

Working with Land Managers

Notes from the partnership workshop at NCTA's 2011 Conference in Dayton, Ohio.

Challenges for Volunteers

- Communication (lack of)-It is hard to get land managers to respond when needed (Passive support)
- There is a perception of conflicting uses of the trail by land managers – especially in WMA
- Issues with liability especially on private lands
- Finding adequate time for land managers and volunteers to work together, most land managers have lives outside of their work so schedules don't always match that of volunteers.
- There can often be an underestimation by the Land Manager regarding the skill levels of volunteers.
- There is no standardization across agencies for the land manager/volunteer relationship. There is no central approach and can greatly depend on the individual land manager and volunteer involved.
- Volunteers experience a lot of waiting
- Often it's hard to find the right land manager staff member to talk to.

Challenges for Land Managers

- Land Managers have to be very process oriented which is often slow and volunteers are much more result/product oriented. There is a large difference in the timeframes that volunteers and land managers operate with.
- Land managers often have a lack of current/updated plans
- Lack of money and staff
- Worry about bureaucracy or what boss wants
- Changeover of land manager staff – this can be fairly frequent and hurts land manager/volunteer relationships
- Are required to abide by laws, processes, NEPA etc.

Best Practices

- Know and follow the proper chain of command for land managing agencies.
- Volunteers should establish their credentials as representatives of the NCTA, a long upstanding organization. This can be supported by peer-to-peer testimonials from other land managers you may have worked with.
- Find volunteer members/recruit individuals with institutional knowledge of land managers and the paperwork/processes they use.

- Relationships would improve if volunteers took time to understand the specific priorities and “job descriptions” of land manager positions before engaging them. For high level positions, the lower level employees are a good resource for this.
- Volunteers should get to know the plan that the land managers are required to work with for the lands they manage.
- NCTA Regional trail coordinators in every state would drastically improve and help facilitate land manager relations.
- Volunteers want help with paperwork.
- A re-establishment of the Trail Council would improve communication between volunteers and land managers.
- Find other friends groups and organizations that may have contacts or a better knowledge of specific land managers. Look for retired DNR/USFS etc. staff to volunteer with us.
- Advertise for those specific skills that we need to work with land managers...partnership coordinators, etc.
- Get involved in the Citizen Advisory Councils like with the Michigan DNR.