In the last year, it has become more evident than ever that the power of people working together to bring about change is immense. We see it in the legislation that is passed, the lives saved in pandemic-ridden hospitals, and long-needed trails being built or repaired on our beloved public lands. We also see the influence of one individual act that inspires others to join in and do the same. During the week of April 18-24, 2021, we’d like to celebrate National Volunteer Week by recognizing the many volunteers that take their valuable time and energy to work on something bigger than themselves.

This aerial view of the Wasatch Front was taken when landing at Salt Lake City International Airport. The area is where Wasatch Mountain Club spends much of its time and energy volunteering and partnering with the Forest Service. Photo by USDA Forest Service.

In the Intermountain Region’s case, we want to thank the4,442 Volunteers & Service Programs participants who, according to the [Intermountain Region (R4) Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Volunteers & Service Programs Annual Accomplishments report](http://fsweb.r4.fs.fed.us/unit/rhwr/yvh/news/FY%202020%20R4%20VSP%20Accomplishment%20Report.pdf), provided 272,539 hours of service to the region. This is the equivalent of 151 full time employees valued at $7.4 million dollars using the Independent Sector Value of $27.20/hour in fiscal year 2020. This is remarkable, considering all of this was done during the rise and blight of the COVID-19 pandemic. “I am proud and honored to be able to work for the Forest Service and with such awesome employees, partners and volunteers. They are invaluable to helping us accomplish our Forest Service Mission,” Intermountain Region Volunteer & Service Programs Coordinator, Bill Lyons, said.

One group of volunteers who we would like to highlight is the [Wasatch Mountain Club](http://www.wasatchmountainclub.org/). For over a century, the Wasatch Mountain Club has supported and provided “arguably the greatest number of boots on the ground” to the Forest Service for work in the Wasatch Mountains supporting conservation, trails, and outdoor education.

“We have a very positive and supportive partnership with the USDA Forest Service…Our members provide information to the Forest Service about trail maintenance needs and conduct land use surveys in support of Forest Service projects and information needs.” Wasatch Mountain Club president, Julie Kilgore, said. “We have provided volunteers for trail building and maintenance projects and many other projects. We value our public lands and want to support the Forest Service, which is often facing monumental public use needs with limited staff and resources. “

However, most recently, the Wasatch Mountain Club contributed $15,000 to help obtain 26 acres of land in Little Cottonwood Canyon to secure recreation opportunities for both the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest and the Bonneville Shoreline Trail.

“There is very limited access to the north Little Cottonwood Canyon ridge and Deaf Smith Canyon area.  Access to those public lands is blocked by private land and extensive housing developments.  This acquisition was critical to providing access to an extensive area of hiking and climbing, as well the long-term planned extensions of the Bonneville Shoreline Trail,” Kilgore said.

In 2020, Utah Open Lands identified and lead the effort to purchase the parcel of land at the mouth of Little Cottonwood Canyon, which also borders Forest Service land. At the time, the 26 acres was subject to a development agreement with the city of Cottonwood Heights. However, Utah Open Lands had it secured through an option agreement which provided the organization a few months to secure $3 million to purchase the land. Utah Open Lands had several other contributors that helped them purchase the land besides the Wasatch Mountain Club, including Cottonwood Heights, State of Utah’s LeRay McAllister Fund, Salt Lake County, Central Wasatch Commission, and more.

“When we announced to our members that we were dedicating a large chunk of the Wasatch Mountain Club Conservation funds towards this acquisition, some individual members stepped up and made additional personal donations towards the effort.” Kilgore said.

After this acquisition of land was finalized, Wasatch Mountain Club members explored the area following existing trails up the north Little Cottonwood Canyon ridgeline and beyond. In the future, the Wasatch Mountain Club anticipates in supporting the Bonneville Shoreline Trail committee in evaluating on how parcels fit into the overall Bonneville Shoreline area.

Kilgore said. “Everything we do comes from a shared commitment for human-powered outdoor recreation. I believe in my heart that a lot of caring and passionate people doing small things can make a big difference, and I see that play out every day with the members of the Wasatch Mountain Club.”