United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

**Technology and
Development
Program**

6700 Safety & Health
December 2001
Updated Nov. 2003
0167–2841–MTDC

# *Problems Faced by Forest Service Coordinators of Volunteer and Hosted Program Workgroups*

**Allison Lamphier,** *Sociologist*

**Jon Driessen,** *Project Leader*

**USDA Forest Service
Technology and Development Program
Missoula, MT**

**9E92H66—Supervisor and the Work Crew**

**December 2001
Updated November 2003**

# Contents

# Introduction

This paper is a report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service project on the supervision of today's field crews. The project was a result of a white paper (Driessen 1997) presented to the Forest Service Washington Office of Safety and Occupational Health. Driessen's paper recommended an update of the current supervisor video training program, **The Supervisor and the Work Crew** (Driessen 1986). This report has two objectives that reflect the principal findings of the project. The first is to identify and describe new problems caused by changes in the Forest Service fieldwork culture that directly affect the supervision of changing workgroups. The second objective is to recommend new training procedures and perhaps policy changes for the Forest Service employees who supervise these new types of workgroups.

All references to specific people and specific places in this report have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the Forest Service employees who were interviewed. The quotes are transcriptions from taped interviews.

# A Changing Forest Service Work Culture

This study is important because of the growing instability of field crews in the Forest Service. In the last 20 years, the role of the USDA Forest Service has been transformed in ways that affect all Forest Service workers. While discussing these changes, one supervisor said, "It's more than just timber now.... Everything is branching out." Branching out describes the Forest Service's shift from a focus on production goals to social and educational goals. A supervisor concerned about budget cuts said, "This district used to have a BD [brush disposal] crew, and because of budget constraints it went away."

Branching out and severe cuts in the budget for hiring seasonal crews have left work in the field unfinished. The adoption of new kinds of workers such as hosted groups and volunteers has become necessary to, as one supervisor said, "Get the job done." Hosted programs are workgroups formed when outside agencies enter into partnerships with the Forest Service to accomplish specific project work in the field. Hosted employees are paid a base wage by the hosted program. The Forest Service sometimes matches funds with the outside agency to pay for the work. Hosted programs include the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), the Federal Corrections Institute (FCI), Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), and several others. Volunteers also enter into agreements with the Forest Service to complete fieldwork. Although volunteers are unpaid workers, they are covered by the Office of Worker Compensation Program (OWCP), so the Forest Service is ultimately liable for injuries and accidents that occur on the job. Seniors, students, mountain biking clubs, Boy Scout troops, swim teams, and church groups are some examples of Forest Service volunteers.

Several problems have arisen from using these new kinds of workgroups in the Forest Service. Today's supervisors are faced with different types of crews who work on continually changing projects in the field. Paramount concerns for current Forest Service field crew leaders are keeping control, completing work tasks, and especially maintaining safety awareness in these new kinds of workgroups. Liability for injuries is also a principal concern for the Forest Service. The primary rationales for funding this project are the increasing safety concerns and the agency's liability when working with these new crews. To understand the current project, it is important to know its history.

# History of the Supervisor Training Project

In 1986, the Forest Service's Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) produced a training video, **Supervisor and the Work Crew**, for first-line supervisors of field crews. The Forest Service Washington Office of Occupational Safety and Health supported and funded the project.

In 1996, MTDC produced another training video, **Making a Crew**. This video focused on the workers, not the supervisors. While interviewing Forest Service employees during the production of **Making a Crew**, Driessen noted that numerous changes had occurred in the fieldwork culture. This insight led to the white paper, **A Changing Forest Service Work Culture: Training Crew Leaders** (Driessen 1997). The white paper had two purposes: to present some of the changes taking place in the work culture in the Forest Service and to discuss some sociological reflections on the training of Forest Service crew leaders. The paper concluded by recommending that the supervisor training program be updated.

# *Updating Supervisor Training*

The project to update the supervisor training program began in January 2000. This training project was also supported and funded by the Forest Service Washington Office of Occupational Safety and Health. The new project team met several times to discuss project history and to set the goals for the first year's work. Development work on the project began—reading related materials pertaining to the project, interviewing current Forest Service supervisors, and observing and taking notes in the field.

Development work for the updated version was based on a qualitative approach using semistructured, open-ended questions (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Driessen 1997) similar to the approach used to develop the original supervisor training program. Interviews with Forest Service district rangers, supervisors, and coordinators were tape recorded and transcribed. Coordinators are previous Forest Service supervisors who now manage and plan projects and act as Forest Service representatives or direct supervisors of hosted groups and volunteers. The interviews were coded using Atlas TI (Muhr 1997) and Topical Analysis (Driessen 1969).

In February 2000, the project team began interviewing Forest Service supervisors in the Missoula, MT, area in the Northern Region. Four interviews were conducted in Missoula. In March 2000, 10 interviews were conducted in 3 Forest Service districts around Montgomery, AL, in the Southern Region. In June 2000, seven interviews were completed in the Columbia River Scenic Area near Portland, OR, in the Pacific Northwest Region. Another seven interviews were conducted at Forest Service districts near Yachats, OR, and the Dunes, 1 hour south of Yachats, in the Pacific Northwest Region. The final trip for 2000 was to New Mexico in the Southwestern Region. During the last week of July, 11 Forest Service fieldwork supervisors were interviewed from four different Forest Service districts around Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

Forty current Forest Service supervisors with several years experience supervising seasonal, volunteer, and hosted crews were interviewed for the project. During the initial interviews, investigators asked a broad spectrum of questions to identify the changes in current fieldwork crews and the difficulties supervisors faced. As the project progressed, questions focused on the problems supervisors encountered when leading hosted and volunteer workgroups.

Primarily, the project team spoke to coordinators in charge of volunteer and hosted workgroups. However, the team also spoke to supervisors of a variety of traditional field crews who were working on science, recreation, fire management, and timber-marking projects. Minorities, including Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, and several women, and senior citizens were among the Forest Service supervisors interviewed.

# *Initial Findings*

When the project began, the project team planned to identify the changes in seasonal field crews and to use that knowledge to design and produce a new training program for seasonal field crew leaders. As interviews progressed, the project team found that traditional seasonal crews were almost extinct on districts. Workgroups, such as volunteers and hosted programs, were replacing and augmenting traditional seasonal work crews. Because of this finding, the project took a different direction.

After traveling to various regions and interviewing a wide variety of supervisors, several general themes became clear. As expected, problems with budget cuts and downsizing were major concerns for crew leaders. However, early on the project team did not realize that budget cuts and the continued rapid downsizing had eliminated most seasonal field crews throughout the Forest Service.

The project team found that while the mission of the Forest Service to protect the National Forests has not changed, the manner in which this mission is carried out has changed significantly. The Forest Service is branching out from timber production to community and social service. The primary example the team found was the Forest Service's use of hosted programs and volunteers to promote education in communities, as well as to help districts complete tasks. These changes affect the composition of workgroups and create new problems for supervision and safety.

For example, the project team found that the few stable crews that do exist today are expected to do many different tasks. As one supervisor said, "As work comes up we are asked to pull together across traditional boundaries to get the work done." Another supervisor described the changes this way: "I'm used to the old crew dogs. They went out in the woods and got the job done, and they didn't have to know how to relate to the public. Now, you're a crew leader, you have to know how to switch gears all the time."

An additional finding, and the main focus of this paper, is the emergence of a variety of new partnerships in field workgroups. These new partnerships raise a broad spectrum of supervisory challenges. Several of these new workgroups perform potentially dangerous jobs, like trail maintenance and tree planting projects that were previously done by work-savvy, stable seasonal crews. Coordinators expressed concerns about the safety of the new workgroups and liability issues for the Forest Service.

This paper will present problems faced by Forest Service supervisors who coordinate volunteer and hosted workgroups. The first section will identify and describe problems that have a major impact on safety and liability. The second section will explore other safety problems and more specific problems that influence the way supervisors get the job done. A discussion of the effects of these new workgroups on the Forest Service follows. The paper ends with recommendations to terminate the current training program, **Supervisor and the Work Crew** (Driessen 1986), and begin a new training project to create more relevant tools to help Forest Service coordinators safely organize and supervise volunteers and hosted workgroups.

# Major Safety and Liability Problems Faced by Coordinators

Safety and Forest Service liability are supervisors' primary concerns when working with hosted and volunteer crews. The increase of such workgroups has created numerous difficulties for coordinators. The problems discussed here are the most pressing because they directly affect the safety of the work crews and the liability of the Forest Service.

