

Land, Water and People

Forest Recreation Face Lift

People have been recreating on the Rio Grande National Forest since before the area was even designated a national forest. Over the last 100 years, the forest has developed a transportation system of roads and trails which provides visitors access to all corners of our mountains. The forest has also constructed recreation facilities composed of campgrounds and picnic sites for those wanting a few more comforts.

Maintaining the forest's transportation infrastructure and developed recreation facilities takes planning, time and money. In order to get a better handle on the management of the developed recreation facilities, the forest has embarked on an evaluation process known as Recreation Facilities Analysis (or RFA in government lingo).

Recreation Facilities Analysis is a process used to help us align the management of our recreation sites with visitors' desires and use. RFA helps ensure that developed recreation sites fit the special characteristics, or niche, of the forest. Additionally, through the RFA process, we develop an understanding of how, when, and to what extent visitors use our facilities. This information is then used to develop a program of work that may result in changes to how our developed recreation sites are managed. For example, some of the campsites may be removed at a low-use campground.

The majority of the developed recreation sites on the Rio Grande National Forest were built in the 1960's. Many do not meet accessibility standards and several are in poor condition. The maintenance required to bring these recreation facilities to standard is estimated at 2.7 million dollars. Many of these facilities, such as outhouses and water systems, were never designed to last as long as they have and are in need of replacement or repair. Our goal is to eliminate 90% our recreation facilities maintenance backlog by 2020.

The Rio Grande National Forest is close to finalizing a draft program of work that will be made available to the public for review and comment. The forest will then use the comments to develop a final program of work, which will be submitted to the Regional Forester in Lakewood for approval. Once approved, the Rio Grande National Forest will become eligible to receive an additional \$450,000 to help reduce the 2.7 million dollars of maintenance backlog. These funds will primarily be used to replace outhouses and repair water systems. The public will be given additional opportunities to comment on site specific projects in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Implementation of the Recreation Facility Analysis will create a sustainable developed recreation program in which the forest provides clean, safe and accessible facilities and water systems. Ultimately, we hope that visitors don't give the facilities a second thought, but instead spend their time enjoying their national forest while creating lasting memories.

John Murphy is the recreation program manager for the SLV Public Lands Center. Over the years, John has proven to the Public Lands Center employees that Murphy's Law is alive and well.