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Very interesting stuff to hear that broad overview of why people volunteer, where they are right now, and you know, when you hear the statistics of just the sheer numbers of volunteers and volunteer hours to the Forest Service alone, it's a large throw weight that that kind of volunteer service brings to the mission of the service and you're gonna hear more about analysis of volunteer trends within the service and then some very ground-breaking work that Margaret and Chris Komar are gonna report on later on this afternoon. Let me now turn to introducing Lisa Macnic who is the natural resources specialist for the Forest Service in Region 4. Welcome Lisa. Are you on?

Yes I am. Thanks Rich. Sorry. I had to remember to unmute my phone there.

Good. I knew Lisa when she was a young sprout and an undergrad in Clemson, and it's great to see her get such a great job with the Forest Service and she's made contributions in her work to the field now and we expect many more. Lisa joined the Forest Service Intermountain Region Recreation Heritage Wilderness Resources staff as a natural resources specialist in September of this year. She works on the recreation budget, partnerships, national recreation areas, recreation strategy, recruiting, and sustainable operation. She received her doctoral degree from Clemson University, as I said, in recreation resource management and recently completed a two-year presidential management fellowship with the Forest Service, and as part of that fellowship she worked as an active recreation program manager in Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

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Prior to joining the Forest Service, Lisa worked as a researcher in a variety of federal and international agencies including the National Parks Service, the BLM, Parks Canada, and the Department of Forestry in Dominica. She has worked as a volunteer as a peer certifier for the NPS Interpretive Development Program and did trail building and native plant collection for the Australian Trust for Conservation. She has worked as a backpacking and rock climbing guide and is an all around outdoor girl. She also has a _____ master trainer certification. So we're very proud and pleased to welcome Lisa, and take it away.

Well thanks for that introduction Rich. I'm just gonna dive right in. I'll be talking about the volunteer program capacity assessment that was conducted in early 2009, but I wanted to start with a little background about the need for this internal assessment. You heard Jim Bedwell referring to the workshop that was held in 2008 in Salt Lake City, and it was actually titled Building Capacity to Connect People and Nature through Youth, Volunteer, and Hosted Programs. A lot of great work was done there, and at the time, some of the needs for the volunteer program were identified including a better understanding or an assessment of our current program capacity and the potential for capacity so that we can develop and maintain a dynamic program that responds to both the volunteer wants and needs and our Forest Service mission and goals. So how does this internal assessment project move us forward? Well it's really a tool for explicitly recognizing the issues, challenges, and concerns at all levels of the organization that we need to look at for effective program management. As we develop a

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vision and a direction of strategy for the future, having a clearly articulated goal in mind, we're gonna be a lot more effective at targeting and allocating what are fairly scarce resources. If we look at the data for the last few years just in the Forest Service we can see that our volunteer program is pretty big. We've got pretty big numbers, numbers of people, numbers of hours that are volunteered, and a dollar value of work that's been completed, but at the same time we have a program that to some degree held together by some incredibly dedicated people, both Forest Service staff, our partners, and our volunteers who are really struggling to keep some programs going. To a degree, we're not really able to keep up with the demand for volunteer opportunities and we struggle with the consistency in our processes and infrastructure and limited budget like everybody else. So we need to figure out what's not working and how we can build capacity to meet the demand for volunteer opportunities, looking at some of those trends described earlier as well as how we can meet our goals, but I also want to mention the other side of the story, which is the successes that we realize in a program that provides a lot of personal satisfaction for people while it helps realize some greater good, so we need to identify and capitalize on what's really working well. Next slide please?

So the key word on this slide I think is really engage, and you hear people talk about working with volunteers, about hosting, using, managing, coordinating, and then doing all the things that are in the second part of that slide, recruiting, supervising, recognizing, and these elements are critical and we need to do them

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effectively and consistently, but engaging is the difference between just getting stuff done and then creating these opportunities for citizen stewardship, for developing relationships, for offering volunteer opportunities where people can connect with resources to be involved and really start to understand and care about the land and the water and everything else that the Forest Service mission is to care for, and that's where this internal capacity assessment fits. With the great work that's been done by Jim Apshire and Margaret Bailey and Chris Komar, who will be presenting later in this session, I'm gonna talk specifically about the results of a survey that was conducted last year where Forest Service staff and some of our partners shared their thoughts. I particularly want to thank all the participants for taking the time to think about where we are and where we're going and what we need to do to get where we want to go. People were really candid about the problems in the program. They were really excited to share their success stories, and a lot of people out there are looking for ideas and support. But above all, I really got the sense that people were appreciative of the fact that this effort was going forward and recognize that we have a great opportunity to contribute to developing a strategy for the volunteer program success.

