



Wayne NF Trains Volunteer Trail Patrol for OHV Trail System

The volunteer trail patrol initiative on the Wayne National Forest is off to a good start with the first group of seven volunteers almost fully trained and equipped.



A Volunteer Trail Patrol team learns the basics of fire management from Dan Anerino.

"We weren't certain of our response but had some tentative interest from user groups and knew we were at a crossroads of needing to provide more of a presence out on the ground in our OHV (off highway vehicle) areas," said Chad Wilberger, Recreation Program Manager for the Wayne National Forest.

"But, we've now held our first two training sessions and can verify this program is well on the way to success with seven well trained volunteers!"

Two additional volunteers who came to the first session and were unable to attend the second, may still complete their training as well.

Wilberger coordinated the effort and has compiled a Volunteer Trail Patrol Handbook as well as organized the training and recruited the first class of volunteers.

"The initial training requires the volunteers to attend three Saturday sessions," Wilberger explained. "Our first session was orientation and customer service. We did role playing and got the group comfortable with what their role would be on the Forest."

The second session included use of the Forest Service radio, basic fire safety, GPS and map use, and information on invasives. One more session is required which includes First Aid and CPR if they are not currently qualified.

Wilberger noted that if the volunteer has not already taken an ATV Safety Course, the Wayne will also require them to complete the safety training.

Prior to the first training, Wilberger had done outreach programs to several OHV groups explaining the role of the volunteers and recruiting interested individuals. His initial efforts garnered several recruits but, as he noted, "a surprise source of volunteers was a

Hocking College professor."

He presented the program to his students who were training for careers in law enforcement or to be a park ranger. Four of those students came out for the training.

"This is a great opportunity to provide us some practical experience doing exactly what we want to do once we graduate," said Paul Finley, one of the Hocking College students. "Plus, each of us already ride ATVs so it gives us a good excuse to get out on the trails, interact with people, and get some on-the-job experience."

Wilberger said the volunteers came from as far away as a suburb of Cleveland, and represented members from several OHV groups. He reflected that the more knowledge each of the volunteers takes away about the Forest, the more that knowledge will pay dividends as the volunteers work with their peers and visitors they meet on the trail.

"Many of them mentioned they were surprised by something they learned in the training and can now help correct misunderstandings among OHV users," Wilberger said. "These volunteers are in a great position to present information to the public. They aren't out there to enforce any regulations though they might point out what other riders are doing that could be unsafe or harmful to the natural resources, but we emphasized that every contact they make should be a pleasant one. Their whole purpose is to improve the memories our visitors have of their trip to the Wayne, and to make sure visitors get home safely."

To equip the volunteers, Wilberger assembled a tool box that he will sign out to each of them. The tool box includes everything from clipboards and collapsible saws to flagging and first aid kit. If the volunteer wishes to become certified for chainsaw use, additional training will be offered.

Each volunteer is also readily identified with a reflective fluorescent vest and a cap (when not wearing their OHV helmet on the trails) with the Wayne Trail Patrol Logo on them. Wilberger explained the volunteers will work in pairs and will always be in communication with a Forest Service employee for their personal safety.

Wilberger is enthused about the program.

"The use of ATVs and motorcycles keeps increasing and our annual appropriations to fund trail operations and maintenance haven't kept up with the needs," he said. "We've used grants for maintenance, and the districts have done an admirable job improving the trails during these hard times. But with this program we can engage the user groups and volunteers to take an active role in forest and trail management and to educate riders to ride responsibly as well as the need to stay on designated trails."

Wilberger says the Trail Patrol seems to be the ideal program to work with partners to help the Forest manage its trail system. He intends to expand the program to include volunteers to patrol the OHV trail systems on the Ironton Ranger District later this year.

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