Creating Shared Stewardship of the Wilderness Resource through Partnerships and Volunteers: The Top 10 Partnership Challenges and Solutions.

Executive Summary

This paper addresses the top ten barriers to creating partnerships that support wilderness stewardship activities in the National Forests. The Forest Service Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) was asked to address this issue by the Washington Office wilderness program staff in October 2008. The conclusions and proposed solutions are drawn from the collective professional experience of the WAG, interviews, and existing publications on this subject.

The top ten barriers to creating wilderness partnerships are:

1. **Inadequate capacity** of the local unit to initiate, develop and sustain partnerships due to low funding, and limited staff time.
2. The substantial investment of time and energy needed to address **logistics and complexity** inherent in any new program.
3. **Agency culture and transition** to smaller wilderness and recreation budgets, many vacant positions, and greatly expanded individual program of work responsibilities reduces motivation or a sense of reward that would support partnership development.
4. **Declining recreation budgets** have hit wilderness programs hard. Wilderness managers have accomplished a lot with little support, but additional funding is necessary to stimulate new partnership efforts.
5. Many partners and grants **focus on trail maintenance**. Shifting partner focus to wilderness stewardship projects may create more relevant opportunities for partnership development.
6. Wilderness managers face numerous **process barriers** to forming new partnerships. Although these are part of doing business, processes incur an additional cost in staff time that can prevent initiation of new relationships.
7. Legal constraints, agency priorities, advocacy history, and other considerations often lead to **differing expectations** between volunteers and managers regarding the emphasis, type, and amount of work to be completed by the volunteers.
8. **Limited communication** of wilderness stewardship priorities can result in a lack of awareness among partners and insufficient coordination within management units.
9. **Shortage of skills and abilities** among agency staff to create partnerships and among partners to implement wilderness stewardship projects.
10. Forest Service decisions, past actions, and strained relationships have often damaged **agency credibility and trust**. Many wilderness non-profit organizations are focused on advocacy instead of stewardship support. Establishing effective partnerships requires a significant effort among wilderness managers to earn trust.

The authors felt that a discussion of barriers would not be complete without proposing possible solutions to these challenges. The body of this paper includes many suggestions, but the highest priority solutions that can address multiple barriers are presented here. The **top three solutions** proposed by the Wilderness Advisory Group to lowering barriers to wilderness partnership creation are:

1. Fund positions at the local or regional level that focus on partnership creation for wilderness stewardship. Consider creative approaches such as positions shared among partners, jointly funded volunteer coordinators, or foundation-funded development positions.
2. Develop additional non-federal funding sources that can contribute to wilderness stewardship projects via National Forest Foundation (NFF) granting. Consider a wilderness stewardship focused micro-granting NFF program without a cash match requirement that can support individual projects.

3. Demonstrate agency support for wilderness partnership development by investing in Forest and District wilderness staff. Inadequate capacity is the common theme running through all ten of the barriers to partnership creation identified by the Wilderness Advisory Group.
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Introduction

Partnerships and volunteers play a growing role in our wilderness stewardship mission and will be central to its future. To be successful, we need a sustaining environment for wilderness partnerships and volunteers and an institutional framework that facilitates long-lasting relationships. Our partnerships must be community and place-based, with the Forest Service and private nongovernmental organizations and volunteers working together to facilitate and support the partnership. We need a process that captures, shares, and internalizes lessons learned; we must minimize administrative barriers, and create a supportive authorizing environment; we need to acknowledge and recognize that partnership and volunteer programs are not “free”, and require an investment in time, staffing, and funding within the agency and the partner organizations; we must have a positive, enabling environment for partnerships that includes the presence of a strong “partnership culture” within both agency and non-agency partners; we need to value and encourage collaborative leadership and relationship building skills; we must have agency employees and partners that are trained and skilled in both creating and managing successful partnerships and technical project skills; and we need governing models that rely on shared leadership and decision-making, local engagement, flexibility, effective communication, and learning from experience.

