

# THE DENVER POST

## ENVIRONMENT



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### Colorado Fourteeners Initiative's "14er Report Card" shows trails need \$24 million in repairs

By [Jason Blevins](#)  
The Denver Post



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Rachael Hudson and Chris Houde, trail crew members for the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, clear a trail off Flat Creek in the Mount of the Holy Cross Wilderness Area. Photo by Jason Blevins

Colorado's fourteeners are ill.

And the bill for trail reconstruction and restoration on the state's beloved peaks could be more than \$24 million.

That's according to the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, which this week released its first-ever "14er Report Card," [a three-year inventory and analysis of trails](#) that wind to the summit of 39 of Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks.

The report card shows the state's fourteeners in dire health, with 26 trails built in the last 20 years needing \$6 million in improvements and 16 user-created trails needing \$18 million for new trail construction.

Lloyd Athearn, executive director of the [Colorado Fourteeners Initiative](#), said his three-year report card is "a sobering reality check" on his group's goal of a sustainable, durable trail to the summit of every fourteener.

When the nonprofit Colorado Fourteener Initiative formed in 1994, there were two purpose-built, established trails up fourteeners, the Keyhole Route up Longs

Peak and the Barr Trail up Pikes Peak. Every other fourteener summit trail was simply trampled tundra connecting trailhead to peak. Through what Athearn called his group's "glacial like progress," the CFI and other partner groups have worked with the Forest Service to design sustainable 26 trails up 30 peaks.

2015 Colorado Fourteeners Statewide Report Card							
Planned, Constructed (later Summit Routes) (later Build)		Grade	Cost	Unplanned (later Summit Routes)		Grade	Cost
Blanca Peak & Ellingwood Peak - Lake Camanche (2011-12)		A	\$	Mount Elbert - Black Cloud F		C	\$555
North Maroon Peak - Approach, Northeast Ridge (2012)		A	\$	Quandary Peak - Blue Lakes		C	\$555
Pyramid Peak - Approach, Northeast Ridge (2012-04)		A	\$	Mount Princeton - Radio Towers F		C	\$555
Mount Harvard - North Horseshoe Basin (1999-2002)		A	\$	Hanley Peak - Grizzly Gulch F		C	\$555
Humboldt Peak - South Colony Lakes (1997-98)		A	\$	Mount of the Holy Cross - North Arm F		C	\$
Whitson & Sunlight Peaks - Chicago Basin (2007, 2009-10)		B	\$	Mount Antero - Anderson Gulch		C	\$
Mount Yale - Denver Creek (2008-11)		B	\$	Hanley Peak - American Basin F		C	\$55
Mount Evans - Chicago Lakes & Summit Lake (2005-2006)		B	\$5	Mount Lindsey - Lily Lake		F	\$5555
Tabagash Peak - Jennings "CICOP" (2002)		B	\$5	Mount Elbert - North		F	\$5555
Capitol Peak - Capitol Lake (2002)		B	\$	Mount Evans - Guanella Pass		F	\$5555
Crestone Peak & Needle - South Colony Lakes (2001-2003)		B	\$	Mount Shavano - Blonde Gulch		F	\$5555
Mount Massive - East Slopes (2005-2009)		B	\$5	Redcloud Peak - Silver Creek F		F	\$555
Mount Massive - Clear Creek (1998-2002)		B	\$5	La Plata Peak - Winfield - SW Ridge		F	\$5555
Mount Evans - Bygones (2008)		B	\$	Mount Columbia - North Horseshoe Basin		F	\$5555
Mount Massive - North Horseshoe Creek (2003-05)		B	\$5	Mount Elbert - East Slopes F		F	\$5555
Quandary Peak - East Slopes (2001-02)		C	\$555	Snowmass Mountain - Snowmass Creek		F	\$5555
Mount Democrat - Elk Lake (2008)		C	\$55				
La Plata Peak - Northwest Ridge (1995)		C	\$				
Mount of the Holy Cross - Redhorse Pass (2011-12)		C	\$5				
Mount Snodgrass - Iceberg Day Basin (2003-04)		C	\$				
Uncompaghe Peak - Nether Creek (2006)		C	\$55				
Mounts Bedford & Oxbow - Missouri Gulch (1995-96)		C	\$5				
Wentworth Peak - Montanero Creek (2004-05)		C	\$55				
Grays & Torreys Peaks - Shavano Gulch (2005-02)		C	\$555				
Mount Manitou - Missouri Gulch (2003-01)		C	\$55				
Mount Bierstadt - Guanella Pass (1999-2002, 2014-15)		F	\$55555				
<b>Total Estimated Cost:</b>			<b>\$6 million</b>				
<b>Goat Routes and Legends:</b>							
F = Go to bring route to good condition, not including on-going maintenance							
S = \$125,000							
\$5 = \$125,000 to \$124,999							
\$8 = \$125,000 to \$199,999							
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#### Cost Notes and Legend:

1) Cost to bring route to ideal conditions, not including on-going maintenance.  
 \$ = <\$125,000  
 \$5 = \$125,000 to \$249,999  
 \$55 = \$250,000 to \$499,999  
 \$555 = \$500,000 to \$999,999  
 \$5555 = \$1,000,000 to \$9,999,999  
 \$55555 = \$10,000,000 and up

#### Peaks/Routes to be inventoried

Castle & Comandrum Peaks - Castle Creek  
 El Diente Peak - Kijacator & Navajo Basins (2014-15)  
 Mount Elbert & North Elbert - Chicago Basin (2013, 14)  
 Elk Canyon Peak & Challenger Point - North Slope (2014-15)  
 Mounts Lincoln & Cameron - Elk Lake Loop  
 Maroon Peak - South Ridge (2013)  
 Pikes Peak - Barr Trail & Crogs Trail  
 San Luis Peak - Stewart & Cockatoo Creeks (2012-13)  
 Mount Sherman - Fourmile Creek & Snow Gulch  
 Sunshine Peak - Redcloud traverse  
 Tabagash Peak - Shavano traverse  
 Mount William - Snowmass Basin & Rock of Ages  
 Wilson Peak - Rock of Ages

#### Peaks/Routes that Will Not be inventoried

Culebra Peak - Entirely on Private Land  
 Little Bear Peak - Too Hazardous to Maintain  
 Longs Peak - Maintained by National Park Service

Those trails need \$6 million in work, according to the CFI report, which analyzed 10 different factors including erosion and train widening and the amount of natural rock available to make needed repairs. That repair cost includes more than \$2 million to fix the [trail up Mt. Bierstadt from Guanella Pass](#), which was rebuilt from 1999 to 2002 and again in 2014. Bierstadt got an "F" on the report card, largely due to its popularity, ease of access, ease of climb and the absence of natural rock to build the trail.

Another 16 fourteener trails built by Vibram-soled users over decades – which were built without longevity in mind – need \$18 million in repairs, including eight "F"-graded peaks that need \$8.5 million to \$15 million in repairs. CFI is still studying 16 peaks that were not included in the report card.

The problems with the trails is not over-use as much as the location of the user-built trails, Athearn said, hence the hefty cost for redesigning and relocating those 16 unplanned summit trails. The [five Front Range fourteeners – Mt. Bierstadt, Mt. Evans, Grays Peak, Torreys Peak and Quandary Peak](#) – see about 100,000 annual hiker days and need an estimated \$6.3 million in trail repair, according to the report card.

The CFI is not advocating for permits to limit use or installing user fees to fund repairs. The group has honed a different model over its two decades, raising private money and enlisting the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps and volunteers to support its work on Colorado's highest peaks. Each year for the past six years the group has set a record for fundraising. The group now raises \$10 for every \$1 provided by the Forest Service to design and rebuild trails, Athearn said.

"It seems like we have an opportunity here to harness philanthropy and volunteerism and try a different way that does not involve limiting use (through permits) or going into that regulatory direction with fees," he said. "We are continuing to grow the potential of foundations, the Youth Corps and local governments that are working to keep us from going into that regulatory model."

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