

2020 USDA Forest Service Volunteers & Service Award Recipients

In fiscal year 2020, the U. S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service engaged over 67,300 volunteers and service participants to “care for the land and serve people.” Although a 36 percent decline from 2019 outcomes, the continued engagement of the public to steward public lands during a pandemic was heartwarming and exceeded expectations. The 3 million hours they contributed represented the work of 1,718 full time employees. The economic value of their service is \$79 million. Their efforts addressed high priorities including trail maintenance and improvements, citizen science monitoring, visitor services and volunteer coordination. Volunteers and service participants were particularly impactful to Forest Service efforts to facilitate safe access for record breaking numbers of visitors during the pandemic. Nominees included volunteers, groups and partnerships and/or other participants such as interns and resource assistants. Congratulations to the 2020 Volunteers & Service Award winners for their outstanding contributions to the Forest Service mission and the Forest Service staffs who made it possible for the public to continue to serve safely.

Citizen Stewardship & Partnerships

Rocky Mountain Wild, White River National Forest, Rocky Mountain Region



Increasing volunteerism and cooperation among multiple organizations to assess American Pika on the White River National Forest is citizen science at its best. On the most visited national forest in the country, Rocky Mountain Wild successfully coordinated the work of over 100 volunteers who contributed 3,700 hours and conducted 142 pika occupancy surveys. The American pika is a focal species to indicate alpine system integrity. Evidence from the surveys suggests that pika are widespread and trends are stable across the forest.

Partner volunteers Tehri Parker, Megan Mueller and Alex Wells prep to begin a pika survey. Photo courtesy of Rocky Mountain Wild.

Cultural Diversity

Kiley Heth & Josh Orem--YCC Angoon, Tongass National Forest, Alaska Region



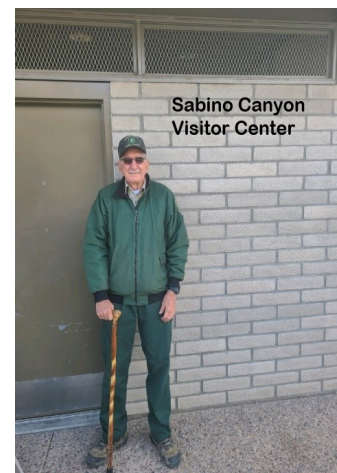
As resource assistants, Kiley and Josh coordinated and led the 8 member Angoon Youth Conservation Corps crew of Alaskan Native teenagers on wilderness stewardship projects for 4 summers straight. Their sustained engagement has resulted in stronger ties between the forest and the community of Angoon and more diverse work and learning opportunities for tribal youth. Kiley and Josh earned special hiring eligibility for Forest Service permanent positions. Josh was subsequently hired by the Forest Service in Special Uses using the Resource Assistants Program direct hire authority.

Angoon YCC crew and coordinators at South Arm of Chaik Bay on Admiralty Island in the Kootznoowoo Wilderness. Photo courtesy of Josh Orem.

Enduring Service

Dewey Howard, Coronado National Forest, Southwest Region

At 80 years of age, Navy veteran, Dewey Howard, continues to regularly volunteer 40+ hours weekly on the Coronado National Forest’s Santa Catalina Ranger District (SCRD). Dewey applies his engineering background and institutional knowledge to creatively solve complex problems. He is the “go to” for everything from technical support and volunteer coordination to facility maintenance and recreation management. Since beginning his volunteer career with the Forest Service in 1999, Dewey has contributed over 10,000 hours and has become a core and valued member of the SCR D staff.



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

Leadership

Friends of the Red River Gorge, Daniel Boone National Forest, Southern Region



The Friends of the Red River Gorge (FORRG) was founded to increase cooperation among volunteer groups devoted to the stewardship of the Red River Gorge in the Daniel Boone National Forest. This new non-profit resulted in more than 1,000 volunteer hours in 2020, their start-up year. Volunteer projects focused on information sharing, interpretive services, and water quality improvement.

Friends of Red River Gorge greet visitors to the Gorge and share information. Photo courtesy of Forest Service.

Alberto Rivera, El Yunque National Forest, Southern Region



A reliable volunteer over many years, Mr. Rivera sensed an opportunity to promote volunteerism among the increasing visitors to the El Yunque National Forest. Working with local organizations he leveraged this increased capacity to put visitors to work on a trail volunteer project while they enjoyed the outdoors. His efforts resulted in 124 visitors contributing 868 hours to clear 165,792 feet of trail and plant 160 trees and shrubs and led to a new partnership with Love in Motion to continue and expand the Trails Volunteer Program on the forest.

Alberto Rivera with volunteers on the Bisley Trailhead. Photo courtesy of Forest Service.

Restoration

Mariposa Trails, Sierra National Forest, Pacific Southwest Region



Mariposa Trails was among the first volunteer groups to get back to maintaining hiking trails during the pandemic and worked with forest staff to develop COVID-19 safety protocols and risk assessments for volunteers. In 2020, Mariposa Trails recruited new volunteers and contributed 900 hours to make repairs to the Hite Cove Trail that had been closed for two years, and is now open because of the partner's commitment to improve access.

Mariposa Trails volunteers take a break from work on the Hite Cove Trail. Photo courtesy of Mariposa Trails.