

Proposal to Invest Unallocated TRT Funds in Trails and Trail Related Infrastructure in Deschutes County

January 4, 2022

Prepared by Deschutes Trails Coalition

Summary

The Deschutes Trails Coalition (DTC) is proposing that \$1M of unallocated TRT funds be reinvested annually towards trails and trail-related infrastructure throughout Deschutes County, to be distributed through a competitive grant process. Deferred trail maintenance and infrastructure needs throughout Central Oregon exceed \$10M. Existing and predicted financial resources are insufficient to address the basic maintenance needed to sustain our trails in their current state, let alone the growing deferred maintenance backlog. Trails are the reason and means by which millions of people visit and explore Central Oregon and this landscape. Without funding to sustain this resource, we risk compromising the very thing that makes this place so special to so many people. Parables abound about “Killing the Golden Goose” and the “Tragedy of the Commons”, and Deschutes County is so fortunate to have the natural, financial and community resources to influence where our story goes from here.

Need

Central Oregon is a place well known for its diversity of natural beauty and recreation opportunities. As one of the fastest growing areas in Oregon and a place beloved to residents and visitors alike, projections show the population of Deschutes County to increase by 64% over the next 25 years for a total of 311,000 people. In turn, trail use is also forecasted to increase over the next 20 years from an estimated 2.5 million trips on Deschutes National Forest trails alone in 2021 to nearly 3 million annual trips by 2040 (*The Economic and Social Importance of Deschutes National Forest Trails*, ECONorthwest Report, 2021). We have already seen sustained and dramatic increases over the last decade and then the unanticipated surge of use related to COVID during the last 2 years that has given a glimpse of the impacts that can be expected to continue in the years ahead.

Trails are the means through which the majority of visitors experience the natural beauty of Central Oregon; on the Deschutes National Forest, in State and local parks, on BLM lands, and across segments of privately owned land. Through the report referenced above from ECONorthwest - a consulting firm based in the Pacific Northwest that specializes in economics, finance, and planning - we have a clearer view of both the value of trails, economically and socially, and declining financial stability of funds that were once more plentiful to maintain our trails and trail related infrastructure – a financial trend that is at great odds with use trends and increasing associated impacts to an existing infrastructure.

From this report we also know that trails on the Deschutes National Forest bring \$136M to \$200M into the local economy (the range is based on the share of visitor expenses attributed to trail activities) and, in 2021, created 1400 jobs. As those funds re-circulate through the local economy, every \$1 million spent generates nearly \$1.3 million of total economic contribution, supporting \$468,000 in labor income and 12 jobs. We also know that Forest Service gross receipts dropped by more than 75% in the 1990s due to reduced timber receipts and have hovered around the same level since the early 2000s. Federally appropriated dollars are not keeping pace in maintaining the current trails infrastructure and addressing deferred maintenance backlog.

Through both objective data as well as the anecdotal observations that so many of us have had, it is clear that trails are a huge economic driver in Central Oregon. Also, the funds that were once available to maintain and grow this trail network – that is inextricably linked with the culture, allure, and growth

of this geographical area and its economy – are being dramatically outpaced by the declining condition of our trails.

Additionally, there are limited grant opportunities for high value projects and most funding sources require “shovel ready” projects. Because unallocated TRT funds are unrestricted, these monies could help fill a critical gap in funding, and further help to significantly leverage other grant opportunities into the County. There is often substantial work needed to get a project to the implementation (a.k.a. shovel ready) phase and – in addition to funding project implementation itself – TRT funds could move projects forward to the point that they would then be eligible to apply for other grants to fund implementation.

