

Sisters Trails Alliance holds annual meeting

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Last week, the Sisters Trails Alliance (STA) held their annual meeting, hosted by Sisters Art Works, to review accomplishments from 2016 and look forward into the upcoming year. "It was a good year for STA!" said Catherine Hayden, STA's new board chair, as she opened the meeting.

Established 16 years ago, the STA has grown to become a principal advocate and facilitator of outdoor recreation in the Sisters area. An all-volunteer organization, it is dedicated to the planning, construction and maintenance of non-motorized trails in Sisters Country.

Some of the highlights from 2016 included the doubling of individual donations in just the last year. The membership rolls were also increased by 38 percent in 2016. Special grants were obtained from the National Forest Foundation and the Ford Family Foundation. Substantial reserves have been established for future trail projects, and 20,000 free trail maps were printed and distributed to the public.

Another community milestone is STA's continuing

sponsorship of the Bjarne Holm Memorial Speakers Series, a quarterly series of talks that bring outstanding speakers to Sisters in order to enhance outdoor public recreation opportunities and to educate the public in the wonders of the natural world of Sisters Country.

In addition to ongoing trail maintenance and expansion of the existing trail network in Sisters Country, one of the most significant projects of 2016 included completion of the Whychus Overlook and its connecting trails. The new Whychus Creek Overlook and loop trail opened to the public last year as a unique ADA-accessible trail destination completed through the cooperation of government, business, and private organizations.

The Whychus Overlook project was part of the Tale of Two Rivers Treasured Landscapes Conservation Campaign, encompassing both Whychus Creek and the Metolius River. The overlook was funded by the National Forest Foundation, with Forest Service leadership by Maret Pajutee and others. The STA played a key role in establishing the connecting trails, in cooperation with other groups and organizations. The overlook was just the latest in a

continuing series of projects and improvements to enhance the region's watershed restoration, recreation, and community engagement.

Also, as a part of last week's annual meeting, the STA hosted Bill Dean, acting manager of the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and BLM landscape architect, Gregory Currie. Together, they discussed BLM land management issues, particularly as related to the nearby Cline Buttes Recreation Area.

The BLM representatives discussed the challenges of managing a 32,000-acre public site that includes 22 private in-holdings totaling 4,650 acres. Only a few miles east of Sisters, the region is home to hundreds of miles of trails, most of which are user-created, thereby complicating management issues.

A multi-year BLM project has focused on reducing trail conflicts and ensuring that recreation and wildlife are managed harmoniously. Hot-button issues discussed included the decommissioning of more than 200 miles of existing trails and seasonal trail closures for raptor nesting of prairie falcons and golden eagles.

STA's annual meeting

also presented the organization with the opportunity to recognize contributions by some of its key members. Ann Marland, STA's community outreach director, shared the Volunteer of the Year award with Donna Timmerman, outgoing STA secretary and membership coordinator. Patrick Eckford was recognized as the Trail Adopter of the Year, under an STA program where individuals have the opportunity to adopt and oversee the maintenance of specific local trails.

Gary Guttormsen, STA's trails coordinator — himself a 1,000-hour volunteer — referred to Eckford's extensive contributions as deserving of "interstellar" recognition. Guttormsen, Marland, Eckford, Pat Marquis, and Chuck Humphreys all received awards from the U.S. Forest Service for their extensive contributions of volunteer hours.

An excellent buffet of refreshments, snacks, and hors d'oeuvres was provided for the attendees, which was followed by a drawing for multiple door prizes. Prizes and refreshments were provided courtesy of several local sponsors, including Black Crater Bread, Blazin Saddles, Cascade Street Distillery,

Cork Cellars, Eurosports, Ray's Food Place, Sisters Athletic Club, Sisters Movie House, Sisters Meat and Smokehouse, Three Creeks Brewing Co., and Your Store.

The Sisters Trails Alliance is a community volunteer organization dedicated to the planning, constructing and maintenance of walking, hiking, cycling, and equestrian trails in Sisters Country. The STA believes that trails are an indispensable ingredient for the quality of life and economic vibrancy in Sisters Country. Volunteer help and new members are always welcome.

STA also sponsors a series of guided hikes and rides during the summer months. The trips are designed to help introduce people to STA trails and to the natural environment of Sisters Country. These events are typically announced via social media and are open to the public.

For more information about STA or performing volunteer work on trails or other outdoor-related projects, contact the organization at 541-719-8822. Additional information about STA can also be found on their website at www.sisterstrails.com or follow STA on Facebook at Sisters Trails Alliance.

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