So how did we go about this internal assessment and what did we learn? Next slide please? So before even starting to ask questions within the Forest Service, I looked at some of the research on volunteering that was being done by other individuals and organizations including outside organizations like the grant maker

forum on community and national service, the Urban Institute, and even UPS, the United Parcel Service, who did a great set of research a couple years ago, among some other resources. This background research really helps structure some of the questions to ask of our internal staff and provide some information and context to interpret information. Looking at it now, I didn't quite type this slide in the right order. Where I started was with the regional and national level Forest Service program coordinators, conducted informal interviews with these folks to talk about their experiences with the volunteer program, their perceptions of current capacity, needs, current issues, critical issues, and potential direction for the future. Also, we had five partner organizations that were identified by the Forest Service as part of these discussions, and I talked to staff who worked with these groups. They also shared some great insights into the program.

Pulling this all together with the needs identified in the 2008 workshop, I developed a survey for internal Forest Service staff for people who are identified as working with the volunteer program. It's just a 20-question survey directed in three big sections, and the first section focused on the Forest Service staff person's role in managing elements of the volunteer program. we had questions like what's your position title, where do you work, what percentage of your time is spent working with volunteers, youth, and hosted programs and have you had any training for managing volunteers or volunteer programs. The second section of the survey explored how different programs use volunteers, and we asked what kind of work volunteers did, where they worked, whether or not that unit

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worked with a friends group or partners in coordinating activities, and if so, how they coordinated these activities and what we could do better. Finally, we looked at people's perceptions of how the Forest Service could improve its volunteer program capacity, so we asked things like what tools do you use now to build program capacity, what are some of the roadblocks to increasing volunteer capacity, we asked people what kind of training the program offered for volunteers, we asked people to share their thoughts on how the Forest Service program should be managed in the future, and we asked people to identify the critical needs for a successful volunteer program, and we got a lot of information.

So who responded? Well in talking with the regional program managers at the very beginning of this process, I asked for lists of field staff who worked with volunteers, sent them all an E-mail explaining the project and inviting them to participate, and then I invited them to share the survey with other people that they knew who worked in the volunteer program, so we kind of had a modified snowball sampling going on here to try to get as many people involved as possible. About two thirds of the initial respondents answered the survey, and of this group 170 people chose to share their contact information and said yes, I want to be part of this process. I want to work with developing a strategy and moving this program into the future. That's a pretty good base, but it's still not a huge number of people looking at the size of our program and what we've got going on. We had 272 people sharing their thoughts, their hopes, their

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expectations about the program, and I think we got a really good picture of where we are.

We also got the critical issues that came out of this process, and for the rest of this presentation I'm going to go through these areas in a little bit more detail. Classic money and time issues we all deal with, elements of training for the Forest Service, for our volunteers and for our partners, communications, which really underlies everything, administration, we've got some issues of consistency and process, and then I want to wrap up by talking a bit about our partners, where we're at, what we learned, and how we can grow.

So let's move to the next slide please and talk a bit about leadership. There were some common themes that came up when the Forest Service staff had the opportunity to talk about leadership and the volunteer program including the real need for recognition by leadership of the value of volunteers and of the volunteer program. In fact, one out of four of the survey respondents said lack of leadership was a roadblock for their increasing volunteer capacity. The Forest Service staff also identified both the need for program representation at all levels, but they reflected on the difficult decisions that we have to make when we're allocating scarce resources, so there's a desire, for example, for leadership and representation at the national level in the Washington office, but there's also a real desire to put more money on the ground and to have more resources at the local forest and district levels. So there's been a lot of tradeoffs people want to

