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# When Disaster Strikes: The Role of Trails In Regional Recovery





# TRAIL NATION

rails-to-trails  
conservancy



**TRAIL  
NATION**  
PROJECTS

**TRAIL  
NATION**  
PLAYBOOK

**TRAIL  
NATION**  
COLLABORATIVE

# Before we begin...

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# Panelists

Jackie Cassino

- Rail Trails Program Manager, Vermont Agency of Transportation

Lisa Raleigh,

- Executive Director, RiverLink

Saman Dias,

- Chair, Maui Bicycling League



# Vermont Rail Trails Program: Overview, Disaster Response & Recovery

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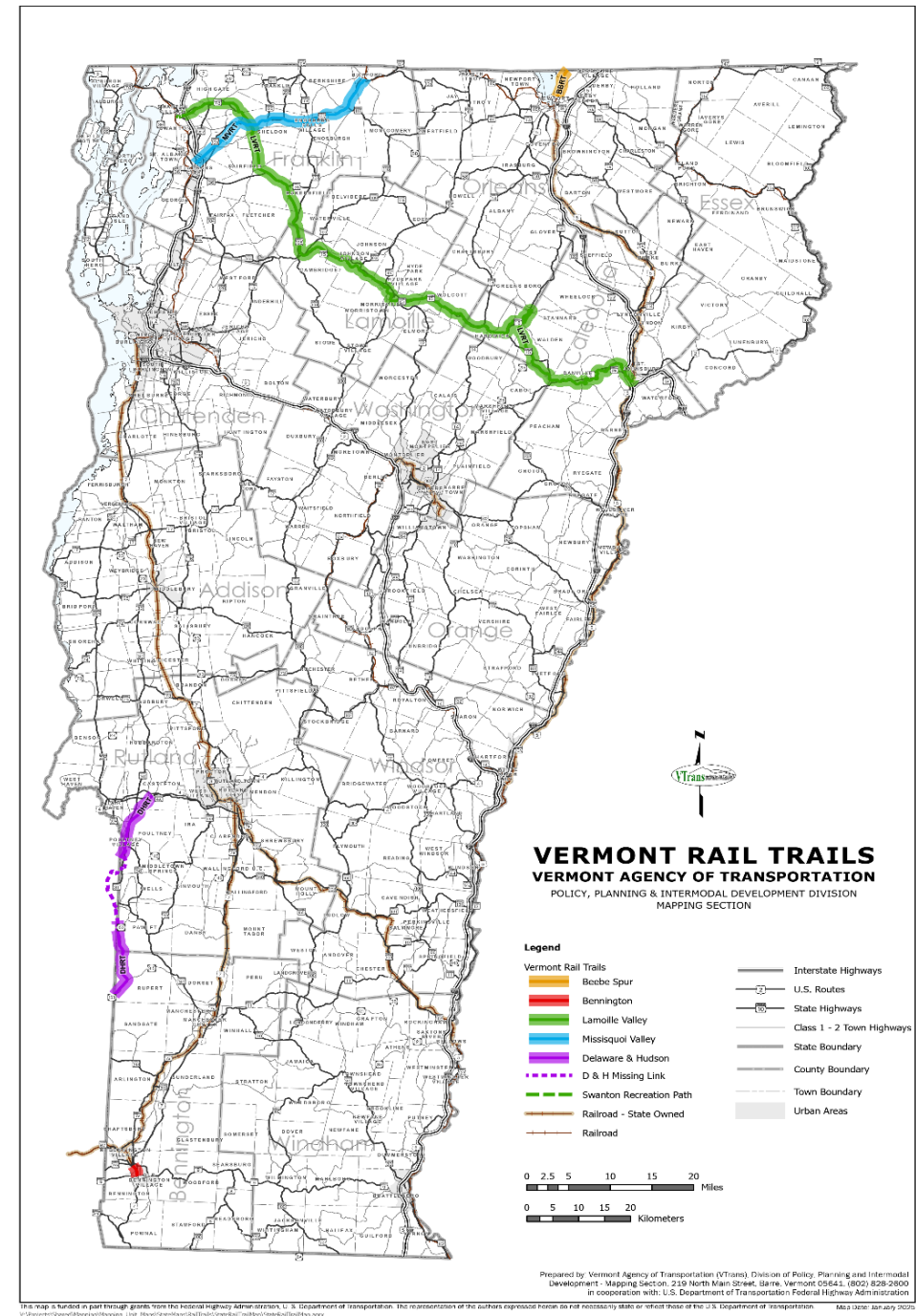
Jackie Cassino, Rail Trails Program Manager

