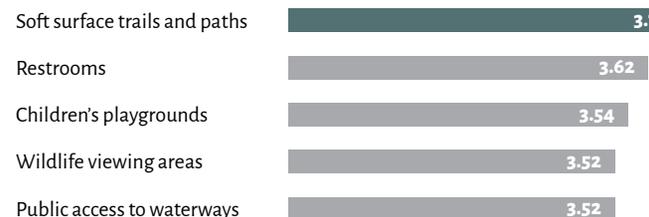
2019-2023 SCORP



Score Based on a 1-5 Likert Scale
(1=Lowest priority need to 5=Highest priority need)

Oregon Resident Need: Close-To-Home Priorities

2019-2023 SCORP



Score Based on a 1-5 Likert Scale
(1=Lowest priority need to 5=Highest priority need)

² "Outdoor Recreation Industry Sees Significant Growth With Changes In Consumer Behavior Sparked By Covid-19." *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michellebruton/2023/02/28/outdoor-recreation-industry-sees-significant-growth-with-changes-in-consumer-behavior-sparked-by-covid-19>

tactic aligns well with strategic priorities of the agencies who manage these public lands, such as the National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System.

Complicating the situation is a rapidly accelerating climate crisis. Wildland fires burn larger, hotter, and longer each season. Rain and flood events get more frequent and severe. Ice storms, beetle infestations, and heat-stressed trees create a growing maintenance backlog. When these conditions overlap, we see tremendous damage to our trail systems—heavy rain after an intense fire can erode landscapes at a rate not seen before. The agencies tasked with managing these landscapes have had their funding cut over the years, meaning their staff capacity for managing climate impacts is greatly reduced. And what they can do with limited resources is at the expense of lower priority projects—usually recreation projects. This reality is important context for understanding the findings of this study. Many thematic points of friction often have deeper roots and it is important to hold empathy for each other’s difficult roles.

In Oregon we know that roughly 74% of the population (3.1 million people) like to hike or walk on trails and 15% of the population (620,000 people) like to cycle off-road.³ Many other people enjoy riding horses, motorcycles, OHVs, snowmobiles, and skis on trails. All told, trail-based recreation in Oregon contributes over \$300 million in Cost of Illness savings every year. For every \$1 we spend on trails, there is \$2.94 in Cost of Illness savings.⁴ In 2019, outdoor recreationists

“We know that recreation is the largest driver of economic spending and outcomes associated with our National Forest System lands.”

*– Chris French, Deputy Chief, National Forest System
2023 Reimagine Recreation Knowledge Sharing Workshop*

spent \$15.6 billion in Oregon and supported 224,000 full and part time jobs.⁵ Trails also provide educational opportunities, therapeutic benefits, increase the value of homes, and more.

The benefits are too numerous to count, but are we doing enough to meet recreation demand? There are 15,500 miles of trails on National Forest lands in Oregon, or about 20 feet per resident.⁶ Only about 20% of these trails meet their maintenance standard, and evolving use types demand trails

that are designed with them in mind. Dirt and other soft surface trails and paths topped the list of recreational needs in the 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)—above bathrooms, playgrounds, and wildlife viewing areas.⁷

So how can we rise to these challenges and meet this growing demand? How can we provide more miles of trails that are accessible to more people and provide the experience they are seeking?

³ “Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.” Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/prp/pages/pla-scorp.aspx>

⁴ “Health Benefits of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon.” College of Forestry, Oregon State University, <https://revaluation.forestry.oregonstate.edu/health-benefits-outdoor-recreation-oregon>

⁵ “Oregon Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact Study.” Travel Oregon, <https://industry.traveloregon.com/resources/research/oregon-outdoor-recreation-economic-impact-study/>

⁶ “10 Year Sustainable Trail Stewardship Challenge.” United States Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region, https://drive.google.com/open?id=161zCRRrLNoSnj17numQzbuDHS9jtjHtH&usp=drive_fs

⁷ “Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.” Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/prp/pages/pla-scorp.aspx>

Purpose

The impetus for this study was to try and better understand the social, administrative, and political landscape that surrounds trail development projects, and discover solutions so we can all be more effective in our respective roles.

If we are truly going to embrace trail-based recreation as a positive impact in our communities we need to make sure our investments of time and money are efficient and well-spent. We need to talk to each other not only about the economic, environmental, health, and quality-of-life benefits of recreation—but also the challenges and threats that trail development faces.

This study surveyed people who were involved in the development of a new trail and examined several trail project case studies in Oregon that have either failed to meet expectations or were remarkably successful in some aspects. These projects represent diverse recreation types, geographic areas, land management agencies, and cover a wide range in scope and size. The study analyzes and attempts to quantify the qualities and objectives of the projects, where the friction points were, and what strategies were implemented (or should have been) to overcome these threats to its success. If the project exceeded expectations in some aspect, what strategies led to this success?

Desired Outcomes:

1. Categorize common themes that can cause a project to falter or succeed
2. Educate trail professionals and other leaders about potential challenges and strategies for success
3. Identify what preventative actions can be taken to mitigate these challenges
4. Introduce the findings at the 2022 Oregon Outdoor Recreation Summit

Method

This study consists of three elements:

1. a survey to identify and quantify common challenges and successes.
2. a series of case study interviews that were conducted as follow up to the survey results, and
3. a panel discussion held at the 2022 Oregon Outdoor Recreation Summit.

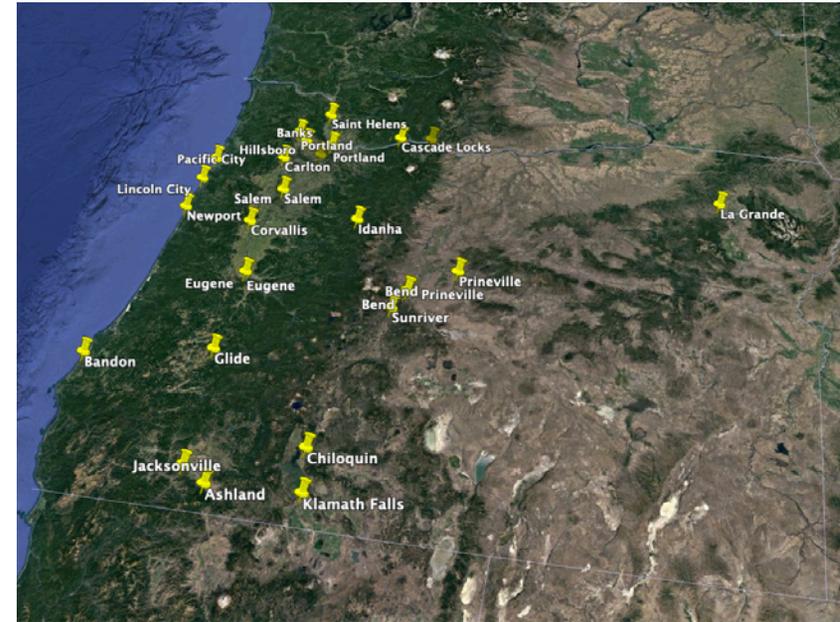
This report contains the findings from the first two elements. A summary of the conclusions is found below, and a more thorough examination is in the appendices. In this report, “advocate” and “trail organization” are used interchangeably, as are “agency” and “land manager”. The photos throughout the report are not intended to represent the report contents in any way, they are merely examples of trail users, stewards, and builders.

Survey

The survey was distributed for approximately 3 weeks in the summer of 2022 through the Oregon Trails Coalition, the Oregon Mountain Biking Coalition, and the many organizations that are represented by each. Forty-three respondents filled out the survey from across the state and shared info about trail projects of varying sizes and purposes.

Case Studies

From the survey responses six projects were chosen to be examined with an in-depth interview. These projects vary in scope and land manager, and the interviews are summarized into key themes and potential solutions.



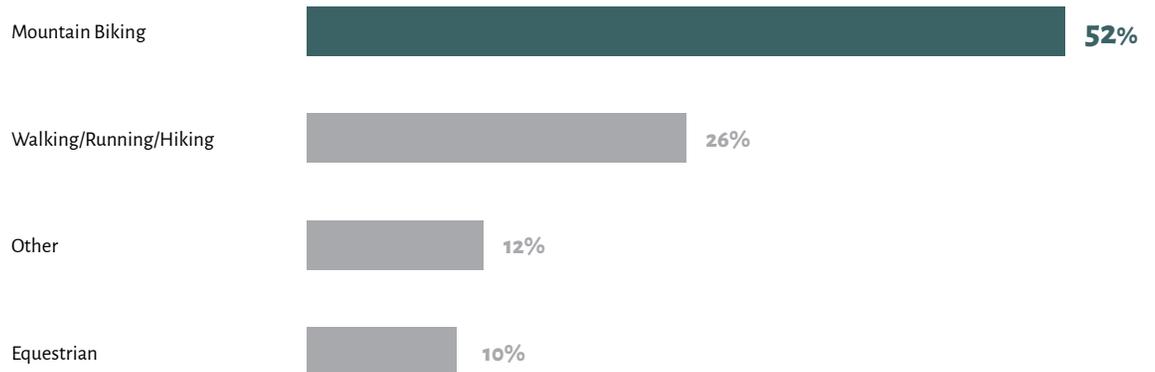
Forty-three people from across Oregon who were involved in a trail development project responded to the survey

Conclusions

The clearest conclusion that we can make from this study is that there is significant interest and demand for more trails, especially mountain bike trails. Of the 43 survey respondents who took part in the survey, 27 of respondents proposed trails designed for mountain biking—more than all other use types combined. When compared with the recreation trends outlined in the 2019 SCORP⁸, we can only expect the desire for more trails to grow in coming years.

