Rim Country Regional Trails Vision Plan

Regional Agencies & Partner Groups

Town of Payson (TOP) · US Forest Service – Tonto National Forest (TNF) · Gila County · Rim Country Trail Fund (RCTF) · Pine/Strawberry Fuel Reduction (PSFR) · Rim Country Mountain Bike Association (RCMBA) · National Forest Foundation (NFF) · Arizona Trail Association (ATA)

Our Shared Purpose

Rim Country Trails partners are committed to building and enhancing a regional trail system that reflects the character of our region — combining outdoor adventure, community pride, and natural beauty. This vision plan outlines collective priorities identified through collaboration among participating agencies and trail groups across Arizona's Mogollon Rim Country.

Why Rim Country Trails Matter

- **Community Benefits**: Encourages mental and physical health; provides safe spaces for outdoor recreation; enhances quality of life and connection with nature, history, and cultures.
- **Economic Benefits**: Supports tourism and local businesses; reinforces Rim Country's identity as a sustainable outdoor recreation destination.
- **Environmental Benefits**: Promotes stewardship, conservation, and outdoor education; connects locals and visitors with their public lands.

Current Context — Strengths & Challenges

Strengths

- Spectacular natural landscape: including the largest continuous Ponderosa Pine forest in the world, the Mogollon Rim, majestic views, and varied elevation.
- Wide range of trail types and difficulty levels.
- Active local interest: adventure clubs, mountain-bike programs at schools, and passionate volunteers.
- Growing number of trail-based events and programs (races, MTB events, hiking or running programs) and desire for more from the regional community.

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- Proximity to Phoenix-metro — enhancing accessibility and visitor potential.
- Year-round access and existing regional trail features: e.g., over 50 miles of the Arizona National Scenic Trail pass through Rim Country; the Highline Trail provides 63 continuous miles of world-class trail along the Rim.
- Rich cultural history and connections to trails from indigenous communities to early European-American pioneers.

Challenges & Gaps

- Limited funding for trail planning, construction, maintenance, and promotion.
- Lack of a dedicated funding source for environmental reviews for proposed trail projects.
- Insufficient signage.
- Inadequate connectivity among trail systems; lack of unified access points or trailheads (especially within Payson).
- High cost and long timelines related to environmental review and approval for projects on federal lands.
- Absence of a centralized "hub" for Rim Country trails — no one-stop resource for up-to-date maps, links, information, and trail updates.
- Engagement with local tribes (Tonto Apache) has been limited.

Vision for the Future

We envision a Rim Country trail network that is:

- **Connected** — across jurisdictions and land management agencies.
- **Sustainable** — designed and maintained for long-term viability.
- **Collaborative** — partners working together with shared purpose.
- **Welcoming & User-Friendly** — offering high-quality visitor experiences.
- **Educational & Responsible** — promoting stewardship, conservation, and safe/reasonable use.
- **Economically Beneficial** — supporting tourism, local businesses, and regional economic vitality.

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Core Focus Areas

- **Connectivity & Regional Coordination**
  - Strengthen inter-agency collaboration.
  - Develop unified regional maps and resources.
- **Trail Creation & Development**
  - Identify and prioritize new opportunities for trail access and connections.
  - Expand trail and trailhead offerings to meet growing community and visitor demand.
- **Maintenance & Sustainability**
  - Comply with consistent maintenance standards as outlined in FS1262.
  - Coordinate regional volunteer and stewardship programs.
- **Funding & Grants**
  - Develop shared strategies for pursuing grants, donor support, and state and federal funding.
  - Explore sustainable financing models for construction and maintenance.
- **Signage & Visitor Experience**
  - Create consistent, up-to-date regional trail maps.
  - Improve signage, wayfinding, and trailhead information.
- **Education, Stewardship & Community Engagement**
  - Promote responsible recreation practices and conservation awareness.
  - Engage community, youth, and local organizations in trail stewardship and programs.
  - Collaborate with healthcare providers and individuals to promote the 6mental and physical benefits of outdoor recreation. (e.g., Nature RX)

Short-Term Priorities (Next 1–2 Years)

- Expand the RCTF website to serve as a unified "Rim Country Regional Trails" hub website for maps, links, and information.

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- Continue to secure sustainable funding: apply for more grants and engage local, corporate, and individual donors.
- Establish and grow a volunteer network with regularly scheduled training, trail-building, and maintenance events.
- Continue trail and trailhead development (e.g., Event Center Trail, Boulders Area Trail System, Strawberry Mountain, Red Rock Springs Trail).
- Expand programming: mountain bike races (e.g., events under the National Interscholastic Cycling Association), locally hosted MTB events, trail running races, hiking programs, etc.
- Allocate resources: tools/equipment, and consider creating a dedicated Regional Trails Coordinator position.

Long-Term Goals

- Realize a fully connected Rim Country trail system, with trails available in all geographic quadrants and access off the Highline Trail.
- Develop new trail areas and connector trails to link existing systems with communities.
- Install sustainable and functional signage throughout the region.
- Expand maintenance programs through a combination of volunteers, local support, and reliable funding.
- Support trail-oriented businesses: bike shops (sales, rentals, maintenance), outdoor gear retailers, local guiding services, and mountain biking and trail running events through the RCTF website.
- Foster a reputation for Rim Country as a premier destination for outdoor recreation, community engagement, and stewardship — benefiting both residents and visitors.

We, the participating agencies and trail groups across Arizona's Mogollon Rim Country, are committed to building and enhancing a regional trail system that reflects the character of our region and benefits all. This vision plan, which outlines collective priorities identified through collaboration among participating agencies and trail groups across Arizona's Mogollon Rim Country, will guide and demonstrate our shared commitment as we work both independently and collaboratively to achieve regional trail building goals in Rim Country.

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Signatures of Participating Organizations:

Rim Country Trail Fund – RCTF

X Michael Browning

Michael Browning
President

Town of Payson – TOP

X Steve Richardson

Steve Richardson
Director

Rim County Mountain Bike Association – RCMBA

X Trevor Creighton
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Steve Bowen
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Rim Country Regional Trails Vision Plan

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X CJ Whitted (May 25, 2026 09:40:03 PDT)

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