Rails to Trails Conservancy  
When Disaster Strikes: The Role of Trails in  
Planning and Recovery  
04/03/2025



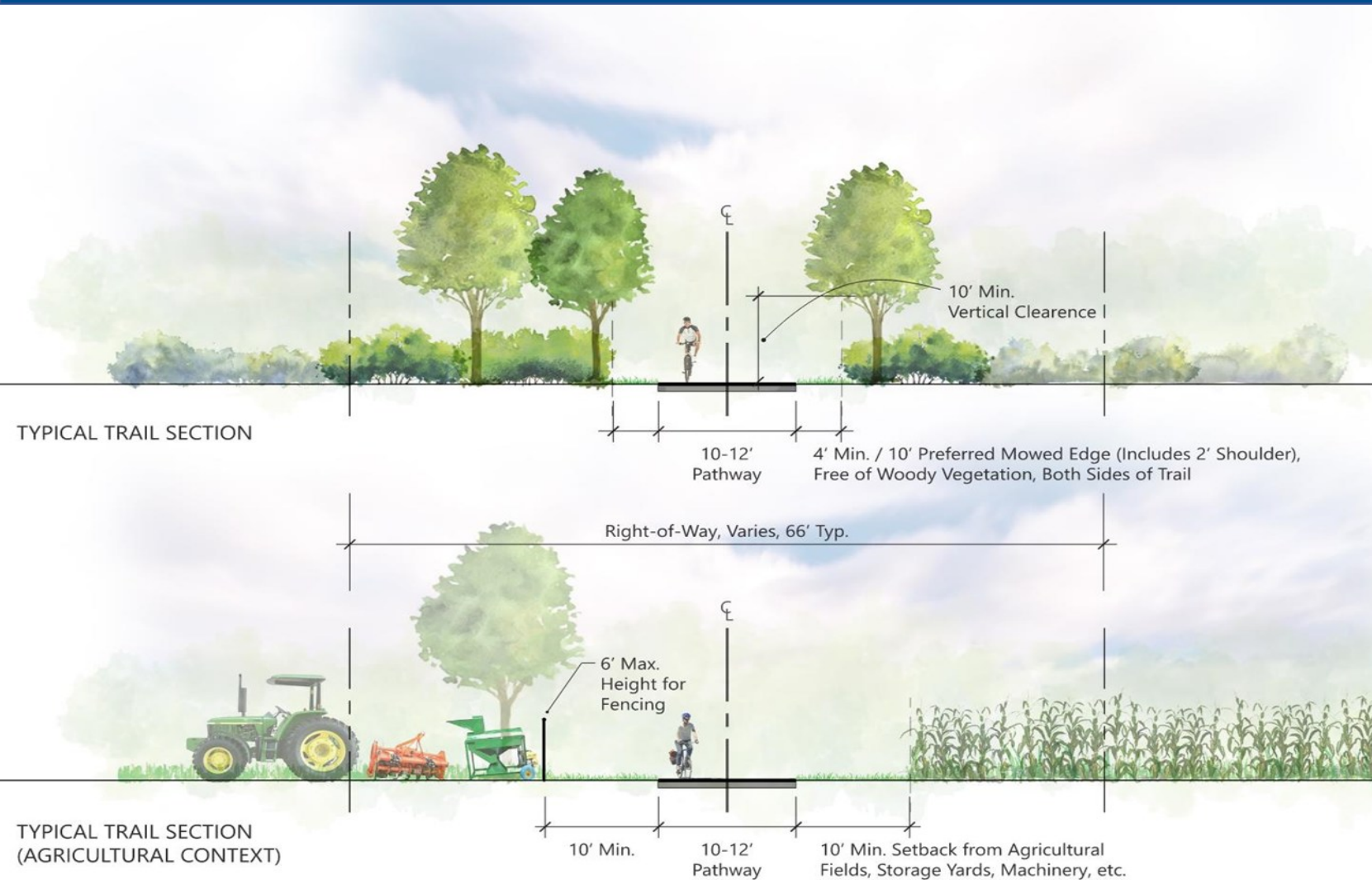
# AOT Maintained Rail Trails

- **Beebe Spur Rail Trail (BBRT) – 6 miles**
- **Delaware & Hudson Rail Trail (DHRT) – 19 miles**
- **Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail (MVRT) – 26 miles**
- **Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) – 94 miles**

