

# FY21 Field Survey - Trail Program

A survey conducted by the Washington Office Trails Program in partnership with the University of Colorado Denver

**Purpose:** To evaluate the current perceptions of USFS trail employees at the district and forest level on topics such as:



**Trainings**



**Trail Data**



**Trail Program Integration**



**Natural Disaster Impacts**



**Professional Development**



**Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion**



**Partner & Volunteer Engagement**



**Trail Strategies**



**Washington Office Communication**

**Washington Office**  
*National Trail Program*

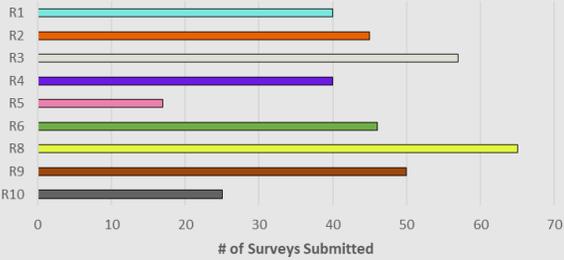
**387**

Completed  
Surveys

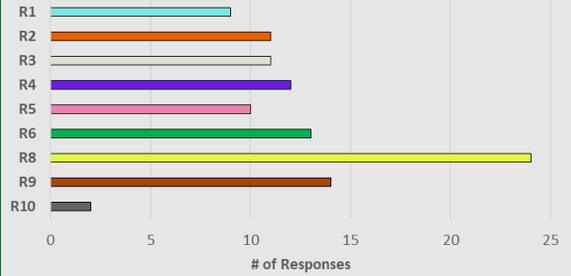
**106**

Forests/  
Grasslands

Surveys Recieved by Region



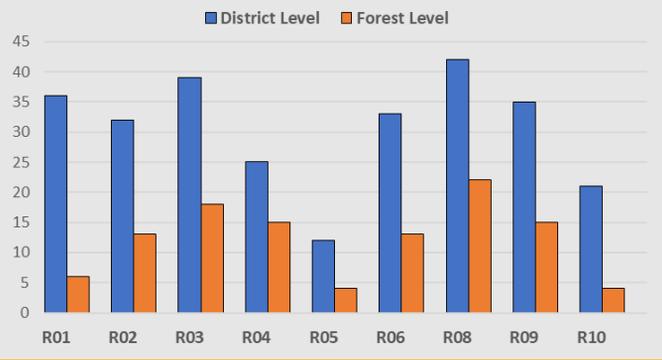
Number of Forests Response by Region



**71%\***

District  
Responses

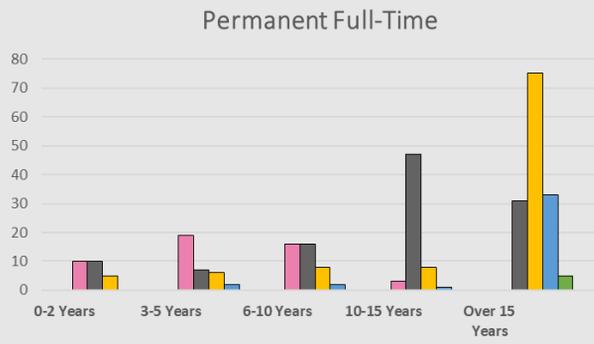
District/Forest Level Responses by Region



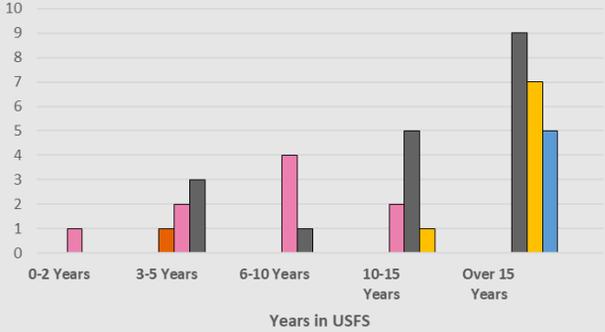
\* 20 responses for district information were left blank and assumed as forest level

# Demographics

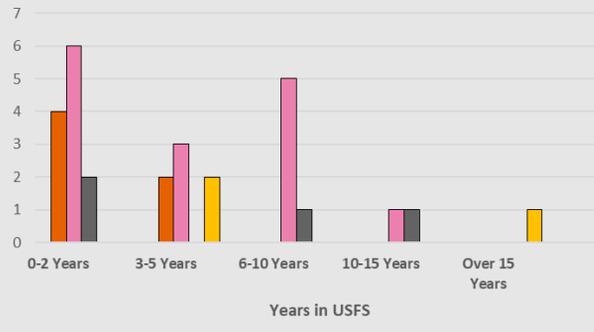
82% of responses from permanent full-time employees



