

**Forest Service Strategic Communication Plan**

**The Southern California National Forests  
Volunteer Program**

Office of Communication  
201 14th Street, S.W., 2-Central  
Washington, DC 20250

Diane M. Harris  
Southern California National Forest Volunteer Program Manager

September 22, 2004

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this communication plan is to increase Forest Service and public responsiveness to the Southern California National Forest Volunteer program initiative. The goal of the program is to expand volunteer activities in the national forests in order to meet fire recovery goals for 2004 and 2005. The Communication Plan will be used as a template on which to build the long-term strategy for creating a systematic, and seamless approach within the four Southern California National Forests (Cleveland, Los Padres, Angeles, and San Bernardino) for recruiting and working in collaboration with volunteers.

Diane Harris, Southern California Volunteer Program Manager, will be the primary contact for the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program. Wallace E. Mathes, Province Media Relations Specialist, will review the Communication Plan and planned media releases. Finally Forest Public Affairs Officers will utilize media strategies created in this plan.

Both internal and external audiences are targeted for the communication plan, including but not limited to, Forest Service leadership, front line officers, conservation, recreation and volunteer organizations, and the media. The purpose of the communication plan is to share information with internal and external audiences in order to raise awareness about the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program.

## **BACKGROUND**

Of the 3,894,000 acres of forestland, more than one-fifth (800,000 acres) was burned by the 2003 fires and ten percent (415,000 acres of land) continues to be threatened by the Bark Beetle. In addition, the fire resulted in the loss of hundreds of homes, 24 lives, including one firefighter, and sixteen people were killed in post fire flooding. Contributing to the risk in our forests is the rapid urbanization in our region and the resulting high levels of Forest recreation traffic.

Volunteers are urgently needed to assist the Forest Service with their goals to meet fire recovery objectives. The Province is working to strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention efforts in the region.

In April of 2004, The Southern California Volunteer Program Manager was hired to provide coordination to ensure that volunteers can easily learn about and participate in volunteer opportunities between the four Southern California forests and assist with building long-term capacity in managing volunteers and building advocacy.

Recently, a team of eight Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns and one SCA staff member were recruited to assist the forest service with the implementation of the Southern California Volunteer Program. Their main role is to provide volunteer coordination and capacity

building services for the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program (Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino, and Cleveland) for one year (July 6, 2004 – July 1, 2005).

## **GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

### **Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program Goals:**

The goal of the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program is to:

1. Improve the forest ecosystem, especially that burned in the fires, through the implementation of forest stewardship projects.
2. Provide opportunities for volunteers to have rewarding, meaningful experiences.
3. Inspire members of diverse populations to participate in ongoing forest stewardship opportunities.
4. Develop infrastructure and capacity on the four Southern California National Forests for building long-term programs that cultivate ongoing relationships with partners and volunteers.

### **Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program Objectives:**

#### **Improve the Forest Ecosystem:**

1. Provide Forest Service staff with avenues for posting volunteer projects with the Southern California Volunteer Program in order to complete projects and accomplish fire recovery goals.
2. Make available Volunteer Program Managers for each Southern National Forest to coordinate project priorities for each forest.

#### **Provide Rewarding Opportunities:**

1. Create a range of projects involving botany, wildlife, recreation, and fire restoration to engage the diverse interests of volunteers.
2. Provide a system of recognition for volunteers such as hats, certificates, fee free passes, etc to thank them for their participation.
3. Provide conservation education, team building and other activities in order to ensure that the public has a rewarding volunteer experience.

#### **Inspire Diverse Populations:**

1. Outreach to segments of the population that are not typically involved in Forest Volunteer Program activities (refer to County TAG information).
2. Participate in community and other organizational events.

#### **Build the Capacity of the Forest Service to Work With Volunteers:**

1. Utilizing Volunteer Program Management Tools developed by the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program Management team, implement an organized approach among the four national forests in Southern California for recruiting and working in collaboration with volunteers.

### Communication Plan Goals:

1. Introduce the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program to the Forest Service, partnering organizations, and to the public. Provide them with information regarding:
  - Forest Service:
    - Where FS staff submits a request for volunteers.
    - How volunteers can contribute to forest stewardship projects.
    - Where to find current information about ongoing projects.
  - Volunteers and Partners:
    - Available volunteer opportunities.
    - Contact persons at each forest for volunteer interested in participating in activities
    - The benefits of volunteering
2. Recruit volunteers, staff, and partnering organizations for the Southern California Volunteer Program.

## AUDIENCES

The identified audiences for the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program Communication Plan are both internal and external.

**Internal:** The main focus of the internal audience includes forest associations, national forest leadership, front line Forest Service staff, the Regional Office and the Washington Office.

- **Forest Associations:** The purpose of reaching forest associations is to expand our ability to interface with the public, share information about volunteer opportunities, and motivate and recruit potential volunteers.
- **Southern California National Forests:** The national forests are targeted to communicate and disseminate information about how to initiate volunteer projects and where to direct the public to participate in projects.
- **Regional Office:** The purpose of reaching the Regional Office is to include them in the process of streamlining communication and collaboration among the four forests.
- **Washington Office:** The purpose of raising awareness in the Washington Office is to gain national exposure and support for successful Southern California volunteer programs and events.