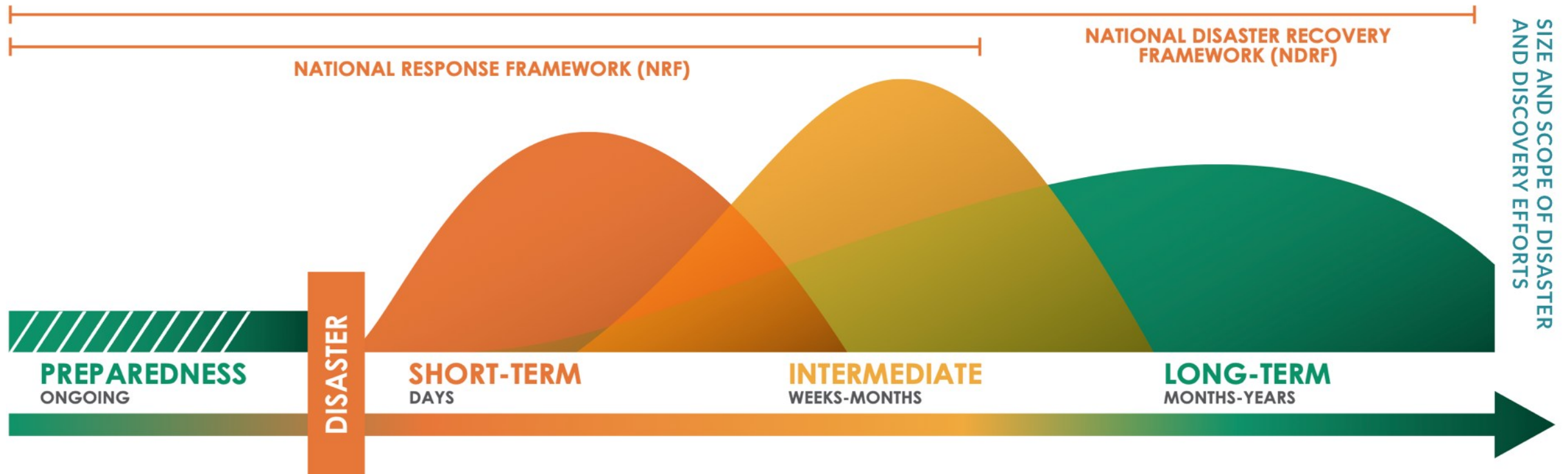




# Trail Maintenance & Operations



# Emergency Events: Procedures, Roles, & Responsibilities



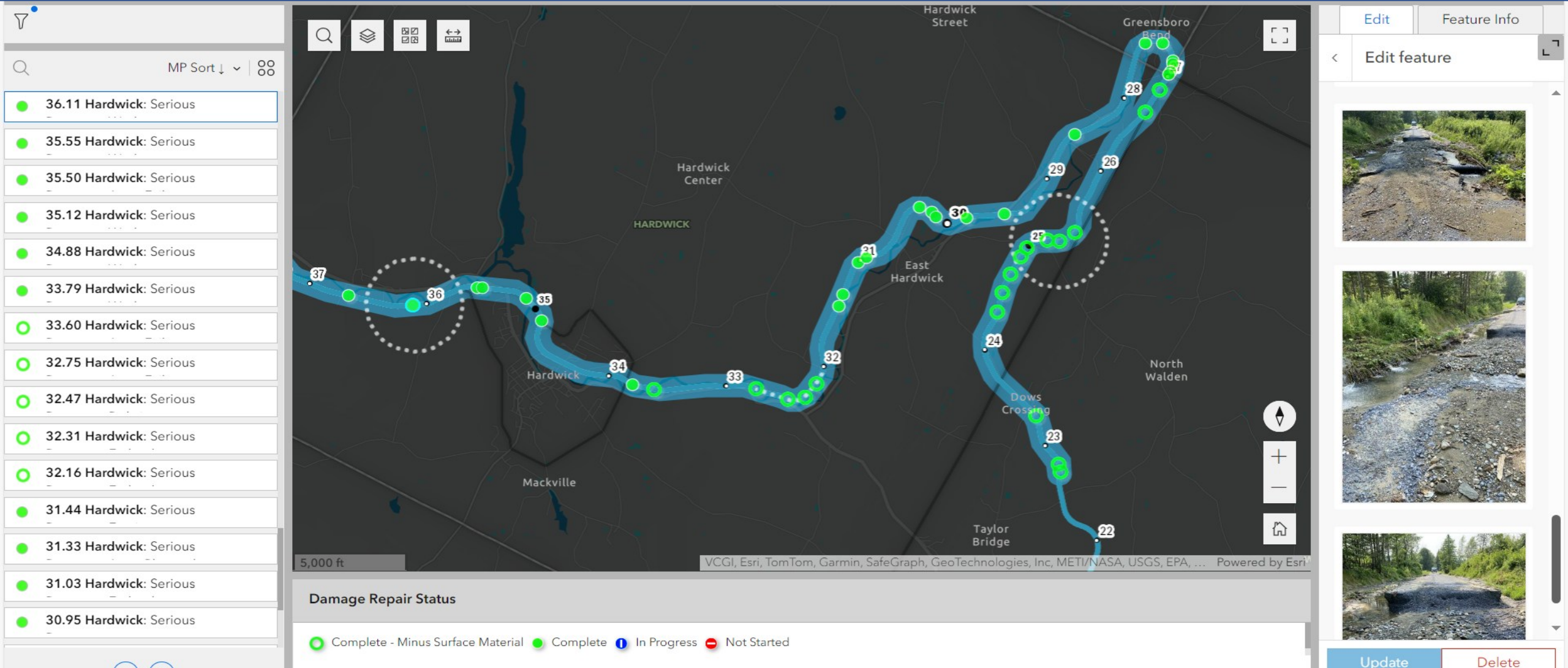


# July 2023 Flood Event (DR#4720)





# LVRT Damages







- Bridge 38, MP 32.75, Town of Hardwick, Caledonia County
- Length 200', Width 30', Depth 40'
- Damage Western abutment failure, bridge span being supported by this abutment damaged, structural steel and one flange damaged, and trail approach washout.
