



**Scott Condon**

**scondon@aspentimes.com**

June 10, 2015

## Trails on Colorado, Aspen 14ers still need work



Members of a Rocky Mountain Youth Corps trail crew use a sling to move a heavy boulder during work on North Maroon Peak Trail in August 2012. Colorado Fourteeners Initiative is assessing how much work is needed on other big peaks.

### HOW ASPEN PEAKS RATE

The report card prepared by Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI) shows a mixed bag for trails on the big peaks around Aspen.

North Maroon Peak, Pyramid Peak and Capitol Peak all received high marks for their trails. CFI worked on North Maroon in 2012. The trail has a rating of “A”.

The Pyramid Peak trail is rated an “A-“. CFI worked on in in 2005 and 2006.

Work was performed around the Capitol Lake section of trail on Capitol Peak in 2002. The trail has a “B” rating.

CFI estimates that bringing each of the trails to “ideal conditions” would cost less than \$125,000 each.

Snowmass Mountain's trail via Snowmass Creek was rated an "F" because it is a user-made rather than a planned and constructed summit route. Building a sustainable trail could entail using parts of that route, said CFI Executive Director Lloyd Athern, but extensive new trail and reclamation of existing sections is foreseen. The cost is estimated at between \$1 million and \$2 million.

The trails on Castle and Conundrum Peaks haven't been inventoried, Athern said. The trail on Maroon Peak wasn't assessed, but CFI worked on it in 2013, so it's in good shape.

Overall, the trails on the big peaks in the Elk Mountains, including those around Aspen, were rated a "C+" in the report card. The trails in the Sangre de Cristo Range received a "B". The Front and Tenmile Ranges only managed a "C-" as did the Sawatch and Mosquito Ranges.

The trails on the San Juan Mountains were assessed at a "D+."

A nonprofit organization that has worked extensively on trails on Colorado's biggest peaks — including several in the Aspen area — said \$24 million is needed for future work and "long-term sustainability."

The Colorado Fourteeners Initiative on Tuesday released its first-ever report card on the condition of the trails on most of the state's 53 peaks over 14,000 feet in elevation. Snowmass Mountain's trail received a letter grade "F". (See related fact box on page A8.)

The fourteeners have paid a price for surging popularity. The growing number of hikers and climbers in recent decades has resulted in more trail degradation. Colorado Fourteeners Initiative Executive Director Lloyd Athern said many of the peaks have user-made trails through gulches and over tough terrain. The trails were never planned and aren't necessarily sustainable. Many are eroding or leading to damage to nearby vegetation.

Colorado Fourteeners Initiative officials spent three years taking an inventory on many of the trails and doing an analysis of conditions. They looked at different factors — from the extent of erosion to the amount of rock available on-site to create stairs and other features.

"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," Athern said in a prepared statement.

---

The report concluded that about \$6 million is needed for final trail improvements on 26 routes that were already built by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative or partner organizations after planning with the U.S. Forest Service.

Another \$18 million is needed to work on 16 user-created routes that have never been formally planned or built.

The report said inventories weren't taken on 16 routes for various reasons. In some cases, peaks have multiple routes and the inventory focused on the most highly used trails.

Athern told The Aspen Times all the information was shared with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, agencies that oversee the land where the fourteeners are located. He said the \$24 million in work was based on the organizations experiences in the field since its formation in 1994 and its knowledge of how much it costs to undertake high-altitude work. It's also based on the organization's ability to harness volunteer labor for many of its projects.

"I don't think there would be any contractors able to underbid us," he said.

The report card will serve as a foundation for talks with hikers, local governments, nonprofit groups and anybody who loves fourteeners, Athern said. The goal is to mobilize their help in raising the funds necessary for the projects.

Details on the report card can be found at [www.14ers.org/stay-informed/colorado-14ers-statewide-report-card](http://www.14ers.org/stay-informed/colorado-14ers-statewide-report-card).

[scondon@aspentimes.com](mailto:scondon@aspentimes.com)

©2005 - 2015 [Swift Communications, Inc.](#)