

Ocoee- Hiwassee Ranger District Trail Crew Bulletin

FY 2023



Meet Our Trail Crew



Trails Specialist: Mason Boring
Trails Crew Lead: Devin Douglas
Seasonal Trails Technicians:
Brittany Alvarez
Dillon Brady
Mary Pepper

What's New

The 2023 fiscal year brought many changes to the Ocoee trail crew, but one in particular has made the key difference. In the past year, our crew has grown from two to five! Adding new members has not only more than doubled our hands, but given us access to precious new knowledge and perspectives. With each new addition - Douglas joining in February, Pepper in April, and Brady in June - we have seen exponential growth in the important work being done in our district. Bringing on new crew members has brought with it a lot of training. Each member is now crosscut and chainsaw certified, up to date on first aid and CPR, and red carded! With the additions of these new skills, we are thrilled to see how much additional work can be accomplished in the upcoming year.



Benton Falls Project

with SECC Partner



Partner Crew Members: 8

Crew Hours Worked: 448

Check Dams Installed: 10

Crush and Fill: 320 ft³

The Project

The Benton Falls Trail is the most well known and used trail on the Ocoee-Hiwassee Ranger District. Located at the top of Chilhowee Mountain, the Benton Falls trail is a class 4 trail and allows for both hiking and biking. Drainage issues on this popular trail have allowed for large gullies to appear and worsen with each storm. With the help of our FS partner, the Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC), we were able to install a series of check dams to allow the water to drain off trail more sustainably. The youth crew on this project was composed of many first time members. Their adjustment to trail crew work was aided by the fact that several of our own members are SECC alumni. The youth crew successfully left their legacy with the massive improvement to our trail. This was a huge first step in a series of projects for this beloved trail.



John Muir Tread Project

with SECC Partner

Partner Crew Members: 7
Crew Hours Worked: 280
Ft of Bench Repaired: 755

The Project

The John Muir trail of Tennessee is a scenic 20.7 mile trail that runs along the north side of the Hiwassee River in Cherokee National Forest. It was constructed in 1972 through the efforts of the Youth Conservation Corps, so it was very fitting that the YCC were back with us to lend a hand in maintaining it. Though temperatures soared during their hitch on the JMT, the crew members were troopers and left the Towee section looking pristine after some much needed bench work.



Tellico Eco Days

South Zone Education Effort

Crew Hours Worked: 48

Classes Taught: 16

Students in Attendance: 400

The Project

The Eco Days education event is an annual education opportunity in Cherokee National Forest that celebrated its 15th year in 2023. It brings students from multiple counties together to learn about various topics ranging through silviculture, primitive tool use, fire safety, and archaeology. The Ocoee trail crew participated this year, teaching the importance of bear safety while camping and how to correctly store food. A mock campsite was set up for the kids and they got to investigate the area to discover what issues the site had that could result in a bear encounter. After going over the proper way to store food, each student got to try their hand at setting up a bear hang. Even the chaperones had questions for our crew! It was a great learning opportunity for all involved.



Ocoee Nature Day

South Zone Education Effort

Crew Hours Worked: 16

Classes Taught: 11

Students in Attendance: 150

The Project

Ocoee Nature Day held its inaugural event in 2018, creating a day of education right on the banks of the Ocoee River. After having to cancel during the height of the pandemic, this year held the return of Nature Day to Polk County, Tennessee. Students from multiple schools attended to learn about a variety of topics, including wildlife, wilderness, fire management and aquatic life. The Ocoee trails crew held a primitive tools workshop where students were able to get up close and personal with the tools of the trail maintenance trade. Students learned what being part of a trail crew means, why it is important, and got to try using a crosscut saw and draw-knife for themselves.



