

Forest Service Policy for Trail Monitoring

FSM 2320:

2323.13f - Transportation System. Design, construct, and maintain the transportation system in wilderness to provide access to and within a wilderness, that meets the wilderness objectives described in the forest plan.

1. Trails. Trails are an acceptable improvement. Construct and maintain trails to standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook.

FSH 2309.18 Trails Management Handbook:

4.1 - TRAIL OPERATION. Trail operation involves management of the type, volume, and season of trail use to achieve the desired trail management objectives. Elements of trail operation include: monitoring the volume of use, the type of use, and the effects of use on the trail management objectives; implementing trail restrictions; and informing the user through guides and signs of the use that is intended for each trail.

4.11 - Monitoring Use. Monitor type and volume of trail use to determine if trail management objectives are met. Use the resulting data to direct trail maintenance planning.

The type and volume of use can be monitored in a number of ways [including]:

5. Tread Wear. Study imprints and tread wear on trails to gather information about the volume and types of use.

4.25 - Condition and Prescription Surveys. The condition survey is the backbone of maintenance management. The person who performs the condition survey must be knowledgeable about the entire maintenance management process. The data gathered and the decisions made during the condition survey provide the information needed for subsequent decisions. The condition survey may also be used for scheduling and reporting work accomplishments.

Review the management objectives for each trail prior to performing the condition surveys. These objectives are used in the development of the annual maintenance plan and generally include the following considerations:

1. Requirements to protect specific adjacent resources or improvements, such as streams, lakes, meadows, vegetation, scenic strips, view areas, experimental forests, facilities, and the like.
2. Planned use of the trail. The season of use, difficulty level, type and volume of use, and trail restrictions and regulations are examples of the type of information that must be known before conducting a condition survey. Use this information to determine whether a trail is adequately providing for the planned use.

Condition surveys are conducted to provide up-to-date information about the condition of all physical features that are of concern to the manager. Prior surveys provide information to forecast work requirements that are used in formulating the annual maintenance plan. Examples of possible deficiencies that should be noted in condition surveys include the following:

1. Inlets and outlets of culverts that are plugged.
2. Locations of hazard trees.
3. Brushing growth within cleared limits.
4. Sluffing backslope.
5. Missing or damaged signs.
6. Subgrade failures.
7. Stone retaining wall failures.
8. Slide encroachment on trailway.
9. Trail tread erosion.

These surveys also provide data to make an account of deficiencies and corrective measures that can be used in planning reconstruction projects.

The prescription survey identifies actions to correct the deficiencies noted on the ground. A qualified person can prescribe the action needed to correct the deficiency at the same time the condition survey is made. The prescription may be designated by referring to a specific maintenance activity and maintenance specification.

A detailed condition survey may not be needed during the springtime opening of trails. However, trail inspectors are needed to verify the type and extent of work needed before dispatching crews or awarding contracts. Opening trails in the spring normally involves logging out and drainage maintenance.