



U.S. Forest Service
Coconino National Forest
1824 S. Thompson Street
Flagstaff, Ariz. 86001

News Release



MEDIA CONTACTS:

Brady Smith, (928) 527-3490, bradysmith@fs.fed.us
George Jozens, (928) 527-3412, gjozens@fs.fed.us

www.coconinonationalforest.us

www.twitter.com/coconinonf

www.flickr.com/coconinonationalforest

On-Call PAO Line: (928) 224-8306

Little Bear Trail reopens after being closed for 6 years

Flagstaff, Ariz., Oct. 20, 2016, For Immediate Release — The Flagstaff Ranger District of the Coconino National Forest is pleased to announce the re-opening of the Little Bear Trail after many donations and years of volunteer efforts.

The trail was closed in 2010, when the entire area was closed for public safety concerns after the Schultz Fire impacted the area. Following the Schultz Fire, numerous hazards along the trail such as falling trees, rolling rocks and unstable trail conditions kept the trail closed, and monsoon storms continued to severely erode and flood the trail.

“Without the amazing efforts of our Flagstaff trail volunteer community, this re-opening would not have been possible,” said Sean Murphy, Flagstaff Ranger District Trails and Wilderness Technician. “It is a privilege to work for, and with, such a dedicated and involved community!”

The trail’s revitalization was a huge effort from multiple partners with the Forest Service. Individuals and businesses within the community stepped forward, and more than \$40,000 was spent to employ American Conservation Experience (ACE) crews in the interest of seeing the trail stabilized and made safe for public enjoyment.

Flagstaff Biking Organization (FBO) and the U.S. Forest Service used grants and work days to repair treacherous rocky terrain to once again provide a safe trail for bikers, equestrians and hikers. Not only did Flagstaff Biking Organization have three volunteer events in 2016 to work on Little Bear Trail, but they collected \$10,000 in grants and funds garnered from events managed by the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona (MBAA). This allowed for additional ACE crews to help realign one of the most problematic spots on the trail. Additionally, the Flagstaff Ranger District obtained another \$30,000 in grant funds to keep ACE working through the fall.

Other organizations assisted in repairs, sponsored trail events and helped provide refreshments to those working on the trail. This included the Coconino Horseman’s Alliance, Coconino Trail Riders, Cosmic Cycles, Flagstaff Bicycle Revolution and Run Flagstaff. Fratelli Pizza, Kickstand Coffee and Biff’s Bagels graciously provided refreshments.

“Some of the things that ACE has completed on the trail are, quite frankly, works of art,” said Deborah Soltesz, volunteer trail worker and Coconino National Forest webmaster. “The work involved not just major rehabilitation labor, or the moving of dirt and rock sloughed over the trail, but fixing some washed out drainages and trail rerouting by building new trail near the old one, where repairing the old eroded trail was unfeasible.”

During the last trail day sponsored by Flagstaff Biking Organization on Oct. 15, more than 45 people participated, representing all types of forest users and community volunteers.

“The trail closure is one of the little wounds left by the Schultz Fire,” said Soltesz, “and the process of reopening it has been part of the community’s healing following the [Schultz] fire’s devastation.”

Little Bear Trail climbs the Dry Lake Hills from Little Elden Trail to meet Sunset Trail in a quiet nook between the Dry Lake Hills and Mount Elden.

The trail climbs through the skeletons left behind by the Schultz Fire and patches of surviving ponderosa pine and Gambel oak. It gradually winds through Douglas-fir, limber pine, and pockets of aspen trees at the top. The trail offers outstanding views of the San Francisco Peaks, Sunset Crater, several prominent volcanic peaks, and in the distant background the Painted Desert acts as a colorful backdrop.

Many wildlife species make their home in this area including mule deer, elk, porcupine and black bear for which the trail is named. In addition, red-tailed hawks, raven and the occasional turkey vulture will dazzle you with their aerial acrobatics.

The Coconino National Forest would like to thank all of those who helped support this effort over the years it took to rehabilitate this trail. “This was a true multi-partner effort!” said Murphy.

For images of the Oct. 15 Trail Day, please visit the Coconino National Forest Flickr site at <https://goo.gl/3omDwj>. More information and a map showing the location of Little Bear Trail is located on the Coconino National Forest public website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/coconino/recarea/?recid=55124>.

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