## Multiple Roles of Coordinators

The problems that existed in traditional seasonal crews, such as crew members getting along and the work ethic of individual crew members, also exist in volunteer and hosted groups. The supervisory skills needed to deal with these problems are outlined in **Supervisor and the Work Crew**. However, new difficulties have arisen when using hosted and volunteer workgroups. One major difficulty is the changing role of the first-line supervisor. During the interview process the project team found remnants of the old "crew dogs" who were supervisors in charge of specific crews, such as trail or timber crews, for an entire season. However, Forest Service employees who are placed in charge of hosted programs and volunteers no longer serve in one supervisory capacity. They take on multiple roles as managers, planners, coordinators, liaisons, and Forest Service representatives. For the remainder of this paper, all Forest Service employees placed in charge of hosted or volunteer groups will be referred to as coordinators.

As managers, coordinators organize and plan the projects that need to be completed in the field. As coordinators, they work with hosted programs and volunteers, setting up times and dates for projects and working with other staffmembers to arrange suitable projects for the workgroups. Coordinators also work as liaisons, acting as technical advisors for hosted programs. In this capacity they train the crews on job skills and safety. At times, liaisons are placed in situations where they have to take on the role of supervisor in volunteer and hosted workgroups. This happens when crews split up or when the hosted group's crew leader is unable to maintain control of the crew. Finally, a coordinator's role as a Forest Service representative is to observe crews directly to make sure they are following Forest Service policies, specifically safety regulations.

Coordinators often assume two or more of the above roles, which creates ambiguous job responsibilities and greatly increases concern for safety. For example, the same Forest Service employee who manages and plans projects often acts as coordinator and is responsible for direct supervision to make sure workgroups follow Forest Service policy. A coordinator in the Pacific Northwest Region told the project team that she was the direct supervisor and manager for 40 volunteers.

"Our system of supervision has changed considerably in practice," said a Forest Service safety coordinator from the Southwestern Region who went on to explain how the coordinator's job description was unclear. Safety was this coordinator's major concern.

## Collateral Duty Overload

In most circumstances, Forest Service employees placed in charge of volunteer and hosted groups have several other unrelated responsibilities. All of the coordinators interviewed by the project team said that managing and working with hosted employees and volunteers was only one of their many responsibilities. For most of these coordinators, working with these groups was a collateral duty in addition to their primary responsibilities.

Nearly all coordinators said they were overworked. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region spoke to us about her job responsibilities:

❝My job isn't just working with these 40 volunteers…I have mailing lists. I have to be developing interpretive programs and educational programs for the district. I have to do bunches of different things. And like anybody else on the district…go out and pick up trash myself and give programs and arrange special events and stuff. So I can't do all of that on my own.❞

Because budget cuts lead to cuts in personnel, Forest Service coordinators have taken on many duties. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region told the project team that volunteer workgroups are only part of his many responsibilities:

❝I try to coordinate that [volunteer programs] amongst my other duties...[the district] downsized from the two 11's, the 9, the 7 to just now an 11 and a 7. So I'm doing all the special-use recreation permits. When I came here that wasn't even part of my job. That's a whole job in itself. That's been added along with the trails, the development, the wilderness. I have to try to juggle all these things, and now the volunteers. I could whine like this all day, but I know I'm not the only one.❞

At times, some of the Forest Service workers who oversee these new crews are not field-crew coordinators, but members of traditional seasonal crews. One coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region described what is happening to the "old trail dogs" on his district:

❝Now these are old trail dogs, they used to work with me in the past on the trails. These guys are no longer working as a single crew during the summer. They're split up, each of them going out, one or two of them, and working with these other types of interagency crews. They're no longer just trail dogs who would work for the one supervisor, but each of them is acting as a liaison or as sort of a leader.❞

Most coordinators feel they are spread so thin that they usually cannot directly oversee hosted and volunteer crews working on projects out in the field. They said crews are often left unsupervised by any Forest Service employee. One safety coordinator from the West Coast said that the primary role of coordinators is no longer direct supervision. He said they are usually involved with planning the project, and supervision is a collateral duty. Volunteer or hosted groups often choose someone from their own group to be in charge. "A lot of them [leaders from within the group] are not prepared to provide the kind of classic supervision that motivates employees to be safe and monitors the behavior and corrects it," he said.

Coordinators who are spread this thin can experience burnout. Pressure and stress from the job create increased risk. All coordinators said that working with hosted programs and volunteers is stressful. One coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region spoke about the pressure of his job and why he transferred to a different area in the Forest Service:

❝I'm away from all of that because the pressure of that life, I got real stressed out and I just really couldn't do it any more because it is stressful, especially when you're doing the corrections part and Forest Service part and working back and forth with so many different objectives. I'd been into it and wasn't getting the cooperation that I believed I needed from management to survive and all of a sudden I was spending three or four days out of my week in the office trying to put out fires instead of working out in the field with crews like I loved.❞

## *Insufficient Training*

Many coordinators talked about the lack of sufficient training for working with new types of crews. They were trained to work with traditional seasonal crews who generally completed one project before moving on to the next. Hosted and volunteer crews vary greatly from traditional seasonal crews. Coordinators lack the experience to supervise these new crews. All of the coordinators who were interviewed said they received minimal to no training before working with hosted and volunteer crews. A Pacific Northwest Region coordinator described the minimal training he had received:

❝I was given the manual, the guy that was the coordinator for that program gave me the manual, said, 'Here's the manual, here's the van, here's a crew of 10 corrections people that are staying over at the house and you're their crew leader and here's the job. Go do it.' That was the training I had…. By the next year I was the coordinator, teaching other people how to do the job, but there was no training. Since then, I've had to put on training sessions for people in the Forest Service to work on a multicultural basis with people who are coming from a corrections background.❞

Working with new types of workgroups can be intimidating for a Forest Service coordinator, especially since most, if not all, coordinators have not received proper training. One coordinator stated that she had not been trained to work specifically with convict crews: "They hired me to run that program and work those guys. They did not have that when I started here, when I took the job." She said she wanted the position, so she accepted, and her training consisted of a lot of on-the-job trial and error. She said the job continues to be a "learning process."

## *Ambiguous Contractual Agreements*

Several coordinators expressed concern about the lack of formal procedures when working with hosted programs and volunteer groups. Most coordinators said there is no formal contract for hosted groups working with the Forest Service. On some districts, the form used for hiring seasonal contract crews is also used for establishing partnerships with hosted programs. A volunteer contract agreement in the Forest Service does exist and, in almost all districts, volunteers sign the agreement. This printed agreement between volunteers and the district leaves many issues up in the air. When asked about this contract, a West Coast coordinator expressed her feelings: "There's no contract other than 'I'll come and work these hours and I will do this for you and you will pay me my mileage or whatever.' You don't have that black-and-white contract with them."

Many Forest Service coordinators are confused about how to treat volunteers and the types of projects to assign them. A coordinator in the Southwestern Region expressed her difficulties with this issue:

❝That's probably the hardest thing, for me to train seasonals to do work with volunteers, making them understand that the volunteers are there to do work, not to sit around and talk with them, not to just kick back and watch the seasonals work.❞

Another hosted program and volunteer coordinator in the Southern Region discussed how unclear policies for volunteers led to a potentially serious problem when a volunteer carried his gun while working on her district:

❝I said you can't play Barney Fife. Then I told my supervisor we need to put something down in writing and have this person sign it to cover…to make sure that it's on record that's he's been told, or whatever. So that was that thing. Well, a couple of them quit, 'Well, we don't want to volunteer anymore since we can't do this and we can't do that.' But at least I did what I had to do.❞

## *Unclear Lines of Authority and Workgroup Supervision*

Coordinators have problems understanding the degree of control the Forest Service maintains over hosted programs and volunteer workers. Hosted and volunteer crews cannot be supervised in the same manner as traditional seasonal field crews. Individuals working on hosted crews often have a set of rules imposed by their own agency. Examples of such crews would be the Federal Corrections Institute or inner-city youth workgroups. Both programs have strict rules and regulations governing their crews. Outside agencies may be matching employment funds with the Forest Service. Some hosted agencies are paying the entire employment costs and have separate regulations governing their workers. The members on Federal Corrections Institute crews are paid entirely by the State.

