

Helping Warfighter Outfitters help veterans

Warfighter Outfitters is well equipped to put veterans in the woods and on the water — but there is a significant and ongoing need for local cash donations to cover permit and licensing costs, meals, gas to get to destinations, etc.

Warfighter Outfitters founder Brett Miller notes that cash donations have fallen off from the \$25,000 that helped stand the organization up in 2015 to just \$5,000 in 2016. That's not enough to get the mission accomplished.

When cash is short, Miller has been putting up money from his own pocket to make things happen.

"I'm the one who hates to cancel a trip, so I end up forking into the gas tank, the permits," he told *The Nugget*.

Small donations have a big impact. With a new emphasis on jet-boat fishing trips that accommodate larger numbers than fishing excursions, it only takes \$125 cash to put six veterans on the water.

Miller reckons that the young organization still has a ways to go in raising its local profile, which will help with fundraising.

"I still talk to people all the time who don't even know we're here," Miller said.

He also acknowledges that some potential donors may be leery of contributing due to uncertainty about where contributions to veterans' organizations actually end up.

Miller is quick to allay any such concerns.

"We're not a large entity," he notes. "We're controlled by a local, all-veteran board."

Warfighter Outfitters has virtually no administrative overhead. A cash contribution goes directly into funding activities that directly impact the veterans served.

"One hundred percent of donations to Warfighter

Outfitters go directly to fund the veteran outings," board member Craig Rullman wrote last year. "When the donations come in, the trips go out. There is no reserve, no account held back 'for a rainy day.' Grants from larger foundations are used to pay for the equipment to support these missions, such as fishing rods and reels, boats, trailers, and the trucks to haul them."

Miller himself is tied-in to everything that happens on his watch.

"It's a personal connection," he said. "I know personally every single person that's come through this charity."

Last spring, Sisters resident Cris Converse sponsored a fundraising concert with The Anvil Blasters, which raised over \$1,000 for Warfighter Outfitters. Plans are underway for another such event later in 2017.

In the meantime, individual contributions of any size are welcome — and each have a significant impact on the well-being of several veterans.

To contribute, go to <http://www.paypal.me/warfighteroutfitters> or send checks to Warfighter Outfitters, 160 S. Oak St., Sisters, OR 97759.

VETERANS: Small donations have a big impact

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alive and engaged.

Miller explained the engagement missions: "Basically it's a sweat-equity service project. It's like a working vacation."

Warfighter Outfitters partners up with agencies like the Border Patrol and the National Parks Service to engage in projects that allow the veterans to do useful work and "work as a team again" as they did in the military.

The engagement missions last year included well-clearing and other work along the Arizona-Mexico border (covered in *The Nugget*, March 23, 2016) and rebuilding bison corrals at Yellowstone National Park. While at Yellowstone, the veterans were granted special permission to fish on a lake that was closed to other boats.

"We fished Yellowstone Lake for the big lake trout," Miller recalled. "We were the only boat out there at that time of year."

Warfighter Outfitters will lead another engagement mission in 2017 to the Grand Canyon, where they'll rebuild campgrounds under the auspices of the National Parks Service.

Thanks to several grants and in-kind donations Warfighter Outfitters is well-equipped, with a jet boat, a drift boat, a couple of large trucks for towing and carrying



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Brett Miller affixes a new rack to Warfighter Outfitters' Jeep.

personnel, and a set of trax that allow a Jeep to get into the snow-laden backcountry.

Miller recently defied the heavy snowfall of the season to take some veterans ice fishing.

"We were able to get out to Round Lake and drill some holes in the ice," he said.

The specially equipped Jeep has been a bit of a fundraiser lately. Miller recounted how a Marine veteran neighbor and he responded to retrieve a passenger vehicle stuck in deep snow. That effort earned Warfighter Outfitters a \$300 donation from a grateful motorist.

Miller has found that fishing from the jet boat is a more viable proposition for many of the veterans than the more labor-intensive and physically demanding fly-fishing drift-boat trips. While Warfighter Outfitters will continue to offer fly-fishing, they are

shifting focus to offer more jet-boat excursions, which can accommodate more people at one time and are easier for those with physical limitations to navigate.

"We're going to try and get a bigger jet boat," Miller said. "I know it sounds funny, but after all we've done and our population now, we're taking six guys — and that boat (the current one) is a little small."

While Warfighter Outfitters is rich in equipment, it's still a small outfit, and there is an ongoing need for cash donations to cover gas, licensing and permits, and other expenses (*see sidebar story, at left*). The organization continues to need support from the local community to continue work that is having a major positive impact on the lives of veterans who have been injured in service to their country.



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