



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STANLEY, IDAHO—The Sawtooth Society's Austin Kraal Memorial Volunteer program has accomplished a great deal since it began in the summer of 2013. The program was started to honor Austin Kraal, a youth devoted to the Sawtooth National Recreation Area who worked the trails of the area every summer for the Forest Service before his passing in 2011. What started as an effort to memorialize one boy's life turned into a program that has affected the lives of many.

The Austin Kraal Memorial Volunteer program has brought over 650 volunteers to the Sawtooth NRA. Of those volunteers, nearly half were urban or at-risk youth who may not have had any other opportunities to enjoy the incredible area. These volunteers dedicated around 4,500 hours to the Sawtooth NRA, making the program the largest volunteer effort in the area.



Photo by Kelly Conde

The Magic Valley Boys and Girls Club volunteers build an exclosure cage after hiking the material to a spot designated by GPS. These cages are used by the Forest Service for vegetation monitoring.

As the program continues to grow, the Sawtooth Society is focusing the efforts of the volunteers to three key areas. The first is a continuation and expansion of an important part of the program to provide urban and at-risk youth an opportunity to visit and work hard in the Sawtooth NRA. This has always been a keen focus of the volunteer program and will continue to be so in 2016 and beyond.

The second area will be projects in the new Hemingway-Boulders and White Clouds Wilderness areas. After the effort the Sawtooth Society put in to help pass the legislation for Idaho's newest Wilderness areas, it now will be initiating projects on the ground to help give the Boulders and White Clouds the gold standard Wilderness protection.



Photo by Kelly Conde

Two volunteers getting it done as they clear the trail to the Fishhook meadow. This trail is easily accessible and one of the first to dry out in the spring, which makes it very popular so it's important to get it cleared as early as possible.

The third area of focus is early-season trail clearing.

"The Sawtooth NRA trail system is a huge value to visitors and the public alike," said Sawtooth NRA Area Ranger Kirk Flannigan. "The Sawtooth Society's willingness to assist and to engage both youth and adults in this effort especially early in the season—is a huge benefit to the Forest Service, visitors and residents,

while also providing an invaluable experience. The Forest Service is proud to partner with the Society in this effort and look forward to many more years of working together.”

While the Austin Kraal Memorial volunteers have done some trail work every summer, this year the Sawtooth Society is looking to increase its work to 100-miles of trails, much of which will be done early in the year.

“Without regular maintenance, these trails are easily overrun with vegetation and destroyed by foot traffic,” Volunteer and Membership Coordinator Kelly Conde said. “Helping the Forest Service clear and maintain the Sawtooth NRA trails is a very effective and direct way we give back to the area. None of these projects could be completed without the strong support from the Sawtooth NRA, and we’re appreciative of their identification of key work that its limited staff and budget just is unable to complete in a timely way.”

The Sawtooth Society, formed in 1997, is the only non-profit group dedicated exclusively to serving as an advocate for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, preserving open space in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area and enhancing its recreation facilities and services. The Sawtooth Society has funded over 175 recreational-related projects throughout the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. It will take many dedicated people to reach their goal to work on 100-miles of trails.

The Sawtooth Society is looking for anyone who enjoys the area and wants to give back to dedicate a day or two to trail work. If interested in volunteering, contact Kelly Conde at (208) 994-1654 or kelly@sawtoothsociety.org and visit www.sawtoothsociety.org for more information.