

FOREST SERVICE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANAGEMENT – CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

March, 2009

Executive Summary

Participants in the 2008 *Building Capacity to Connect People and Nature through Youth, Volunteer, and Hosted Programs* workshop identified the need for a national volunteer strategy to: 1) assess current program capacity and 2) articulate a vision of this program for the future. This report supports the development of an effective volunteer strategy by:

- providing an overview of current volunteer program management and capacity;
- summarizing issues, challenges, and concerns identified by Forest Service (FS) staff at all levels of the organization;
- describing needs for effective volunteer program management; and
- presenting vision(s) and directions for the future of the volunteer program suggested by FS staff and selected partners.

Developing and implementing an effective volunteer strategy requires that the FS identify critical program issues and specific strategy goals, and plan to implement and evaluate actions taken towards these goals. This report is intended to support and complement the volunteer strategy effort.

Multiple sources of information were used to develop this document, including a web-based survey of FS field staff, interviews with key FS staff and with selected partner groups, and a review of selected volunteer organization and volunteer program management literature. The critical issues of leadership, resources, training, communication, administration, and partners are briefly discussed, and potential action items are described.

Key findings include:

- **Current FS infrastructure for managing the volunteer program is inconsistent across the agency.**
- **Volunteering provides opportunities for educational and recreational citizen stewardship and supports relationships between the Forest Service and communities.**
- **Managing volunteers requires financial, administrative, staff time, supervisory, and equipment resources; the FS must realistically assess and plan for the costs of a volunteer program.**
- **Investing resources and dedicating staff time to volunteer management is directly related to the success of a volunteer program.**

Background

“The primary reason people stop volunteering is because of poor management”¹

A well-managed volunteer program increases an organization’s capacity. A poorly managed volunteer program drains limited time, resources, and goodwill. A call to service must be balanced by an effort to make sure that volunteers are involved in effective and meaningful ways; that we are prepared to offer a quality volunteer experience so that volunteers can provide quality service to their community and the resource. Without adequate infrastructure and capacity, we risk providing a disappointing or frustrating experience for volunteers and staff that will discourage future volunteerism and alienate staff who are critical to the success of this effort.

Volunteers work across all areas of the FS; individuals and groups are engaged as trail crews and campground hosts, in wildlife and archeological research, rehabilitation and restoration, education and interpretive programs- to name just a few areas where the contribution of volunteers is critical to achieving FS goals. In fiscal year 2008, 72,225 volunteers across the FS contributed 3,414,930 hours – valued at \$59,239,871.²

Volunteers contribute substantial resources to the FS. However, **our ability to engage volunteers and effectively direct their contribution towards fulfilling agency goals is dependent on our capacity to recruit, place, manage, supervise, support, and recognize our partners, individual participants and the program as a whole.**

The traditional volunteer model (where an individual or group is able to commit to a regular schedule of duties over time) is changing. Volunteers today are likely to be employed, have limited time to share, bring a variety of professional skills and personal interests, and are seeking both an opportunity to contribute as well as personal gratification.

Current FS infrastructure for managing the volunteer program is inconsistent across the agency. Some regions have designated volunteer program managers or coordinators at district, forest, and/or regional levels, while others have no full-time or designated employees responsible for this program area. More than 100 different position titles for individuals with responsibility for the volunteer program were identified in a recent survey. The majority of respondents to a recent internal FS survey (~84%) indicated that they spent only ‘up to 10 percent’ of their time on aspects of the volunteer program (including working directly with volunteers, administering the volunteer program, and working with youth and hosted programs). This is echoed by

¹ United Parcel Service, Points of Light Foundation, Association of Volunteer Administrators. *A Guide to Investing in Volunteer Resources Management: Improve your Philanthropic Portfolio*. November, 2002. <http://community.ups.com/philanthropy/toolbox.html#guide>

² The dollar value of volunteer time for 2007 was estimated at \$19.51/hour (Independent Sector; www.independentsector.org).

Absher and Brudney's³ (2007) findings that FS staff with responsibility for the volunteer program allocated on average approximately 15% of job time to volunteer administration and training.

While program organization and delivery occur through a variety of mechanisms across the agency, **volunteer programs are an area of critical importance- not only towards completing necessary programs of work, but also in providing opportunities for educational and recreational citizen stewardship and in developing relationships between the Forest Service and communities.** Well-managed volunteer programs are essential to fulfilling the FS mission; however, these programs will not succeed without the necessary support and infrastructure.

