



Deschutes
Trails
Coalition

2026-2028

STRATEGIC PLAN

Deschutes Trails Coalition



INTRODUCTION

WHO WE ARE

The mission of the Deschutes Trails Coalition is to work collaboratively to foster an exceptional regional trail system that is sustainably managed and balances the needs of people and nature. We are a coalition of over 30 organizations and agencies representing public lands, outdoor recreation, conservation, tourism, businesses, and trail user groups. The Deschutes Trails Coalition (DTC) was initially formed in 2017 by the Deschutes National Forest, in partnership with Discover Your Forest. The two organizations invited a diversity of local and regional recreation stakeholders to come together to provide community leadership and support to organizations and land management agencies to address escalating challenges to our trail system. This community of stakeholders continues to drive the Coalition today. We know that a collaborative approach is necessary to address the environmental, social, economic, and physical needs of a sustainable trail system.

CASE STATEMENT

Central Oregon is a place well known for its natural beauty and recreation opportunities, and trails are the means through which the majority of visitors experience the region: on federally-managed lands, in State and local parks, and on public easements on private land. Trails provide significant social and economic contributions that sustain 1,400 jobs and infuse up to \$200M of revenue annually into our local economies. Our expansive trail network contributes to the high quality of life that Central Oregon residents have, providing endless opportunities to access the physical, mental, and emotional health benefits that time outdoors provides.

While trails offer many benefits, there are also negative impacts that trails and trail-based recreation contribute to such as erosion, disturbances to wildlife, impacts to vegetation, and increased risk of wildfire. As trail use increases, the trade-off between benefits and costs is becoming more evident. Our community feels the demand for more trails, sees increasing instances of user conflicts, and also knows there are inequities in who is able to access the trail networks. Ecological impacts from existing trails and the creation and maintenance of new trails will certainly rise under this pressure, threatening sensitive wildlife and fragile habitats. This increased use and demand threatens to undermine the sustainable balance of our trail network. Climate change will also have impacts on trails, especially on winter recreation.

Additionally, the great economic value that trails provide is out of balance with the minimal monetary investments our community makes to sustain them. The funds that were once available to maintain and grow this trail network are being dramatically outpaced by the declining condition of our trails. Even with the over 40,000 hours of volunteer labor donated annually, current resources are woefully inadequate to address trail needs in a sustainable manner. This imbalance between escalating use and static funding will degrade the quality of the recreational experience in the region.

To address these impacts and retain this resource, our community must work collaboratively to invest in an exceptional regional trail system that is sustainably managed and balances the needs of people and nature.



OUR PROCESS

This Strategic Plan is the result of a several month process involving Steering Committee members, staff, and partner organizations of the Deschutes Trails Coalition. Through our process, we affirmed and brought greater clarity to our mission, vision, and the four pillars of sustainability that are foundational to our work. We've identified our five primary goals for the next three years and focused on strategies that make the best use of our resources and collective expertise. Finally, we built out an Action Plan, which identifies specific action steps, timelines, and measurable outputs to evaluate our progress.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We affirmed that our strength comes from our collective voice, which represents a diversity of interests and values. We strive to utilize the strength of our shared values to build a stronger culture of trail stewardship in our community.
- The significant gap between the economic benefits of trails in contrast to the economic investment is a motivator for our organization. One of our main goals is to lessen this gap and secure stable community investments in a sustainable trails system.
- We are eager to engage in and provide more resources for on-the-ground trail projects with our dedicated coalition of partners representing a diversity of trail user groups. Our four Pillars of Sustainability will ground and inform our decision-making and prioritization.
- We will strive to uphold our commitment to equity and inclusion, and know that this is a major area of growth for our organization. For the next several years, we are focusing on building our awareness about key issues impacting underrepresented communities and bringing more representation of marginalized groups into our committees and decision-making processes.

MONITORING OUR PROGRESS

This Strategic Plan is an important document that will guide our daily operations. DTC Committees and staff will utilize the Action Plan as a guide to inform their work. The DTC Coordinator will provide an annual report to the Steering Committee of progress made on each strategy and measurable output. Our intent is for this to be a living document that is responsive to ongoing changes in our coalition and community.