One coordinator talked about these regulations for hosted and volunteer crews:

❝Some of the crews have their own way of doing things, completely separate. Like, if we have a group from Marlen, which is a State school for boys in Saul, they have real tight security…. They only do their work in a certain way and they are not going to modify from that. So we have to be real compromising with that…. Not as far as safety standards, but just in terms of how they get things done.❞

One coordinator from the Northwest recalled a story of a co-worker who was a traditional seasonal employee for the Forest Service. This coordinator had a problem with an inner-city youth crew slacking off on the job. However, he was working with the crew as a liaison for the Forest Service and did not have direct authority over the crew:

❝My buddy, J.R., who no longer works for the Forest Service, was working with an inner-city crew out here…if they got tired during the day, would go sit in the van for half the day. J.R. blew up. He's been around for years, was raised over here in eastern Washington, was very conservative, if you didn't work, you got canned…. They just told him basically to stick it where the sun don't shine, they'd do what they want to do.... He was just a liaison, he wasn't really their boss. So he was really upset and he came and talked to a bunch of us that afternoon back at the work center.❞

The same coordinator discussed how crew leaders dealt with problem employees in the past and how these old techniques are no longer an option with hosted crews:

❝A lot of issues where you might normally get in somebody's face and try to solve it, if you were on an old BD crew, you would've just stood up and said, "Get your ass back to work or you're history buddy." You know, that sort of stuff doesn't necessarily work anymore and so some of that stuff kind of needed to be put on hold.❞

The coordinator explained that the major problems liaisons have with hosted employees have to be taken to the coordinator (if the coordinator is separate from the liaison) and the coordinator will discuss the problems with the hosted group's crew leader and the hosted organization.

Sometimes the individuals employed by hosted programs to supervise their own crews are not qualified for the job. This makes working with these crews even more difficult for the Forest Service coordinator who is acting as a liaison. When describing some of the external crew leaders, one coordinator stated they were "not very swift with what's going on."

Several coordinators said volunteer and hosted workgroups are frequently left without a supervisor or a Forest Service representative because the coordinator is unable to go into the field and directly oversee the crew. A coordinator explained the limited contact he has with some of the workgroups on his district:

❝They tell me, "Well, there will be a group tomorrow coming in. Meet them up there, take them all the bags…they are going to be doing the trails. So I'll go up there and give them that and they're gone. Sometimes I don't even see them, I just leave the stuff there with the host and I'm gone to do something else.❞

When volunteer groups and hosted programs choose their own leaders from within their group, problems often develop. One coordinator said, "Sometimes groups kind of think they have a leader, but they ain't. And that gets pretty touchy." He stated that such situations call for "delicate negotiations." He gave the following example of a volunteer who was not suited to lead a crew:

❝We've got a group and we've got an individual that is the [leader]. He's kind of coordinated this volunteer effort for probably 5 or 6 years now. And he's very good at getting people, coming out, doing the work, getting them excited about the work. But he doesn't have a very good work ethic, and so when he comes out he's kind of the natural leader of the group…. But when it comes to working, common sense isn't one of his big points.❞

Because volunteers are not paid, situations involving authority over them are frustrating for many coordinators. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region said, "You can't take anything away from them and say, 'If you don't shape up….'" That same coordinator told of a situation in which she was having difficulties with a volunteer who was giving misinformation to visitors and not helping the other volunteers:

❝It's really hard to fire a volunteer. You can't just say, "This is your performance. It's not acceptable. We're going to have to part ways here." With a volunteer it's a whole different thing because they are giving you their time…there's nothing like salary to deal with. There's no arbitration point…. We can't take anything away from them.❞

The coordinator said the situation was ambiguous and she felt confused about how to deal with the problem.

On some districts, however, volunteers are disciplined the same as seasonal and full-time employees. A coordinator from the West Coast said a district near hers had a "military-run volunteer program." If the volunteers did not pull their weight, they had to leave. Sometimes volunteers in this district were given performance ratings.

## *High Turnover Leads to Constant Training*

Coordinators are continuously dealing with a variety of outside crews. These crews come and go and generate many different safety and liability issues. Diverse types of crews make it difficult for coordinators to train crew members to do the job and do it safely. Also, production is slowed down significantly due to the constant training that is required. A coordinator from the Southwest described what happens when different types of groups want to work on her district and the kinds of safety hazards coordinators have to look for with such diversity of volunteers:

❝We have church groups that want to come out, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, swim teams, but that's what I get on a constant basis. I have four classes of 4th graders that want to come out and do public service. Well, you know, with 4th graders on a field trip their basic thing is just to go out and run. They don't want to be doing work…. "No, we don't want you picking up any hypodermic needles or condoms or something like that in a campground." That's just going to blow past them. How do you guarantee the greatest amount of safety and minimize risk for all these groups? So you have people that are trained, the crew coordinators for each one of these groups has to recognize that it's constant turnover, that it's constant reintroducing those safety aspects with every group, and you can't assume that people know what to do.❞

Crewmembers of hosted programs and volunteer groups frequently change as some members leave and others join. Sometimes the individuals on crews will vary from day to day. This problem forces Forest Service coordinators to retrain crews during a project, sometimes daily. One coordinator said, "It can be very complicated, I think, working with all these people, that some of them only work twice a month and some work once a week or twice a week all season long. It's a wide variety of people." Obviously, these sorts of workgroups have little—if any—cohesion (Driessen 1986, 1996). This is a critical element in work group safety.

Planning is a critical element of completing a project out in the field. Safety depends on planning. As one safety coordinator said:

❝Where you've got a mixed crew coming together, to take time to give them a proper safety orientation is critical. You can't do it if you don't have a good plan in place. And then you have to take enough time to really let them know what their responsibilities are, what's expected of them. And all of that takes time. When you have crews mixing and matching and you don't have a system for orienting somebody before they go out to work that day or the next day, it's a mess. And so the easiest thing is to ignore it.❞

Crews habitually in flux present major liability issues for the Forest Service and for the field crew leader. A coordinator explained how easy it is to neglect major safety precautions when crews are in flux:

❝Your liability and your control for safety just gets more and more diluted because of the variation, and also for the volunteer groups…. These aren't people that are coming back year to year. If you get a [FCI] workgroup…they are different guys every week. Their community service is up last week so there's a new guy, so you're training them again.❞

The coordinator explained that it is her responsibility to recognize any new people on a hosted crew. If there are any new folks, the safety training has to be repeated, over and over; that is a very time-consuming task.

## *Limited Resources*

Several coordinators said that working with hosted programs and volunteers often creates "more hassle than it is worth." Budget cuts have left the Forest Service without the resources and personnel to supervise these groups. Many times coordinators have to tell the hosted groups that the district cannot work with them because they do not have the safety equipment or a supervisor for the crew. A coordinator in the Pacific Northwest Region explained how working with hosted groups and volunteers can be more costly than beneficial:

❝We used to work with Job Corps. That was just too much hassle. We didn't have the time to spend with them that they needed when they came up to work. If they brought a crew boss with them that was a whole different thing, but it just didn't time wise, it wasn't beneficial for either one of us.❞

Another coordinator in the Pacific Northwest Region also expressed her feelings about the time and energy required to work with hosted and volunteer groups:

❝So you have maybe a 6-hour day that you're holding this Forest Service person for this project, and to get somebody that can do that, that has the time to do that is really precious. You just don't get a lot of people that are doing that anymore.❞

Because Forest Service employees are spread thin, many members of hosted groups and volunteers become, as one coordinator stated, "the supervisor on the spot." In several districts, hosted employees supervise their own groups as well as other hosted program groups. One such group is the Federal Corrections Institute. A coordinator discussed the types of circumstances in which seniors on her district could be placed in charge of Federal Corrections Institute individuals:

❝If their job has some intense labor or something, then I'm going to send some inmates along in that truck to get the labor-intense work done and then the seniors will then become the driver and then they tell the inmates what to do and instruct how to do it…. If we've got a recreation area that's been closed down for 3 months for the winter season, we've got leaves to burn off. If we've got split-rope fence to replace, holes to dig, if we've got pressure washing to do, painting, scraping, sanding, I'll just give them [the seniors] a list and tell them who [FCI members] to take, name out the ones that they need to take because that clears up any confusion and then let them go.❞

The coordinator said that she would go and check on the work-group when she was able to find the time. The seniors could reach her by radio at other times.

Because the Forest Service has very few seasonal crews left to complete necessary projects, youth crews are needed, especially crews from the Youth Conservation Corps. The YCC crews are also in high demand in rural areas because these districts lack the volunteer pool to maintain campgrounds and trails. One district coordinator said his YCC crew is a precious commodity that has to be shared with other coordinators to complete essential projects. Because support and resources for youth crews are limited, coordinators and communities have to take responsibility for funding. A campground project coordinator explained how one YCC project was funded and supported on his district:

❝Yesterday they put [up] all the barriers, and the tabletops and the benches and now they're doing that thanks to the community [director] that convinced somebody to give them some money for these kids to work. And we give them the transportation and everything, bring them back and forth.❞

The same coordinator explained how low funding was forcing his district to use its maintenance man rather than a trained crew leader as a YCC supervisor: "He cuts all the boards and does everything for them and shows them how to put them up. The kids all carry them up. We've got 20 kids carrying them up, and some painting." When a maintenance man who has no training or experience in supervision is in charge of 20 people, safety and liability issues are a concern.

