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# Grant Modification Proposal

Re-submitted November 2007

# **Jake & Bull Mountain Trail System Assessment, Management Plan, and Trails Education Workshop**

Promoting Environmental Protection through  
Assessment, Collaboration, and Education

It is much more important to understand how the forces of water and gravity combine to move dirt than it is to actually dig dirt, install waterbars, or build puncheon.  
—WOODY HESSELBARTH, *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*, 1999

An application submitted by the:



**U.S. Forest Service**  
*R8, Southern Region*  
*Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest*  
*Blue Ridge Ranger District*

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# Jake & Bull Mountain Trail System Assessment, Management Plan, and Trails Education Workshop

Promoting Environmental Protection through Assessment,  
Collaboration, and Education

## Forest Service Mission

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is *to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.*

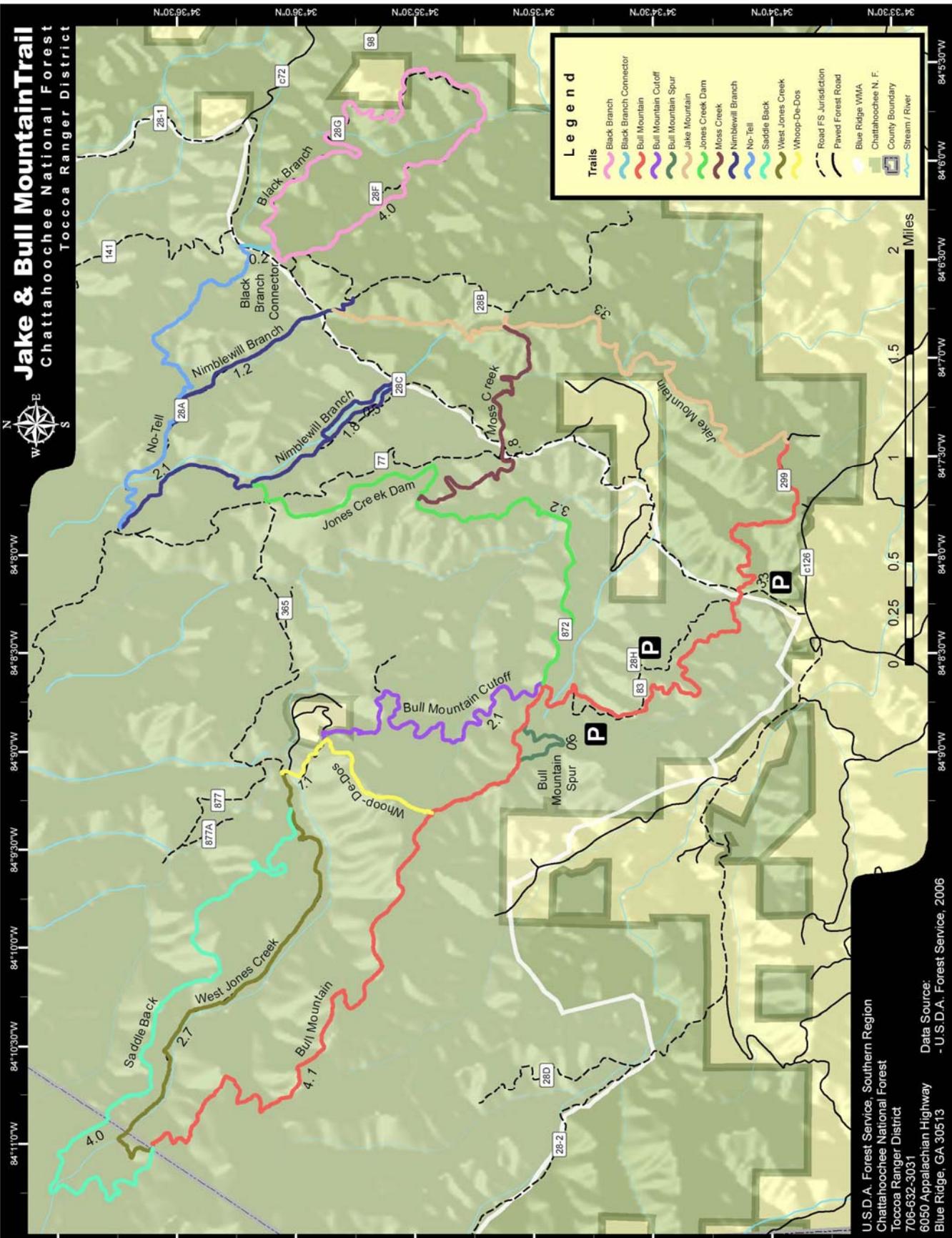
The phrase, "*CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE,*" captures the Forest Service mission. As set forth in law, the mission is to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people: It includes:

- 1) Advocating a conservation ethic in promoting the health, productivity, diversity, and beauty of forests and associated lands.
- 2) Listening to people and responding to their diverse needs in making decisions.
- 3) Protecting and managing the National Forests and Grasslands so they best demonstrate the sustainable multiple-use management concept.
- 4) Providing work, training, and education to the unemployed, underemployed, elderly, youth, and disadvantaged in pursuit of our mission.

The Forest Service Strategic Plan, a multi-year guiding strategy, is tied to the Mission Statement which aims to protect and enhance the Nation's natural resource base and environment. It is one of many tools which ultimately prioritize project-level work. Contained within the current USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004-08 are 6 broad Agency goals. One of these six goals is to; **provide high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities on forests and grasslands, while sustaining natural resources, to meet the Nation's recreational demands.**

# Jake & Bull Mountain Trail

Chattahoochee National Forest  
Toccoa Ranger District



### Legend

- Trails
- Black Branch
- Black Branch Connector
- Bull Mountain
- Bull Mountain Cutoff
- Bull Mountain Spur
- Jake Mountain
- Jones Creek Dam
- Moss Creek
- Nimblewill Branch
- No-Tell
- Saddle Back
- West Jones Creek
- Whoop-De-Dos
- Road FS Jurisdiction
- Paved Forest Road
- Blue Ridge WMA
- Chattahoochee N. F.
- County Boundary
- Stream / River

U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Southern Region  
Chattahoochee National Forest  
Toccoa Ranger District  
706-632-3031  
6050 Appalachian Highway  
Blue Ridge, GA 30513

Data Source:  
- U.S.D.A. Forest Service, 2006

As stated in the Strategic Plan, by mid-century, the Nation's population is projected to increase by nearly 50 percent. If public lands are to continue to provide additional recreational benefits without experiencing unacceptable impacts to resources, emphasis must be placed on effective management solutions. As part of this broad goal, the U.S. Forest Service has identified that maintaining trail networks is a critical component to meeting this objective.

In line with this national directive, the 2004 Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Plan states that a goal of the Forest is to "provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities," including horse and bike trails. For trails under Forest Service jurisdiction, the Plan specifies that "horse, pack stock, and bike use is on designated routes only." As such, the Chattahoochee National Forest is committed to providing these types of opportunities on the forest through effective management on a designated trail system.

More specifically, during the FS Southern Region "Recreation Realignment" process, which began in 2004, the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System complex was identified for future improvements after the completion of a design narrative, or comprehensive plan. Such direction has carried over through the current operating season. Having a Trail Assessment and Management Plan will serve as the basis for this study to prioritize and determine future action items. Rather than reacting to crisis situations, it is the Forest's goal to clearly articulate a plan for maintenance and improvements projects within the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System complex..

## **Jake & Bull Mountain Trail System**

The Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System provides approximately 35 miles of recreational riding for equestrians, bicyclists and hikers. The Jake Mountain Trail System and the Bull Mountain Trail System connect to form a complex system of scenic trails within a four (4) square mile area of the Chattahoochee National Forest. This area is located in western Lumpkin County, less than ten (10) miles from downtown Dahlonega. The system is made up of interconnecting dirt trails and gravel roads through the Chattahoochee National Forest, including a portion of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Management Area. The trail system attracts recreationists from local Georgia communities, the metropolitan Atlanta area and surrounding states.

