



CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST

PUBLIC MEETING

SANTA CATALINA TRAIL PLAN

November 9 & 17, 2022

SANTA CATALINA TRAIL PLAN

- Purpose and Context
- What the Plan Is and Is Not
- The Current Trail System
- Top Issues
- Goals, Objectives and Strategies
- Let's talk about [insert your recreation activity here]...
- Highlighted Projects
- How to Provide Feedback



WHY TRAIL PLANNING?

A system of trails and trail access points that will meet the needs of current and future users.
Ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable.



A rare empty moment along the Catalina Highway

Value to the Community

- Used by 70%+ of Coronado visitors
- Health and quality of life
- Tourism economy

Evolving and Increasing Visitor Use

- Population growth
- The pandemic use bump
- Rise of trail running, mountain biking, through-hiking, climbing...overall backcountry to frontcountry shift

Bighorn Fire

- Impacted 175 miles of the trail system
- Erosion and safety issues



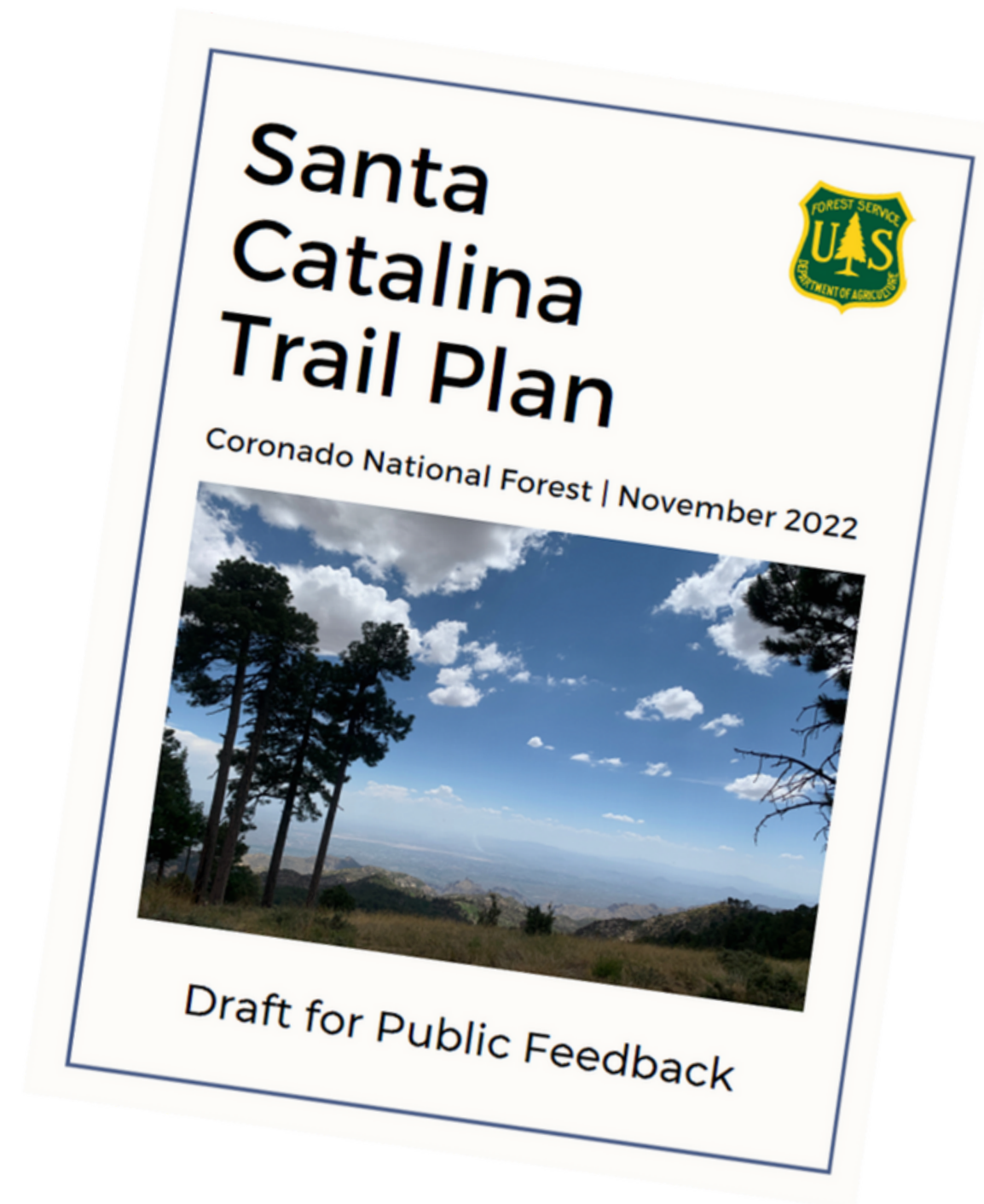
WHAT IS THE TRAIL PLAN?

