



COMPONENTS OF AND BARRIERS TO BUILDING SUCCESSFUL INTERAGENCY WILDERNESS CITIZEN STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Introduction

Integrity of the National Wilderness Preservation System is threatened by fire suppression, invasive species, heavy and highly concentrated use of sensitive areas and a growing disconnect between people and wilderness. The staff, skill base and funding needed to address these challenges continues to decline and is currently insufficient. Unless approaches for closing this staffing and funding gap are developed, the integrity of wilderness will continue to erode and, along with it, the ecologic, economic and social benefits of wilderness to our citizens, our country and our world.

One approach successfully employed by some units to help compensate for federal staffing and funding shortfalls is developing and deploying skilled citizen wilderness stewards. The purpose of this paper is to identify common elements of successful citizen stewardship programs and barriers to be avoided.

Methods

Individual and group meetings were conducted during the 2004 calendar year to explore and identify intersecting circles of interest and capacity among agencies, academia, volunteers and other partner organizations in developing and deploying citizen wilderness stewards. A complete list of individuals and organizations consulted is presented in Appendix A.

Results

This section identifies common components of successful volunteer wilderness citizen stewardship programs and barriers to successful programs. Specific to the Forest Service are elements of the *10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge* that could successfully be addressed by citizen wilderness stewards. This information is presented in Appendix B.

A. Common Components of Successful Citizen Wilderness Stewardship Programs

A number of successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs were reviewed to determine what makes them successful (see Appendix A for a complete list). When compared one to another, the following common components of success surfaced:

1. **Agency champion** – The most successful projects included an agency employee who solidly invested in volunteer efforts by providing leadership, support, feedback, reward, and sometimes field presence.
 - a. Leadership – Time was taken to build and cultivate trusted relationships with volunteer organizations
 - b. Support – Bunkhouse and office space, equipment and supplies, transportation, radios, training, etc were furnished by the agency to the degree possible
 - c. Feedback – Projects were evaluated from the perspective of both parties with feedback provided to decision makers

- d. Reward – Volunteer efforts were appropriately acknowledged and rewarded
 - e. Field presence – Agency employees participated in project work to the degree possible
- 2. Non-governmental champion** – The most successful projects included a non-governmental organization that conducted volunteer recruitment, training, outfitting and supervision.
- a. Recruitment – Conducted outreach and matched volunteer interest and skill with the project
 - b. Training – Provided training to ensure appropriate skill level for the project with some agency support
 - c. Outfitting – Provided food, transportation and equipment with minimal agency support
 - d. Supervision – Provided full-time field supervision with minimal agency support
- 3. Meaningful volunteer experiences** – The most successful projects were those inspiring connectedness and community, interesting and meaningful work with clear expectations and responsibilities, adequate training, effective supervision and appropriate recognition.
- a. Connectedness and community – Clearly connected volunteer contributions to final outcomes so volunteers could see how important their efforts were in the big picture no matter how menial the task may have been. There was a common sense of what volunteers were trying to achieve together with the agency resulting in a strong sense of community and an incentive to return.
 - b. Interesting and meaningful work – Large or small, specific, place-based, discrete projects were offered having a beginning middle and end on a continuum from weekend to week-long to month-long that were clearly connected to making a positive difference to the resource. These projects and programs generated ownership and enthusiasm among volunteers and an incentive to return.
 - c. Clear expectations and responsibilities – Expectations and responsibilities were clearly defined for the agency, volunteer supervisor and volunteers so there was no confusion on who was supposed to do what. This helped ensure a positive experience for all parties.
 - d. Adequate training – Volunteers were provided the training needed do the job right. This eliminated frustration, generated mutual respect, improved safety, resulted in good work and provided an incentive to return.
 - e. Effective supervision – Volunteers were supervised by highly qualified, experienced and inspiring individuals, agency/non-agency/both, who provided guidance and opportunities for growth throughout the entire experience.
 - f. Appropriate recognition – Volunteers received recognition appropriate to their effort and contribution.
- 4. Academic and scientific support** – Among the most successful monitoring projects were those supported by academic institutions providing training, ensuring data quality

assurance and quality control, data analysis, and long-term project continuity and management.

