Forest Service Struggles to Keep Up with WA Backcountry Maintenance

Local News

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SEATTLE, Wash. - Cuts to Forest Service programs outlined in the U.S. House Republican budget are raising concer

Conservation and sportsmen's groups are predicting that camping, hunting and hiking experiences in Washington are

Backcountry Horsemen of Washington
is one such group. Its public lands committee chairman, Jeff Chapman, says some areas could be closed or become

"If there's a reasonable amount of support, a reasonable amount of funding to keep enough folks on the ground, enou

Some of the jobs are too big or complex for volunteer crews, Chapman says, and both federal and state grant money they typically use to pay for materials to do the work has all but dried up. He says he's been to Washington, D.C., four times in recent years to advocate for better Forest Service funding.

Former Forest Service chief Dale Bosworth says the programs targeted for cuts are associated with things well-loved and appreciated by the public. Forest Service cutbacks are part of a long-term trend, he says, and are preventing the agency from doing its job: to keep forests healthy and accessible.

"What I'm really concerned about on this is that the Forest Service has been so underfunded for so long, and now, looking at more reductions, they're just not going to be able to meet the expectations of people."

About half the nation's drinking water sources are on national forest land, Bosworth says. He's hopeful that the Senate will find ways to reverse the squeeze on national forests, and bolster programs that promote collaboration in problem-solving, forest restoration work and rural jobs.