consider. From the perspective of the survey respondents however, leadership on a district is key. District ranger support and having a strong person in that program management position was the item rated as critically or very important most often in the survey. There are also some successful programs that enjoy really effective and creative leadership support that we need to look at and build on. For example, some of our partners that I talked to said well we have representatives from our friends group that get to go to district leadership team meetings or forest leadership team meetings, and that really helps us all understand what the goals, plans, and limitations are as well as come up with creative ways to move forward. Demonstrating leadership's commitment to volunteers and partners has also been shown, where for example, Forest Service staff can go and attend a partners board meeting or a forest supervisor joins a project for an hour on site, or leadership shows up at a volunteer recognition event. All of these things are happening and they all demonstrate the value of this program and spreading the word about these little things that make a big difference to our volunteers I think is really important. So where do we go with this as part of the strategy? Well, survey respondents had a lot of thoughts, and some of those included having Forest Service leadership clearly articulate the values and beliefs that this agency holds about volunteerism and create a mission or vision statement specific to the volunteer program and then share it widely. We also need to develop program direction and policies that encourage leadership at all levels to explicitly support the volunteer program.

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Okay. Let's talk about resources cuz we all know that scarce resources are part of what we deal with on a day-to-day basis. Managing an effective volunteer program is a commitment that requires financial, administrative, staff time, supervisory, and equipment resources. I looked at some estimates from other volunteer areas, and when you look at the numbers it seems to be that volunteers can cost anywhere from \$350 to \$1200 a year. That's per volunteer depending on the program and how it's run. A number of survey respondents perceive that the Forest Service is really upping expectations for the volunteer program, but at the same time we struggle with decreasing resources and the related ability to manage, but the volunteer capacity management study that was conducted by the Urban Institute in 2004 clearly indicates that investing resources and dedicating staff time to volunteer management is directly related to the success of the volunteer program. There's a positive feedback loop in terms of the benefits we realize. So while it does cost, and we all know that volunteers aren't free, it comes back.

Now across the Forest Service the structure of the volunteer program varies a lot. We have different position descriptions, different percentages of staff time that people get to allocate to the volunteer program, people are at different grade levels and different departments, and most of the Forest Service staff who works with the volunteer program does so as just one part of their job. Only about 10% of respondents that replied to the survey were full-time volunteer program coordinators, and that's across all levels of our organization from district offices

all the way up to the Washington office level. And while it may not be necessary to have a full-time position at every office, most of the respondents indicated they were able to spend less than 10% of their time working with volunteers, so it's a really small piece of a lot of people's busy schedules, and I've been leading up to the fact that some survey respondents indicated that right now they're not purposely seeking to build capacity because they don't feel that they have the resources to manage the current program. We need to figure out how to support them so that they can more effectively integrate volunteers and build this area. We do have potential partners and volunteer groups who would like to become involved in Forest Service activities, but we're just not seeing that we're always able to incorporate them and to manage the program effectively. We've got a lot of suggestions on what we could do moving forward, and they include, for example, structuring our staffing so that we can support career ladder volunteer and partnership coordinator positions. We have people say you know, what we need to do is commit to capturing institutional knowledge. Fill and fund positions before they're vacated and then work on our effective communication, so between volunteer coordinators and from the volunteer side to other areas in the Forest Service and our partners and our volunteers to really talk about how we can make this work better. Okay. Let's go to the next slide please.

Training and communication. Well these are really critical elements, and they came up a lot when people had the chance to talk about the volunteer program. There are two elements here. I'll talk first about training for Forest Service staff.

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73% of people who responded to the survey said nope, haven't had any training for managing a volunteer program or for working with volunteers. So that tells me we need a little bit of work in this area. Those folks who have received training have had everything from on-the-job training or just some handouts to having had the chance to attend specific volunteer workshops or work in partnerships with other agencies to get some training, and this number really parallels some of the findings by Apshire and Bredney from 2007. They found that in a separate survey 70% of respondents who worked as volunteers hadn't had any formal training or education in this area, so this isn't just a one off. This is an area we need to work on. The volunteer program can be really complex. You've got grant and agreement elements, we could have contracting elements, it can be really large in scope. So what's happened is that with a lack of good consistent training we've had some different areas interpreting things and developing their own training resources, which really isn't an efficient use of the scarce resources we do have. There's some duplication here, and it's also great information that isn't accessible to everybody cuz we just don't know about it.

I do want to quickly mention the Volunteers and the Forest Service Coordinators Desk guide that's out there. That was some great work done recently by Lisa Perkins and Bob Beckley from the Missoula Technology and Development Center, so that's a training resource that everybody can access, and that ties to a companion document, which is called Welcome to the Forest Service, a Guide

for Volunteers, so there's some stuff out there, we just need to do a little bit more in terms of getting it into everyone's hands and building on it.