Permanent Seasonal



Temporary



# Trainings

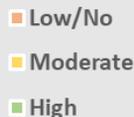
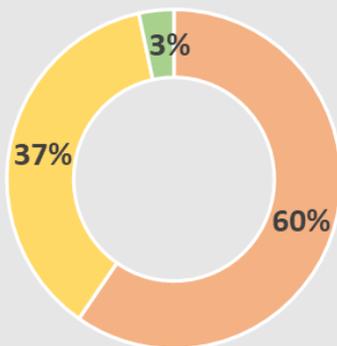


## Trainings Most Important to Job Performance

Training	1 = Highest Ranked Training, 12 = Lowest Ranked Training									
	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R8	R9	R10	National Avg
Partnership/Volunteer Engagement & Mngt	2	3	1	1	1	2	2	1	5	1
Grants & Agreements	6	1	4	1	2	3	3	4	3	2
Program Mngt (Planning & Budgeting)	4	4	3	3	3	4	1	3	5	3
Technical Trail Skills (Construction)	1	1	7	4	5	1	7	8	1	4
Community Engagement	5	6	2	5	5	8	4	5	8	5

\* Respondents rated the level of importance of each training. The ratings were averaged out to get overall national and regional rankings.

## Availability of Trail Related Trainings



60% of responses noted low or no trail related trainings available.

*"There is **no regional cohort of technical or professional training. Units are left to fend for themselves by creating internal training sessions...."***

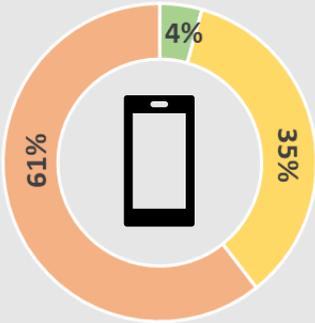


# Trail Data

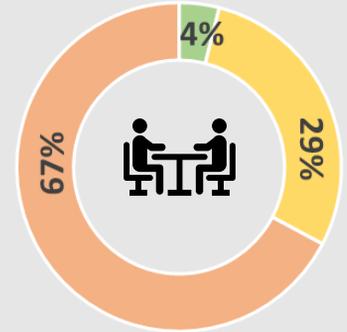
**INFRA** was labeled as **'outdated'** and **fails** to capture 'ground-based nuances.'

Sharing Data with Agencies/Public

Mobile Applications - Ease of Use



Data Entry- Ease of Use

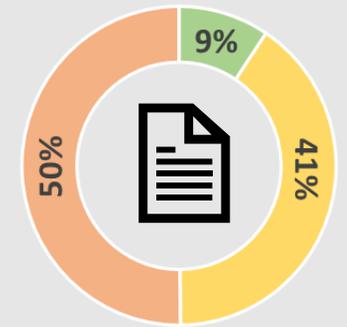
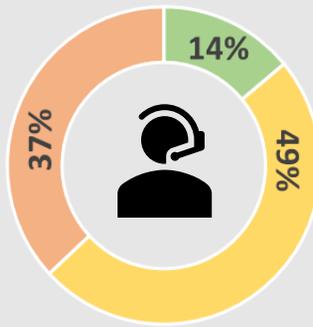
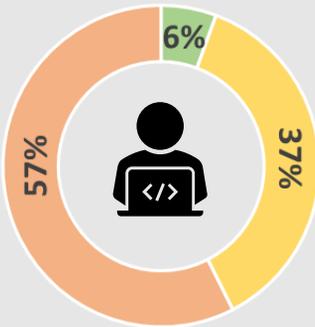


Generating Reports & User Views

"Move from INFRA to **GIS based** trail data **reporting**."