MISSION, VISION & OUR FOUR PILLARS

MISSION *The Deschutes Trails Coalition works collaboratively to foster an exceptional regional trail system that is sustainably managed and balances the needs of people and nature.*

VISION *A deliberately-designed and sustainably-maintained regional trail system that is stewarded by land managers and the community, and upholds the four Pillars of Sustainability: Environmental, Social, Economic, and Physical.*

OUR FOUR PILLARS

1

Environmental Sustainability

Environmentally sustainable trail systems minimize, mitigate, or improve existing and potential impacts of recreation on wildlife and other natural resources. Environmental sustainability depends on a greater understanding of the impacts of trails and using the best possible science and data to inform decision-making.

2

Social Sustainability

Socially sustainable trail systems provide equitable access to recreation for all user groups and demographics, and ensure high quality experiences for all. Social sustainability depends on engagement with diverse user groups and collaboration to mitigate conflicts among user groups.

3

Economic Sustainability

Economically sustainable trail systems are funded at a level that acknowledges their incredible economic benefit and positions them as a long-term economic assets. Economic sustainability depends on partnerships with the tourism and business communities, and leveraging the role that sustainable trails play in Central Oregon's economy and quality of life.

4

Physical Sustainability

Physically sustainable trail systems are designed for longevity and have resources to ensure long-term maintenance. Physical sustainability acknowledges that agencies need additional collective capacity to achieve this goal, through funding and volunteer resources.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

GOAL 1

Support and improve trails in Central Oregon in collaboration with our partners and land managers, driven by the Four Pillars of Sustainability.

Strategy 1.1:

Create a collaborative structure across partners and land managers for planning, implementing, funding, and prioritizing of trail-related work.

Strategy 1.2:

Sustain and broaden relationships with local, state, and federal land managers.

Strategy 1.3:

Conduct research and analysis of trail needs to inform further strategic planning and priorities.

Strategy 2.4:

Fund, administer, and expand the trail maintenance and project crew in collaboration with land managers and partners.

Strategy 2.5:

Support recruitment, training, and coordination of trail volunteers with/for our partners.

Strategy 2.6:

Engage in opportunities to advocate for public funds, access, and capacity for trails.

GOAL 2

Instill a stewardship ethic within Central Oregonians and its visitors and increase community recognition of DTC's leadership in sustaining trails.

Strategy 2.1:

Promote a culture of stewardship through educational messaging.

Strategy 2.2:

Elevate and amplify the work of DTC and its partners to those that live in and visit Central Oregon to enhance brand recognition.

Strategy 2.3:

Recruit DTC partner organizations to expand reach of messaging and activities.

GOAL 3

Promote equitable access for underrepresented communities to foster positive trail experiences for all.

Strategy 3.1:

Conduct fact-finding about trail experiences of underrepresented groups to better understand existing needs in Central Oregon resulting in a focus plan for the next three years.

Strategy 3.3:

Encourage partners to expand opportunities for underrepresented communities to enjoy trails.

Strategy 3.2:

Develop or find existing tools to educate land managers and partners on techniques that increase and improve trail access for all.

GOAL 4

Encourage community and visitor investment that reflects the economic and social value of Central Oregon trails.

Strategy 4.1:

Administer and expand a grant program that funds trail maintenance and development projects in our region.

Strategy 4.3:

Develop and implement a collaborative fundraising plan that increases and diversifies funding for DTC and our partners, including \$1 for Trails and a donorship strategy.

Strategy 4.2:

Pursue expansion of funding from city, county, and regional tourism revenue.

Strategy 2.4:

Investigate opportunities to develop a capital campaign, identifying specific projects or programs that would benefit.

GOAL 5

Grow and strengthen our structure to support future organizational & program development.

Strategy 5.1:

Refine committee structure and staffing needs to support our goals. Recruit future DTC partners with leadership and committee participation strengths and interest.

Strategy 5.2:

Investigate the potential advantages and feasibility of alternative business structures.