A bigger concern for many coordinators is the safety of volunteers who are hosting campgrounds. Because of limited resources, some campground hosts do not have telephones or any other way to contact the Forest Service or the police in an emergency. Certain districts do not have the money to pay for phone lines. Volunteers may have radio access, but the radio does not work at night when no one is at the office to answer it. One coordinator explained the situation on his district:

❝I've got volunteers in the campground, the campground hosts, that are in danger…. We are hiring them, we're keeping them in the campgrounds, we're giving them a spot, but what happens at night? The host is there, the people come knocking on his door at 2 a.m., those guys are drinking and throwing rocks at each other. What's a guy going to do? He doesn't have communications. He has a radio, but there's no dispatch out here where they can call and get a cop or anything. So those guys are liable to get hurt eventually. And that's happened, they got one beat up last year. And this year we had a guy get shot at 20 times. And we use volunteers to do our work and we're not giving them the adequate support.❞

Volunteer campground hosts could choose to leave the campground if they felt unsafe. However, one coordinator said some of the campground hosts on his district are homeless and do not want to leave. He discussed his concern for several of the volunteers living on campgrounds in his district:

❝Some of them don't have telephones at all, nothing at all. They can be killed out there and by the time somebody goes out

there, you won't know nothing until the next morning.… But something is going to happen eventually and it's going to turn, that's the way the system works. Until something happens, things aren't going to change.❞

The coordinator said that he feels these campground hosts' lives were in danger because the Forest Service could not supply phone lines.

## Lack of a Physical Presence

Every coordinator interviewed by the project team discussed the agency's increasing liability because of hosted and volunteer groups. When speaking about his experience with outside groups, one coordinator from the Southwest said, "Well, if they sign up with us…legally we've got to pay for them. Whatever happens out there, if they get hurt…we've got to pay for them." Another coordinator from the West Coast discussed his concern for Forest Service liability in this way:

❝Well, it's getting less and less clear in practice who is responsible for the safety of the employees. Obviously, this person [the coordinator] would not have been able to provide the direct supervision and observing the people working to make sure they're safe.… So he was depending on some more experienced people to pay attention to what's going on. But that is nowhere in the system of assigned responsibilities. That's an informal system that's developed to try to deal with it.❞

The Forest Service is responsible for enforcing its safety rules. If a Forest Service representative is not observing a work group at all times and someone is harmed, the agency is responsible for failing to enforce its own safety regulations. This is true when working with any kind of outside organization, including contract crews. The Forest Service is solely responsible for training all crewmembers, explaining Forest Service standards, and enforcing those standards. Many coordinators express major apprehension when working with volunteers and hosted groups because they cannot "watch them all of the time." One coordinator spoke about her reluctance for taking on volunteer crews due to liability:

❝I don't have the people. We probably have four project managers doing the work of 15 people right now, and there's no way that they are going to come in for a group that probably isn't going to get a lot of work done anyway—sacrifice their time. And because they are signed up as volunteers, we're assuming risk for them. We're assuming liability for anyone that gets hurt. Is it worth it? They've already told me, 'No way, Jose. Not going to assume that.' …if some volunteer comes out and they are cleaning up a campsite and they are doing 2 hours worth of work and all of a sudden they get hurt and they put on a workmen's comp claim, my project is dead in the water. I'm not going to assume that. I'd rather not get the work done.❞

One coordinator described an incident where safety was not monitored because a Forest Service supervisor was not present:

❝We had an incident that happened on the district here about 3 weeks ago where we had to fire two people. One was a YCC kid and the other was an older American. And some of the stuff that's going on is because there's not a supervisor that can actually know the rules and regulations of the Forest Service to guide these people.❞

In all the districts visited by the project team, too few Forest Service employees were available to oversee the work of hosted or volunteer groups. The possibility of accidents happening in volunteer and hosted workgroups increases significantly when Forest Service representatives are not present to intervene immediately to prevent unsafe working conditions and unsafe acts.

## Lack of Managerial Support

Most of the coordinators said they were not getting the support they needed from management to work effectively and safely with hosted employees and volunteers. A coordinator from the Northern Region explained one reason misunderstandings about support occur in the Forest Service chain of command:

❝I think some of these things have been in labor and management forever.… Many times they don't really know what the people are having to deal with to get a job and maybe they come out and they start giving some of their observations and many times they are not quite right because they just come out for a day.❞

Support from management is critical when dealing with hosted and volunteer crews. "Hopefully, you have a supervisor or someone above you that will back you up," said a coordinator from the Southern Region. Many coordinators said they were feeling alienated from the Forest Service and that their supervisors were not "going to bat" for them.

The story of J.R. illustrates this problem. J.R., a Forest Service liaison, was having work ethic problems with an inner-city youth group. After discussing the issue with several of his coworkers, one coworker suggested that he and J.R. switch crews. The coworker was working with a hosted group that J.R. had worked

with in the past. The coworker telling the story stated management's reaction to the plan:

❝Somebody in management figured out what we were doing and called J.R. the next morning and said, 'J.R., you gotta go back up there with the crew. What are they going to think?' What that crew thought was more important than what J.R., who had worked for years, thought. Political implications that those people had driven this guy up the wall and he needed to leave was more important. J.R. was supposed to swallow his pride, swallow his work ethic and go back and accept that because a guy in the office was more concerned about the political implications. I see that a lot.❞

A coordinator from the Southwestern Region spoke about the problems he had filling needed positions for the new workgroups:

❝We're kind of handcuffed with the certain number of positions we do have, and I don't know why that is. We still have, nobody has ever given me a straight answer. What I'm trying to do here on this district is I'm trying to build an organization that's needed to do this, to do this type of thing [work with volunteers and hosted programs], and it's difficult to do it if you don't get the support from management and everywhere else.❞

Another coordinator from the Southwestern Region discussed problems getting supplies and equipment for his hosted groups and volunteer workers: "I don't think that I have the support that I should have…. Why do we have all this [referring to hosted and volunteer groups] if we can't afford to do what we have to do?" He described having to tell volunteers and hosted groups that they could not have the specific items they needed because there was no money.

## *Inappropriate Levels of Work Expectation*

Hosted programs and volunteer groups are made up of a variety of individuals with different levels of training and experience. Workers range in age from children to senior citizens. Also, most individuals participating in hosted programs are paid minimum wage or less. Because of the diversity of these crews and their pay, coordinators must organize and plan projects performed by these groups according to their individual levels of work expectation so the groups, as one coordinator put it, "are able to perform safely within the limits of their skill."

Working with very young people, such as Boy Scout troops, creates work-expectation problems for coordinators. One supervisor said the purpose of working with very young people was not production, but to maintain good community relations. The Forest Service is fully liable for all youth working on a campground or trail. Extra safety precautions have to be taken to make sure children are not injured. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region spoke about limiting groups like Boy Scouts to the simple task of picking up trash in the campgrounds. Even then the Forest Service coordinators have to make sure the younger workers do not touch glass or needles.

Work expectation for seniors is also a major safety concern. Some seniors are pushed much too hard and forced to do jobs they cannot handle. Many of these people quit because the level of work expectation is too high. A coordinator discussed this problem on his district:

❝I lost five foremen with the concessionaire because they were people that were hired that were too old. One had a hernia trying to unload a barrel, so he quit. The other one had a nervous breakdown because it was too much work for him. The other one, I don't know what happened to him, but he left.❞

A Southwestern Region coordinator voiced her views on the safety of seniors working on projects that were too physically demanding:

❝Some of our folks are well into their 70s and some of them are extremely fit and can go work on trails if they really wanted to, but others have some physical disabilities and impairments that it wouldn't be practical for them to be out on the trail. In fact, it would be dangerous and a safety hazard to have them out on the trail maintaining it, digging water bars or whatever.❞

Occasionally, seniors in this program are expected to do things they do not want to do or cannot do safely. They feel they need to do the tasks because they need the job. A coordinator discussed this problem. For years he had seen old men being pushed beyond their limits and being forced to quit. He had men falling asleep while driving. Some seniors do not feel comfortable driving the trucks, but they have to do it to keep the job.