1. Capacity

We need to keep wilderness wild! One successful tried and true method to help in this goal is to have enduring relationships with wilderness volunteers and stewardship groups. The Forest Service needs to build relationships with partners and build trust and goodwill as well as provide a solid foundation for partners to work with the FS to achieve mutual wilderness stewardship and management goals. Presently we have some hurdles to improve our ability to consistently support wilderness volunteers and stewardship programs on all of our 454 Wilderness areas in the NF Wilderness Preservation System. There are some key elements for successful partnerships and continuing strong relationships but capacity to nurture and develop these relationships is a challenge.

Over the past decade, the field level of wilderness management and staff has been challenged with declining staff and budget. The capacity to add more duties to the wilderness managers by increasing wilderness stewardship with partnerships and dedicating time to manager volunteers with less financial assistance to the program “plate” has been frustrating. It has also created resentment because volunteer programs should augment the wilderness program and not take the place of wilderness rangers in the field.

Another key aspect in building capacity with volunteers is providing an articulated vision of their role as Forest Service wilderness volunteers and be mission focused. It is vital to acknowledge the obstacles the group faces in accomplishing the vision and mission. There is a challenge to increase capacity with volunteers and wilderness partners by accepting all volunteer one-time offers with limited staffing however this may not be fruitful.

Possible solutions to increase capacity:

- Hire field level volunteer coordinators to assist wilderness managers. Presently this is the main capacity challenge to move wilderness stewardship forward positions at field level.
- Clear objectives documented for achieving wilderness stewardship.
- Agreed-upon scope of work between volunteers and FS wilderness managers.
- Sufficient resources and information for volunteers to go out in the field.
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- Respect for each other and duties to achieve program of work.
- Use technology (volunteer web sites) to improve communications.
- NFF grants to support wilderness volunteer programs
- Sustained funding and leadership at all levels to support field level partnership coordinators for support of the wilderness program.
- Understanding each others (USFS and wilderness partnership groups) constraint’s with number of volunteers, funding, needed resources, and matching dollars.
- Teach and provide examples about seizing opportunities. Also be energetic and creative with wilderness volunteers. Many agency personnel were trained in how to collect and work with technical information. Shifting agency culture from control in decision making to working collaboratively.
- Provide short term volunteer opportunities i.e. completion in a field season (campsite monitoring) and also provide long term volunteer opportunities (invasives, trail improvements, visitor monitoring)

2. Logistics and Complexity

Presently wilderness managers encounter numerous procedural barriers and challenges with the FS internal processes. Whether it is a task to enroll a wilderness volunteer or have a sponsored volunteer stewardship group trained wilderness managers encounter many hurdles to “sign them up” and be viable in the field. Wilderness managers have found the process of enrolling wilderness stewardship organizations more complicated over time due to a myriad of internal processes and requirements. Uniforms, training, certifications, safety, communications with radios, GPS trainings, remoteness for wilderness volunteers, agreements, (Volunteer, CSS Challenge Cost Share) are just a few of these challenges. Overseeing a USFS wilderness stewardship and volunteer program has necessitated changes in the focus, time management, and priorities in a wilderness manager’s job duties. The functions of volunteer management are sometimes played haphazardly by individual members of the wilderness staff. Organizations that involve wilderness volunteers are most effective when they do so as a part of a coordinated volunteer program. The systematic approach to volunteer involvement requires a manager who plans and coordinates all the activities of the wilderness volunteer stewardship process. This manager plays a critical role in the success of the entire volunteer organization. There is an increased emphasis and commitment in the USFS towards long-term sustainable partnerships and volunteer programs. There are efficiencies in producing a managed volunteer program versus hit-or-miss volunteerism. There are also liability issues with volunteers such as their preparededness for the challenges that await them in wilderness. Presently there are only a few positions in the wilderness program (WO, RO, SO, and DO) that assist in volunteer and stewardship groups to help with the logistics and complexities of wilderness management.