The second conclusion that we can see is that the current processes used to develop trails are not able to keep up with demand. Many factors affect this, but perhaps foremost is lack of a clear process—58% of respondents said there was none at the beginning of the project.

More new Mountain Biking Trails Were Proposed Than all Other use Types Combined



58%

The Majority of Survey Respondents Said That the Process and Timeline for Building a Trail was Unclear



⁸Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.* Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/prp/pages/pla-scorp.aspx>

Themes

Below is an examination of these and some of the other themes that arose in the study findings. Most, if not all of these findings are interconnected—certain challenges may exacerbate others, or help alleviate them if avoided. If a project is particularly strong in one category, it may be enough to buoy a project through a particularly rough patch in another.



Thematic Challenges:

- Shifting timelines, inconsistent project management, lack of accountability
- Individual biases/priorities within land management agencies
- Lack of professionalism within trail organizations
- High staff turnover within land management agencies
- Environmental review bottleneck, and other staff capacity constraints
- Lack of community/stakeholder support

Thematic Successes:

- Sustained community interest and engagement throughout project lifespan
- Trail construction and trail maintenance
- Collaboration between user and stakeholder groups
- Hiring professional consultants for various stages of the project
- Long-term relationship building between land managers and trail organizations

“Project management can always be tightened up. Lack of continuity for project lead is the most common cause of avoidable delays.”

-survey comment



CHALLENGE:

Shifting timelines, inconsistent project management, lack of accountability

As seen in the survey results, the average length of trail projects is 5.6 years to completion. These projects are driven in large part by volunteer advocates, and the roles that are paid are usually under-staffed. These factors naturally contribute to volunteer burnout and a high rate of staff turnover (more on that below). The result is that many different people contribute to or champion the project throughout its lifespan. Without a clear purpose, strategy, timeline, or stakeholder roles, the project can easily stumble and morph over time. Establishing these criteria early on in the project and adhering to them could ease this inefficiency. Furthermore, if projects are treated as contractual/professional relationships, having established timelines and processes will build confidence of the land manager and set expectations for the advocate.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.
- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Have clear roles, milestones, and timelines throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and by what dates. Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability.
- Establish a good foundation and transparent process with the land manager by focusing on a pilot project. Subsequent phases or trails should benefit and move much faster.
- Hire professional consultants for feasibility, planning, stakeholder engagement, trail design, project management, or other roles when possible.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.

“Individual staff members at [land manager redacted] deemed the project a low priority and were able to stifle project movement for almost 15 years.”

-survey comment

“[Land manager redacted] did a recreation plan in 1999 and called out MTB as a priority. Even identified [trail name redacted] area as a zone for MTB development. But when pressed, they wouldn’t even acknowledge their own plan. This indifferent attitude might be changing but is totally dependent on personalities.”

-interview comment

CHALLENGE:

Individual biases/priorities within land management agencies

Individual biases are inherent in any working relationship. We should expect (and welcome!) there to be a wide range of opinions on the importance and implementation of a trail project. This challenge is hard to assess with this study, as each scenario is likely very unique. But if we run our organizations with this expectation, we can usually avoid a hard “no” and design projects to satisfy multiple stakeholder nuances.

This foundation looks like a high-level strategic plan on the advocate’s side, and an understanding of the plans and priorities of land management agencies. This requires a fair amount of homework for both parties, as well as transparent and frequent communication. If a project runs into a wall, ask why, and what partners can do to make the project a priority.

Unfortunately a single individual can still be an impediment despite your best efforts to collaborate. Oftentimes, there are other decision makers at the agency—reach out, ask questions, and try to make their jobs easier, not harder.

Put extra effort into building a community-led coalition. Talk to your elected officials and economic development agencies. It’s a lot harder to say no to one hundred people than one.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Act fast when your project is experiencing agency support.
- Ask land managers about ways the advocate can alleviate bottlenecks and escalate the priority of recreation projects.
- Demonstrate commitment by assisting with projects that are currently underway, even if they don’t completely align with your goals.
- Establish a good foundation and transparent process with the land manager by focusing on a pilot project. Subsequent phases or trails should benefit and move much faster.
- When agencies have more revenue, they can increase staff capacity and better prioritize recreation projects. Understand their funding mechanisms. Advocate for more funding to land management agencies for recreation and environmental review staff capacity.
- Invite more people/groups to the table and be receptive to their input. Hunting and fishing groups, hikers, equestrians, cyclists, motorized recreation, conservation groups, land managers, and neighboring landowners. Build community support and direct their energy towards a productive outlet.

“I’ve tried so many ways to grow, support and foster community and it always seems to fall back into entropy, power struggles, and lack of follow through. My experience has shown most mtn bikers are far from professional, lack accountability on board of directors and lastly mtn bikers have very vocal opinions of how things should be without action or initiative. Still love em though.”

-survey comment

CHALLENGE:

Lack of professionalism within trail organizations

There is a wide gamut of professionalism among trail organizations and advocates. The study found that trail organizations proposed 38% of trail projects and citizens came in 2nd at 25%. It also found that citizen-proposed projects took longer than average to complete—6.8 years compared to the average of 5.6. This makes sense, individual citizens usually have minimal experience and time to devote to the project. Even trail organizations have widely varying budgets and staff capacity, leading to inconsistent levels of professionalism. Furthermore, the nonprofit structure and funding models that many organizations operate in is arguably flawed. Volunteers serve as the board of directors that guides the organization, with no oversight and frequently no experience in leadership or management. Funding for staff capacity in the nonprofit sector is notoriously difficult to obtain.

Five years ago there were almost no trail nonprofits with paid staff, yet recently several have grown enough to hire an executive director. These roles have typically been successful in growing the organization’s revenue and hiring

support staff. It is too recent to say with certainty, but with this growth one would expect to see an increase in professionalism when dealing with other project stakeholders on trail development projects.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/ cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Do your homework, extensive outreach, and document it all.
- If your organization lacks capacity, consider hiring professional consultants for feasibility, planning, stakeholder engagement, trail design, and project management work.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Nonprofits are a lot of work to start and usually ‘bootstrapped’ by inexperienced volunteers. Partnering with an existing nonprofit or starting the process early can ensure the organization has sufficient capacity for interfacing with land management and other stakeholders.
- Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability. Have clear roles throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and within what timeframe.

“Turnover in [land manager redacted] staff and shifting priorities made the planning process take a LONG time. I think it’s important that when an agency takes a project on, they develop a realistic timeframe and stick with it. Lots of time lost picking up and putting down the project.”

-survey comment

“Land manager decision makers changed and did not openly support trail management, funding, growth or planning.”

-interview comment



CHALLENGE:

High staff turnover within land management agencies

Most land management agencies have seen their responsibilities rise over time, and simultaneously, their budgets reduced. This results in fewer roles available and less competitive salaries. In order to advance one’s career, many agency personnel need to look farther afield for their next promotion—leading to a high rate of turnover. Unfortunately for all stakeholders, this has a large impact on the continuity and speed at which trail development can happen. A large part of these roles is interfacing with community partners, and relies on these relationships for executing education, stewardship, and recreation planning goals. When these relationships are lost, along with institutional knowledge of projects and initiatives, the onus for educating the replacement frequently falls on a volunteer advocate.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/ cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.
- When roles change at a land management agency, more care should be taken to train this new staff person for success in adopting their partner relationships.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability. Have clear roles throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and within what timeframe.
- When agencies have more revenue, they can increase staff capacity and better prioritize recreation projects. Understand their funding mechanisms. Advocate for more funding to land management agencies for recreation and environmental review staff capacity.

“Build illegal trails. I am kidding, mostly. I understand the value of safeguards but the state and fed agencies are making it way too onerous on volunteers.”

-survey respondent

“Illegal trails are a statement of need, and we’re proposing solutions. But NEPA is a pinch point. If you solve the NEPA problem, we will help you solve the illegal trails problem.”

-case study interviewee



CHALLENGE:

Environmental review bottleneck, and other staff capacity constraints

More than any other phase of the trail development process, environmental review posed the most challenges. Depending on who manages the land, different requirements exist for this process. On federal land, the most common site for trail projects, any ground-disturbing activity needs to go through the process mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). There are three levels based on the complexity of a project; most new trail projects will fall under the simplest: Categorical Exclusion (CE). This process exists for good reason, we need a way to understand the impacts of a particular action—like building a trail, a parking lot, logging, fuels reduction, or operating a ski resort.

