

Wilderness stewards seek volunteers

By Diane Goble
Correspondent

Unless you frequent the wilderness, you might not be aware of how much needs to be done during the season to keep it visitor-friendly.

Friends of the Central Cascades Wilderness (FCCW), in partnership with the Deschutes and the Willamette National Forests, are there to help get that work done. FCCW is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization founded in 2014 by Molly Johnson to promote public awareness of wilderness and wild lands through educational programs, building constituency among local communities to support wilderness stewardship practices, and engaging in a variety of boots-on-the-ground work to maintain and improve wilderness character.

Those who enjoy hiking the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness, Mt. Washington Wilderness, Three Sisters Wilderness, Diamond Peak Wilderness and Mt. Thielsen Wilderness, can do so with a sense of purpose as FCCW volunteers monitoring and maintaining trails and some 4,200 campsites, checking wildlife camera setups and collecting samples for wildlife research, erecting trail markers and regulatory signs, and keeping track of changes over time, in partnership with the Forest Service, which only has six wilderness rangers to cover the entire Oregon Cascade Crest.

This data collection will affect wilderness management

plans for years to come.

One important aspect of wilderness management is mitigating the human impact on vegetation, water and animal life along the trails and in the campgrounds, around the lakes or wherever people venture. The program is based upon The Wilderness Act of 1964, which recognizes a wilderness "as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

"Pack it in, pack it out."

This means all your trash, including food, plastic bags ... human waste and vomit ... and, yes, dog poop.

As good stewards, we are guests who are politely reminded: "pack it in, pack it out." This means all your trash, including food, plastic bags, snack wrappers, cigarettes, human waste and vomit, toilet paper, baby diapers, personal hygiene products, used condoms, and, yes, dog poop. Consider the next family who comes after you leave and leave it like you would hope to find it.

Johnson, who is president of FCCW, said, "Even banana peels and orange rinds don't disintegrate. People aren't doing the animals any favors by leaving their uneaten food behind. In fact, it can also attract predators to the area."

The organization is looking for donations to support their public-awareness programs, and not just financial, but equipment. They use all hand tools, no power tools, for cutting and digging sign posts, affixing signage, chopping trees that have fallen across the trails, raking campgrounds, moving rocks, etc. They also need backpacking supplies and lots of trash bags to haul out what unaware hikers leave behind, much of which attracts flies, mosquitoes, and other insects, which can spread disease, pollute the streams and lakes, and take away from the enjoyment of those who follow.

This is FCCW's second field season for boots-on-the-ground stewardship work to maintain and improve wilderness character. You don't have to become a member to go on one of their hikes, and there are hikes for all levels of hiking. You just have to have a willingness to work and pick up some yucky trash along the way. Forest rangers take groups of six to 12 people on four- to six-day hikes. They provide education about the state of the wilderness and what is being done to protect it while balancing the impact of man vs. nature along the way. And they tell a lot of good stories.

Participating in one of these trips will likely raise your awareness and, in turn, you are more likely to teach others to become stewards for our wilderness environment. Summer recreational use in the area has increased,



PHOTO BY DIANE GOBLE

A local nonprofit provides stewardship on local forests.

particularly along the PCT since this summer's blockbuster movie "Wild," and with a very extreme fire danger all around us, visitor information about wilderness hiking is even more important. The more you know, the more likely you are to educate your friends and guests.

Go to the Friends of the Central Cascades Wilderness website for more information at www.CentralCascades.org. You'll find a calendar of their

upcoming hikes this summer to the final hike of the year in late October and information about how you can get involved and what to bring. They supply all the tools.

They need volunteers for the on-the-ground work, but they also need computer help, website maintenance, sign wood workers, grant writers, help with public education, and administrative work. Contact Molly Johnson at info@centralcascades.org.

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For further information contact Matt Kirchoff at 541-647-7586