Possible solutions to address logistics and complexity issue:
- Hire district volunteer coordinators to help streamline logistics for wilderness stewards.
- Provide simple examples on the WEB on using and crafting the right agreements and grants. R2 has used Colorado 14ers and note it is effective to learn from but not simple.
- Work with regional partnership coordinators on how to expedite and ease ASC agreement process.
- Both parties understand FS basic authorities and restrictions on volunteer activities and the reasons why
- Develop database for online web use to be the centerpiece of the wilderness stewardship in communication.
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- Have the volunteer organization provide tools for training instead of FS wilderness managers. This includes creating a field guide book specific to their wilderness and volunteer duties, volunteers becoming LNT trainers, offering workshops, and volunteer organization leading the new member training.
- Continue to encourage and reward FS employees for forming partnerships and volunteers.
- Include volunteer leadership successes and challenges in the supplemental performance appraisal annual review process.
- Continue to recognize wilderness stewardship in the regional forester awards and national wilderness awards.
- Provide incentives for employees who develop wilderness partners and examples on the web.
- Share how the commitments to wilderness partners help wilderness versus hinder it.
- Show agency support by dedicating funds for innovation and change agents for collaboration and partnerships. Not only NFF and More Kids in the Woods, but funding in NFRRW to support volunteers.
- Help Forest Service managers to not feel demoralized or downtrodden when it comes to working with partnerships to continue the cultural shift.
- Moving advocacy groups and FS adversaries to finding the connection with the land and land managers through wilderness stewardship and know these groups serve a purpose versus being a conflicting interest.
- Have a wilderness manager train other wilderness managers in the grants and agreement process so it could be a more effective tool with operating and financial plans than a G&A person.
- One-on-one mentoring, and create a network for master performers in wilderness volunteer groups.
- Continue to allow volunteers to work on our computer systems.

3. Agency Culture and Transition

The Forest Service has always been a leader in wilderness management and research. As the agency reflects on its mission and seeks to transition and grow locally and globally to accommodate people and resource concerns, wilderness programs are also being forced to change. The Forest Service of the past has relied on wilderness rangers and staff to manage the wilderness. They have led monitoring programs, supervised crews, enforced laws, written plans and tenaciously ensured that wilderness will endure for the present and future generations. These program leaders have passionately been driven to care for the wilderness with less workforce capacity and funds.

The wilderness community is aging and from some there is a resistance to change and to trying new ways of doing business. There are health and family concerns that keep employees from going in the field. There is a lack of energetic young people taking over the helm. Credible and hardworking seasonals are not staying on for more than three years to pursue a permanent job. Budgets continue to decline and workforce planning across the country has eliminated or combined positions to the point there is not the prioritization or focus on wilderness. Wilderness is now one small slice of a large recreation pie that keeps getting smaller with other priorities and expectations. Every employee now has more duties associated with training, hiring and computers. There is a lack of field presence from the agency and often decisions are being made without going in the field. In the current economic climate people are fearful of their jobs being eliminated, they do not want to move to enhance careers due to challenges with the housing market and transfer of station.
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Employees fear that volunteers, the private sector and contractors will threaten the need for their positions and believe that volunteers cannot do their work. Volunteers are being asked to represent the Forest Service more often in the field and often are not given the awards and recognition they deserve. Bureaucratic barriers make it difficult to reimburse volunteers for gas, supplies, etc. or to purchase gifts in recognition of their efforts. This is a tremendous impediment to volunteer efforts resulting in the generation of ill will between otherwise supportive volunteers, a decline in returning volunteers, and a lack of incentive for agency employees to continue volunteer efforts. Rather than being rewarded for accomplishing work with volunteers, some units are being penalized by having funds shifted from their program due to their ability to get work done with less.

There is also a reluctance and lack of incentive within the agency to share and engage partners for wilderness stewardship. Many employees simply don’t want or don’t have time to spend coordinating volunteer efforts and there is a lack of trust in their abilities to have ownership and the skills to assist in management of the resource. Many experts in the field of partnerships see a need for the agency to relinquish some of its perceived control over decision-making and find effective ways to engage the public and outside organizations in its land management efforts.