A 15-year framework for prioritizing work

Aspirational

Conceptual, generally scouted for feasibility but details may change

Driven by public comment and partner collaboration



WHAT IS IT NOT?

Not a formal proposal or decision under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Not fully reviewed for all environmental effects, and cleared for construction



The Santa Catalinas and Rincons are an incredible community resource



70 Bighorn Sheep and counting

Cultural and Tribal
Significance

Wildlife Habitat

Working Landscape

Scientific Research

Water Source



*Keeping an eye out for near
Earth Objects*



WHAT GUIDES OUR PLANNING & MANAGEMENT?

Forest Plan (2018)

Example guidance for the Santa Catalina Ecosystem Management Area...

"...a wide spectrum of developed recreation opportunities for a growing population, while large tracts of undeveloped areas remain for primitive and dispersed recreation."

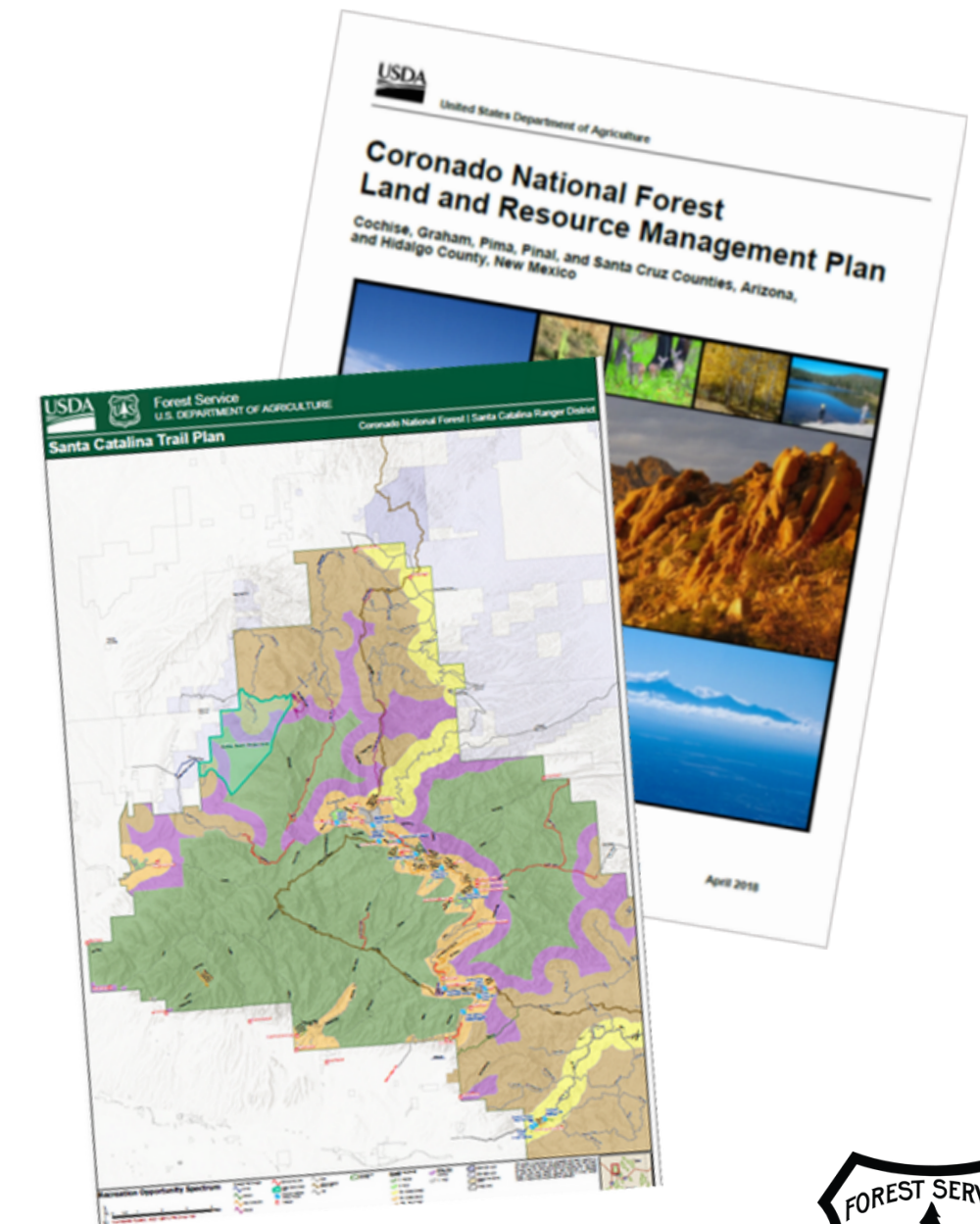
Or Designated Wilderness.... *"New trail construction should only be considered if the objective is to enhance wilderness character (to control overuse or limit resource degradation)."*