This analysis includes biologists, botanists, hydrologists, archaeologists, public sentiment, and more. Even for a CE, the process demands a considerable amount of staff time. These same specialists are typically working on many projects competing for their time, and recreation projects are frequently deprioritized in favor of other pressing needs, like fire management. This is exacerbated by staffing capacity and the other issues outlined in the staff turnover section above. Trail advocates need to be cognizant of these challenges faced by our agency partners and help them find ways to make the process more efficient.

It is no surprise that this phase experiences more challenges—it is designed to ensure that the positive impacts outweigh the negative impacts. Additionally, the NEPA process allows us to understand and mitigate impacts; and to improve design proposals in a manner that better protects natural and cultural resources. Advocates should expect and plan for changes in this phase, being flexible will make the end result something that more people can be proud of. To allow advocates to do this planning and minimize repetitive work, land management agencies should



provide a transparent process and communicate in advance any potential issues that may arise.

The study also found that the phases after environmental review were the least problematic—trail construction and trail maintenance. This means that the majority of the project's lifespan usually happens in the years before environmental review—feasibility, planning,

stakeholder engagement, and design. Unfortunately, many trail development grants and other funding opportunities require the environmental review to be completed prior to submitting an application. Which leads to advocate organizations often taking on significant risk by investing staff time in the first two-thirds of a project's lifespan, before funding—or even approval—is secured.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, and accountability. Mutually shared planning and process documentation.
- Have frank conversations with land managers about realistic expectations for staff capacity to execute NEPA on recreation projects. Even if timelines are longer than hoped, having a target to plan around is helpful. This requires both parties to deliver their respective responsibilities on time.
- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Combining recreation projects with fuels reduction or other types of more complex NEPA analysis is an appealing strategy to reduce inefficiencies in the process, yet at least for the projects studied here, this tactic usually held up trail development instead of streamlining the process.
- Diversify your approach to fundraising and rally the community behind the project.
- Resist any requirements that could cause the NEPA bottleneck to get tighter/slower.
- When agencies have more revenue, they can increase staff capacity and better prioritize recreation projects. Understand their funding mechanisms.
- When partner organizations can help fund the NEPA process it is easier for agencies to prioritize the project, and much harder to stall it.
- Environmental review process isn't as onerous on non-federally managed lands, which allowed for the early procurement of RTP grant funding. (which requires environmental review to be completed before grant application)
- Ask land managers about ways the advocate can alleviate this NEPA bottleneck.

“Some stakeholders felt they were not included in planning in a meaningful enough way. We also dramatically underestimated some of the community’s fear of cultural change associated with mountain biking. It would have been beneficial to have a MUCH larger public relations and education effort from the very beginning.”

-case study interviewee

CHALLENGE:

Lack of community/stakeholder support

Sometimes community support comes naturally to a project, and sometimes it derails the project completely. There is no single effective way to build community and stakeholder support. Building an email newsletter, social media channels, and inviting local media to community events are great ways to start building this community and awareness of the project. Have a core group of staff and volunteers dedicated to the project and meet regularly, and welcome input and engagement at whatever level community members are willing to give. If there are stewardship activities that can be activated faster than building a new trail, start there and give people an outlet for their enthusiasm. Figure out when your local chamber of commerce, city government, or other entity meets and ask to share your vision at their next meeting. Host your own Q&A or info sessions at a local business; or even better, invite your community for a field trip to the project site. Take photos, share a livestream, write an op/ed, and ask supporters to share with their networks.

Community engagement helps demonstrate to agencies that there is widespread support for the project, not just a single-interest group. And if you can broaden your community into a coalition, you can engage agencies with a single voice, instead of multiple voices competing for limited resources.

Community support also helps procure funding for the project, as well as support from your elected officials.

It’s important to remember that no matter how much outreach and community engagement is done, there will always be a few people who feel left out and unheard.

Key mitigation strategies:

- Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/ cadence, and communicate often in both directions.
- Diversify your approach to fundraising and rally the community behind the project.
- Focus on trails that are close to where people live, especially youth—pumptracks, safe routes to school, etc.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Build community support and direct their energy towards a productive outlet.
- Always do more community outreach than you think is necessary!
- Ensure that coalition members are reporting back to their respective organizations and can speak on behalf of them. Develop a strategic plan that coalition members sign off on.
- Invite more people/groups to the table and be receptive to their input. Hunting and fishing groups, hikers, equestrians, cyclists, motorized recreation, conservation groups, land managers, and neighboring landowners.
- Do your homework, extensive outreach, and document it all.
- Interpersonal and societal politics all play a role in community support—things we cannot necessarily control.

“The build went incredibly fast thanks to a huge amount of volunteer support. 4.5 miles of trail completed in just over a year. 40+ volunteers showed up multiple weekends, and a core crew of 2 dozen finished the rest on evenings and weekends.”

-case study interviewee

SUCCESS:

Sustained community interest and engagement throughout project lifespan

Sustained interest and momentum ranked least problematic by a large margin in the survey results. Even when examining just the trail projects that took longer than average, sustained interest and momentum kept its margin for working well or better than expected. We can conclude what we already knew: people are stoked on trails!

In fact, if one looks at sustained interest and momentum as an indicator for overall project successes, some interesting results appear. On average, projects who's sustained interest and momentum went better than expected also scored higher than average in all other eight categories/phases of the project.

Don't underestimate the power of your community to carry a project to its ultimate success. Stay engaged with your community on your communications channels and give them outlets to be a part of the process and advocate on your behalf.



Lessons Learned:

- Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.
- Do more community outreach than you think is necessary!
- Build community support and direct their energy towards a productive outlet.
- Diversify your approach to fundraising and rally the community behind the project.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Focus on trails that are close to where people live, especially youth—pumptracks, safe routes to school, etc.

“Let’s just hire the pros and get this shit done.”

-case study interviewee

SUCCESS:

Trail construction and trail maintenance

After sustained interest and momentum, the project components that consistently worked the best were trail construction and trail maintenance, respectively. Unsurprisingly, trail maintenance had the highest percentage of volunteer roles, likely filled by the same core volunteers that are so integral in sustaining interest and momentum. Trail building roles, on the other hand, had more paid roles than any other category aside from environmental review.

When hiring a professional trail builder, the expectations are fairly transparent. There’s a final deliverable that needs to meet certain qualifications within a given timeframe. At this stage of the project community engagement has wound down, environmental review has been completed, and the project greenlighted. The path to project completion is clear and stakeholders are excited to get over the finish line. What can we learn from these two phases that has the potential to streamline other more problematic stages that come earlier?



Lessons Learned:

- Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability. Have clear roles throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and within what timeframe.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- If your organization doesn’t have the experience on staff, consider opting to hire professional trail planners, designers, and builders for their expertise and efficacy.

“Collaboration among various user groups prior to the project being submitted to USFS was very successful in bridging a lot of perceived conflicts.”

-survey respondent

SUCCESS:

Collaboration between user and stakeholder groups

We've seen this theme come up many times throughout the study. Inviting other stakeholders into the process is a winning strategy. Even if they aren't supporters of the project at first, having those discussions and learning why they're concerned will lead to better understanding, and frequently a solution that can make them an ally. And if you don't extend a welcome to other stakeholders, you run the risk of creating a rift that's much harder to heal.

However, stakeholder support is perhaps the largest wildcard in the trail development process. It is largely dependent on individual perception or emotion and there is no universal playbook on how to garner support. The best strategy for success is providing a platform for difficult conversations and full and frequent transparency throughout the process.

Lessons Learned:

- Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.
- Invite more people/groups to the table and be receptive to their input. Hunting and fishing groups, hikers, equestrians, cyclists, motorized recreation, conservation groups, land managers, and neighboring landowners. Build community support and direct their energy towards a productive outlet.
- Find the areas where there is alignment and common values and focus on those first. This will build trust, and help create a productive atmosphere for discussing areas of friction.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Focus on trails that are close to where people live, especially youth—pumptracks, safe routes to school, etc.
- Ensure that coalition members are reporting back to their respective organizations and can speak on behalf of them. Develop a strategic plan that coalition members sign off on.
- Interpersonal and societal politics all play a role in community support—things we cannot necessarily control.
- Do more community outreach than you think is necessary!

“Having partners who were external to the community as the project leaders was helpful in navigating/usurping tensions that existed between community entities.”

-survey respondent

SUCCESS:

Hiring professional consultants for various stages of the project

Throughout the interviews we found that many projects benefited from hiring paid roles to assist with the trail development process. These paid roles were either staff people (agency and advocate orgs) or independent consultants (trail builders, facilitators, planners).