## *Lack of Knowledge of Forest Service Safety Standards*

Though members of hosted or volunteer groups may have a great deal of work experience, they are not always aware of the safety standards established by the Forest Service. A safety coordinator from the Southwestern Region discussed some of the common difficulties crew leaders have with hosted and volunteer groups who do not know Forest Service safety standards or do not have the proper training:

❝You might have some senior citizens that are coming out to work and they have a lifetime of painting their house or whatever and they figure they know how to paint, but they don't know what safety standards are for painting and they may have had some very unsafe practices that have become part of their way of doing things. So it gets very complicated very fast, and that's really typical.❞

Another coordinator expressed how he deals with such safety issues on his district:

❝Of course, chain saws, no one runs a chain saw unless they've got a card. I'm sure everywhere else in the world is just like this place—everybody's an expert with a chain saw. We get these volunteer groups coming up and they are all bummed out that they can't run the saw. And I'm one of the teachers for saw safety here so I put on a number of courses throughout the year and if they don't go through my course and get the certification, they ain't going to run a saw.❞

During safety training, it is difficult for Forest Service coordinators to know how detailed the information should be so these groups understand the risks and can complete projects safely.

One coordinator expressed concerns when planning safety information for a volunteer group that wanted to clean up a burned trail:

❝I was writing this stuff up, these safety topics, and I put some stuff in there about hazard trees. But then I started thinking, 'That's almost like a whole half-day training session—how to identify a hazard tree.' You've got to actually look at them from the backside and you've got to walk around what you are looking at. And I'm realizing these volunteers, they may not know what I'm talking about.❞

Because of limited resources and the many collateral duties of coordinators in the Forest Service, some districts have used members of volunteer and hosted groups to train the rest of their group about safety and use of equipment at the work site. Coordinators pointed out that often the training was not properly directed, and the members of the group did not learn correct safety procedures. One coordinator described how someone on his district was harmed due to poor training:

❝They were teaching the crew leaders how to use the tools and then relying on those crew leaders of the volunteer groups or whatever groups to teach their own folks. It turns out that didn't work very well. The crew leader wasn't a very good teacher and an individual was injured. Not seriously, you know, cut on the leg from a pulaski, but training wasn't done properly.❞

The coordinator told the project team that after this incident occurred, all training was relocated to the station. He said the coordinators now spend an hour to an hour and a half on the safe handling of basic tools.

## *Crews Working Too Close to Each Other*

Many hosted and volunteer crews work out in the field. Often, these crewmembers work close to each other. Sometimes members on hosted crews do not understand or follow instructions from supervisors, creating safety hazards. One such situation involving a convict crew and Youth Conservation Corps crew was discussed by a safety coordinator in the Pacific Northwest Region:

❝A YCC crew was also designated to be in the same area doing another section of the trail. Well, the YCC work ethic…is incredible, if they saw something wrong, they want to fix it. If they were walking on a trail, they'd want to fix it. Well, as they were coming through, they were supposed to walk past this Bulta County crew and go on down to another section. Well, they saw a bunch of stuff that they wanted to fix. So, all of a sudden there are two crews working in close proximity to each other and it was on a slope. So these people [YCC crew] are rolling stuff down on these people [convict crew] that are working here and the supervisor was up on the road talking with the Forest Service liaison person.❞

The safety coordinator said that she just happened to walk through the area. She stopped both workgroups and had a discussion with the crew leaders about the safety of their crews.

# Other Problems Faced by Coordinators

## Production Versus Social and Educational Goals

In the last 10 to 20 years, field crew supervision has changed in the Forest Service, and supervision continues to change. Traditional seasonal crew leaders have had to switch gears and adjust to new situations. One coordinator from the Southern Region reflected, "There's always going to be a need for leadership. The leadership role is changing and it's becoming a little bit more dynamic, more complex." Another coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region expressed his views about the effects the shift toward educational and social goals has had on crew leadership:

❝It is nothing you can put your finger on because it's [leadership] in a state of flux. It's like we were discussing, you have the good ol' boys who have the skills base, and you have the newer different ways of viewing cultural groups and the ideas that maybe just the work project itself is not all that's going on there, but there's the education of groups of people that may affect the future of the forest and whatever else. Twenty years ago you could tell me this is what a crew leader is, this is what a crew leader does, and this is the way you respond in a given situation. It's not that way anymore because you have so many different situations. You need to be able to respond, and like I said in the beginning, switch gears. It's not always going to be the same. So a crew leader is nothing you can really define right now.❞

The same coordinator said that coordinators today need to learn to be open to change and to roll with the punches:

❝So I think that becomes really pertinent with crew leaders that as the expectations change you have to be a changeable being. You can't learn the job and then say, 'I've got it learned and I don't have to learn anything anymore.' That was kind of the traditional fire crews and the old trails crews…. You worked your way up and once you became the top dog everybody else had to learn from you. That's not the way it is anymore. You have to keep learning to stay up there and know how to deal with the new situations.❞

Most traditional Forest Service coordinators were hired for production and were trained to get the job done. They referred to this as reaching hard targets. Now they are having to adjust to new crews and new social and educational goals, which they refer to as soft targets. Traditionally, Forest Service seasonal crewmembers were not easily able to get away with slacking off or failing to follow orders to accomplish hard target goals.

Today, the main goals of working with many of the hosted and volunteer crews are educational or social welfare goals, soft targets. The Senior Community Service Employment Program, which is found in nearly every region, is set up to aid seniors with job skills and experience. Often senior citizens cannot produce as much as traditional trail crews. Production is not the primary intent for the SCSEP program. Projects with YCC, Jobs Plus, youth groups, schools, church groups, and other groups are set up for educational or community welfare purposes. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region described his difficulty when shifting to soft targets:

❝I work with some of these youth crews. They're [old timers] really upset because they don't get as much done in a day as one of the old trail dog crews would. We consider maybe we're educating some city people, some inner-city kids about what the woods are about and some of the funding that's going on for that project may relate to that. And we may have taught them how to get up regularly and go to work on a daily basis, being dressed, prepared for work. What kind of social value does that have for our society and for people being put back into the criminal justice system 5 years from now. So there's a whole lot of things that go on that are not production.❞

The coordinator concluded by stating the need for balance between soft and hard targets and the need for the Forest Service to remain geared for production.

## Problems With Gender, Work Culture, and Generation Gaps

Historically, field crews in the Forest Service were mostly made up of young, white men. Field crews have always had personality problems, but with increasing diversity, more issues have appeared. The multicultural issues that come up when working with diverse crews have made it difficult for many coordinators to communicate, teach, and supervise. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region discussed his concern with multicultural issues when he was working with hosted groups:

❝Well, you need to be able to be directing somebody how to do a work project, but then if all of a sudden you realize you may have a cultural issue going on because you have somebody from a different background, you need to step back and think, 'Okay, am I communicating right?'…Now all of a sudden you need to be aware that that person may have other issues on how you're telling them to do the work and you need to make sure that you're communicating in an appropriate manner [with] somebody who may have a totally different background.❞

Different types of personalities and slang create problems for some coordinators. For example one coordinator said that, when working with senior volunteers, "My complaint would be…you have to be a psychologist to pull this off. You have to deal with

all these different personalities." Another coordinator told a story about learning to communicate with inner-city youth. He dealt with language barriers due to different styles of speech. He would often have to explain things several times to the young workers:

❝It's just like, my god, dealing with some of these youth crews, the language changes. They are not speaking English, not the English that I thought I learned…. And if I just said, 'Speak my English or I don't want to talk to you,' I wouldn't get very far with them. The respect would go away. That doesn't mean I have to learn to speak the same slang that they do, but I at least need to realize that they've got their rights to talk their way.❞

## *Gender Issues*

Female coordinators have expressed having difficulties with older male employees. Senior male volunteers and members of hosted workgroups were identified by several female coordinators as an added and irritating difficulty. A coordinator discussed gender problems on her district and the response when she was first hired: "When I first came aboard, it was completely negative kind of vibes…. They would go to my supervisor and just go right over my head."

A Southern Region coordinator explained why she believes she has had difficulties with male seniors on her district. She also talked about how she confronts gender issues:

❝The seniors have been doing the same job for years and then I come in…. With your seniors you may have some folks that have been to the old school and…[it] is kind of hard for them to take directions from a female. So you have to kind of learn how to do that with, I guess, not offending and getting the job done and pleasing them at the same time. That's difficult. Sometimes you just don't get the respect.❞

Gender-based problems are serious because they can escalate to dangerous situations. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region discussed a situation where a SCSEP employee presented a risk to his female supervisor. She said he "had an issue with women supervisors...and at times would just have outbursts, angry, angry outbursts…to the point, that [it] was definitely workplace violence." The coordinator said that the supervisor did not deal with the situation. "It had become a safety issue and it should never have gone that far," she said. Another coordinator expressed the quick and to-the-point way she handles gender-based difficulties with senior citizens:

❝I say, 'You can either listen to me or…you have a choice. You can do it my way or you have the alternative of going back to camp, going home, or wherever, because the work here has got to be done and I'm the one that's passing it on.' You cut to the chase and get right to the point and say, 'This is it.'❞

## *Understanding the Forest Service Work Culture*

Historically, most seasonal trail and timber crews understood the work ethic and commitment that came with working for the Forest Service. They were trained in the Forest Service and became part of what several coordinators called the "Forest Service family." These crews understood how the Forest Service worked and they developed a sense of loyalty and responsibility to the Agency.

