



February 13, 2018

Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado  
Att: Dean Winstanley & Jason Bertolacci  
600 South Marion Parkway  
Denver, CO 80209

Dear Dean and Jason;

We wanted to follow up with you after our phone call last month regarding the scope of the Statewide Stewardship initiative that VOC is currently conducting. The Organizations welcome the discussion on how to expand the effectiveness of Stewardship efforts in Colorado and believe this project is well timed in relation to the passage of the National Trails Stewardship Act and Sustainable Trails guidance by the USFS. We feel compelled to further address an issue that was only briefly addressed in the call and has been excluded from the scope of the questionnaire despite being well within the scope of the project. Mainly this issue is the importance of the voluntary self-tax that both the summer and winter motorized community of Colorado placed on itself more than 40 years ago. This program transformed the volunteer efforts of the motorized community and changed the traditional paradigm of 10% of volunteers doing 90% of the work to 100% of the users being able to support the 10% of volunteers doing the work. That is a fundamental change to how volunteer stewardship is performed.

The CPW grant program and dedicated funding that resulted from this voluntary self-tax has proven to be a cornerstone to upscaling the effectiveness of volunteers in the motorized community throughout the State and this program has become a national model for maintenance and support of public lands throughout the country. In Colorado approximately 85% of trail mileage is located on federal public lands and this volunteer tax program has been integral to maintaining these opportunities in partnership with what has been consistently identified as one of the largest sources of volunteer labor in the state.

As a result of the voluntary motorized funding sources brought to bear decades ago, a hybrid programs for volunteers has developed that matches the efforts of volunteers with trained and certified staff that are funded through the OHV program and related grants. This volunteer funding has resulted in the State of Colorado having stewardship resources that are unheard of nationally. The USFS Sustainable trails initiative highlighted the precedent setting impacts that have resulted from the voluntary tax imposed by the motorized community as follows:

“A generation ago, nearly every ranger district had its own trail crew, but that is no longer the case. The Forest Service will overcome a significant reduction in field staff by moving from a model of “doing it all” to a model of shared stewardship in order to achieve mutual goals and receive shared benefits.”<sup>1</sup>

As a result of these self-taxes that were voluntarily imposed by the motorized users more than 40 years ago most Ranger Districts in Colorado have a well-equipped trail crew and many districts have two trail crews, one to address summer routes and one to address winter maintenance issues. These benefits are not merely government programs but the direct result of stewardship in the motorized community moving beyond merely relying on volunteer labor for projects. While these voluntary self-tax programs of the motorized community are game changers, they also fall well short of maintaining at levels necessary

When your website was investigated for more information on the Stewardship Initiative, the following goals and objectives were stated:

*“Outdoor volunteerism and volunteer stewardship organizations provide an important source of support in maintaining recreational land use, rehabilitating areas damaged by floods and fire, educating the public about natural resources, and cultivating leaders who care for public lands, but barriers exist. The quality, scalability and impact are hampered by lack of coordination, inconsistent work practices and trust gaps between organizations and land managers.*

- *Land managers lack the capacity to train and deploy volunteers for vital land stewardship projects. Ibid.*
- *Outdoor stewardship organizations lack resources and guidance to improve volunteer training and participation at the scale needed. Ibid.*

### **Our Goals**

1. *Increase the quality and quantity of statewide stewardship projects;*
2. *Increase the collective impact of stewardship organizations by advancing collaborative projects at scale;*
3. *Increase the diversity of stewardship volunteers; and,*
4. *Engender a stewardship ethic in Colorado’s citizens.”*

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<sup>1</sup> See, USDA Forest Service, *National Strategy for a sustainable trail system*; December 30, 2016 at pg. 3.

The Organizations would be remiss if the similarity of these goals and objectives and the reasons that the voluntary registration program was put in place more than 40 years ago were not highlighted. These programs are not merely “agency maintenance” but the result of more than 40 years of effort and resources addressing the most effective way to upscale the volunteer efforts on the ground. This grant program has also highlighted critical pinch points within CPW for stewardship projects and was the driving force behind passage of the Stewardship Organizational immunity legislation passed by the Colorado Legislature in 2014. (SB 17-100). This program has resulted in volunteers and grant funding now being inseparably intertwined for the benefit of on the ground projects.

The Organizations believe that a few examples of how the voluntary taxes have changed the nature of volunteer stewardship on the ground will be highly enlightening and understand how the voluntary winter registration program has increased the quantity and quality of stewardship projects for winter recreation. The winter grooming program that has resulted from voluntary tax funding to the CPW program provides a compelling example of how the registration program has exponentially upscaled the effects of volunteer labor and efforts. This program has resulted in 28 pieces of professional grooming equipment maintaining more than 3,300 miles of trail throughout the state annually. While this program is the sole source of winter maintenance, often the program reduces or stops operations far too early in a heavy snow season due to a lack of funding, despite programmatic funding, volunteer support and significant donations from local communities.

