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Vancouver hiking trail listed as endangered

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A new Washington Trails Association report found 10 hiking trails in Washington are endangered, including Vancouver's Silver Star.

The report, released this week, is compiled annually by the state hiker advocacy organization, conservation and recreation groups and volunteers. Specific criteria were used to determine whether a trail is endangered. An endangered trail has evidence of logging and mining damage or illegal use of motorized vehicles.

But with an estimated \$25 million required to restore endangered parks and a lack of U.S. Forest Service workers, some say it will take time and effort from volunteers to improve area hiking trails.

Jonathan Guzzo, director of advocacy for Washington Trails, said his group performs volunteer trail maintenance and works with the Forest Service to ensure quality hiking trails. He said lack of maintenance has caused a deterioration in trails at state parks that were once in good shape.

"There's been a backlog of unperformed work, lack of staff and lack of money to hire people to do trail maintenance," Guzzo said Thursday. "It's a long-term issue, and it makes it hard for the Forest Service to keep up."

Guzzo said he receives feedback from hikers on the condition of Washington's hiking trails.

"We get calls every day, especially during hiking season, saying, 'Hey, when is the Forest Service going to maintain this?' " he said.

In addition to volunteer trail maintenance, money has been provided to prevent further damage on some trails. Silver Star hiking trail received a \$58,000 grant this week from the Gifford Pinchot Resource Advisory Committee. The money will go toward boulder installation to keep unauthorized vehicles from damaging the trail and will cover rock for the boulders and the price of a contractor. Volunteers will be needed for planting and seeding the area when the work is finished.

Susan Saul, a Washington Trails Association board member, said such grants are baby steps toward a solution to endangered hiking trails. Saul nominated Silver Star's trail for the grant after a visit last year left her disheartened with the trail's condition.

"Signs are missing, and there are new wheel tracks through meadows," she said. "People are driving up and down the slopes. I went up there last September and saw the damage, and I said, 'We need to do something about this.' "

Ken Eldredge, public service staff officer at Olympia National Forest, said volunteers can help improve the quality of hiking trails.

"We have helped train people to go out and do trail maintenance work to save the Forest Service from doing work," he said. "We work with them on trails with a high priority. We don't have a lot of employees."

Saul said she hopes the attention trails receive by being ranked on the endangered parks list will help bring light to the issue.

"The Forest Service says they don't have money to solve this themselves," she said.
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