United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Hoosier National Forest

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Dear Trail User:

This past fall the Hoosier National Forest conducted a series of workshops to involve trail users in a review of the current trail program adopted in 1995. This letter summarizes those workshops, and offers some suggestions for change to the existing trail program. Please take a look at these ideas and provide your comments by February 16, 2001.

All the workshops were facilitated by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. The first workshop attracted 30 participants and was held October 7, 2000 at the Holiday Inn Express in Bedford, IN. The second workshop hosted 27 participants and consisted of a caravan style field trip to six Hoosier National Forest trails on October 21, 2000. Twenty people attended the final workshop at the Mineral Springs Hotel in Paoli, IN on November 4, 2000. All trail user groups were represented at all three workshops and included organizations such as the Hoosier Horsemen, Hoosier Hikers Council, Indiana Bicycle Coalition, and Discover Indiana Riding Trails, to name a few. Forest Service trail, engineering, and planning staff also attended.

The first workshop provided a look at several different approaches to trail management through presentations by trail experts. Topics included trail impact studies, hiking trail maintenance, horse trail maintenance, mountain bike trail maintenance, engineering considerations, and accessibility inventory. Several common threads emerged regarding successful trail management and included location, construction, and maintenance. This information reinforced some of what was already known, but also introduced new ideas. For example, the Forest will experiment with the use of geotextiles as a way to stabilize the trail tread. The gravel issue was discussed, and while many pros and cons were presented, no single solution emerged as an alternative to gravel.

The field trip provided an opportunity to view various maintenance techniques in practice. Several good and bad examples of gravel, drainage structures, and trail location were observed. The Hickory Ridge Trail was inspected at several locations. Participants viewed an example of a properly designed trail that could hold up without gravel, an example of a typical graveled trail after three seasons of use, and a very recently treated trail that was formerly a logging road. In order to observe trail work done without heavy equipment, participants looked at maintenance completed by mule on a wilderness trail and at hand construction on the Nebo Trail. The field trip was timely because a heavy rainfall had occurred just a few days earlier and participants were able to observe the level of effectiveness of drainage control devices.

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The final workshop provided good discussion and suggestions for improvement. The following is a sample of some of the comments: hikers don't like gravel or multiple use trails, don't close any trails, graveled trails are good, narrow trails are preferable, designate single use trails, make the trail permits more durable, and provide shorter loops on multiple use trails. There were also suggestions for new trails.

So where do we go from here? We feel some excellent information and public input came from the workshops. This input, along with internal review by Forest Service staff, indicates a need to take another look at the 1995 Trail Program. We would like to propose some changes to the existing trail program and want to know what you think of these ideas. To help you understand the issues, the proposals with background information are attached. We would appreciate receiving your comments by February 16, 2001.

Thank you very much for your interest in the Hoosier National Forest. Please respond to Les Wadzinski, Recreation Program Manager, at the address listed above. Please note this effort is separate from the ongoing Forest Plan revision because operational issues such as these are not part of that process.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kenneth G. Day

KENNETH G. DAY
Forest Supervisor

Updates and Suggested Changes to the Hoosier National Forest Trail Program

Gravel. It is recognized that many people are unhappy with the use of gravel on multiple use trails. However, we have several needs to be met if we want to continue to provide multiple use trail opportunities. These needs include: the protection of soils and watersheds in steep terrain, elimination of muddy spots in poorly drained soils, providing all weather use, using existing routes because it is not feasible to relocate the entire system, and providing a tread type able to stand up to repeated impact from all three user types. We have unsuccessfully attempted to find another alternative to meet these needs. For example, we have visited several other facilities with highly impacted trails that use gravel such as the Big South Fork National Recreation Area, Brown County State Park, and Harrison Crawford State Forest. We also attended two national trail symposiums, searched the literature, and hosted our own workshops. There simply does not appear to be a better method available. We plan to continue to use a fine grade of gravel in problem areas until another alternative can be found. New trails or reroutes will be designed to minimize gravel use as much as possible, and we will try to use geotextiles to assist in stabilizing the gravel tread.

