

Middle Fork Willamette Community Trails Plan

Community Engagement Trails Survey Report

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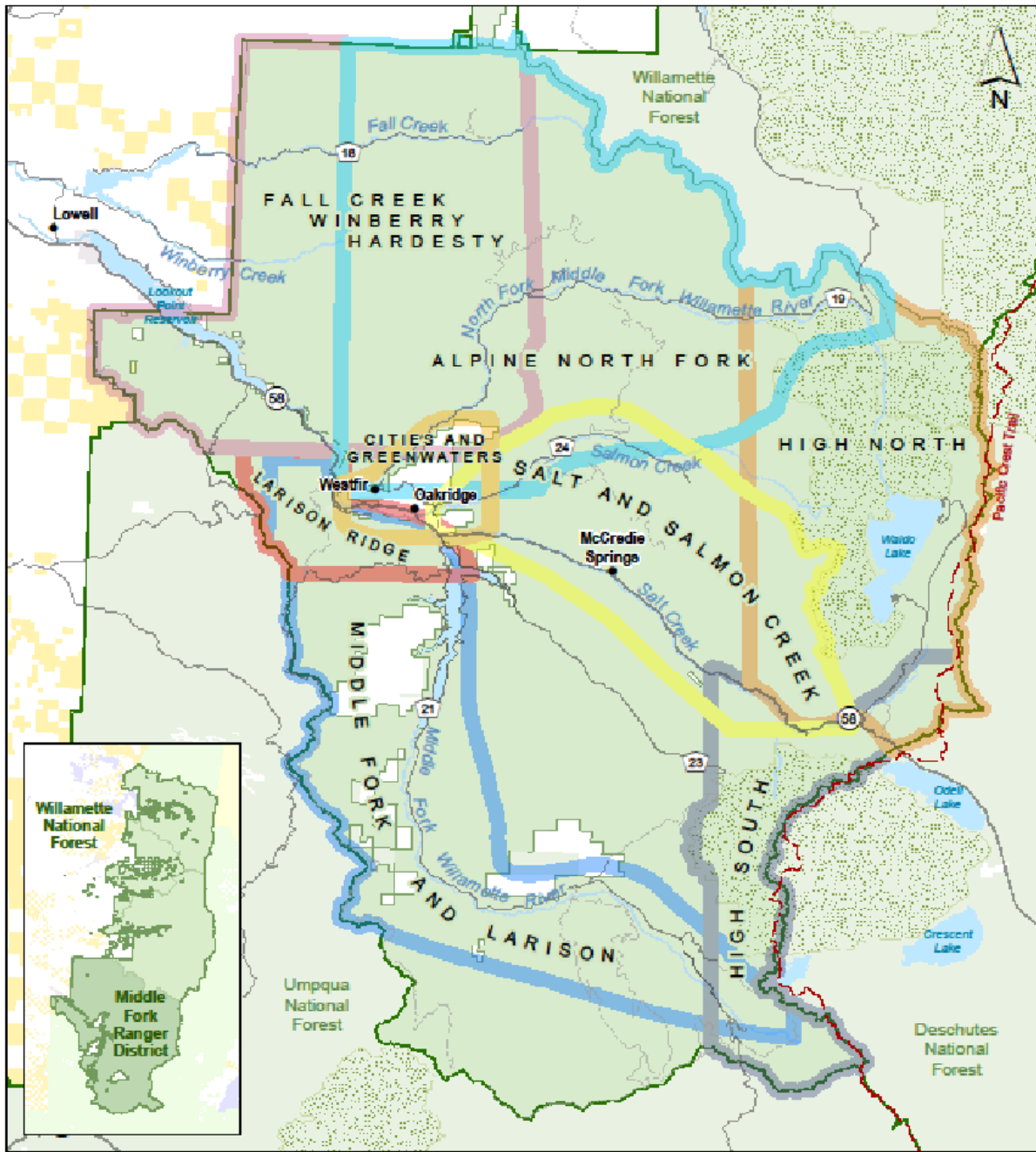


Volunteers heading up to work on the Bunchgrass Ridge Trail-Photo by Gabriel Amedeus Tiller

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Map Overview of Planning Area



Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
Trail Area Overview Map
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- National Forest Boundary
- Middle Fork Ranger District
- Wilderness
- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Other Federal Land
- Other Land, Including Private



Executive Summary

In 2013, a [report](#) issued by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that, “The Forest Service has more miles of trail than it has been able to maintain, resulting in a persistent maintenance backlog with a range of negative effects.” This report offered three main suggestions for how to move forward: “(1) assessing the sustainability of the trail system, (2) improving agency policies and procedures in regard to how trail work gets done on National Forests, and (3) improving management of volunteers and other external resources.”

In the Middle Fork Ranger District, many of these suggestions are under way. Management of volunteer resources has long been a collaborative affair in the District, with the leaders of various volunteer groups working closely with the Forest Service on trail maintenance events, including planning and construction of new trails and volunteer education and recruitment. Newly implemented legislation such as the “[Recreation not Red Tape Act](#)” has resulted in the rolling out of a pilot program to allow Outfitter Guide permit holders to perform trail work in lieu of permit fees. While this program is still in its infancy, it is showing promise. Additional policy has recently been adapting to more efficient use of volunteer resources. A web-based volunteer data organization application, [Better Impact](#), is now being used to schedule, document and track trail work in real time, along with volunteer hours and skills certifications.

The GAO Report suggestion which most piqued local interest was that of “assessing the sustainability of the trail system.” The *assessing* process has mostly been completed by the USFS, and locals are proud of their ability to work with the Forest Service each spring to clear fallen trees and brush. Local volunteers, partners, and Forest Service trail crews have been able to maintain 75-95% of the trail system on the Middle Fork Ranger District each year, leaving most of the work in more remote corners of the high elevation Wilderness areas. However, there is still a mounting list of small reroutes needed for resource protection, deteriorating trail infrastructure, and problem areas that have been difficult to keep up with; some of these have been addressed in one year only to need further maintenance the following summer. As the list of tasks continued to expand, it became obvious that a well-thought out plan was needed. We needed a plan formed with community input that covered the entire Middle Fork Ranger District and holistically included all aspects of trail system planning.

This is not a new idea. The [Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan](#) was completed in 2007; it was written collaboratively with the local trails community and the Forest Service, but focused only on trails systems accessed closest to town. This plan was effective and provided several useful projects. To date, some have been completed, such as the extension of the Flat Creek Trail to the top of Dead Mountain and to the bottom of the Salmon Creek drainage. Other projects were not completed due to changing user patterns, lack of funding, and/or waning local interest. Nonetheless, the 2007 plan provided a template to start from, as well as many good ideas and inspiration for moving forward.

Meanwhile, outdoor recreation-based industries have taken root and increased rapidly in the region, including a new guiding and shuttle services which has added a larger user base to trails already impacted by high visitor traffic. According to estimates from local businesses (including the Oakridge local bike shop, Willamette Mountain Mercantile), visitor traffic has doubled in the last five years. More restaurants have opened, including the newly-named Three-Legged Crane Brew Pub, positioned in the heart of Uptown Oakridge within cycling distance of the Salmon Creek trail network. This pub is often packed with mountain bikers, hikers, dirt bikers, fisher-folk and other recreationists sharing stories of their latest outdoor adventures. Demand has increased for access to trails within walking distance from the center of Oakridge. Most of these changes have been welcome, but this economic growth relies on one main asset that is still in limited supply: trails.

Any local resident can point out the increase in vehicles carrying mountain bikes in the small town of Oakridge, but with impacts to the trails themselves noted in high traffic areas, such as the popular Alpine trail system, the Hardesty trail network and the Dead Mountain trail, adjustments clearly need to be made to provide more trail access while preventing additional traffic from negatively impacting the trail system. In this context, the commonly-used term “*sustainability*” refers to the integrity and accessibility of the trail system as a whole. **A sustainable trail system provides enough trail experiences of sufficient quality to meet and match demand as it grows at a predictable rate while ensuring the ability to maintain appropriate access, mitigating possible hazards to trail users or negative impacts to natural or cultural resources.**

Achieving the high standards of sustainability requires acknowledgment that the trail system will need to grow and/or change over time. Careful planning is necessary to appropriately sustain and control growth. Unplanned growth costs more in the long run because of the additional need for restoring damaged landscapes, and that type of growth tends to heavily favor the largest trail user group(s) at the expense of the rest of the trails community. Based on the inability of the Forest Service nationwide to maintain its legacy trail system, it is clear that funds for trail development and maintenance are in short supply; therefore, careful planning for sustainability is the only way to prevent degradation of the trail system, trail experiences and the trailside environment, as well as preventing impacts to other (forest) resources.

This report is full of great ideas to improve our local trail system. It is not hard to gather ideas for new trails, expanded parking or similar improvements, but it is difficult to confront the need to let some things go. Trail systems are organic. As part of the built environment, trails necessarily change in response to changing human needs, desires and technology. Some trails don't fit within current use patterns and may get little, if any, use. Does it make sense to use taxpayer funding and volunteer crews to maintain trails no one appears to be using and which no longer seem to serve a purpose?