That sort of gives me a little segue into training for volunteers. This element, training for our volunteers, was identified as critically important to a successful volunteer program by more than half of the survey respondents, and most people that answered the survey said yeah, our program offers skill-based training for volunteers, so that's your saw class, your trail building. A small percentage of them also offer leadership training, which is great, but there's a concern that our requirements for volunteer training is really increasing and it really puts a lot of pressure on Forest Service staff to get the program moving forward. Partners can help us with a lot of our training activities and elements. We still need to provide Forest Service resources to ensure that the Forest Service perspective and our safety elements are consistently applied. Again, we had plenty of suggestions from survey respondents, and people said well why don't we have a focused project where we assess and consolidate and update all the bits and pieces of training that are out there and make it accessible for people. Let's talk to our partners and friends groups and take advantage of those opportunities out there to build on the successes that they've had and support the development of a national volunteer database where we can track training and specialized skills so people can use their specialized skills in their volunteer experience, among many other ideas. But in these suggestions, as in others that came up, there was really a common theme and that was communication. From staff not always

knowing who to call with questions to our not necessary effectively publicizing accomplishments, the Forest Service has been somewhat inconsistent with our internal and external communication about the volunteer program. So as one survey respondent said, and here's a little quote here, we don't really know who's doing what. Sometimes in areas that are 50 miles apart, it's kind of a mystery. The issue here is our inefficiency in managing information and then communicating effectively in response to program, partner, and participant needs. So if we're not doing that as well as we could, how could we even imagine that we're effectively communicating about the program to people who aren't directly involved, those potential volunteers. Similar to the training issue, we've got several areas across the country developing their own databases for communication for information and tracking, and we've got some real initiative going. There's some great opportunities to build on that and coordinate some effective communication programs that we will have to invest in identifying them and effectively talking about communications, effectively communicating about communications. Some of the suggestions that we've had from our Forest Service staff and partners included enhancing our internal website, partnering amongst different Forest Service areas and working with their outside partners to host things like the national conference every three years or to host future training sessions. Whether it's in person, on a webinar, or on line, we need to emphasize the need to enter and track consistent and accurate data so that we can communicate, we can find things to talk about that really tells people what

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our programs are all about, tell people what they can do, what we're doing, what's going on. Next slide please?

I'm going to open this section with kind of an unflattering quote. This is one of the warts that Jim Bedwell mentioned earlier at the beginning of this session is another quote from someone kind of off the cuff, but they said to me, the administrative processes we've developed are just a nightmare. Now that's one person's perspective, but that's a pretty pervasive theme in that our processes aren't working as well as they could for us and for our partners. So for example, with our grants and agreements processes, sometimes there's inconsistent interpretation and application where actions that are approved and accepted in some areas aren't approved by others, and we get some reinterpretation of authorities, some decision making that's not necessarily consistent. We need to be careful that we are working through the appropriate processes and have the planning and personnel involvement that's needed, and this again goes back to the communication side of things. Some of the specific areas of concern identified by field staff include the fact that sometimes our lack of a really solid administrative process causes delays in project implementation, so that results in some snafus both for us and for our partners. Getting and keeping our agreements up to date, signed, reviewed, that can be a challenge for folks, especially going back to this whole it's 10% of someone time, getting all the ducks in order, takes a little bit of time. It takes some focus. In a larger sense, the authority for us to be able to do things aren't always clear. People haven't

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had training, they don't have time to spend on this program, having a really good understanding of our administrative processes can be lacking, and this weakens our ability to manage our successful program. So clearly this is an area that we need to work on.

We had a lot of great ideas from our survey respondents, and I'll just share a couple of those with you. We had a lot of people say well what we need to do is streamline the process and recognize that the Forest Service needs to be a little more sensitive to community momentum. Sometimes there's an opportunity that appears and we need to be able to seize it and move forward in a timely manner, and that will help us really support those good relationships and maintain and increase our capacity, because sometimes things just don't happen because we couldn't get it together in a timely manner. Continuing on the communications theme, we had people say well why don't we figure out how to share those frequently asked questions, share out the status of current issues and develop some field and expert contacts so that when things come up, if this is something that is part of your job you do occasionally, there's somewhere you can go and say nope, can't remember how to do this, or how do I make this a quicker, smoother process to go forward, so we need some contacts for those issues. One of the suggestions was that we identify and train the core staff at our Albuquerque service center so people who are grants and agreements specialists, and they do have very specialized knowledge, they're invaluable parts of the process, but not all of them know how the volunteer program works,

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so if we can start talking to them a little more effectively we can help everything move along a little bit more smoothly.