The culture of the Forest Service used to be one of strong local commitment. Over the last 20 years, however, there has been inconsistent political direction regarding collaborative stewardship and the constant movement of managers to new jobs and positions has discouraged partners and communities from engagement and willingness to work together on common interests.

Possible solutions to address agency culture and transition:

- Ensure the Wilderness program is a priority at all levels of the USFS organization
- Provide forums and opportunities for the aging workforce to mentor new employees
- Get staff out on the Forest and in wilderness
- Create new career opportunities and jobs for young people
- Provide a program of work that clearly defines the roles of volunteers
- Develop positions that can focus on wilderness partnerships and agreements
- Provide opportunities to engage partners to develop a shared vision and have ownership in the future of wilderness.
- Develop commitments and opportunities for partners who have a shared responsibility to engage in problem solving and decision-making for wilderness.
- Bring individuals into the agency who are creative, risk takers, innovative and have strong interpersonal skills to engage in partnership development.
- Develop opportunities to establish trust with partners and other agencies by working across administrative boundaries.
- The most successful projects include agency employees or non-governmental advocates who are solidly invested in volunteer efforts by providing leadership, support, feedback, reward, and sometimes field presence. They need to be able to focus on wilderness and be mentors to employees and citizen groups to follow in their footsteps.
- Institutional culture can be overcome through training, technical assistance, and informal networking.
- Agency personnel need to invest more time in developing relationships with outside partners and become less rigid in its approach to interpreting the law especially with volunteers.
- Provide skills such as problem solving, dispute resolution, and communication to understand local politics, local communities and to foster partnership opportunities. It is a job in itself.
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4. Funding and Budget
Budgets for Wilderness have been on a continual decline throughout the country. Wilderness is funded under the NFRW job code and often is consumed by the developed recreation, facilities, special uses and fee programs. CMTL dollars have aided many programs with trails in wilderness and grants have often supplemented projects. Wilderness is a resource that should be funded by other resource areas and not just recreation. Wilderness is often lost in regional and forest program budget advice, and line officers are not being held accountable for meeting targets. Often, the comment is the wilderness targets are soft and not hard targets like the timber, fire or range programs. The bar has been set high that program managers will accomplish the Chief’s 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge with no additional funding.

Wilderness programs have often gotten the work done with passionate people being devoted, creative and willing to donate extra hours to accomplish the work. Some of this work has been done with partnerships and volunteers. Most often however there is insufficient agency collaboration and coordination with volunteer organizations. There are fewer employees doing more work who are stretched so thin that they cannot spend time cultivating relationships with volunteer organizations, preparing field projects, conducting outreach and coordinating volunteer efforts. Creative solutions need to be found to supplement a declining budget with partnerships and other funding opportunities.

Possible solutions to address budget:
✓ Ensure the Wilderness program is funded from other programs besides recreation
✓ Have wilderness as a separate line item in the budget advice at all levels.
✓ Have Forests and Districts build work plans for wilderness
✓ Hold Line Officers accountable for wilderness
✓ Engage other resource areas to fund wilderness internally
✓ Develop partnerships, grant opportunities and foundations to support wildernesses
✓ Engage partners at a local level that can provide a strong local taproot who know the communities adjacent to wilderness that can provide place based initiatives that catalyze citizen engagement.
✓ Explore non-federal funding in support of Citizen Stewardship Program Coordinator Positions through grants, foundations and organizations such as the Outdoor Industry Association.
✓ Provide leadership and coordination across District and Forest boundaries to stretch dollars and set work priorities.
✓ Provide incentives and rewards for people who are leading partnerships.
✓ Make “off the top” funding available to plant the seed and grow relationships with communities and projects that tie to wilderness, clean air, clean water and sustainability.
✓ Celebrate project successes or key benchmarks. Take time to reflect on major accomplishments. Look for ways to motivate and spur people onto new challenges. This can be done with thought and insight and not just based upon budget woes. Celebration and acknowledgment can go a long way.
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5. Shifting Partner Focus from Trail Maintenance to Wilderness Stewardship