There was a time when the Forest Service could build a new trail simply because it led to a lovely waterfall or overlook. It was often “nice to do” projects like that which motivated the

need for a new trail. People enjoyed those trails and the Forest Service could easily maintain them. However, federal budgets for trail maintenance have not increased in recent years, and the days of a large trail crew on every Ranger District are long gone. The Forest Service has welcomed volunteers, youth crews and other partners to maintain trails and trailheads and has taken opportunities to use the skills and abilities of outfitter guides to help steward recreation resources. These measures have expanded the collective maintenance capacity of the trails community, but they are not enough to keep up with the legacy of large, disconnected trails left by better-funded generations before us. We can't sustain all of those trail resources at the same level as we did in the past, and we shouldn't. Trail users are different now. The way people use the trail system is different and the need to protect the environment around trails has changed. Like any system, trail systems need to adapt and to do that, decisions must be made about what to keep, what to stop maintaining and what to build new.

So what is an “unsustainable trail” for the purposes of this discussion? It is easier to list the general characteristics of a sustainable trail. Using the definition of a sustainable trail on page 5 of this report, here are some of those characteristics:

- Does not take more maintenance than the average trail to keep it usable
- Does not damage surrounding natural resources in an ongoing or recurring way
- Meets the demand for its designated use
- Does not have conditions that deteriorate to create hazards or unreasonable challenge and risk to users
- Is used by the public in its accessible season with regular frequency
- Generally remains accessible to its designated users regardless of design, location and use patterns

The United Nations declared 2017 to be the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism Development.” Inspired by the work ahead, and by the momentum building within both the global and the local trails community, in October of 2018, Oakridge Mayor James Coey, City Councilor Kathy Holston, Alpine Trail Crew Association board member Michelle Emmons, and USFS-Middle Fork Ranger District Trails Manager Kevin Rowell came together as a steering committee to guide a revision of the 2007 Oakridge Westfir Community Trails Plan.

The final draft of the new trails plan will outline the purpose and need, methodology and data collection, maintenance recommendations, and suggestions for future project development, including resources to support funding and labor.

The following interim report is intended to provide an update to the trails community about our progress and to convey the information gathered at the first two public meetings held in the fall and winter of 2018.

Report: Trail Preferences & Uses Findings by Survey

In October of 2018, two public meetings were held, one in Eugene and one in Oakridge. These two meetings were announced on the Willamette National Forest Facebook page, advertised by flyer at local businesses in Eugene, Springfield, Bend and Oakridge, shared on several trail-related social media pages and listed in the Oakridge Dead Mountain Echo newsletter. Invitations to attend were also emailed to all of the known trail advocacy groups which have shown interested in trails on the Willamette National Forest over the past ten or so years (since the old trails plan was published). We also sent email invitations to a few environmental advocacy groups who have previously commented on trail projects on the Willamette National Forest.

Approximately 80 people attended the meeting in Eugene and 38 attended the Oakridge meeting. A good mix of hikers, bird-watchers, fisher-people, equestrians, mountain bikers, skiers and photographers were in attendance. At each of these two meetings, a short presentation was given to let attendees know about the Community Trails Plan revision and to describe the need for their input to the new plan. After the presentation, attendees were invited to provide their feedback and network with fellow trail enthusiasts.

To facilitate public input and to ease information gathering, large maps were hung on the walls, one for each trail area. These are listed in the Table of Contents for this report. The maps were available with sticky notes, sticky tabs, pencils and highlighters to draw proposals for trail projects on the maps or to simply write notes regarding anything specifically trail-related that the public wanted to share. Attendees were also provided a questionnaire to solicit feedback in an open, narrative style with plenty of room for comments. This resulted in a wide variety of comments, concerns and project proposals being delivered to the steering committee. All of that feedback was captured with two spreadsheets. One for comments shown on the maps and one for questionnaire responses. The purpose of this report is to share those responses with the public.

Important note: this report documents several comments and suggestions from the public that have not been evaluated for implementation feasibility. Suggestions listed in this report that fit in with the existing Forest Service land management framework, may be adapted as part of the final trails plan. Those projects will be analyzed and documented according to the National Environmental Policy Act and other appropriate environmental laws before they can be approved for implementation.

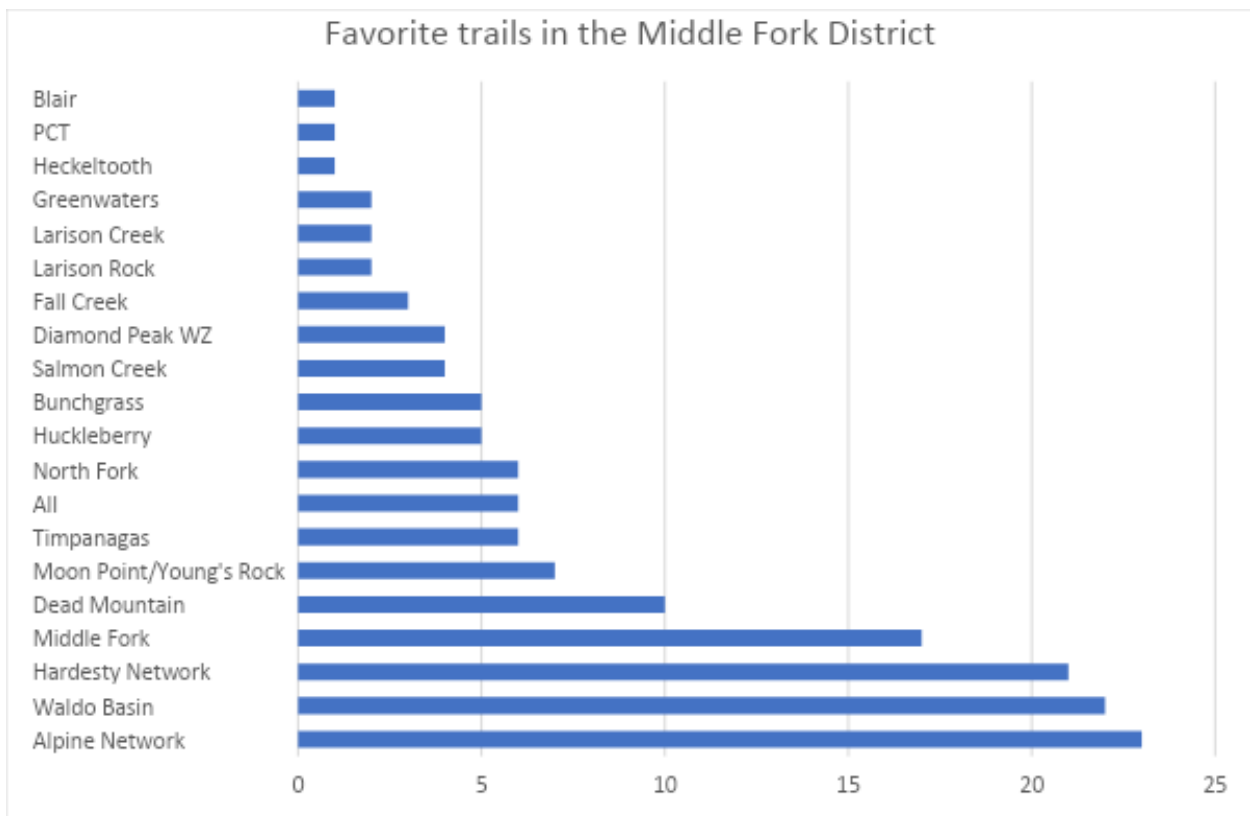
Major Projects which have been completed or underway since we started this process:

- Cloverpatch trail connection to the Cloverpatch Tie in progress
- Cloverpatch Tie to Alpine from the top of Cloverpatch Tie to the Alpine Trail below Buckhead Shelter, completed in 2019
- Rehabilitation of flood damage to Salmon Creek trail; one segment complete, second segment flagged for corridor clearing is on hold due to logging plans summer 2021
- North Fork bridges will be replaced in 2021-2023
- Tire Mountain bridge to be replaced in 2021, 800 feet of trail was rerouted in 2018 to accommodate the permanent bridge installation
- Dead Mountain three crib wall replacements and reconstruction of in-sloped turns
- Larison Rock culvert installation and French drains installed / Larison Rock direct connection trail from Greenwaters proposed to be completed in 2021
- Fall Creek bridges replacement including Slick Creek (lost in the Jones Fire) and Dolly Varden in planning process
- Major trail corridor clearing by chainsaw after 2019 snowstorms
- Proposed Larison Ridge Trail Extension in design phase
- Greenwaters Trail system extensions are in the planning process
- Fugrass Connection to complete a bike-legal route from the Waldo basin to Oakridge is approved for construction in 2021
- Indian Creek bridge to be relocated and replaced, approved for construction in 2021
- Reroute of steep, eroded section of Sawtooth 3643 is in progress
- Rehabilitation of Deception Butte Trail in progress
- Cowhorn Cut-off in planning