The second* most frequent paid roles throughout a trail project’s lifespan were professional trail builders. This phase of the project can be completed in a relatively short timespan once approved for construction, but also usually includes the majority of a project’s billable hours. It is a role that is well situated for execution by professional contractors; and as shown in the survey results, the second most successful phase of a project on average. The third most frequent paid role is trail design and layout, a service that many professional trail builders naturally prefer to offer as part of their overall scope of work.

Aside from those roles, we found that several projects were able to overcome challenges or delays by hiring outside consultants to help with feasibility, visioning, planning, stakeholder engagement, or maintenance.

**The area that had the highest rate of paid roles was environmental review, which was also the most problematic phase. This outlier is likely due to the nature of this phase—it is designed to find the potential negative impacts of a project, and as such it is a threat to the success of a project.*

Lessons Learned:

- Hiring professional consultants for feasibility, planning, stakeholder engagement, trail design, and project management work can lead to the project’s eventual success.
- Inexperienced or small organizations can opt to hire professional trail planners, designers, and builders for their expertise and efficacy.
- Have an “At a Glance” project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.
- Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability.

“After 10+ years of planning, and once the construction was wrapping up on [name redacted] trail, a second trail was proposed. Because the procedure and working relationship was already established, the second project moved much, much faster than its predecessor.”

-survey respondent

SUCCESS:

Long-term relationship building between land managers and trail organizations

Relationships are the key to a project’s success in many fields; and in the trail development world the relationship you build with your land managers will pave the way for ultimate success (or failure) of your project and subsequent projects. Land managers hold the power to say yes or no to the projects you or your organization care deeply about. As we might expect, the study found this dynamic to be the source of a lot of frustration for trail advocates.

The primary takeaway we found was that starting to build these relationships early frequently helped set expectations for the remainder of the project. In addition, once navigating one or more trail projects with the same agency relationships, subsequent projects moved faster and less bumpy.

As an advocate, you can set yourself up for success by starting these relationships early and communicate your goals and expectations transparently and frequently. As a land manager, one can help partners develop

successful projects by devoting staff time to the project, setting realistic timelines and adhering to them, and improving the transfer of relationships when staff roles change.

Lessons Learned:

- Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.
- Establish a good foundation and transparent process with the land manager by focusing on a pilot project. Subsequent phases or trails should benefit and move much faster.
- Have clear roles throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and within what timeframe. Mutually shared planning and process documentation. Transparent and frequent communication.
- Help the agency achieve other goals/projects to demonstrate commitment and good-faith.
- When roles change at a land management agency, more care should be taken to train this new staff person for success in adopting their partner relationships.
- Act fast when your project is experiencing agency support.
- Have frank conversations with land managers about realistic expectations for staff capacity to execute NEPA on recreation projects. Even if timelines are longer than hoped, having a target to plan around is helpful. This requires both parties to deliver their respective responsibilities on time.

Next Steps

Beyond the scope of this study, a good subsequent area of focus is to understand each land manager's strategic plan, and use it to develop or refine your own organization's strategy. Highlighting established agency priorities could help mitigate common challenges, and implementing some successful case study strategies found in this report could help achieve mutual goals.

For example, the US Forest Service National Strategy for a Sustainable Trails System identifies action items. These few in particular could help transform the thematic challenges into better ways of working together:

2.2) Evaluate and reorganize the trails program at all levels to both increase field capacity and to shift toward collaborative and inclusive trail stewardship.

3.3) Work with local communities, partners, and industry to understand and leverage how trail systems can support rural and urban economic

health and growth where appropriate and through strategically targeted investments.

4.2) Collaboratively identify socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable trail systems across unit and jurisdictional boundaries, incorporating contemporary design principles and including potential new trails and ways of repurposing, realigning, or decommissioning existing trails.

4.4) Evaluate new trail proposals to make sure they are sustainable and supported by adequate stewardship resources.

Ultimately there is little financial incentive for land management agencies to prioritize recreation projects. When agencies conduct a timber sale or do fuels reduction, they retain a portion of the revenue or receive federal funding. When they invest time and resources into a trails project, there is no financial benefit (recreation fee sites are an exception, but trails are exempt from fees on federally managed

land. Fee sites must be developed—trailheads, campgrounds, boat launches, etc.). We know that outdoor recreation is a massive \$15.6 billion industry in Oregon but that economic impact is very dispersed—which is great for communities and small businesses, but this economic impact doesn't feed back into the agencies that manage our recreation resources in any meaningful way.

Recreation and trails advocates should think hard about how we can change this dynamic—until there is a practical and monetary incentive to rise up to meet the growing recreation demands on our public lands, agencies are unlikely to change how they prioritize their limited resources.

Some potential solutions to explore:

- Agencies could publish an up to date guide on their partnership process and how they go about building new trails/infrastructure so the process is clear for trail organizations
- New trail systems could be built with integrated fee sites to ensure some funding can be generated for ongoing maintenance.
- Statewide advocacy groups could develop a toolkit to help agencies understand current and future user need for ongoing and future planning and infrastructure development.
- Municipal/regional park providers tend to have lower turnover rates than federal agencies. Consider partnering with these agencies to guard against staff and NEPA permitting issues that arise with federal agencies.
- The 2019-2023 SCORP presents a number of innovative solutions to generate more funding to help land managers prioritize the needs of recreation users.

Other Research and Strategies in Neighboring States

The statewide **Oregon Trails Coalition** has produced some resources for trail planning that may help clarify the trail planning process for advocates or land management agencies who are less experienced in some aspects. The guide, funding sources matrix, and project planning worksheet can be found here:

<https://www.oregontrailscoalition.org/trail-planning>

The **Oregon Mountain Biking Coalition** has compiled some data and talking points to help communicate the benefits of trails to other stakeholders. These can be found along with a variety of other trail-related resources here:

<https://www.ormtbcoalition.org/member-resources>

This report focuses on Oregon, but a similar study was conducted by the **California Mountain Biking Coalition** in 2022. It uncovered many similar themes, and takes it a step further with recommended action items. You can read this report here:

<https://camtb.org/2023/03/14/usfs-r5-2023-report/>

To the north, Washington's **Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance** has grown rapidly over the past decade, building networks of mountain bike specific trails close to where people live. This is due in large part to their strategy of forging relationships with state-level land management agencies. By focusing on non-federal land, they are able to avoid the federal NEPA requirement, and accelerate the trail development timeline. This is possible in Washington partially because there is considerably more state-managed land than in Oregon.

<https://www.evergreenmtb.org/>





Appendices

Survey Findings - 28-39

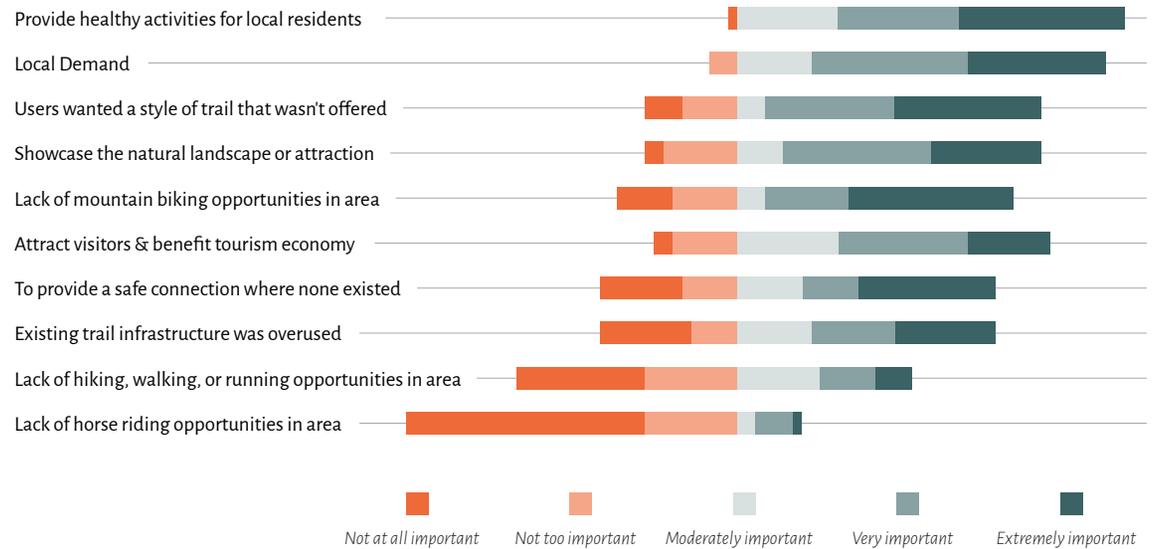
Case Studies - 40-46

APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

1) Why was a new trail proposed?

Healthy activities for residents and *local demand* topped the list for 'why' a new trail was built, followed by *wanting a style of trail that wasn't offered*.