Adequate resources, consistent program infrastructure, and accessible training to use resources effectively are critical to developing capacity in a volunteer program. More than half of the organizations contacted in a 2003 study conducted by the Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service⁴ indicated an unwillingness or inability to accept more volunteers due to the real financial costs associated with hosting and managing an effective volunteer program. **Managing volunteers requires financial, administrative, staff time, supervisory, and equipment resources.**

Calculating the cost of a volunteer program depends on agency and other legal requirements, program infrastructure (including training, administration, management, supervision, and recognition), and staff time. While there are challenges to calculating these costs, estimates range from approximately \$350-\$1200 annually per volunteer, depending on the program needs and requirements, with a return on investment of \$2.05 to \$21.24 for every \$1.57 invested⁵. It is critical to recognize that while there is limited research on assessing the costs of volunteer to the organizations where they serve; **the FS must realistically assess and plan for the costs of a volunteer program.**

Major findings from the *Volunteer Management Capacity Study* conducted by The Urban Institute⁶ indicate that **investing resources and dedicating staff time to volunteer management is directly related to the success of a volunteer program.** Further, investment in volunteer management and the benefits derived from volunteer programs form a positive feedback loop. Staff training on how to work with volunteers is critical to the maintenance of an effective volunteer program, while capacity for using volunteers is related to the level of staff support.

³ Absher, J. D., & Brudney, J. L (2007). Volunteer management capacity in a public land management agency. Draft paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Atlanta, GA., November 15-17.

⁴ The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service, 2003. *The Cost of a Volunteer*. www.gfcns.org.

⁵ In *The Cost of a Volunteer*, 2003. Numbers from 2002 are adjusted for inflation.

⁶ Urban Institute, 2004. *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report*. Washington, DC.

Methods

At the 2008 *Building Capacity* workshop, breakout groups identified a number of critical issues. These materials, along with discussion with the volunteer strategy development team, and a review of selected volunteer organization and volunteer program management literature provided direction in developing the three outreach elements that form the basis of this report:

1. On-line survey of FS staff at district, forest, and regional offices. (Total responses = 272). [Referenced in document from this point as VPC survey].

A list of field staff associated with the FS volunteer program was compiled with assistance from Regional Youth, Volunteer and Hosted Program Managers. Challenges to developing a comprehensive list included staff turnover and lack of defined volunteer program management positions. A contact list was developed by 1) requests for Regional Coordinators to identify individuals, and 2) an invitation to those individuals to forward the survey to other FS staff known to them who were currently working with volunteers. Not all Regions provided contact names, and the number of names provided by Regions varied from less than 10 to more than 40.

Individuals thus identified were invited to participate in a short survey, using a Survey Monkey web survey at the following website: (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=dMeQeabEwMsVXIqFSvEYQQ_3d_3d). All potential known participants were contacted by email and invited to participate. A follow-up email 7 days after the initial contact resulted in 222 responses. (However, employees who may have received a forwarded email, as described above, were not always identified to the researcher, if the respondents did not choose to share contact information).

This modified snowball sampling method reduces the accuracy of the reported response rate (approximately 67%). However, this drawback was accepted in light of the benefit gained by reaching out to and potentially identifying FS employees who work with volunteers but who are not necessarily on record as doing so in our current system.

An additional single request for participation was sent to the FS Heritage email distribution list, as the Passport in Time project was identified as a popular volunteer activity. This single email invitation resulted in an additional 50 completed surveys; these results are incorporated into this report.

2. Interviews with key FS staff.

Regional and national level program coordinators were invited to participate in an informal telephone or in-person interview to discuss their perceptions of current capacity, critical issues, and potential direction for future volunteer program

management. Through these interviews, additional key staff working in this area were identified and contacted. Similar to the challenges faced by field staff in this area, staffing changes (such as retirements and reassignments) and scheduling demands resulted in some areas not having representation in this assessment. Twelve FS employees were successfully contacted; ten interviews were completed and comments or additional contacts were provided by two program coordinators who were detailed into the position for short periods of time.

3. Interviews with selected partners and volunteer organizations.

Additional questions for informal interviews with selected staff and partner organizations were also developed. Five telephone interviews with a range of volunteer/partner groups were conducted. The goal of these contacts was a preliminary assessment of partner perceptions of areas in volunteer program management where: 1) the FS is currently doing well and, 2) where improvements could be made; this information is intended to complement the work conducted by CHM.