- Photo credit: AOT staff; 07/14/23













































# Thank you

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<https://railtrails.vermont.gov/>







Lisa Raleigh :: Executive Director





## Riverlink's mission

To promote the environmental and economic vitality of the French Broad River watershed for all.



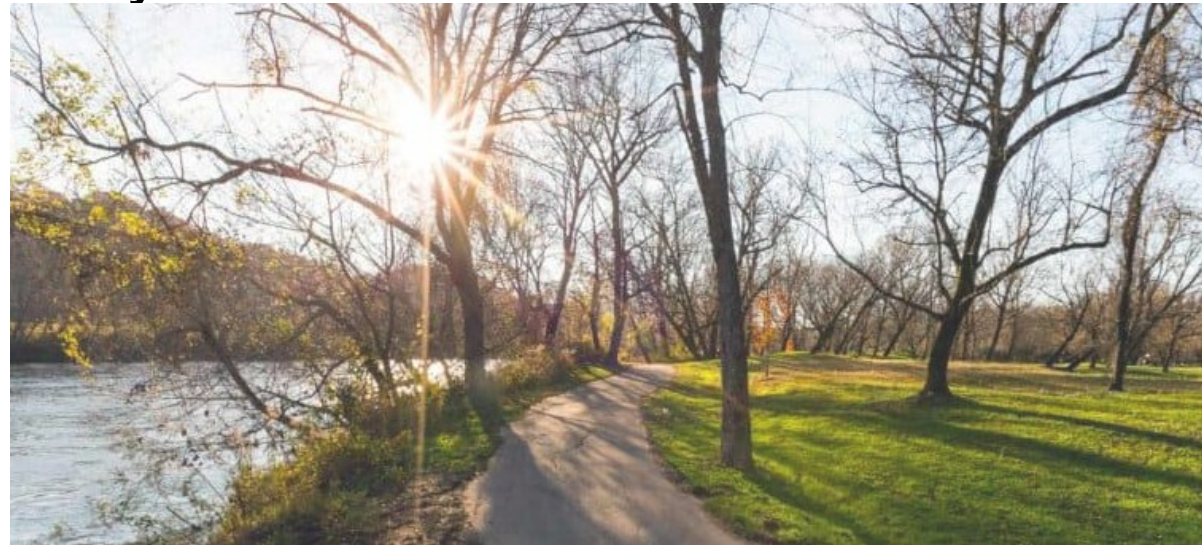
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## Greenways & River Parks

