

A hiker with a large blue backpack is walking away on a dirt trail through a dense forest. The trail is surrounded by lush green ferns and other vegetation. The background shows tall trees and a canopy of leaves. The overall scene is a vibrant, natural setting.

“CoTrails” Strategic Plan

*A Collaborative Trails Initiative
Supporting the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
January 2012*

Foreword



George Bain, Forest Supervisor

When we embarked on this collaborative initiative to examine the trail system on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests almost a year ago, we were moving into unknown territory. Most of us didn't really know what to expect, but we knew there was potential for something very meaningful to occur. In reflecting on our collective efforts, there has been excitement, a lot of hard work, and most of all, a commitment to results. It has been a great year.

We began by bringing together a diverse group of trail users—who have sometimes been in conflict with one another or with the Forest Service—to find common ground and address a shared concern of maintaining an appropriate trail system on the forest. We were confident that we were entering into this collaborative effort with one very important common understanding: we all share a concern and a passion for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and the remarkable recreational opportunities the forest provides.

Our National Forest is visited by more than 2.2 million visitors each year, and many of them enjoy recreational experiences on the forest's 850 miles of designated system trails. This extensive and diverse trail system is only possible because of the commitment and contributions of volunteers. In 2010, those contributions amounted to the equivalent of

twenty-one full time employees assisting with trail maintenance, repair and construction. We simply could not do it without you.

I am proud to stand behind the CoTrails' mission statement: "To provide diverse, quality trail experiences that are maintainable and ecologically sustainable." And I'm encouraged by the new and strengthening relationships among those who use and care about this forest. This was demonstrated by the more-than-forty individuals who worked together for several months last year to move this effort forward. They invested their confidence in eight capable individuals who stepped up to form the CoTrails Working Group. This group pioneered a strategy that harnesses the creative power of this collaboration, and the CoTrails Strategic Plan is the result.

I fully support and accept the CoTrails Strategic Plan and the five strategic objectives outlined within it: (1) Engage volunteer organizations, their members, and other trail users in the collaborative trails initiative and CoTrails' projects; (2) Conduct professional assessment of selected Chattahoochee-Oconee NFs system trails; (3) Create a forest-wide interactive digital map of system trails; (4) Identify and assess unauthorized trails and routes in the Chattahoochee-Oconee NFs; and (5) Identify and propose opportunities for new system trails in the Chattahoochee-Oconee NFs.

This is a dynamic plan, and we will work together to find the best ways to achieve its objectives over time. Together we have already made great progress. Accomplishing these objectives will result in a well defined trail system that will meet users' expectations and be sustainable on the ground.

The influence of this effort will be far-reaching, benefitting not just trail users by offering a more satisfying recreation experience, but also by protecting watersheds, improving forest health, and contributing to local and regional economies that depend on forest-related recreation. This collaborative effort has the potential to have a lasting impact on quality of life for generations to come.

Accomplishing these ambitious objectives won't be easy, and there will be bumps along the way. But with the foundation of mutual respect built through this collaborative process, I feel confident we can achieve success. I am proud to join with you in this effort, and I look forward to many more good things to come.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "George Bain". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chattahoochee-Oconee Collaborative Trails (CoTrails) Initiative

Strategic Plan Executive Summary

About the CoTrails Initiative

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest receives 2.2 million visitors each year, and their primary activity is use of the forest's 850 miles of designated system trails. Hikers, cyclists, hunters, anglers, off-highway vehicle enthusiasts and equestrians all recreate on national forest trails. In 2011, the Forest Service launched a Collaborative Trails "CoTrails" Initiative by hosting a series of meetings in communities surrounding the forest to find out how different trail users could work with one another and with the Forest Service to help create a diverse, quality trail system that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable. More than 350 people attended those meetings, and a core group of forty plus volunteers coalesced to see the effort through the planning stage. The group developed a mission, guiding principles and strategic plan for the future of trail management on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

Objectives of the CoTrails Initiative

1. To reach a mutual understanding between USDA Forest Service management and staff and their clients of the responsibilities, requirements and constraints under which Forest Service land managers must do their jobs, and the needs and expectations of their clients – members of the public who use and enjoy trails in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.
2. To achieve a level of mutual respect, a spirit of collaboration and a working partnership between and among these users and the Forest Service land managers.