Multiple use trails. With 204 miles of multiple use trails on the Forest and the high expense of upkeep, we feel we are reaching the saturation point in terms of what we can provide and still be good stewards. In the 1995 Trail Program, several new trails were proposed, some have already been installed, and some are in the process of analysis. Still others are showing signs of disuse and we question the feasibility of keeping them open. We want to be sure that the time and money devoted to multiple use trails is in line with the number of people that will benefit.

To help answer this question we looked at two recent measures of use and demand. A recent use study of multiple use trails based on trail tag sales indicates approximately 6,631 bike riders and 10,818 horse riders used these trails as of December 14, 2000. Also, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) recently published by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources offers useful information about recreation trends and demand in Indiana. Horse riding ranked 20th in outdoor recreation activities that people participated in the last year and biking ranked 9th (there was no differentiation for mountain biking and road biking in the summary). The SCORP also reports ‘‘latent demand’’, which is a measure of activities people would be most likely to participate in if adequate facilities were available. In the 1995 SCORP horse riding topped the list for latent demand activities, but dropped to 11th place in 2000. Bike riding remained the same in 7th place for each report. This data suggests that horse and bike use is not that high, and that horse-based facilities are catching to up to the demand.

We plan to continue to follow the guidance of the 1995 Trail Program, but with some modification to accommodate the changes in use and demand. By implementing some unfinished portions of the 1995 Trail Program we would increase the current miles of multiple use trails by 13.8 miles, but would do so through the addition of new trails and closures of others. We may also consider installing some shorter loops in existing trail systems to be responsive to that suggestion. The following list displays trails that are still pending from the 1995 Trail Program along with our suggested action:

Springs Valley Trail (multiple use): This 10.8 mile trail was proposed in the 1995 Trail Program and is currently being analyzed through an environmental assessment (EA). We propose to keep this trail in the Trail Program as a pending project.

Shirley Creek North (multiple use): This 11 mile trail was proposed in the 1995 Trail Program and has received preliminary analysis. We propose to keep this trail in the Trail Program as a pending project.

Shirley Creek West (multiple use): This trail was proposed in the 1995 Trail Program and would add 28 miles to the system. There are several concerns with this trail: the Forest Service does not own all the land necessary to make a continuous trail, it would be very expensive to complete the environmental analysis and construction for a multiple use trail of this length, it is possible a new trail segment will already be added at Shirley Creek North, and the light use by horse and bike riders may not warrant this level of effort. Land or easments would need to be acquired, both of which can be expensive and cumbersome processes. We propose to keep this trail in the Trail Program as a possible future project, but recognize that under current conditions it is unlikely this trail will be built in the near future.

Ogala (multiple use): This 6 mile trail currently exists but gets little use. It consists of three dead end segments ending on county roads. To be viable, the route of this trail would need to be reconfigured into one or more loops and a parking lot installed. We do not feel the expense of the environmental analysis and new construction is warranted. We propose dropping this trail.

German Ridge South (multiple use): This 2 mile segment currently exists but gets little use. It is an isolated segment of trail located about one mile south of the German Ridge Trail. To be viable, the route would need to be made into a loop to connect to the German Ridge Trail and a parking lot installed. We do not feel the expense of the environmental analysis and new construction is warranted. We propose dropping this trail.

Knobstone (use type would vary): The Knobstone Trail, managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Outdoor Recreation, currently ends south of the Hoosier National Forest. In the 1995 Trail Program the Nebo Trail and Fork Ridge Trail were identified as Knobstone routes. Because the Knobstone Trail never officially reached the Forest, the Knobstone name identifier was changed to avoid confusion. If the Division of Outdoor Recreation wishes to extend the route across the Forest, we will work with them to do so by using those routes and other links where needed.

Hiking trails. Unlike multiple use trails, we do not feel we have reached a saturation point for hiking-only trails. Hikers have long requested separate trails and currently have only 35 miles available on the Hoosier National Forest. It is recognized that hiking trails are cheaper to build and maintain than multiple use trails. In addition, both the 1995 and the 2000 SCORPs lists walking/hiking/jogging as the number one outdoor recreation activity in Indiana, and also as the number one latent demand activity in the 2000 report. Given this demand, and the fact that we can provide hiking facilities relatively cheaply, we propose the following additions and updates to the trail plan.