### External:

**Groups:** The main focus of the external audience includes organizations that may or may not have a relationship with the forests and are looking for opportunities to contribute to forest stewardship work. Potential audiences include:

- *Youth Groups:* The Girl Scouts, The Boy Scouts, The Children's Forest, SOS Youth and Family Inc.,

- *Conservation Partners:* Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation, Mule Deer Association of California, The Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Tree People, Habitat Works, California Native Plant Society, Fisheries Resource Volunteer Corps, Morro Coast Audubon Society, The Wildlife Society.
- *Recreation User Groups:* Mountain Bike Assoc., Equestrian Groups, OHV, Good Sam Club, Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers, Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers, California Trail Users Coalition, Pacific Coast Trail Association, San Gabriel Mountain Trailblazers, The San Geronio Wilderness Association, Front Country Recreation Volunteers, San Diego Wildfire Recovery Group, Trails 4 All, SHARE Mountain Bike Club
- *Corporations:* Home Depot, American Honda, Toyota, Disney, REI, Sport Shops, and Equipment groups, Starbucks, Ticket Master, Republic of Tea, Trader Joe's, Adventure 16, Patagonia, Jeep, Walmart, Office Depot, Rainbird, Safeway, Ralphs.
- *Church Groups*
- *Schools*

**Individuals:** The secondary focus would be those individuals who have no prior relationship with the Southern California Volunteer Program but are looking for opportunities to volunteer or just participate in outdoor activities. This audience would be targeted at special events such as the LA Count Fair, Market Nights, etc and locations such as Ranger Stations, campsites and recreation stores.

## Analyzing Audiences

For volunteer activities in the forests, outreach would typically require targeting those audiences that are interested in recreation and/or conservation efforts. However, with the devastation to homes and lives that occurred as a result of the 2003 fires, the Southern California National Forests Volunteer program can capitalize on a heightened public awareness to capture attention of diverse populations and increase volunteer involvement in forest recovery efforts.

## THE KEY INTERNAL & EXTERNAL MESSAGES

### Internal Message

#### Key Message 1:

The Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program has been developed to increase volunteer activity in the Southern California National Forests.

- Individuals or groups interested in volunteer opportunities can contact a Forest Volunteer Program Manager or the Southern California Volunteer Program Manager for project information.
- Forest Service staff will be provided with updates on volunteer projects in the four forests as well as guidance as to how to post projects and recruit volunteers.

- Volunteers can help the Forest Service to accomplish fire recovery goals for 2004 and 2005.

**External Message**

**Key Message 2:**

Volunteer opportunities can be fun, a chance to socialize, get exercise, experience the outdoors, learn new skills, and contribute to forest preservation.

## THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY - INTERNAL

**Goal 1: Introduce the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program to the Forest Service. Provide them with information regarding:**

- **Where FS staff submits requests for volunteers.**
- **How volunteers can contribute to forest stewardship projects.**
- **Where to find current information about ongoing projects.**

### **Tactics**

1. Volunteer Coordinators for the four forests will present a brief summary and continuous updates about the Southern California Volunteer Program (including updates on projects, partners, contact information for Volunteer Program Managers, and instructions for project submissions) at their FLT staff meetings:
  - San Bernardino National Forest: Every Monday
  - Cleveland National Forest: Every other month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week
  - Los Padres National Forest: Every other month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week
  - Angeles National Forest: Every other month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week
2. The Southern California Volunteer Program Management Team will circulate a handbook regarding the Student Conservation Association and their work in the four Southern California National Forests. This handbook will help the forests to understand the SCA's role in building the organizational capacity of each forest to manage and recruit volunteers.
3. The Southern California Volunteer Program Manager will distribute a fact sheet to the Southern Province staff for the purpose of:
  - Ensuring that front line officers and other staff are aware of the program and know where to direct inquiries from the public.
  - Instructing Forest Service staff on who to contact to submit projects.
  - Informing staff of other projects that have already been posted.
4. Electronic Newsletters will be distributed throughout the Forest Service on a bi-monthly basis that will include information on ongoing projects, the benefits of utilizing volunteers, contact information and instruction for project submissions, and a calendar of scheduled volunteer activities.

## THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY - EXTERNAL<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Under no circumstances should any official activity identified in this plan be misused to influence Congress. Although the definition of lobbying differs within each statute or regulation, the restrictions generally prohibit contacting or encouraging others to contact federal legislators in an attempt to influence the enactment or modification of legislation or other specified activities. Should any questions arise as to the appropriateness of an activity, Legislative Affairs staff should be contacted prior to conducting the activity.

