



In Collaboration With:

NATIONAL WILDERNESS
STEWARDSHIP
ALLIANCE

American Trails
For those who build, maintain, use, and dream of trails...



2018 National Forest System Trail Stewardship Partnership Funding - Final Report -

NOTE: The last page describes post grant work accomplished in 2019 on the South Fork Trail

Organization: Upper Merced Watershed Council, Project ID: UMWC 2018 T

Amount of Grant: \$1,130

Project Name: "South Fork Merced River Trail"

Project Details:

The aim of this project was to repair several segments of the South Fork Trail which the SNF has not been able to maintain in years, and which is subject to being absorbed by nature. In 2018, nature ramped up her efforts, leaving the area devastated from a 96,901 acre fire and now rains. Additionally, official closures of the forest reduced our access to the area. While nature has removed vegetation, tasks to repair retaining walls and to remove soil from the trail have multiplied many fold.

This project was undertaken by a completely volunteer staff. Other than our Forest Service partners, no paid staff was involved in the work. Twenty-eight volunteers from the local community stepped up to work on the trail, sixteen of these being new recruits. We were successful in our efforts to partner with the Mariposa County High School agriculture class and students to construct nine directional signs to be placed along the 20-mile route. The signs are a timely component of the project, replacing any that survived the fire. Despite the fire and related forest closure orders, we yielded 300 volunteer hours during the grant project period. This occurred over 8 trail workdays (see page 2 for trail work details).

Substantial Project Outcomes:

Besides trail work (described on page 2), the following outcomes occurred:

- (1) sixteen new volunteer recruits;*
- (2) partnership with Mariposa County High School to engage youth in the project;*
- (3) collaboration with adjacent Yosemite National Park to redirect their extra volunteers to help re-establish and maintain the South Fork Trail; and,*
- (4) initiated discussion with Mariposa County Sheriff to hold a Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) communication skills training with the Sierra NF in the South Fork drainage during a trail work day outing.*

Lessons Learned:

The fire and subsequent closure of the forest precluded any trail work during the planned outing dates. When the closure order was lifted on November 29, we immediately went to work and discovered that



work in the cooler months has several advantages. In addition to the temperatures being cooler, there were no bugs and the soil was soft due to rain. In California, where it is dry from May to October, the soil becomes hard during these months, not to mention higher temps and bugs. Hence, we have shifted the focus of our trail work days to November, December, January, February and March. Recon work can occur in the late spring and early fall. Our volunteers have really appreciated working under these refreshing conditions.

Forest Service Coordination:

Communication and coordination with the Sierra N.F. has been excellent. The grant of tools and PPE has enabled our organization to deploy easily and quickly to sites in need of trail work, without the need to rely on Forest Service equipment and personnel.

Timeline:

Immediately, upon award of the project, we purchased all the tools and Personal Protection Equipment described in the grant. We initiated contact with the Mariposa County H.S. to inquire as to their interest to partner with us to create directional signs. In June, we held our planned 3-day outing to re-establish an overgrown trail segment. Then, on July 13, a major forest fire (the "Ferguson Fire" consumed the entire South Fork drainage within the National Forest) erupted lasting through the remainder of July and much of August. The Sierra NF issued a closure order of the forest, which lasted until November 29. In early December, we mustered 5 more trail work days. For safety reasons, the Sierra N.F. issued another closure order on December 20, closing several segments of the South Fork Trail to the public. Our organization entered into an agreement with the SNF, however, which allows our group to continue with trail repair work during the closure, which we intend to do intensively in the first quarter of 2019; our first event of 2019 occurred on January 4.

Trail System Accomplishments:

Despite the fire and related forest closure orders, we yielded 300 volunteer hours during the grant project period. This occurred over 8 trail workdays.

- (1) In June, we completed the most difficult task of re-establishing a 1/2 mile section of the trail that was completely overgrown; and,*
- (2) In December, we repaired approximately 2 miles of the trail from impacts caused by the wildfire and subsequent rains.*

Hence, we report 2.5 miles of "Deferred Maintenance Items Completed."

Memorable Quotes from Participants:

Please include any memorable quotes from participating volunteers and staff. 2-3 are sufficient.



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1) "Bill, I really like these trail tools. They are very durable and designed to make trail work easier."



Photos:



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BCHA
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ADDENDUM to the 2018 Final Report Continued Work on the “South Fork Trail” in 2019

In 2018, project work came to a screeching halt in July 2018. The massive Ferguson Fire and subsequent closure of the national forest barred entry to the entire South Fork drainage. Still, as described above, significant work was completed in December 2018.

As more work than ever was needed on the South Fork Trail, trail-tending efforts continued in 2019. The extent of work may be summarized as follows:

- 23 trail-tending outings (total of 34 days);
- 50 new volunteers;
- 1,200 volunteers hours contributed; and
- 3 Trail Segments Improved
 - (1) Hite’s Cove (4.5 miles completely restored)
 - (2) Peach Tree Bar/from the west (4 miles of brush cleared)
 - (3) Bishop Camp Trail (3 miles of brush and trail cleared)

Summary of Targets and Actual Work (2018-2019)		
Metric	2018 Grant Proposal	Actual Work Accomplished *
No. of Trail Days	12	44
Volunteer Hours	728	1,500
Miles Repaired	18.25	14

** The Ferguson Fire and subsequent rains created several challenges, for example, limiting access to certain areas and magnifying the extent of work needed.*