- a. Training – Provided volunteers monitoring training, use of equipment, survey instruments, etc.
 - b. Data quality assurance/control, analysis – Built in field checks to ensure QA/QC and analyzed data providing results to decision maker.
 - c. Long-term continuity – Managed long-term monitoring projects to ensure continuity over time, application to long-term global trends
- 5. Meets needs** - Successful citizen stewardship efforts meet both agency and nongovernmental organization needs.
- a. Agency Needs
 - Tie need with opportunity
 - Think of volunteers as partners
 - Conduct air quality monitoring
 - Build social capacity through experience as wilderness stewards
 - Data analysis/collection
 - Recreation management and dispersion of people
 - Standardized program in training, recruitment, reimbursement
 - Identify experiences we can give people while getting work done
 - b. Nongovernmental Organization Needs
 - Educate citizens for decision making
 - Cultivate happy, healthy, connected people
 - Provide opportunity for citizens to serve
 - Match desired experience to project –retirees might have different need, skills development
 - Provide appropriate recognition of volunteers
 - Meet organization mission
 - Preserve access
 - Consider volunteer objectives

B. Barriers to Successful Citizen Stewardship Efforts

Some efforts to develop and deploy citizen wilderness stewards failed and even successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs experienced setbacks along the way. When compared one to another, the following common barriers preventing successful citizen stewardship programs surfaced:

- 1. Insufficient agency collaboration and coordination with volunteer organizations**
 - a. Limited agency staff and time – 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.
 - b. Limited knowledge and expertise – There is inconsistency in volunteer management among staff due to varying levels of awareness and knowledge about available partnership authorities.

2. Bureaucratic barriers

- a. Inability to reimburse – New requirements make it almost impossible to reimburse volunteers for gas, supplies, etc. 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.
- b. Inability to provide gifts – The agency cannot purchase gifts in recognition of volunteer efforts. They have to find some other organization to do this adding to the already demanding volunteer coordination efforts.

3. Insufficient volunteer training and support

- a. Training – Volunteers are treated as if they were employees so before they even get to technical training in monitoring, trail reconstruction, campsite restoration, weed identification, etc, they are required to take a considerable amount of training including defensive driving, crosscut saw safety, horse safety, first-aid certification, field communications, etc. In some cases volunteers spend more time in training than they spend in the field unless they are returning volunteers. Concern about liability and number of courses required frequently precludes investment in volunteer program development.
- b. Support – Providing bunkhouse and office space, equipment and supplies, transportation and the inability to dedicate time with volunteers in the field are barriers.

4. Insufficient incentive

- a. Agency – Rather than being rewarded for accomplishing work with volunteers, some units are being penalized by having funds shifted away from their program to another program. Because they have demonstrated an ability to make do with less, even less is given. Some become a victim of their own success.
- b. Volunteers – Volunteers are most interested in the volunteer experience. They want interesting and meaningful work with clear responsibilities, effective supervision and appropriate recognition. Without these incentives, they are unlikely to return.

5. Insufficient commitment

- a. Agency – While there are unquestionably outstanding exceptions, the some of the agencies as a whole do not have a volunteer culture. In some cases employees do not believe volunteers capable of doing their work. In other cases, employees are threatened because volunteers can do their work. Many employees simply don't want to or don't have time to spend coordinating volunteer efforts. Generating volunteer hours is not part of employee performance elements. Volunteers aren't free. It takes time to build a strong commitment from both parties, to do the planning to prepare a field project and to conduct outreach. Spending time cultivating volunteer opportunities is not a priority.
- b. Volunteers – If volunteers don't show up, projects are cancelled resulting in lost investment and disappointment among volunteers who didn't cancel.

Implications and Recommendations

Consistently, the most successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs displayed the common elements of success and avoided the barriers presented herein. The implication is that if units launching citizen wilderness stewardship efforts embrace the common elements of success and avoid the barriers, their likelihood of success will be significantly greater than those who choose to do otherwise.

Results further suggest that units would benefit tremendously from establishment of citizen wilderness stewardship program coordinator positions to cultivate relationships with volunteer organizations, prepare field projects, conduct outreach and coordinate volunteer efforts. Additionally, results indicate that all units considering establishing new or enhancing existing citizen stewardship programs would benefit from knowing who is interested in what types of stewardship opportunities, what opportunities are available and how stewards can be trained. In light of these implications, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Embrace Components of Success and Avoid Barriers** – Ensure that units considering development of citizen wilderness stewardship programs are aware of and follow to the degree possible the identified components of success.
 - a. distribute electronically through wilderness mailing lists
 - b. post on wilderness.net
2. **Explore NonFederal Funding in Support of Citizen Stewardship Program Coordinator Positions** – Given current limitations of federal funding, pursue private funding in support of these positions with organizations such as the Outdoor Industry Association.
3. **Identification** – Launch efforts to recommend a process to successfully:
 - a. identify organizations interested in participating in wilderness projects and what their needs are to be involved
 - b. identify projects to be completed and requirements for participation
 - c. match projects with interested volunteer organizations
4. **Organization and Training** – Explore methods for getting nongovernmental organizations to provide leadership in:
 - a. organizing, providing logistical support for and implementing project work
 - b. training volunteers
5. **Coordination** – Provide leadership in coordination at the local, regional and national levels by:
 - a. identifying available “toolboxes” for successfully coordinating and running volunteer programs and develop materials if they don’t already exist
 - b. hosting a regional or national workshop to pull together people who work on citizen wilderness stewardship efforts and share experiences
 - c. designating Agency Champions on each project site