Chilhowee Day Use Project

Recreation Renovation Effort



Trail Crew Hours Worked: 168

Tables Built: 16

Benches installed: 11

Signs Painted & Installed: 3

The Project

The Chilhowee day use area is a popular destination for swimming, fishing, hiking, biking, camping, and picnicking. On almost any given day during the warmer months you will find the place filled with people, many of whom have been coming here since they were young. There are years of history within this site, and the amenities had begun to show the signs of heavy use. Employees from the Ocoee and Blue Ridge Ranger Districts worked alongside partners from the Great Outdoors Fund and Ford Bronco Wild Fund to accomplish the demo, reconstruction, and installation of new site amenities. This involved removing all old structures, digging trenches, assembling tables, pouring concrete, and installing all new furnishings to the site. Even community volunteers pitched in to complete this much anticipated project! Chilhowee will be ready for thousands more visitors in the years to come.



Tellico Disaster Relief

Emergency South Zone Aid Effort

Trail Crew In Attendance: 4
Trail Crew Hours Worked: 104
Miles Scouted: 15.57

The Project

On August 14th, 2023, Tellico Plains experienced a flash flood that involved the Tellico River rising about 13 feet higher than usual. This caused massive damage including road washouts, downed trees, debris pile ups, and indoor flood damage. The Ocoee trail team assisted in clearing areas and documenting damage for emergency funding applications. The crew spent the week moving office furnishings, hauling mud and water out of flooded buildings, surveying trails, and documenting damage.



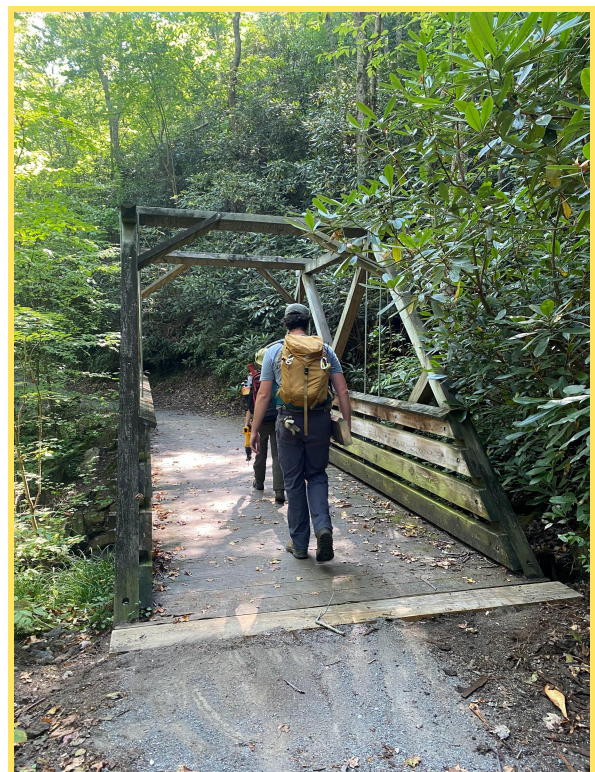
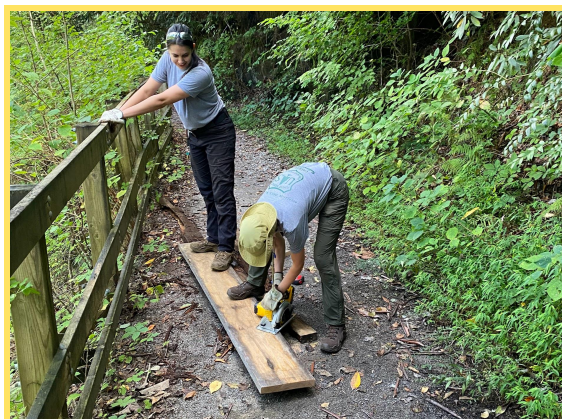
Rhododendron Trail Structure Project

Repair of Bridge and Walkway Deterioration

Trail Crew Numbers: 4
Trail Crew Hours Worked: 96
Structures Repaired: 3

The Project

The Rhododendron Trail is a 1.5 mile out-and-back trail that runs along the Ocoee River in Polk County, Tennessee. Being an easy hike or ride and located near the historic site of the 1996 Olympics, it is a popular choice for visitors. This is a class 4 trail and therefore contains many structures that allow the visitors to hike along the steep riverbank comfortably. These bridges and walkways were built around the time of the Olympics almost 30 years ago, so many areas are beginning to show wear and are in need of repair. This fall, the trail crew fixed three spots along this trail that had missing or rotten wood, making sure this trail remains open for recreation enthusiasts.



