



School of Forest Resources

# Volunteer Committee Report

March 2010



## ABSTRACT

The Volunteer Committee (*ad hoc*) convened to address the need for increased volunteer participation within the School of Forest Resources (SFR) as identified by the participants at the 2009 SFR Strategic Planning Retreat. With the climate of “doing more with less” upon us, the effective use of volunteers and increasing the pool of interested, talented volunteers is an important priority for SFR. As our School’s staffing continues to diminish, the workload required to recruit, administer and support volunteers is increasing. Volunteers make things possible and collaborative resources can effectively create a viable SFR-wide volunteer program. The volunteers are there; SFR just needs to find an effective and efficient way to reach out to them and manage their activities in compliance with UW rules and regulations.

The committee reviewed and explored current practices, policies, and practicalities at the core of volunteer recruitment, management, recognition and retention. It recognized the potential for increased use of volunteers to fill gaps in academic, research and outreach activities as the SFR budget for such activities decreases.

The committee found a diversity of current volunteer experiences within SFR in terms of numbers of annual volunteers, activities, documentation, recruitment, and recognition. Additionally, the committee uncovered that human resources, legal, labor, and risk management requirements when engaging volunteers have not been consistently adhered to at SFR.

To streamline recruitment, provide consistent management of volunteers, and optimize resources, SFR needs to centralize its volunteer resources, at least to some degree. A centralized web-based volunteer site is a key step in effectively and efficiently promoting and managing a volunteer program, providing “one stop shopping” for information for volunteers and management requirements for supervisors. Importantly, SFR needs to bring current volunteer practices at SFR into compliance with University of Washington policy and State of Washington regulations. A unified SFR-wide process for recruiting and managing volunteers will go a long way towards minimizing non-compliance and maximizing the potential for a larger cadre of qualified volunteers.

To craft the centralized volunteer program, the committee considered the possibility that a current professional staff member could be temporarily assigned to this project. Given the current economic conditions, the committee recognized that advocating for a new staff position to handle the coordination of volunteers at SFR, while desirable, would not be realistic. Rather, the committee focused on ways to streamline the volunteer processes and bring the practices into compliance. The committee did agree that a position tasked with SFR volunteer oversight would be a strategic goal if SFR views volunteers as a critical resource in its work and in accomplishing its mission.





## Introduction

The Volunteer Committee (*ad hoc*) is an outcome of the School of Forest Resources (SFR) 2009 Strategic Planning Retreat. The committee explored how volunteers are currently being used at SFR, researched current UW volunteer policies and considered ways to increase volunteer opportunities.

Retreat participants identified a need for a SFR volunteer coordinator. The committee considered whether a staff person or simply better processes for recruiting and securing volunteers would best support an enhanced volunteer program.

Committee members emanated from diverse settings within SFR, providing a broad spectrum of representation. They agreed on the importance of and value in increasing the use of volunteers in SFR activities, particularly as current economic uncertainties make available funding more scarce. The committee was also mindful of the UW requirement not to supplant paid workers with volunteers. These agreements provided a foundation in our considerations.

All units at SFR could enhance their projects with the use volunteers. Some examples of possible work: office tasks, facility maintenance and improvement, and special projects such library restructuring. SFR's need for volunteers is going to grow with the anticipated budget cuts.

This report is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the current and potential volunteer programs at SFR. It will provide an excellent introduction to the benefits and complexities of using volunteers to enhance SFR's education, research, and outreach activities.

The specific committee charges included:

- Document extent, types of use, and need for volunteers within SFR.
- Identify best and appropriate practices for using volunteers, including required compliance with UW and state regulations.
- Explore person- and web-based strategies for using, training, and rewarding SFR volunteers.
- Identify areas where shared effort would be possible and beneficial.



## Document extent, types of use, and need for volunteers within SFR

Volunteers and their usage across SFR units vary greatly. The UW Botanic Gardens (UWBG) has a long standing program and was frequently referenced during the committee's report investigations. Other SFR units make limited use of volunteers. However, if tools and a more structured volunteer program were available, those units might expand their volunteer usage.