Scope of Work

- **Establish a Grant Program** – There are multiple organizations with proven track records that could successfully take on the administration of a grant program: DTC, VCO, or COIC are all potential administrators. The Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) has significant experience and capacity to manage a grant process that is fair and transparent, as could DTC or VCO. Grants would be evaluated and awarded under the guidance of an Advisory Committee (see section below), and monitored by the administering organization.
- **Establish Eligibility Criteria.** The steering team/advisory committee will establish eligibility criteria for the use of the funds. Below is a starter list of potential criteria:
 - The project proposal supports a trail system that is sustainably managed and maintained, and balances the needs of people and nature.
 - The project benefits all members of our visiting and local community, and the project has a useful life of greater than 10 years.
 - All known barriers that would inhibit the start or completion of the project have been cleared.
 - The project will be completed within 18 months or 2 field seasons (whichever is longer), with an opportunity to extend.
 - Eligible uses of the funds will be trail and trail-related infrastructure maintenance and project design, planning, analysis, and implementation within Deschutes County.
 - * *Proposals will also be evaluated based on the degree to which these TRT funds can be leveraged with other funds to complete all phases of a project. Given the restrictions of various funding opportunities, not all funding sources are able to fund every potential phase of a project (planning, design, implementation, etc.). Therefore, these TRT funds contribute to a larger funding matrix that, collectively, can help to bring all phases of a project to completion.*
- **Grant Promotion and Outreach** – The Deschutes Trails Coalition will promote and publicize the grant opportunity and solicit proposals broadly amongst the trails community.
- **Create an Advisory Council** to evaluate grant applications and make award selection recommendations. The proposed composition of this council would be made up of 5-7 people that could include: 1-2 DTC representatives (Executive Director and 1 other), a county seat as determined by the BOCC; representation from various geographic areas within the County, representation from under-served communities, and a local community seat.
- **Convening Regional Trail Community** for project development and review - DTC is well positioned to convene the trails community to identify projects and create proposals that have been vetted and discussed among a multi-stakeholder group representing a diversity of trail user groups, resulting in well-informed projects and a process that all trail users can get behind.

- **Publicize Successes** – DTC will publicize the successes of the grant program, highlighting the County’s role in supporting trail use in the County and how partners, agencies, city and county have successfully come together in this effort.

Geography–Eligible projects would include trail and trail-related infrastructure projects within Deschutes County.

Product – An enduring funding source that enables the completion of high-value, multi-phase trail and trail-related projects across Central Oregon (see below), and is awarded through a fair and transparent grant program administered by a qualified entity, steered by an Advisory Council, and publicized by the Deschutes Trails Coalition.

Potential projects that directly contribute to trail sustainability are too many to list. However, below are general project themes most ripe for this grant opportunity and a range of costs - depending on the scope, scale, and complexity of a given project.

Project Type	Range of Costs	Examples
Trail Maintenance/Construction		
<i>Basic Maintenance</i>	<i>\$200 - 350/mile or 6-person crew for 6 months for \$150K</i>	Brushing, cutting blow down, cleaning drainage
<i>Construction</i>	<i>\$26K - \$125K/mile</i>	Adding new mountain bike trails, relocating trails to improve sustainability
Road Maintenance/Reconstruction		
<i>Maintenance</i>	<i>\$6K/mile</i>	Grading of roads that access trailheads; i.e. 41 Rd to Deschutes River Trail
<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>\$70K - \$100K/mile</i>	Sparks Lake Rd, 16 Road in Sisters accessing Three Creek area, Swamp Wells Rd to horse camp
Minor Projects	\$2 - 10K	Trailhead kiosks, trail signs, volunteer training, educational efforts, publications, media
Major Projects	<i>Varies depending on project</i>	Replacing trail bridges, backcountry shelter restoration and replacement, paved path maintenance, rehabilitation of user-created trails
Environmental Analysis (NEPA)	<i>\$30 - \$100K</i>	Limited mileage of new trail construction, analysis of a project area such as a comprehensive trail plan for Tumalo Falls or China Hat
Reports, Strategic Trail Planning, etc.	<i>\$30K to \$500K</i>	Studies on e-bikes, strategic planning to assess trail priorities across Deschutes County
Grant Administration	<i>\$20K - 40K</i>	Salary to administer grant process

Partners– In addition to the partners discussed above - the DTC, Deschutes County, local communities, and travel and tourism partners - Central Oregon is rich not only in natural resources but also with volunteer trail clubs and passionate trail enthusiasts. Together, in partnership with Deschutes County Commissioners, these trail user groups have the capability to accomplish a great deal of trail maintenance and projects annually. DTC is composed of representatives from nearly 40 organizations that support a wide variety of trail-based recreation – from snowmobiling to mountain biking, hiking, groomed Nordic and ungroomed backcountry skiing, OHV riding, etc. Due to this diversity of trail

stakeholders, DTC has a unique advantage of having access to a well-rounded perspective from the greater trails community and the ability to mitigate conflict and explore differing needs/desires prior to going public with a project or proposal. This degree of collaboration has been proven to result in well informed project proposals that reflect the voices across the spectrum of trail users.