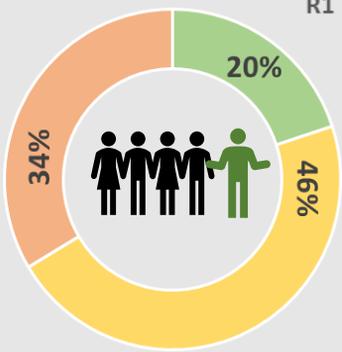
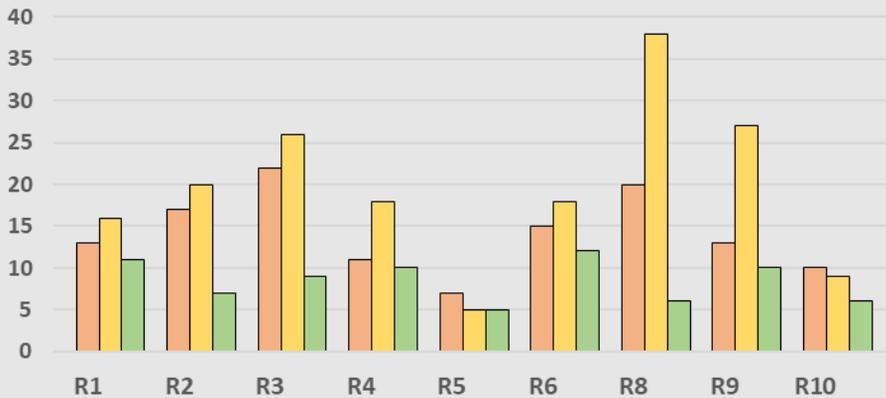
Poor Average Excellent