Hosted and volunteer groups have little-to-no experience working in the Forest Service. Therefore, these groups frequently have difficulty understanding and following safety regulations and accepting how the Forest Service undertakes projects in the field. A safety coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region explained what she saw happening:

❝What we've found with the hosted crews, particularly like the Bulta County work crew, the con crews, or crews that come up with their own supervisor, that it takes a lot of work working with them so that they understand our work ethic in terms of safety behavior because they kind of come with a whole different—maybe—outlook. Or maybe they've never done the project before and they are just going to implement the "bull through it" type of stuff. So what we've tried to do with those crews is have the Forest Service project manager meet with their supervisor and work with them for the first week or so, ideally.❞

## *Generation Gaps*

Several coordinators indicated problems with youth crews due to differences in generational values, especially the way youth perceived their work in the Forest Service. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region discussed how she copes with the environmental concerns of some young crewmembers:

❝It's a different generation than when I came into the Forest Service 23 years ago…. They've been raised with the environmental movement from their adolescent years all the way into their early twenties. They are raised in the Northwest media and what they've heard from the media about the environmental movement. One of the things that I try to do is to let them have their opinions, but they come to work for the Forest Service and this is our job…. You are American, you can think anything that you want to think. But you signed on the dotted line to a certain job…. This is the job and this is what the job requires. If it goes against your ethics and your morals then that's your problem…. You have to decide. Can you do this job or not?❞

Young people sometimes have a different understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable in a working situation. A coordinator from the Northern Region said, "These younger attitudes come in here and think they can say or do whatever

they want, and that's totally inappropriate." Some coordinators believe that youth today expect more for less in a work environment. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region said, "They are raised in a different generation where they expect more from an agency who they work for. They expect to be—what's the word I'm looking for—coddled."

## Helping Volunteers and Hosted Workgroups With Personal Problems

Most of the Forest Service coordinators expressed difficulty with the "emotional work" that is inherent when working with seniors and persons enrolled in employment programs. Outside issues come up that have to be worked through. Nurturing and taking care of members of volunteer and hosted groups is often considered part of a coordinator's job. One coordinator from the West Coast explained how she nurtures the volunteers on her district:

❝It seems to me, and I've certainly experienced that, a lot of taking care of volunteers is just flat out listening to them, showing concern for them. 'How are you doing today? How is that daughter? How is she doing at home?' That kind of thing. That's been the biggest thing here.❞

The same coordinator explained some of the ways she found she could help the members of the SCSEP program in her district get back on their feet:

❝When you are 55 years old and you are looking for a part-time job at minimum wage, you've had some things happen to you, you really have. So it's trying to help them get back on a track or encourage them or something like that to get going again…. They were down and this was something that they grabbed onto, and our job then is to go right there with them, right side by side and make sure that we can give them all we can give them, whether it's emotional support or if you need the glasses or the boots or whatever. Making sure that they can get those so that they can do a good job here and then looking for things, looking for training for them…. Getting them involved in even little things like first aid, CPR, just getting as much training as we can get to them…. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. Just helping them get back on their feet again.❞

Coordinators say that emotional work with hosted groups and volunteers takes up valuable time and energy, which they do not have. Their focus must be on the work. However, they feel some time must be set aside for meeting the emotional needs of the hosted employees and volunteers.

## Coordinator Problems With Different Types of Workgroups

The common troubles coordinators have with volunteer and hosted groups manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Many of these problems occur simultaneously, creating a lot of confusion and stress for coordinators.

### Volunteers

Using increasing numbers of volunteers seems to be the wave of the future for the Forest Service. One coordinator from the Southwestern Region said, "It's getting harder and harder to do our job, and I think volunteers are more and more important." Another coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region stated, "Our doors would not be open if it weren't for volunteers." Coordinators are grateful for the volunteers on their districts. Volunteers are able to do work that cannot be completed by the downsized staffs and seasonal employees on districts.

The Forest Service fully supports this volunteer movement, but many coordinators said they have more volunteers than they can handle. Frequently, only one person on a district is in charge of coordinating and working with volunteers. Because working with volunteers is one of many additional duties assigned to Forest Service employees, they are unable to find the time, and often, the resources, to set up projects for all the groups that want to volunteer. A Forest Service employee from the Southwestern Region described his situation:

❝I have, I think, six groups, volunteer groups I work with and… I'm the only contact. I work with them and there's no such thing as a volunteer coordinator here, not even at the supervisor's office. Yet there is a vast number of people out there that are willing to work for free, and we don't even take that seriously as a way to tap into that and really use that. I try to coordinate that amongst my other duties.❞

Another problem for coordinators is the tremendous variety of volunteers. A coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region said, "What I think about volunteers, it's one of the hardest programs ever to run because of the nature of the people involved in it." One coordinator discussed common assumptions made about the type of people that volunteer and described volunteers on her district: "Some people have often thought that it's older people, Caucasian people, rich people, wealthy, well off, and it's not true. You have more volunteers from the lower socioeconomic classes than you do from the upper ones."

All sorts of organizations and groups volunteer for the Forest Service. Volunteer groups come from churches, schools, youth groups, such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, environmental organizations, recreation clubs, and many other sources. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region described the volunteer groups on his district:

❝I've got the Back Country Horsemen, which are all middle aged, some of them retired even, the Los Alamos Nordic cross-country ski club, they are all a bunch of gray beards, same thing at the Norski, [a] cross-country ski club, they each have a little trail head they volunteer and work on, and all of those groups, there is not new blood coming into them. The Tough Rider Mountain Bike Club, they are pretty young, well, I'd say some young, middle aged, and they are a real active bunch, done a lot of volunteer work with them. It's hard finding the time really to coordinate more, like I'd like to.❞

One of the differences between volunteers and hosted groups is that volunteers do not get paid a wage and have more free choice about working—they can leave at any time. A coordinator from the Southwestern Region explained how the differences between hosted groups and volunteers affect supervision:

❝The difference I can see…is that our volunteer groups do not have to be with us…. With a convict crew…they want to be out there getting work skills, they want to be out of jail, they want to be out doing. There's different motives…. With the convict crews there's real limited choices that they could be making.❞

The same coordinator expressed the need for taking the time to understand individual motivations for volunteering:

❝You have to know why those folks are up there and you usually do that because we interview them before. We don't just say, 'Yeah, if you want to volunteer go on up there and we'll take care of you.' It's like why are these people volunteering? Are they volunteering because they want to work with the Forest Service some day? Or are they retired and had always wanted to be ranger so it fulfills some kind of dream for them? Do they just truly love the mountain? Are they there to learn new skills? All these different things. So you're kind of trying to figure that out in their conversation and gear them toward something.❞

Volunteers want to feel respected and part of a team. They need to know they are doing something important and relevant. Meeting these expectations can be difficult when planning projects for volunteer groups and placing individual volunteers. As one volunteer coordinator said, "[You have] to try to match the right group to the right project." Another coordinator who supervises 40 volunteers discussed the importance of relevancy and team membership when working with volunteers:

The volunteers are volunteering because they want to work, and it has to be relevant work. They have to be learning, they have to be feeling that they are a part of your team because they are a part of your team and that is really hard to get across to people [Forest Service representatives], and it's probably the hardest thing. But one of the most important things is the relevancy of what they are doing.

Another coordinator explained how giving respect and creating a sense of team membership are important factors for maintaining the interest of volunteers:

❝If you want to keep the volunteers coming back, you need someone from the upper ranks coming down. I'm just the supervisor of this group, but quite often I'll get the ranger to come out and work part of a day with us. Because that's showing our commitment to them, also. It's a chance for them to watch the ranger swing a tool and interact. But you know, if we can get a 10- or 12-person crew, we can compound our labor force by four or five times, and that's pretty cheap. The half-day the ranger spends or the day I have to spend from doing some other…what other people might think is important, I can compound my labor by about four or five times. That's a pretty good deal.❞

Some coordinators prefer to use volunteers for specific projects because of limited budgets. One coordinator described volunteers by saying, "They're a cheap source of labor, obviously, they're volunteers…. They're able to do the grunt work, they actually get a whole lot of trail built." Another coordinator said he decided to use volunteers because he had problems with the work ethic of previous paid crews: "I soon realized that I could go out with a volunteer group on a few weekends a summer and get more work done than my paid crew got done all season…. I don't think that's proper use of funds."

