

Rocky Mountain National Park Trail Crew Has Big Summer Plans

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The Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) Trails Program is a robust program that includes trail crews on both the east and west sides of the park, a sign shop and an animal packing operation. The Trails Program has a small winter staff that grows to impressive numbers in the summertime, comprised of NPS employees, Conservation Corps crews, and volunteers. These people are integral for the host of significant trail construction projects and maintenance needed in Rocky. It is not uncommon at some points in the summer for more than 50–60 individuals to be working on park trails in the park, performing trail improvements and repairs that ensure visitor access, resource protection and long-range care of these much-loved trails.

Rocky's Eastside Trails

The park's trail program will have two crews working from **Granite Pass** to the **Longs Peak Boulderfield** this year. The crew is committed to improving the trail and resources around the trail by installing additional erosion control using rock "rip rap" paver tread surfaces. This type of trail material has proven to be a very effective resolution for poor trail conditions, as well as to create a clear demarcation to protect the fragile tundra.

Additionally, over the next several years, the crew has committed to continuing to improve the **Longs Peak Trail** conditions with projects starting at tree line and leading up to **Chasm Junction**.

Crews will also be out in full force on the **Alluvial Fan Trail** this year. A very large crew was hired to continue restoring the trail that was demolished in the 2013 flood. Part of the improvements include a new Outdoor Recreation Accessible Route (ORAR) on the west side of the trail. This is defined as: "A continuous, unobstructed path that is intended for pedestrian use and that connects accessible elements, spaces, and facilities within camping and picnic facilities and at viewing areas and trailheads. ORARs cannot be used at other



New rock wall supporting the tundra and preventing erosion on the Longs Peak Trail

types of facilities, such as educational campuses, office parks, or theme parks." The east side of the trail will also be built for accessible-use, with some exceptions resulting from challenging existing terrain features. Visitors should expect closures of this area throughout the summer and fall so crews can safely work with large machinery in the area.

Another eastside project includes additional improvements on the **Cub Lake Trail**. The very large step issue that was present about a one-half mile below the lake has been resolved, and the crew is now working on improving water drainage, mitigating trail widening, eliminating social trails, and improving trail tread retention.

Keep your eyes peeled for improvements that are beginning at the **Gem Lake Trail** this year. Trail widening mitigation will be a priority where in some areas the trail is more than 30feet wide. Progressing upward toward Paul Bunyan's Boot, crews will be working to improve trail tread retention and stabilization. Additionally, during the next couple of years, visitors can expect to see some improvements on the famously large steps on the trail that lead to the lake.

Rocky's Westside Trails

This will be a busy year for the trail crew on the west side of the park, and visitors can expect to see crews in some popular areas of the park.

In a project that started last year, crews will continue making improvements on the **Onahu Trail**. To date, crews have been focused on improving drainage in areas that are very wet which is causing trail widening and tread loss as a result.

On the trail around **Lake Irene**, work

will be done to mitigate areas of erosion and social trails. This includes extending an already existing log retainer wall to support the uphill side of the trail, and adding log retainer walls below a steep area to support the trail and deter new social trails.

A two-year project will begin this summer as crews begin transporting new bridge material via helicopter to the **North Inlet Falls Bridge**, located on the Nakoni/Nanita Trail. This is an old bridge that, while still safe for hikers, no longer safely supports stock use. Crews have been building components of the bridge in the eastside trail shop during the winter to facilitate a more efficient construction schedule in the summer of 2021 when the bridge will be constructed.

The trail program is also planning to repair the **Red Mountain Trail multi-use bridge**, located just a short distance from the Colorado River Trailhead. Trail crews will replace the rock gabions that support the bridge with new concrete footers to increase the lifespan of the bridge structure. This project will start in July and ramp up construction at the end of August and into September.

Parkwide

Parkwide, the Rocky Mountain National Park Trail Crew is taking a new approach to trail maintenance to prevent deferred maintenance. This year, the program will have a crew located in the park's backcountry performing more in-depth trail maintenance in areas that have proven difficult for work crews to access due to the site's remoteness and high snowmelt. These more remote areas include areas far in on the **North Inlet Trail, the Mirror Lake area and Black Canyon**.