## **State Trails Program**

## **Overview**

Trail use is the number one recreational activity in Colorado. Each year people use Colorado's trails over 40 million times. Roughly nine out of ten Coloradans (87%) report they use trails and about half (48%) say they generally use trails one or more times a month. State, federal, municipal, regional and cities provide extensive trail opportunities to the public. These groups work together to offer connecting trail opportunities, enabling people to bike, hike or walk around Colorado. Trails are also the top outdoor "gateway" activity across the United States.

In 2006, the Outdoor Industry Foundation reported that Colorado's outdoor recreation generated more than \$10 billion annually to the state economy. Trail recreation makes up a significant, yet largely unrecognized portion of that total.

Health care professionals increasingly acknowledge the significant benefits of regular outdoor activity. Eighty percent (80%) of Coloradans say they have convenient access to trails. Trail recreation, including hiking and biking, offers valuable opportunities for healthy life styles.

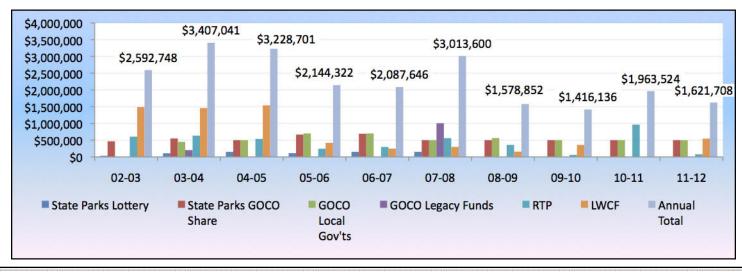
## Colorado's State Trails Program

Established by the Colorado General Assembly in 1971, Colorado Recreational Trails Committee advises the Parks and Wildlife Commission on trail plans and development, standards and funding issues and grants. This is a nine member, volunteer body. Colorado's Park and Wildlife Division's (CPW) Trails Program consists of three principal, programmatic components: the Recreational (non-motorized) Trails Program; the Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Program and; the Snowmobile Program. Technical assistance is offered by the program to anyone interested in submitting trail grant applications through site visits or grant writing workshops.

The Recreational (non-motorized) Trails Program assists local governments, clubs, nonprofit partners and federal land managers through grants and expertise for non-motorized trails in Colorado. Every year the program awards \$2 to \$3 million in non-motorized trails grants depicted in the chart below that shows CPW's annual non-motorized grant awards (light blue columns) and the funding sources (other columns). Public interest in trails access and use continues to increase, representing a significant obligation to the Trails Program. Unfortunately each year, the difference between funding requests and available grant funds grows annually. The erratic and generally declining federal funds seriously hinder CPW's ability to meet Colorado's growing trails needs. In particular, federal Land and Water Conservation Funds and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding levels continue to decline. Fortunately, the reliability of Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) funding provides some consistency for non-motorized trail grants. These funds are especially important for clubs, nonprofits and other trail supporters to continue their work. The need to create a stable, dedicated funding stream for non-motorized trails is crucial.





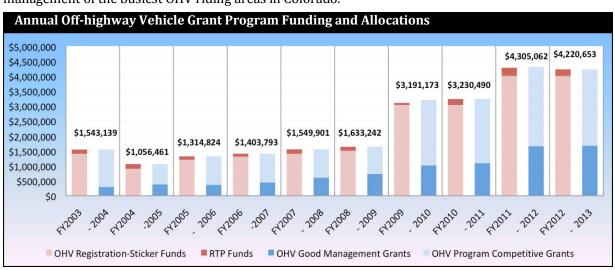


The largest block of federal funding derived from the Federal Highway's Recreation Trails Program (RTP) must go to all three CPW trail grant categories: non-motorized, OHV and Snowmobile, consistent with federal requirements.

**Colorado's OHV (Off-Highway Vehicle) Program** funding comes principally from annual OHV registrations and use permits. In 2011, the Program issued 160,000 OHV registrations and use permits. This enabled the OHV Program to award over \$4 million in OHV grants for on-the-ground trail improvements, trail maintenance, rider education and compliance programs.



Colorado developed a unique and groundbreaking OHV trail maintenance approach known as the "Good Management Program." Trail crews that successfully fulfill their annual OHV trail grant work become eligible for "Good Management Program" status. Designation as a Good Management Program ensures steady annual funding. This strengthens the crew sponsor's ability to hire experienced, seasonal workers. The result is more efficient funding for the maintenance and management of the busiest OHV riding areas in Colorado.





The chart above details OHV grant funding and the allocations to the Good Management Program and other grants. Revenue from OHV registrations continues to increase. Annual requests for OHV grants also exceed available funding.

The OHV program initiated a Law Enforcement "Pilot" Program with the US Forest Service and BLM in 2011 to document rider compliance with OHV regulations. Officers contacted over 10,000 OHV riders. The results showed 97 % of riders complied with OHV rules in OHV riding areas across Colorado. Results documented little environmental damage from OHV use in sensitive areas. Trail maintenance, education, and signage were identified as top priorities for further action.

**The Snowmobile Program** provides funding for trail grooming, trail improvements, the Snowmobile Safety Certification Program as well as enforcement and signing. Program funding comes from registrations and out-of-state use permits. Grants totaled about \$900,000 in 2011, with grants going to snowmobile clubs affiliated with the Colorado Snowmobile Association. Through the program clubs groom over 3,000 miles of snowmobile trails for the use and benefit of all winter sports enthusiasts.

## **Summary**

Over the past decade, CPW's Trails Program distributed over \$54 million for trail grants, capital improvements that benefit trail use and winter trail grooming operations. These funds created job opportunities especially through the Youth Corp organizations, which received about \$1.6 million to build and maintain trails.

While these funds are significant, the program's available funding clearly does not keep pace with the growing demand for trail improvements. Over the past five years, applications for trail grants totaled over \$50 million while money for grants provided about \$26 million in grants. The decreases in federal trail funding seriously erodes CPW's ability to meet public expectations for trails, even as the wellness benefits of outdoor recreation receive stronger attention.