



File Code: 1510/2350/1830

Date: July 25, 2011

Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer
U.S. Representative
1740 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Luetkemeyer:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the e-mail from your constituent concerning our trails. I am pleased to see that the Show Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen (SMMBCH) are getting the word out to their membership and other equestrians that the National Forests need their help in maintaining our trail systems and our recreation opportunities. In the past couple of years, they have increased their interest and their participation, working with us and other volunteer groups and partners so that we can continue to provide quality recreation experiences.

Recent surveys have shown that we have hundreds of thousands of dollars of deferred maintenance backlog associated with our trails, and even more with our recreation areas. This backlog has grown more rapidly in recent years than in the past for a number of reasons, including some catastrophic weather events, and the Forest Service's loss of the Department of Labor's Senior Community Service Employment Program (which formerly provided over 100 half-time enrollees to assist with operation and maintenance of our forest recreation facilities, while they received job training). A failure to address some of those deferred maintenance items could result in safety issues that could force us to at least temporarily close some of our trails.

As SMMBCH indicated in their e-mail, we are depending more and more on volunteers and partners to get involved and to help us to provide these recreation opportunities. Partnering with volunteers not only provides a less expensive way of getting work accomplished, but it also strengthens the volunteer's connection with the land, their stewardship ethic, their pride in our public lands, and has some social and health benefits as well. As you are working with your colleagues in trying to trim and balance the federal budget, I'm sure that you can appreciate the willingness of this group and hundreds of others to roll up their sleeves and to do their part to help provide services for their fellow Americans to enjoy.

I hope that you will join me in commending the members of the SMMBCH for their willingness to work with the Mark Twain National Forest to continue providing quality recreation experiences, and for their efforts to encourage others to get involved. If you or they have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please don't hesitate to contact me at the office or phone number above, or to contact Forest Recreation Manager Nancy Feakes at (573) 341-7472.

Again, I appreciate your interest in the Mark Twain National Forest and our recreation program, and the opportunity to respond to this inquiry.



Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas E. Haines
THOMAS E. HAINES
District Ranger

cc: Dave Whittekiend
Jane Mobley
Nancy Feakes
Russell Martin