

New Hampshire State Parks Volunteer Program



VOLUNTEER

Year In Review:

2014

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“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart.” - Elizabeth Andrew

Overview:

2014 was a year of growth; of establishing legitimacy and building a foundation for a Program that was largely unable to be supported from an Administrative level until late 2013.

The only other previous solely dedicated Volunteer Program Coordinator for NH State Parks filled the position briefly; for about 11 months from 2010-2011. She was successful in that short time to establish some policies, forms, and procedures, but did not have time to grow the Program past that stage.

The focus word of the Volunteer Program in 2014 was inconsistency. If we were not able to establish consistent expectations, procedures, and understanding on both the Volunteer and Field Staff level, then the Program would not have found traction, stalling on any potential progress.

2014 was also the time to refocus on supporting, rebuilding, and nurturing relationships with Friends Groups and Volunteer Crews. While work was done to make progress with existing and some new *individual* volunteers throughout the year, much of my time was spent focused on groups. I attended dozens of meetings throughout the year, introducing myself, my role, and establishing a new direction.

Importantly, we are in the process of finalizing Memorandums of Agreements with two groups and have either completed signed Volunteer Group Agreements or are in the process of completing the agreements with many others. Much time was spent over the past year renovating the entire MOA template, providing a more workable, and consistent document for future use.

Last winter, I met with select Park Operations staff, including Regional Supervisors, to engage them in dialogue about what the Volunteer Program could do to benefit their Parks and to get their feedback and input on procedures and forms and to find out what I can do better to support them and their staff in utilizing volunteers to improve Parks and user experience.

As a result of our meetings, Volunteer forms were modified, and the application process was defined, understood, and followed by staff and volunteers alike this year; a significant accomplishment at this stage.

Overall, the Volunteer Program saw a 326% spike in reported volunteer hours in calendar year 2014 compared to 2013. Some of this increase can be attributed to existing volunteers now having a concrete single place to send reports to and someone was requesting the reports, (while underlining their importance), but we also saw an increase in Volunteer activity as well.

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”- Winston Churchill

Highlights:

- Reported Volunteer hours increased more than three times in 2014, compared to 2013.
- Volunteer hours gave DRED the equivalent value of over \$194,000 of time.
- Multiple Events provided further volunteer opportunities and partnership cooperatives, including National Public Lands Day, National Trails Day, and two significant volunteer events with the Society For The Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF).
- The Belknap Range Trails Tenders (BRaTTs) received a Spirit of New Hampshire Award for their service within the Belknap Range, which includes trail maintenance at Belknap and Mt. Major State Forests. Nomination was submitted by the Volunteer Program Coordinator.
- Groundwork was laid for two new potential Friends/Volunteer Groups in Spofford (Pierce Island State Reservation) and Franconia Notch (Profile Plaza).
- A large volunteer effort at Monadnock State Park concluded with a complete overhaul and renovation of the Visitor Center which was celebrated with a re-opening ribbon cutting ceremony attended by State Officials and other notable guests.
- Held the first ever Volunteer Chainsaw Safety Certification classes, in collaboration with the Division of Forests & Lands (August 2nd at Pisgah State Park and November 15th at Bear Brook State Park). Members of three different Volunteer Groups were certified.
- Friends of the Pemi- Livermore Falls Chapter provided new picnic tables and fire grilles on the beach side, co-hosted a trash clean-up day with Plymouth State University, provided visitor information, held a public visioning session in March, provided a vital bridge to the community and local police for support, and advised the Division on future plans, raising funds and awareness.
- The Friends of the Wapack conceived and received approval to open a new hiking trail on Temple Mountain Reservation (Beebe Trail), which was completed this Fall.
- The Friends of the Wapack also rebuilt the historic picnic shelter at the summit of South Pack Monadnock in Miller State Park (picture below).
- The Blue Ocean Society volunteers removed 2,125 pounds of garbage from Seacoast Parks.
- The Volunteer Program Coordinator attended the National Association of State Park Volunteer Coordinators (NASPVC) Conference hosted by Kansas State Parks (October 21-23 in Lawrence, KS), joining State Park Volunteer Coordinators from 23 other States.
- The Volunteer Program Coordinator became an active member of the New Hampshire Association of Volunteer Administrators (NHAVA).

- The Volunteer Program Coordinator participated, by invitation, on the selection committee for the "Spirit of New Hampshire Awards" through VolunteerNH.
- Provided direct support to the Division of Forests & Lands in managing volunteers on their parcels as requested and directed by their administration. F&L adopted the same procedures and forms for Volunteers being used by the Division of Parks and Recreation.
- The NH State Parks Volunteer Coordinator gave the Guest Speaker presentation at the Granite State Carriage Association's Annual Banquet in Manchester (February 23rd).
- Met with and explored expanded or new partnership opportunities with numerous organizations, including the White Mountain National Forest, SPNHF, Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Monadnock Conservancy, The Stewardship Network- New England, Old Man Legacy Fund, White Mountains Community College, the Jolly Rovers Trail Crew, NEMBA-Brattleboro/Keene Chapter, and the Spofford Lake Association.
- Encouraged, supported, and participated in meetings between user groups and the Division; particularly at Bear Brook State Park, resulting in improved and more effective communication between the groups and with DRED.
- A year-long review and research project resulted in a renovated Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) template which will be used as the basis for all agreements moving forward within the Division and its Bureaus. The first two MOAs featuring this new template are nearing signatures.