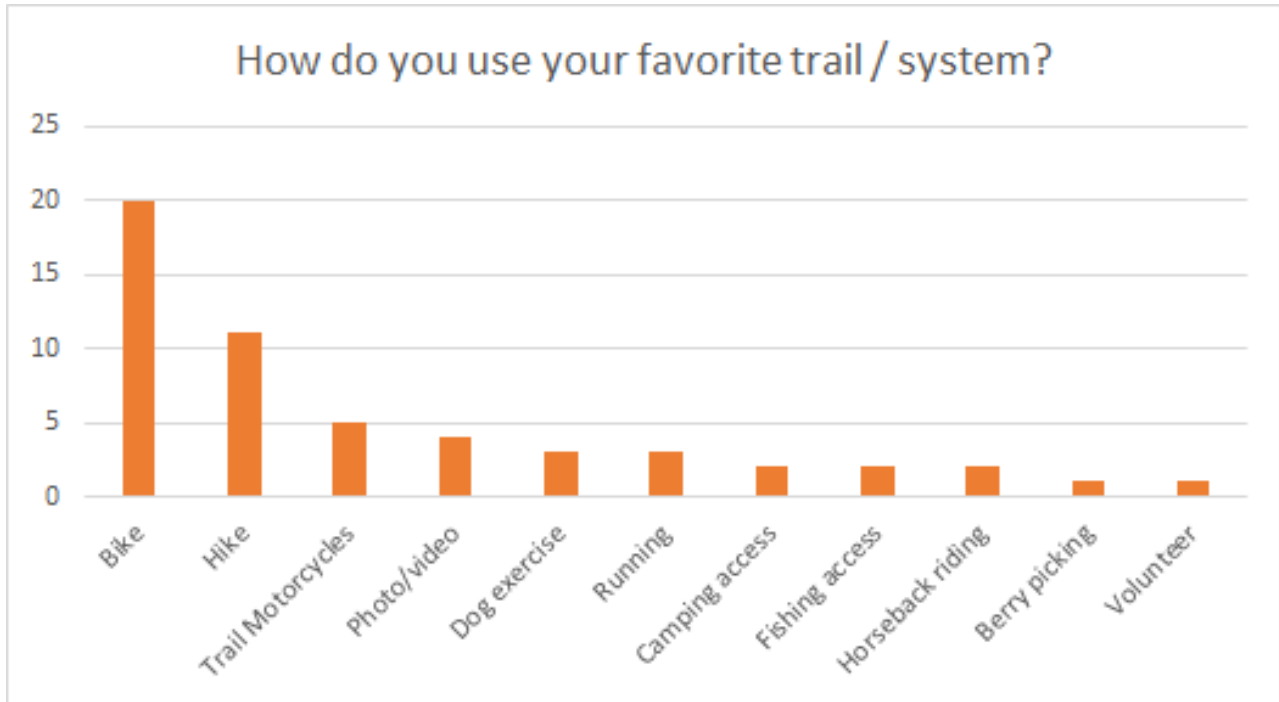
Report: Trail Preferences/Uses Findings by Survey

It is important to note that EACH QUESTION is nuanced differently. For instance, one’s primary use on their favorite trail, may differ from their use on their top *three* favorite trails. One’s choice of trail *most used*, may not match their choice of *favorite* trail.

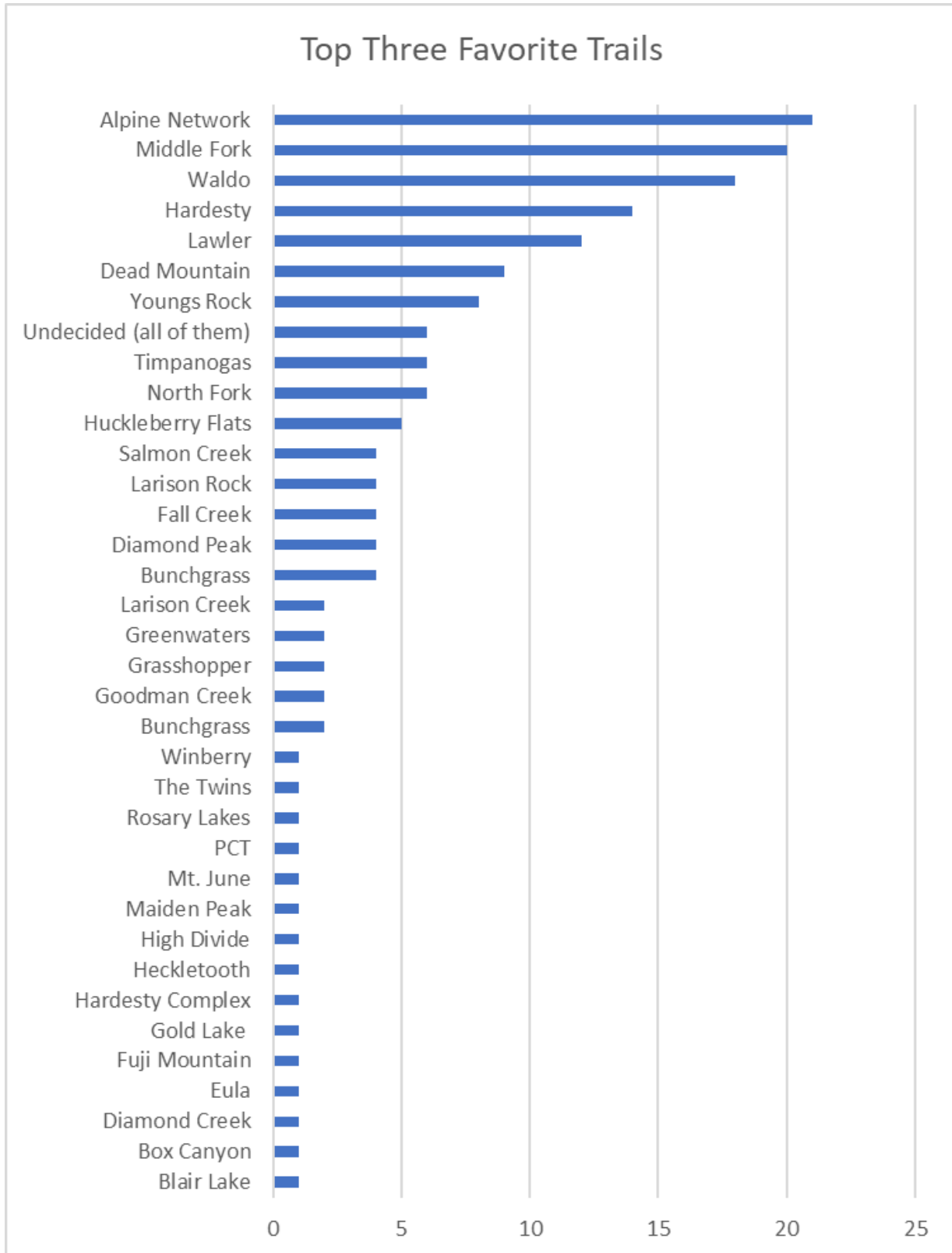
Question: What is your favorite trail? Some respondents may have answered more than one trail, or undecided (aka: “all of them”).



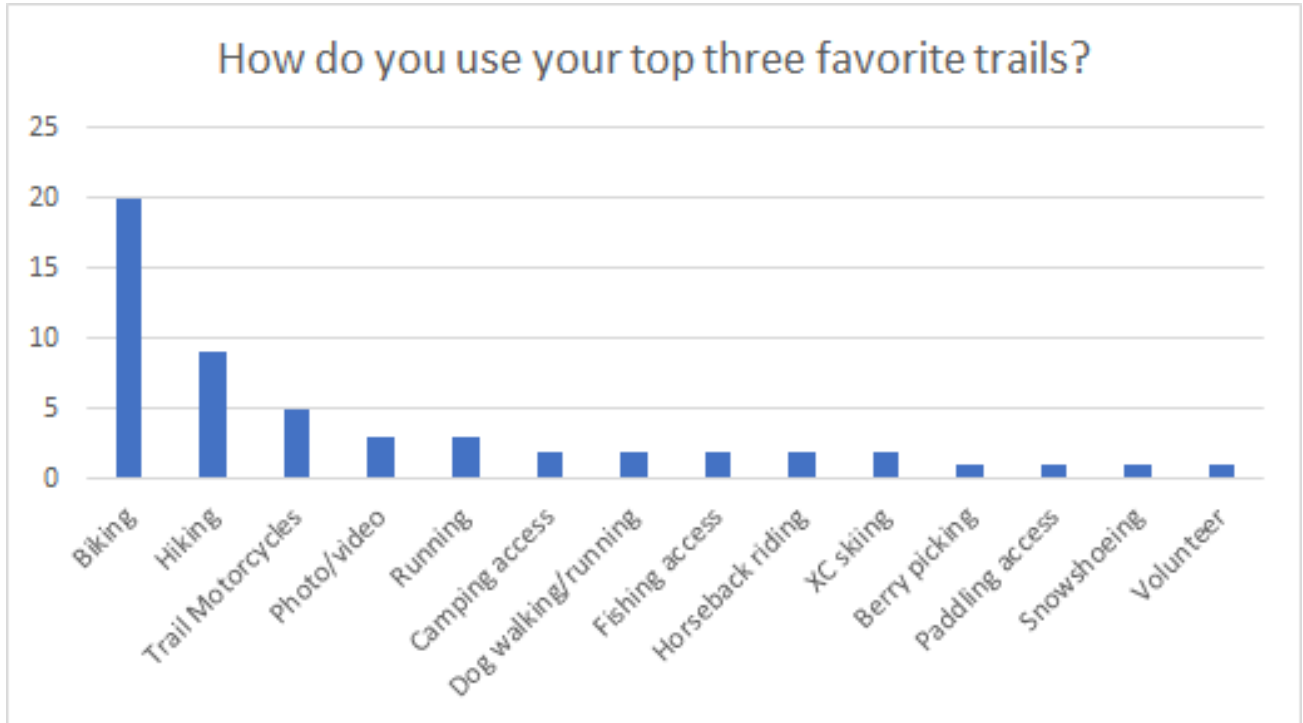
Question: How do you use your favorite trail? Because this study is specifically focused on dirt trails (vs. Forest Service roads) it was assumed that “biking” and “mountain biking” were classified as one and the same uses.