Critical Issues and Proposed Actions

Respondents to the VPC survey ranked a series of items in terms of their importance to a successful volunteer program. The 10 items most often ranked as ‘critically’ or ‘very’ important⁷ were:

1. Leadership on a District (67%)
2. Funding from FS sources (58%)
3. Training for volunteers (58%)
4. Volunteer awards and recognition (55%)
5. Leadership at the Forest (54.3%)
6. Administrative support (53%)
7. Having a designated volunteer coordinator (48%)
8. Partner involvement (43%)
9. FS employee as volunteer coordinator (43%)
10. Training for FS employees (39%)

The top three roadblocks to increasing volunteer capacity included⁸:

1. Lack of FS staff time (81% of respondents)
2. Lack of funds (67% of respondents)
3. Administrative challenges (46%)

⁷ Choices were: critically, very, moderately, somewhat, or not at all important.

The following sections synthesize material from the VPC Survey with internal and external interviews, as well as related volunteer program research and literature. The following critical issues are briefly discussed, and potential action items are described:

- Leadership
- Resources
- Training
- Communication
- Administration
- Partners

Leadership

Perceptions of program leadership varied among respondents to the VPC survey as well as among interview participants. Twenty-three percent (23%) of survey respondents identified “lack of leadership” as a roadblock to increasing volunteer capacity. Common themes include the need for explicit management recognition of the value of volunteers across the agency, management-level commitment to supporting the program, and the need to communicate this recognition and support.

Issues identified included a lack of strong leadership at the Washington Office (WO), with an associated lack of WO accessibility to the field. Perceptions varied on the need for program representation at the WO, reflecting the difficult decisions to be made in allocating scarce resources and a desire to ‘put more money on the ground.’

Regional Offices (RO) were described as more responsive to specific program issues/questions, especially where a dedicated (and filled) position exists. ROs, Forest, and District levels have a wide spectrum of leadership in the volunteer program, including different position descriptions, varying percentages of staff time allocated to the volunteer program, varying GS levels, and different departments or areas where staff responsible for the volunteer program work. This affects program leadership as well as capacity and consistency.

It is important to recognize and capitalize on the very successful programs that enjoy substantial leadership support. Examples include the relationships between the FS and groups such as the San Bernadino National Forest Association and Friends of Sedona-Red Rocks, where, for example, members of these friends groups are included at District Leadership Team or Forest Leadership Team meetings. In conjunction, field staff report that reciprocal leadership presence at volunteer programs, whether at a partner’s board meeting, project site for an hour, or at a recognition event ‘adds a lot to the volunteer experience’.

There is a perception that senior FS staff expects ‘more’ – “without necessarily recognizing what is being done.” The need for leadership in recognizing both volunteers

and employees working in the volunteer program is critical. Recognition does not need to be extensive or expensive, but must be visible and sincere.

Proposed Actions:

- FS leadership clearly articulate values and beliefs about volunteerism with a mission/vision statement about the volunteer program
- Develop support for committed funding sources (including development of non-traditional sources from partners)
- Element of leadership support for volunteer program in performance standards
- Develop policy and provide tools for readily available volunteer and FS staff recognition – not necessarily large in scale or expense, but more than 1x/year
- Support development and maintenance of a ‘Toolbox’ to capitalize on and share expert knowledge. Model after other toolboxes currently in use (e.g. REA, Wilderness)
- An excellent resource for evaluating leadership and other elements of volunteer resource management is available through the United Parcel Service Points of Light Association of Volunteer Administrators

Resources

A majority of respondents to the VPC survey (89%) manage the volunteer program as just one part of their job. There are few full-time volunteer coordinators (or partnership and volunteer coordinators) at the District and Forest levels. Some VPC survey respondents indicated that they are not seeking to build capacity as they are unable to effectively manage current programs. In addition, staff turnover is high, undermining program operations and consistency.

Research shows that investing in a volunteer manager may be an extremely cost-effective way of leveraging scarce dollars; an effective volunteer manager can generate far more value from a volunteer program than is invested⁹. Having an FS employee responsible for the volunteer program at the District Office level was ranked as critically or very important for 86% of VPC respondents, at the Supervisor’s Office level, 59%; at the Regional Office level 39%; and at the Washington Office, 37%¹⁰.

Respondents to the VPC survey and interviews indicated that there are potential partners and volunteer groups who would like to become involved in FS activities, but our current staff structure does not give field units the ability to manage programs effectively.

