

## Pacific Crest Trail won't be severed, after \$1.6M deal with Stevens Pass landowner

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*The Pacific Crest Trail Association purchased land near Stevens Pass to preserve access to the namesake trail the organization maintains.*

A forgotten easement could have severed the Pacific Crest Trail, which extends from Mexico to Canada along the crests of several mountain ranges, including the Cascades in Washington. Most of the trail weaves through public lands, but about 10 percent of it is owned privately.

The Pacific Crest Trail Association on Wednesday closed a deal to buy more than 400 acres of land in

the Stevens Pass area, preventing the famous 2,650-mile trail from being severed about 160 miles from the Canadian border.

The [PCTA](#) reached a \$1.6 million deal with a private landowner, who the association said had considered erecting a fence and closing off access to the public.

The Pacific Crest Trail extends from Mexico to Canada along the crests of several mountain ranges, including the Cascades in Washington.

The trail was designated as a National Scenic Trail in 1968 and [officially declared finished in 1993](#). Hikers often travel the length of the route in the summer, but it is also popular with day hikers and other recreational users.

Most of the trail weaves through public lands, but about 10 percent of it is owned privately, said Megan Wargo, the PCTA's director of land protection.

"The Forest Service is the overall manager for the entire trail," Wargo said. "Where the trail goes through private land, they have a trail easement to allow the public to pass through the private property."

On the section of trail at the Stevens Pass Trailhead, however, no one secured an easement, Wargo said.

"The trail was built and put together in pieces, historically," she said. "In most likelihood, it was just an oversight. Somebody thought there was an easement there, but the easement was not recorded."

After the association learned in 2015 that the property owner was looking to sell and was considering fencing off the path, it examined alternate routes for the PCT, but found no suitable option.

"Given the topography, we found it very difficult to loop around that piece of private property," Wargo said. "There's only a short window you can be out there building trail. It would have meant several years of access to the PCT as a through-hike would have been closed."

Working with the Forest Service, the association lobbied for and secured federal money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund ([LWCF](#)) to pay for the purchase.

After a difficult season of wildfires, however, the Forest Service raided its budget and diverted the project's funding to fight fires.

The PCTA then had to secure a loan from [The Conservation Fund](#) to finance the sale.

Once Congress replenishes LWCF funding, the PCTA will sell the land to the Forest Service at market value and repay its loan.

"It was a roller-coaster ride getting it closed," Wargo said. "The risk of not closing that project would have been pretty large as far as the PCT and keeping it open."

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