

Poudre Wilderness Volunteers 2013 Fact Sheet

Poudre Wilderness Volunteers (PWV) is a Larimer County, Colorado nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1996 to assist the Canyon Lakes Ranger District of the United States Forest Service in managing and protecting the wilderness and backcountry areas within its jurisdiction. To achieve this mission, PWV recruits, trains, equips, and fields citizen volunteers to serve as wilderness rangers and hosts for the purpose of educating the public, and provides other appropriate support to these wild areas.

PWV has grown substantially and diversified since its founding and is considered to be one of the largest, most effective organizations of its kind in the nation.

The Need

- Federal appropriations for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are no longer sufficient to cover the costs of forest management. The USFS no longer has enough staff to adequately patrol and monitor the Wilderness and backcountry trails in our area.
- Backcountry use continues to rise, reflecting population growth and demographic changes along the Front Range and elsewhere in the nation. A recent National Survey on Recreation and the Environment reported that backpacking had grown in popularity by 73%, hiking by 93% and bird watching by 155%. In 2005, the Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests were visited by 5.2 million people, the second highest number of visits to a National Forest in the nation.
- Many backcountry users have no idea what a designated Wilderness is or why it must be left “untrammeled” by man. A majority of them know very little about low-impact camping. If there is nobody to guide visitors in Wilderness use, some of our Wilderness areas will become so heavily impacted that additional restrictions on public use will have to be imposed.

The Concept

- Most duties of a USFS ranger can be assumed by carefully chosen, well-trained citizen volunteers. PWV recruits citizens who fully represent our community

and those who use our region's outdoor resources. Members commit to a minimum of six days of service each year "hiking or riding with a purpose."

- PWV members have no law enforcement authority but use education and diplomacy to promote compliance with Wilderness and backcountry regulations and Leave No Trace principles.
- PWV members wear uniform shirts with identifying patches and name badges that make them a highly visible non-official U.S. Forest Service presence on the trails. They typically carry two-way radios and/or SPOT satellite communicators, and are trained to handle various emergency situations that might be encountered in the backcountry.
- PWV is an all-volunteer organization with no paid staff.

The Results

PWV has grown from 110 founding members in 1996 to **273 active members in 2013**.

Poudre Wilderness Volunteers currently patrol 286 miles along 69 system trails in 650,000 acres of Wilderness and general National Forest and National Grassland lands.

Due in part to PWV's efforts:

- The most heavily used Wilderness areas are cleaner, the numbers of illegal campsites and fire rings have declined, and the number of dogs off leash in Wilderness has decreased
- When there were no USFS funds or personnel to clear trails in early summer, PWV established a **Trail Crew**
- When the U.S. Forest Service was unable to meet its goals for controlling/eradicating noxious weeds, PWV established a **Weed Crew**
- When the USFS added a Kids in the Woods emphasis, PWV established a **Kids in Nature Program**
- When wildfires and floods ravaged the Canyon Lakes Ranger District, PWV established a **Restoration Program**
- Lost hikers have been found, and potential forest fires have been averted by prompt actions of our volunteers
- PWV members make an effort to talk about leash benefits and requirements with every dog owner they encounter in the Wilderness, addressing the most difficult educational task facing PWV
- PWV provides the most informative statistics on trail and Wilderness use that the Canyon Lakes Ranger District has had in years

Since 2005, PWV has donated a total of **174,243 volunteer hours**, worth **\$3,540,535** to the USFS.

In September of 2013, widespread flooding damaged or destroyed roads and trails, restricting or preventing access to most of the areas that PWV typically patrols.

Despite the floods, in 2013 PWV:

1. Conducted a total of **868 trail patrols** and had **meaningful contacts with 9,869** of the **15,934** Wilderness and backcountry users seen
2. Removed or rehabilitated **187 illegal or inappropriate fire rings**
3. Reported **674 violations** and contacted **364 violators** using the *Authority of the Resource Technique* and explaining *Leave No Trace* or other reasons for the regulations
4. Carried out **774 pounds of trash**
5. Removed **927 fallen trees** along over 150 miles of trail
6. The PWV Weed Crew **pulled noxious weeds on 165 acres** of National Forest lands
7. The PWV **Restoration Program** organized and implemented a trail restoration work day on the Young Gulch Trail that involved **29** members of the public
8. The PWV **Kids in Nature** program expanded significantly: 9 hikes, 107 kid-days, **70 different kids**
9. Additionally, other PWV programs (e.g., **Adopt-a-Trail, Adopt-a-Highway, and Winter Patrolling**) contributed environmental stewardship and public outreach via various activities
10. Contributed a total of **22,311 volunteer hours**, worth **\$493,962** to the USFS

Given that PWV expenditures in 2013 totaled \$11,645 - every dollar spent by PWV provided over \$42 of value to the USFS

The Future

As population growth along the Front Range results in more and more backcountry use by the public, PWV needs to keep pace; adding new volunteers each year to assure adequate coverage of the District's many popular trails throughout the summer.

We continue to seek public and corporate support to meet our modest operating costs and to provide volunteers with appropriate training, essential equipment and emergency gear, and uniforms to make members easily identified while on patrol, even in rainy or cold weather.

A Different Organization

PWV and its members have gained regional (1997, 2009, 2012, & 2013 *Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award*; 2008 *Colorado Weed Management Association Outstanding Volunteer Efforts Award*, 2011 *United Way of Larimer County Senior Volunteer Excellence Award*) and national (2010 *Take Pride in America Award for Non-profit Organizations*, 2010 *University of Phoenix National Points of Light Volunteer Leader Award*) attention as a different kind of environmental organization, which has:

- No political or hidden agendas. Our single purpose is to protect the region's Wilderness and backcountry areas through public education. We are not an environmental advocacy group.
- The most rigorous and comprehensive training of any volunteer group of its kind.
- No other organization providing volunteer rangers for the U.S. Forest Service has as many members, provides as many hours on the trail, or does so much without any paid staff.

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