



## **The Mt. Hood Wilderness Stewards Program Earns Honor from Regional Forester**



The Wilderness Stewards, a group that is dedicated to protecting and educating the public about Wilderness, received the National Forest Volunteer & Service award in the trails group category from Kent Connaughton, Regional Forester for Region 6 of the Forest Service. An awards ceremony will be held on May 4 at the Mt. Hood National Forest to recognize the group's achievement and thank them for their efforts in assisting the Mt. Hood National Forest manage the 311,448 acres of Wilderness within its borders. The partnership between the Mt. Hood National Forest and the Wilderness Stewards

has been vital to the success of the forest's Wilderness recreation program.

In 1999, the Mt. Hood National Forest proposed restrictions on Wilderness access due to concerns regarding overuse. As a result of public dialogue on the issue, the Mt. Hood Wilderness Stewards program was developed as a way to educate the public and help monitor recreation impacts on Wilderness more closely.

Since that time, Wilderness Stewards have patrolled the forest much like the Wilderness Rangers of the past. Steward's primary duties include: supplying wilderness permit boxes, replacing signs, clearing trail,

cleaning campsites, and educating the public on applicable regulations and the Leave No Trace doctrines. In addition, Wilderness Stewards have created a website and online calendar that allows volunteers to easily submit their volunteer hours, the miles traveled, people contacted, and other educational tools.

Skip Tschanz, a volunteer with the Stewards since 2000, further explains, “We hiked, counted people, on the trails, checked to be sure they had filled out a wilderness permit and gave lessons on the 10 principals of Leave No Trace Wilderness ethics to people that were not adhering to Wilderness regulations.”



The Mt. Hood Wilderness Stewards program has grown every year, and today the organization patrols six Wilderness Areas on three different Ranger Districts. The Wilderness Stewards also offer an annual volunteer training day after which volunteers are mentored by experienced Stewards out on the trail.

This year, the Mt Hood National Forest was in danger of losing points on the Chief’s 10 Year Challenge:



a series of necessary steps each national forest must take to insure their Wilderness areas are up to standard. These standards were put into place as a way to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Wilderness Act being signed into law. One such standard requires visitor use data for each Wilderness area and the Mt. Hood's data for public encounters was outdated. With cuts to personnel, the forest was in danger of not fulfilling this important requirement but the Wilderness Stewards stepped up to the challenge and collected the necessary data.

Altogether, the Wilderness Stewards have hiked 700 miles, contacted over 3,300 people, and volunteered 1,400 hours of time on Mt. Hood National Forest Wilderness areas. Their work helped to protect forest resources, maintain the trail system, and preserve Wilderness on the Mt. Hood National Forest.

But as impressive as all of those numbers may seem, to Noryne Robinson, a seven-year veteran of the Stewards program, the greatest experience has been meeting with one family in particular. Robinson met the parents of Sarah Bishop, a young woman who passed away during a river crossing accident. "She (Sarah) died in 2004 hiking the Timberline Trail," said Robinson. "I now help clean the signs that are

posted in remembrance of her that warn of the dangers of water crossings."



These sorts of personal encounters abound among the many volunteers who participate in the Wilderness Stewards Program. As budgets continue to tighten for the Forest Service, the dedication of so many individuals working with the Forest to meet the needs of both the public and the forest ecosystems is crucial. The Mt. Hood is proud of the work that has been accomplished and joins the Regional Office in its appreciation for the Wilderness Stewards.