- Wilma Dykeman Riverway Plan
- From industrial brownfields to parks
- French Broad River Park, Jean Webb Park, Carrier Park, Karen Cragnolin Park + future Gateway Park



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RIVER-INFLUENCED  
VISITORS

\$2.7B

ANNUAL  
VISITOR  
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## Karen Cragnolin Park :: Why it fared so well



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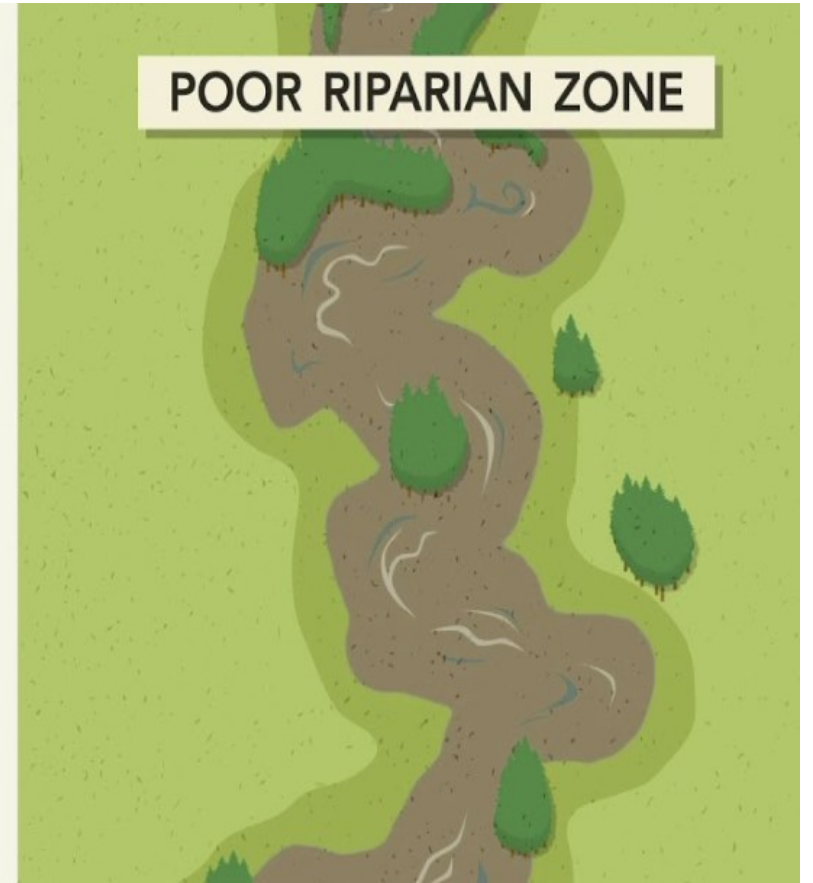
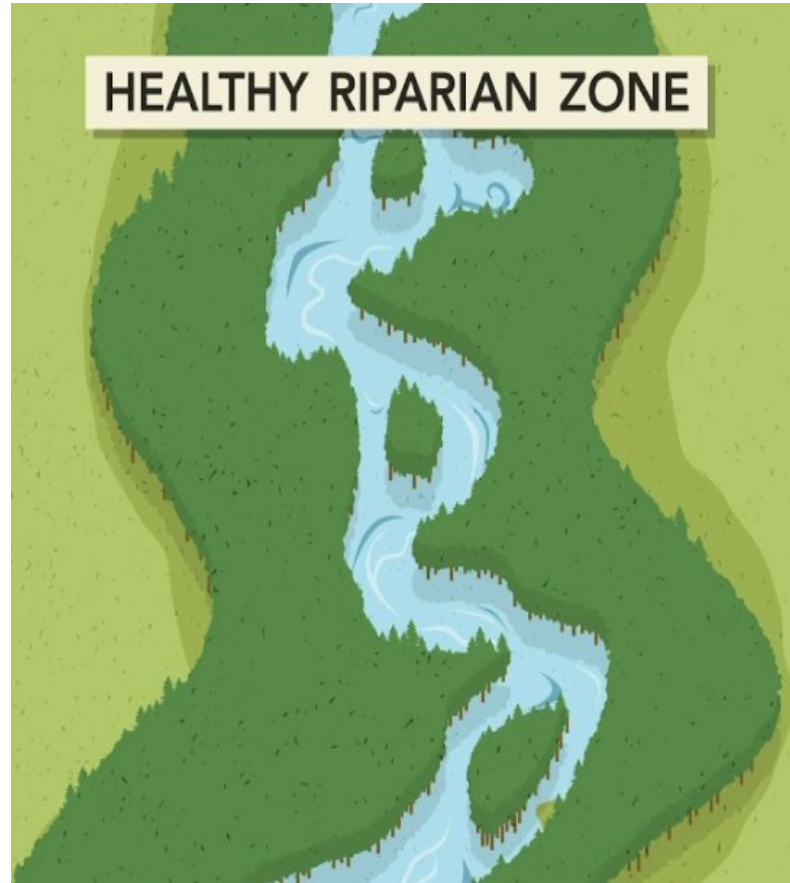


