



## CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

September 19, 2016

### **H.R. 845** **National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act**

*As ordered reported by the House Committee on Agriculture on September 14, 2016*

H.R. 845 would require the Forest Service to develop a strategy to double the number of volunteers engaged in trail maintenance activities on Forest Service lands. The bill also would provide liability coverage for volunteers working for partner organizations (private entities whose members donate services to the Forest Service) on those lands. Finally, the bill would establish a pilot program that would allow firms operating on Forest Service lands to conduct trail maintenance work in lieu of paying an annual permitting fee to the agency.

Based on information provided by the Forest Service, CBO estimates that implementing the legislation would cost \$3 million a year over the 2017-2021 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts. CBO also estimates that the bill would increase direct spending for additional compensation claims from volunteers related to workers compensation, torts, and lost or damaged personal property by \$1 million over the 2017-2026 period; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures apply. Enacting the bill would not affect revenues.

CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 845 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits by more than \$5 billion in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2027.

H.R. 845 would require the Forest Service to develop a strategy to double the number of volunteers engaged in trail maintenance activities and to prepare a report assessing the effectiveness of that strategy. In 2015, the agency spent about \$13 million to recruit and manage roughly 80,000 volunteers, of which about 25 percent were engaged in activities related to trail maintenance. CBO estimates that efforts to double volunteer participation in such activities would cost \$3 million a year over the 2017-2021 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.

The bill also would make the federal government liable for damage claims from volunteers of partner organizations that have cooperative agreements with the Forest Service. (Under current law, the Forest Service is liable for individuals who volunteer directly.) That expansion would allow volunteers who are injured in the course of their organizations'

work with the Forest Service to have related medical expenses paid through the federal workers compensation program; such costs are considered mandatory spending. Based on the current ratio of volunteers in partner organizations to people who volunteer directly with the Forest Service, CBO estimates that the additional liability under the bill would increase direct spending by between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year, and by around \$1 million over the 2017-2026 period.

In addition, H.R. 845 would extend federal liability coverage to volunteers working for partner organizations that commit torts (wrongdoing under civil, rather than criminal, law) or have personal property lost or damaged while working on Forest Service lands. Based on an analysis of information provided by the agency, CBO estimates that the cost of providing that liability coverage would be negligible over the 2017-2026 period.

Finally, the bill would allow certain firms operating on Forest Service lands to conduct trail maintenance work in lieu of paying annual permitting fees. Based on information provided by the agency, CBO estimates that enacting that provision would reduce offsetting receipts, which are treated as reductions in direct spending, by less than \$200,000 a year; however, because the Forest Service has the authority to spend those fees, reducing those receipts would reduce associated direct spending by a similar amount. Therefore, CBO estimates that enacting this provision would have no net effect on the federal budget.

H.R. 845 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Christina Hawley Anthony (federal workers compensation) and Jeff LaFave (forest service). The estimate was approved by Theresa Gullo, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.