**Goal 1: Introduce the Southern California National Forests Volunteer Program to the Forest Service's partnering organizations and to the public. Provide them with information regarding:**

- **Available volunteer opportunities.**
- **Contact persons at each forest for volunteers interested in participating in activities.**
- **The benefits of volunteering.**

## **Tactics**

1. Develop a system of scheduled quarterly press releases with the Southern Province Media Relations Specialist and the Forest Public Affairs Officers in order to continue to engage the public in volunteer activities.
2. Circulate the annual Volunteer Opportunity Guide among the four national forests and the Province for distribution to the public.
3. Post quarterly volunteer electronic newsletters on forest websites and Forest Association Websites or link the websites.
4. Utilizing the assistance of Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns, participate in community, corporation, and organizational outreach activities.
5. Develop promotional posters, easels, and other materials to be displayed in windows, on store counters, and in the headquarters of volunteer and conservation organizations.

**Goal 2: Recruit volunteers, staff, and partnering organizations for the Southern California Volunteer Program.**

## **Tactics**

1. With the assistance of the SCA, develop a network of organization, company, and community contacts.
2. Post volunteer activities on [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov) and [www.tpia.org](http://www.tpia.org)
3. The Southern Province will host monthly conference calls (next conference call scheduled for August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004) to inform and recruit potential partners of volunteer events.
4. Develop an ongoing partnership with organizations and corporations utilizing the assistance of the Student Conservation Association. Customize projects to suit organizational interests. Provide team building opportunities, recognition, tap into the healthier US Initiative, provide education, and allow opportunities for feedback.

## Action Plan

Due Date	Activity	Purpose	Who Responsible
Ongoing	Inform FLT meetings	To update the forests on the programs	Vol. Program Mgrs.
Bi-monthly	Distribute Fact Sheets throughout the Province	To inform the Forests about the Vol. Program	Province
Ongoing	Community and organizational outreach	To inform new partners about volunteer opportunities	SCA and Volunteer Program Managers
Ongoing	Develop Promotional posters, easels, brochures to be distributed to potential partners	To have another tool to inform the public about volunteer opportunities	Province
Bi-monthly	Electronic Newsletters	To inform the forests and the public of volunteer activities and information	Province
Annually	Volunteer Opportunity Guide Print and Distribution	To inform the public of volunteer activities and to recognize volunteer work	Province

## EVALUATION

### **Increase Awareness:**

The Forest Service Southern Province will collect basic evidence on media exposure from the four forests and from the Province. The Southern California Volunteer Program Manager will quantify the number of media articles, radio spots, and web site hits on a quarterly basis and will evaluate the effectiveness of media outreach strategies.

### **Increase Volunteer Participation:**

The Forest Service Southern Province will collect quantitative information from the four national forests regarding volunteer participation in projects. The Province will collect completed evaluation forms from volunteers to determine the level of satisfaction from volunteer experiences in the national forests.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS CONTACTS**

### **Regional Office:**

Wallace E. Mathes  
Media Relations Specialist

### **Forest level:**

San Bernardino National Forest  
Ruth Wenstrom  
Public Affairs Officer  
Forest Headquarters  
1824 S. Commercenter Circle  
San Bernardino, CA 92408-3430

Cleveland National Forest  
Joan Wynn  
Public Affairs Officer  
Forest Headquarters

Los Padres National Forest  
Kathleen Good  
Public Affairs Officer

Angeles National Forest  
Sherry Rollman  
Public Affairs Officer  
Forest Headquarters

# The Southern California Wildfire Recovery Program

Sponsored by: The USDA Forest Service

## Background

Of the 3,894,000 acres of forestland, more than one fifth (800,000 acres) was destroyed by the 2003 fires and ten percent (415,000 acres of land<sup>1</sup>) continues to be threatened by the Bark Beetle. In addition, the fire resulted in the loss of hundreds of homes, 24 lives, including one firefighter, and sixteen people were killed in post fire flooding. Contributing to the risk is the rapid urbanization in our region and the resulting high levels of Forest recreation traffic.

Volunteers are urgently needed to assist the Forest Service with their goals to meet fire recovery objectives. Some groups have stepped forward from corporations, conservation groups and youth groups to student interns and other citizens. However, these efforts are just a small portion of the manpower necessary to keep our forests healthy and available to the public.

Recognizing the urgent need for volunteers, the Forest Service recruited the Student Conservation Association (SCA) to build volunteer support in the four southern California national forests (Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino, and Cleveland). This program is a continuation of the California Wildfire Recovery Project, a program previously funded by the Earth Day Network and Home Depot Inc. that operated between January to June, 2004. The SCA volunteer management team works on fire restoration projects as well as general forest health and public service projects.

## Forest Service Champions – The Student Conservation Association

The SCA is the leader in national resource conservation, providing service opportunities, outdoor skills and leadership training to thousands of high school and college students each year.

In all 50 states, young men and women join together through SCA to care for our national parks and forests, historic and cultural resources, and urban green spaces -- the benefits of which extend far beyond our environment:

- SCA participants practice leadership and teamwork, rise to new challenges, and gain valuable experience.
- Resource Management partners achieve more of their critical conservation goals.
- Hikers, campers and other visitors enjoy a richer wilderness experience.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Emergency Address by Governor Grey Davis, March 7, 2000

- SCA's many supporters exercise a direct hand in building the next generation of conservation leaders<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> This information was taken directly from the Student Conservation Association Website: [www.sca.org](http://www.sca.org)