More resources are available to wilderness managers to conduct trail maintenance than for the many elements of wilderness stewardship such as invasive species control, resource condition monitoring, campsite restoration, visitor education, oversight of Outfitter/Guide operations, and preservation of solitude. Volunteer organizations already offer many options for people interested in doing trail maintenance in wilderness, the National Trails System is well funded compared to Forest Service wilderness programs in some regions, and external funding sources are attracted to physical projects with clearly observable results. Yet, trail maintenance can be one of the least pressing needs in terms of overall preservation of wilderness character. Finding funding and partners interested in conducting projects other than trail maintenance and “wilderness patrol” can be a barrier to wilderness managers looking to improve wilderness stewardship.

Possible Solution shifting partner focus from trails to stewardship:

- Work at the national level to develop stewardship capacity within existing non-profit partners that are currently focused on recreational access and/or wilderness designation.
- Make NFF stewardship grant funding more accessible to partners who have the capacity to do stewardship projects but not the cash match
- Substantially increase NFF funds reserved for wilderness stewardship through a focused campaign of private donations matched with federal funds
- Create NFF wilderness stewardship micro-grant category with only in-kind matching requirement

6. Process Barriers to Developing Partnerships and Working with Volunteers

Administrative processes can be a barrier to developing new partnerships with wilderness stewardship organizations or volunteers. Administrative activities can include negotiating the latest restrictions on e-mail and network access for volunteers, working with the Albuquerque Service Center to process reimbursements, creating travel authorizations for volunteers, coordinating and enforcing requirements for mandatory trainings such as computer security, and keeping individual volunteer agreements up to date. These administrative requirements represent part of the overhead cost of engaging volunteers in wilderness stewardship projects and can discourage Forest Service staff from taking on these tasks. In the case of creating a new partnership with an independent organization, the wilderness manager must also develop a formal agreement such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Challenge Cost Share (CCS) with the new partner. The MOU or CCS usually requires an Annual Operating Plan and an Agreement for Sponsored Voluntary Services. Negotiating these agreements and then shepherding the MOU through the Forest Service agreement approval process can require a substantial commitment of time from the wilderness manager. Adjustments may also be made to these agreements as the partnership evolves. In addition, some of the administrative requirements for individual volunteers must still be applied to the members of the partner organization.

Once a partnership is established, other process barriers may arise such as figuring out how to move funds between federal and non-profit organizations, addressing worker’s compensation claims, sharing staff positions, and tracking volunteer performance.
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Although no single issue mentioned above is likely to prevent partnership development, the cumulative cost in time and energy of administrative processes can be sufficient to prevent some Forest Service staff from making the effort.

Possible Solutions to eliminate barriers:

- Create a limited access option for partners to use FS email and network file storage
- (Re)create agency-wide wilderness communication network such as an internal wilderness bulletin board to facilitate managers helping each other work through administrative processes
- Adequately fund staff to make time to do administrative tasks
- Demonstrate to staff why making the effort to partner is good for wilderness

7. Wilderness Volunteer and Forest Service Expectations

Several pitfalls may result from differing expectations between volunteers and agency personnel. Individuals and volunteer groups often base their priorities on personal experience and interest, community concerns and politics, knowledge of the land, advocacy history, and the needs of their members. These factors influence their choice of project locations and type of stewardship activities performed. Land managers often have a much larger array of tasks to prioritize and must also consider mandates, resources available, relevant policy and law, and budget constraints.

This wide array of considerations often leads to differing expectations between volunteers and managers regarding the emphasis, type, and amount of work to be completed by the volunteers. This may lead to situations in which volunteers perform tasks not identified/sanctioned by the agency, or in which tasks deemed priority by the agency are not completed by volunteers. These differing expectations regarding volunteer work can also result in a devaluation of volunteer ideas and input by managers.