CoTrails Initiative Mission and Guiding Principles

Mission

To provide a diverse, quality trail experience that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable.

Guiding Principles

1. A diverse, quality trail system meets expectations of a range of users, is safe within those expectations, has a variety of terrain and routes, and is located in a natural setting. The trails include appropriate infrastructure that provides users access to a range of opportunities.
2. A maintainable trail system has the long-term commitment from the public, volunteers and the Agency. Resources, including financial and volunteer, are available to provide trail system management while protecting the natural and cultural resources.
3. An ecologically sustainable trail is maintained so negative impacts to natural and cultural resources are minimized to acceptable limits. Any new trails or reroutes will need to be properly designed and constructed.

Objectives of the Strategic Plan

1. Engage volunteer organizations, their members, and other trail users in the collaborative trails initiative and CoTrails projects
2. Conduct a professional assessment of selected Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests system trails
3. Create Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests forest-wide interactive digital map of system trails
4. Identify and assess unauthorized trails and routes in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests
5. Identify opportunities to incorporate new system trails in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

“CoTrails” Strategic Plan

*A Collaborative Initiative
Supporting the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest*

INTRODUCTION

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest (CONF) covers 867,000 acres in Georgia. It is managed by the CONF’s Supervisor’s Office in Gainesville, Georgia and its four Ranger District offices: in Chatsworth (Conasauga RD), Blairsville (Blue Ridge RD), Lakemont (Chattooga River RD) and Eatonton (Oconee RD).

The CONF offers more than 2.2 million annual visitors extensive opportunities to enjoy many types of recreational experiences on Forest trails, rivers, lakes and Wilderness areas.

There are a total of 850 miles of officially designated system trails. Approximately 645 of these are accessible to hikers, 169 to mountain bikers, 251 to horseback riders and 203 to motorized vehicles (ATV’s, motorcycles, Jeeps, etc.). There are also approximately 1,600 miles of Forest Service Roads open to traffic for all users.

The CONF trails program operates on an average budget of \$400,000, not including grant funding. These funds partially finance 9 employees on the Forest to accomplish trails-related maintenance and management. In 2010, the contributions of volunteers who assist CONF land managers with maintenance, repair and construction tasks on trails and campgrounds in the Forest were estimated to total \$819,479, or the equivalent of 21 full time employees (“FTEs”).

The current national economic situation and federal budget pressures are having an adverse impact on USFS financial and personnel resources. To sustain or enhance the current level of recreational opportunities on CONF trails and campgrounds will require an expansion of the current volunteer base and increased participation and contributions from them.



Grand opening of the Dry Creek MultiUse Trail System

BACKGROUND

Late in 2007, the CONF leadership team welcomed the arrival of a new Forest Supervisor, followed in 2008 by a new Recreation Program Manager, and by the assignment of the former Blue Ridge District Ranger as Engineering and Recreation Staff Officer.

Traditionally, volunteer organizations representing the main user groups of recreational Forest trails (hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, and motorized vehicles) established relationships with land managers in the CONF Ranger Districts, but there was little contact or cooperation between and among the different user groups on or off the trails.

Team Conasauga, the trail maintenance volunteer group started in the Conasauga Ranger District many years ago, has been an exception by bringing together volunteers from the different user groups to perform trail maintenance on regularly scheduled monthly workdays. This group has contributed to collaboration and on-the-ground cooperation by individual members of the various user groups, but by its nature, not generally among the organizations that represent them.

Since the arrival of the new CONF Forest Supervisor in 2007, the approach by the Supervisor's Office and the four Ranger Districts has been very proactive and collaborative. The CONF Leadership Team has fostered and facilitated communication and cooperation between and among CONF clients – members of the principal user groups of the Forest and their volunteer leadership.

The CONF Leadership Team has also created opportunities for the principal user groups to work more closely with CONF staff – and with each other – in specific projects dealing with the management and maintenance of recreational trails in the Forest. As a result, existing partnerships between user groups and the CONF have been strengthened, and new collaborative relationships have been created between volunteer user groups themselves. These new collaborative relationships began as the USFS engaged user groups in the planning and implementation of trail projects, in addition to assisting in maintenance needs.