Chainsaw Safety Training at Pisgah State Park



The renovated picnic shelter roof at Miller State Park

*"But a life lived for self will soon be destroyed by death;
only a life lived for others leaves behind permanent results."*- Albert Einstein

2014 Events:

Earth Day- April 22:

12 park staff members from both Park Operations and Park Administration assisted in painting over graffiti and trash removal at Odiorne State Park's historic Military Bunkers. Participants included Commissioner Rose and Director Bryce.



Clean-up Day at Mt. Major State Forest- May 4:

Partnered with SPNHF, Prospect Mountain High School, and the Belknap-Range Trail Tenders to provide over 140 hours of trail maintenance and graffiti removal on Mt. Major.



National Trails Day, June 7:

9 volunteer events hosted by 7 groups on 8 different DRED properties, open to the public, resulting in over 400 hours of volunteer trail maintenance.



Monadnock Trails Week, July 11-15:

Partnered with SPNHF and Monadnock State Park. 868 hours of work on 5 hiking trails from over 60 participants.



National Public Lands Day, September 27:

Partnered with park staff, Belknap Range Conservation Coalition, and Student Conservation Association to bring interpretive educational programming to 6 properties (Monadnock, Mt. Washington, Bear Brook, Pawtuckaway, Umbagog, and Mt. Major) that brought the story of the parks and NPLD to over 200 people.

“There are many wonderful things that will never be done if you don’t do them.”- Charles D. Gill

On DRED property	# of Reported Volunteer Hours	\$ Value of Reported Hours
2013	3, 208	\$59,605
2014	10,456	\$194,273

Reported Volunteer Hours Contributions on DRED lands Honorable Mentions, 2014:

Belknap Range Trail Tenders- 625 hours

The Cohos Trail Association- 461 hours

Monadnock State Park Trail Adopters and Individual Volunteers- 1,400 hours

Cardigan Highlanders Volunteer Trail Crew- 421 hours

Chesterfield Gorge Natural Area Volunteers- 375 hours

Friends of Pisgah State Park- 330 hours

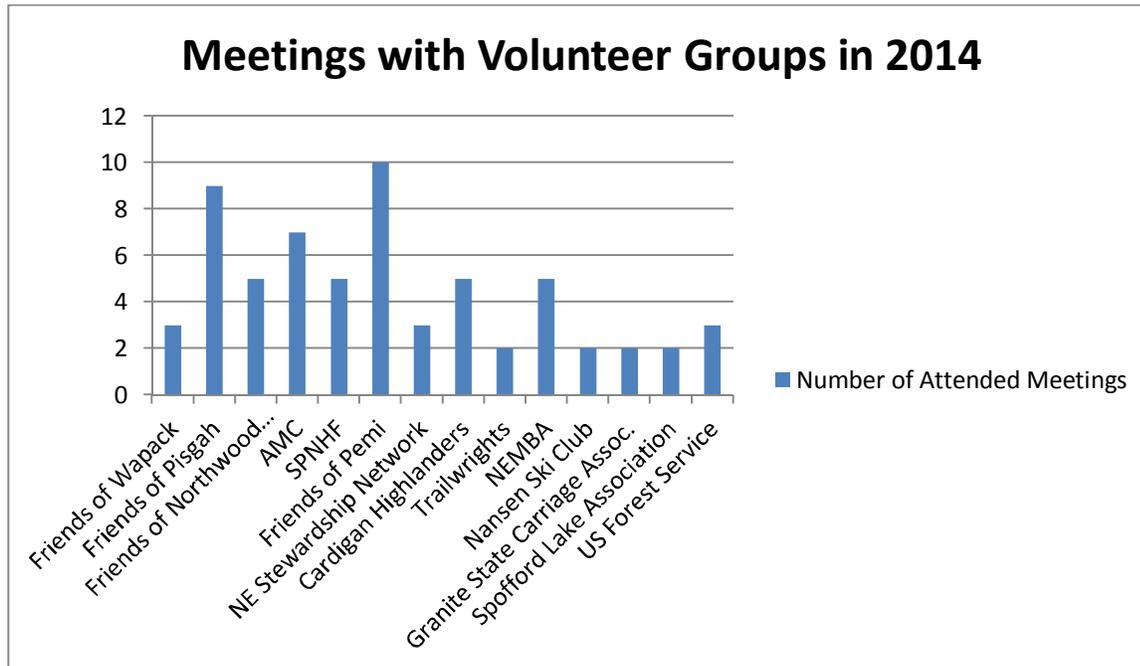
Seacoast Science Center- 1,156 hours

Blue Ocean Society- 1,014 hours

Events partnered with The Society For The Protection of NH Forests- 948 hours

“The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contributions. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically.”- Kurek Ashley

Meetings-



During the year, I met, in person, with 27 different volunteer groups, Friends Groups, and other partnering organizations; this is in addition to dozens of phone call conversations. Some of these groups meet monthly (Friends of Pisgah, Friends of Northwood Meadows), semi-monthly (Friends of the Pemi, Nansen Ski Club, Friends of the Wapack, Trailwrights-NH, Monadnock-Sunapee Greenway Trail Club), and others annually (Belknap Range Trail Tenders).