Managing an effective volunteer program is a commitment that requires resources; a number of VPC survey respondents perceive that the FS seems to be upping expectations

⁹ Urban Institute, 2004. *Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report*. Washington, DC.

¹⁰ Overall, a majority of respondents (62%) work in a District Office; and additional 35% work at a Supervisors Office, only 3% of respondents work in Regional or the Washington Offices.

for the volunteer program but at the same time decreasing resources and ability to manage. The use of intensive service volunteers who commit to full- or part-time service over a period of time (e.g. AmeriCorps volunteers, college work-study programs) is increasing. These types of programs may offer increased stability in a volunteer program, where the FS needs assistance in developing and maintaining necessary volunteer program infrastructure. However, there is still a need for supervisory and program management resources beyond this initial funding need.

Volunteer opportunities are a mix of one-time events or special projects (79% of respondents manage these types of activities) and ongoing projects repeated annually or long-term projects (78% also manage ongoing programs)¹¹. The work involved in developing, managing, supervising, and recognizing volunteers for a one-time or short-term project is moderate to high throughout the activity. From recruitment to administrative work to on-site activity coordination, FS staff must have adequate resources to take an active role in a variety of projects and programs.

While longer-term programs (vs. one-time events) take as much (or possibly more) resources for the FS contact during the initial phases, the front-loading effort of these programs may result in significantly reduced demand on the FS staff over time as volunteers become oriented to and integrated within the agency.

Proposed Actions:

- Structure staffing to have a career ladder GS 7/9/11 full-time volunteer and partnership coordinator on each forest (or zoned combination of forests) to coordinate with partners and district staff. In some areas, a full-time FS staff person on a district/area will be necessary. This position would be a liaison with districts and partners, and coordinate administrative work, upward reporting, etc.
- Continue staff presence at RO or combination RO/Research Station zones to respond to questions from the field and requests for advice about reports, reviews, title 6 compliance, interpreting policy, etc. (There is a need for experienced staff to interpret and help ‘work through’ issues.)
- Role of WO is to set national direction and policy, to represent the program and ensure its visibility at top levels of leadership, and to develop and coordinate national-level partnerships (as well as function as a liaison to the field)
- Commit to capturing institutional knowledge by funding and filling positions before they are vacated; support at least one dedicated WO position committed to implementing the actions determined as best practices under the volunteer strategy under development

¹¹ Most respondents from the initial survey list worked both as a volunteer coordinator (73%) as well as directly with volunteers on projects (65%); Heritage-specific volunteers tend to work more specifically on projects (95%), while only 31% also act as volunteer coordinators.

Training

Overall, 73% of VPC survey respondents report having had no training for managing a volunteer program or for working with volunteers; those who have received training report a range of experiences from ‘just some handouts’ to specific ‘volunteer theme’ workshops, and training through other agencies and non-profits. Other respondents report having had on-the-job training only. This parallels findings by Absher and Brudney (2008)¹², who found that 70% of respondents to a separate survey reported having no formal education or training in this area, even after some time on the job.

Currently, training for FS staff working with the volunteer program is inconsistent. The volunteer program can be complex, can include Grants and Agreements and contracting elements, and can be very large in scope. While there is a ‘Coordinator’s Desk Guide’ now available, the lack of accessible resources has led to different regions, districts, and areas developing their own training resources- a duplication of efforts and an inefficient use of scarce resources.

Training for volunteers was also identified as *critically important to a successful volunteer program* by more than half of the VPC survey respondents. A majority (89%) of respondents to the VPC survey indicated that their program offered skill-based training for volunteers (e.g. saw class, trail building). Eleven percent (11%) also offer leadership training. However, there is a perception that “requirements for training of volunteers seem to increase annually, eventually pushing the cost of the volunteer program out of reasonable reach.”

While partners can take on many training activities/elements, adequate FS resources must be provided to endure that FS perspective and safety elements are consistently applied. For example, the Florida Trails Association (FTA) does all their volunteer training, with FS involvement depending on the certification required. In this role, the FTA coordinates all logistics, from sign-up to administrative paperwork, to securing a location for training and associated food and housing, while the FS provides instructors.