Budget

\$1M annually allocated for this grant program, with up to \$40,000/year for grant administration, program promotion and outreach, facilitation, and coordination.

The intention of this grant opportunity, given the unrestricted nature of these funds, would be to fund fewer large projects, as opposed to many small projects. Anticipated annual awards will support 3 -6 proposals valued between \$150K and \$350K each, with the opportunity for 3-4 small projects of \$2-10,000 up to a total of \$40K to allow for responsiveness to the community and urgent needs, etc.. DTC will work with Visit Bend/BSF and other funding sources to create a complementary funding opportunity to leverage with these other funding sources.

Summary

By reinvesting unallocated TRT funds in trails and trail-related infrastructure, Deschutes County can ensure that our trail system will continue to provide the world-class recreational experiences that draw visitors to our area and enhance our residents' quality of life.



File Code: 2350

Date: January 4, 2022

Deschutes County Commissioners
1300 NW Wall Street
Bend, OR 97701

Dear Deschutes County Commissioners:

I am writing in support of the Deschutes Trails Coalition's (DTC) proposal to reinvest Deschutes County Transient Room Tax funds into trails and trail-related infrastructure throughout Deschutes County. As you are aware, trails are a highly-valued recreation opportunity locally and a significant economic driver for Central Oregon, connecting people to the Deschutes National Forest (DNF), as well as to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Parks, local communities and Deschutes County.

Continued growth in Deschutes County along with a steady increase in the popularity of trails as a resource for local populations and visitors requires investment in maintenance of trails infrastructure and thoughtful development of opportunities for existing and emerging uses. Community engagement and support, from volunteers to new and flexible funding opportunities, is key to sustainable management of these resources. As highlighted in EcoNorthwest's recent research, alternative sustainable local funding for trails and trail infrastructure, which complements traditional federal investments, is a critical component to the development and maintenance of responsive, environmentally sound, and community-supported trail systems.

DTC has demonstrated the ability to convene a diversity of trail user groups into a collective voice for the trail's community in Central Oregon. It is made up of nearly 40 partners representing dozens of local trail organizations. These trail organizations together donate thousands of hours of volunteer labor and equipment to support of local trails. DTC has taken on projects of varying complexity ranging from engaging in the planning and implementation of Forest Service trails projects, to convening user groups, infrastructure, and facilitating the creation of a complex database to inform Trail Master Planning across Deschutes County and the National Forest. Not least, DTC administers a 'small grants' program that awards \$30-60K annually to fund trail improvement projects on the DNF.

As established DTC can play an important role in investing the Transient Room Funds into trails planning and maintenance that will keep recreational trail use as a long-term economic driver for Central Oregon. In addition, DTC has the ability to make sure that the significant natural resources and scenic beauty of our federal, state, and Deschutes County public lands remains protected. I hope you will consider their very worthy proposal.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Holly Jewkes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'H' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'J'.

HOLLY JEWKES
Forest Supervisor

cc: Deschutes Trails Coalition

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January 3, 2022

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Deschutes County Board of County Commissioners
1300 NW Wall St.
Bend, OR 97701

RE: Deschutes Trails Coalition Request for Unobligated TRT Funds

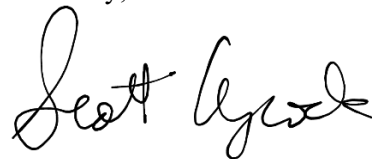
Dear County Commissioners,

Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) respectfully submits this letter in support of the Deschutes Trails Coalition's (DTC) proposal concerning the administration and use of Transient Room Tax (TRT) dollars to support sustainable trails throughout Deschutes County. COIC's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, which was developed in partnership with community and economic development stakeholders across the region, identifies the natural environment and related recreation amenities as a key component of the region's economic base. Without world-class recreation offerings, Deschutes County would certainly not have experienced the degree of economic growth spurred by business owners and skilled labor seeking the Central Oregon lifestyle. Ensuring that recreation facilities are well-maintained and that recreation activity does not undermine other resource values, is therefore vital for our economy.

From our discussions with DTC, COIC is aware of DTC's intention for these funds to be awarded via a competitive grant program and in COIC potentially playing a role in the administration of this grant process. Understanding that there are additional details to be decided upon that pertain to this proposal – such as how the grant would be administered and by whom – I am writing to let you know that COIC is willing to take on such a process, and has the capacity to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Scott Aycock
CED Director, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC)



January 2, 2022

Board of County Commissioners
Deschutes County
P O Box 6005
Attn: BoCC
Bend, OR 97708-6005

Dear County Commissioners,

The Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA) respectfully submits this comment in support of the Deschutes Trails Coalition (DTC) proposal concerning the administration and use of unallocated Transient Room Tax (TRT) receipts to support reinvestment in outdoor recreation resources in Deschutes County.

