

# Virginia Highlands Horse Trail / Jones Creek Project 2023 Progress Report



**The Virginia Highlands Horse Trail**, a multiuse trail in the Mount Rogers NRA/George Washington Jefferson National Forest, has many erosion and drainage problems in the section between hwy 21 and SR 798 (Hale Lake Road) that are affecting the water quality in the New River Watershed. Jones Creek has become blocked causing trail damage and a safety issue for trail users as well as an environmental hazard.

The Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands (BCHVH) are proposing an extensive trail rehab project that will focus on bringing the trail to sustainable standards, reducing the amount of sediment washing into the streams and increasing the safety and enjoyment for trail users.

This map shows approximate locations of just some of the problems which are outlined in the following photos.



Phase One (2023) of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail / Jones Creek Project, headed up by the Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands, was a huge success! This project is made possible by a Legacy Trails Grant from American Trails along with partnerships with the US Forest Service at Mt Rogers NRA, Back Country Horsemen of the Virginia Highlands, Appalachian Conservation Corps, a private landowner and support from local business owners, trail users and general public. Along with volunteers from BCHVH and other Virginia BCH chapters 8 motorcyclists, who use the trail seasonably, put in many hours on the project. BCHVH members donated equipment such as excavators, chainsaws, tractors, UTVs and dump trailers along with their expertise and many long hours. Jones Creek River Rock (a neighboring business and also a mule rider) donated 80 tons of rock for the turnpike.

The Appalachian Conservation Corps Crew worked on brushing and benching the Iron Mountain Trail (3 mi.) and started drainage work on the Little Dry Run Trail in July and in September the ACC along with BCHVH constructed a 300' turnpike structure on a heavily eroded section of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail. AK Trails LLC was also hired to preform specialized trail work with a Ditch Witch trail dozer, adding to the sustainability of the project.

Accomplishments to date- Virginia Highlands Horse Trail (8.5mi) brushing to full width, regrading and drainage enhancements including 165 grade dips and other features constructed or repaired and hardened, de-berming. 2 trail bridges cleared of debris and vegetation. 300' turnpike structure. Iron Mountain Trail (3 mi.) - brushed to full width (trail was completely blocked by rhododendron in places), benching (0.6 mi). Little Dry Run Trail (1 mi) started drainage features (0.25mi)

54 volunteers have been involved so far since the beginning of the project totaling 2,200 volunteer hours with the following breakdown-

Basic work hours- 1029

Skilled Work Hours (chainsaw, equipment operator etc) - 706

Recon- 184

Travel hours- 169

Administrative- 112

Donated Equipment Hours- Power Equipment- 125, Heavy Equipment- 746

The value of all this volunteer work (as determined by the Independent Sector) is estimated at - \$155,251.60

Materials included 355 tons of gravel and crusher run, 80 tons of donated natural rock, 20+ tons of gathered natural rock, a culvert, safety equipment and trail tools.

The total projected cost of the project is \$100,285.00. Revenue sources- Legacy Trails Grant- \$75,000.00, BCHVH Trail Fund (donations, fundraisers and small grants) - \$25,285.00.

Legacy Grant funds used to date- \$47,880.45. BCHVH Trail Fund- \$8,402.19

The project will resume in 2024 and is projected to be finished by May 1st. 2024.

# BCHVH AND PARTNERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE!!