6. Motivation and Accountability –

- a. figure out what motivates some agency employees to continue developing volunteer programs in spite of all the reasons they have not to do it then institutionalize it
- b. figure out what motivates volunteer participation and provide those incentives
- c. develop competencies for citizen wilderness stewardship development and management
- d. define accountability and build it into performance elements
- e. include “actively promoting and managing volunteers” in wilderness managers position descriptions
- f. reward success
- g. conduct a two-way review of each project upon completion to evaluate success

Conclusion

While citizen wilderness stewardship programs will not completely compensate for federal staffing and funding shortfalls, they are one means to continue advancing wilderness programs in light of these austere times. A word of caution to those eager to launch such a program. The most successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs include a non-governmental champion who conducts volunteer recruitment, training, outfitting and supervision and a solidly invested agency champion to provide leadership, support, feedback, reward, and sometimes field presence. Given these requirements for success, citizen wilderness stewardship programs are not to be entered into lightly. They most certainly cannot be thought of, or marketed as, “cheap labor.” Rather, successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs are partnerships and partnerships are all about relationships and establishing and cultivating relationships take time and dedication. Units unwilling or unable to dedicate time to this endeavor are discouraged from even attempting to launch citizen wilderness stewardship programs. Those units having successful citizen wilderness stewardship programs stand as a testimony to what can be achieved for wilderness when time is dedicated to cultivating relationships with volunteer organizations, preparing field projects, conducting outreach and coordinating volunteer efforts. We are thankful for their inspiring examples to help ensure an enduring resource of wilderness.

Appendix A - Individuals and groups consulted during the 2004 calendar year about developing citizen wilderness stewardship programs.

Individual and group meetings were conducted during the 2004 calendar year to explore and identify intersecting circles of interest and capacity among agencies, academia, volunteers and other partner organizations in developing and deploying citizen wilderness stewards. Individual meetings were held with:

- Mary Margaret Sloan, President, American Hiking Society
- Celina Montorfano, Director of Conservation Programs, American Hiking Society
- Thomas Benjamin, President, Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement
- Kate Boland, Executive Director, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
- Pam Packer, Director, Colorado Outdoor Training Initiative
- Interagency Wilderness Character Monitoring Team
- FS Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group
- National invasive species representatives in the FWS and FS

Formal meetings included:

- 1. Meeting the Chief's 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge in the Northern Region, 19 August 2004.** Participants included: Perry Brown, Dean, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana; Laurie Yung, Director, Wilderness Institute, University of Montana; Nicki Phear, Wilderness Institute, University of Montana; Bobby Grillo, Regional Supervisor, Montana Conservation Corps; Diane Taliaferro, Assistant Staff Officer for Recreation Wilderness & Trails, Livingston Ranger District; Tom Carlson, Forest Service Representative, Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center; Connie Myers, Partnership Coordinator, National Wilderness Preservations System
- 2. Restore the Wild Northwest, 9 September 2004, Portland, Oregon.** Participants included: Adrian Hall, Wilderness Program Manager, Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest; Mary Ellen Fitzgerald, Wilderness Program Manger, Mt Hood National Forest; Dianne Bedell, Wilderness Program Manager, Gifford Pinchot National Forest; Susan Sater, Regional Wilderness Program Manager; Bonnie Lippitt, Regional Interpretation, Tourism Program Manager; Connie Myers, Director, Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center; Mary Vasse, Northwest Director, National Forest; Don Hunger, Director, Partnership & Program Development, Student Conservation Association; Elizabeth Lunney, Executive Director, Washington Trails Association and Board of American Hiking Society; Tom Wolf, State Council President, Trout Unlimited; Paula DelGuidice, Field Office Director, Northwestern Natural Resource Center, National Wildlife Federation; Gayle Marechal, Board Member, Wilderness Volunteers; Charlie Walkinshaw, Director, Experience International; Ethan Nelson, Northwest Youth Corps

3. **USDA Forest Service Northern Region Centennial Forum: 100 Years of Conservation, 40 Years of Wilderness, a New Century of Service, November 9, 10, 2004, Missoula, Montana. The Making of Citizen Stewards: Increasing Public Awareness and Citizen Participation in Wilderness Stewardship.** Participants included representatives from the following organizations:

- **Student Conservation Association** – Provides enthusiastic, pre-screened, first-aid certified, trained volunteers to conduct weed pulling and camp ground cleanup projects.
- **State Conservation Corps, Americorps on Pacific Crest Trail** – Visibility of youth crews brings high-level officials from DC
- **Back Country Horsemen of America** – Secured funding from Weed Board, mapped and sprayed weeds on the Nez Perce. NEPA work was already completed.
- **Mountain/River Stewards/Eagle Watch** – Developed clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, built trusted relationships, got commitment from management to assist in meeting goals of education and stewardship; remained flexible and realistic while working to build a sense of community with volunteers and a network within the agency.
- **Reach a Teacher, Touch the World** - Brings in high school students and teachers around the west to do reconstruction and trail maintenance work on the Clearwater/Nez Perce. Follow through throughout the year helps teachers incorporate wilderness into their curriculum. Require evaluations and summaries of experiences. Includes contributions from backcountry sportsmen and others. An agency employee goes into the field with students and teachers to ensure a positive experience.
- **Bob Marshall Foundation** - Going for eight years has expanded in volume and quality of work from just Flathead to throughout the Bob Marshall. A challenge cost share exists with the FS. The Foundation effectively competes for other nongovernmental funds. A FS representative identifies projects to Foundation leadership. The Foundation provides training, set up, recruiting volunteers, logistics, etc. sometimes themselves, sometimes using other organizations. Sometimes a FS rep is present on project site but many times is not. The Foundation always provides a volunteer coordinator. This approach requires little output from the FS yet yields tremendous benefits. 40 projects were coordinated last year. This approach is similar to SCA but local in scope.
- **Montana Conservation Corps** – A youth development organization providing training in land ethics and skills and work experiences in the woods. It is a gateway for program participants into careers with natural resource organizations.
- **University of Montana** – Provides students to conduct long-term, recurring plant monitoring helping both students in their academic endeavors, the resource and the agency.
- **Idaho Ambassadors Program** – Supplement wilderness rangers efforts in trail maintenance.
- **Mt Baker Monitoring** – University students collect data in support of management plans that is often better than FS data because of academic training, faculty oversight and their ability to spend more time focusing on the project. Feedback loops are included.

- **Youth Forest Monitoring Program** – High school students provided stipend to monitor soils, water and weeds on the Helena NF. Title III funds complimented agency funds. Benefits include collection of objective baseline data, students pursuing natural resource degrees and careers, development of ecologically literate constituents, passionate citizens who remember their experience for the rest of their lives. This builds support for wilderness.

Appendix B - Elements of the Forest Services *10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge* that Could Successfully be Addressed by Citizen Wilderness Stewards

The goal of the *10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge* is that within 10 years, every Forest Service unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System will meet at least 6 of the 10 following stewardship elements. Currently, only 18 percent of the FS wilderness units meet minimum standard. Of these 10 elements, those identified as appropriately addressed by volunteer citizen stewards are highlighted in bold, italic print.

1. ***Wilderness is covered by a fire plan that allows for the full range of management responses.*** (Volunteers can help implement and monitor fire plans once completed by the agency)
 - What are the effects of fire exclusion?
 - What are the fuels in wilderness?
 - What are the logical (natural) fire boundaries?
 - What is the pattern of lightening?
2. ***Wilderness is successfully treated for noxious/invasive plants.***
 - Where are the invasive species?
 - What are the ecosystem effects of invasive species?
 - How do we effectively treat invasive species?
3. ***Air quality monitoring is conducted and baseline is established.***
 - Which lakes, lichens are sensitive to acid deposition?
 - What is the special pattern of ozone? Where it forms and where it hits is important.
4. ***Wilderness education plans are implemented.***
 - Where do we find the capacity to make visitor contacts at the trailhead and within wilderness to inform visitors about proper behavior to minimize impacts to the resource?
5. ***Wilderness has adequate standards, in which monitored conditions are within forest plan standards, and opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are stable or increasing.*** (Volunteers can monitor once standards are set by the agency. There is a need for consistency and training).
 - Identify quiet places, are they changing?
6. ***Wilderness has completed recreation site inventory.*** (Need unbiased volunteers to collect data that is of high quality).
 - What are the baseline site inventories?
 - What is the connection between use, sites and changes?
7. Outfitter and guide permit operating plans are in place that direct outfitters to model appropriate wilderness practices and incorporate appreciation for wilderness values in their interaction with clients. (Outfitters need professionals to assess operations. It is the agencies responsibility to provide these professionals).
 - How can we help outfitter/guides and their clients understand wilderness?
 - What is the performance of outfitter/guides in the field?

8. Wilderness has a full-range of adequate standards which prevent degradation of the wilderness resource. (This is the agencies responsibility).
 - What are the Forest Plan standards for wilderness?
9. ***Wilderness managers have their priority information needs addressed through data collection and corporate applications.*** (Volunteers can analyze data).
 - How can we get the data we already have entered and analyzed?
10. Wilderness has a baseline workforce (from workforce assessment) in place for each wilderness. (Agency responsibility).
 - How do we figure out how many people are needed to accomplish the work of wilderness?