



United States Department of Agriculture

Update

Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA) East End Trail System Realignment George Washington and Jefferson National Forests

I want to clarify some of the information circulating about the Mount Rogers NRA East End trail system realignment proposal. The Iron Mountain Backcountry Horsemen have been excellent partners and have worked closely with the Forest Service for almost 10 years to help develop a great trail system. To reach that goal, some conditions require improvement, such as public access, reducing duplication of routes, improved connectors and loop routes, and relocation of damaged sections. We also need to address the resource issues that are occurring from not only user-created trails, but also segments of Forest Service developed trails. During the last meeting with club representatives and Forest Service staff, we shared these 6 goals.

1. Improve trail access day-use parking: we are proposing to add trailheads to improve public access.
2. Relocate excessively steep or eroding sections of Forest Service developed trails to comply with Forest Service standards.
3. Trail decommissioning of duplicate routes, to allow for additional trail locations.
4. Add connectors to Forest Service developed trail system to provide a better experience.
5. Begin to address 200 miles of user-created trails across the entire NRA by implementing a Forest Supervisor's closure order as directed by the 2004 Jefferson National Forest Plan. Over time, trail users have made and/or used unofficial routes that are contributing sediment to streams affecting trout habitat and water quality, contributing to the spread of invasive plants, and impacting wildlife habitat and viewing. The numerous user-created trails are also confusing to visitors. We are working with the East End now because these critical problems must be addressed soon.
6. Improve campground facilities and dispersed camping sites to address resource issues: Over time we'd like to improve facilities at Collins Cove and Hussy Mountain Horse Camps, and protect water quality near popular dispersed sites.

I believe we all agree we would like Mount Rogers NRA to provide the best trail system possible for both visitors and residents of our area. None of these projects would reduce the overall trail mileage that the NRA now offers—which is approximately 500 miles. All interested trail users need to come together to look at the proposal that has been developed so far, and discuss ideas, concerns and new ideas. The Forest Service will be holding workshops and field trips over the next few months to invite as much participation as possible to develop good solutions to move toward our goals. Please contact us with questions or comments. The George Washington & Jefferson National Forest website will post further updates, beginning next week.

BETH MERZ

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Forest Service

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