The potential conflict of expectations is further complicated by the Wilderness Act, which influences the expectations of wilderness managers, but may differ dramatically from the concept of wilderness held by some volunteers. Here are a few examples of Wilderness-specific expectation conflicts:

- A volunteer group is only interested in clearing trails, yet the district needs help eradicating noxious weeds at a particularly popular lake.
- A volunteer group wants to aid with improving public safety in a designated wilderness by conducting patrols, when the manager needs help educating the public on appropriate camping behavior to reduce impacts in and around campsites.
- An organization is interested in doing a service project as part of its pre-planned event, but the location they have selected and the time they have to commit is not suitable to complete the work that the manager deems appropriate to help with a specific problem or to counter the resources required to administer the project.

Possible solutions to address the expectations issue:

- Utilize collaboration when developing work agreements with volunteer groups. Collaboration identifies common goals between volunteers and the agency by examining each group’s priorities and working together to find priority projects. The resulting shared vision should influence the nature of the overall working relationship as well as the development of individual projects. Collaboration may result in managers becoming more flexible in the tasks that are assigned to provide a meaningful experience for the organization or individual, while still assuring that key
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mission goals will be addressed. It also improves communication and draws clear boundaries regarding the appropriate roles of each party.

✓ Continue to improve the availability and distribution of existing and new information resources to wilderness managers and volunteer coordinators.

✓ Provide support for managers taking the time and effort to effectively collaborate with a diverse population of volunteer organizations and individuals will also help to improve this situation. This could involve the hiring of individuals at the local and regional levels to focus on collaboration and partnerships for wilderness as a primary component of their jobs.

✓ Context regarding the expectations associated with wilderness stewardship can be provided at the regional or national levels by further developing relationships and exploring the overlap in mission statements and goals between volunteer organizations and the agency.

8. Communication
In the process of setting priorities for wilderness stewardship, managers often involve only a limited subset of decision makers and specialists and rarely inform the general wilderness community of the resulting program of work. This leads to a general lack of awareness among our partners and the general public, sometimes resulting in situations where volunteer groups are assigned wilderness-related tasks without the necessary context of the entirety of wilderness stewardship needs in a given situation. A lack of coordinated planning between Forest Service personnel across district boundaries, forest boundaries, and program areas can sometimes result in poorly coordinated efforts in the management of wilderness and the labors of volunteers.

Possible solutions to address communication issue:

✓ Share general priorities for wilderness stewardship or program of work with external audiences through the use of local Forest websites, interactions with the local community, and existing channels of communication with volunteers and partners. Highlight accomplishments and the contributions of partners in the broader context of wilderness stewardship.

✓ Within the agency, expand the wilderness management team to be more inclusive when developing priorities and setting the program of work. This has been successfully implemented in some areas through the use of charters or working groups to manage wildernesses across administrative and program area boundaries.

✓ At the national level, invite partners to the table to discuss wilderness stewardship priorities and needs based on agency policy and direction. Encourage the dissemination of priorities through these national groups to their members.

9. Skills and Abilities
Our ability to achieve our wilderness mission depends on our ability to cooperate with others. But partnerships are hard work - they require skills, abilities, and resources, from both our employees and our partners. The lack of such skills and abilities within the agency and with partners has been a barrier to creating and managing successful wilderness stewardship citizen programs and partnerships. We need to provide the resources that will help our employees build and sustain successful partnerships. We also need to assist our partners in developing not only technical field skills, but also business planning and agreements management skills. Both are critical to the success of any partnership. Many volunteers and citizen groups do not have the skills and abilities to work within wilderness (backcountry and primitive skills, safety, and survival training). This creates significant safety and liability concerns. Obtaining the skills and necessary agency certifications (e.g., crosscut saw) is often too onerous for both the agency and
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partner to accomplish for a given project. Matching volunteer projects with the skills, abilities, and interests of partners and volunteers is critical to the success of any project. Volunteers must be provided the training needed do the job right. This eliminates frustration, generates mutual respect, improved safety, results in good work, and provides an incentive to return. There must be an appreciation and reliance upon each other’s strengths and skills.

