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Repairs to iconic N.H. trail underway to address heavy use and climate change

The Franconia Ridge Loop Trail is a destination for as many as 1,200 hikers on a given day. A \$1.35 million project will restore sections of the 8.9-mile trail.

By [Amanda Gokee](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 18, 2024, 3:11 p.m.



Trail work is underway at the Franconia Ridge Loop Trail, one of the region's most popular trails. ALEXANDER DELUCIA/AMC

PINKHAM'S GRANT, N.H. — The [Franconia Ridge Trail Loop](#) is one of the most popular hiking trails in New Hampshire and in the region.

The trailhead off of I-93 is easy to access, and it offers stunning 360-degree views, which have landed it on National Geographic's list of [10 mind-blowing hikes](#).

At its busiest, the 8.9-mile loop trail can attract as many as 1,200 hikers per day, according to the Appalachian Mountain Club, a nonprofit that maintains the trails.

But its popularity, paired with changing weather conditions, has taken a toll, and some sections of the trail have fallen into disrepair.

Now, a \$1.35 million [restoration project](#) is underway to repair the trail and rebuild sections of it so visitors will be able to enjoy it for years to come.

The Appalachian Mountain Club initiated the project, with agreement and guidance from the US Forest Service. The project received [\\$1.125 million in federal funding](#) and the AMC contributed an additional \$225,000 for the project.

Crews began repairing sections of trail located on federal land in 2022, and work is expected to continue through 2026 as part of the five-year project.

Some of the trails were built even before AMC's founding in 1876, which makes it the oldest outdoor group in the country, according to the organization. For example, the Bridle Path, one of the four trails that make up the Franconia Loop, was opened in the 1850s as an activity for visitors staying in the area.



Trail work is underway at the Franconia Ridge Loop Trail, one of the region's most popular trails that can attract as many as 1,200 visitors on a busy day. ALEXANDER DELUCIA/AMC

“When these trails were constructed, this was long before an understanding of erosion or a concept of just the volume of use that these trails would see in modern day,” said Alexander DeLucia, AMC’s director of trails and recreation management.

DeLucia said these old trails typically follow the shortest, and therefore steepest, path to the summit. That means when it rains they will often turn into stream beds, carrying away soil and causing erosion.

Some parts of the trail have lost 4 to 6 feet of soil, so the forest floor could be at shoulder height for a person standing on the trail, according to DeLucia. The trails have also been widened by hikers avoiding water or trying to pass.

DeLucia said crews work from Monday through Thursday to avoid the busiest hiking days and allow the trail to remain open during construction.

They're installing rock structures to keep soil from eroding, and splitting up existing granite steps that are so tall hikers tend to avoid them. In other places, they're widening the trail to accommodate passing. Some steeper sections of the trail will be relocated entirely to create a more gentle grade that won't turn into a stream when it rains. DeLucia said this includes a portion of the trail near Cloudland Falls that's seen a high concentration of accidents.

DeLucia said the hiking public has mostly been appreciative of the efforts, although there's been some pushback from people who prefer a more rugged trail.

"This trail, with this volume of use, needs this type of work to ensure that this trail frankly exists for future opportunities to hike it," DeLucia said.

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