COTA's mission is to develop, protect, and enhance the Central Oregon mountain bike experience through trail stewardship, advocacy, collaboration, and education. COTA is a nonprofit with more than 2,000 members. Included in our base are Deschutes County chapters in South Deschutes County (Sunriver and La Pine), Sisters, Redmond and Bend. Through these chapters we maintain more than 400 miles of singletrack trails on federal, county and private lands under volunteer agreements with the various land managers. COTA is a DTC partner with members serving on the Steering Committee, as well as the Leadership, Partnership and Programs, and Outreach subcommittees.

COTA strongly supports the DTC proposal for the use of a portion of the unallocated TRT receipts a reinvestment to address critical needs in maintaining and enhancing the recreational trail infrastructure within the county. The DTC proposal contains especially well thought out rules of engagement for administering and managing an effective grant program. It ensures well developed projects are fairly evaluated and successfully implemented via supportive community involvement.

Implementing the measures described in the DTC proposal will indeed help ensure that our trail system will continue to provide the world-class recreational experiences that draw visitors to our area and enhance our residents' quality of life

Respectfully,

Emmy Andrews
Executive Director
Central Oregon Trail Alliance

Travis Holman
Vice President
Central Oregon Trail Alliance



January 3, 2022

Board of County Commissioners
Deschutes County
P O Box 6005
Bend, OR 97708-6005

Dear County Commissioners,

Oregon Equestrian Trails is respectfully submitting this letter to support the Deschutes Trails Coalition's proposal to annually invest a portion of unallocated Transient Room Tax (TRT) receipts in trails and trail-related infrastructure in Deschutes County.

Oregon Equestrian Trails is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization whose members work hard to maintain our trails. Whether working on the trails or riding our horses, we see firsthand how our scenic trails attract visitors to Deschutes County and enhance our residents' quality of life.

We also see that our trails need more funding and community support. For example, many forest roads are now in such poor condition that we can no longer reach some trailheads and horse camps without risking damage to our vehicles and injury to the horses we are hauling. In addition, some trails suffer from so much deferred maintenance that they are unsafe to ride. These conditions not only restrict access and degrade the recreational experience for equestrians, but they also affect mountain bikers, hikers, Nordic skiers, and snowmobilers.

The Forest Service's budget has been cut to where they cannot maintain all our trails. Assistance from volunteers like us helps, but it's not enough. We would love to see visitors pitch in to help keep the trails in shape. Investing a portion of the County's unallocated TRT is a great way to accomplish this.

We appreciate your consideration of the Deschutes Trails Coalition's proposal.

Respectfully,

Kim McCarrel

Kim McCarrel
Central Oregon Chapter
Oregon Equestrian Trails

Board of County Commissioners
Deschutes County
Attn: BoCC
P O Box 6005 Bend, OR 97708-6005

Re: Transient Room Tax Funds

Dear Deschutes County Commissioners,

Central Oregon public lands and trails are one of its most precious commodities. Most people visit our region to recreate and enjoy the outdoors. Our roads, trails, creeks, rivers, and lakes are full of users year round. Local residents and visitors all have an impact on our lands. It is time that the visitors' TRT dollars start supporting the sustainability of our public lands.

Most volunteer trail maintenance, clean-ups, and public land projects are carried out by Central Oregonians. Visitors typically don't have the opportunity to give back to the lands on which they recreate. Allocating TRT funds to trail related projects helps our massive tourism industry give back to its greatest resource.

We support the Deschutes Trails Coalition Proposal for \$1 million of unallocated TRT funds to be annually reinvested towards trails and trail related infrastructure. All types of recreation on public lands have seen a large increase in users. The Motorized community has seen one of the largest increases in users in many years. Existing trails are in need of maintenance, signage, and additional parking/camping. TRT funding for the Motorized/OHV community should be included. The OHV community has a long history in Central Oregon and is an important part of the Central Oregon economy.

Thank you,

Kevin Hopper
centraloregonohv@gmail.com
Central Oregon OHV Association (COOHVA)