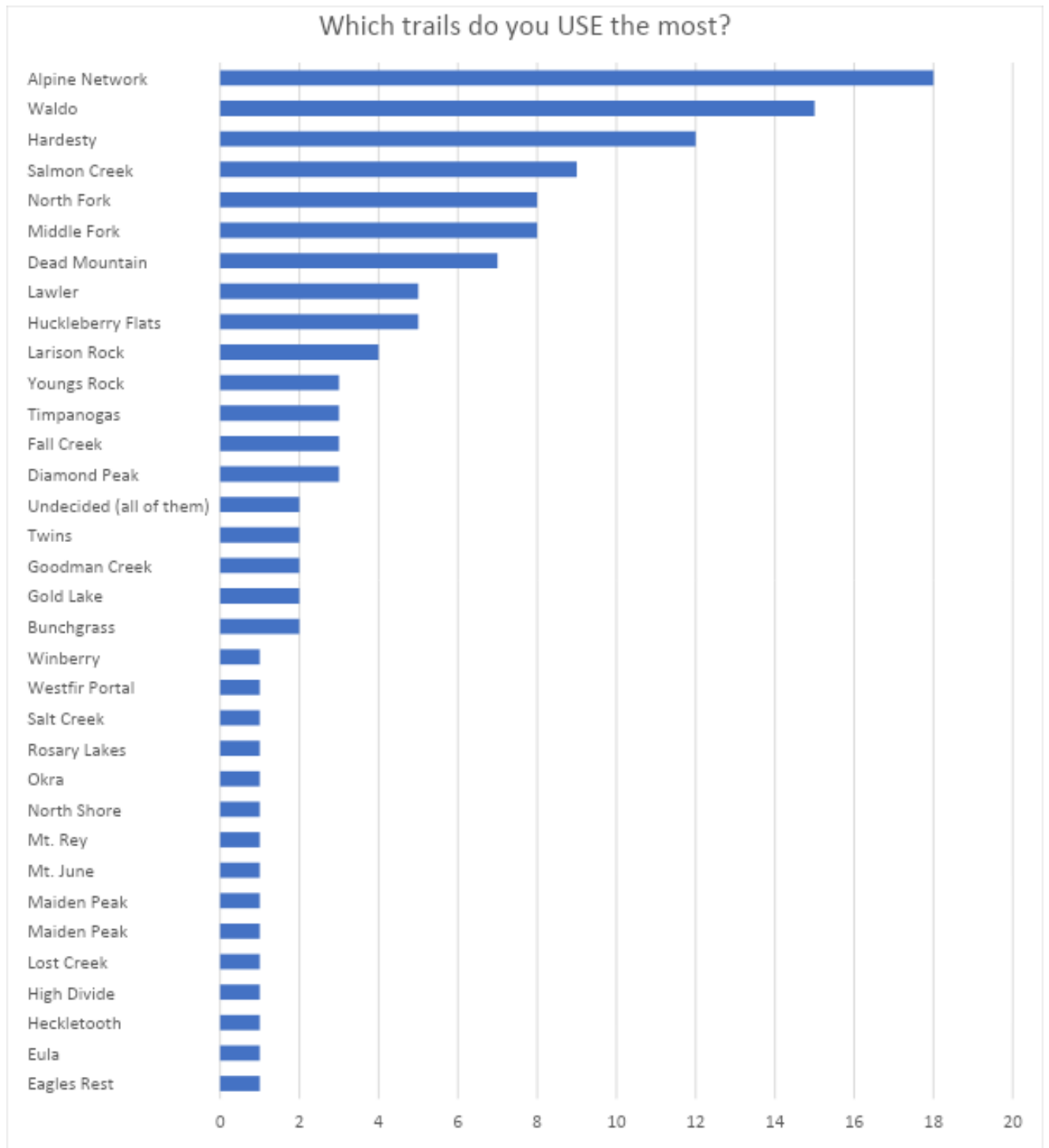
Question: What are your top three favorite trails? Respondents may have only answered one or two trails instead of three.



Question: How do you use them (your top three favorite trails)? This question encompasses more possible uses than the first question and showcases a broader spectrum of uses.



Question: Which trails do you use the most? This question is not the same as “favorite” trail - it is important to distinguish that the trails with the highest use are likely trails that users have the greatest access to for their primary use.



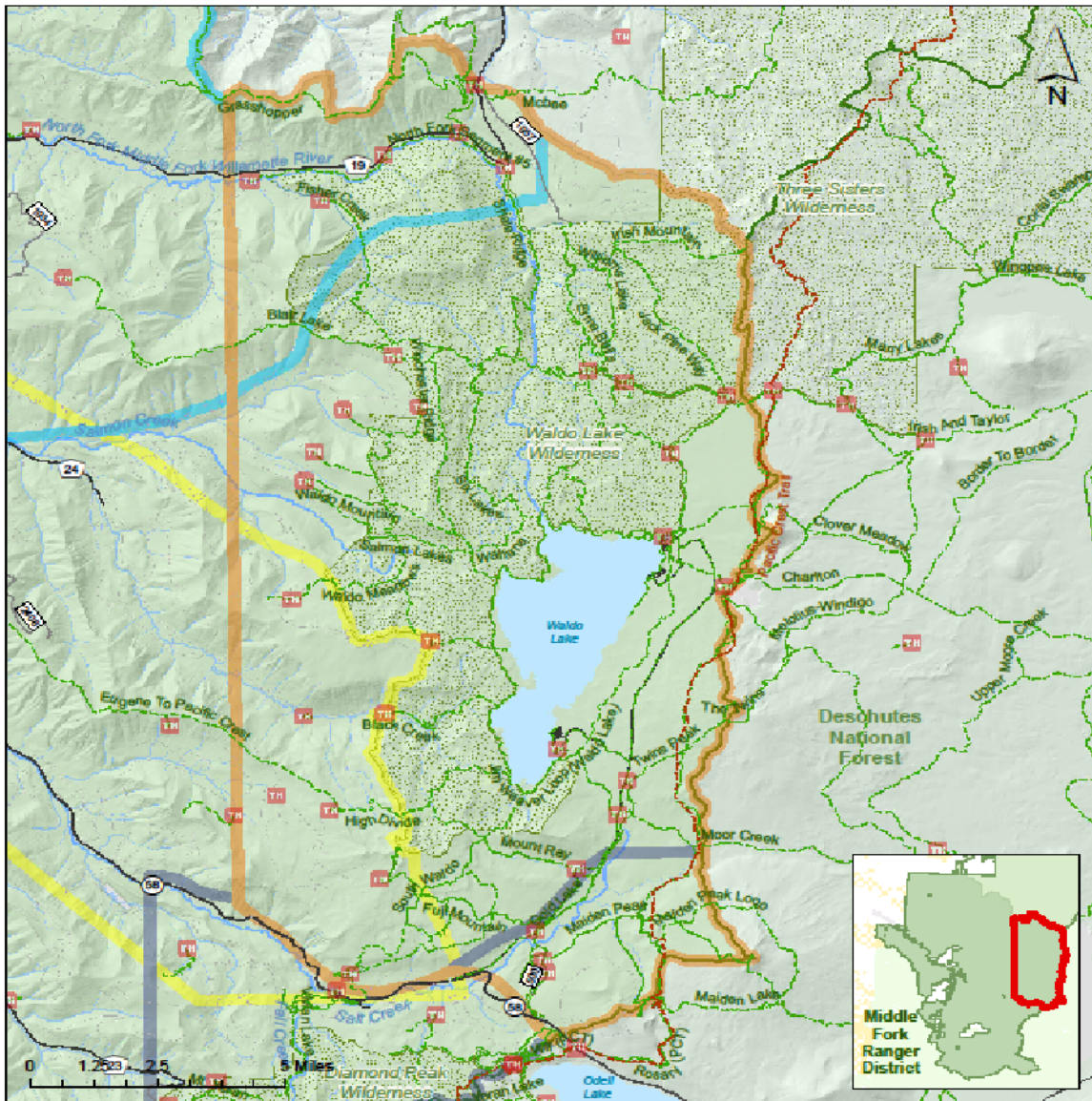
Community Input by Trails Region



Community Volunteers relaxing after a work event on the Alpine Trail

High North District “High Country” Area

The North Middle Fork District “High Country” areas include Willamette Pass north to the Three Sisters Wilderness. This includes the Waldo Basin; i.e. Fuji Mountain, Maiden Peak and the Twins and many miles of Wilderness trails west of Waldo Lake.