Help Desk Support



## Rate of Knowledge - Agency's Trail Data Requirement/Accomplishment Reporting

Low/None Moderate High

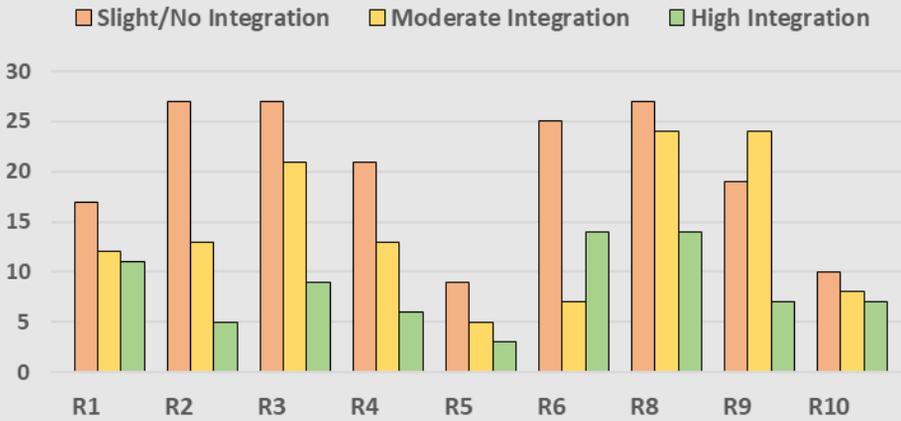


**About 1 in 5** report a high understanding of trail data requirements and reporting.

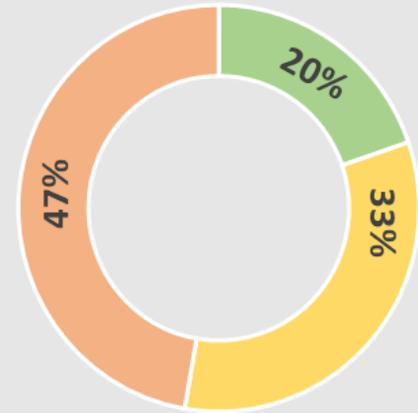


# Trail Program Integration

### Unit's Integration of Trails within other Program Areas



### Overall Response

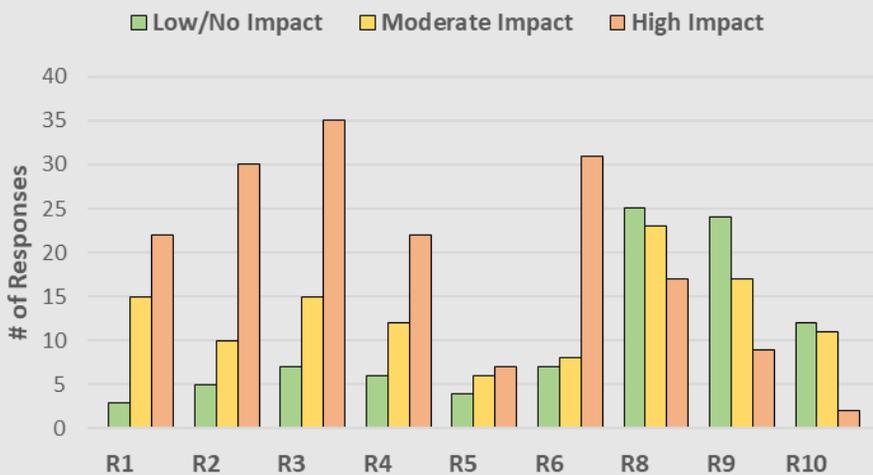


**Almost half** of respondents reported **little to no integration** of trails with other program areas.

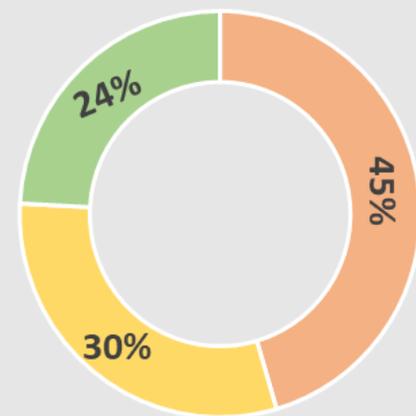
# Natural Disaster Impacts



### Impacts from Fires, Beetle Kill, and other Natural Disasters on Ability to Maintain/Access Trails



### Overall Response



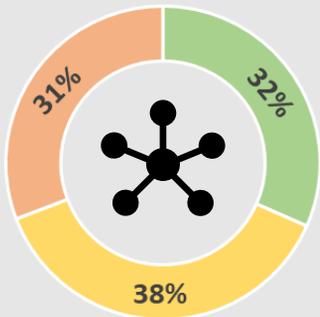
**Nearly half** of responses noted **high impact**. **Regions 8, 9, and 10** reported **less overall impacts**.

# Professional Development



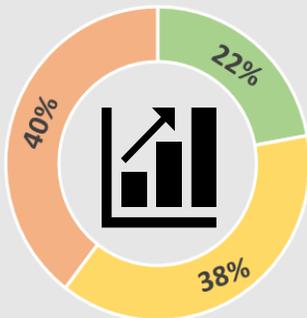
□ Poor   □ Average   □ Excellent

## Connectivity within the Trails Community



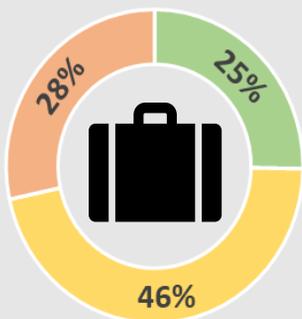
“We need to have employees to engage and manage volunteers. Currently we are **significantly understaffed**, feels like we’re **hanging on by a thread** and **can’t keep up with our base program of work**, let alone recruiting and managing volunteers in a way to meet their needs and the agency’s needs.”

## Career Ladder Opportunities within USFS



“We need **stable base budgets** with enough capacity to support a **consistent program**, retain good employees, and **provide career ladder opportunities** for temps looking to transition to permanent positions.”

## USFS Ability to Support Professional Development



“**We are not creating professionals** in our own agency and giving much of the work to partners who have low skillsets and very little understanding of public land management...”

Many written responses noted a **lack of career ladder opportunities** as a major issue within the trails program.

# Survey Quotes



"We are **struggling** recruiting and retaining a seasonal trail crew...**Locality pay adjustments** are needed or **govt. housing** or it will become impossible to fill seasonal positions."



"I have journeyman skills...I trained almost all trail based skills...and recently took a Rec Staff Officer position to improve my socioeconomic status...if the agency **does not pay more than a GS7 for these skills**...we will continue to **lose them**...and institutional knowledge. I wish the agency had **professional jobs that trained these skills** to ensure a **capable workforce into the future.**"



"I need my trails foreman (GS7) position filled so I have **someone** that can **focus on working with partners/volunteers**. We have great volunteers, but **we need someone to lead and coordinate** them on our side"



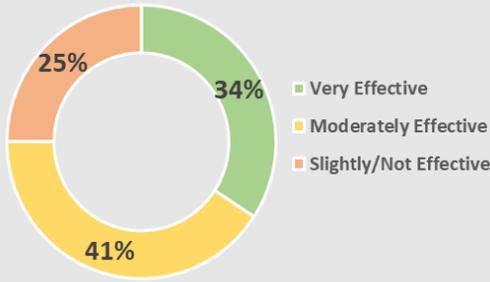
"Our modern system of trail management requires far **more administrative burden** than the older system of appropriated funds... we have more volunteers than ever, we have equally **increased the enforcement of our red tape**...Our **administrative workload has become larger than ever**, yet we are doing it with a **fraction of the permanent staff** which built the system we maintain...Counterintuitively the shared stewardship model requires more administrative capacity ...We simply cannot handle this large administrative model with our tiny workforce."



# Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion



Unit's Effectiveness at Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into Trails Management



"We have **renamed trails with offensive names** to reflect native names. We are working with one of our partners to **host a BIPOC affinity trip** in the wilderness...."

"**Nothing**, we are **here to work** on trails. We all do the same work, **we are all equal**. It is stuff like this that **divides us**."

Majority of responses equated their **DEI efforts** towards **hiring**.

**What Action is your Unit Taking to Incorporate Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Trail Management?**



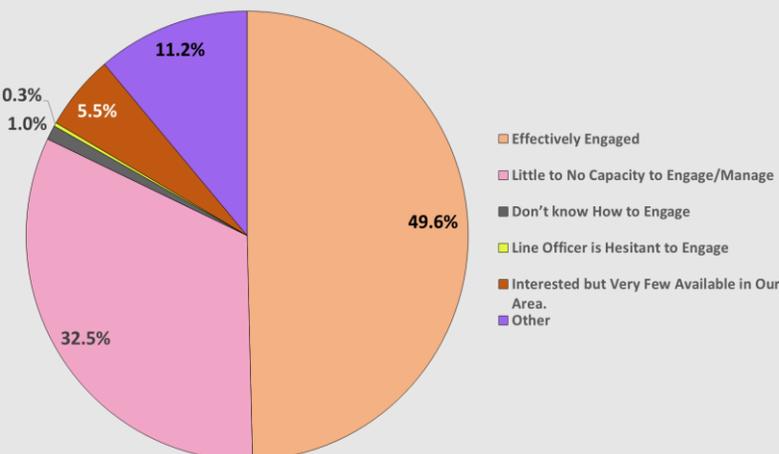
"...**HR and hiring** are the single **greatest obstacle** in recruiting and trying to get diversity."

"My unit is in a **very rural location** with low diversity and **very little available housing**. It is **nearly impossible** to recruit a diverse workforce."

## Partner & Volunteer Engagement



Trail Maintenance - Ability to effectively engage with Partners/Volunteers



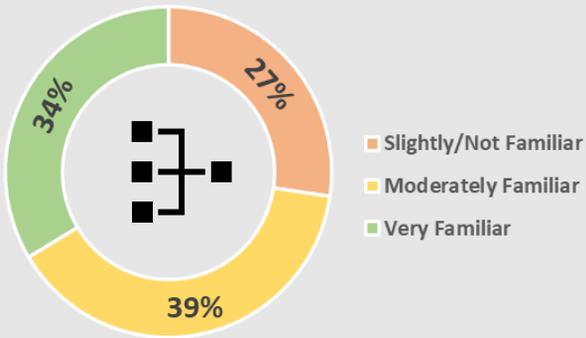
**Half of respondents** report **effectively** working with partners/volunteers in trail maintenance and the **other half reported barriers**.

"We have **engaged with partners**...but we have **project planning obstacles** (NEPA and ESA consultation) which keeps us from our full engagement potential."



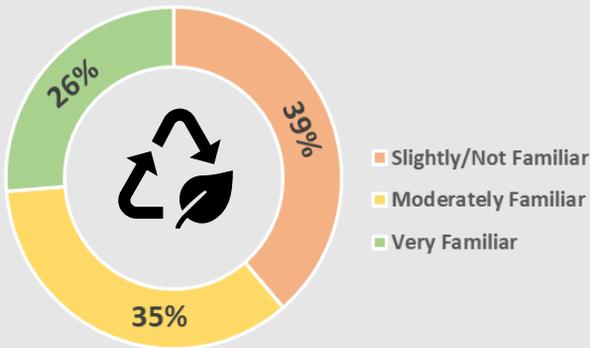
# Trail Strategies

USFS Trail Program & Priorities -  
Rate of Familiarity



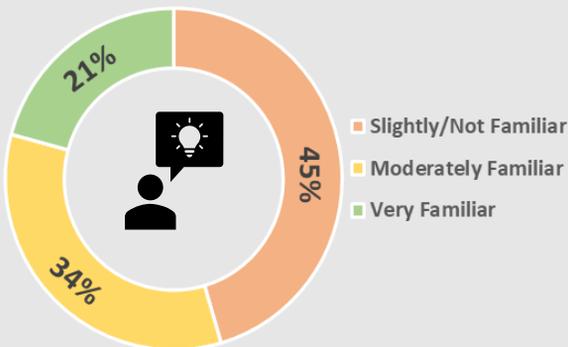
“We REALLY **need support** in areas where the trails program is **losing effectiveness**. The **blasting program**, for example, should be **GROWING....**”