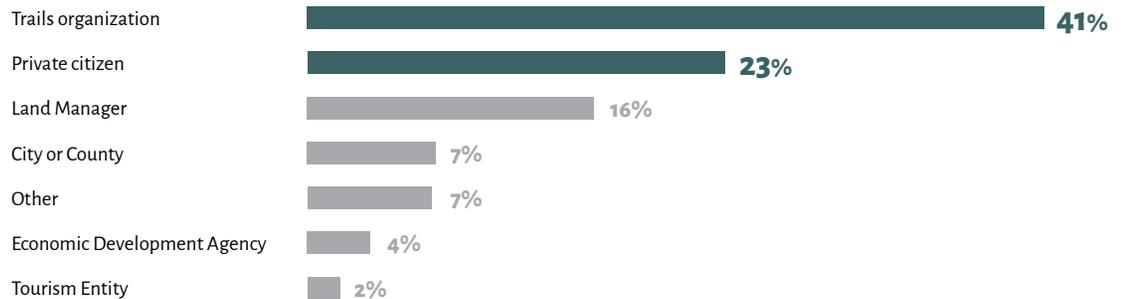
Healthy Activities for Local Residents and Local Demand Topped the List for Why New Trails Were Proposed



2) Who proposed the trail project?

Trail organizations and private citizens proposed about two-thirds of new trails, with land managers, economic development agencies, tourism agencies, municipalities, tribal government, and conservation organizations making up the remaining third.

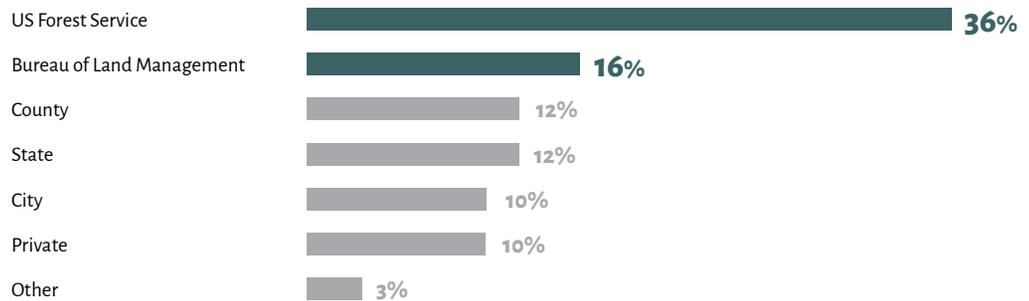
Trail Organizations and Private Citizens Proposed 2 of Every 3 New Trail Projects



3) Who is the Land Manager where the project is located?

About half of the projects are located on federally managed land. (US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management)

Over Half of Proposed new Trail Projects are on Federal Land

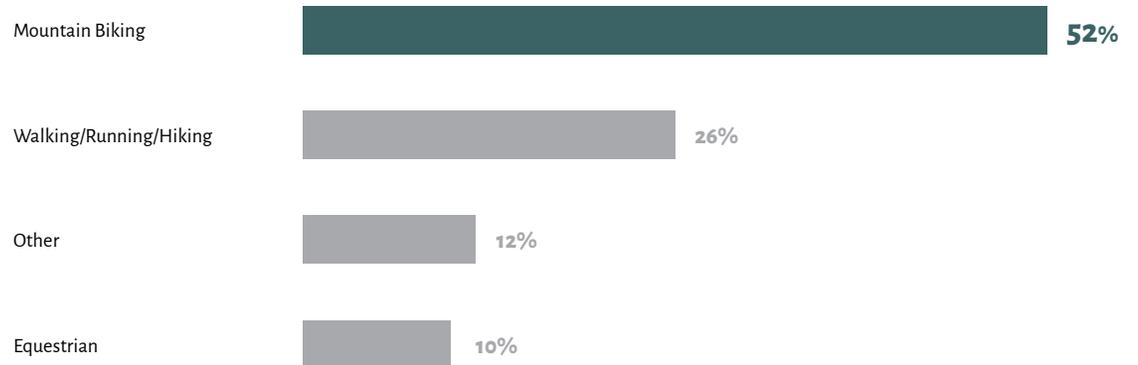


APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

4) What is the primary use type(s) for the new trail?

More new mountain bike trails were proposed than all other use types combined. This may indicate unmet demand.

More new Mountain Biking Trails Were Proposed Than all Other use Types Combined



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

5) What style trail did/will the project create?

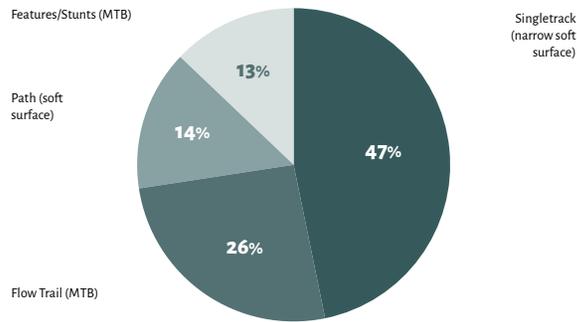
6) What kind of system or trail does the project envision?

7) How many miles were built/proposed?

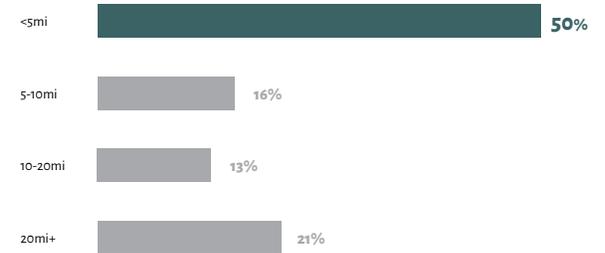
Interestingly, most trail projects proposed were one-offs: loops, point-to-points, and additions to existing systems. Stacked loops or other full system plans only made up about 23% of proposals. About half of all the proposals were less than five miles long.

In the case study interviews we found several examples where advocates determined that proposing one trail at a time was a more effective strategy when engaging land managers than developing and proposing a system plan with multiple trails.

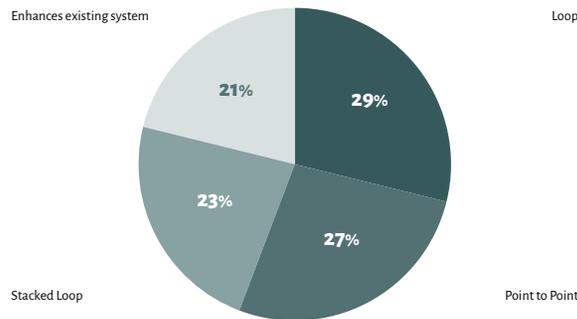
Narrow, Soft Surface Trails Made up the Majority of Trail Projects



Half of all Trail Proposals Were Under 5 Miles



Only 1/4 of all Trail Projects Proposed Multiple Trails (Systems or Network)



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

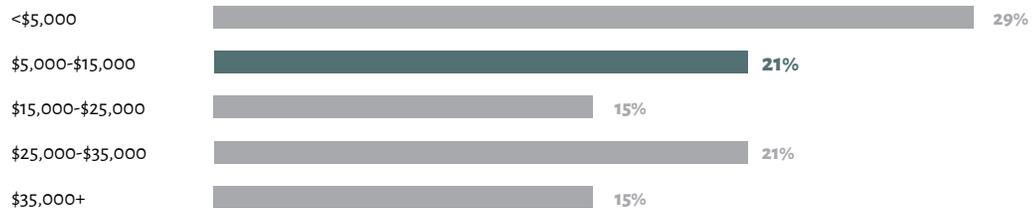
8) If completed, what was the appx cost per mile of trail?

About two-thirds of the trails constructed cost less than \$25k/mi, which is the low-end of a per-mile contractor rate. The average cost per mile was \$5,000-\$15,000. This suggests organizations used cost saving measures like volunteer labor.

9) If completed, what was the total cost of the project? (Include trailheads, bathrooms, and other amenities)

The average total project cost was approximately \$130,000. Nearly one third of respondents said the total project cost was over \$500k. Paired with the avg length of trail constructed and avg cost per mile, this suggests that total project costs may have increased greatly with the addition of other amenities such as parking lots and bathrooms.