## **A Brief History of the Jake & Bull Mountain Trail System**

The Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System is a product of years of collaborative planning and financial support through the U.S. Forest Service, its volunteers and the Georgia Recreational Trails Program. The construction of this 30+ mile trails system began in the mid-90's and occurred in multiple phases. The system was built, primarily, on old road beds and existing user-created horse and bicycle trails with very few miles of new trail construction. In addition to the trail system, day-use parking lots and long-term parking/camping facilities were also constructed to accommodate horse trailers and automobiles at the Jake Mountain and Bull Mountain trailheads.

From its conception, the purpose and need for this trail system was to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities for horseback riders, mountain bike riders and hikers in a safe and amenable environment. The intention was to actively engage volunteer groups in the development and maintenance of this system so as to ensure its longevity for the future.

Upon initial analysis of the immediate area, it was determined that several mitigation techniques would need to be implemented to protect the ecological and hydrological integrity of Jake and Bull Mountains.

Among the mitigation techniques implemented during the planning and construction phases were as follows:

- 1) Installation of waterbars and construction of broad-based dips on slopes;
- 2) Grading and aligning trails to appropriate slopes;
- 3) Hardening of any wet prone areas; and
- 4) Planting approximately 200 white oak seedlings within the Jake Mountain parking facilities to replace those extracted during construction;

The heavy concern for erosion control at stream crossings and their approaches prompted the inclusion of a separate mitigation plan for these specific areas. Several mitigations were identified, including the following items:

- 1) Relocating 0.25 mile of existing trail around steep slopes to protect water quality and downstream T&E species;
- 2) Protection of the Jones Creek floodplain through installation of gravel-filled geoweb panels at stream crossings.
- 3) User education materials will be produced and distributed by the project partners and the U.S. Forest Service.
- 4) The stream buffer(s) will be monitored semi-annually, corrective management actions will be taken as needed to maintain its integrity.
- 5) As needed, additional consultations will be sought to correct any induced environmental degradation resulting from use.
- 6) Additional funding will be sought to add bridges as mitigation if current efforts fall short.

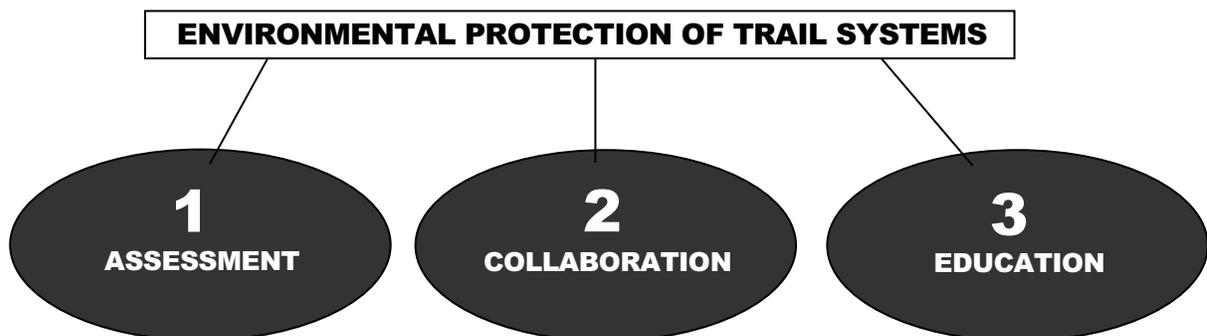
Today, the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System is enjoyed by more people than ever before. The Chattahoochee Trail Horse Association (CTHA) and Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) continue to play an active role in the management and maintenance of this large trail system network. In recent years, CTHA and SORBA members have contributed over 1,000 hours of volunteer labor to improving forest trail systems, with many of those hours directly contributing to the conservation of the Jake & Bull Mountain Trail System. Both groups have invested a substantial amount of time, money and talent to help the Forest Service construct and maintain the trail system.

