

Shoulder to Shoulder: Effective Partnership Models Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) and the Forest Service

History

- Many wilderness bills in the area were opposed due to the logistics and restrictions involved if the designation came through. With a designation, tools currently used like chainsaws and mechanized transport would be forbidden.
- In November 2010, Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) was formed as a project of The Wilderness Society that was dedicated to stewarding wilderness using the primitive methods and tools instructed by the Wilderness Act.
- SAWS works in 5 states – Tennessee, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia – with over a dozen Forest Service Districts.
- Maintains offices in Tennessee and North Carolina.



Challenges

- A “top-heavy relationship” with the Forest Service: Due to strong relationships with the regional office, the district units can feel that they are being given orders rather than supporting a partnership that gives them an equal voice.

**“We walk the fine line of not ‘telling’ the forests what to do through influence at the regional level.”
–Bill Hodge, SAWS Executive Director**

Solutions

- Always be respectful of the chain of command, and learn the proper way up it.
- Always check-in at the district level to make sure they share the vision the regional office is presenting, and vice-versa.

Outcomes

- Wilderness Skills Institute where SAWS partners, volunteers, staff, and agency folks can receive wilderness stewardship training.
 - Ensures skills are held by a variety of people, both paid and volunteer, so proper wilderness stewardship can continue regardless of budget cuts or other hurdles.
 - Brings together people with a common interest working towards a common goal and makes them feel like part of a larger team.
- 5 year Challenge Cost Share Agreement with the Forest Service.
- A region-wide volunteer agreement, rather than 19 individual agreements with each district they partner with.

“We work with the forest, not on it.” –Bill Hodge, SAWS Executive Director