High North Trail Area
Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Trailhead | U.S. Forest Service |
| Trail | Bureau of Land Management |
| National Forest Boundary | Other Federal Land |
| Middle Fork Ranger District | Other Land, Including Private |
| Wilderness | |

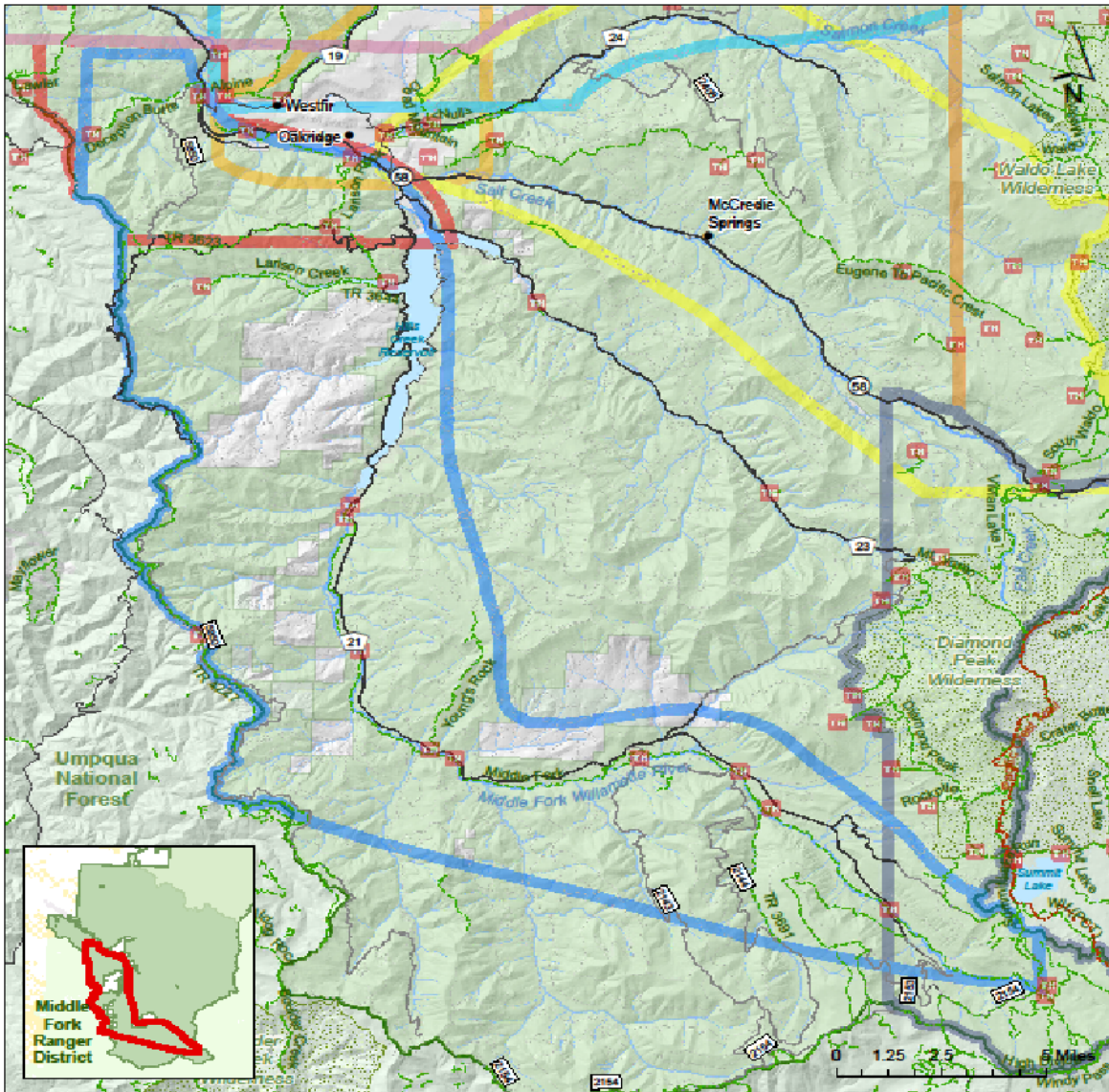
Community Feedback for the North District / High Country areas:

- Widen trails and install bridges for greater accessibility and add barriers to aid trail-goers with acrophobia and vertigo.
- Current road leading to Waldo Mountain area is narrow, brushy, and “failing”.
- Connect 2409 to Little Bunchgrass – the trail is already there, but it needs to be made official.
- Connect Maiden Peak saddle to the Maiden Lake trail for bicycle access.
- Currently, the only connection is the PCT trail, and it would require a very short access trail. (This comment was supported x2)
- Connect PCT to the Trapper Creek trail. (Deschutes)
- South Waldo Trail needs clearing more frequently.
- Consider improving off-road riding opportunities on old logging roads (low standard FS roads” – the Taylor Burn Road was referenced as an example of a premium off road recreation area.
- Connect Fuji Mountain trail to Waldo Lake Basin – this is the end of the Bunchgrass trail to Fuji Mountain trail. (This comment was supported 5x)
- Consider placement of restrooms near trailhead at Black Creek trail and Joe Goddard’s Grove.
- More frequent maintenance on High Divide trail – especially near Wilderness boundary.
- Improve access to Box Canyon at Roaring River Ridge and McBee trail, across from Box Canyon Horse Camp.
- Close Bunchgrass, Hells Half Acre and all other sub-alpine meadows to bicycle access to prevent damage to fragile ecosystems.
- Joe Goddard’s Grove trail needs more frequent maintenance.
- Connect Windy Pass trail (at Timpanogas Lake) to Calumut Lake (in Umpqua).
- Reduce recreational use in Oregon Cascades Recreation Area (OCRA) (Timpanogas and Windy Lakes) Oregon Cascades Lakes area with a limited use recreation permit system.

South District / Middle Fork and Larison Areas

The South Middle Fork District areas include the Middle Fork Trail and the Timpanogas Lake area, Larison Ridge, including Larison Creek and Larison Rock trails.

This area is outlined in blue:



Middle Fork and Larison Trail Area
Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Trailhead | U.S. Forest Service |
| Trail | Bureau of Land Management |
| National Forest Boundary | Other Federal Land |
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| Wilderness | |

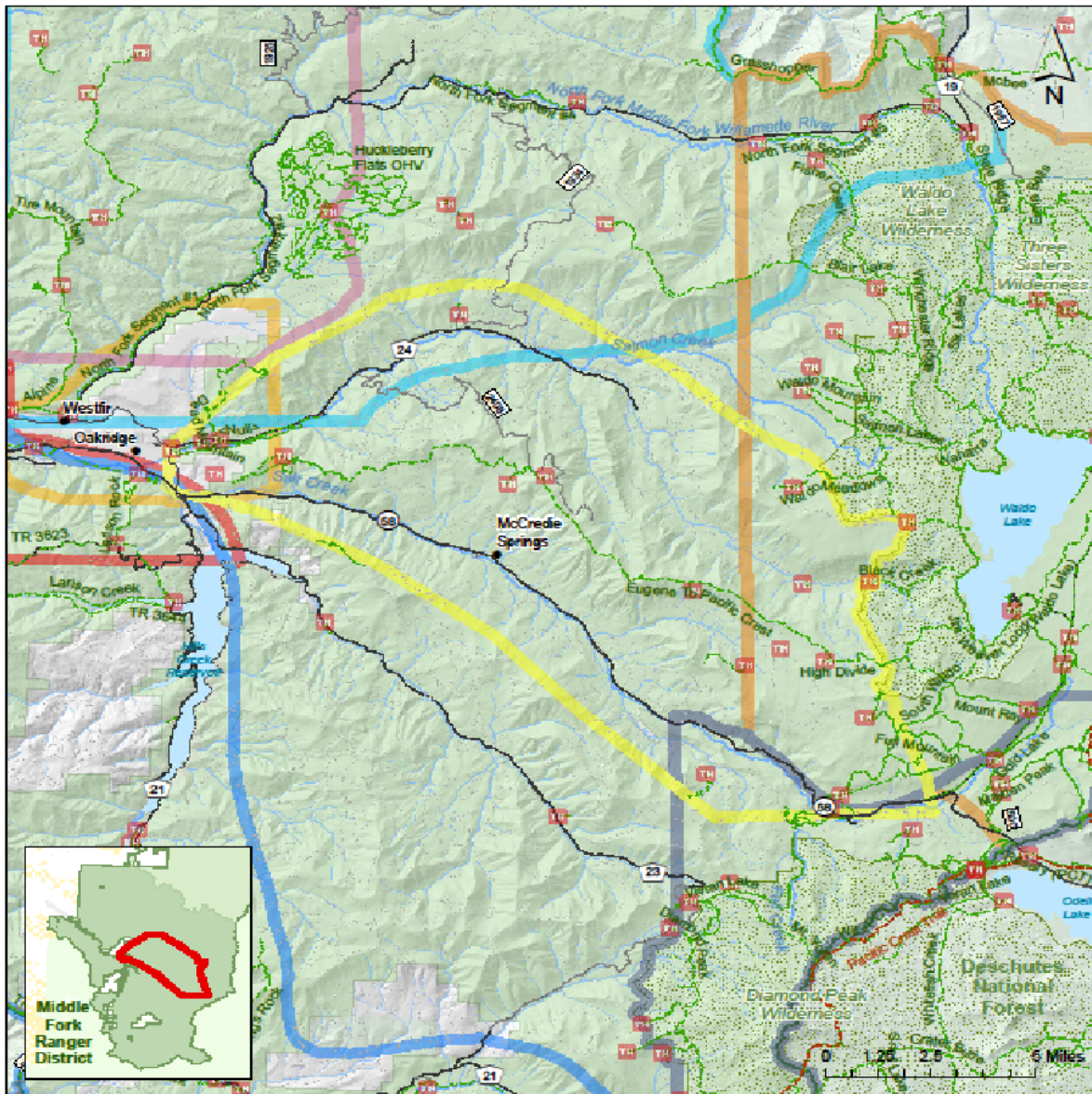
Community Feedback for the South District area:

- Need improvement to bridges and other creek crossings on Middle Fork trail.
- Expand the Larison Rock Trail System (Larison Ridge).
- Middle Fork trail upstream from Chuckle Springs needs improved maintenance and wayfinding signage replaced.
- Horse trailer parking facilities are needed for the Middle Fork trail at Paddy's Valley/FSR 2153.
- Provide a direct connector trail from Larison Rock to Greenwaters Park.
- Horse trailer access needed at Middle Fork trail Butcherknife Creek/FSR 2127.
- Horse trailer parking needed for Middle Fork trail at Sacandaga Campground.

East District / Salt and Salmon Creek Areas

The East Middle Fork District area includes trails in the areas of lower Bunchgrass/Heckletooth, Dead Mountain, Salmon Creek, and Salt Creek.

This area is outlined in yellow (yellow):



Salt Creek and Salmon Creek Trail Area
Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- Trailhead
- Trail
- National Forest Boundary
- Middle Fork Ranger District
- Wilderness
- U.S. Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Other Federal Land
- Other Land, Including Private

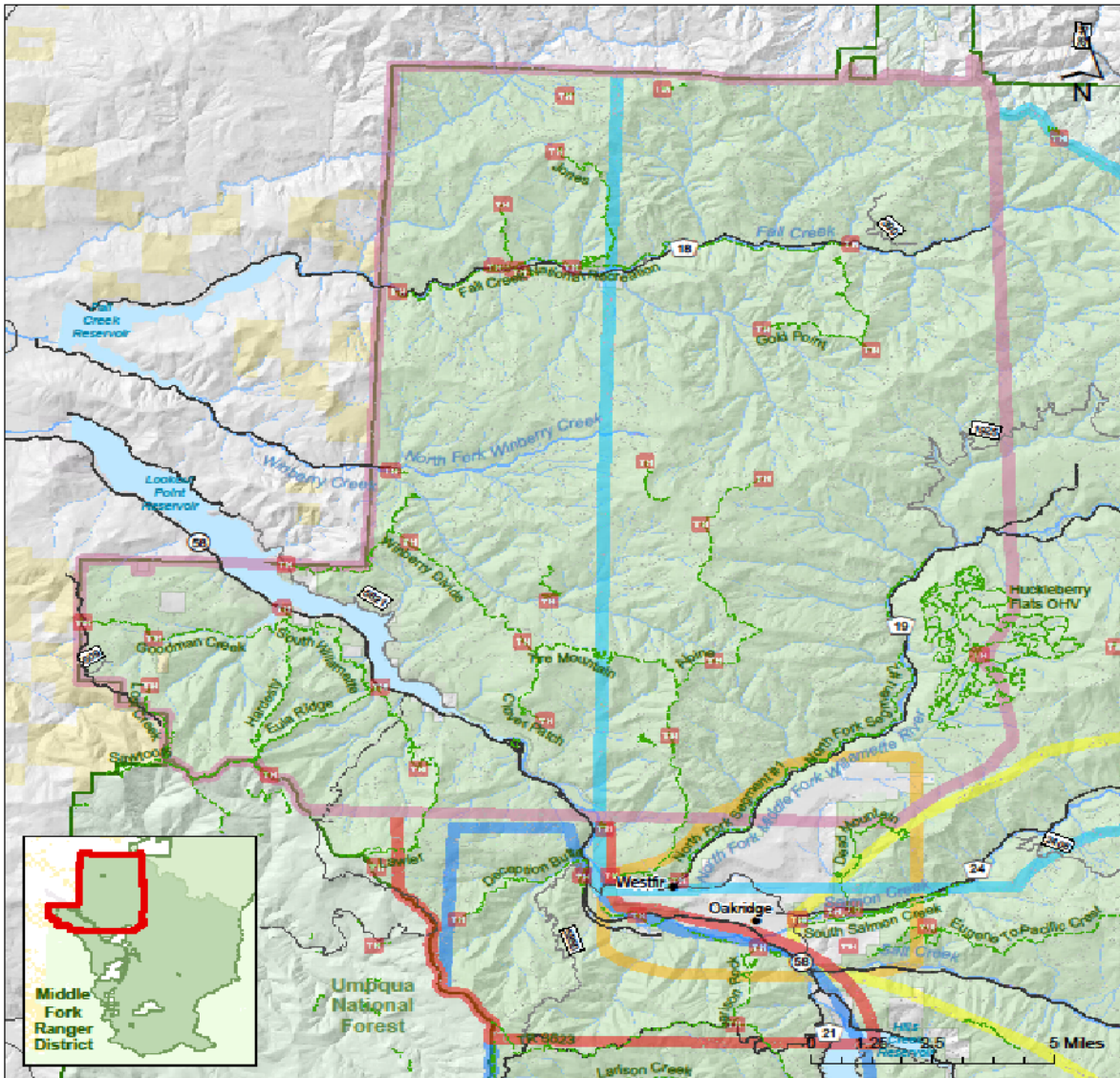
Community Feedback for the East District area:

- Solve the long-term illegal camping issue at Salmon Creek.
- Connect 2404/103 to 1928/194 in the Dead Mountain Trail System as a separate climbing trail. (This suggestion x2)
- Bring back the Rigdon Bike Path back (destroyed by flooding).
- Expanded trail system in the Dead Mountain/Salmon Creek area.
- Horse trailer access is needed at the bottom of Aubrey Mountain trail at Dunning Road.
- Create trail from Aubrey Mountain summit to South Salmon Creek trail.

West District / Fall Creek, Winberry and Hardesty Area

The West Middle Fork District areas include Fall Creek and Winberry drainages, and Hardesty Mountain; Hardesty, Eagle’s Rest, Goodman Creek, Lawler, Eula, Deception Butte, and Lost Creek trails.

This area is outlined in lavender:



Fall Creek, Winberry, Hardesty Trail Area
 Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Trailhead | U.S. Forest Service |
| Trail | Bureau of Land Management |
| National Forest Boundary | Other Federal Land |
| Middle Fork Ranger District | Other Land, Including Private |
| Wilderness | |

