

Ketchum Ranger District Trail Crew 2023 Annual Report



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FROM THE SUPERVISOR



The abundant snow last winter made for awesome skiing and was a much needed boost to local rivers and reservoirs. Due to all the snow, the spring of 2023 saw a handful of impressive avalanche cycles, and if the snow and avalanches weren't enough, the heavy snows transitioned into a rainy spring. All this avalanche activity and precipitation left expansive avalanche debris piles across our trails in multiple locations and runoff damaged trail tread and filled trail drains to capacity. All that to say we had our hands full this summer. The Ketchum Ranger District Trail Crew, our partners, and volunteers worked diligently to clear the debris piles, fix the damaged trails, and bolster our robust trail drains. There is still more work to be done, and we are actively seeking funds and making plans to make lasting repairs to these affected trails next year and into the future.

With all the damage, fortunately we had an exceptional six person trail crew. Their work ethic and attitude was outstanding through a rather tough summer of maintenance and project work. Having a six person crew on the Ketchum Ranger District is key to ensuring our trails remain resilient and enjoyable. The six person crew allows us to split up in the spring and work in smaller groups to clear trail of downed trees (log out) and clean silt and debris from water drains. During our core season we reconvene for project work and backcountry heavy maintenance. Going into this winter we are prioritizing hiring, housing, and retaining experienced professional trail crew members to continue the high standards of the Ketchum Ranger District Trail Program.

These high standards could not be met without our partners and volunteers. They have supported this crew both financially and physically, and without them we would not be where we are today. As we endure through the struggle with staffing, housing, and budgets we will continue to lean on these partners and volunteers to make sure we have boots on the ground completing meaningful trail work that will continue to enhance our trail system.

Again, thank you to all our partners, donors, and trail workers who have helped ensure our Ketchum Ranger District Trail System remains one of the best in the West.

Sincerely,
Kent May

Trail Crew Supervisor, Ketchum Ranger District

STAFF



Front Row (left to right): Kent May, Logan Gustafson
Back Row (left to right): Wesley Anderson, George Skivington, Anthony Ursetti, Jake Zlotnick

Kent May: Trail Crew Supervisor

Prior to coming to the Ketchum Ranger District in 2022, Kent spent 18 years working for the Forest Service all over the West and Alaska. Kent's experience ranges from Wilderness trails to recreation operations. In the winter Kent is a member of the Sun Valley Ski Patrol.

Jake Zlotnick: Trail Crew Foreman

Jake Zlotnick is originally from New Jersey, but began working trails in Flagstaff as a volunteer in 2018. From 2019-2021 he worked on the Wenatchee NF in Washington as a Wilderness Ranger and trail crew member. In 2022 he came to the Sawtooth NF to work trails on the Minidoka District before coming to Ketchum for the 2023 season to be the Crew Foreman. In the winter Jake is a Snow Ranger for the Forest Service.

Logan Gustafson: Trail Crew Member

Logan did 10 seasons in wildland fire working for the Medicine Bow National Forest and three years in the private sector doing land management and logging. This was Logan's first year working trails.

Anthony Ursetti: Trail Crew Member

Anthony started doing trail work as a conservation intern on the Hebgen Lake Ranger District trail crew in 2020. In 2022, he was a field crew leader with Montana Conservation Corps where he led a crew doing trail work in various national parks, national forests, and other public lands. In his free time, he can be found on the trails he maintains and elsewhere pursuing any sort of outdoor recreation he can try.

Wesley Anderson: Trail Crew Member

Prior to coming to Ketchum Ranger District, Wesley worked on the Salmon Challis National Forest as a wildland firefighter. When not digging trail or cutting out downed trees Wesley is a student of Iowa State University where he is majoring in Urban Forestry and slacklining.

George Skivington: Trail Crew Member

George spent his first summer doing trail work as a solo Wilderness Ranger working on the Ruby Mountain, Jarbidge, Mountain City Ranger District. After this he did a stint as a winter ranger doing snowmobile patrol in the same district. He is currently pursuing a Minor in Wilderness Studies from the University of Montana.

Matt Rowell: Trail Crew Project Supervisor (not pictured)

Matt started working in public lands with the Washington Conservation Corps doing habitat restoration and trail work for two years. He began his professional trail career with the National Park Service in Yellowstone, working backcountry trails for 6 years. He started working full time for the Forest Service last year in Las Vegas before moving to the Ketchum RD in August. Matt is excited to settle down near family in the Wood River Valley with his wife and daughter.

PROFESSIONAL/AGENCY PARTNERS



Season Stats for Ketchum Ranger District Trail Crew

Miles of trail maintained: 178.9

Trees Removed from trails: 989

Drains Installed or cleaned: 1402

Feet of trail brushed: 59,827

Feet of tread improvement: 9,280



Spring Damage

The heavy snow load of the 2022/2023 winter produced a massive avalanche cycle and spring run-off that had dire effects to many of our trails. The Ketchum Ranger District, along with our local partners, responded quickly and effectively to this challenge. During the summer we cut out five very large debris piles that completely blocked access to some of our most popular trails, most of which needed continued cutting throughout the summer as the entrained snow continued to melt. The spring run-off, and continued rains in June caused severe gouging and erosion damage which slowed the normal pace of annual heavy maintenance.