UWBG has an active, well-managed volunteer program with a volunteer committee that meets regularly. UWBG includes the Washington Park Arboretum (WPA) and the Center for Urban Horticulture (CUH). Volunteers are an essential part of the operation of UWBG. UWBG volunteers participate in many tasks: seed collection, data entry, native plant propagation, grounds maintenance, gardening assistance, library assistance, class assistants, front desk reception, adult and children guides, and administrative tasks. In several of the programs such as Rare Care and WPA's "Saplings" volunteers are required to attend training workshops before participating in volunteer activities.



UWBG also relies on community service events throughout the year to help maintain its gardens, grounds and natural areas. Projects that engage a large pool of volunteers require much preparation, planning and staff input to manage these events effectively (e.g., SFR’s Arbor Day Fair and WPA’s Earth Day).

A few more recent ideas are for volunteer groups to “adopt-a-garden” or individuals with horticulture experience to be garden stewards within WPA, with the hope that these individuals may in turn participate in recruiting additional concerned citizens to join them in their grounds maintenance.

WPA’s other managing partner, Seattle City Parks and Recreation, as well as its fundraising arm, The Arboretum Foundation, support each other for volunteer events which benefit the arboretum on a regular basis. Other major unaffiliated WPA partners include, the Student Conservation Association (SCA) (high school students who work in state and national parks) for Earth Day and a new summer program with the Urban Forestry Corps (crew of six Seattle area students working in WPA). Seattle Youth Garden Works participate in UWBG’s Native Plant Propagation Program.

Unpaid internships and service learning are two ways in which UWBG provides opportunities for high school seniors and higher education students in regional, national, and even international horticulture studies. Typically taken on in summer, these students are exposed to the full scope of public garden management and, in turn, assist UWBG staff in all work areas. UWBG continues to search for partners in service learning, such as Urban Forestry Corps of the SCA mentioned above.

The Centennial Tree Grove located in UWBG’s Union Bay Natural Area (UBNA) was a gift from the SFR Alumni Association to recognize SFR’s 100 year history. Work parties of alumni, faculty, staff, and students continue to volunteer their time to maintain the grove. The Laurelhurst neighborhood community has also partnered with UWBG to help recruit and manage volunteers for UBNA events and recently submitted a neighborhood grant to build a boardwalk through UWBG’s east basin wetlands.

Often people are eager to help but don’t have needed skills. UWBG uses job descriptions to help screen volunteers and then match them with activities that are most appropriate for the talents, interests, and capabilities of each individual.

Volunteers at The Center for Sustainable Forestry at Pack Forest (“Pack Forest”) in Eatonville maintain its trails and participate in grounds maintenance. Pack Forest has alliances with both the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts; they frequently participate in these activities. Volunteers often come to Pack Forest by word of mouth. Pack Forest thinks it would be good to formalize these alliances and increase opportunities for local children and youth. Additionally, Pack Forest has utilized volunteers with varying degrees of success involved with the criminal justice system—youth and adults—who are required to perform community service. Pack Forest is interested in developing an on-going relationship with SCA, exchanging training facilities for trail and grounds maintenance.

The Olympic Natural Resources Center (ONRC) in Forks uses volunteers in its annual Nature Days field trip for kindergarteners but otherwise does not have a formal volunteer program. In the past, volunteers have worked with K-12 students in science-based experiences on the ONRC campus. Community members who hike the trail often do light trail cleanup and maintenance. The more robust trail maintenance is accomplished by work crews from the Olympic Corrections Center.

ONRC is currently entertaining possibilities on how it can expand its use of volunteers. Future volunteer activities could include programs such as hikers adopting a section of the trail for trail monitoring and cleanup, inviting retired local natural resources professionals to lead educational opportunities for regional children and youth, and working with the local literary enthusiasts to consider how the ONRC library can play a more vital role in the community.

A more ambitious idea for ONRC would be to offer ONRC as a “learning-based experience” where it would match skilled volunteers with research activities. “Visit Forks and participate in engaging, scientific

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work.” This might be popular with natural resource professionals who come to know Forks during a visit with their teens who are fascinated with the globally popular Forks-based Twilight book series.