The Average Cost Per Mile was \$5,000-\$15,000



The Average Total Project Cost was Approximately \$130,000

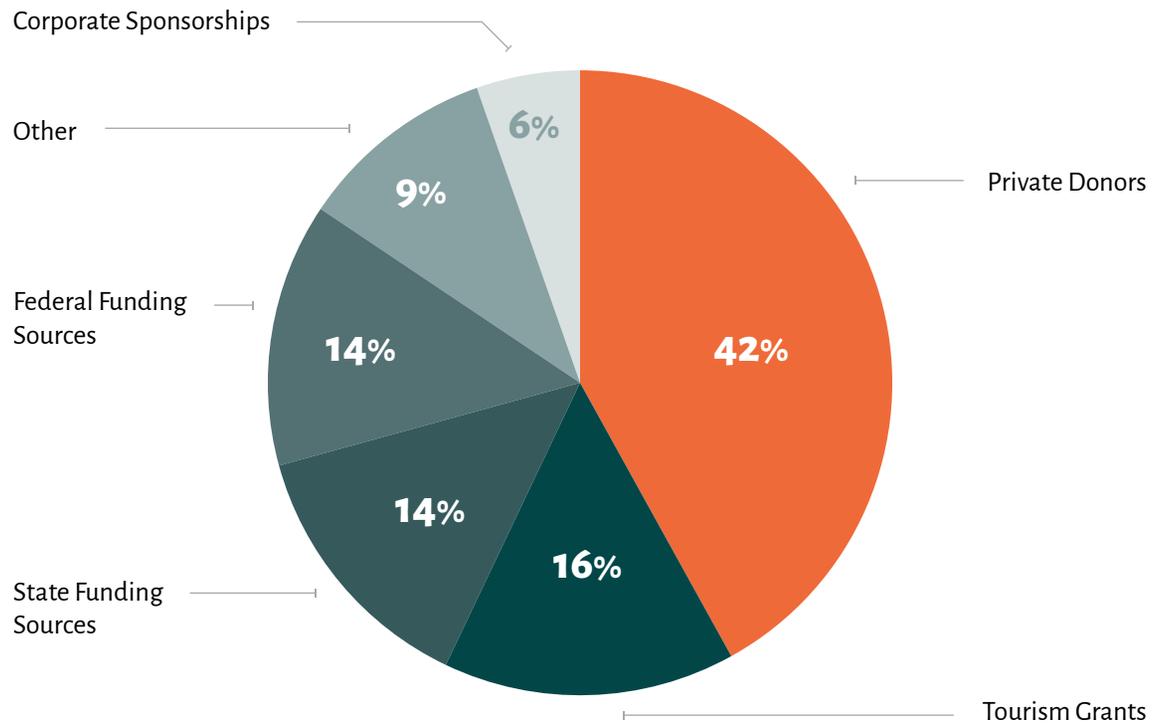


APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

10) If fully or partially funded, where did the funding come from?

Private donors funded about 40% of project costs; with grants, tourism, and corporate sponsorships making up the other 60%. Many respondents indicated funding as problematic but few elaborated on this challenge.

The Majority of Trail Funding in Oregon Comes From Private Donors



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

12) If completed (or at least the first phase), how many years did the project take from idea to completion?

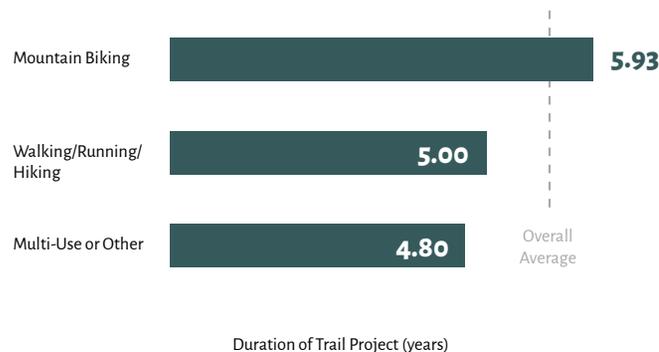
Responses to this question were quite variable and evenly distributed between 1 and 9+ years. The average duration of time to complete a trail project was 5.6 years, with 14% of respondents indicating the process took over 9 years.

When analyzed by designed use, we see that Mountain Biking trail projects take slightly longer than average (5.9 years) and Walking/Running/Hiking, Equestrian, and Other trail projects are completed slightly faster than average.

Interestingly, the opposite trend appears when looking at average project cost broken apart by designed use.

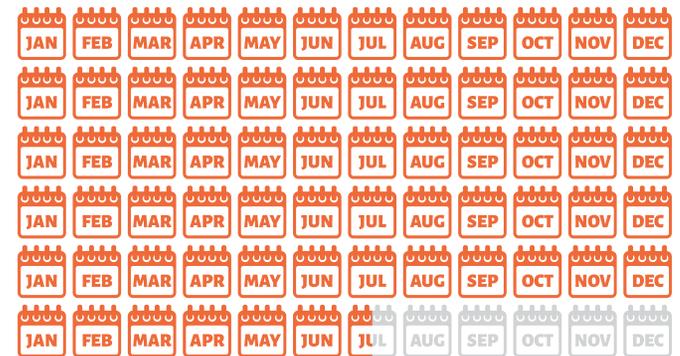
Mountain Biking projects average \$60,000 and Walking/Running/Hiking, Equestrian, and Other trail projects average closer to \$200,000. This is possibly due to the high levels of engagement and sustained momentum on mountain biking trail projects—more

The Average Duration of Trail Projects Separated by Designed Use



5.6 years

The Average Duration of Trail Projects in Oregon is 5.6 Years



Average Total Cost of Trail Projects Separated by Designed Use



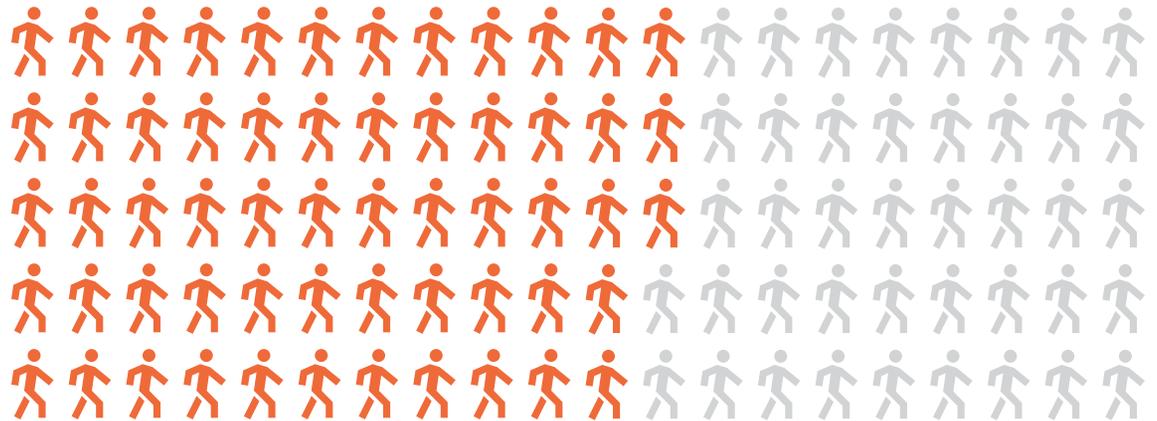
APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

13) At the beginning of the project was it clear what the process/timeline was for building this trail?

A majority of respondents (58%) said that the process and timeline were unclear at the beginning of the project.

58%

The Majority of Survey Respondents Said That the Process and Timeline for Building a Trail was Unclear



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

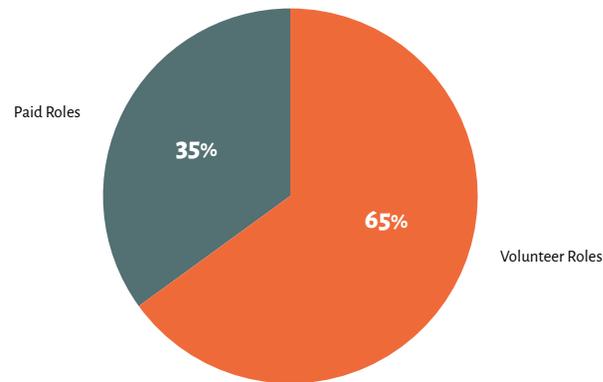
15) What roles were paid?

16) What roles were volunteer?

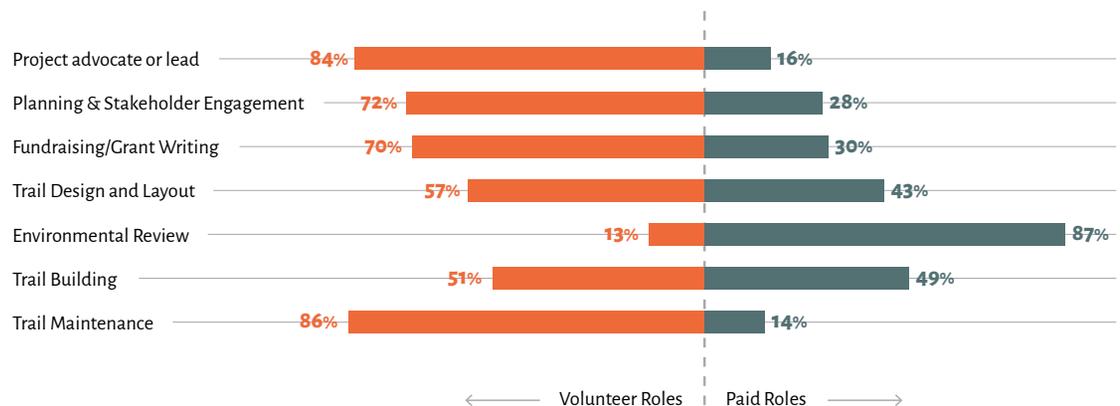
A large majority of roles (76%) early on in the process were executed by volunteers: project lead, planning, stakeholder engagement, and fundraising. Trail design, layout, and trail building had a more even split—with 54% of these roles being volunteer.

