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Spotted Bear Ranger District in Northwest Montana Receives Prestigious National Award

The Spotted Bear Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest in Northwest Montana recently received the national Take Pride in America Federal Land Manager- Forest Service Award at a ceremony in Washington, DC. The Spotted Bear Ranger District was recognized for its long-term support of and commitment to volunteers engaging in projects reflecting good stewardship of public lands.

Spotted Bear District Ranger Deb Mucklow and District Wilderness Manager Tad Wehunt attended the ceremony and received the award on behalf of the employees of the Spotted Bear Ranger District.

Take Pride in America is a national partnership program authorized by Congress to promote the appreciation and stewardship of public lands including parks, forests, historic sites and schools. Americans count on the Take Pride in America program to provide the most comprehensive portal of public lands volunteer opportunities.

In addition, the program highlights exceptional federal employees who work with volunteers to complete their land stewardship mission. Each year, the federal land management agencies are asked to nominate an individual or unit that shows outstanding commitment to collaborating with volunteers in pursuit of their agencies' mission.

Chief of the Forest Service Tom Tidwell said, "This is the first time the Forest Service elected to nominate all employees on a ranger district, as opposed to an individual. The staff of the Spotted Bear Ranger District takes a team approach to encouraging people to become connected with their forest through volunteerism."

In 2008 the Spotted Bear Ranger District hosted a wide range of volunteers who contributed time equaling 13.5 full-time employees. This volunteer labor exceeded the 12 full-time staff positions the district employs and equals a donation of approximately \$425,000.

The Spotted Bear Ranger District is one of the unique jewels within the Forest Service. The district is approximately 1.2 million acres, with approximately 850,000 acres within the Bob Marshall and Great Bear Wildernesses. It is one of few traditional units of the agency which utilizes traditional and historic methods to accomplish the work in managing the resources. Many of the projects involve hiking or riding and packing stock for up to three days to just to get started. And many say it's a combination of magnificent country and wonderful company that soften the task.

District Ranger Mucklow said, “We have a very rich and traditional history at our remote district and we have a family atmosphere that encourages all of us to work together.” She credits the district’s success with the employees and volunteers that go above and beyond with their work. She said, “We all care about the work we do and the stewardship we provide our public lands.”

There is a wide range of volunteers at the Spotted Bear Ranger District, including several youth groups, organizations and individuals. Mucklow finds it rewarding to see many of the volunteers return for several seasons, and to see some of the volunteers pursue natural resource studies and careers.

Volunteers at the Spotted Bear Ranger District contribute to trail maintenance, wilderness management, facility management, airstrip maintenance, weed control and inventory, wildlife and fishery work, recreation facilities and visitor services. Volunteers play a key role in maintaining the history and tradition of the district, as well as creating a connection to the future.

Tidwell said, “The Forest Service is proud of all the volunteers working on National Forest System lands across the county and says the Spotted Bear Ranger District is a shining example.”

For more information about the Take Pride in America program and volunteer opportunities with the various public land management agencies visit www.takepride.gov.