Volunteers who work with the SFR central administration or are referred to research project work are often people who approach individual faculty members with a request to be of assistance. Volunteers are used by faculty on research projects and engage in such tasks as entering research data into a database. Some volunteers are high school students who are fulfilling their community service requirements. SFR central administration does not actively recruit volunteers.

The committee thinks SFR can build on the success of the UWBG Volunteer Program. Linking to volunteer opportunities from the SFR homepage, developing an online application for each unit’s Volunteer Program, and putting together a common handbook that includes all the information needed by the volunteer employees.



### Identify best and appropriate practices for using volunteers, including required compliance with UW & state regulations

The committee uncovered not only some best practices for using volunteers in SFR units but also in other UW departments and at sister universities in Washington State. It made note of important issues relating to the use of volunteers where SFR may fall short. Importantly, the committee discussed and looked into legal liabilities associated with the use of volunteers.

UWBG provides the best example of a vibrant, well managed, and well executed volunteer program within SFR. Its website provides a listing of volunteer activities that includes job descriptions, contact person, and duration. It also includes an application form with instructions. <http://depts.washington.edu/uwbg/support/volunteer.shtml>

UWBG maintains a clear record of volunteer hours and activities. Every volunteer logs in before engaging in work activities. Rather than the payroll coordinator, the education coordinator, Jean Robins, receives and records the hours quarterly from each supervisor. The supervisor tracks volunteer hours, maintaining an ongoing record of volunteer work that contains the date, volunteer’s name, type of work, and hours worked. UW requires this documentation. This documentation is required in the event there is a Worker’s Compensation claim.

UWBG does not allow volunteers use of power equipment or chemicals. It does provide training for safe use of hand tools.

The UWBG volunteer webpage, <http://depts.washington.edu/uwbg/support/volunteer.shtml>, provides job descriptions and tasks for all volunteer opportunities. A link to their pdf Application Form is on this webpage. UWBG publishes a Volunteer Handbook that volunteers are required to read; it provides basic information regarding UWBG and policies governing their work. It also clarifies expectations for both sides – what the volunteer is responsible for and what the supervisor and unit are responsible for.

UWBG addresses volunteer “boredom” by assisting the person to determine what other opportunities of interest are available in other areas. UWBG frequently shares volunteers across programs.

In our discussions, UWBG emphasized the importance of being ready for groups of volunteers. It’s a lot of work prepping for groups. The unit needs to clearly define parameters for volunteers in these circumstances. UWBG found that orientations for group events (one time volunteer events) don’t need to be as extensive as the orientation for long term volunteers.

Other units in SFR do not track volunteer hours and other information so closely, if at all. Though required by UW, a current record of volunteers and their invested hours is inconsistently maintained



across SFR units. As stated, UWBG has a tracking system, central administration does not track volunteer hours, Pack Forest tracks juvenile offenders who are doing community service (grounds maintenance), and ONRC does not track volunteer hours.

The UW Department of Physics, Department of Astronomy, and the Institute of Nuclear Theory unified web pages have good volunteer program guidance, containing detailed rules and regulations, safety training checklists, and clear delineation of supervisor responsibility. It provides an example of a well organized and executed volunteer program at UW. Its website clearly articulates the procedures and guidelines for engaging volunteer workers. While encouraging outreach programs consistent with UW's public service responsibilities, it reminds department faculty and staff of its legal responsibilities when hiring volunteers. Some of these responsibilities include proper supervision of volunteers, safety & training requirements, and facility access procedures. The following link accesses this information:

<http://www.phys.washington.edu/forms/VolunteerForm.pdf#xml=http://phys.washington.edu.master.com/taxis/master/search/mysite.txt?q=volunteer+program&order=r&id=2848c000f46c5ad0&cmd=xml>

The Department of Physics, et al., provide detailed guidance on safety practices associated with its volunteer activity on its website.

[http://www.phys.washington.edu/forms/safety\\_form.pdf](http://www.phys.washington.edu/forms/safety_form.pdf).

This orientation training is used with both new paid and volunteer employees.

