



National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance

Building a wilderness stewardship community

Getting Started

This checklist can help your startup group identify what's needed to get off the ground.

Whether or not the future holds more protected wilderness, we are certain that the need for stewardship and more volunteer organizations will only continue to grow. As more and more start-up groups approach us for guidance, we've created a checklist to help them assess what's needed for success.

First Things First

As you get started, it's essential that you have:

An agency ally who

- values wilderness and sees wilderness management as essential
- values volunteer support for wilderness management
- wants to work with a stewardship group, and with volunteers

Community members who

- have a strong sense of place and identity with the local wilderness area(s)
- have a positive attitude about partnering with an agency
- are passionate to form a local stewardship group
- know, or are willing to learn, how different stewardship groups function
- are strongly networked in their community ("Pillars of the Community")
- are ready to work with NWSA to develop formal essentials such as Mission Statement, Bylaws, incorporation, MOUs, financial agency arrangements, funding sufficient to get underway

Years One and Two

As your group gets underway, look for:

An agency ally who

- believes volunteers are essential to effective wilderness management and communicates that belief within the local agency
- understands local community demographics and opinions
- knows how to manage risk effectively in the field with volunteers; plans for risk management to match mission expectations

- manages essential training

Community members who

- know how to define and find a pool of potential volunteers
- develop enthusiastic, effective recruiting strategies
- can work with community organizations and media to form local alliances (funding, extra volunteers...)

Agency / Community Cooperation

- specific, well-defined, agreed-on goals and objectives
- required technical expertise or a way to obtain it (e.g. trail work)
- see the management agency as ally, not an opponent, even if your group plans to mix advocacy and stewardship; practice leadership with the ability to collaborate even when potentially disagreeing with agency decisions.

As Your Group Matures

To ensure sustainability for the future, establish

- agency and group best practices
- 501(c)(3) status
- increasingly strong recruiting, training, retention, financial strength and management, celebrations and recognitions
 - strong cooperative communication, trust, and good balance between focused and distributed leadership within the group
 - plans for clear, open communication between agency and group, to build and maintain trust
 - coordination and agreement among potential competitors in the area
 - projects, goals, and mission statements that bring in the local community
 - agreement between agency and organization goals, needs and capabilities; "good fit" with the agency's priorities and the kind of work that can be carried out by the volunteer resources available to a particular group
 - shared sense of place and identity associated with the wilderness area
 - capacity to coordinate meaningful project work that encourages grassroots volunteering.