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Trail-goers: Public hears about trail progress, plans



Les Stukenberg/The Daily Courier
Rob Hehlen points out some of the proposed trails in the Emmanuel Pines area as nearly 200 people attend the Greater Prescott Trails Planning meeting in Prescott Monday night.

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PRESCOTT - When nearly 200 people showed up for a meeting about local trails Monday evening, it was clear that the subject draws strong interest from the Prescott-area community.

Francisco Valenzuela, who oversees recreation for the entire Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service, said the Prescott area offers the best example of trails collaboration he has ever seen.

"You're really what makes this thing work," he told the crowd gathered at the Grace Sparkes Activity Center in Prescott Monday, May 11, for the third annual Greater Prescott Trails Planning community workshop.

Citizens heard what the [Prescott National Forest](#), Arizona State Parks, Yavapai County, City of Prescott and Town of Prescott Valley have been doing over the past year to improve and expand and connect local trail systems with the help of a multitude of volunteers. The public was involved in creating the 10-year trail plans through the Greater Prescott Trails Planning process.

"Agencies can only create great trails with the help of great communities," State Parks official Jeff Prince told the crowd. At least two dozen local citizen-led groups are involved in the Greater Prescott Trails Planning process.

The Forest Service and City of Prescott reached out to audience members for more input on specific upcoming projects.

For example, Prescott National Forest officials want to hear about potential environmental and social issues related to the proposed expansion of the Seven Mile Gulch motorized single-track trail near Lynx Lake.

Just two years after the Greater Prescott Trails Planning process began, local agencies have a list of accomplishments on the short-term projects identified a year ago. They have built 13 more miles of the approximately 50-mile Prescott Circle Trail in just 18 months with the help of the Over the Hill Gang, City of Prescott Trails and

Natural Parks Land Coordinator Chris Hosking said. Another nine miles of trails north of Granite Mountain are nearly complete too, Prescott National Forest Wilderness and Trails Manager Jason Williams said.

And on the same day as Monday's meeting, Bradshaw District Ranger Sarah Tomsy signed off on the majority of a proposal to add 18 miles of non-motorized trails to the Prescott National Forest in the Prescott Basin.

"One reason people love living in Prescott is because of the close proximity to trails," Tomsy said. But that also means they live in areas that face a high risk of wildfires, she added.

That's why the presentations included a talk from Forester Ben De Blois about the Prescott National Forest's recent Spence Basin timber sale in the Emmanuel Pines area just west of Prescott. He discussed how it helps reduce wildfire danger by bringing ponderosa pine tree density back to a more natural condition.

While the area might not look so great right now, "the end result is worth it," De Blois said, showing a photo of abundant grass and flowers that were able to grow after another local timber sale. He's planning public field trips this fall to show people forest restoration work.

The Forest Service now is working on designing a trail system for the Emmanuel Pines area, Tomsy said. In the meantime, officials are leaving some of the illegal social trails for people to use.

She asked the public which of the myriad social trails they really want to keep. "They need to be a good backbone" for the future trail system there, she added.

Williams wants to hear what kind of services people want at new trailheads including the White Rock Trailhead in the Emmanuel Pines area. If people want amenities such as picnic tables, toilets, water and trash pickup, the Forest Service will have to charge a user fee, he said.

People who were unable to attend Monday's meeting can register comments via the Greater Prescott Trails Planning website at

<https://sites.google.com/site/greaterprescotttrails>. Information compiled from Monday's written public comments also will be posted there in the future.

After people had a chance to check out maps and ask agency representatives questions at various tables Monday, Tomsy related that many asked how they can help make future trails a reality.

"That to me is a symbol of success," she said.

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