Western Washington University (WWU), Central Washington University (CWU), and Washington State University (WSU) Cooperative Extension all have volunteer information available on their respective websites. This information on volunteer programs at other universities is intended to highlight some best practices and is not intended to be a robust look at or evaluation of the respective university's volunteer program procedures.

WWU has an efficient volunteer registration web-

page. It includes links to volunteer hours. WWU puts all the technical information in one place under the Human Resources (HR) department while giving the departments flexibility with specific volunteer applications, training, etc. It has a web based log on for hours and information on becoming a volunteer. The volunteer application is submitted to HR. HR makes the determination about the need for a background check and officially registers the volunteer for hours.

<http://www.acadweb.wwu.edu/HR/eelr/EmployeeServices/PoliciesandProcedures/Volunteer/Volunteerindex.shtml>

WWU and CWU have central reporting for volunteer hours.

WWU and WSU are very clear about what employment law requires for volunteer employees and has added onto those regulations as appropriate for their universities.

WSU Cooperative Extension documentation talks about volunteer responsibility, the responsibility of faculty and staff, and how that relationship will work. It also articulates WSU and volunteer liability rules, regulations, and provisions in easy-to-understand language. The material is thoughtfully written.

<http://ext.wsu.edu/admin/volunteer.html>

The basic issue in using volunteers is they legally become non-paid employees of UW. This means they are covered under UW's state-insured Worker's Compensation Program. (See Administrative Policy Statement 14.1, <http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/APS/14.01.4.html>.) This emphasizes the need for supervisors to be trained in the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) workers compensation claim process and method for reporting incidences. Environmental Health & Safety provides the On-line Accident Reporting System (OARS). <http://www.ehs.washington.edu/ohsoars/index.shtml>

International volunteers are covered here: <http://depts.washington.edu/uwiso/volunteer.html>

UW has well defined guidelines for volunteers classified as minors. More information can be obtained at



<http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/APS/44.03.html> and at <http://www.washington.edu/admin/hr/pol.proc/minor.employ.html>. The UW guidelines conform to the Washington State guidelines laid out in publication F700-022 that can be found at <http://www.lni.wa.gov/ipub/700-022-000.pdf>. These documents describe the records that must be kept, the hours that can be worked, and those specific activities that cannot be undertaken by minors of certain ages. The supervisor should be familiar with the contents of this publication before engaging volunteers who are minors.

In general, under-18 volunteers must not do:

- Jobs using power-driven machines
- Jobs with possible exposure to bodily fluids, or radioactive and hazardous substances
- Jobs requiring specialized personal protective equipment
  - examples include jobs requiring: chemical or bio-protection suits, respirators, helmets, gas/vapor masks, welders gear;
  - does NOT include jobs requiring: items meant only to protect clothing (e.g. aprons, lab coats), clean-room clothing, or items commonly used in lab classrooms, such as eye protection, hearing protection, gloves, or dust masks.

Further Washington State rules on hiring minors can be found at:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/TeenWorkers/HiringMinors/NormalProcess/default.asp>

More information on coverage for volunteers and the supervisors' responsibilities is available by calling the Office of Risk Management, 206-543-0183 or by sending an email inquiry to: [workcomp@u.washington.edu](mailto:workcomp@u.washington.edu)

The committee consulted with Senior Claims Specialist Wendy Winslow-Nason in the Office of Risk Management about reporting volunteer hours. Winslow-Nason indicated that volunteer hours are not currently being reported to or tracked by Payroll. Risk Management is working with Washington State Labor and Industries to establish a web-based reporting sys-

tem to record volunteer hours. This procedure is anticipated to be ready by the end of the current academic year. Winslow-Nason did indicate the department or unit is currently required to record the following volunteer information:

- name of the volunteer
- date and number of hours worked
- kind of work performed.