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## New Opportunities Post Storm



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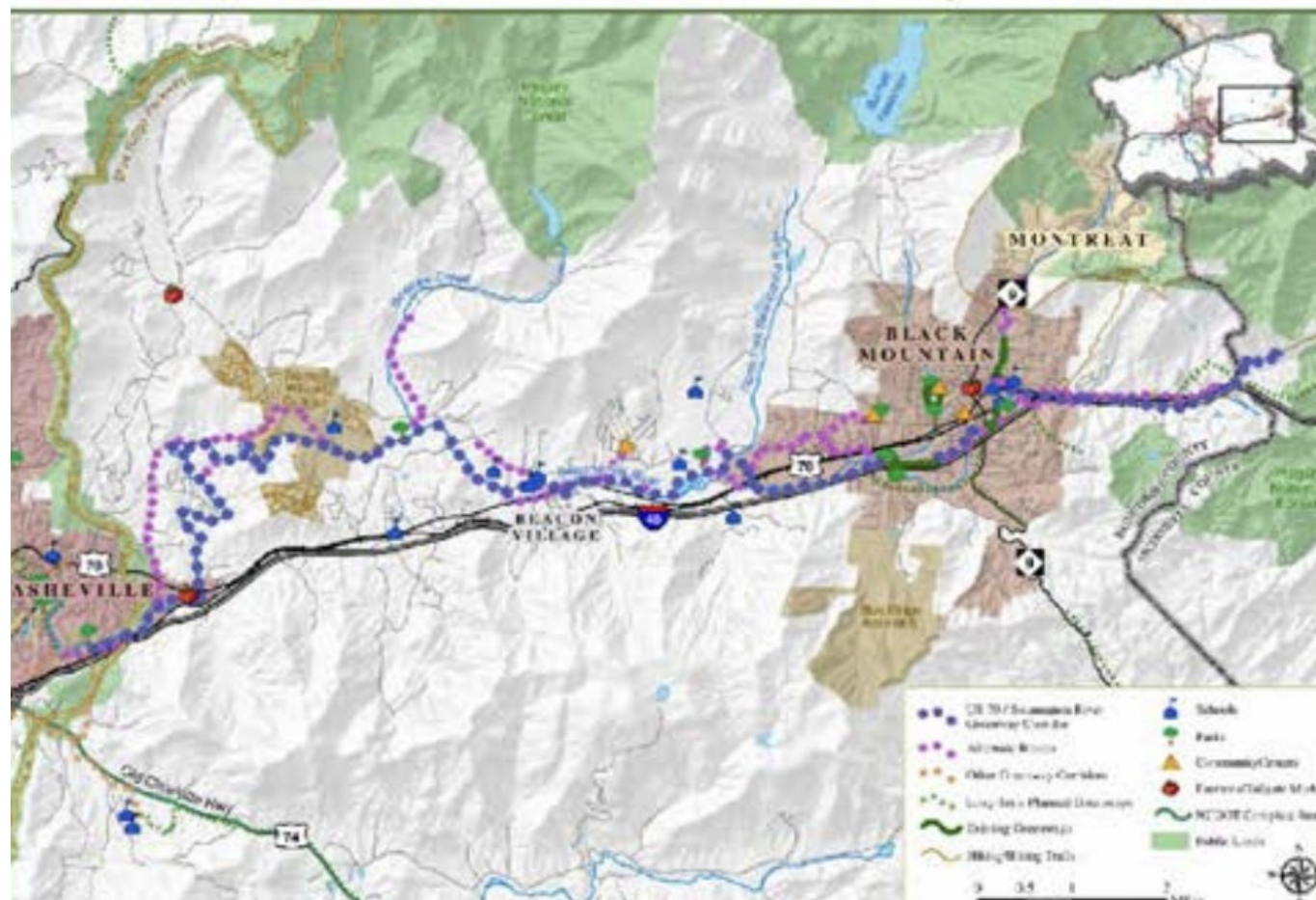


