

Volunteers in Resource Management: A Forest Service Perspective

Jerry D. Greer

One area in which volunteers are contributing significantly to our society is in the protection and management of natural resources. The use of volunteer services in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, has increased dramatically over the past several years. Volunteers are turning out in large numbers to protect forests, to repair facilities, and to help other people.

The Forest Service is the agency in the USDA charged with the management of National Forests. The organization is directed by the Chief in Washington, D.C. The Service is divided into nine regions each headed by a Regional Forester. Each region contains a number of individual National Forests managed by Forest Supervisors. Each National Forest is divided into a number of Ranger Districts which are managed by District Rangers and staffs of technicians, volunteers and professionals. Most volunteers are found at the Ranger District level but every other level has accepted the services of volunteers.

BACKGROUND

The Forest Service has always had volunteers. When the Service was formed in 1905, people would organize to assist in the suppression of

forest and range fires. They would work without pay and without any promise of financial aid if an accident occurred. But no records were kept about these volunteers.

We know that people over the years have repaired trails and fences or have helped visitors to the forests. We really never acknowledged these acts as voluntary services, perhaps because we did not think in those terms. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have for years and years done volunteer work for us. But it was often seen as something the groups were doing for their own benefit, not necessarily for the benefit of the public.

This attitude slowly changed. In 1969, Congress passed "The Volunteers in the Parks" Act. It permitted the National Park Service to accept the services of volunteers. Their volunteers were deemed to be federal employees in relation to tort claims and compensation for work injuries. In 1972, Congress passed the "Volunteers in the National Forests" Act. This act was nearly identical to the Park Service legislation but permitted the Forest Service to utilize volunteer services in many more areas. Park Service volunteers were restricted to working only in interpretative and visitor services. The

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Forest Service Act is more liberal and permits volunteers in practically any area of maintenance, public service, management or planning.

The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management also became a participant in the volunteer program in 1972. The Bureau began to organize volunteer efforts for the protection and management of its lands.

FROM LEGISLATION TO ACTION

Despite the passage of legislation in 1972, the Forest Service as an organization did not jump suddenly to the forefront as a leader in the natural resource volunteer movement. In some cases, it took from three to five years for the knowledge that the Act existed to filter down to the lowest levels -- the levels where the program would be implemented. It was a full ten years later (1982) that the Forest Service appeared as a fully equipped, ready-to-go organization which recognized dependency upon volunteers. During March, 1982 the first National Workshop on Volunteers in the National Forest was held at Colorado State University. This meeting was attended by many managers who by now were heavily involved in the field of volunteer administration.

Much of the delay in implementation can be simply attributed to the fact that most people are reluctant to try new things. The Forest Service is a conservative agency composed of conservative, generally non-people oriented employees, so the slow start in involving volunteers was probably to be expected.

Even today, we find the best programs on those units where some high level manager or staff assistant believes in the program. Although all managers have been asked to develop volunteer resources, many have not done so. Despite performance appraisals and merit pay, there is no way to hold a manager personally responsible for either having or not having a program. In general, too,

most managers have seen neither reward nor recognition for developing good programs. As a result, managers who are hard pressed may opt for other ways to get the job done.

THE WORK OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE FOREST SERVICE

Although willing volunteers can help accomplish almost any job in the Forest Service, volunteers are not permitted to collect or handle funds which belong to the government. Also, they are not permitted to participate in law enforcement actions. These are administrative determinations based upon an interpretation of legal restrictions.

Table I is a list of projects which are generally known to exist. It is admittedly incomplete. There are undoubtedly many other projects which have received little exposure across the administrative levels of the Forest Service. Some of these projects have had very significant impact upon the service given to the public by the Forest Service. The monetary value can be well calculated. The improvement in cooperation between the public and the Forest Service defies easy analysis and evaluation, but in some locations valuable lines of communications have opened and people are working with the agency instead of against it to solve problems.

EXAMPLES OF FORESTRY VOLUNTEERING

Trail Maintenance

One of the most visible activities of volunteers is the trail construction and maintenance program. Across the nation, clubs and organizations have "adopted" trails or trail segments. Through formal agreements with the local forest officials (that is, the District Rangers) the groups agree to clean and repair trails to standards set by the Forest Service. Vegetation is trimmed back, the path is leveled, erosion-preventing structures called "water-bars" are re-

paired or installed. Trail signs are installed or repaired. Fence crossing or gates are maintained. Casual users of the National Forest trail system are generally unaware that the work is performed by volunteers unless a special effort is made by the District Rangers to give recognition.

