

Working with a crosscut saw partner, six feet apart, for days on end in the wilderness naturally leads to some in-depth conversations.

Jon Erickson and Justin Ewer both worked as seasonal employees on the Deschutes National Forest, Sisters Ranger District Wilderness and Trail Crew in 2004 and 2005, and spent many hours conversing about trails and wilderness. Today, Jon works with the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and Justin on the Mt. Adams Ranger District of Gifford Pinchot National Forest.



A volunteer working through a “mock” visitor contact promoting Wilderness stewardship and Leave No Trace.

One topic they picked up in the backcountry that continued to re-emerge over the years was their passion about the importance and value of training wilderness rangers.

Although many Forest Service wilderness rangers receive excellent training, as first-season rangers, they were essentially told to “go ranger.” They figured it out, largely through trial and error. Later, both worked to train seasonal rangers and volunteers and were struck by the amount of time it takes to become proficient with the range of skills needed for effective wilderness stewardship. “Go ranger” just isn’t enough.

Recognizing that some incredible and talented people — both within and outside of the Forest Service — work for wilderness preservation, they realized that effectively passing on their knowledge to the next generation of wilderness stewards is critical to the Forest Service mission and to wilderness itself.

*USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*



for the greatest good



Guest speaker, Rick McClure, sharing some incredible stories and insights about cultural history and Wilderness.

“We certainly are not the first to wrestle with this question. There has been some great work done nationally, but this training came about as we asked what we could do in our region,” Justin said. They immediately enlisted wilderness rangers throughout the region as instructors and spread the word to their colleagues to encourage their existing volunteers to commit a weekend as students.



Gifford Pinchot National Forest Wilderness Ranger, Lauren Marsh leading a group on the PCT for the intro campsite restoration techniques.



for the greatest good

On May 30 and 31, 2015 they led the first Region 6 Wilderness Training for Volunteers. The results surprised them. Thirty volunteers from across the region eagerly signed up—contributing their time and travel costs— to learn basic wilderness skills, wilderness monitoring, visitor contact skills, and wilderness restoration—all necessary duties for rangers.



Volunteers learning about recreation site monitoring.

“Our focus was to improve the quality of the training and build stronger connections regionally within the wilderness community around volunteerism,” Justin explained. “As budgets have declined, some Forest Service units struggle to find the capacity or personnel to recruit or train wilderness volunteers, whereas other Forest Service units have managed to build strong volunteer programs and partnerships.” Here was a great way that Justin and Jon could help fill that gap and prevent others from having to learn things the hard way, as they had done.

This training would not have been possible without help. Specifically, they credit The Mount Adams Institute, an education partner of the Mt. Adams Ranger District;

Kari Nielsen, an AmeriCorps volunteer who canvassed Region 6 to determine the need for and interest in the program; and Lisa Machnik, the Regional Wilderness Program Manager.



for the greatest good



Ochoco National Forest Wilderness Ranger, Drew Peterson facilitating a portion of the visitor contact module.

“The 2015 training was a trial and we were conscious about ensuring that our vision didn’t exceed our available resources,” Justin said. But he and Jon hope to be able to continue to offer, and expand upon, these types of trainings in the future.



Map and compass class with Dylan McCoy (Willamette NF) and Lauren Marsh (Gifford Pinchot NF).



for the greatest good

“Building on the momentum from this last training will be critical to providing more training opportunities.” If volunteer enthusiasm and feedback are good indicators, they are on the right track.

Sharing a crosscut saw in the wilderness teaches you a lot about partnership and shared purpose. Applying those lessons and enlisting a host of partners—professionals who want to teach and volunteers who want to learn—may just become another wilderness skill and a tool as necessary as the crosscut saw itself, to wilderness management.



The 2015 Region 6 Wilderness Stewardship Skills Training Group



for the greatest good