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## Greenway Feasibility Studies

### US 70 / Swannanoa River Greenway Corridor



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# The West Maui Greenway: A Resilient Pathway for Disaster Recovery

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- Saman Dias, Chair of the Maui Bicycling League. And West Maui Greenway Alliance.
- **West Maui Greenway (WMG)** is more than a recreational path—it's a **lifeline for disaster resilience, mobility, and economic recovery.**





## The Push for WMG

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- Advocates saw the opportunity to implement WMG using **cane haul roads** due to traffic congestion and the need for a **multiuse trail for health, transportation, and emergency evacuation**.
- Attended **MAP-21 in 2015**, leading to the establishment of **MBL as a nonprofit under Hawaii Bicycling League HBL (2015)**.





- **Advocated for Maui to establish an MPO (2016) to access federal funding.**
- WMG was incorporated into the community and long-range transportation plans.
- Established WMG Alliance, Created WMG website and held community events. Funded via Hawaii tourist Authority to engage and educate community
- Funding secured via MPO for WMG Master Plan **(completed October 2022).**
- Held bike exploration rides using e-bikes to encourage and increase public officials' participation and awareness.
- **Challenges:**
  - Maui County's slow response due to funding, staffing shortages, and lack of a designated implementation agency.
  - MPO is not an implementation entity.
  - DPW prioritizes traditional infrastructure over multiuse trails.





# Cane Haul Roads & Longstanding Advocacy

- Cane haul roads have long been considered for **emergency evacuation but never implemented.**
- West Maui Greenway project has been in **planning for over 50 years.**
- Maui Bicycling League (MBL) has **been advocating for this project for over 10 years.**





# Why Trails Matter in Disaster Response

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- **Lahaina Wildfire (August 2023)** – One of the deadliest wildfires in U.S. history.
- **Losses:**
  - **100+ lives lost**
  - **2,200+ structures destroyed**, over **\$5.5 billion** in damages (source: FEMA)
  - Thousands displaced, major economic loss, and job loss due to tourism and business shutdowns.





# West Maui's Infrastructure Challenges:

- **Only one lane in, one lane out** of West Maui.
- Residents had no evacuation route—**some jumped into the ocean**, spending over **14 hours** in the water before rescue

## **Trails are not just recreation paths; Trails Provide Emergency Solutions:**

- Alternative evacuation routes when roads are blocked.
- Access for first responders to reach affected areas faster.
- Trails act as Fire barriers