The Sandia Ranger District on the Cibola National Forest, Albuquerque, New Mexico was one of the first to have a very large volunteer trail maintenance program in the Forest Service. It is a small but heavily used District with a designated wilderness area abutting the city limits. Under the guidance of the Recreation Staff Officer, John Hayden, all 70 miles of trail on their system were "adopted" by groups in the 1981 to 1982 period. The District's "Adopt-A-Trail" Program has received national recognition. Their solution to showing appreciation to the groups is to install a sign on the trail clearly marking "this trail is maintained by the _____ Club," so that the users will know who, at least in thought, to thank for having nice hiking trails. The value of volunteer services on this single District exceeded \$70,000 in 1983 for the trails program.

Volunteers work not only on hiking trails but also on special trails for the handicapped and on special trail routes for cross-country skiers. Routes are cleared, bridges are repaired, and signs are maintained.

Another outstanding trails maintenance program was started by Steve Sams, Recreation Staff Officer on the Payson Ranger District of the Tonto National Forest in Arizona. In contrast to the program at Albuquerque where volunteers were often within fifteen minutes of their trail project, volunteers at Payson would often drive up to three hours from Phoenix to reach their projects.

Age and gender present no barriers to the trail maintenance groups. Children from church and youth groups maintain trails just like the adult groups. Retired citizens at Sedona, Arizona spend strenuous hours

repairing trails on the rugged walls of Oak Creek Canyon. College students devote summers to trail maintenance on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forests in the scenic Eagle Cap Wilderness Area.

Publications

The trails program has had some unique spinoffs. For example, volunteers in the Albuquerque area did most of the design work on a map for cross-country skiers. The map was subsequently published by the Forest Service and it received instantaneous acceptance. Volunteers also contributed editorial time, photography, and hours in field checks when the District published a new map for visitors and recreationists.

New Mexico also provided the pool of volunteer talent that wrote and published a small, excellent book about trail maintenance. The Forest Service through Floyd Thompson provided the technical guidance and the volunteers gave everything else. Incidentally, the parent group, Volunteers for the Outdoors, grew out of a formal cooperative effort between the Forest Service and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Service to People

Some of the earliest people in the formal Forest Service Volunteer Program were recruited to be "Campground Hosts." The years of 1974 and 1975 saw an increasing participation in this program. Campground Hosts may be provided with a space to park their mobile home or camp trailer. They normally work during the summer recreation season to offer help to other recreationists who visit the area. The Hosts pick up litter, make sure signs are posted and maintained, hand out literature and brochures, and answer questions about the area and the Forest Service. Problems in the campground may be quickly reported to the District Ranger via telephone or radio.

Hosts are often called upon to identify poison ivy, show new

TABLE 1

A LIST OF SOME VOLUNTEER PROJECTS IN THE FOREST SERVICE

Trail Construction

Trail Maintenance

Sign Construction and Installation

Install Off Road Vehicle Barriers

Maintain Buildings

Host Campgrounds

Host Picnic Areas

Wilderness Rangers, Wilderness Information Specialists

Litter Cleanup

Nature Talks and Guided Nature Hikes

Fire Control Support Activities (provide special communications)

Search and Rescue

Cross-country Ski Patrols

Cross-country Ski Trail Building and Maintenance

Build and Patrol Snowmobile Routes

Repair Fences

Observe Areas for Illegal Activity

Librarians

Photographers

Archaeological Site Assessment and Mapping

Program Planning and Budgeting

Map Design and Production

Trail Maintenance Handbook Publications

Writing Recreation Opportunity Guides

Stream Cleaning and Bank Stabilization

Maintain Trails for the Blind

Survey and Document Damage to Trails

Mapping Facilities on Heavy Use Areas

Mapping and Management of an ORV Area

Reception and Office Based Visitor Services

Operating Fire Lookouts

Environmental Education

Educating Groups in Wilderness Ethics

Organizing and Implementing Special Litter Cleanup Sessions for Very Large Areas

Roadside Cleanup

Gathering Data about Wildlife Species

Presenting Programs to Clubs and Organizations

Planting Trees in Forests

Planting and Maintaining Landscape Shrubs

Repair and Restore Features Damaged by Vandals

Gully Stabilization and Soil Erosion Prevention

Wildlife Habitat Improvement (food plots, provide shelter, etc.)