Proposed Actions:

- Focused project (possible detail) for training/volunteer specialist to assess, update, and consolidate current assorted FS training. A number of excellent resources exist (from R6, R2, R5, the FS Partnership Website, BLM, Fish and Game, private industry, non-profit foundations, etc.)
- Make the Coordinators Desk Guide available on the website- even if in draft form (in proposed toolbox)
- Provide examples of partners/friends groups that conduct training, and how they do so (in proposed toolbox)

¹² Absher, J. D., & Brudney, J. L. (2007). Volunteer management capacity in a public land management agency. Draft paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Atlanta, GA., November 15-17.

- Move away from traditional ‘powerpoint in a classroom’ training, and develop case studies, examples, source experts (provide in toolbox), and provide intensive sessions at meetings and conferences
- Support development of national volunteer database where volunteers’ training and specialized skills could be tracked

Communication

Communication within and across the FS is inconsistent. Several areas (from regions to districts) have developed or are developing their own databases in response to local needs for information and tracking. There is a need for an effective and efficient centralized (internal) source for reliable information about:

- Specific processes (e.g. Grants and Agreements, administrative issues, and the development of friends groups)
- FS staff working with the volunteer program (our internal resource network)
- Volunteers’ training and skills

In addition, respondents described the need to effectively publicize volunteer program opportunities and activities both within and outside the FS; as one respondent commented: “...we don’t really know who’s doing what. In areas that are just 50 miles apart – it’s a total mystery.”

Proposed Actions

- Enhance internal website for FS use, coordinate and publicize
- FS to host (or partner with others to coordinate) national conference every three (3) years; focus on specific issues; use as train-the-trainer session
- Follow-up with current ‘new’ database development to ensure efficiency and usefulness
- Emphasize need to enter/track consistent and accurate data; link accurate and detailed reporting to publicizing program for internal and external audiences. This is especially critical when volunteer management/administration is a collateral duty
- Improve identification and tracking of FS staff working with the volunteer programs
- Improve reporting of volunteer achievements internally and externally; coordinate with Public Affairs to develop a regular feature (internal and external web, other media as appropriate) highlighting volunteer activities for broad distribution

Administration

“The administrative processes we have developed are just a nightmare.” – VPC respondent

Nationally, there is inconsistent interpretation and application of Grants and Agreements processes. Actions that are acceptable in some Regions/Stations/Areas are not approved in others; this leads to repeated re-interpretation of authorities and may result in decision-making and precedent-setting without appropriate planning and personnel involvement. There is a need for closer coordination and training with G & A specialists as well as a need for leadership in articulating and publicizing actions that could be replicated FS-wide. (E.g. Is using Americorps volunteer coordinators acceptable? Responses vary by region.)

Additional specific issues of concern identified by FS field staff:

- The lack of consistent information and application of our administrative processes causes delays in project implementation and results in snafus (e.g. R5 had to refund uniform purchases when delivery never occurred).
- In some regions, much of the reporting work is the only official representation of the volunteer program, and lack of staff resources dedicated to the program results in poor reporting
- NATS User Database; need to streamline the process for HSPD-12 issues
- The provision of Workers Compensation for partner groups is in question.
- Getting and keeping agreements up to date, signed, and reviewed is a challenge
- FS staff described the need for ‘the authorities to be able to do things’. While individual efforts to work around system challenges are underway, passage of the partnership legislation would smooth processes

Proposed Actions

- As part of toolbox recommended in previous section, incorporate an ‘issues board’ with FAQs, status of current issues, field/expert contacts for G & A issues
- Improve data collection and tracking; develop consistent database and information management nationally
- Streamline tracking of volunteers
- Streamline the process of ‘picking up’ individual volunteers. At this time, there are a number of different ways to become a volunteer, while at the same time, many volunteers who express interest (or apply) do not receive follow-up. Develop direction for a more focused process that will reduce the gaps in the system
- Identify and train a ‘core’ of specialists at ASC who can act as G & A resources for field staff
- Streamline processes- FS needs to keep up with community momentum

Partners

“Effective programs with partners are highly dependant on having strong, committed agency person(s) to work with”- FS partner.

Sixty-one percent (61%) of VPC survey respondents *do not* work with a ‘friends’ group in coordinating volunteer activities. However, it is critical to recognize that, where partner programs are successful, the process of building relationships takes time and FS commitment. Partnership management of volunteer programs can be empowering for volunteers and can support its sustainability when volunteers have this level of commitment – however, it takes time to build this level of operation and requires FS support.

Some field staff have expressed interest in starting a Friends group, but are seeking assistance in doing so. Barriers include proximity of population centers, lack of staff time, and lack of information. Setting, location, and needs affect the various structures needed for effective volunteer programs in different areas of the agency and of the country.

