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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **COLORADO'S 14ERS NEED \$24+ MILLION IN TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS FIRST-EVER "14er REPORT CARD" RANKS 42 SUMMIT ROUTES, COST OF FUTURE TRAIL WORK**

(Golden, Colo.) Colorado's popular 14,000-foot peaks, the "14ers" (or "Fourteeners"), need more than \$24 million in future trail reconstruction and restoration work to reach long-term sustainability, according to the first-ever "14er Report Card" released today by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative. The report card culminates a three-year inventory and analysis project that looked at 10 different factors—from on-the-ground issues such as the extent of erosion and trail widening to the amount and accessibility of natural rock source needed to improve the wilderness trails—on 42 summit trails across the state providing access to 39 of Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks.

"This report card is a sobering reality check regarding how much progress has been made toward achieving CFI's goal that every 14er has a sustainably designed, durably constructed summit route," said Lloyd F. Athearn, executive director of Colorado Fourteeners Initiative. "Twenty years after CFI's founding about half of the peaks still have no formally planned route, while many that do are in poor condition and in need of significant improvements. Properly built and maintained summit trails are vital to protecting the rare and fragile alpine tundra ecosystems found on the 14ers and the outstanding recreational opportunities these peaks offer to hikers from across the country."

The CFI inventory analysis found that 26 Forest Service-planned summit routes that were formerly constructed by CFI or another partner organization require an additional \$6 million in trail improvements to be fully sustainable. An additional 16 user-created routes that have never been formally planned or built are estimated to require an additional \$18 million in new trail construction. A further 16 routes were not inventoried in this initial baseline inventory due to trail work under way at the time or other complicating factors.

"Fourteener trail work is time-consuming, physically demanding and slow," Athearn said. "Work is performed by hand using non-motorized trail tools in some of the most challenging wilderness locations possible in the Lower 48 states. The high altitudes where these 14er hiking trails are located allow three to four months of snow-free conditions over the summer when our crews can work. These

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steep climbing trails require extensive armoring with rocks, logs and other natural building materials found on the mountain to stabilize the trail so that it does not erode when it rains or due to the impact of an estimated quarter-million hikers annually.”

Begun in the summer of 2011, CFI staff spent three field seasons (June through September) conducting detailed, foot-by-foot, GPS-based inventories on 42 summit routes that resulted in 20,370 data points. Each trail was assessed based on 10 factors, including:

- the location and condition of existing constructed trail features (i.e. retaining walls, check steps, drains, etc.),
- the extent of trail erosion (in cubic feet), trail “braiding” (proliferation of multiple trails), and trail “widening” (width of the trail beyond the standard, 18-to-24-inch-wide wilderness trail),
- the number and complexity of new trail features needed to be built to bring the trail to sustainable conditions, and
- the amount of source material (i.e. rocks, logs, etc.) needed to construct the required trail features, as well as the distance from the worksite these materials would need to be hauled by hand.

The multi-factor analysis estimated the time required to complete this identified work and the resulting cost to make these improvements. A series of algorithms generated grades for each route that allowed them to be compared with all the other inventoried routes. The amount of time required to complete identified work on every route was calculated, which led to the cost projections that factored in whether trail construction work could be performed by volunteers and/or by hired crews.

The interconnections between inventoried factors help explain why one route that has seen a small amount of trail construction work is rated an “A” while another route that has seen extensive work is rated an “F”. For example, the approach trail on North Maroon Peak, completed in a single season in 2012, is short (0.8 miles) and travels principally through talus fields that allow for ample armoring with large, stable rocks. A small amount of work valued at less than \$125,000 is needed to bring this trail to ideal conditions. In contrast, the summit route on Mount Bierstadt is 3.5 miles in length, crosses flat areas in the opening mile that are prone to staying muddy for long periods after rains, and traverses loose, vegetated slopes with little rock available to build rock staircases and retaining walls. Despite seeing five years of prior reconstruction work and a sixth planned for this summer, the Bierstadt trail is the worst-rated planned 14er trail in the state with a total cost to repair projected at \$3.3 million.

“The report card helps CFI prioritize future trail reconstruction projects to ensure that the

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highest-priority work is completed and that many millions of dollars of prior trail investments are protected,” said Athearn. “Though much work remains to be done to build out the 14er summit trail network, CFI now has a much better idea of what needs to be built, where it needs to be built and how much it will cost. This helps us recruit volunteers, partner organizations and funders to ensure the iconic 14ers are protected for future generations to experience and enjoy.”

Additional information about the 14er Report Card is contained on CFI’s website at: [www.14ers.org/stay-informed/colorado-14ers-statewide-report-card](http://www.14ers.org/stay-informed/colorado-14ers-statewide-report-card).

The inventory and analysis work resulting in the 14er report card was made possible through grants from several institutions, including the Colorado State Trails Program/Great Outdoors Colorado, the Colorado Mountain Club Foundation, Recreation Equipment, Inc. (REI), the Laura Jane Musser Fund, Booz Allen Hamilton, The Summit Foundation, the Aspen Skiing Company Environment Foundation, Pitkin County, the Golden Civic Foundation and the Brown-McNitt Family Fund.

**About Colorado Fourteeners Initiative.** CFI was founded in 1994 to preserve and protect the natural integrity of Colorado’s 14,000-foot peaks through active stewardship and public education. To date CFI has constructed 29 sustainably designed, durably built summit trails on 26 14er peaks. CFI has engaged more than 10,350 days of volunteer stewardship since 2001 in the construction and maintenance of these peaks. A multi-pronged educational strategy has contacted more than 80,000 hikers in the field through paid crews and volunteer Peak Stewards, while CFI’s YouTube channel contains more than 40 educational videos that have been viewed more than 24,275 times. Learn more at [www.14ers.org](http://www.14ers.org) and obtain frequent updates on Facebook.