Projects

The Ketchum Ranger District Trail Crew of today stands on the shoulders of the crews' from the past. We are fortunate to have a quality trail network due to the work of our crews and volunteers that came before us. Each year we continue to build on that legacy, knowing that the crews of the future depend on it.

Blasting on Wolftone

Last year, with the help of Idaho Parks and Recreation OHV program, we completed the reroute of almost one mile of Wolftone single track to a 50" or less OHV trail. All that we left undone was the blasting of an outcropping that made for a tight squeeze in a 50" side by side with a roll bar. This fall, in conjunction with the Sawtooth National Forest Lead Blaster, we were able to reduce the size of the rock making for safe passage by all 50" or less vehicles. Like most all good blasting projects, it started with a ton of pre work by the trail crew drilling holes. Thanks to the crew, Blaine County Recreation District's Chris Leman, and the Bureau of Land Management's John Kurtz for a great collaboration and an awesome trail.



Projects (cont.)

Little Wood Heavy Maintenance: Each year we do one eight day ‘hitch’ in the headwaters of the Little Wood River. The trails of the headwaters are the most remote on the KRD and require getting packed in by a local outfitter. The work that is performed is clearing logs from the trail corridor, re-cutting logs cut by the public to meet Forest Service guidelines, cleaning and repairing water drains, and repairing and widening trail tread. It is a beautiful area of the District that sees little human traffic. A trip to the headwaters of the Little Wood is highly recommended.



Projects (cont.)

Fox Creek Loop Retaining Walls: One of the most popular mountain bike loops on the Ketchum District is Fox Creek Loop. On the loop there are two notorious climbing turns, that people either love or hate. Either way people feel about the challenging corners, the retaining walls were in need of replacement. Due to close proximity to the trailhead, and the availability of both rock and timber, we partnered with WRTC and turned the project into a learning opportunity for both organizations. As you can see below we rebuilt one using dry stacked stone and the other using peeled logs. It was a great training opportunity and collaboration with our most vital partner.



Partners

Wood River Trails Coalition: Every season the WRTC becomes more robust and invaluable to our local trail system. This summer WRTC hosted 10 volunteer events on Ketchum Ranger District. This included rock and drainage work on Fox Creek Loop, Shadyside, and Greenhorn and maintenance on Forbidden Fruit, Alden Gulch, Sunnyside, Wolfstone, Lost Shirt, Federal Gulch, Taylor Canyon, Curly's and the list goes on and on. WRTC staff and over 100 volunteers worked 310 hours on KRD trails in the summer of 2023. WRTC is a huge part of the success of the trails community in the Wood River Valley, and a vital partner for the KRD Trail Program. For the summer of 2024 WRTC will be funding and hiring two 'hybrid' trail crew members. These two individuals will be employed by WRTC, but will work day to day with the Ketchum Ranger District Trail Crew. We are super excited to get more people from Southern Idaho out working trails and finding careers in land management.



Volunteers

Idaho Mountain Dirt Bike Riders Association: Our local off-road motorbike club has worked diligently to log out our motorized trails for decades. This season they again went above and beyond to ensure our trails are open to all users including cutting for hours and hours on avalanche debris piles. Their consistent availability to respond after wind events and storms to re-log out our motorized trails is nothing short of remarkable. This season the local dirt bike riders cut over 700 trees out of the trails on the Ketchum District alone! On top of constant log out, they do an awesome job of reporting larger issues on remote sections of trail that we don't often see. If you see a motorcycle with a chainsaw on it, be sure to give them a high five and a sincere thanks.