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, Land Use Zones guide recreation experiences

Law and Policy

Wilderness Act - National Trail System Act – Endangered Species Act – USFS
Manuals, Handbooks and Directives

5 Year Coronado NF Sustainable Recreation Action Plan (2021)



THE CURRENT TRAIL SYSTEM



WHAT'S OUT THERE NOW?

**Total National Forest System (NFS)
Trails | 250 miles**

Wilderness | 113 miles (47%)

Non-Wilderness | 128 miles (53%)

**Miles Practical for/used for Mountain
Biking | ~55-60 miles (25%)**

**Unauthorized Trails | ~40 miles well
used, another ~200 miles of routes**



Lower Oracle Ridge Trail





53 miles of the
Arizona National Scenic Trail
+ a recommended 22-mile
route around the wilderness

Hutch's Pool



WHO USES TRAILS?

63% of all Pima County residents report using trails in the last 12 months

For Pima County Residents as a whole...

- 62% hike, trail run, or backpack
- 16% ride a quad, side by side, or ATV/UTV
- 16% ride a mountain bike
- 13% ride a dirt bike
- 12% ride horses
- A few impressive people do all five?

Of Trail Users...

- 80% participated in non-motorized activities
- 20% participated in motorized activities



WHAT CAN WE PROVIDE WELL?

USFS Staffing and Financial Capacity

One full-time trails/dispersed recreation specialist for SCRD

- Avg \$50,000 in trails funding each year across Coronado NF
- Avg \$40,000 in fee collections at Catalina Highway trailheads (primarily used for facility service and maintenance)