Environmental review was the only outlier with more paid roles than volunteer—87% of these roles were paid. Trail maintenance was at the other end of the spectrum with only 14% of roles being paid.

Volunteers Fill 2/3 of the Roles in the Trail Development Process



Nearly all Roles in the Trail Development Process had More Volunteers Than Paid



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

17) Throughout the project’s lifespan, what worked especially well/fast/smooth and what encountered challenges or delays?

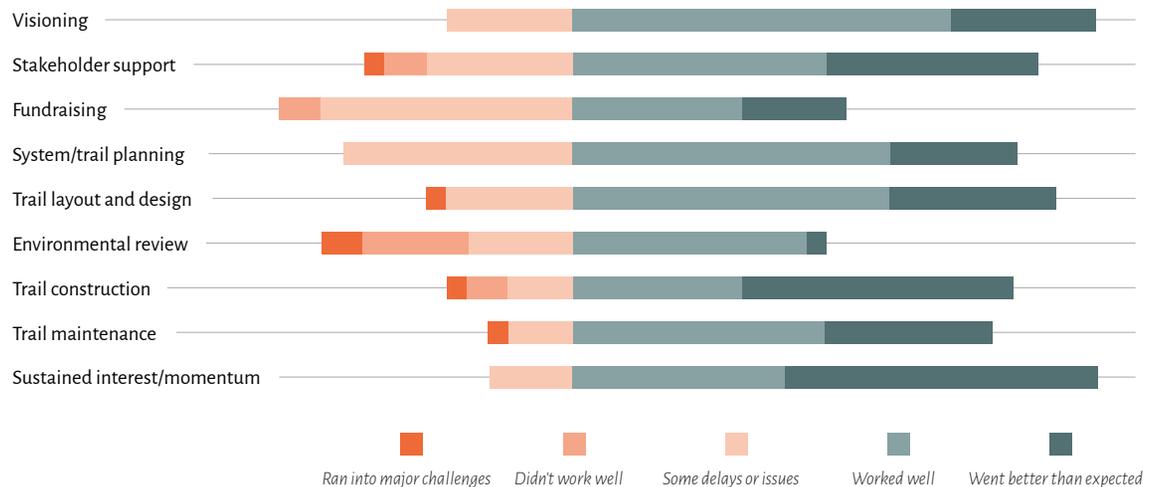
When asked what stages of the project encountered challenges, the majority of respondents said all stages worked well or better than expected. The two most challenging stages were “Environmental Review” and “Fundraising.” The aspect of the project that consistently worked better than expected was “Sustained Interest/Momentum”, which is impressive when paired with the average length of a trail project (5.6 years) and percentage of unpaid roles. (65%) This again points to a high level of unmet demand, demonstrated by consistent long-term volunteer commitment to the project.

If we compare these responses to the rate of volunteer vs. paid roles for each phase, we find an interesting correlation. Environmental review, the category with

the most paid roles, was also the category that encountered the most challenges and delays. Several components of the projects that worked especially well—sustained interest/momentum and trail maintenance—were the components with most volunteer roles. The trail building role bucked this trend—it had the second

most paid roles and was one of the least-problematic project phases. That being said, many respondents indicated that hiring paid roles helped shepherd their project forward so these findings may be highly contextual.

The Majority of Respondents Said all Stages Worked Well or Better Than Expected



APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

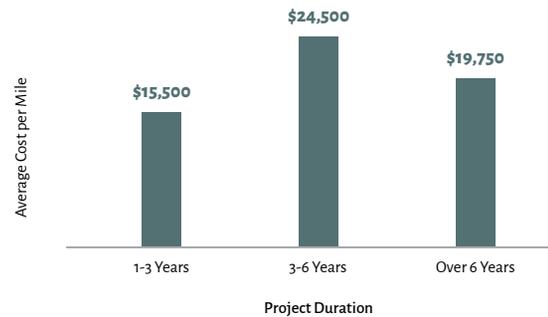
Other Findings

Analyzing the relationship of some of the above survey questions produced results without a clear trend. Further study would be necessary to better understand the factors that impact the duration and cost of trail projects. For example, one would expect projects that take longer to cost more, but the survey responses don't paint that picture.

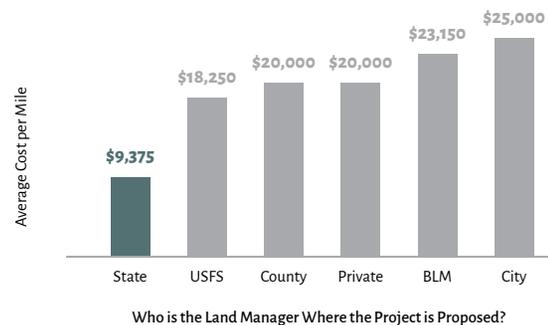
When analyzing the cost per mile the survey found that trails built on state land were the cheapest at \$9,375, and trails built on city land were the most expensive at \$25,000. (Note: the sample size for projects on city land was small: 3 projects. The second most expensive land to build on was BLM land at \$23,150 per mile.)

When dissecting the cost per mile by type of advocate or proposer, the study found citizen-proposed projects the cheapest at \$11,600 and land manager-proposed projects the highest at \$31,000.

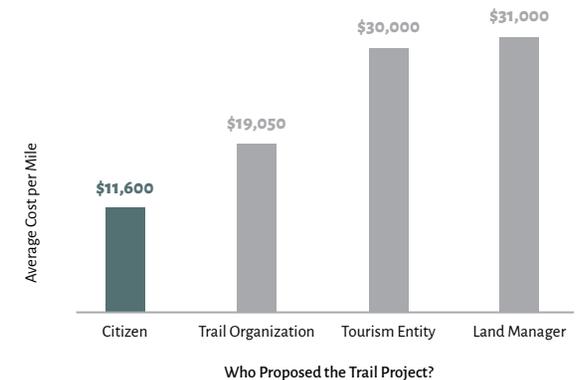
Trail Projects That Took Longer did not Necessarily Cost More



Trail Projects on State Managed Land Cost Less to Build



Citizen Proposed Trail Projects Were the Most Cost Effective



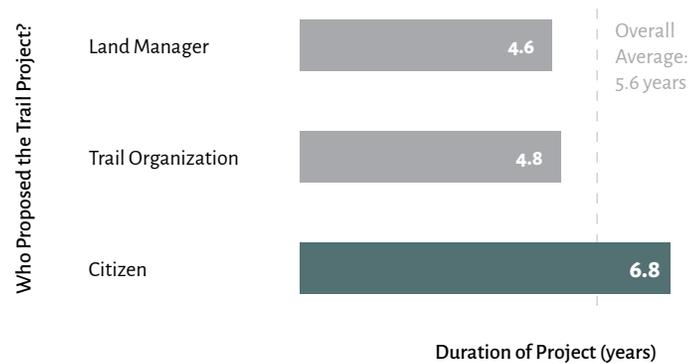
APPENDICES: SURVEY FINDINGS

Other Findings

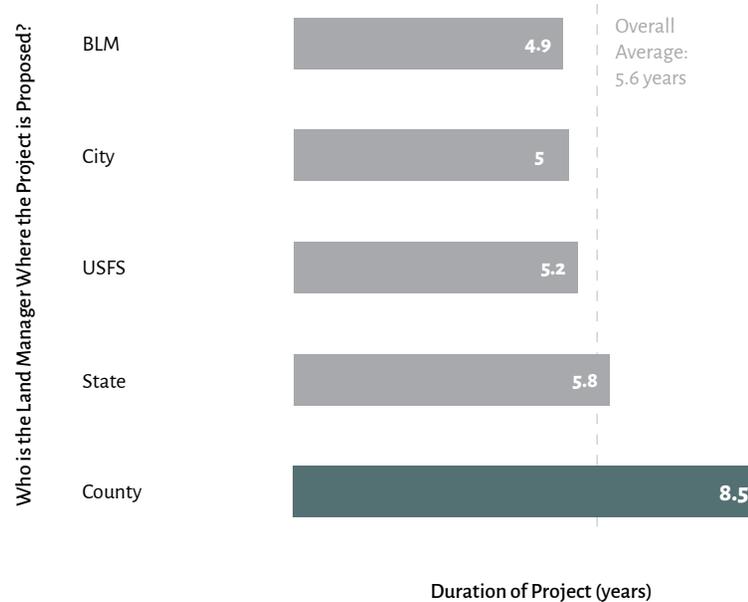
When assessing what factors contributed to the duration of a project the study found that trails built on USFS, BLM, State, and City land all were close to the average of 5.6 years—county projects were the outlier at 8.5 years.

When analyzed by project advocate, we found that land manager and trail organization proposed-projects were completed faster than average (4.6 and 4.8 years respectively), and citizen-proposed projects were longer than average (6.8 years).

