Feds Double Funding for N.W. Forest Road Repairs

Local News

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SEATTLE - The U.S. Forest Service in Washington and Oregon is getting twice the normal amount of funding for road and trail repairs in the coming year. The two states will share just over $19 million - and the agency says that's enough to pick up the pace on an enormous backlog of road maintenance on national forest land.

According to Mike Anderson, senior resource analyst with *The Wilderness Society*, washouts and landslides are common in the backcountry, affecting water quality and fish habitat as well as recreational access, so there's plenty of work to be done.

"The main objective here is to start to close some of the most environmentally damaging of those roads. And the roads that *are* needed, to put those roads into better shape."

Washington has 22,000 miles of national forest roads. It also has Congressman Norm Dicks, chairman of the Interior Appropriations Subcommitee in the House. Anderson says Dicks was instrumental in getting the funding increase, which will benefit more than fish and wildlife.

"At the same time, it's also a real economic boon, because this money is going to translate into jobs for rural communities - probably hundreds of jobs."

Anderson says the crumbling road system is a problem that has taken years to create and will require a long-term commitment and funding to fix.

Two state agencies and about 15 conservation groups have formed a coalition, the *Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative*, to improve watersheds in the Northwest; they'll be keeping an eye on the progress. The new slate of maintenance and reclamation projects, called "Legacy Roads & Trails Remediation," should get underway by this summer.