Estimated Value and Impact

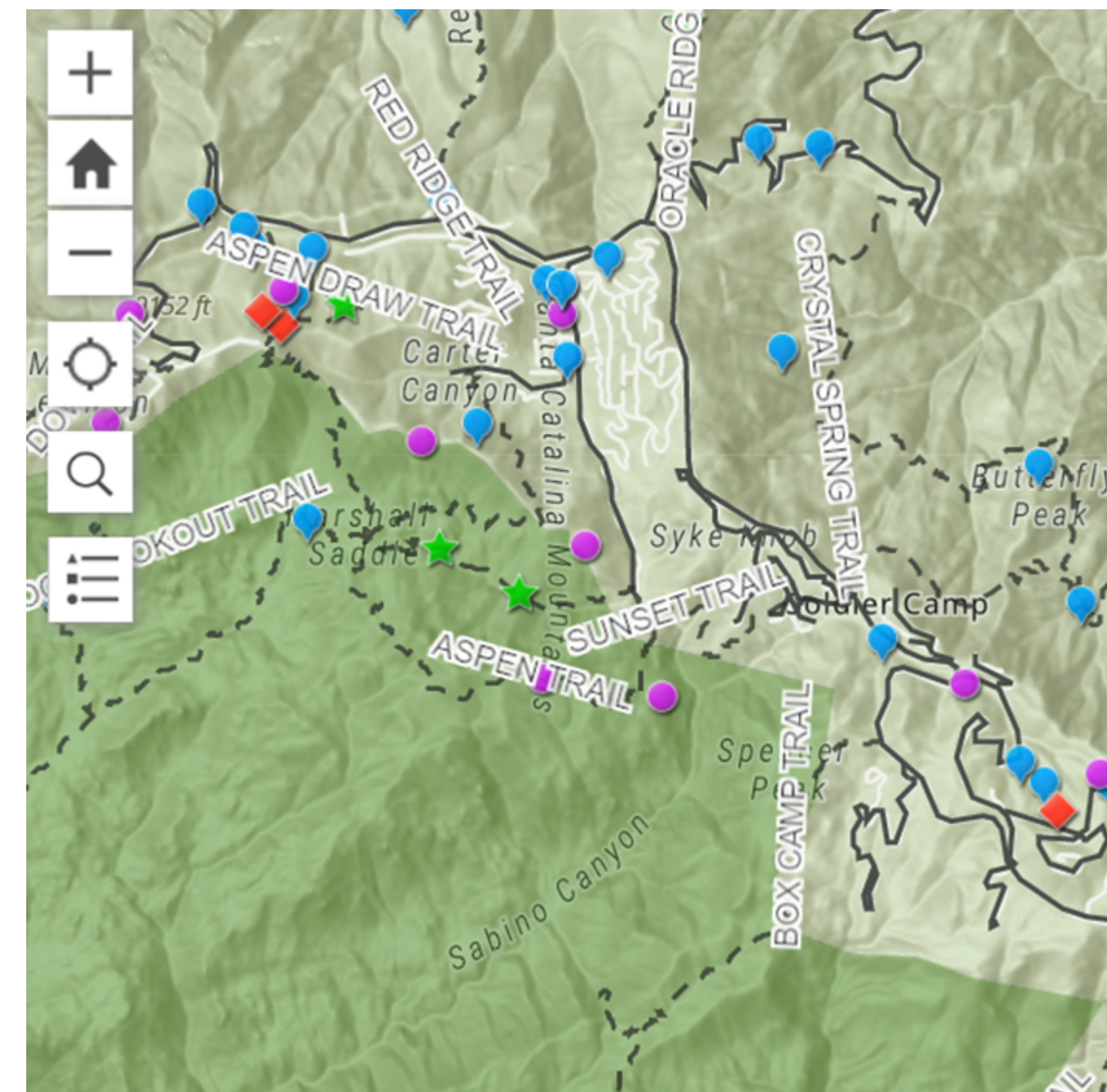
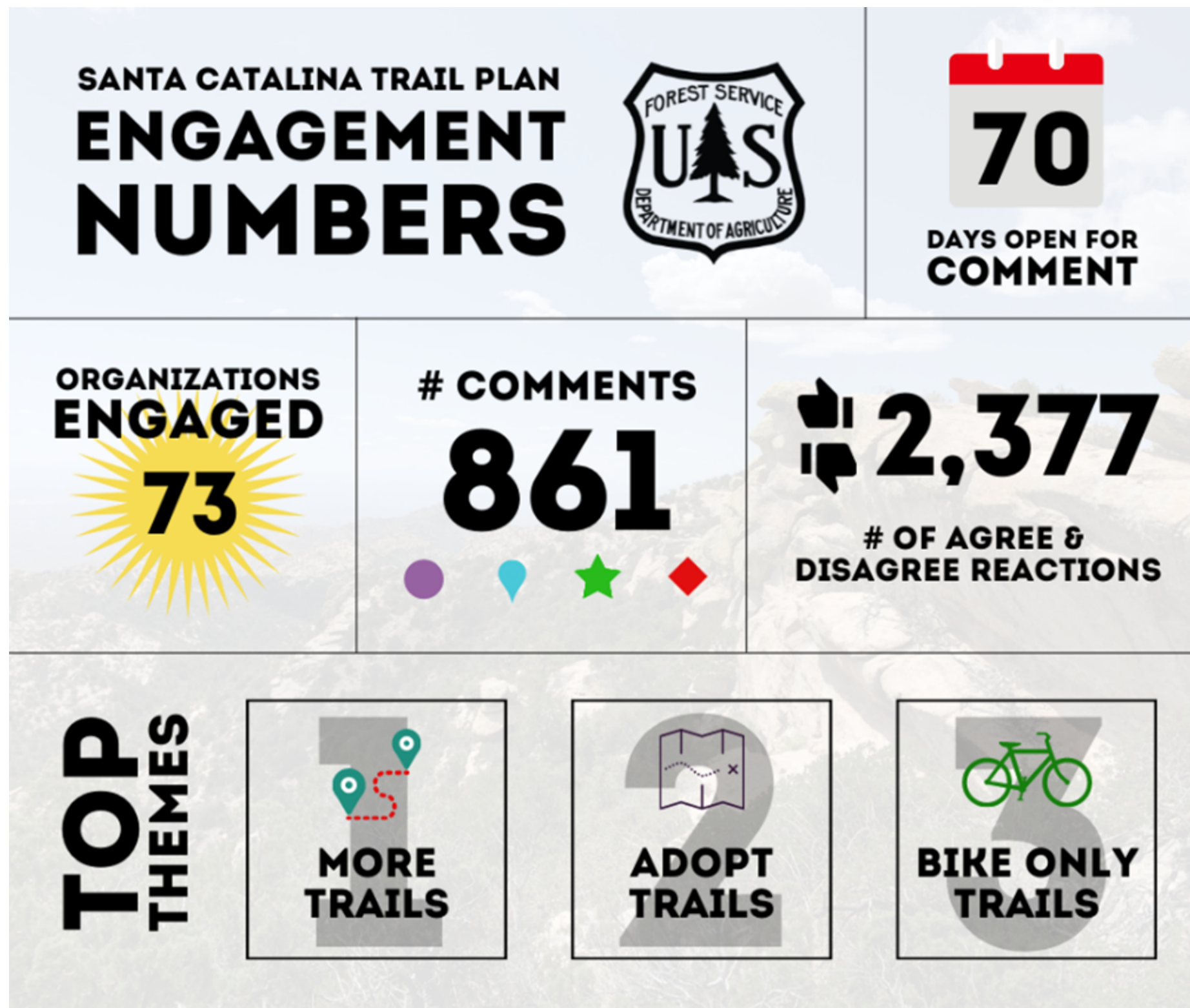
Trail-related volunteer time in FY2019... Worth almost \$1 million (at \$27/hour)