Possible solutions to address skills and abilities issue:

✓ Develop and deliver effective training for employees working with partnerships. Critical skills development should include relationship building, understanding communities, facilitation/mediation; the business side of partnerships, agreements, and monitoring.
✓ Establish Partnership and Outreach positions at each level of the organization to support program managers in creating and managing partnerships and stewardship groups.
✓ Share in development and delivery of effective training for volunteers and citizen groups.
✓ Support and encourage non-government partners to fill this need. Critical skills development should include primitive and backcountry skills; volunteer recruitment and supervision; and the business side partnerships, agreements, and funding.
✓ Create a comprehensive, interactive, interagency website that is available to agency staff and partners and that enhances wilderness partnership and volunteer networking through such means as success stories, skills training opportunities, and links to other websites and sources of information.
✓ Utilize toolboxes on websites to provide easy access to information and training modules, both within the agency and for partners (i.e., www.partnershipresourcecenter.org and www.wilderness.net).
✓ Provide for cross-training. Include partners and volunteers in agency wilderness training, workshops, and meetings.
✓ Provide developmental opportunities for employees with partner organizations.
✓ Develop wilderness publications that can guide, inspire, and teach both agency and partners.
✓ Authorize non-governmental partner organizations to conduct required training to volunteers and provide necessary certifications.
✓ Share success stories that inspire our employees and our partners to do new and exciting things together. Utilize existing agency communication tools to share the success stories.
✓ Make use of case studies to communicate lessons learned.
   Partner with other federal agencies in developing and delivering training and other resources. (e.g., www.doi.gov/partnerships/).
   Target groups that would desire their skills we provide: i.e. forestry and natural resource colleges.
   Tap potential volunteers early and late in their career.
   Modify volunteer application process to identify their focus, desire, skills and expectations of their volunteer experience.
   Organized panel interviews with existing wilderness volunteers have been successful with Poudre Wilderness Volunteers.
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10. Agency Credibility and Trust
The lack of Forest Service credibility and trust is often identified as a barrier to creating and managing successful partnerships. Past actions, agency decisions, and strained relationships have often contributed to this lack of agency credibility and trust. Every organization has its own culture that is built over time based upon its mission, its practices, its people, its governing values, its traditions and its institutional history. In any partnership arrangement, it is important to acknowledge and understand these different organizational cultures, to respect them, and to find ways these factors can contribute to strengthen the mutual endeavor.

Take time to build and cultivate trusted relationships with partner and volunteer organizations. The most successful partnerships and stewardship programs are those that value differences and find ways to integrate them into a workable operating culture for the partnership. To build successful partnerships requires a neutral and trusted body. An improving relationship is only as strong as the most recent evidence that trust has been earned. Always assume that your relationships are fragile and operate that way. Once trust has been nurtured among partners, the working relationships established in this atmosphere of partnership can extend to new venues. Once lost, it is more difficult to regain. Success in one venue can change the course of the partnership and change partners’ perspectives in ways not initially envisioned. Strong interpersonal relationships, trust, and ongoing communication are critical to program success. There is also a need to identify and deal with hidden agendas to keep them from undermining trust.

Possible solutions to address trust issue:
- Identify “thinking partners” who you can talk periodically by phone or email to share thoughts and ideas on projects and partnerships.
- Recognize and reward collaborative leadership skills.
- Promote a governing model that relies on shared leadership and decision-making, local engagement, flexibility, effective communication, and learning from experience.
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Prepared by:
Wilderness Advisory Group
Adam Barnett
Ryan Brown
Martha Moran
Ruth Monahan
Diane Taliaferro

March 2, 2009