Excellent examples are the Jake & Bull Trails Assessment and subsequent re-routes and other improvements; the Conasauga Ranger District Horse Trails Assessment and implementation of its recommendations – some completed and others currently underway; the Dry Creek Trails System development and construction – inaugurated in June 2011; and the Beasley Knob OHV Trail Assessment and upcoming project work.

These recent projects offer enhanced multi-use recreational experiences to members of the CONF constituencies. All have been designed to be maintainable, ecologically sustainable, and all enjoy the formal commitment of volunteer organizations to perform trail maintenance work and upkeep of trailheads and campgrounds as needed.

COLLABORATIVE TRAILS “COTRAILS” INITIATIVE

Caring for the Land and Serving People. This motto of the U.S. Forest Service often puts its land managers in the difficult position of having to manage competing and conflicting interests.

In an effort to better serve the “People” side of their motto, the leadership team of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests (CONF) in Georgia embarked on an initiative to engage their recreational clients – those who use and enjoy the many miles of trails in the Forests – in a constructive dialogue.

The objectives of this dialogue were:

- To reach a mutual understanding between USFS management & staff, and their clients, of the responsibilities, requirements and constraints under which USFS land managers must do their jobs, and the needs and expectations of their clients – members of the public who use and enjoy trails in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.
- To achieve a level of mutual respect, a spirit of collaboration and a working partnership between and among these users and the USFS land managers.

In the summer of 2010, the CONF Forest Supervisor, George Bain, invited a small group of key representatives of the principal user groups to begin a conversation and chart a course that would lead to the achievement of these objectives. This small “core team”¹ represented the main recreational user groups of the Forest: hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians and motorized drivers/OHV riders.

During the next several months, and through a series of meetings and working sessions, the core team defined a process by which the objectives of the proposed dialogue between the USFS-CONF management and its clients would be pursued.

The process was branded the ***USFS-CONF Collaborative Trails (CoTrails) Initiative*** and the core team arrived at a mission statement and guiding principles for the work to follow.



MISSION STATEMENT

To provide a diverse, quality trail experience that is maintainable and ecologically sustainable.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. A diverse, quality trail system meets expectations of a range of users, is safe within those expectations, has a variety of terrain and routes, and is located in a natural setting. The trails include appropriate infrastructure that provides users access to a range of opportunities.
2. A maintainable trail system has the long-term commitment from the public, volunteers and the Agency. Resources, including financial and volunteer, are available to provide trail system management while protecting the natural and cultural resources.
3. An ecologically sustainable trail is maintained so negative impacts to natural and cultural resources are minimized to acceptable limits. Any new trails or reroutes will need to be properly designed and constructed.

SUMMARY OF THE “HERE & NOW”

Early in 2011, during February and March, the Forest Supervisor and his staff convened a series of public meetings in five locations around the state: Blue Ridge, Clarkesville, Dalton, Eatonton and Kennesaw. Their purpose was to inform the public and primarily recreational users of Forest trails from the principal user groups, about the dialogue that had been started and to provide an opportunity for comments and input that would enhance the Collaborative Trails Initiative.

There was extensive participation and constructive dialogue at each of the public meetings, which were attended, in total, by more than 350 individuals, ranging from about 30 in some locations, to over 100 in Blue Ridge. All comments from the public were noted and reviewed by USFS-CONF management and the “core team,” and assembled into general categories by subjects or issues.

A Collaborative Trails Initiative meeting was convened at the CONF Forest Supervisor’s Office in Gainesville on April 30, 2011 to update participants in the earlier public input meetings, review their comments and input, and discuss next steps.

Four categories of interest or concern to the participants stood out.

- Communications
- Education
- Resources
- Volunteer Coordination

¹ Appendix 1 lists the members of the core team and the organizations and user groups they represent.

The core team decided a group was needed to address each of these issues, and so four working groups were formed to discuss, analyze and develop action plans to address them.