- 12,000 hours of trail maintenance
- 24,000 hours of patrol



Happy trail volunteers in a dry canyon





Drop a dot, share an opinion





Time to turn around

TOP ISSUES

- Lack of legal, permanent public access in some areas
- Imbalance in trail difficulty – plenty of hard trails out there, but not too many easy ones!
- Limited connectivity
- Visitors don't accurately reflect our community
- Limited agency resources for maintenance and patrol
- Desire for more mountain biking - one quarter of current system usable by mountain bikes
- Wildfires mean trail damage and higher future maintenance costs
- Recreation-caused impacts to wildlife and soils



RECENT & PLANNED INVESTMENTS



Approved & Upcoming

- Renovate Marshall Gulch Picnic Area and Trailhead
- Tanque Verde Falls Recreation Enhancement Project
- Sabino Canyon restroom replacements and day use area improvements
- Third phase of Bighorn Fire disaster relief trail maintenance

Completed 2021/2022

- Toilet Replacement at Rose Canyon, Bear Canyon
- Sabino Canyon Recreation Area Pavement replacement
- \$150k+ of Bighorn Fire trail rehab supported by National Forest Foundation and others



TRAIL PLAN DIRECTION





MAIN TENSION IN THIS PROJECT...

Lots of requests for **more and better maintained trails**, but resources and the landscape are finite.

Planning is about tradeoffs, balance, and priorities.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES - THE HIGHLIGHTS

Work to get permanent, legal access to the forest

- Golder Ranch/50 Year, Charouleau Gap Rd, Milagrosa

Prevent parking issues – expand capacity where there is limited impact and cost, such as:

- Reconfiguring Palisades and Hirabayashi
- Expanding Molino

Get the Arizona National Scenic Trail off roads by 2035

- Substantial Oracle Ridge re-route
- Marshall Gulch to Summerhaven connector

Boost volunteer and partner stewardship by 20%

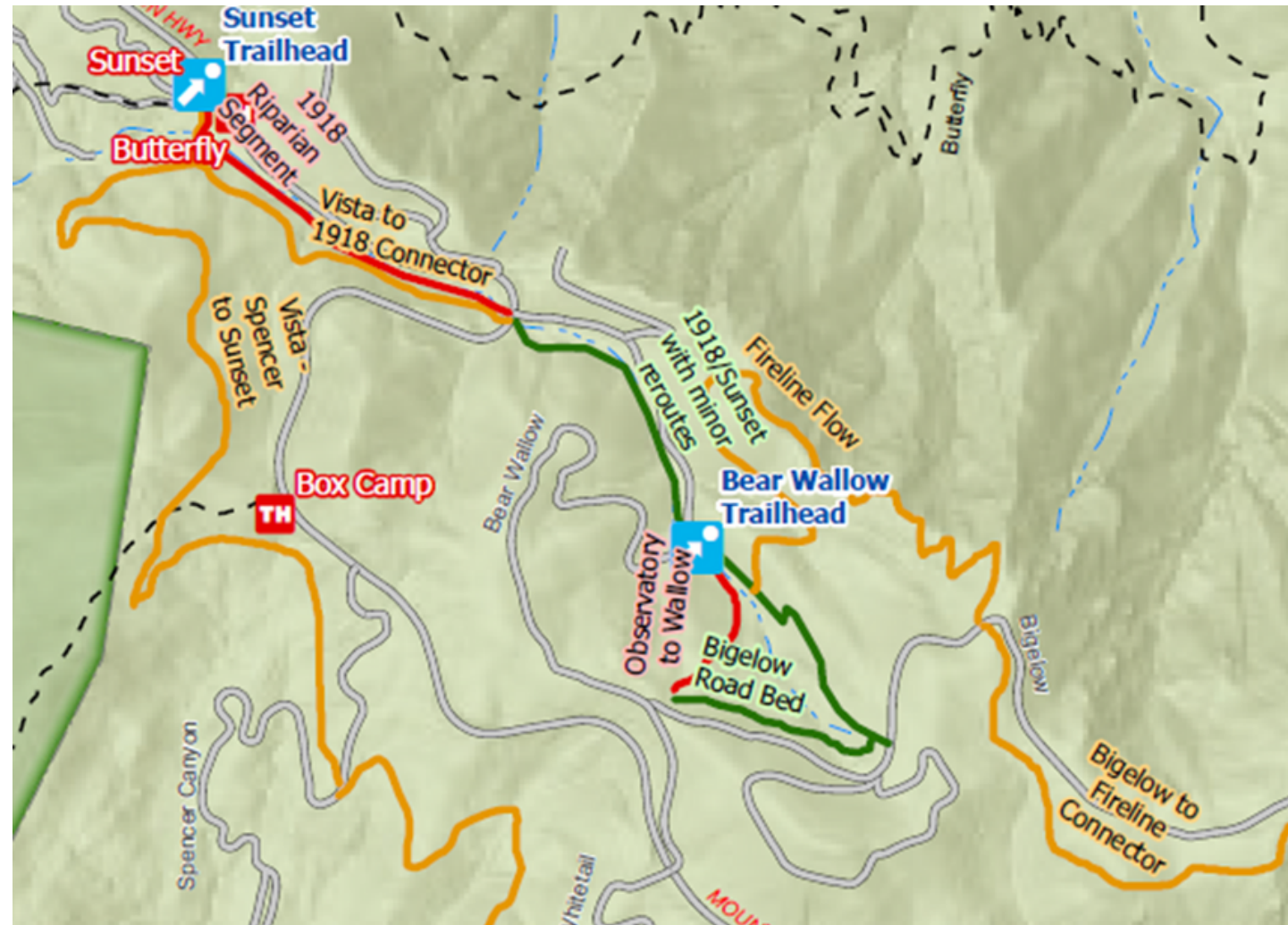
- Expand recruitment and recognition



Sure are a lot of downed trees for a desert



GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES - THE HIGHLIGHTS



Example of trail adoption (green), closure (red) and new construction in the draft plan

Achievable 10% overall system growth

- remove some trails from the system
 - + adoption
 - + new construction
- Focus adoption and new where stewardship is more attainable, and the trails are more accessible for all
 - Remove trails from the system that are very difficult to maintain, have lower levels of use or have redundancy
 - Where possible, put trails where they can be useful for other purposes (e.g. fuel breaks)



LET'S TALK ABOUT MOUNTAIN BIKING...

Top request for change during sensing

- Increase official miles available for mountain biking system
 - 55 --> 86 miles, or a 56% increase
- Trails designed for a high-quality trail experience
 - Bug Junior, Fireline Trail: mountain bike-specific design features and a downhill directional
- Adopt Golder Ranch – 50 Year System; Milagrosa
- High elevation connector – Tucson Vista



We have rocks, let's use them to create sustainable mountain bike trail features...photo courtesy BLM



LET'S TALK ABOUT HIKING...

Top recreational use of the Santa Catalina RD

- Creates safe alternatives to walking on roads
 - Rose Canyon hiker access, Marshall Gulch to Summerhaven, Oracle Ridge
- Easier, welcoming trails with views
 - Tucson Vista Trail, Tanque Verde Falls, Molino Canyon
- Loop opportunity on a popular wilderness trail
 - Finger Rock to Pontotoc Connector
- Adopt Golder Ranch – 50 Year System; Milagrosa



Trails for young and old (and even those in between)



LET'S TALK ABOUT HORSEBACK RIDING...

Important long-time use of the Catalinas

- Adopts the Golder Ranch/50 Year area, a top equestrian priority
- Improves Hirabayashi, Palisades trailer access



LET'S TALK ABOUT ROCK CLIMBING...

Growing and evolving use

- Expands visible site adoption, erosion control, and visitor information efforts to Crags against Humanity, other locations
- Future direction, including in wilderness, provided in a climbing management plan



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT #1

Tucson Vista Trail



Scenic view from the potential Tucson Vista Trail



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT #2

Golder Ranch/50 Year Trail System



The Golder Ranch/50 Year Trail System on the west foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT #3

Bug Junior



Scenic view from the potential site of Bug Junior Trail



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT #4

Crags Against Humanity



*Rock climbing crag, Crags Against Humanity, just off the Catalina Highway.
Photo: Luke Bertelsen, Mountain Project*



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT #5

Mount Lemmon Interpretive Trail



View near the summit on Mount Lemmon



PROVIDE YOUR FEEDBACK BY DECEMBER 2

- Whether the draft plan meets the overall goal of the project
- If there are projects or ideas that are missing
- What the Forest Service and our partners should prioritize

EMAIL YOUR FEEDBACK TO
SM.FS.SCRD@USDA.GOV