Volunteers are used to augment the work of the seasonal and full-time crews. However, some Forest Service employees do not see it this way. Downsizing in the Forest Service has led to the loss of many seasonal and full-time positions. Many seasonal employees see volunteers as the people who took their jobs because the volunteers are doing work previously carried out by paid Forest Service employees.

## *Employment Programs: Senior Citizens and Jobs Plus*

Hosted programs, such as the Senior Community Service Employment Program, Jobs Plus, and many others were created to help people gain job skills and job placements. SCSEP is a federally subsidized senior citizen employment program for

part-time work (between 20 to 25 hours a week) at minimum-wage rates. The goals of the program are to create part-time community-service jobs in both the public and private nonprofit sectors for able-bodied elders. Jobs Plus is another employment program that provides training and employment for people of all ages who are in financial need.

Employment programs are advantageous for local communities and Forest Service districts. But they do present problems for coordinators. Some of the individuals employed by these programs have personal problems, which inevitably become problems in the working environment. Many of the individuals employed in these programs do not live in environments that support changes in their lives. A Pacific Northwest Region coordinator discussed one such situation:

❝I mean we really, really tried to get her to go back to school… because she could've gotten Pell grants. She could've gotten everything and she was bright. She was good with numbers, and we just about had her enrolled. But when you live in that kind of an environment where there's no support, it's really scary. You're here for 6, 8 hours, but then you go home for the rest of the day and night to a family that doesn't support that, and it's real hard to buck that system.❞

Some of the individuals participating in these programs have little previous work experience and do not understand what an employer expects from an employee. A coordinator discussed a situation in which a woman was consistently missing or leaving work because of childcare issues:

❝The woman with the four kids, there were a lot of childcare issues with her and we had to finally come to the point with her in saying, 'Look, if you had a real job nobody would put up with this. You need to learn how to deal with your children and come to work. If you have a babysitting issue you need to take care of that. You can't just stay home for that day.' So she had to learn how to prioritize her life basically and her time…. Actually have a plan B. Who's your second-in-line babysitter? If your kids get sick who do they call? You've got to get that lined up so that you can work at a job. Because it's not going to work for you to leave all the time or not show up.❞

## *Federal Corrections Institute*

The Federal Corrections Institute program is a partnership between the State and the Forest Service. Both youth and adults who have committed nonviolent crimes make up crews and complete field projects for local districts. Working for the Forest Service is voluntary. The offenders make a small wage and are heavily regulated.

Working with FCI crews can be very difficult for Forest Service coordinators. The programs can be confusing for other Forest Service employees as well. A coordinator described how the corrections program on his district was abolished because of a personnel problem: "The office of personnel management couldn't figure out how to do job descriptions, so it became such a nightmare that we finally gave it up." Another coordinator from the Pacific Northwest Region explained giving up his coordinator position because of the high pressure of the job. He was constantly having to cope with safety, political, financial and training issues that came with FCI crews:

❝They're screened, they're nonviolent offenders, but there's still a potential of violence and things going wrong, and training people how to work with these crews. That got kind of stressful, especially the political parts…. I ended up giving up that job and getting into trails patrol.❞

One coordinator summarized sensitive issues that coordinators need to know about:

❝They have to understand that these people had been screened, they were nonviolent offenders, they were there voluntarily and what you would do if they decided not to work because you didn't have to force them to work. You would just inform the crew boss and then later on they would be taken out of the program and have to go back and deal with the judge. But you would also be explaining some of the racial issues, cultural issues, and explaining terminology.❞

The coordinator emphasized the need for heightened sensitivity when working with convict crews and suggested a more thorough training program for coordinators of such crews. Further study is necessary for a full and accurate understanding of the difficulties coordinators face with FCI crews because the project team gathered just a limited amount of information.

# Discussion

## Using Hosted Groups and Volunteers as Workers in the Forest Service

Quite early on in this project, it became apparent that the problems confronting today's coordinators are no longer related to the leadership of traditional Forest Service seasonal field crews. An updated version of the training program **Supervisor and the Work Crew** was deemed unnecessary for field-crew supervisors. The project team redirected its focus toward the problems being created by volunteer and hosted workgroups. The objective of the project became gaining a better understanding of the new problems facing coordinators and the ongoing changes occurring in the Forest Service fieldwork culture that directly affect the supervision of new kinds of workgroups. Several major themes concerning these new workgroups were pulled from interviews with volunteer and hosted crew coordinators. Previous and current literature in the areas of downsizing and cutbacks, interorganizational relationships, and occupational role conflict may help to further clarify the project's findings.

## Downsizing and Cutbacks Influence All Aspects of the Work Culture

Organizational downsizing and cutbacks have important implications for understanding changes in the labor force (Curtis 1989). Cutbacks are a common phenomenon in both public and private agencies. They tend to amplify existing problems, especially those concerning trust, morale, productivity, and depression. Cutbacks hinder authority relations, employee placements, and directives such as the job descriptions of remaining personnel (Rubin 1984). Due to downsizing, the modern workplace has been characterized by the growing use of temporary labor on an as-needed basis to perform specific jobs for single projects and the widespread use of subcontracting to other agencies to provide services that once were completed by inhouse employees (Leicht 1998). This project team found a number of these problems in today's Forest Service fieldwork culture.

## Coordinators Are Stressed, Spread Thin, and Multitasked

Shaw and Barrett-Power (1997) discussed a need for a multilevel stress-based approach to downsizing. With this approach, organizations, workgroups, and individuals are examined simultaneously. In the stress-based model, downsizing is described as a collection of stressors focusing on pressures for labor force reductions that increase demands on the organization, workgroup, and individual employees. The model allows us to look at the problems faced by volunteer and hosted group coordinators through a job-stress lens. A major theme from the recent project findings is that field crew coordinators have many other tasks and are spread thin. These overworked and overtasked employees are unable to give their hosted and volunteer groups much time or attention. Safety hazards are a result and increase Forest Service liability.

## Interorganizational Relationships: Not a New Idea

Hosted partnerships and the use of volunteers are not just the result of downsizing. The literature refers to such partnerships as interorganizational relationships, called IORs (Hall 1991). All organizations have relationships with other agencies. Some are trivial and others are very important. These relationships are designed so organizations can help each other. They present a means of adapting to, rather than simply responding to, pressures on the organizations (Metcalf 1976). Several reasons for the development of IORs have been identified in previous research. The reasons include legal, political, technical, economic, demographic, and cultural (Hall 1991).

## Weak Relationships With Outside Organizations

As budget cuts and downsizing continue, the number of IORs increases (Hall 1991). As the number of relationships with IORs rises in an organization (such as when Forest Service coordinators work with many types of hosted programs and volunteer groups), the quality of each relationship is weakened. This problem is illustrated by limited resources. Few Forest Service employees are able to work with these new workgroups. Other resources, such as money, tools, and safety equipment are limited. Most IORs in the Forest Service are not receiving the careful attention or help they need.

## *Research Specific to Volunteers and Hosted Programs*

Previous and current research has explored specific issues related to the IORs affiliated with the Forest Service (these include volunteers and employment programs for seniors, youth groups, and criminal offenders). A great deal of research has explored volunteer motivation and retention in organizations (Gora and Nemerowicz 1991; Clary, Snyder, and Ridge 1992; Grube and Piliavin 2000). Literature has also focused on the vulnerability of older Americans to insufficient wages and other exploitation in the work environment (Soumerai and Avon 1983; Golden 1990; Morrison 1986; Kahne 1985). Youth group community-based programs (Wardell 1988) and work-release programs for juvenile and adult offenders (Turner and Petersilia 1996) have also received a fair amount of attention. Although this research is valid and remains an important aspect of this project, it is not the focal point of our findings and will not be discussed in further detail.

## *Coordinators' Work Roles Are Not Clearly Defined*

The most pressing issue identified by this project is the undefined and confusing role of hosted program and volunteer coordinators. All coordinators expressed concern about the ambiguity of their role as coordinator because of their lack of training and their other duties. Role ambiguity and role conflict have been demonstrated to be indicators of job stress (O'Driscoll and Beehr 1994) and of unsatisfactory outcomes, such as safety errors (Toffler 1981). Role ambiguity results when employees lack clear information about what is expected of them as far as tasks, responsibility, and behavioral norms connected to their position. Role conflict occurs when the expectations of the organization have been communicated, but the expectations are incongruent with those of the role occupant or when the expectations of each role are incompatible (Kahn and others 1964; Graen 1976; Van Sell, Brief, and Schuler 1977). Organizations can reduce stress through such practices as clearly defining tasks, objectives, and job responsibilities, and setting realistic goals for the employee (Bryan 1996).