In addition to the assistance provided for the purchase and operation of grooming equipment, the coordination that resulted from the grant program also assisted in the pooling of insurance costs for the local clubs through the State Snowmobile Association. The trails that result from this program every year are the pinnacle of outdoor stewardship as every year there is nothing to start with, the trails are then groomed out of the snowfall and meltaway again in the spring. This level of maintenance is simply beyond the scope of possibility for most Ranger Districts in the country that don’t have a basic trail crew. The following photograph directly illustrates the force multiplication of the efforts of a single volunteer as a result of the winter grooming program.



Clearly any volunteer effort is more effective in creating and maintaining trails with the professional grooming equipment the program now makes available vs. dragging a bed spring behind a double track snowmobile, which was the level of sophistication achieved by volunteers without the voluntary registration program. Attempting to groom the amount of snow pictured above without equipment would be functionally impossible. If the grooming program lost volunteer support or grant program funding from the state, the program would have to be massively scaled back. There is simply no credible argument to be made that this level of winter maintenance could be supported by volunteer labor alone.

The significant headway in creating a stewardship ethic for the state of Colorado that has resulted from the voluntary registration program is directly evidenced by the “Stay the Trail” program. A typical trail side “Stay the Trail” display is below:



The “Stay the Trail” program continues to receive national recognition for its education and ethics programs targeting the motorized trail users with efforts ranging from on-line databases of maps for riding areas throughout the state, development of ethics materials and directly supporting stewardship projects on the ground. As a result of the partnership of volunteers and funding each year STT staffs an average of 65 to 95 individual education/ outreach events. These events yield direct trail user contacts and are often conducted at popular trailheads on public lands. In **2017 over 11,000 direct user contacts were made at education and outreach events.** Over 490 volunteer hours were accumulated in staffing these events. In addition to these educational opportunities, STT completes 10 to 15 individual stewardship projects on public lands. These projects range from clean ups, maintenance, signage, infrastructure, and new construction benefiting public land users as well as agency land managers. In 2017 over 1,150 volunteer hours were accumulated in the completion of stewardship projects.



This program is another example of a hybrid program where volunteer support is leveraged with OHV grant funding resulting from the volunteer tax imposed more than 40 years ago. The OHV grant program provide funding for two full time staff persons that develop and coordinate materials, identify locations and mobilize equipment for education of users around where to ride, when to ride and the general ethics of trail usage. Volunteers are then heavily relied on to support or advance the efforts of staff at locations and as a result far more locations can be staffed throughout the year.

Many of the motorized clubs have utilized the grant program to purchase small equipment, like chainsaw, trailers and rental of equipment. The effectiveness of volunteer labor is again leveraged by the fact that many summer orientated clubs own mechanized maintenance equipment, purchased from the competitive portion of the voluntary summer program, which often works in tandem with volunteer trail maintenance days. This mechanized equipment is simply far more effective at addressing heavier maintenance issues, and can resolve larger maintenance issues in hours rather than the days it would take to address these situations with resources available to most volunteers.



As previously references the voluntary tax program has provided good management crews on most ranger districts throughout the state. These full time seasonal crews are better trained to deal with ongoing maintenance issues or maintenance needs that are more programmatic in nature. Often these maintenance crews function at reduced costs when compared to volunteers due to the streamlined training and insurance requirements. These good management crews further leverage the value of equipment that has been purchased, either directly by the district or obtained at exceptionally low costs through partnerships with local clubs. In many locations the programmatic equipment will be used predominately by a good management crew. These maintenance crew's benefits are further expanded by the fact they expand agency law enforcement capabilities as most crews have an Forest Protection Officer as part of the crew.

The voluntary tax program has also resulted in further benefits to all volunteers, as exemplified with the passage of SB17-100 by the Colorado Legislature last year. This piece of legislation significantly limited the possible liability to volunteers and organizations performing stewardship projects on public lands, after many clubs were no longer able to obtain cost effective insurance for their maintenance operations. This legislation is the pinnacle of leveraging stewardship actions as with its passage every volunteer steward in the state became more effective simply due to lower insurance costs associated with their actions.

The Organizations would like to urge your consideration of the very different model of volunteer stewardship that has resulted from the voluntary passage of the OHV and snowmobile registration programs numerous decades ago as part of the VOC Stewardship efforts. Much of the experiences and transformation of motorized volunteer efforts have directly impacted many of the factors that are sought to be addressed in the study. Failing to learn from the 40 or more years of on the ground experiences in leveraging volunteer stewardship under a very different model than a purely providing labor for projects would be a tragically missed opportunity to leverage volunteers and address stewardship projects in the most effective manner moving forward.

If you have questions please feel free to contact either Scott Jones, Esq. at 508 Ashford Drive, Longmont, CO 80504. His phone is (518)281-5810 and his email is [scott.jones46@yahoo.com](mailto:scott.jones46@yahoo.com).

Respectfully Submitted,



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Cc: BLM, USFS