National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System -  
Rate of Familiarity



“We are effectively working with some partners/volunteers, but **little capacity** to adequately engage/manage additional partners to meet management objectives”

10-Year Trail Challenge -  
Rate of Familiarity



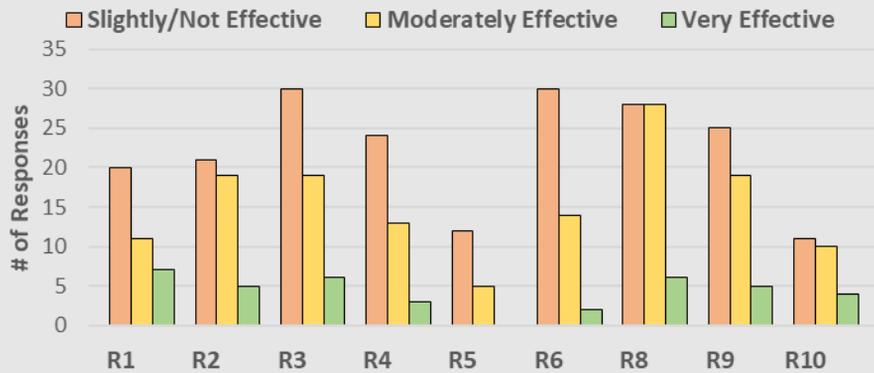
“The new strategies and 10-year challenges **leaves behind** small rural districts that manage trails for regional/national visitors, but don’t have any local volunteers or partners to work with.”

**Almost half** of respondents reported **lack of familiarity** with the 10-Year Trail Challenge.

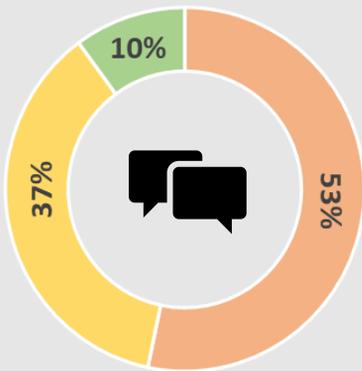
# Washington Office Communication



Effectiveness of Washington Office Communication through Regional/Supervisor's Office



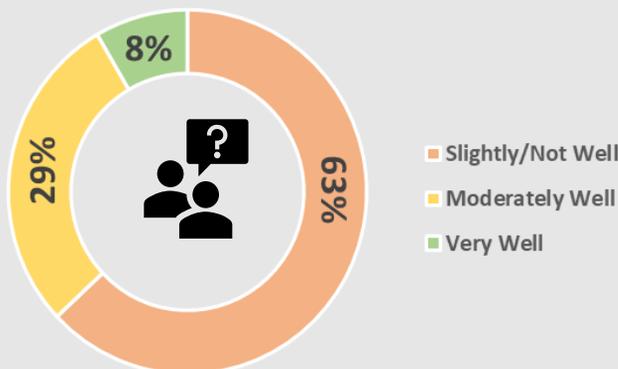
Overall Response



There is a **disconnect** with **Washington Office** communication reaching **forest/district level employees**.

"...need **better communication** with forest/district-level leadership about the 10-yr challenge and the importance of shared stewardship. There are district rangers and trail staff out there **unwilling to utilize and build partners** beyond minimum project-level labor."

How well do you feel the Washington Office Trails Staff understand the needs/concerns of the field?



"**More field visits** from WO and RO staff to ask hard questions of Forest leadership."

"We would love to have someone [WO] out for a **show me trip** any time to talk about our challenges as well as our successes."



"...We need to **value** people performing **work on the ground** the same way we value people who plan work to be done."



"Less focus on outsourcing our program's work to the community and more focus on **improving internal capacity**...We should be **developing strong trail workers**, not assuming it can all be shifted to community groups and volunteers."



"...**Increase** the permanent work force at the GS-09 level and below... We can then focus on shared stewardship..."



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## Next Steps...

WO staff will set up a call after this field season with the 91 participants who provided their contact information for further discussion.

WO Staff and National Trail Board will look closely at the data to help guide FY22 efforts.

Repeat survey during Phase 2 of Trail Challenge to compare and investigate trends and improvements.

## For any follow up or feedback:

Contact us at [WO\\_Trail\\_Program@USDA.gov](mailto:WO_Trail_Program@USDA.gov)



**Washington Office**  
*National Trail Program*