SESSION TITLE : Working with Local communities to promote NSTs

CONVENER(S): Mike Gildesgame

PARTICIPANTS: N/A

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS and/or RECOMMENDATIONS:

Key topics:

- Raising awareness and including your NST and the NST system in outreach
- Finding/Engaging volunteers
- Making the community more welcoming to hikers/identifying community needs
- Building local constituency for trail protection

Raising Awareness

- è Use a multi-media approach at all levels: municipal, regional news outlets including Facebook
- Set up Gateway Community program to highlight that the trail goes through the town (ATC, Arizona)
- Establish "public official of the year" award, or similar
- Signage about the trail on the highways, at major trail intersections so people in town know the trail exists!
- Meet and involve local politicians, chambers of commerce and sign MOU re: the trail (see FL); focus on mutual support and benefits to the town—check out the ATC website
- Challenge of quantifying the benefits to the towns
- Challenge of sustaining the relationships locally/regionally
- NIMBYism especially for new segments and new designations: Local concerns for trash, increased crime, the "wrong" element coming in—homeowners associations—and property value impact
- è Make hosting a trail an honor—becoming a trail host—perhaps having a sign along the trail ROW thanking xxx for hosting the trail or earning free membership in the trail organization; recognize them publicly, perhaps in local papers or short story.
- è PNTS brochure for homeowners and associations describing benefits to community of hosting a trail (Julia's idea) and being part of the NST system

Finding/Engaging Volunteers

- Partner with companies and other organizations like REI, LLBean EMA and others who have service days; train trail ambassadors; set up hiking or backpacking 101 in their stores to highlight the trail—and oh by the way, you can by some good socks here…

Making the community more welcoming

- Outreach and education to the community about the trail (see above), including informative signage about the trail and parking/access information for day hikers. See north country trail signage on their website
- Make available services, or inform hikers about where they can shower, do laundry, sleep, info on outdoor gear stores, food, etc.

- Make sure community knows about the value of the trail (see brochure idea above)
- Find sponsors for the trail—maintenance like adopt a highway section
- Educate hikers about respecting the local property
- è Monitor hiking community information about attitudes and trail conditions, their perceptions of the towns' friendliness—trail blogs, facebook pages, trail logs, etc.

RECOMMENDATION for PNTS ACTION: è = key recommendations