In parallel with the evolving CoTrails collaborative process, an idea for garnering adequate funding for conducting a professional trails analysis of specific problem trails across the CONF was conceived by the original core team and conceptually shared with the evolving larger group of participants. Discussion led to general acceptance that this approach would be useful in getting the analysis done in a timely manner but there was concern about costs. Georgia ForestWatch had previously engaged a major funder for financial support of a trails analysis while USFS staff also investigated applying for a US Department of Transportation Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant.

Concurrently, the four CONF Ranger Districts were requested to provide a list of problem trails for analysis, which now totals nearly 200 trail miles to be professionally assessed. At this time, the two funding approaches have procured \$169,000 for conducting a professional trail assessment, with proposals for specific trail improvements. An educational component will help CoTrails participants understand the concepts and practices of trails sustainability and include them in the analysis and planning process. Implementation of final trails improvements will be subject to the usual National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. Only then can on- the-ground work begin.

Participants at the April 30 CoTrails meeting, in the earlier public input meetings, and any other interested individuals, were invited to join one of the four working groups, depending on their interest, experience or skills.

The four groups worked through the summer of 2011 and presented their final Action Plans at a Collaborative Trails Initiative meeting at the CONF Forest Supervisor's Office in Gainesville on August 16, 2011. The Action Plans developed by the *Communications, Education, Resources and Volunteer Coordination Working Groups* are posted on the CoTrails website at www.CoTrails.org.

A proposal was made by the August 16 meeting participants that the four Action Plans be integrated into a comprehensive CoTrails Strategic Plan to serve as a road map for implementation of the suggestions and recommendations made to date in this process.

Additionally, a proposal was made to form a CoTrails Working Group to develop the strategic plan and guide the process going forward for the next several months. At the conclusion of the August 16, 2011 meeting, nine individuals were elected by the participants to serve on the new CoTrails Working Group.² Their proposed CoTrails Strategic Plan for FY2012 follows below.

In summary, the CoTrails Initiative has led to a very constructive dialogue between the CONF land managers and the leadership of the principal user groups, and increasingly between and among the user groups themselves. Collaborative relationships have been established resulting in new opportunities to work together on policy issues affecting Forest recreational trails and on the design, construction and maintenance of multi-use trails in the CONF.

COTRAILS INITIATIVE – ORGANIZATION & MANAGEMENT

The CoTrails Initiative Strategic Plan was presented for discussion and approval at the CoTrails volunteers meeting October 11, 2011 held at the CONF Supervisor's Office in Gainesville.

There was consensus from those present that the plan was well structured, set out appropriate goals, objectives, timelines and accountability in keeping with the recommendations outlined in the four Action Plans.

As follow-up to the meeting, all CoTrails participants were given the opportunity to carefully review the strategic plan, indicate approval and provide comments. This was done via an email communication and a short but effective online survey instrument. All respondents were overwhelmingly in support of the strategic plan, with the exception of one respondent who objected to Strategic Objective #4. Another respondent approved of the plan but expressed reservations about Strategic Objective #5. A summary of all responses is contained in the spreadsheet that is attached.

At a meeting on November 9, 2011, the CoTrails Working Group reviewed all responses. Those considered appropriate have been incorporated in this updated version of the plan, which will next be presented formally to the CONF Forest Leadership Team on November 29, 2011.

Achievement of each of the five Strategic Objectives will require execution of action items included in the four Action Plans: *Communications, Education, Resources and Volunteer Coordination*. Elements of each of these four plans are embedded in the five Strategic Objectives.

Those action items will be grouped into smaller, more detailed projects that will require CoTrail volunteers to carry them out and team leaders to accept responsibility and be accountable for seeing them through to completion. The first of these project teams will be organized during the next CoTrails meeting on January 24, 2012 to begin work that will support Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 3. Other project teams will be organized later as the work progresses.

The CoTrails Working Group will perform a guiding, monitoring and reporting role to make sure that timely progress is made to accomplish the five Strategic Objectives for FY2012, and that volunteer members of the CoTrails Initiative, other users of the Forest, interested citizens and the public at large are routinely informed and engaged.



