

2021 USDA Forest Service Volunteers & Service Awards Recipients

In fiscal year 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service engaged 66,100 volunteers and service participants who dedicated 3,632,100 hours to “care for the land and serve people” – a total appraised value of \$103,660,000. Although a 36 percent decline from pre-pandemic levels, the consistent engagement of the public to steward public lands throughout these two years continues to uplift amidst a time of national hardship. They served on mission-critical priorities including trail maintenance, restoration, visitor services, and volunteer coordination. Volunteers and service participants were particularly impactful to Forest Service efforts to facilitate safe access for record breaking numbers of visitors during the pandemic. Nominees included individual and group volunteers, partners, employees, and resource assistants. Congratulations to the 2021 Volunteers & Service Award winners for their outstanding contributions to the Forest Service mission and the Forest Service staffs who made it possible for the public to continue to serve safely.

Citizen Stewardship & Partnerships

Stephanie Long – Cibola National Forest, Southwestern Region



Photo courtesy of Julie Padilla.

Stephanie Long has been a volunteer and partner with the Sandia Ranger District since 2013. She is a founder of the Sandia Mountain Bear Collaborative (SMBC), whose mission is to better understand the black bear population in the Sandia Mountains and to educate the public about peacefully coexisting with bears and other wildlife in the area. As a Master Naturalist, she helps train people through a variety of community engagement events to become stewards of the natural environment and to be comfortable with tackling problems the landscape faces. Stephanie sits on the Board of Directors for the Friends of Tijeras Pueblo, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the Tijeras Pueblo Archaeological Site through protection, promotion, and interpretation. She has helped to encourage appreciation of and respect for traditional public lifeways by organizing public events and managing the organization’s bookstore. As a member of the New Mexico Site Watch, Stephanie assists with preservation of New Mexico’s cultural resources, monitoring, and reporting on conditions of

cultural sites throughout the district, and supporting the heritage program. As a member of the Sandia Collaborative, Stephanie has participated in collaborative work groups to identify issues and recommended actions in a landscape restoration project, with the aim of protecting the landscape and watersheds of the Sandia Mountains.

Wood For Life – Coconino National Forest, Southwestern Region



Photo courtesy of Ancestral Lands Hopi.

Wood For Life (WFL) is a collaborative partnership in northern Arizona that provides resources and a sustainable source of firewood to local tribes through forest restoration efforts, reduces forest-wide fuels, and fosters partner relationships. WFL’s extensive collaboration among government, conservation corps, indigenous tribes, and conservation nonprofits has resulted in a creative solution addressing two specific problems. Much of northern Arizona’s forests are degraded, needing large-scale forest restoration efforts. Many homes of the Navajo and the Hopi rely on coal and wood for home heating and are vulnerable to energy uncertainty. WFL facilitated the delivery of a sustainable and substantial amount of firewood to tribal partners from forest restoration projects on National Forests. The WFL partnership demonstrates success in sustaining our National Forests while also delivering life-saving benefits to our tribal partners.

Visit <https://www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us> to learn more about how you can become a Forest Service volunteer.

Cultural Diversity

Dr. Shaneka Lawson – Northern Research Station



Photo courtesy of Dr. Shaneka Lawson.

Dr. Shaneka Lawson, a Forest Service employee with the Northern Research Station, collaborated with faculty at Purdue University to engage diverse populations of youth in a variety of activities and presentations, all geared towards environmental sustainability and opportunities to serve within the Forest Service. Her volunteer work focuses specifically on Cultural Diversity and has enhanced the experiences of those she has engaged. In FY2021, Dr. Lawson concentrated her efforts in three projects. She wrote a grant which funded an 8-week in-person summer immersion program for underrepresented students, who were introduced to natural resources disciplines and whom she led and mentored. She worked with Purdue's Office of Multicultural Programs to teach a 2-week virtual summer camp to introduce students to various careers and to write a manuscript that provides a historical account of the representation of women and minorities in agriculture. She collaborated with a Purdue sorority

and the local library to engage minorities and minority youth programs to consider nature in poetry. Dr. Lawson reached a total of 192 students ranging in age and has steered her two interns to pursue careers in the USDA!

Enduring Service

Betsy MacGowan – Monterey Ranger District, Los Padres National Forest, Pacific Southwest Region



Photo courtesy of American Conservation Experience.

Active on the Monterey Ranger District (MRD) for over 30 years, Betsy McGowan has a passion for trails and trail work. Betsy is the Trail Crew Chief for the Ventana Wilderness Alliance (VWA), a local nonprofit group that advocates for wilderness issues in wilderness areas within MRD. With her VWA Trail Crew volunteers, Betsy has managed projects for American Conservation Experience (ACE) trail crews to work on back country trails. For 11 years, Betsy has led or co-led 252 VWA Trail Crew or ACE crew outings, contributing more than 15,285 volunteer hours, totaling 44,420 yards of trail tread maintained, 111,125 yards of trail brushed, 1765 downed trees removed. Betsy helped to re-establish livestock access on trails vital to the Los Padres NF's Restoration and Maintenance Project and provided technical supervision and support for the crews

implementing the project. Betsy has developed many relationships in and around the MRD and has leveraged these relationships to further her work in good effect to secure logistical support for the Ventana Wilderness Trails Restoration and Maintenance Project.