A volunteer making a worker's compensation claim is treated the same as an employee. An approved claim will pay medical costs but not lost wages since the volunteer serves unpaid. Information on worker's compensation is available on the Risk Management website:

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/APS/10.08.html>

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/APS/14.01.4.html>

All this adds up to the need for SFR to carefully evaluate how it trains its volunteers. Some issues that need to be addressed: safety concerns, training in the prevention of sexual harassment, background checks for volunteers who work with minors and vulnerable adults and those who work with valuable resources (i.e., money, rare plants, rare library books). SFR needs safety rules and training information readily available on its website, particularly for work involving dangerous equipment such as chainsaws. It is logical that the volunteer would need to be trained to pass a safety test.

The committee suggests using disclaimer forms to limit UW's exposure. The disclaimer will also alert the volunteer of the nature of the work. Risk Management has said, regardless of the presence of a signed disclaimer, injured parties can still pursue UW for compensation as UW is ultimately responsible. However, a signed disclosure can often discourage potentially litigious parties from pursuing legal action if the person assumes personal responsibility for their actions.

The administrators of SFR volunteer programs should have training to manage the supervision and tracking of volunteers. This will become increasingly important with the greater need for volunteers in light of



the continuing budget cutbacks and university liability exposure considerations. This training should include instruction in background checks and the tracking/reporting of volunteer hours.

A standardized and universally-implemented rules and regulations resource at SFR would be optimal. The next section will articulate web-based resources SFR could house on its website and use across its units.

The committee agreed that the Office of Risk Management could play a more active role in volunteer oversight because volunteers increase UW's liability exposure. Ways to minimize UW exposure to risk could be better defined by Risk Management. The university expects SFR units to be in compliance but does not offer enough information or proper training. SFR needs to keep in mind that all published information must be adhered to. Any information it posts should be simple, clear, and compliant with Risk Management rules and regulations.

Background checks are particularly important for volunteers that interact with children under 16 years of age; developmentally disabled adults; or vulnerable adults (persons age 60 or older who are functionally, mentally, or physically unable to care for themselves). In considering volunteers who are minors and their interactions with staff and adult volunteers, the committee thinks any adults supervising or working with minors on UW-sponsored events should have a background check unless the minor or protected person is accompanied by a parent, chaperone, or case-worker. The committee believes SFR should err on the side of getting background checks for volunteers and employees working with these populations. Supervisors should also check standard references for each volunteer.

Volunteer registration and background check requirements fall under the HR umbrella. Currently, the completed background check form is forwarded to HR. Basic background checks cost is \$17.00 and are charged to the unit's budget. More information on background checks can be found at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/crime/crimhist.htm>. The

form can be downloaded here: <https://watch.wsp.wa.gov/help/CABFORM.pdf>.

UWBG and Pack Forest have also participated as a community service entity for persons having committed misdemeanor crimes. It is imperative that a thorough screening of these volunteers be undertaken before accommodating these court cases.

Pack Forest receives a background report from HR. It only initiates a background check when volunteers are working with minors, vulnerable adults, or with sensitive material. Washington RCW states that "Any prospective volunteer who will have regularly scheduled unsupervised access to children under sixteen years of age, developmentally disabled persons, or vulnerable adults during the course of his or her employment or involvement with the business or organization under circumstances where such access will or may involve groups of (i) five or fewer children under twelve years of age, (ii) three or fewer children between twelve and sixteen years of age, (iii) developmentally disabled persons, or (iv) vulnerable adults; See <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.43.830>



### Explore person- and web-based strategies for using, training, and rewarding SFR volunteers

Standardizing volunteer opportunities and guidance throughout SFR would reduce the overall time and effort needed to recruit volunteers and implement a safe, satisfying, and expanding volunteer program. This could be done with a volunteer section on its website, providing an efficient way to connect people with volunteer opportunities within the entire School. The website would have links to other units' volunteer programs as well.

The volunteer section would uniformly provide volunteer applications, safety training, and tracking of volunteer hours. It needs to include the basics – hour tracking, supervisor log sheet, job safety information, listing of current volunteer opportunities at units and



centers, links to those programs, applications, job descriptions, picture release form, and background check form. It could include a volunteer blog for the enjoyment and community building of volunteers. A Health & Safety Plan needs to be available for employees and volunteers alike. At a minimum, it is important to assure a prospective volunteer has been informed of all safety and volunteer information.