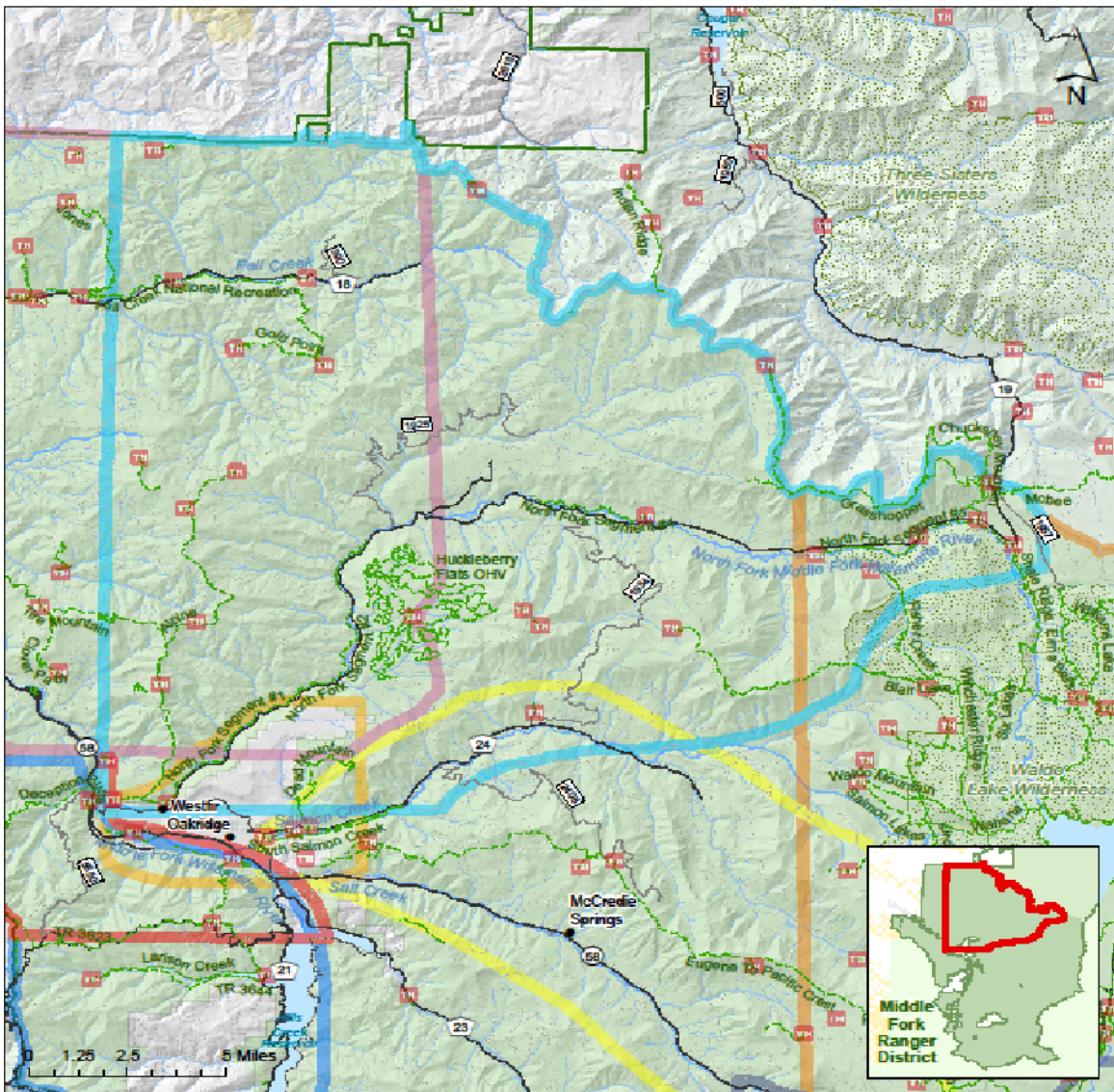
Community Feedback for the West Middle Fork District area:

- More frequent maintenance on the Winberry Divide trail is needed.
- Connect Hardesty Mountain summit to Patterson Mountain summit by trail.
- Improve drainage on Goodman trail to help solve the “muddy trail” problem. (x2)
- More frequent maintenance on North Shore Tie and South Willamette trails.
- Connect Lost Creek to Eagle’s Rest by singletrack. (x2)
- Increase maintenance in the Fall Creek trail area.
- Need signs at west end of Lost Creek trail.
- Re-open the Deception Butte trail.
- South Willamette needs to be re-designed for bike use.
- North Shore Tie and Winberry need improved signage.
- Improved signage and parking at the bottom of North Shore Tie. (x2)

Alpine Trail System / North Fork Area

The Alpine System includes Tire Mountain, Cloverpatch and north Alpine Loop (Elk Camp) and areas to the top of the Fall Creek drainage; while North Fork areas include North Fork access from the Westfir Portal all the way to Box Canyon, Grasshopper and Chucksney trails.

This area is outlined in [light blue](#):



Alpine North Fork Trail Area
Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Trailhead | U.S. Forest Service |
| Trail | Bureau of Land Management |
| National Forest Boundary | Other Federal Land |
| Middle Fork Ranger District | Other Land, Including Private |
| Wilderness | |

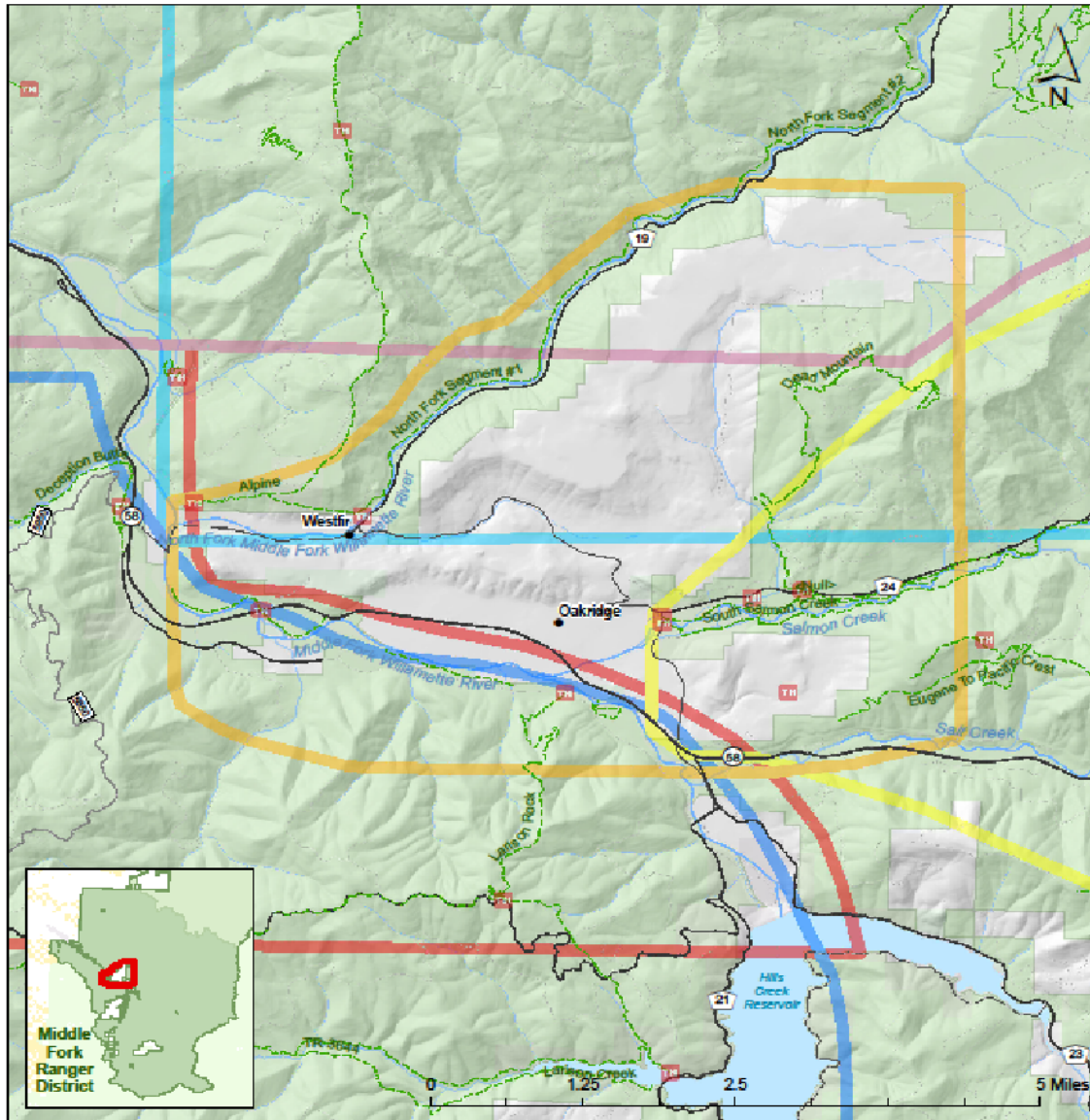
Community Feedback for the Alpine / North Fork area:

- Connect Gold Point trail to the Alpine trail.
- Connect bottom of Saddleblanket Mountain to Alpine trail at Elk Camp.
- Connect the Westfir Portal North Fork Trail all the way to Box Canyon.
- Connect Cloverpatch Trail to the Cloverpatch Tie. (in progress)
- Improved access and maintenance on Grasshopper trail.
- Build an alternative climbing trail on Alpine.
- Horse trailer access at Crale Creek road on South Willamette trail. (completed in 2019 following timber sale)
- Create a loop between Westfir-Tie and the North Fork trail that is hiker-friendly and easy for beginner mountain bikers.

Cities of Oakridge and Westfir Area

The Cities of Oakridge-Westfir trail systems include the levy trails along Salmon Creek, the Greenwaters Park system, Westfir Portal Park Pump Track, Mill Site and all proposed projects within city limits of Oakridge and Westfir.

