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Forest Service taps For The Forest for Hunter Creek trail protection

New public-private partnership designed to keep public access safe

“This is Aspen’s backyard, and we’re pleased that For The Forest will help us ensure that people continue to have safe access to these high use, high value trails.”

— *Scott Fitzwilliams,*
White River National Forest Supervisor

ASPEN — The U.S. Forest Service and the nonprofit For The Forest are teaming up to keep Aspen’s “backyard” safe and accessible.

This new collaboration will allow For The Forest, under USFS direction, to perform trail safety work throughout the Hunter Creek Valley, up to the wilderness boundary. (See list of trails below.) The work will focus initially on cutting hazard trees – dead pine, fir, spruce or aspen trees – that pose a potential safety threat to hikers and bikers.

“This work is important in order to keep these trails safe — and we gratefully welcome and support this effort,” said Bill Kight, acting Aspen/Sopris District Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service. “Without For The Forest’s help, we would not be able to address health and safety issues of an over abundance of hazard trees in this area.”

For The Forest is an Aspen-based nonprofit dedicated to promoting forest health and sustainability. The organization was formed initially in response to the mountain pine beetle epidemic, and it has spent a considerable amount of energy and resources on addressing the pine beetle’s spread into the Roaring Fork Valley.

For The Forest is hosting a free public symposium on the afternoon of Dec. 17 at the Hotel Jerome Ballroom that will include preliminary results of the tree removal and beetle treatment work performed earlier this year in the Smuggler Mountain Open Space at the edge of Aspen. The symposium will also include comments from Gov. Bill Ritter and a panel discussion led by Scott Fitzwilliams, White River National Forest Supervisor. (For more on the symposium, log on to www.ForTheForest.org)

“For The Forest is thrilled to help the Forest Service keep the hiking and mountain biking trails in the Hunter Creek Valley open and safe for the public,” said John Bennett, For The Forest’s executive director. “This is just the kind of public-private partnership that is needed to address this very large issue.”

During a recent walkthrough of the “Four-Corners” area above Hunter Creek, Forest Service and For The Forest officials found more than 700 dead hazard trees along just two miles of trail.

Bennett commented on their findings: “We were surprised at the number of hazard trees in a short distance, and the majority were fir trees rather than pines. The spreading fir decline in our valley is yet more evidence of the today’s forest health challenges.”

The Aspen-Sopris Ranger Districts have been working with For the Forest through a participating agreement since August 2008. The new agreement, now being completed, comes with the support of Scott Fitzwilliams, who took advantage of For The Forest’s offer to help with public safety and forest health work in the Roaring Fork Valley. The work will be funded by For The Forest, which is seeking additional foundation help.

The new agreement allows the Forest Service to direct the manpower and financial resources provided by For The Forest to complete trail protection work that would otherwise have taxed the White River National Forest’s resources, which are currently focused on more immediate safety issues raised by the mountain pine beetle epidemic in Eagle and Summit counties.

The agreement will have the ability to expand as the Forest Service identifies more areas around the valley for protection. “Eventually, we hope to work in a variety of other areas of our valley ... from Maroon Creek to the upper Frying Pan,” said Bennett.

“This is Aspen’s backyard, and we’re pleased that For The Forest will help us ensure that people continue to have safe access to these high use, high value trails,” Fitzwilliams said.

List of Hunter Creek-area trails to be protected under the Forest Service/For the Forest agreement:

Shadyside Trail
Sunnyside Trail
Sunnyside Plunge Trail
Hobbit Trail
Repeater Road
Teapot Trail
Gandolf Trail
Hobbit Trail
Van Horn Park Trail
Hunter Creek Trail
Hunter Valley Trail
Iowa Shaft Trail
Grand Turk Trail

Smuggler Cutoff
Hunter Creek Road
Four corners Road
Bald Knob Road
Van Horn Park Road

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