McKamy Bike Trail Project

Improvement of Tread and Mitigation of Drainage Issues

Trail Crew Numbers: 3

Trail Crew Hours Worked: 90

Ft of Tread Improved: 350 ft

Drainage Structures Installed: 3

The Project

The McKamy Bike Trail surrounds local favorite, McKamy Lake, on the top of Chilhowee Mountain. It is a breezy class 4 trail of .5 miles that is well loved and used by all members of the community, due to its high accessibility to users. A portion of this trail which overlapped with the day use area had succumbed to the effects of heavy rain and poor drainage. The trail crew utilized our access to heavy machinery, including the mini excavator and ditch witch, to install a french drain in the affected area. The machinery was used to layer riprap and gravel to improve drainage, securing the set of steps overlapping the trail. Once this was in place, additional gravel was dispersed further along the heavily used sections of trail and the area was cleared of all brush and debris.



Volunteer Efforts

The Benefits of Trail Maintainer Groups



Total Volunteer Groups: 5
Total Volunteers: 88
Total Trees Logged Out: 503
Total Hours Worked: 3,512
Total Efforts Value: \$111,681.60

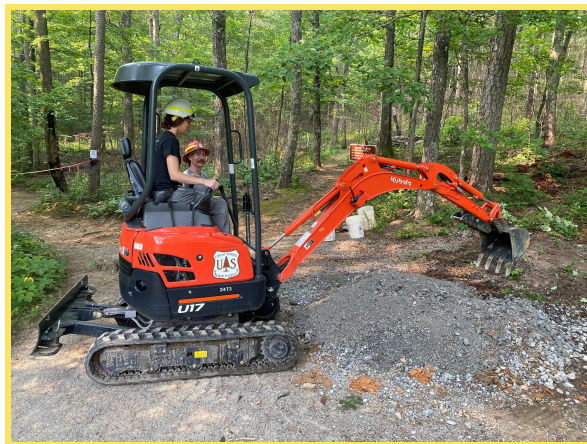
This Year

The Ocoee trail system would not be what it is today without the long history of aid from our highly valued trail volunteers. Some of our volunteer groups have been maintaining trails on the district since 1980. The hard work put in over the years showcases the love that people hold for the beautiful Ocoee landscape, all while helping make it what it is today. In addition to our long established groups, a new volunteer crew was formed this year which focuses on mountain bike trails. The Ocoee trail crew can utilize volunteer work days to accomplish much larger projects in a fraction of the time it would have taken otherwise. Volunteers serve as an extra pair of eyes for the condition of district-wide trails. Many of our volunteers have been maintainers for many years and helpfully share their expertise to our newer employees who are still learning on the job. The increased capacity provided by our volunteers grants us an invaluable asset. The relationship between our trail crew and volunteer groups works to preserve, protect, and maintain the forest while fostering a connection between the agency and the public.



The Big Picture

How the Establishment of a Trail Crew has Benefitted the District



The Reach

- ❖ Increased Daily Output
- ❖ Multiple Program Aid
- ❖ Rise in Public Contact
- ❖ Larger Span of Project Ability

While it has been only a short amount of time with the newly fledged Ocoee Trail Crew, the district and South Zone as a whole has already reaped marginal benefits. With the increased number of members, the potential to tackle much-needed projects has multiplied from previous years. Each day the trail crew is presented with new obstacles discovered by volunteers and recreationists. With a wider array of knowledge, skills, and hands, our crew now has the ability to remedy these situations in a timely and efficient manner. The increased capacity has also been of advantage to other departments such as timber, fire, and recreation, as the trails team has readily jumped in to assist whenever the need arises. With so much progress in just a few months, we look forward to the next fiscal year of new projects and achievements reached with our team. These accomplishments wouldn't have been possible without the support and investment made by the Cherokee National Forest Leadership Team. Now more than ever, we are able to fulfill the Forest Service mission statement of **Caring for the Land and Serving People.**