While volunteer groups have worked diligently to maintain this system, there is clear evidence that the many sections are not **sustainable**. That is, they have a large impact on the natural surroundings, they have significant evidence of soil loss or movement, and they require extensive re-routing and long-term maintenance plans. In addition, it is also clear that more energy must be focused on providing the “right” type of maintenance for those trails capable of being sustained over time. **The focus of this proposal, then, is to promote environmental protection through the creation and maintenance of sustainable trails using a 3 step process focused on 1) Assessment, 2) Collaboration, and 3) Education.**

The first priority for trail work is to correct truly unsafe situations. This could mean repairing impassable washouts along a cliff, or removing blowdown from a steep section of a packstock trail. The second priority is to correct things causing significant trail damage—erosion, sedimentation, and off-site trampling, for instance. The third priority is to restore the trail to the planned design standard. This means that the ease of finding and traveling the trail matches the design specifications for the recreational setting and target user. Actions range from simply adding ‘reassurance markers’ to full-blown reconstruction of eroded tread or failed structures. **Whatever the priority, doing maintenance when the need is first noticed will help prevent more severe and costly damage later.**  
—WOODYHESSELBARTH, *Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook*, 1999

## Grant Project Proposal

The U.S. Forest Service is proposing the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System Assessment, Management Plan, and Trails Education Workshop. This will be a collaborative education project designed to help protect the environment through assessing the existing trail conditions of the 35-mile Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System. The project will utilize the assessment portion of the project as a 7 – 10 day outdoor-oriented education workshop followed by a 1-day collaborative public meeting, a 1-day focused field trip and a 1-day indoor-oriented education workshop. Participants will learn how to assess problem areas and learn technical concepts related to repairing, maintaining and managing sustainable trail systems. The end-result of the project will be a Trail Management Plan that will prioritize maintenance needs and action items to manage the Jake Bull Mountain Trail System. The objective of this project is to meet these needs through 3 steps: 1) Assessment, 2) Collaboration, and 3) Education.



The purpose of conducting an assessment of the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System is to identify current trail conditions and provide an outdoor-oriented education workshop. The purpose of collaborating with the public and organized volunteer user groups is to provide feedback regarding the trail system. Collaboration also provides an opportunity to understand how volunteers view maintenance priorities. Both the assessment and collaboration will facilitate the development of the Trail Management Plan for the entire 35-mile trail system. The purpose of the educational component is to provide field-based trails training to U.S. Forest Service staff, volunteer organizations and individual users. Both the outdoor and indoor-oriented education workshops will help to broaden USFS staff and volunteer understanding of ecological/hydrological trails management issues, strengthen their ability to identify short-term and long-term maintenance needs and provide training in trail assessment, construction and maintenance concepts.

To facilitate this 3-step process, the Chattahoochee National Forest will acquire the services of a Forest Service Enterprise Unit who specializes in projects related to trail planning, management, design, education and construction. The Forest Service Enterprise Unit is an appropriate supplier of this service based on their knowledge of Forest Service design/maintenance standards, and their experience with developing trails management plans, conducting trail assessments, education workshops and working with trails user groups and volunteers.

### **Trail Assessment and Outdoor-Oriented Education Workshop**

**Trail Assessment:** Assessing the content, character and condition of the 35-mile Jake Bull Mountain Trail System is the first step in the project. The Forest Service Enterprise Unit will lead this combined effort between the Chattahoochee National Forest Service staff and a team of volunteers from the Southern Off Road Bicycle Association (SORBA) and the Chattahoochee Trail Horse Association (CTHA). The assessment portion of the project will require 7 - 10 working days to study existing trail conditions of the 35-mile Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System and will be utilized as an education workshop where participants will learn how to assess, repair, and maintain problem areas to create a sustainable trail system.

Due to the high mileage of trail associated with the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System, it will be the most efficient use of time and budget to conduct a broad-stroke review of the current trail condition. This review will be combined into an education workshop that will provide USFS staff and volunteers with a sense of ownership in the trail system. Participants will learn how to assess problem areas and learn technical concepts related to repairing, maintaining and managing the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System.