These meetings with groups from all over the State that are regularly involved with supporting our Parks has provided routine, consistent, and effective streamlined dialogue and communication between the Division and the Volunteers. It also gave the Division insight to the needs, views, and ideas for direction within our properties, and provided a stronger link to our local communities.

Some meetings also involved onsite visitation and review of trail conditions, layout, and future management. For example, I had 7 different site visitations at Livermore Falls during the year. The Friends Group was able to install new picnic tables, fire grilles, and the Division is planning for expanding parking opportunities, historic signage, and improved access as a result of these meetings.

“Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one person can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills, misery, ignorance, and violence. Few will have the greatness to bend history, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. And in the total of all those acts will be written the history of a generation.” – Robert F. Kennedy

Summary:

Of the 10,000+ hours in reported volunteerism in State Parks and Forests, the majority of them revolved around trail work and trail maintenance on non-motorized trails.

Due to the necessity to care for the resource, which Park Operations staff do not often have the availability or skill in maintaining, volunteer efforts are concentrated in this area.

Volunteer Groups and Trail Adopters were issued Field Books (published by the Appalachian Trail Conference) to reference, in addition to “Best Management Practices”, to establish consistency in diagnosing and solving problems on the trails.

Looking ahead, non-motorized trail maintenance will continue to be a much-needed aspect of our Volunteer Program with the understanding that the majority of our existing Volunteer Groups working with the Divisions specialize in this task.

In addition to our Volunteer Groups, Monadnock State Park has previously and continues to manage a growing and successful “Adopt-A-Trail” Program that added an annual average of 500 hours of trail maintenance that would not have occurred otherwise since 2012. This past year, we worked with the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) to implement a similar program at Bear Brook State Park. The “Adopt-A-Trail” program at Bear Brook will likely grow past the 5 adopters we worked with in 2014 (adding another ~80 hours of trail maintenance).

The USFS implemented trailhead hosts this past year at three locations (including the Bridle Path at FNSP), which resulted in contacts with over 16,000 visitors (928 of which changed plans based on information provided to them by volunteers).

We see a tremendous opportunity to not only provide information and meaningful interaction with visitors, particularly in unstaffed, but popular trailheads, but to also focus on impact towards preventative care, potentially drawing down the needs of search and rescue in these locations by influencing visitors to change or re-consider planned routes, grabbing extra gear, or providing valuable insight or access to maps.

“No one has ever become poor by giving.” - Anne Frank

Looking Ahead:

In 2015, diversity will be the focus word for the Volunteer Program.

Especially on an individual volunteer front, there is room for much growth, both in capacity and volume. However, we are still not yet in a stage where a mass recruitment can take place. The Volunteer Program's foundation and scopes are still growing and settling, but we can start putting wheels in motion in the coming year to work towards a higher growth spurt.

Currently, aside from valuable trail work, volunteers are additionally involved in clean-up projects and have been utilized to assist with maintenance projects on the grounds.

But volunteers can find meaningful and diverse ways to aid our Parks in rewarding ways that will also enhance visitor experiences that we have yet to explore or take advantage of.

- A widening scope of opportunities has already begun and we will look to expand roles for volunteers this season. Some of the areas of focus will be Trailhead Hosting (Monadnock, Franconia Notch, Crawford Notch State Parks, the latter two partnering with the White Mountain National Forest), Campground Hosting, and other Visitor Service related components to complement the hard work of Operations Staff.

- Continued chainsaw safety training for volunteers across the State.

- Formal training for trail maintenance, allowing for structure and opportunities for growth in skill to those new to the field of trail work.

- Implementation of a Volunteer Program Handbook with meaningful and consistent information and guidelines, no matter what role volunteers are serving.

- Acquisition of a Volunteer Program Tool Trailer. This will be a mobile unit filled with trail maintenance tools that can be used by Volunteers all over the State. It will be particularly beneficial for Volunteer events and to help in response to storm clean ups.

- Adoption of New Hampshire Trails Day. This day of trail maintenance, typically in mid-July has become nearly extinct over the years. The NH State Parks Volunteer Program has already begun discussions with the groups still involved to utilize the Division's resources to drive and make the State-focused day of trail service meaningful and widely publicized again.

- Improve ways of volunteer recognition. Adoption of an award for State Park Volunteers and holding of an end-of-the-year event is in its earliest stages, but should occur this year.

- Establish better communication and sharing with Volunteers through email newsletter and new, dedicated social media accounts.