This area is outlined in gold:



Cities and Greenwaters Trail Area
Oakridge Westfir Community Trail Plan
 Willamette National Forest
 Middle Fork Ranger District

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| | Trailhead | | U.S. Forest Service |
| | Trail | | Bureau of Land Management |
| | National Forest Boundary | | Other Federal Land |
| | Middle Fork Ranger District | | Other Land, Including Private |
| | Wilderness | | |

Community Feedback for the Cities of Oakridge and Westfir area:

- Resurface the levy trail with something more firm than gravel.
- Build a connector from Oakridge Industrial Park to Aubrey Mountain trail on Dunning.
- Add signage on Greenwaters to the west end of LaDuke to assist in getting bicyclists from Greenwaters to Westfir.
- Connect East 2nd to Westfir Portal over the ridge between Westfir and Oakridge. (x2)
- Connect Greenwaters to Larison Rock trail by official singletrack. (x2)
- Continue to improve Diamond Park pump track.
- Clean up trash in Ferrin Forest. (x2)
- Remove the chain from the path at Greenwaters and use a bollard.
- Open all City trails to e-bikes.

Additional Public Comment: (from the survey)

- Convince private timberland owners to build a bike park to take pressure off natural forest trails.
- Charge fees to user group with the most impact.

ADA Accessible Trails

All current and prospective Middle Fork recreators should have equal opportunity to enjoy our region's trails. Public comments requesting wider trails, drop-off barriers and additional river crossings reflect a deficit in the accessibility of certain trails in the trail system. We encourage further public comment regarding trail accessibility. The Middle Fork Trails Plan will incorporate suggestions from the public and engage representatives of the Disabled Hikers organization to assure that the plan's priorities reflect the full spectrum of needs and desires that our visitor may have.

For many of our trails, simple updates and maintenance would substantially increase their accessibility. The Middle Fork Trails Plan will identify which trails are nearest to satisfying ADA accessible standards and develop accessible trails priorities for the future. These priorities may include trail updates, facilities, and other desires expressed by the community and organizations representing the disabled community.

Next Steps: Middle Fork Trails Plan Update

Stewardship of our trails is integral to the recreation economy in the cities of Oakridge and Westfir. Specifically, the City of Oakridge has adopted the tagline, "Mountain Biking Capital of the Northwest" and is largely focused on outdoor tourism as a business strategy. Recognizing the location of the community as it is surrounded by the Willamette National Forest, local and regional stakeholders can begin working together to address the overall "Sustainable Recreation" initiative in the broader scope of a long-term recreation strategy for the greater Middle Fork District, and more specifically, in the Middle Fork Trails Plan.

Within this plan, several elements will be considered when assessing feasibility, including;

- Prioritizing where different trail use takes place based on number of users visiting the area, local connection and vicinity to other recreation resources
- Creating seamless connections between existing trails to improve access through a contiguous trails experience
- Providing a world class trails experience for all users,
- Evaluating an expanded view of the trails system from Oakridge and Westfir to the entire Middle Fork Ranger District
- Consider connections from rural communities to high country and wilderness areas in the District and identify ways to improve access
- Consider access from Bend to Oakridge on singletrack trails networks
- Consider the expansion of trails systems to help move traffic off high impact areas
- Prioritize trails for ongoing maintenance and sustainable access as well as future expansion
- Permeable boundaries with input from bordering land managers

Based on public feedback, the Forest Service and Middle Fork Trails Plan Steering Committee will continue vetting ideas for feasibility within the existing land management regulatory framework and assess through technical filters which may include the following:

- Heritage concerns such as archeological sites or historical landmarks or settlement areas
- Impact to sensitive wildlife habitat areas and migration corridors
- Rare threatened and/or endangered species of plants and animals
- Treating intersecting roads with care to comply with engineering specs
- Fire and slash considerations affecting wildland fire potential and fuel mitigation operations, including use of fuel breaks as non-motorized trails as appropriate
- Silviculture; i.e. would the trail corridor impact a plantation area or would it require cutting trees used as seed banks or use for future timber harvests?
- Recreational use, including special use permits and Guide & Outfitter operations
- Hydrological considerations such as fish habitat, water quality, stream protection and how those bodies of water will impact trail placement
- Bridges or other anticipated construction needs along with transport of materials and equipment to address those needs
- Impact of trail building equipment on surrounding area

Once projects are identified and vetted, the Middle Fork Trails Plan Steering Committee will work with the trails stewardship community to assign a local “project champion” to shepherd the official USFS Project Scoping Form process, which includes the following elements:

- Project area identification through latitude/longitude measurements, township range section, and watershed
- A map showing streams, rivers, lakes, roads, township and section lines, land management area, and exact project location
- Project name, description, requestor name
- Estimated NEPA timing and project implementation schedule (this will be largely dependent on finding a funding source which typically requires a specific timeline based on seasonality of work, equipment and labor resource availability, and materials and supplies needed to complete the project)
- Location of proposed project in relation to special habitats, quarries, hydrological considerations, quarries, designated special recreation areas, etc.
Disturbance to preceding considerations, why it is necessary, and any mitigation actions
- Purpose and need of project
- Desired condition vs. existing condition and why actions need to be taken in the proposal’s suggested project timeline
- Description of proposed actions to implement project

Once submitted, District leadership (usually the District Ranger and Deputy Ranger) determines the District staff capacity to handle the projects from planning to implementation, along with all

of the other program area's work, and creates a list of projects to plan and analyze that year. Projects included in that year's program of work are then analyzed by the specialists and others who need to be involved. The information gathered becomes the input for the official Forest Service environmental review process that outlines the reasons behind whether or not a project is approved, including references to scientific and socio-cultural considerations such as wildlife, water quality or archeological sites. The Middle Fork Ranger District will draft a decision document and include plans and designs, maps, a mitigation report, if necessary, responding to any findings of concern and how mitigation will take place in order to move the project forward. This will be reviewed by the specialists who contributed and then signed by the District Ranger.

Once the scoping and analyzing work is completed and a project has been signed and approved it can be implemented.

Fully developed proposals can be vetted through the Middle Fork Ranger District in the coming years. This information will make up the final deliverable, the Middle Fork Community Trails Plan, which will provide a flexible road map for moving projects forward within short, medium and long-term proposal opportunities.

Conclusion

The Middle Fork Trails Plan will act as a "living document" with the intention to reconvene annually to reassess priorities as demographics, recreation industry needs and the economy changes. Continued dialog with the public will be a key driving-force in identifying those priorities. The community engagement captured in this report provides a baseline that informs the first version of the Middle Fork Trails Plan. Ongoing community engagement will help to assure that identified budget priorities will match the needs and interests of the communities that use Middle Fork Ranger District (MFRD) trails for recreation. As trail projects are selected to be completed, the public is encouraged to weigh in through formal public comment, through venues like the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative recreation committee, and through informal discussion with the Forest Service and other community members.

The forthcoming plan will build on a broad set of plans developed by the communities of Oakridge and Westfir, the University of Oregon, and the US Forest Service. The Oakridge-Westfir Community Trails Plan was developed with substantial community input in 2008, and the Mill Park Plan came out of an 18-month process of community engagement that concluded in 2019. The University of Oregon gathered data about the recreation economy and conducted community meetings before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020. In addition to these community reports, the MFTP is also informed by input from the just-completed Willamette National Forest Sustainable Recreation Strategy (2021).

Some of the common themes that have emerged in these reports include:

- Balancing local versus visitor interests
- Balancing user types

- Connections and cooperation across jurisdictions, public/private ownership
- Wayfinding and signage
- Recreation as opportunity for community growth and development
- Funding, contracting, and volunteerism (partnerships)
- Environmental considerations
- Stewardship / responsible recreation education

The Middle Fork Trails Plan will address these themes, presenting opportunities to support the changing needs and desires of the community while maintaining the area's unique character and branding. Going forward, it will be key to plan for an increase in recreational tourism. The Middle Fork Trails Plan will provide a framework to balance local and visitor needs, and will identify ways in which the region's trails system can sustainably accommodate diverse use while also benefiting the local community through community connections and economic and recreational development.

As the recreation economy expands in the communities of Oakridge and Westfir and as usage and policies change, the need for a flexible trails plan is emphasized. The full Middle Fork Trails Plan will also include details about purpose and need, methodology and data collection, maintenance recommendations, and suggestions for future project development, including resources to support funding and labor. All of these items may change over time due to a wide range of factors. This report captures a moment-in-time snapshot of the current priorities and needs for MFRD trails. Building out the full plan will help to develop a more streamlined process which can be adapted to changing conditions while maintaining a record of priorities and project details. It will also allow for informed but nimble project selection.

The Middle Fork Trails Plan Steering Committee would like to thank the individuals who provided feedback at the public meetings held in 2018-2019 and those who will give input in the future. Creating the Middle Fork Trails Plan is a shared process that depends upon the valuable contributions of the people who use the area's trails. We look forward to shaping the future of the MFRD trails system to be sustainable, inclusive and efficient. With the help of the completed plan, we look to continue providing world-class recreation opportunities while maintaining realistic expectations about limited capacity and resources.



Young's Rock Trail in early spring-Photo by Dylan VanWeelden