

# Your Forest's Volunteer Program: An Important Resource

When I arrived in southern Colorado for a four-month detail as the forest supervisor for the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF), one of the aspects of the forest that was a pleasant surprise for me was the well-developed volunteer and partnership program on the forest. Newly coming into the San Luis Valley, I looked most closely at the Forest Service's partnerships with volunteers as a great place to understand the quality of the connection to the communities that is so important in meeting our mission.

Ten years ago, the RGNF formed a unique and progressive partnership to bolster the volunteerism in the San Luis Valley. The RGNF, along with the Bureau of Land Management San Luis Field Office, formed a cooperative agreement with the non-profit stewardship organization Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC). The agreement created a position for a full-time volunteer program manager to be based in the San Luis Valley and to serve as the volunteer manager for both federal agencies, as well as work in direct coordination with VOC, based in Denver.

Since starting ten years ago, this position has served as an important catalyst for engaging more of the public with their public lands in

hard to create positive connections between the agencies and the Valley's communities. She does this through a number of avenues. One, she identifies, plans, coordinates and implements VOC projects on both the RGNF and the BLM in the Valley. These projects range from 15-person week-long wilderness projects, to 100-person weekend projects that include families and children. Projects include trail construction, trail maintenance, fence removal, habitat improvement or citizen science. These projects begin to take form about a year ahead of when the volunteers arrive on the project scene. Organizing a project for up to 100 people is not an easy task.

Second, the partnership with VOC also extends to training volunteers so they can offer skilled labor on public lands. VOC has a training branch, called the Outdoor Stewardship Institute (OSI), which offers yearly trainings in the Valley in the field of crew leadership, trail adoption, trail construction skills, ecological restoration and even crosscut saw use. Sally manages all aspects of these trainings from

Sally supported and implemented contributed a total of 8,639 hours of volunteer time on public lands which is the equivalent of 4.15 full-time federal employees, or 8.3 seasonal employees. When forest districts often no longer have dedicated trail crews or other seasonal help, this is a resource which cannot afford to be ignored or unsupported by land agencies. Volunteer work contributions to the agencies in 2018 is valued at over \$213,000. When the public volunteers on public lands, they are not just creating personal connections to the places that belong to them, they are giving back in very real and tangible ways.

The Rio Grande National Forest and San Luis Valley at large, is lucky to have a dedicated volunteer program manager. It is a unique role to our Valley and continuing to support this position is a tangible way to continue to support the care of our lands and the forest's obligation to care for public lands on behalf of the people that own them: you.

*Michael Stansberry is the acting forest supervisor on the Rio Grande National Forest.*

determining training locations with agency staff, to recruiting, to implementing the trainings. This spring OSI offered classes at Penitente Canyon on Crew Leadership for Trails, Trail Adoption in the Conejos Canyon and a crosscut saw training at the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, which included support from expert sawyers on the RGNF.

Third, projects are not exclusively run in partnership with VOC. An enormous amount of Sally's time is spent working on locally-based, community volunteerism. Individuals and small groups work directly with Sally to adopt trails, help monitor wildlife, serve as camp hosts for the summer, take care of tools for volunteer use, scout trails and report on conditions, clean-up trash and more. Engaging people on an individual basis to care for their back yards on the forest or BLM is a critical piece of what this position does.

Last year the programs that

## Renowned composer arranges Spanish SLV folk songs at Mt. Blanca Summer Music Conservatory

**DEL NORTE** — Mari Esabel Valverde, an award-winning composer in steady demand across the United States and Canada, has arranged seven folk songs of the San Luis Valley for performances

Mt. Blanca Summer Music Conservatory. Commissioning of these folk songs was funded through an Equity Engagement Grant through the Office of Title V at Adams

# Valley Publishing EARLY DEADLINES!