Mapping Locations of Abandoned Mines

Assistance in the Preparation of Special Use Permits

Designing Trails and Structures (engineering)

Design and Prepare Visual Aids for Interpretative Areas (posters, signs, displays)

Building Herbarium Collections of Plants

Building Geology Exhibits

campers how to build a safe campfire, or help people erect a tent. The Hosts may also be chased by dogs, verbally abused by visitors, or stung by hornets! Despite the hardship, they come back year after year to help care for a campground that becomes special to them. Retired husband and wife teams are common in this area of volunteer services.

There is another program that provides a similar service for visitors to the backcountry of National Forest areas. Jim Bradley, now on the Toiyabe National Forest in Reno, Nevada, created the Wilderness Information Specialist (WIS) Program in 1974 while he was assigned to the Nezperce National Forest. The first volunteer in this activity worked in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area. Bradley started a greatly expanded program in the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area in 1978. Volunteers in the "WIS" Program hike the trails of undeveloped areas helping visitors with their needs. They repair trails, pick up litter and trash, fix fences, repair damage to campsites and fix signs. They extinguish abandoned campfires and destroy campfire remains to improve the scenic beauty of an area.

The WIS Program was transplanted from Oregon to New Mexico where Karen Voight, working for John Hayden, developed the program which over a couple of years would grow into a very successful effort. The Chief Wilderness Ranger on the Sandia Ranger District at Albuquerque is retired Army Captain Alan Korpinen. He has the full time volunteer job of supervising the efforts of nearly twenty other volunteers. In heavy use areas such as the Sandia Mountain Wilderness, the volunteers do more with people and less with maintenance. They answer questions and give directions to the hundreds of "day hikers" who use the mountain much as a city park. This group of volunteers finds lost people, reports forest fires, and gives talks to local clubs and organizations about wilder-

ness ethics. A similar group of volunteers in the Phoenix, Arizona area provides an identical service in the Superstition Wilderness Area.

Management

It is important to note that volunteers for the Forest Service provide not only labor; they also help with management. Some have been (and continue to be) deeply involved in program management and development. John Southwick is known by reputation throughout the Forest Service as a leading volunteer in the management area. He was recognized by the Chief of the Forest Service for his significant contributions in developing and administering the Sandia Ranger District volunteer project. John Southwick also gave the time needed to speak with volunteers and forest managers as far away as Idaho and Colorado, to teach them about program systems and techniques.

The Forest Service has also received the very long-term services of several people. Joan Wilkes is one of the Albuquerque volunteers who helps the Sandia Ranger District. She volunteers about 24 hours per week to provide her services as a professional archaeologist.

All the Others

It is always difficult to list only a few people who are doing notable work. Many others get left out. There are literally hundreds of people in the Forest Service whose volunteer work deserve mention. Perhaps this brief acknowledgement will signify that, in spirit, they are not overlooked. The largest projects are the more spectacular and receive the most notice. The innumerable small projects have the most impact because they are the most common.

LEARNING TO MANAGE A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Learning how to manage a volunteer program in the Forest Service was somewhat like simultaneous dis-

coveries in scientific research. Several people independently arrived at the same finding and made the same conclusions. Forest Service managers were generally unaware that a body of knowledge about volunteer management existed or knew nothing about organizations such as AVA. As a result, many programs of the Forest Service more or less grew up on their own, isolated from other volunteer programs. All of the individual managers first involved found problems and faced them. It is notable that not only were the problems similar, the solutions were similar. Most of the management techniques used by the Forest Service are the same ones used by volunteer managers in the more traditional volunteer fields.

Forest Rangers recruit and supervise, plan and administer, reward and recognize, and if necessary, terminate volunteers in much the same way as other volunteerism professionals do. Many Forest Service people now belong to volunteer administration groups and organizations. They serve on the boards and committees of local and statewide organizations. They use their influence to improve their programs.

INTEGRATING VOLUNTEERS INTO THE FOREST SERVICE TEAM

The experience gained during the formative years of the Volunteer Program on the Sandia Ranger District led to one major conclusion: volunteers could not be treated as a separate group. Every single volunteer had to be made to feel an integral part of the organization.

While there are some managers today who oppose this concept, most understand the need to treat employees and volunteers alike. This philosophy did not develop without pain. Some employees, for example, saw the encroaching tide of free help as a threat to their own jobs and security. They actively opposed the expansion of the volunteer program until they became convinced that

their jobs were not in jeopardy. These employees were reacting to the supposed threat in a normal manner. The problem was solved by simply communicating with the employees on a unit. When the paid staff on a unit understood that there were no hidden objectives, they either stood in support of the program or, at least, did not oppose it. It is essential for managers to reassure paid staff that there is no plan to replace them with volunteers.