Okay. I'm gonna talk about partners a little bit cuz they're such an important part of this program, and a lot can happen when you partner with folks. This is really where it all comes together in terms of those questions of resources, leadership, and communication. If we can put the necessary energy into developing partnerships, take the time to build them, we can really realize increased program support and stability. There are a number of field units who said yeah, I'm interested in developing a partnership and building a friends group, but I'm not really sure how to go about doing so. Right now 61% of the people who responded to the survey said no, I don't work with a friends group. I don't work with a consistent partner for my volunteer activities, but a lot of those folks said they would like to. So what an opportunity for the new volunteer strategy to emphasize creative ways for us to grow, but one of the partners I spoke to said it really well. I got another quote for you here. This person said effective programs with partners are highly dependent on having strong, committed agency people to work with, so it really goes both ways. There are several excellent examples of agreements where partners manage all or part of the volunteer programs from recruiting and training to administrative paperwork. Capitalizing on some of these successes, figuring out what pieces work for different areas, and learning from the challenges that have been overcome could really help us expand our Forest Service capacity to provide volunteer opportunities.

So we often focus on our external partners when we talk in this area, but I want to talk about our internal partnerships as well. Just kind of coining a phrase there, but I want to make sure we recognize internal staff support across different program areas, and yes, this program is based in the Recreation Heritage and Volunteer Resources, but one of the tools that people who responded to the survey said was critically important to supporting capacity in the program was being able to work in other staff areas. So we have volunteers, yes, lots of them work in recreation, lots of them work in the partners in time and the heritage volunteer program, but we also have volunteers in wildlife, in fisheries and aquatics, in vegetation management, in watershed, research, fire aviation and air, land, human resources, engineering, minerals, state and private forestry, so this diversity in volunteer activity really I think demonstrates the need for us to talk really broadly about how we can develop a strategy that works for us. So there's a lot that can be done here, and again, we had a lot of suggestions from people who commented. One of them that I really liked was that we should talk with our partners and selected groups to develop sort of toolbox resources where people who are interested in working with partners or working with friends groups could have a really dedicated resource to try to figure out what might work for them. We've had partners offer to do show-me tours of their program and to share with people the basics of how they work with the Forest Service, what's worked for them and what they've learned. One of the things that would be great to see would be more of a direct connection between the volunteer program and

the partnership resource center of the Forest Service, and then a lot of people talk about increasing the support for and the ability of our partners to directly manage aspects of our volunteer program, where it works and where it's appropriate.

So going back to that communication theme again, we heard from a lot of people who are working successfully with our partners to develop volunteer capacity and to build opportunities, but the key really is being able to communicate. What works, what doesn't, understand how we're succeeding, and figuring out how to build on those successes. Okay. So we're on the home stretch. Next slide please?

We've had some great success so far thanks to the people who are part of this program. So we're at a point where things are changing, and you saw the trend slide earlier. The traditional volunteer model is changing. People's expectations are changing. Unless we actively make decisions on how we're gonna do business in the volunteer program, we're not gonna be successful in building the capacity to realize the opportunities for citizen stewardship, those opportunities for building relationships and building connections, and we won't be engaging people. Right now we have a program that works really well in some areas, and in some other areas it's kind of patched together with a little duct tape. We have passionate, committed people, Forest Service people, partners, and volunteers, and they're realizing great accomplishments. We've also got plenty of people

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who are really interested in this program but aren't quite sure what to do or how to start doing it. So this process and this commitment to developing a volunteer strategy is the next step towards building a long-term success for the volunteer program where we actively make decisions about where we're going to go with our internal structure and processes, where we choose to build on our success, and where we build a program that's supported by leadership at all levels.

So again, I want to really thank everyone who made this presentation possible, the Forest Service staff, our partners who shared insights and ideas, and those people who make the volunteer program happen. Thank you.