Upon completion of the assessment, the Chattahoochee National Forest will require the USFS Enterprise Unit to prepare a Trails Management Plan and provide the following items:

1. A Trails Management Plan will be developed that will be used to plan out-year maintenance and management needs.
  - The Plan will provide a summary of problem areas and recommendations for remedial actions associated with each section of the 35-mile trail system.
  - Each problem area will be summarized and depicted with reference photos to a GIS map.
  - The Plan will recommend, prioritize, and identify by location action items that will be used to plan future maintenance projects specific to each trail segment

- Best Management Practices and management action items for the 6 major stream crossings will be addressed.
  - Recommendations and action items related to improving and managing the trail-heads and camping areas which feed the trails system will be addressed.
2. Electronic compilation of the Trails Management Plan including all digital photos, GPS and GIS files for trail conditions and action items identified by photo points.

The estimated completion time for this report is 6 - 8 working days for two resource specialists.

The results of this assessment will not only provide a broad assessment of existing trail conditions, but, more importantly, it will provide an education workshop that will help teach the USFS staff and volunteers how to implement the resulting Trail Management Plan. This Plan will be used as a guide for Forest Service recreation staff and volunteers to systematically plan upcoming work to maintain and manage a sustainable trail system.

### **COLLABORATION**

**1-Day Public Meeting:** The project will include a one-day public meeting that is open to all users, volunteer organizations, local landowners, surrounding community members, etc. This meeting is necessary to share information regarding the trail system, assess opportunities/constraints/concerns regarding the area and its activities, discuss the need for volunteerism, and collaborate among various focus groups.

**1-Day Field Visit:** Following the public meeting, the Forest Service staff, Enterprise Team and Volunteer Focus Groups will conduct a field visit to the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System to discuss specific maintenance needs. The value of meeting with volunteers and users is to gain their perspective in identifying trail problems and solutions.

### **EDUCATION**

**1-Day Follow-Up Indoor-Oriented Education Workshop:** After completion of the outdoor-oriented education workshop and assessment stage, a one-day follow-up indoor-oriented education workshop will be organized with the USFS staff and volunteer groups to discuss the findings of the assessment and the recommendations for future maintenance activities. The meeting will be facilitated by the Forest Service Enterprise Unit (and may be assisted by a local trails education specialist) and will need to meet the following objectives:

- 1) Summarize the maintenance needs/ trail problems of the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System using on-the-ground examples and illustrations (Maintenance needs must include major and minor examples)
- 2) Specifically address water-caused erosion problems, explaining why they happen and possible solutions using water control structures along the trail
- 3) Review the recommendations for maintaining/managing stream crossings; Identify how volunteers can play an active role in the process
- 4) Question and answer session
- 5) Field exercise- yet to be determined

## Project Timeline

The following represents the proposed timeline for this project. These dates and times are subject to change according to the Enterprise Unit's availability, project funding and seasonal conditions.

Date	Activity
Tuesday, April 1, 2008	Preparation for project
Saturday, April 5, 2008	J&B Field Assessment and Outdoor-Oriented Education Workshop
Saturday, April 12, 2008	Public Meeting Held in Dahlonega
Sunday, April 13, 2008	1-day Indoor-Oriented Education Workshop or similar education program
Monday, April 14, 2008	J&B Field Visit with Focus Volunteer Groups
Monday, April 28, 2008	Trails Management Plan Completed

TOTAL TIME = Approx. 21 Working Days spread-out over a month

## Potential for the Project to Continue after the Grant is Completed

The potential for this project to continue years after the grant is completed is almost certain due to its collaborative approach and volunteer support. At the completion of this grant, the Chattahoochee National Forest will be provided with a short-term and out-year Trail Management Plan for the Jake and Bull Mountain Trail System, as well as be provided with better trained and more acute volunteers to help perform this necessary work. This combination of planning and training will provide a solid approach to environmental protection. We hope you will find this project a worthy candidate for funding through the Georgia Recreation Trails Program.

....volunteerism is not a fad but a viable, long term solution to providing many recreation services. The success and importance of volunteer activities today are far exceeded by their potential for the future. Volunteer programs require a great deal of effort to initiate and sustain, and they are not free. However, when approached properly, these programs can have broad long term benefits that far outweigh costs.

—ROGERMOORE, Appalachian Mountain Club,  
in President's Commission on Americans Outdoors,  
*Report and Recommendations to the President of the United States*, 1986