Breakout session at the public meeting in Clarkesville, GA

² Appendix 2 lists the members of the CoTrails Working Group and the organizations / user groups they represent

COTRAILS STRATEGIC PLAN

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, APPROACH & EXPECTED RESULTS

For the federal FY 2012 (Oct 1, 2011 -- Sep 30, 2012), with calendar year timelines

1. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Engage Volunteer Organizations, their Members, and Other Trail Users in the Collaborative Trails Initiative & CoTrails Projects

Rationale:

Recreational opportunities in the National Forests will be diminished if they are only managed and maintained by USFS staff. Volunteer contributions will be essential to sustain, maintain and improve the current trails infrastructure on the CONF. The future of recreational trails in the CONF relies on a close cooperative and communicative relationship between USFS-CONF management and the leaders and members of the Forest's principal user groups, volunteer organizations and engaged citizens.

Approach:

- a. Develop a proactive communications system to inform volunteer organizations, their members, and other trail users on the CoTrails Initiative progress and engage their participation in upcoming CoTrails projects
- b. Identify volunteer organizations whose members regularly use recreational trails
- c. Identify organizations with active programs to maintain system trails
- d. Monitor and provide oversight of the volunteer trail work performed by members of these organizations and other trail users
- e. Develop literature and materials to educate volunteers, trail users and the public on the prerequisites for volunteerism, on what constitutes a maintainable, sustainable trail, and on responsible trail use
- f. Launch an aggressive campaign to recruit volunteer groups and individuals who will commit to maintain trail sections under an "adopt-a-trail" or similar program
- g. Develop formal and regularly offered volunteer training & certification programs

Expected Results:

- (1) A "dynamic" and easily maintainable database of volunteer organizations active in the CoTrails initiative and its projects
- (2) Active volunteer participation in CoTrails projects, including ongoing trail maintenance, and additional volunteer recruitment and retention
- (3) Education of volunteers, recreational trail users, and the public at large in appropriate trail etiquette, Leave No Trace principles & practices, crew leader training, and the responsible use and care of recreational trails in the Forest

(4) A growing number of trained volunteers prepared to help identify problem areas and determine maintenance needs on trails they frequent and/or that their volunteer organizations have adopted

(5) A trail “use and conditions” reporting process for volunteers that is system-wide and uniform across the four USFS-CONF Ranger Districts

Timeline:

- a. b. & c. Began Q3CY2011; In progress Q4CY2011 and continue going forward
- d. e. f. & g. Begin Q1CY2012 and continue going forward

Organization Responsible:

- a. CoTrails Initiative volunteers with communications skills and experience
- b. c. e. f. & g. CoTrails volunteers and leaders of user groups with communications, education and training skills and experience; oversight by CoTrails Working Group
- d. CoTrails Working Group

2. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Conduct Professional Assessment of Selected Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests System Trails

Rationale:

Many CONF recreational system trails are not sustainable in their present condition, either because of severe overuse or abuse, a maintenance backlog, or because they were ill constructed before they were incorporated as system trails. A professional assessment will help USFS-CONF land managers determine which trails need repair or improvement, which ones should be re-routed and which ones should be closed.

Approach:

- a. Select and contract with one or more pre-qualified professional trail builders to conduct assessments on approximately 200 miles of trails selected by USFS-CONF staff*
- b. Utilize this opportunity to engage volunteers, educate them on the USFS Trails Classification System, and train them to help identify problem areas and determine maintenance needs
- c. Include in contract requirements an education and training component to prepare qualified volunteers to perform future trail evaluations
- d. Develop criteria and forms to be utilized by qualified volunteers in performing future evaluations of the trail system and reporting problem areas
- e. Develop an aggressive outreach through volunteer organizations to recruit qualified members to participate in this training

*Georgia ForestWatch, a 501(c)(3) conservation focused non-profit organization, made an early pledge toward the cost of these assessments. GAFW also has solicited matching contributions from other donors, which are further supplemented by a recently approved U.S. Department of Transportation Recreational Trails Project (RTP) grant.

