

COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE

Forest Service Roads

POSITION: The Colorado Forest and Water Alliance (COFWA) advocates a multi-pronged approach to addressing the critical need for road maintenance on Colorado’s National Forests, including increasing Forest Service appropriations for road maintenance, re-authorizing and re-prioritizing the Federal Lands Transportation Program, and looking for outside partners and non-federal funding sources to help offset the costs of road work associated with low-value, high-cost vegetation projects.

BACKGROUND: COFWA advocates for accelerating the pace and scale of forest management in Colorado’s forests, including the 11.3 million acres of National Forest lands in the state, to ensure our forests are healthy and resilient. Maintaining Forest Service roads is not only critical for needed forest management and effective wildfire suppression, but also increases public access for recreation, and reduces sedimentation from poorly maintained roads that degrade water quality. It is worth noting that of the total miles of Forest Service roads, 22% are designated for low-clearance passenger cars, and over 50% are open and available for high-clearance SUVs and pickups. These roads are critically important for public access to our public lands for hunting, fishing, and most other forms of outdoor recreation.

Status of Forest Service Roads funding: The Forest Service funds the maintenance of its 380,000 miles of roads through three funding sources – discretionary appropriated funds, spending from the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP), and timber receipts. The agency has identified a nearly \$4 billion backlog for road maintenance. Unfortunately, all three funding sources are being reduced or may be eliminated.

Discretionary Appropriated Funds: Discretionary funding for Forest Service roads has stagnated for the past decade. In 2009 the roads program was funded at \$235 million and in 2019 it was funded at just under \$180 million. However, the \$180 million figure is inflated by \$40 million because in 2018 the “Legacy Roads and Trails” program was folded into the Roads program line item. *The reality is that the discretionary roads program funding, adjusting for inflation, has been reduced nearly 38 percent since 2009.* COFWA supports restoring road maintenance funding as part of the Forest Service’s efforts to increase the pace and scale of forest management – these two activities go hand in hand.

Federal Lands Transportation Program: FLTP provides mandatory funding to five Department of Interior agencies and the USDA Forest Service. The Forest Service receives about 7 percent of these funds, in spite of that fact that its road system is almost four times larger than Interior’s. In addition, even though the Forest Service road system includes approx. 83,000 miles of passenger car accessible roads, *almost 10 times as many as the National Park Service*, the NPS receives 80 percent of FLTP funding. This disproportionate allocation is difficult to reconcile with the data available.

	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	Total
NPS	\$268M	\$276M	\$284M	\$292M	\$300M	\$1.420B
FWS	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$30M	\$150M
USFS	\$15M	\$16M	\$17M	\$18M	\$19M	\$85M
BLM, USACE, BOR, and IFAs	\$22M	\$23M	\$24M	\$25M	\$26M	\$120M
Total	\$335M	\$345M	\$355M	\$365M	\$375M	\$1.775B

The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.

Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry, Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners

Approved by Consensus: XX/XX/2020

Timber Receipts: Much of the existing road system on the National Forests was initially built and funded through receipts collected from timber harvests. Beginning in 1990, timber harvesting on the National Forest dropped precipitously, especially as the majority of harvests are now focused on lower value, smaller diameter, second growth timber. Available timber revenue for road work is down 90 percent over this 40-year period. COFWA believes that with the Forest Service focusing on lower value timber – timber receipts will not be a consistent funding source for the critical road maintenance work needed on the National Forest System and that alternative funding sources must be developed.

Action Needed

- 1. Increase Forest Service appropriations for road maintenance:** Road maintenance funds must be viewed as a critical part of the Forest Service strategy to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and support effective wildfire suppression efforts– and must be funded accordingly. Maintenance of the road system will also enhance public access for recreation and improve water quality by reducing erosion and sedimentation caused by poorly maintained roads.
- 2. Re-authorize and re-prioritize the Federal Lands Transportation Program:** Support the re-authorization of this critical program and triple the amount of funding the program receives or reallocate the funding to a more equitable distribution based on miles of passenger-car roads requiring maintenance.
- 3. Look for outside partners and non-federal funding sources to help offset the costs of road work associated with low-value, high cost vegetation projects:** Encourage state, municipalities, businesses, NGOs, and various user groups to help pay for road maintenance that will benefit multiple uses. Consider programs that would leverage local user groups' interests in specific roads to develop diverse and dedicated funding sources (e.g. adopt-a-road programs funded through non-federal stakeholders).