## *Decreasing Job Stress, Maintaining Safety, and Reducing Liability in the Forest Service*

The primary functions carried out by coordinators are often unrelated to working with volunteers and hosted workgroups. Forest Service coordinators say their roles are not well defined. Two steps need to be taken to clarify the coordinator's roles:

- Examine the relationship between the coordinators' perceptions of their roles and how these roles are defined formally on districts.

- Explain how a coordinator's role relates to volunteer and hosted programs.

These two steps are critical for decreasing safety risks and liability in the field.

Working with hosted crews and volunteers is often collateral to the coordinators' primary duties. For most, it is not an assigned role but a variety of tasks that they do when they can find the time. The findings of this project and past research indicate that more attention needs to be directed to defining the coordinator's role and clarifying how the coordinator fits into volunteer and hosted programs. The main findings of this project all point to the critical importance of the relationship between the coordinator and volunteer and hosted programs to ensure that safety standards are established through training and enforced in the field.

# Recommendations

The original project, **The Supervisor and the Work Crew Update**, should be terminated. Since the inception of the original project, the traditional seasonal workforce has all but disappeared from the Forest Service. Fire suppression crews are an exception to this trend. Districts now rely almost exclusively on hosted groups and volunteers to get work done. Few people are now supervising traditional seasonal crews. Training supervisors for traditional crews is not a top priority.

The primary concern of Forest Service field-crew coordinators has shifted to managing hosted and volunteer labor on districts. The project team recommends a new project to create a handbook and possibly a video as tools to train Forest Service employees in coordinating and organizing these new kinds of workers. These materials should clarify coordinators' multiple roles and suggest ways of resolving the safety and liability problems faced by coordinators of hosted and volunteer workgroups. The project should focus on developing training materials to assist coordinators and on clarifying the roles coordinators could play.

The Forest Service National T&D Steering Committee on Safety and Health ranked this recommendation its number-one funding priority during its March 20, 2001, meeting in Denver, CO. Work to produce the training programs started in October 2001.

# References


Bryan, Sue. 1996. Work-related stress: an ethical perspective. Business Ethics. 5 (2): 103–108.

Clary, E.G., Snyder, Mark; Ridge, Robert. 1992. Volunteers' motivations: a functional strategy for the recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers. Nonprofit Management and Leadership. 2 (4): 333–350.

Curtis, Russell L., Jr. 1989. Cutbacks, management, and human relations: meanings for organizational theory and research. Human Relations. 42(8): 671–689.

Driessen, Jon. 1969. Topical analysis: a method for collecting, classifying, and developing concepts and models from narrative data. In: The Trip. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado. Dissertation.

Driessen, Jon. 1986. Supervisor and the work crew. Missoula, MT: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center.

Driessen, Jon. 1996. Making a crew. Missoula, MT: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center. Videocassette.

Driessen, Jon. 1997. Raymond L. Gold's ethnographic method in sociology. Qualitative Inquiry. 3(4): 387–402.

Driessen, Jon. 1997. A changing Forest Service work culture: training crew leaders. Tech. Rep. 9767-2816-MTDC. Missoula, MT: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center.

Glaser, Barney; Strauss, Anselm. 1967. The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research. Chicago: Aldine.

Golden, L. 1990. Employment and marginalization of older workers. In: Doeringer, P.B., ed. Bridges to retirement. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Gora, Jo Ann; Nemerowicz, Gloria. 1991. Volunteer: initial and sustaining motivations in the service to the community. Research in the Sociology of Health Care. 9: 233–246.

Graen, George B. 1976. Role-making processes within complex organizations. In: Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Grube, Jean A.; Piliavin, Jane Allyn. 2000. Role identity, organizational experiences, and volunteer performance. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. 26(9): 1108–1119.

Hall, Richard H. 1991. Organizations: structures, procedures, and outcomes. 5th ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

Kahn, Robert L.; Wolfe, Donald M.; Quinn, Robert P.; Snoek, J. Diedrick; Rosenthal, Robert A. 1964. Organizational stress: studies in role conflict and ambiguity. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Kahne, H. 1985. Reconceiving part-time work. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld.

Leicht, Kevin T. 1998. Work (if you can get it) and occupations (if there are any)? What social scientists can learn from procedures of the end of work and radical work place change. Work and Occupations. 25(1): 36–48.

Metcalf, J.L. 1976. Organizational strategies and interorganizational networks. Human Relations. 29(4): 327–343.

Morrison, M. H. 1986. Work and retirement in an older society. In: Pifer, A.; Bront, L., eds. Our aging society: paradox and promises. New York: NY: W.W. Norton and Co.

Muhr, Thomas. 1997. Atlas ti. Berlin: Scientific Software Development.

O'Driscoll, M.; Beehr, T. 1994. Supervisors' behaviors, role stressors and uncertainty as predictors of personal outcomes for subordinates. Journal of Organizational Behavior. 15: 141–155.

Rubin, I.S. 1984. Marasmus or recovery? The effects of cutbacks in federal agencies." Social Scientist Quarterly. 65: 74–88.

Shaw, James B.; Barrett-Power, Elaine. 1997. A conceptual framework for assessing organizations, work-group, and individual effectiveness during and after downsizing. Human Relations. 50(2): 109–127.

Soumerai, S. B.; Avon, J. 1983. Perceived health, life satisfaction, and activity in urban elderly: a controlled study of the impact of part-time work. Journal of Gerontology. 38: 356–362.

Toffler, Barbara Ley. 1981. Occupational role development: the changing determinants of outcomes for the individual. Administrative Science Quarterly. 26: 396–418.

Turner, Susan; Persilia, Joan. 1996. Work release in Washington: effects of recidivism and corrections costs. Prison Journal. 76(2): 138–164.

Van Sell, Mary; Brief, Arthur P.; Schuler, Randall S. 1977. Role conflict and role ambiguity: a review and synthesis of the literatures. Working Paper Series. No. 76-30A. Ames, IA: University of Iowa.

Wardell, Patrick J. 1988. The implications of changing interorganizational relationships and resource constraints for human services: a case study. Administration in Social Work. 12(1): 89–105.

## *About the Authors*

**Allison Lamphier** received her graduate degree in sociology from the University of Montana in 2001 after completing this project. She lives in Billings, MT, where she works for the State of Montana Department of Health and Human Services Child Support Enforcement Division. In addition to her full-time work, Allison serves in the Montana Air National Guard.

**Jon Driessen** received his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Colorado in 1969. Until 2000, he was a full-time professor of sociology at the University of Montana. Since 1977, he has also worked as a faculty affiliate at the Missoula Technology and Development Center. His most recent project has been the production of a series of personal safety training modules. Module 1, *Personal Safety Awareness in Remote Work Locations,* was released in 2001.

## *Library Card*

Lamphier, Allison; Driessen, Jon. Problems faced by Forest Service coordinators of volunteer and hosted workgroups. Tech. Rep. 0167–2841–MTDC. Missoula, MT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center. 22 p.

Forty USDA Forest Service field crew supervisors from four Forest Service regions in the United States were interviewed to gain a greater understanding of the current changes in the Forest Service fieldwork culture and the problems new kinds of field crews (volunteers and hosted workgroups) created for supervisors. Several major themes, identified as current problems by supervisors, were discussed during the interviews. The themes included: downsizing and budget cuts, branching out (or the shift in the way the Forest Service carries out its mission), and new types of workgroups consisting of volunteers and members of hosted programs. These new types of workgroups were identified by supervisors as a new labor force for the Forest Service. Supervisors working with hosted programs and volunteers expressed several common safety and liability concerns as well as specific problems associated with specific volunteer and hosted groups. The report includes recommendations for a training program that will teach Forest Service employees how to organize and coordinate these new kinds of workers.

Keywords: legal liability, safety at work, supervision, training

**For additional technical information, contact Jon Driessen at:**
USDA FS, Missoula Technology and Development Center
5786 Hwy. 10 West
Phone: 406–329–3931
Fax: 406–329–3719
E-mail: *jdriessen@fs.fed.us*

**Electronic copies of MTDC's documents are available on the Internet at:**
*http://www.fs.fed.us/eng/t-d.php?link=pubs*