Trail Projects Proposed by Citizens Took Longer Than Average



Trail Projects Proposed on County Land Took the Longest to Complete



Case Studies & Interview Findings

The six case studies below were selected from the survey respondents to learn more about the qualities that led to their successes or challenges. They've been anonymized, as the goal of this study is not to direct blame towards any stakeholder group, but to learn from each other's points of friction. These interviews were typically 30-60 mins long and covered many topics. The challenges and successes below are a summary of these discussions. The majority of the suggestions and mitigations either came up during each interview, or were unearthed in other interviews or survey responses. Neither are direct quotes unless specified as such.



Case Study #1

PURPOSE:	Lack of recreation infrastructure
ADVOCATE:	Community
LAND MANAGER:	US Forest Service
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Singletrack network
TRAIL MILES:	20+
TOTAL FORECASTED COST:	\$500k+
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	9+ years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Environmental review / stalled

KEY CHALLENGES

Frequent staff turnover within the Forest Service district office has been the primary challenge.

Advocates were 'blind leading blind' and unfamiliar with the process—leading to more challenges.

This project was nested within a larger timber sale project's NEPA review. In theory this should have made the NEPA bottleneck easier, but in practice it's held up the process.

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Contractually agreed upon written expectations, timeline, documentation, and accountability.

Mutually shared planning and process documentation.

Keep the project independent, and have mutually agreed upon timelines.

KEY SUCCESSES

Merged with an existing nonprofit, so onramp for fundraising and agreements was fast-tracked.

Fundraising has been successful with grants, tourism, and industry support.

Community support has been very strong, due to other projects focusing on youth riding infrastructure

While a supportive district ranger was in their role, the project moved very fast and smoothly.

LESSONS LEARNED

Nonprofits are a lot of work to start and usually 'bootstrapped' by inexperienced volunteers. Partnering with an existing nonprofit or starting the process early can ensure the organization has sufficient capacity.

Diversify your approach to fundraising and rally the community behind the project.

Focus on trails that are close to where people live, especially youth—pumptracks, safe routes to school, etc.

Act fast when your project is experiencing agency support.

Case Study #2

PURPOSE:	User demand, diversify types of riding opportunities
ADVOCATE:	Established trails nonprofit
LAND MANAGER:	US Forest Service
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Progressive/flow
TRAIL MILES:	1.25
TOTAL COST:	\$80-90k
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	9+ years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Completed

KEY CHALLENGES

Trail project was required to be bundled with a habitat restoration project NEPA, but no clear/consistent direction on how.

Lack of process/consistency/vision within the nonprofit organization.

NEPA was the primary bottleneck causing years of delays.

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Resist any requirements that could cause the NEPA bottleneck to get tighter/slower.

Have an "At a Glance" project sheet to debrief and get all stakeholders on the same page about trail purpose and specifications.

Have frank conversations with land managers about realistic expectations for staff capacity to execute NEPA on recreation projects. Even if timelines are longer than hoped, having a target to plan around is helpful. This requires both parties to deliver their respective responsibilities on time.

Ask land managers about ways the advocate can alleviate this NEPA bottleneck.

KEY SUCCESSSES

Ensuring the land manager that the nonprofit would procure and pay for construction, signage, and maintenance went a long way towards building trust and confidence.

Nonprofit organization has a positive, lengthy relationship with the land manager. Land manager is responsive and has a great recreation team.

Organization contributed \$10-20k towards the NEPA review.

LESSONS LEARNED

Have clear roles throughout the process indicating who is responsible for what, and within what timeframe.

Develop relationships early at multiple levels, establish communication channels/cadence, and communicate often in both directions.

When partner organizations can help fund the NEPA process it is easier for agencies to prioritize the project, and much harder to stall it.

Case Study #3

PURPOSE:	User demand
ADVOCATE:	Citizen/community
LAND MANAGER:	Oregon Dept of Forestry
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Downhill
TRAIL MILES:	5
TOTAL COST:	Less than \$25k
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	9+ years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Completed

KEY CHALLENGES

No timeline was given, and many differing answers as to how the project was prioritized. Internal politics at the land manager didn't value recreation.

Advocates started thinking big and proposed a whole system with multiple trails. This bogged down the proposal process and timeline.

A high rate of turnover within the land manager (3-4 district rangers throughout project lifespan) caused multiple delays and varying levels of interest in recreation projects.

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Advocates helped build unfinished trail projects for other use types to demonstrate commitment.

One trail at a time is much more efficient and easier for land managers to conceptualize and process.

Advocate for more funding to land management agencies for recreation and environmental review staff capacity.

KEY SUCCESSES

Volunteer support was immense with dozens of riders showing up every build day, completing the 5 mile trail with many technical features in 12 months.

The build process was very straightforward once the community got the greenlight. A second trail was proposed, and that process moved very quickly.

ODF is funded by timber sales, and a portion of that money goes to counties and some goes back into the agency.

LESSONS LEARNED

Build community support and direct their energy towards a productive outlet.

Establish a good foundation and transparent process with the land manager by focusing on a pilot project. Subsequent phases or trails should benefit and move much faster.

When agencies have more revenue, they can increase staff capacity and better prioritize recreation projects. Understand their funding mechanisms.

Case Study #4

PURPOSE:	Unmet demand, disperse use
ADVOCATE:	Trails organization
LAND MANAGER:	Oregon State Parks
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Singletrack, cross country, progressive skills building
TRAIL MILES:	6
TOTAL FORECASTED COST:	\$25-50k
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	2 years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Completed

KEY CHALLENGES

Staffing turnover was the biggest challenge. Land manager had three different project leads in its two year lifespan. The responsibility for re-educating the land manager about the project fell on volunteers.

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Model the arrangement and project agreements after bike and pedestrian transportation projects. Have clear roles, milestones, and timelines.

KEY SUCCESSSES

Had some funding secured at the outset of the project, which helped build land manager confidence and allowed for the hiring of contractors to execute the vision.

LESSONS LEARNED

Environmental review process isn't as onerous on non-federally managed lands, which allowed for the early procurement of RTP grant funding. (which requires environmental review to be completed before grant funds are distributed)

Project moved quickly despite multiple staffing turnovers at State Parks. Two years from idea to completion.

Organization was young and inexperienced so opted to hire professional trail planners, designers, and builders for their expertise and efficacy.

Case Study #5

PURPOSE:	Reduce conflict with other users, lack of MTB infrastructure, disperse use
ADVOCATE:	A nonprofit coalition was formed to find solutions
LAND MANAGER:	US Forest Service
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Downhill, singletrack
TRAIL MILES:	50 miles
TOTAL FORECASTED COST:	\$1-2 million
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	6 years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Project abandoned by land manager

KEY CHALLENGES

Despite years of mediation and coalition building with many different stakeholder groups, the project caught the surrounding rural community off-guard.

People can see any change as a bad thing, it's not necessarily about you or your project.

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Ensure that coalition members are reporting back to their respective organizations and can speak on behalf of them. Develop a strategic plan that coalition members sign off on.

Do more community outreach than you think is necessary!

Interpersonal and societal politics all play a role in community support—things we cannot necessarily control.

KEY SUCCESSES

Despite the project's eventual pitfalls, the coalition that formed to collectively solve problems is a great example of diverse user groups convening and developing solutions they all eventually supported.

LESSONS LEARNED

Invite more people/groups to the table and be receptive to their input. Hunting and fishing groups, hikers, equestrians, cyclists, motorized recreation, conservation groups, land managers, and neighboring landowners.

Find the areas where there is alignment and common values and focus on those first. This will build trust, and help create a productive atmosphere for discussing areas of friction.

Case Study #6

PURPOSE:	Grow tourism economy
ADVOCATE:	Economic development agency
LAND MANAGER:	US Forest Service
DESIGNED USE:	Mountain Bike
TRAIL TYPE:	Singletrack stacked loop system
TRAIL MILES:	10-20
TOTAL FORECASTED COST:	\$600k+
LENGTH OF PROCESS:	16 years
STAGE OF COMPLETION:	Under construction

KEY CHALLENGES

POTENTIAL MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Project has endured a very long process to date because of shifting agency/staff priorities.

"I think it's important that when an agency takes a project on, they develop a realistic timeframe and stick with it. Lots of time lost picking up and putting down the project and transitioning to a new planner."

Identify a strong personal champion/advocate for the project.

Land management staff turnover caused a lot of delays.

When roles change at a land management agency, more care should be taken to train this new staff person for success in adopting their partner relationships.

Varying levels of professionalism within trail organizations exacerbated delays.

The project's eventual success was partially due to hiring professional consultants for feasibility, planning, stakeholder engagement, trail design, and project management work.

KEY SUCCESSES

LESSONS LEARNED

Land management risk tolerance was a primary factor in the project's ultimate success. A lot of groundwork was laid—a feasibility study, grant for stakeholder engagement, and support from the local government.

Do your homework, extensive outreach, and document it all.