

# CalIPC Working Group: Volunteers, Engaging the Public

## Notes

10/2/03

We began with a round of introductions and description of interest in the subject of volunteers. Several common interests emerged:

- How do we find volunteers?
- How do we retain volunteers?
- How do we find new volunteers to add to an existing group?
- Engaging the public
- Communication with volunteers
- Attitudes – why do people volunteer? Existing surveys, etc.
- Volunteer coordinators
- Volunteer paid camping opportunities

Kari Norgaard then shared information on her research into successful groups. She studied a unique area consisting of largely public land and populated by 250 residents. They had an initial interest in weed control that dated to spraying during the 1970s that had resulted in health issues. Indian basketweavers were also concerned about herbicide exposure.

Kari learned:

- People become involved for the social aspects – getting to know their neighbors and their area (their community)
- They're motivated when they see someone they know as a model
- Having a standard time to come and grub weeds facilitated the process
- Residents feel an attachment to their land, and a desire to keep it pristine
- Desire to protect salmon resulted in concerns over herbicide use along the river; since they don't want spraying to occur, they feel responsible and are willing to work at hand removal
- There's a sense of community leading to community-based stewardship

Golden Gate Natural Resource Area has a huge dataset on volunteers. They had 215,000 volunteer hours last year! They've found that:

- There are many different reasons for volunteering, including:
  - A sense of place
  - Food
  - An opportunity to say "yes" about something
  - An opportunity to get free education
- Volunteers are a very diverse group; not exclusively white, urban, well-to-do, etc.
- Stewardship is recreation

Other thoughts on finding volunteers:

- Many high schools have requirements for community stewardship or service projects
- Other groups such as Lions and Kiwanis may want to be involved

- Adopt-a-Mile Stewardship program
- There are tradeoffs needed for those coordinating the volunteer event – we need to balance recreation/education/stewardship with the need to get the work done
- Work with University Parks and Recreation departments – they’re often willing to hand out flyers, etc.
- Find out which University departments have mandatory service hours
- Religious groups
- Fraternity and sorority community service days – take photos of projects and email them to the volunteers

Suggestions for keeping in touch with and retaining volunteers:

- Advertise in newspapers and on radio; try to develop readership/listeners by targeting a fixed time or day of the month
- Use brochures advertising standard meeting times (the first Tuesday of the month, 9 am – 11 am, etc.)
- Newsletters to group members
- Have weed parties
- Personal outreach to visitors
- Make sure newcomers don’t feel excluded
- Use booths and other methods to educate folks; make it fun, and give them materials to take home for free
- Have samples of plants available to people can learn why they’re problematic, and what they look like
- Get a reporter involved; media recognition of volunteers
- Adopt-a-Site
- Recognize your volunteers for their contributions
- Provide many different types of jobs, and let people switch jobs periodically to prevent burnout. Avoid putting too much pressure on volunteers
- Remember to have fun!
- Have a “stewardship” workday that includes multiple activities, not just weed pulling. Consider interfacing with Make a Difference Day (see “Points of Light” website)
- Work with teachers to give students extra credit
- Need to have regular communication and coordination of who is doing what
- For those who can’t meet on a regular schedule, let them adopt a small site and work on their own
- Remember that we need to focus on what the volunteer is getting out of the experience, not just what we want to accomplish

There was broad agreement that it is essential to have a paid volunteer coordinator with the following qualities:

- Charismatic
- People-oriented; likes working with people
- Upbeat
- Open

- Friendly
- Enthusiastic
- Experienced

There is a perceived need to get agency buy-in to work with volunteers. There is often a perception that volunteer efforts are not sustainable, and a misbelief or mistrust that volunteers will be able to get a job done, therefore it is preferable to pay someone. Also, there is a fear of losing jobs to volunteers who can do the same job.

Also, there was discussion about involving agency folks in volunteer weed efforts given how busy they are. Agency administration must be convinced that weed issues and volunteer projects are important. Some suggestions:

- Put them on the board as mentors
- Circulate among the RC&Ds
- Include the flood control folks
- Write grants
- Partnerships with schools
- Develop relationships with folks about to retire – both from agencies and schools/universities – as they are potential volunteers.

How can CalIPC help our volunteer efforts?

- Create a depository of materials
- Provide a booklet on the website that includes information on working successfully with volunteers (see the TNC website)
- Create a volunteer guidebook – everything a volunteer needs to know to start a project – liability issues, property ownership, a flowchart of regulations, the ABCs of weed management, etc.
- Provide a basic article on “Why weeds are bad, and what you can do” that can be give to volunteers or newspapers to assist in recruiting volunteers
- Maintain a catalog of available resources
- Simple colored photos to identify problem weeds vs. native plants
- Assistance in grant writing and examples of successful funded grants (10-15) on the website
- Local fundraising and promotional info and ideas – what does it cost to purchase promo items such as caps, vendor information, and feedback on impacts
- Sources for free items
- Case studies of problems and their solutions that can be posted on the website and updated in real time
- An email list of people working on volunteer projects
- List of organizations that can provide volunteers for remote locations

Ideas for future working groups on volunteer issues:

- Present case studies of problems and their solutions
- Discuss sources for materials: names, phone numbers, email, websites
- Generate a resource list