Pate Hollow (hiking): This trail was not proposed in the 1995 Trail Program. We propose to add this 4 mile hiking-only trail. It would be located just north of the Paynetown Recreation Area and would provide a convenient location for users from Bloomington and Indianapolis. Preliminary discussion with Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff indicate they may be willing to cooperate on this trail by providing parking on DNR property and perhaps a tie-in to their existing trail.

Tincher (hiking): This trail was not adopted in the 1995 Trail Program, but was included in the Tincher Special Area management plan. We propose to add this 14 mile hiking-only trail. It would be located in the Tincher Special Area with loop possibilities northwest and southeast of Highway 50.

Fork Ridge (hiking): This 4 mile trail was listed in the 1995 Trail Program and was even marked at one time. It became impassable due to blowdown from the 1996 tornado, but has since been cleared of large trees. This trail is not a loop trail, but a linear configuration that was identified in the 1995 Trail Program as a potential suitable segment for the Knobstone trail. We plan to complete routine maintenance to bring the trail back up to standard. This trail may still be considered as a Knobstone segment if the Division of Outdoor Recreation wishes to extend the trail across the Forest.

Twin Oaks Interpretive Trail (hiking/interpretive): This 1.4 mile trail is located in the Hardin Ridge Recreation Area. It was not part of the 1995 Trail Program because that effort did not address short existing trails in recreation areas. We propose to enhance the interpretive aspect of this trail through the installation of interpretive features such as signs, a kiosk, or a trail brochure.

Other plans: In addition to implementing the 1995 Trail Program, we are continuing to try and improve services based on user input. For example, we have made a capital investment proposal through Forest Service budget channels to provide potable water at camps at Shirley Creek, Hickory Ridge, German Ridge, and Youngs Creek. The Recreation Fee Demonstration Program has provided income through the sale of trail permits. That revenue has been used for projects such as parking enhancement at Mogan Ridge, Nebo Ridge, and Birdseye, toilet replacement at Shirley Creek, stock watering at Hickory Ridge and Shirley Creek, hitch rails at Hickory Grove Church, trail signs at Hickory Ridge, and general trailhead enhancements such as new picnic tables, trees, hitch rails, and road repair. We are also looking at options to improve parking at areas such as Oriole and Nebo and plan to improve trailhead information with bulletin boards and better graphics.

Summary information: Tables 1 and 2 summarizes suggested trail program changes. Attached is a map locating the suggested changes. Also attached is a Recreation Opportunity Guide that lists existing trails and a locator map.

NOTE: All proposals are subject to environmental analysis and funding before a final commitment can be made.

Table 1

Summary of Trail Program Update and Suggested Changes

Trail	Proposed activity	Current Miles	Miles proposed in 1995*	Miles proposed in 2000**	Net change in miles from current
Springs Valley multiple use	Construct trail	0	9	10.8	+10.8
ShirleyC North multiple use	Construct trail	0	11	11	+11
ShirleyC West multiple use	Put on hold	0	28	0	0
Ogala multiple use	Decommission	6	7	0	-6
GermanR South multiple use	Decommission	2	2	0	-2
Knobstone links	Wait on DNR, provide links			To be determined	
Pate Hollow hiking	Construct trail	0	0	4	+4
Tincher hiking	Construct trail	0	0	10	+14
Fork Ridge hiking ***	Finish maintenance	0	5	4	+4
Twin Oaks Hiking/interp	Enhance	1.4	na	na	0

* Current miles may vary from 1995 figures due to more accurate measurement or route changes.

** Proposed miles are approximate.

*** Although Fork Ridge is an existing trail and was included in the 1995 Trail Program, it has not been publicized as an official trail for several years due to the tornado blowdown.

Table 2
Summary of proposed mileage changes

Use Type	# Trails currently in place	# Trails under new proposal	Miles currently in place	Miles under new proposal	Net change in miles
Bike/horse/hike	11	13	162.8	176.6	+13.8
Bike/hike only	2	2	7.9	7.9	0
Horse/hike only	2	2	33.5	33.5	0
Hike only	9	12	35.1	57.1	+22
Total	**24**	**29**	**239.3**	**275.1**	**+35.8**

NOTE:

All proposals are subject to environmental analysis and funding before a final commitment can be made.

Trail miles may be increased beyond those proposed if short loops are added on existing trails. However, such action would be analyzed on a case by case basis.