Expected Results:

- (1) A report on the current condition of the trails selected for assessment and on the scope of work required to repair, re-route or close the trails that are not up to USFS standards
- (2) A cadre of trained volunteers prepared to help identify problem areas and determine maintenance needs
- (3) A trail “use and conditions” reporting process for volunteers that is system-wide and uniform across the four USFS-CONF Ranger Districts

Timeline:

a. > e. Contract awarded 12/7/11; Expected Results Achieved by June 1, 2012

Organization Responsible:

a. > e. USFS-CONF, with volunteers engaged in training and education component

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Create Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Forest-wide Interactive Digital Map of System Trails

Rationale:

Recreational trail maps currently available online on the CONF website have been created over time and do not always conform to a uniform standard of data, information, and detail. A single centrally maintained and regularly updated Forest-wide digital map that is user-friendly, interactive, easily navigable and readily downloadable will be of great benefit to Forest users and a major asset for USFS-CONF staff to effectively manage and supervise the CONF trails system.

Approach:

- a. Review the CONF’s existing authorized trail data and maps currently available on the CONF website, determine their accuracy and update those that are not current
- b. Select and install an easily navigable, user-friendly, interactive online viewer to publish the maps online and allow for easy downloads
- c. Use the CONF website to publish the new comprehensive Forest-wide digital trails map online
- d. Use the digital map to overlay unauthorized trails and help determine their suitability for adoption into the CONF’s authorized trails system, to consider re-routes, or to decide on closure (see Strategic Objective #4)
- e. Use the digital map to overlay proposed new trails and help determine their potential for adoption into the CONF’s authorized trails system (see Strategic Objective #5)

Expected Results:

(1) A comprehensive and user-friendly USFS-CONF Forest-wide online trails map that is interactive, easily navigable by all users, continuously updated, and readily downloadable in logical and practical geographic sections

Timeline:

- a. Mostly completed; updates ongoing
- b. Begin ASAP; complete by Q1CY2012 (beta test site set up Dec 2011)
- c. Begin Q1CY2012; complete by Q3CY2012
- d. Begin when Strategic Objective #4 is underway e. Begin when Strategic Objective #5 is underway

Organization Responsible:

a. > e. USFS-CONF, with assistance and support from CoTrails Initiative volunteers with GIS / digital mapping skills and experience

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Identify and Assess Unauthorized Trails and Routes in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Rationale:

There are many miles of non-system trails created in the Forest over the years by users without the authority to do so. There are also many miles of old roads that are not in the CONF official trails system but are used routinely as Forest trails. Many sections of unauthorized user-created trails and non-system old roads currently used are sustainable, and could meet USFS requirements to be approved and added to the CONF official trails system. Many other sections, however, are poorly situated on the terrain and/or badly constructed, creating significant resource damage and making them unsustainable. Identifying and assessing unauthorized non-system trails will make it possible to disable those that are unsustainable while providing opportunities to consider new trail miles for adoption into the CONF official trails system creating enhanced recreational experiences for all users.

Approach:

- a. Solicit the collaboration of volunteer organizations to encourage their members, familiar with regularly used non-system trails, to provide details of locations, conditions and frequency of use
- b. Create a map of the unauthorized non-system trails that are identified
- c. Identify which unauthorized trails are in irreparable condition or poorly located on the terrain to make them unsustainable

Expected Results:

- (1) An inventory of unauthorized trails in the CONF that includes location maps
- (2) Trail condition reports that describe the current state and characteristics of each unauthorized trail identified
- (3) Trail “use and conditions” reports of each unauthorized trail identified to assist the USFS-CONF land managers in reviewing and determining which trails should be closed and which ones have potential to be improved or re-routed

Timeline:

- a. > c. Begin 4QCY2012, after the CONF Trails Assessment (Strategic Objective #2) is completed and results analyzed

Organization Responsible:

- a. > c. Relevant volunteer organizations in cooperation with USFS-CONF staff

5. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: Identify opportunities to incorporate new system trails in the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Rationale:

While many areas of the CONF provide extensive recreational system trail miles, there are other areas where user groups are underserved, or are limited to out-and-back trails vs. loop trails of varying distances, visual experiences or degrees of difficulty. There are opportunities to provide additional system trail miles in the underserved areas and to enhance current trails by adding short connectors and/or new trails to create loops.

