



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sawtooth Society launches Austin Kraal Memorial Volunteer Program

STANLEY, ID — The Sawtooth Society will launch the Austin Kraal Memorial Volunteer Program this summer to complete key on-the-ground projects within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (Sawtooth NRA). A portion of the program will include engaging youth to get them into the outdoors, broaden their experiences and enhance their connections to the splendor of the wide-open spaces in the Sawtooth's.

Austin Kraal, who died over a year ago, had a deep passion for the Sawtooth Mountains and often spoke of the peace and tranquility he experienced when he was enjoying the area. In his enduring honor, the Sawtooth Society is proud to sponsor a new volunteer program that will enable youth, community members, recreational tourists and members of varied organizations to participate in protecting, preserving and enhancing the Sawtooth NRA. This partnership with the Forest Service has been made possible by donations from his family, friends and others who worked to establish a legacy for Austin and to see important projects completed.

“Austin was in the Sawtooth NRA before he could walk,” said his father Kevin Kraal. “We backpacked throughout the area. When Austin grew up, he found himself working for the Forest Service doing backcountry trail maintenance. After he died, we didn't want friends and family to waste money on flowers, but if they wanted to make a difference, they could contribute to something that meant something to Austin. The mountains kept him alive and sustained him. Contributing to the Sawtooth Society was a natural fit.”

Gary O'Malley, Executive Director of the Sawtooth Society, said, “The Sawtooth Society is initiating the Austin Kraal Memorial Volunteer Program in the Sawtooth NRA as part of a broader outreach effort to better educate people, particularly youth, on how they can help protect, nurture and enhance this unique area, often considered Idaho's Crown Jewel. In some instances, we will be reaching out to disadvantaged or troubled youth who can chose to participate in an outdoor work experience otherwise not available to them. Anyone who has spent time in the Sawtooth's can fully appreciate their restorative powers, and we want to support the youth being exposed to the essential benefit of being involved in something larger than themselves and finding they can make a difference.”

“When we think about the Sawtooth's, it's a spiritual feeling and an understanding that the mountains are an integral part of the world,” said Kraal. “A

Sawtooth mountain experience is a special gift for any kid, especially one who has never seen them, or perhaps didn't grow up with a family situation to get outdoors. They can have an experience in the natural world and feel they're a part of something good and healthy. It's for kids to realize that they're part of something bigger, when so often they're centered on a small part of the world."

Youth groups represent the future users and will ensure the protection of the Sawtooth NRA. Engaging them now in preserving, protecting and enhancing the area helps insure this work will continue in future generations.

"When you put a kid in the wilderness, things get stripped away," said Kraal. "They can explore a larger part of the world and be exposed to a host of new possibilities. It's healthy for any kids, especially those who are trying to find their way."

Kraal has known about the absolute pleasure of being in the Sawtooth NRA since he moved to Idaho in 1982 and considers it a home away from home. He said his son Austin was passionate about the Sawtooth NRA and passion is a good thing when directed toward a healthy objective.

"I would love to see a push toward Austin's experience in the Sawtooth NRA because he learned what a really a good thing it was to be really dirty and tired at the end of the day and that he could make a difference. He took pride in working hard and seeing the results of his work. I think a lot of kids don't get that sense of accomplishment. It's a good thing to be exhausted at the end of the day, and it's a pleasure to work hard and be close to the land."

With so many young people's focus today on the Internet and social media, there is a dangerous decline in young people's outdoor recreation and a disconnect looming between the next generation and our natural world. The Sawtooth Society is providing avenues to reinvigorate the connection. Loss of appreciation for nature jeopardizes continued protection and sound use of our natural resources, leads to a poorer understanding of our environment and may result in less fulfilling lives for our children and grandchildren.

The Sawtooth NRA comprises 756,000 acres of public and private land in central Idaho. It contains 50 snowcapped peaks, each exceeding 10,000 feet, 500 alpine lakes, numerous lush meadows, countless species of wildlife and remnants of our pioneer heritage. Groups scheduled to take part in a Sawtooth NRA experience in summer 2013 include the Stanley Community School Children, Twin Falls Boys & Girls Club, The Sage School in the Wood River Valley, White Otter Outfitters, The River Company, Sawtooth Adventure Company, The Sawtooth Brewery and numerous members of the community at-large.

The Sawtooth Society has a 15-year history of offering memberships, programs, grants and volunteer opportunities to benefit the area. Committed to enhancing everyone's Sawtooth NRA experience, the Society has a variety of ways to get involved beyond the volunteer projects, including membership, attending the Sagebrush Soiree, its annual fundraiser on July 27, or providing auction items for the event. Individuals and organizations are invited to help the Society accomplish its aggressive efforts to help preserve, protect and enhance the Sawtooth National Recreation Area for future generations.

For details and more information, visit the Sawtooth Society's new website www.sawtoothsociety.org or contact Executive Director Gary O'Malley at 208-721-2909.