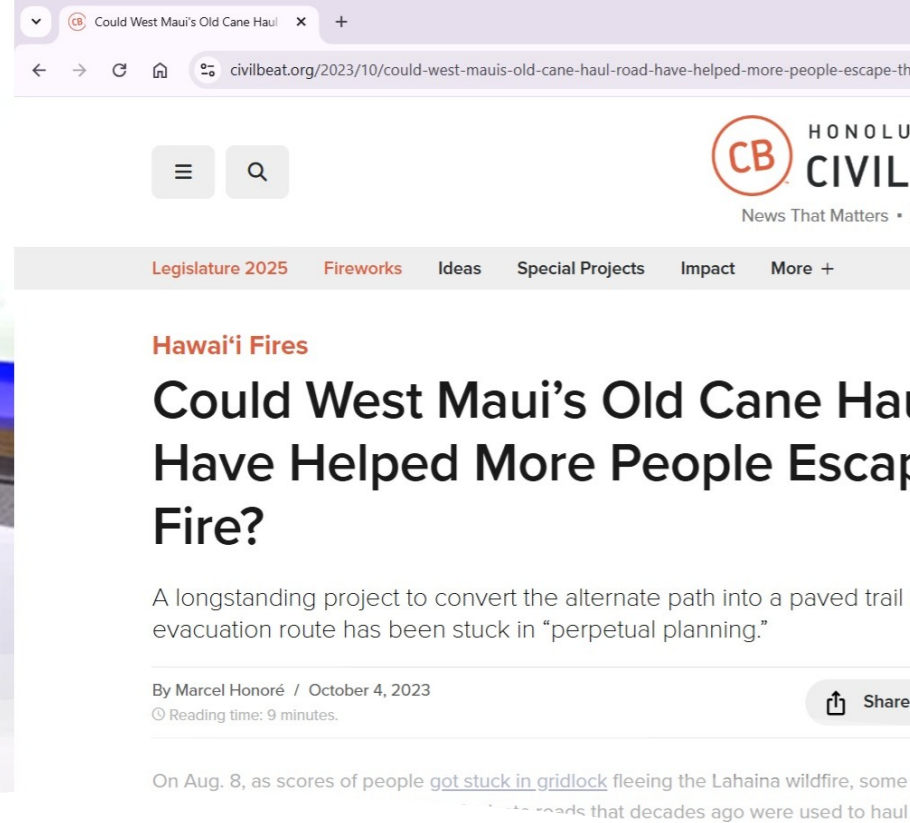
# Right Place, Right Time

## The Lahaina Fire & Momentum for WMG

- August 2023 fires reignited the urgency for WMG.
- Supporters pointed to evidence that locked gates and blocked cane haul roads prevented evacuation.
- **A trail advocate from Kauai reached out, emphasizing:**
  - 'Never let a disaster go to waste.'
  - "Denver used post-disaster funding to build its amazing Cherry Creek trail system—Maui can do the same."







## This fueled renewed advocacy efforts:

- 100+ letters to public officials
- Media outreach - Honolulu Civil Beat article highlighted that WMG could have saved lives if it had been open.
- Testimonies at public meetings
- **FEMA introduction—FEMA was seeking recovery projects to integrate into long-term plans.**
- **WMG was the only plan with a Master Plan**
- Community engagement and surveys secured high-level support.



## Major Breakthrough – Federal Funding & Next Steps

- FEMA & National Park Service backed WMG as a key recovery project.
- Maui County Incorporated WMG into Lahaina's Long-Term Recovery Plan.
- Maui County applied for the RAISE Grant (now Build America) and secured \$15.4M to complete Phase 1 of WMG (5.5 miles).

## West Maui Greenway RAISEs the bar: Federal grant fuels vision for a resilient future

January 23, 2025 - 6:00 AM HST

96  
Shares



Ukumehame Beach Park to Launiupoko. PC: West Maui Greenway Alliance

A vision decades in the making is now becoming a reality with the announcement of a \$15.43



# Lessons Learned & Call to Action

- **Key Takeaways:**
  - Disasters expose vulnerabilities—but also create opportunities for resilience.
  - Trails must be recognized as essential infrastructure, not just recreation.
  - Access for Emergency Services / Resilience and Preparedness / Environmental Conservation / Transportation and Connectivity / Public Health and more
  - Being in the right place at the right time – Have a plan be prepared and ready





# Call to Action:

- **Facts-** Since 1980, there have been 400 weather and climate disasters where overall damages/costs reached or exceeded \$1 billion (including CPI adjustment to 2024), according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.
- The total cost of these 400 events exceeds \$2.785 trillion
- We need to re-brand Trails are more than recreation path
- Advocate at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Address economic impact
- Encourage private/public partnerships to fund trail projects like WMG.
- Support National organizations like Rails to Trails to get the message out to policy makers





# Mahalo! Questions?

- Thank you for your time.
- Let's work together to make **trails part of our disaster recovery and resilience strategy.**
- Contact info- Saman Dias | Maui Bicycling League Chair| [maui@hbl.org](mailto:maui@hbl.org) | 808-209-2542
- **Learn More about West Maui Greenway –**  
<https://www.westmauigreenway.org/>



# TrailNation Summit

HOSTED BY RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY

October 27-29, 2025  
Cleveland, Ohio



Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail | Photo by Jason Cohn

Register Today: [railstotrails.org/trailnation](https://railstotrails.org/trailnation)