The FS currently has partners (e.g. SBNFA and Friends of Sedona-Red Rocks) who are willing to work with the FS and interested in sharing their experiences, processes, and expertise with other potential partner groups, particularly in the initiation and development of ‘Friends’ groups.

There are several excellent examples of agreements where partners manage all or part of the volunteer program, from recruiting and training to administrative paperwork. Capitalizing on these successes, learning from challenges that have been overcome, and adapting and adopting successful elements would expand FS capacity to provide volunteer opportunities. Examples of current volunteer partnership programs include:

- Partners managing aspects of volunteer program. Examples include the SBNFA and the Florida Trails Association. These organizations recruit, train, manage, and complete the necessary paperwork, in close cooperation with the FS
- Other partner groups that could be considered as models for creative development of volunteer and partnership programs include Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (large scale) and Friends of Pathways (smaller scale)

Internal partnerships (internal staff support within and across programs) was identified as one of the tools used to build volunteer program capacity by almost three-quarters (74%) of VCP survey respondents. Over 90% of FS staff who responded to the VPC survey reported volunteers working in the Recreation program (including Partners in Time and Heritage volunteers). However, respondents also reported volunteers in Wildlife (42%), Fisheries/Aquatics (33%), Vegetation Management (31%), Watershed (26%), Research (12%), Fire, Aviation, & Air (11%), Lands (9%), HCM/HR (8%), Engineering (8%), Minerals (5%), State and Private Forestry (1%), and Other (30%). This diversity in volunteer activity demonstrates the need for internal cooperation and coordination in the management of an effective volunteer program with our partners.

Proposed Actions

- Coordinate with selected Friends group(s) to develop partnership toolbox resources (*specific templates, budgets, plans, examples*)
- Participate in SBNFA ‘show me’ tour of their program to learn the basics of how their program works with the FS (April 2009)
- Develop ‘Volunteer Resource Center’ modeled after Partnership Resource Center
- Improve direct connection/relationship between Volunteer program and WO Partnership Resource Center
- Clarify process of communication between partners and agency- articulate whether partners can/should communicate directly with ASC and where administrative processes need to be processed through FS field personnel and/or area/zone/forest coordinator
- Coordinate with umbrella partner organization to help friends groups and other interest/volunteer partner groups get started and manage themselves. The National Forest Foundation may be a good resource for this as an overarching umbrella coordinator (current online presence, already does volunteer programs, and has credibility and long association with FS, may be able to do things differently due to operating authorities); could act as ‘middleman/coordinator’ and work with WO Volunteer/Partnership staff. This would require FS resource commitment in terms of time, funds, etc
- Increase support for and ability of our partners to directly manage aspects of volunteer programs.
 - This occurs right now but is piecemeal and should be service wide, where appropriate
 - Need to analyze where this is working well and provide templates and case studies for new and upcoming areas and their partners
 - Critical to have correct, consistent, updated info about our admin processes and authorities *shared with FS staff and external partners*
 - Need to stay linked and accountable as we turn over elements of the program to our partners
- Intern Volunteer Coordinators (AmeriCorps) as a low-cost option (currently ~\$14,000/year). Challenges include interpretation of administrative processes and authorities used to implement the program; need for support, training, and supervision; and perception that they are ‘taking jobs from FS employees’
- Recognize that Districts will still need flexibility to integrate individual volunteers depending on local conditions/needs

The Future of the FS Volunteer Program

There has been substantial research into volunteer ‘Best Practices’ and FS investment in strengthening its volunteer program. It is critical to recognize the work that is currently underway and integrate these pieces into a whole strategy. Specifically, the contact

names provided by VPC survey respondents should be considered for any working groups designated as part of the strategy development process. In addition, the research on volunteer management capacity conducted by Jim Absher, PhD., at the FS PSW research station should be integrated into the strategy development– with ongoing cooperation between the strategy team and researchers focusing on volunteerism.

The critical items and proposed actions identified in this document are drawn from FS staff responses to surveys and interviews, from focus groups, conferences, and meetings. While there is a desire for additional funding and staff to enable increased direct FS management of the volunteer program, many (but not all) FS staff look to partnerships as the future of much of our volunteer program. Many FS staff have a strong commitment to the volunteer program and have provided thoughtful comments in response to the question “How do you think the FS volunteer program should be managed into the future?” These comments should be reviewed as they are written by all members of the strategy development team.

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