Approach:

- a. Identify areas of the Forest where recreational opportunities exist for new system trails and demand from user groups is underserved
- b. Determine logical routes for potential new system trails that provide pleasant hiking or riding experiences through variety of trail lengths, degrees of difficulty, visual characteristics and convenient connectors & loops
- c. Conduct preliminary GPS mapping of these proposed new routes by trained volunteers from the various user groups, in close coordination with USFS-CONF land managers

- d. Identify and, whenever possible, incorporate in any proposed new route existing unauthorized non-system trails that are situated properly on the terrain and are in suitable condition to be upgraded, or re-routed as needed, and can be sustainably maintained by volunteer organizations' members
- e. Present formal requests to USFS-CONF management for consideration of proposed new system trails and assist where appropriate in their analysis and evaluation process, subject to the guidelines of the CONF Forest Plan and NEPA requirements
- f. Conduct trail assessments (similar to Strategic Objective No. 2 #2 above) of those trails that have potential to be approved and incorporated as system-trails, subject to guidelines of the CONF Forest Plan, NEPA requirements and the commitment of a volunteer organization(s) to maintain them

Expected Results:

- (1) Detailed information and characteristics of potential new trails to be incorporated into the USFS-CONF official recreational trails system
- (2) Selected additional miles of new sustainable and maintainable system trails that provide pleasant hiking or riding experiences through variety of trail lengths, degrees of difficulty, visual characteristics and convenient connectors & loops

Timeline:

- a. > e. Begin after 2QCY2012, as volunteer organizations with trained members wish to propose new routes, loops or connectors, except where underserved areas of opportunities have already been identified and authorized for analysis by CONF land managers

Organization Responsible:

Relevant volunteer organizations with "member volunteer forces" trained to perform this work and committed to maintain any new trails or trail segments that are approved and incorporated into the USFS-CONF recreational trails system



Trail discussion on the Jake and Bull Trail System

Appendix 1 – Original Core Team Members / User Groups Convened by Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Forest Supervisor to Discuss & Chart CoTrails Initiative

Conservation: Wayne Jenkins, Georgia ForestWatch

Equestrian: Debbie Crowe, Chattahoochee Trail Horse Association

Hiking: Gary Monk, Georgia Appalachian Trail Club

Motorized: Dave Logan, Southern 4WD Association

Mountain Biking: Tom Sauret, Southern Off Road Bicycling Association (SORBA) & International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)

Appendix 2 – CoTrails Working Group Members and Brief Profiles

Debbie Crowe rides her horse for pleasure on forest trails. She is a former president of the Chattahoochee Trail Horse Association (CTHA) and currently serves as CTHA’s USFS liaison. CTHA members are very active volunteers who perform regular maintenance on many trails in the CONF, and on state and local equestrian parks. CTHA has adopted the Jake & Bull multi-use trail system and campgrounds in the Blue Ridge Ranger District and Debbie has been instrumental in leading volunteer teams in making repairs, designing & building re-routes and performing routine maintenance on trails and campgrounds, very often in partnership and collaboration with SORBA members and volunteers. Her “other” full-time job is as a financial manager with The Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta. Debbie and her family live on a horse farm in Loganville.

Bill Decker is an avid hiker and ATV rider, having logged many miles and hours on Forest trails. In 2010 he “thru-hiked” the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. Bill joined the CoTrails Initiative at its inception and led the CoTrails Resource Group to develop its action plan, which contained many recommendations now included in the CoTrails Strategic Plan. He was co-founder of Lydian Trust Company and VirtualBank and founder of Lydian Data Services. Bill is a chartered financial analyst and consults regularly with a number of large institutions on banking, fixed income, information technology and mortgage banking. He lives on Lake Blue Ridge in Fannin County.

Joe Gatins is a long time member of Georgia Forest Watch where he has served as a former board member and board president and is now volunteer district leader for ForestWatch on the Chattooga River Ranger District. Joe has been involved in the CoTrails initiative since it was launched and served as a member of the Communications Group. He replaces Wayne Jenkins on the CoTrails Working Group. Wayne, former executive director of Georgia Forest Watch, accepted a new challenge as executive director of Inletkeepers, an organization dedicated to protecting Alaska's Cook Inlet watershed. After years of urban living and a fast paced career in journalism, Joe now enjoys his time tending to his organic garden – he's a certified organic grower – and in the National Forests of North Georgia. He lives in Rabun County, near Clayton.