Enduring Service

Stream Watch – Seward Ranger District, Chugach National Forest, Alaska Region



Photo courtesy of Amber Kraxberger-Lin.

Stream Watch (SW) is a volunteer program promoting river stewardship on the Kenai Peninsula founded by a group of dedicated citizens in 1994 to share river protection information with visitors on the Russian and Kenai Rivers. Now, 27 years later, SW volunteers assist land management agencies with stewardship of important recreational sites and the health of the region's watersheds. Stream Watch volunteers remove riverside litter, install habitat protection fencing, complete fish habitat restoration projects, and share critical information with the public on river stewardship, agency regulations, and bear safety. Since 1994, SW volunteers have dedicated 23,400 hours of service, provided peer-to-peer education to 68,171 individuals, and picked up 36,378 pounds of trash. The program helped revegetate miles of riverbank through habitat

fencing and community engagement. This year, Stream Watch collaborated with the Kenai Watershed Forum invasive species program to provide an opportunity for 10 Ambassadors to participate in special invasive species training and control efforts. In FY2021, Stream Watch broke 27-year records for total volunteer hours and hopes to continue in the future to deepen the program's impact.

Midewin's Longest Serving Volunteers –

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Eastern Region



Photo courtesy of Veronica Hinke.

Twelve of the first volunteers of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie have served since 1996 for a total of 25 years each: Cindy Alberico, John Baxter, Bill Bromer, Gayle Crompton, John Field, Marianne Hahn, Connie Heinrich, Richard Hickson, Don Nelson, Espie Nelson, Rita Renwick, and Michael Rzepka. They have contributed a combined 23,100 hours of service during 5000 service days since 1996 – an undercounted total not including the early years before documentation. The volunteers have performed critical roles to support prairie restoration, ecological monitoring, cultural heritage projects, and public services. They were essential to rally support for the establishment of the Midewin and inspired the conservation of Midewin's vast, intact grassland areas. They continue to motivate other volunteers to help the prairie restoration process. They formed the Midewin National Tallgrass

Alliance in 1997, a nonprofit organization that still actively supports prairie restoration and promotes volunteer, research, educational, and recreational opportunities at Midewin. Several of these volunteers still serve as the most experienced monitors for grassland birds, breeding birds, raptors, and frogs. Others have surveyed Midewin streams for over 15 years to contribute data to the statewide RiverWatch program. A few contribute essential plant identification skills on the floristic quality monitoring team. These dedicated volunteers have contributed to 25 years of mission achievements and are witnessing the vision come to fruition.

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Leadership

Janida Bonham – Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, George Washington & Jefferson National Forest, Southern Region



Photo courtesy of Forest Service.

Janida Bonham has been the foundation of the Mount Rogers NRA volunteer program during her six years of volunteer service. Her leadership built the structure that makes it the effective program it is today. In FY2021, she contributed over a thousand volunteer hours which is the equivalent of almost 27 work weeks. Janida mentored the new volunteers and service coordinator on management of the volunteer program, the operation of the visitor center, and the administration of the volunteer campground host program. Janida has provided multiple functions to the district, including customer service, inventory tracking, collection officer, organization, and acquisition of information for visitors, and redesign of campground maps. She helped create annual plans to keep operations running during the pandemic and helped the unit move forward remotely. Janida has been vital to creating an environment of inclusion among volunteers. Her exemplary skills in relationship-building allow her to have a keen sense of any needs and challenges that volunteers face on the ground. Through her dedication, leadership, and appreciation of others, Janida has become the heart of the district – strengthening the volunteer program and contributing to sustainable recreational goals.

Restoration

Poplar Bluff Trails Coalition, Poplar Bluff Ranger District, Mark Twain National Forest, Eastern Region



Photo courtesy of PBTC.

The Poplar Bluff Trails Coalition (PBTC) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to plan, promote, build, and maintain trails in the greater Poplar Bluff, MO area. The 2021 Board of Directors, including Brock Littles, Clark Allen, Bruce Haas, Rob Nations, Trevor Gregg, Steve Halter and Kenny Rowland, worked hard to restore many trails on the Poplar Bluff Ranger District of the Mark Twain National Forest. Significant wind damage in May 2020 created a dire need for maintenance which the coalition answered. Formed in January 2021, PBTC became a key USFS partner, gradually restoring 54 miles of trail on the Mark Twain National Forest. They logged out downed trees, brushed back vegetation from the trail corridor, installed new signs, and repaired facilities at trailheads. They brought multiple trails up to the standards outlined in the Trail Management Objective. They also provide stewardship of four trailheads and provided much-needed deferred maintenance work such as painting benches, kiosks, and picnic tables, securing fire rings to prevent theft, and extensive

dumping and litter clean up on Wolf Creek Road in FY2021.

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