There continues to be some opposition to permitting volunteers to serve as spokespersons for the Forest Service Agency, though the National Park Service has encouraged volunteer representation through their Volunteers in the Parks Program. These volunteers are referred to as "VIP's." Opponents do have fair ground upon which to base their opposition. Only certain people in an organization can speak about certain things, especially the sometimes complicated programs of the Forest Service. For example, accountable line officers can make commitments. They can discuss and, within authority, change a policy. Volunteers and many employees cannot do these things.

The "spokesperson" problem in the Forest Service has essentially been solved. Managers who are extremely uncomfortable with volunteer speakers or representatives simply do not have volunteers in these areas. Managers who are comfortable in these situations have resolved their dilemma by: 1) carefully recruiting well-spoken volunteers who will be asked to represent the Forest Service; and 2) by communicating with the volunteer. This communication step insures that the volunteer knows what to talk about and what not to try and explain. The result is a scattering of exceptional volunteers throughout the Forest Service who give dinner talks to service clubs and other organizations. They may also represent the Forest Service at meetings of groups such as the Sierra

Club, Wilderness Society, or garden clubs, at which they present informative talks.

A PERSONAL OPINION

It is impossible for a rational person to look upon the work done by volunteers in the Forest Service and not agree that the benefits far outweigh the costs of the program. The costs are minimal and the benefits are great. The benefits are of two kinds.

The easiest benefits to quantify are those which can be reduced to dollar or money values. The work performed by volunteers in the Forest Service can conservatively be estimated in the higher hundreds of thousands of dollar range. While this is especially appealing during times of tight budgets, the true value of the Forest Service Volunteer Program may very well lie outside the realm of accountants.

Sociologists can better explain the second group of benefits. In many areas where volunteers are extensively used, we have noticed an improved tie to the community. Where openly hostile arguments over resource management policies once echoed, there now exists a strong line of communication. While the adversaries may indeed have their same ideas and hold to their former positions, they now are able to communicate.

It is to the credit of everyone that this occurs. It was observed to have happened in Albuquerque after the Sandia District got their very successful program going. People still disagreed but somehow the acceptance of volunteers by the Forest Service made the Agency seem more a member of the community and less an enemy of the citizens. This kind of benefit is non-quantifiable.

Benefits do not accrue solely to the Service. Each volunteer gains something from the relationship. This is no different from the situation in more traditional volunteer

programs. However, Forest Service volunteers probably satisfy more personal needs associated with a desire to protect natural resources or to correct environmental problems. Many have less need to give direct help to people as is done in the social services.

A COMING TOGETHER

Slowly, managers in traditional volunteer areas are being joined by managers of volunteers in the less traditional resource management areas. Volunteers in both of these areas are also joining together for their common support.

A good example can be seen in the Greater Albuquerque Volunteer Association. This dynamic group of volunteers and managers is composed of members of each realm. Together they work on statewide recognition ceremonies, training sessions, and conventions. It is notable that in 1981, Mr. John Southwick was one of the recipients of the Governor's Award to outstanding volunteers in the state. He was recognized for his part in the Sandia District Volunteer Program. He may be the first volunteer to be recognized by a state governor for outstanding contributions in the field of resource management and conservation.

Managers of volunteer programs in the Forest Service may be willing and able to participate in the general volunteer program movement. Find out if National Forest units near you have a volunteer program. Determine who the leaders and managers are. Invite them to join your associations, to help organize events, to assist with training sessions. Many will be willing to serve as officers in your organizations. Others may be available to serve on Boards of Directors or as members of statewide or regional groups working to recognize the work that volunteers are doing.

Everything that we can do today to bring these two very different



SPECIAL FEATURE SERIES

Alternative sentencing is a rapidly-developing area of volunteerism. The Journal has been seeking articles addressing the many issues related to this special type of volunteer service. We are therefore pleased to begin a series of articles that will run in three succeeding issues.

First, we offer the following overview of the many aspects of alternative sentencing, based on a study in Dane County, Wisconsin.

In the Fall 1985 issue, we will publish an article by Kay Taylor describing the experiences of the Durham County Library in Durham, North Carolina, with community service work performed by offenders.

In the Winter 1985-86 issue, Katherine Noyes will share the results of an extensive study on this subject she has been conducting for the Virginia Division of Volunteerism. Her article will include excerpts of program materials and guidelines for a wide variety of agencies utilizing volunteers referred by the justice system.

Readers with experiences to share about alternative sentencing are encouraged to send their comments to us for possible inclusion in this series.