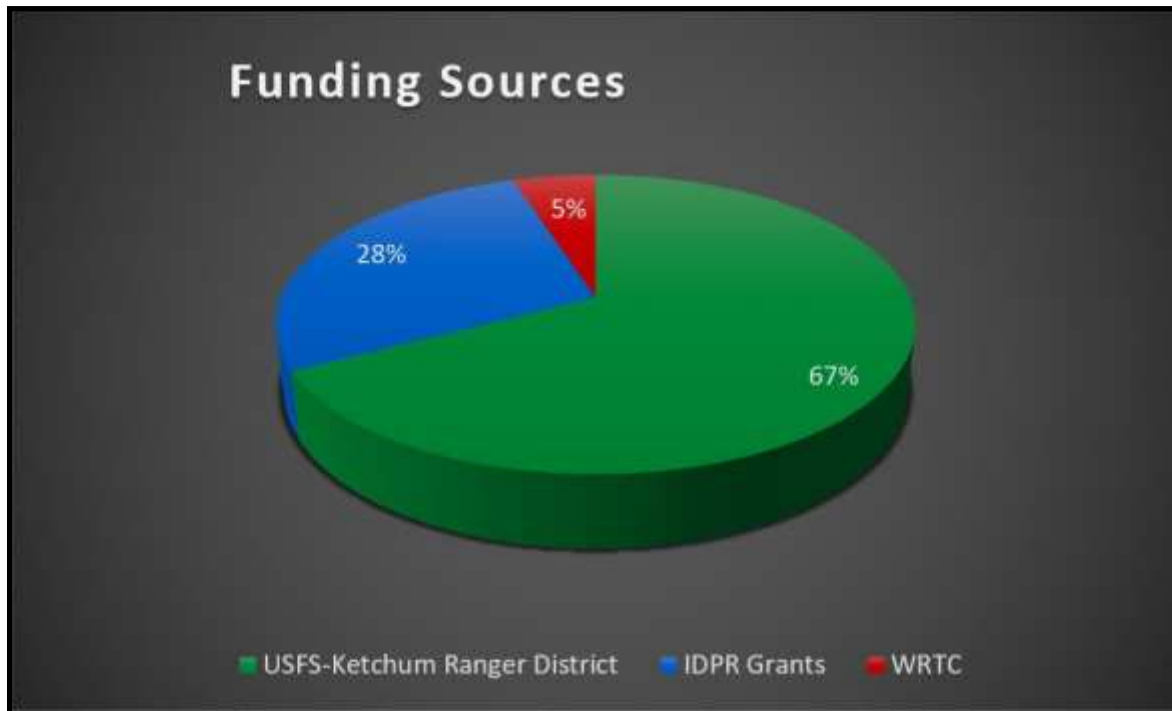


Maintenance

Daily Basic Maintenance: As mentioned before, we stand on the shoulders of crews' that came before us. Nowhere does this shine more true than with basic maintenance. This day to day work of log out, brushing of trail corridor, tread repair/widening, and drain construction/maintenance is truly what makes a trail a pleasure to travel on and easier to maintain. Brushy, incised, and/or overly out sloped trails are hard to travel on and make for a less enjoyable user experience. For the last eight years, we have averaged 240 miles of basic trail maintenance each summer. For the summer of 2023 we performed basic maintenance on 180 miles of trail. We attribute this lower number to the extensive damage caused by the winter of 2023. Going forward we will continue to prioritize quality over quantity of miles while doing daily basic maintenance. If you see issues that need fixed, please report them through the Wood River Trails Coalition by clicking on the 'Trail Reporting Form' on their homepage.



FUNDING



Budget: \$167,626

Trail Crew Wages: \$137,647

Materials/Supplies:\$16,479

Vehicles:\$5,000

PPE:\$4,500

Packing: \$4,000

100% of our budget goes directly to boots on the ground and tools in the dirt. This efficient use of funding ensures that grant funding through Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) and the donations to Wood River Trails Coalition (WRTC) are funding meaningful trail work on the Ketchum Ranger District. To continue the high standards of the Ketchum Ranger District Trail Program, we will continue to lean on outside funding sources to get the needed work done on the ground through the Forest Service professional trail crew.

NEXT SEASON'S GOALS

- **Rooks Creek Trail:** Avalanche debris once again blocked off access to this iconic trail. Summer 2024 we will prioritize a week long backcountry hitch to clear the avalanche debris and reestablish the trail tread.
- **Fox Creek upper bridge:** The heavy spring runoff in 2023 diverted Fox Creek near the upper bridge. The result is a wet crossing for the public and a bridge that crosses a dry channel. We will assess the creek in the spring to decide on the best placement of a new bridge.
- **Little Wood Heavy Maintenance:** The Little Wood Drainage is the most remote area of the Ketchum Ranger District. Because of this, the drainage and its tributaries have not seen the level of maintenance of the rest of the District. Over the last five seasons we have spent one to five weeks making a dent in back log of maintenance, but there is still plenty of work to do. We plan to work in the headwaters of the Little Wood again next year with the goal of bringing more of this beautiful trail network up to the level of the rest of the Ketchum Ranger District trail system.
- **Greenhorn Reroute:** One of the two main bridges that access the Greenhorn trail network had to be removed this summer due to damage caused by the winter snow load. We are in the planning stages to reroute the trail out of the sensitive riparian zone and relocate to a nearby south facing slope. This reroute will eliminate the need for two of the three bridges. We hope to finish a Categorical Exclusion and secure funding for this new trail project by spring of 2024 so we can construct the reroute in the fall of 2024.
- **District wide tread improvements:** The wet winter and early summer of 2023 caused some tread damage that we were not able to get to in the summer of 2023. Summer 2024 we will take the time to improve trail tread on some popular routes to reduce cupping of the tread, which will improve the sustainability and user experience.