Dave Logan enjoys driving his Jeep on dedicated Forest trails. He is a member of several organizations dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of single-purpose motorized trails on public lands where he has held leadership positions. After the launch of the CoTrails initiative, Dave served as a member of the CoTrails Resource Group. Dave is vice-president of the International 4WD Trainers' Association. He founded the 4WD School in Georgia, which provides professional training to 4WD vehicle drivers in large international corporations, US government agencies and military personnel in the US and overseas as well as recreational 4WD club members. He is also a Master *Tread Lightly!* Trainer. He lives in Roswell.

Carlos Martel rides his horse "Martel's Cognac" for pleasure on forest trails. He has been involved in the CoTrails Initiative since it was launched and served on the CoTrails Resource Group. He is a member and officer of Back Country Horsemen of North Georgia (BCHNG) and of BCH of Georgia. In 2006, BCHNG and the USFS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding whereby BCHNG adopted the Jacks River Fields Campground and Horse Camp in the Cohutta Mountains of the Conasauga Ranger District. Since then, BCHNG volunteers have performed all maintenance tasks at the campground and on nearby multi-use trails. Carlos enjoyed a career in international business, including serving as Deputy Commissioner for International Trade at the Georgia Department of Economic Development. He lives on a horse farm in Mineral Bluff.

Gary Monk is a dedicated hiker and long-time member and former president of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club (GATC) where he currently serves as USFS liaison. He and other GATC members have logged thousands of volunteer hours performing maintenance, repairs and reroutes on this historic trail. Those are only surpassed by Gary's hours and miles hiking the AT and other famous trails across the US and overseas. In 2002, he "thru-hiked" the AT from Georgia to Maine. Currently, Gary is GATC's project leader, managing the reconstruction of the roof and other elements of an historic 1930's CCC built shelter atop Blood Mountain in the Blue Ridge Ranger District. A true example of CoTrails collaboration, the building materials have been transported up the mountain under a special USFS permit by a pack team of horses & mules led by a BCHNG member. After the launch of the CoTrails Initiative, Gary led the CoTrails Volunteer Coordination Group to develop its action plan, which contained many recommendations now embedded in the CoTrails Strategic Plan. Gary enjoyed a distinguished career as a Delta Air Lines pilot and was a Boeing 767 Captain, the largest aircraft in the fleet at the time of his retirement. He lives on several wooded acres in Cobb County, near Marietta.

David Muse is a committed volunteer and serious mountain biker and long-time member of IMBA- SORBA. In November 2011 he completed the Cross Florida Individual Time Trial (CFiTT), a mostly off-road mountain bike race along a 180-ish mile route around central Florida. He has been involved from the start of the CoTrails Initiative and led the CoTrails Education Group that contributed a number of important recommendations to be executed during the implementation of the CoTrails Strategic Plan. David is an Information Technology entrepreneur. He has recently launched FirstWorks.com, a technology start-up providing consulting, support and database integration services. He lives in Cumming.

Keith Owen is also a dedicated volunteer and mountain biker, long time member of IMBA & SORBA. He serves on IMBA-SORBA's regional leadership advisory committee and as liaison with the USFS Chatooga River Ranger District. Previously he served on SORBA's board and as its executive board president, as well as chapter president of the Upper Chattahoochee Cycling Club. He also serves on the Georgia Trails and Greenways Committee. He has been involved in the CoTrails Initiative from the outset and served on the CoTrails Volunteer Coordination Group that contributed a number of important recommendations to be executed during the implementation of the CoTrails Strategic Plan. Keith replaces Tom Sauret, IMBA-SORBA's southeast regional director, on the CoTrails Working Group. Tom has had to step down due to his demanding work and travel schedule. Keith is capacity planner with Ethicon, Inc., a worldwide supplier of suture materials, subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson. He lives in Habersham County, near Mount Airy.