SESSION TITLE : USFS Enhancing Partnership Policies

CONVENER(S): Mike Dawson – PCTA

PARTICIPANTS: Beth Boyst – USFS, Anitra Kass – PCTA, Jon Knechtel – PNTA, Michelle Mitchell – USFS, Bob Proudman – ATC, Morgan Sommerville – ATC, Jonathan Stephens – USFS, Suzanne Wilson – PCTA, Kent Wimmer – FTA

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and/or RECOMMENDATIONS:
Please refer to Federal Register Vol. 75, No. 177.

Mike Dawson hosted an unscheduled group discussion to review the Federal Register notice and collect comments of the Partnership and USFS. USFS proposed a **deadline for comment 11/15/10**.

Combined comments for USFS Questions 1-4 from October 20 and 21 meeting:

USFS Question #1: Purposes served by partnership arrangements

- Consistent volunteer policy across all agency levels
- Capture intrinsic value of volunteers in the financial plans and structure
- Provide education to professional staff of the values of the partnerships
- Support volunteer importance and their ownership of the trail
- Foster citizen stewardship
- Ensure agency contacts are trained and professional
- Recognize the inherent value of volunteers to accomplish the shared vision between partners
- Quantify volunteer involvement
- Enhance education conservation
- Recognize volunteers as future stewards
- Build support of USFS mission in the general public
- Emphasize and cite NTS authorities
- Codify mutual benefit of partnership
- "Value-added" recognized
- Establish a deeper partnership vision statement (i.e. poem) to include mutual goals and benefits

USFS Question #2: Essential characteristics of partnerships

- Investment in non-profit, agency unit level management
- Investment in trail planning at all levels
- Develop complimentary skill sets
- Interaction with the general public
- Empowerment
- Partner commitment to develop wider USFS goals beyond the NTS (ex. training for the general public)
- Across agency commitment to making it work

- Transparency and trust on both sides
- Shared vision and understanding
- Mutual evaluation and accountability (i.e. monitoring the partnership)
- Respect of autonomies and mandates by both groups (to include financial stability of partners)
- Recognize the value of the partnership at all levels
- Willingness for all parties to share risk
- Clarification of USFS mechanisms (ex. MOU, cost-share, volunteer agreement) and clear understanding of authority

USFS Question #3: Reaching new partners

- Partnership empowerment to bring in other groups
- Provide bureaucracy leadership and education to other groups (i.e. be the intermediate)
- Increase diversity in the USFS
- Include relevant organizations, such as:
    - Land managers
    - Health care organizations
    - Other NGOs (ex. Tribal communities)
    - Chamber of Commerce
    - Tourism industries

USFS Question #4: Partner recognition and sponsorship

- Investment in the partnership beyond finances
- Incorporate community and USFS culture
- Recognized endorsements to increase credibility of partners (ex. thank you letter)
- Public acknowledgement
- Capitalize primary partnerships

<u>Comments from October 20 not designated into a category during meeting:</u>

- Provide consistent standards of authorization and use of government vehicles to partner staff and corps crews
- Provide adequate training and certifications:
    - Training to be performed by professionals (agencies, partners, or contractors) so volunteers meet professional standards
    - Ensure instructors are qualified and conveniently located. An expert volunteer should be able to get recertified as easily as one gets a drivers-license renewal
    - Provide better education, increased confidence and consistency among instructors
    - Develop step-by-step training process to be adopted regionally (individual areas can customize to fit specific needs)
- Pooled Risks for Volunteers in the Forest:
    - Risk aversion of Line 1 Officers
    - Any one accident “penalizes” host district

Other comments made on October 20:

Michelle Mitchell called for input regarding the development of a National Volunteer Strategy. Deadline November 15. Bob Proudman included that the National Scenic Trail Groups should probably provide drafts to each other and a coordinated strategy of input to the USFS. PNTS should provide the lead statement. USFS staff may be willing to review drafts (check to be sure).

Jonathan Stephens and Michelle Mitchell pointed out that the National Trail System Act (Sect. 7H) has broader authorities than others that guide the Forest Service.

Strict requirements from USFS Grants and Agreements (business section) are limiting feasibility and success of NGO-NSTs and their volunteer and trail-crew projects *despite* broader NSTA authorities; NGO-NSTs should band together to effectuate appropriate change.

Added by Bob Proudman, FS staff unfamiliar with national scenic trails do not understand the lifelong commitments made by citizen volunteers. Using an analogy by the A.T.'s founder, Benton MacKaye, we can say that the Trails in the National Trail System are "its Body;" where as the citizen-volunteers, NGOs and hikers and visitors, are the trail system's "Soul."