The SFR volunteer web pages would have all the volunteer information available in one place. The completed volunteer application form could be emailed for processing and approval to the proper person in their respective unit directly from the web page.

A centralized volunteer web site would assure volunteers are trained properly. It could provide the supervisor an orientation checklist like WSU provides. The website needs to have hour tracking available: volunteer name, hours, date, and what they are doing.

Website contents could include interactive forms (e.g., Adobe Acrobat fill-in application forms), training, reporting, general guidelines, hours, and emergency contacts. Importantly, the SFR units need to agree to rules and universally apply them in their volunteer programs, particularly as it relates to safety issues and liability matters. Catalyst and other web tools could be applied to create online training sessions for volunteers. It also could be used to report hours worked.

The volunteer web pages would have fact sheets and materials for orientation to SFR and its role in the new College of the Environment. These materials would include the mission statement for each unit so the prospective volunteer better grasps how he or she fits into the bigger picture.

UWBG currently has an information page for volunteers. UWBG needs a separate web section for supervisors, though this could easily be part of the standardized SFR volunteer webpage mentioned above.

Often engaging in interesting work is reward enough for volunteers. However, more formal or tangible

rewards are often also of value to these dedicated people.

UWBG rewards volunteers by providing them low cost gifts, educational field trips, barbecue/dessert appreciation events, educational speakers, and field trips to other gardens where it often pays for admission. These activities enrich the volunteer's work experience and provide enjoyable visits to other gardens. The volunteers receive a discount when registering for continuing education class after completing a certain number of volunteer hours. This provides the volunteer a richer experience for his/her time. It also has two appreciation events annually.

UWBG rewards large groups of short term or one time volunteers by instilling the sense of having accomplished something important. Its recognition events – like the two Brian Mulligan Awards issued each year to the highest amount of volunteer hours and dedication – are for its long term volunteers.

UWBG's Education Program personally thanks volunteers in little ways. For instance, they have end of season parties where staff shares the number of hours a volunteer worked and how many children and adults were positively impacted that season.

In the case of UWBG's interns and service learning partners and participants, the primary reward is the practical learning and education component of the program itself manifested often times with school credits.

Often volunteers don't know the impact they make. Noting their contribution shows them the impact and acknowledges their value. Also, emphasizing how the work would not have gotten done otherwise reinforces the value of the volunteer to the unit. Conversely, understanding the positive financial value of volunteers is useful when seeking additional funding or reporting in-kind contributions.

Volunteers could also be given SFR certificates of appreciation and be highlighted on the SFR website or in the newsletter.



## Identify areas where shared effort would be possible and beneficial

SFR needs to have a centralized volunteer program organizer to optimize SFR volunteer resources throughout its units. With more budget cuts, the effective use of volunteers and increasing the pool of interested, talented volunteers needs to be a priority for SFR. Even as our school's staffing continues to diminish, the workload required to recruit, market, administer and support volunteerism is increasing. Volunteers make things possible. But collaborative resources are required to effectively manage a viable SFR volunteer program. The volunteers are there; SFR just needs to find an effective and efficient way to reach out to them and manage their activities in compliance with UW rules and regulations.

The committee suggested the possibility that a current professional staff member could be temporarily assigned to craft a working volunteer program for SFR.

A single portal website that centralizes and links to all volunteer materials, applications, and unit websites, health and safety information, and supervisor and volunteer information would go a long way towards sharing volunteer resources across the units. As mentioned previously, the web information would brief volunteers on the mission of the unit and SFR and introduce volunteers to the need for and the importance of each organization.

To minimize the burden on central administration, one thought is to centralize the administrative tasks and then provide links to unit websites for hours tracking, applications and information about unit's volunteer program and opportunities. The committee suggested mapping out the web interface process from the volunteer's perspective to see where difficulties exist.

Importantly, training would need to be specific to the proposed task so the units would need to conduct specialized training. Basic safety training along with administrative briefings and forms, however, could be

centralized. It is possible Risk Management and/or HR would take on these university-wide common tasks.



## Committee Members

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