

# Volunteer with the Trailhead Stewardship Program

Bill Tarkulich didn't know that his hike in Mahoosuc Notch would end in a search and rescue. After he boosted himself up about ten feet to reach the top of an incline, he lost his footing and tumbled onto the rocks below. Bill's fall caused immediate bleeding from his brain and he couldn't stop vomiting. When a search and rescue team did arrive, it took them twelve hours and thirty people to extract him from the trail.

That hike took place back in 2009, but it had a lasting influence on Bill. "It really brought home to me that every time you do a search and rescue, it's a prolonged effort," he said. Bill has been a volunteer with the White Mountain National Forest for three years, and he is very passionate about the Trailhead Stewardship program, brainchild of John Marunowski, the Backcountry/Wilderness Manager of the Pemigewasset Ranger District.



The program began when John examined the number of accidents that happen in the White Mountains. When he discovered that around 200 search and rescue attempts happen statewide per year, he investigated further and found that about half of those accidents happen in the White Mountains. About half of total 200 attempts are pursuing hikers. Things get messy when considering that the search and rescue teams are all volunteer positions, and these individuals are overwhelmed if more than one call comes in at once. The easiest solution is to prevent accidents from happening in the first place.

Enter the Trailhead Stewardship program. John chose five trailheads that connected to the most vulnerable locations in the White Mountains. He and his volunteers set up information tents there and made it their mission to maintain a flow of communication with hikers passing through. They ask a lot of questions. Where are you off to? Do you know the weather conditions at the summit? Did you pack the the "10 Essentials?" If it's clear to the stewards that a hiker is ill prepared, poorly dressed, or starting a long hike too late in the day, they will encourage the hiker to either try an easier, shorter, hike, or return with more supplies the next morning.



### **BECOME A VOLUNTEER**

Trailhead Stewards staff the trailheads on Saturdays and Sundays in two four-hour shifts from May through October. Last year, they spoke with 30,000 people. It sounds like a big number, but the White Mountains receive around 6 million visitors per year. There are many more hikers to reach. The 800,000 acres of land in the White Mountain National Forest requires many volunteers to keep it pristine, beautiful, and serviceable for

the public. “We need help everywhere,” said Bill. “The forest rangers don’t often have opportunity anymore to go hiking while people are out.”

Volunteers with the Trailhead Stewardship program need the ability to approach people and communicate information to them. They should have experience hiking, but John doesn’t want that criteria to scare potential volunteers away. “Even a few times on the trail educates you a lot more than someone who hasn’t hiked at all,” he said. He and the rest of the team are willing to teach those who are willing to learn. They never send a volunteer out on their own until that volunteer is confident in the information they must know and share.

If you’d like to volunteer with the Trailhead Stewardship program or simply gain knowledge about hiking responsibly, you can attend the free training session on Saturday, April 8, from 8 a.m.-12 p.m. This training is at the National Forest Headquarters in Campton. Bill, who has attended this training before, is sharing some knowledge this year and taking more of a leadership position. “[After my first training session], I found I had a much better sense of how the forest operates,” he said.

If you are interested in volunteering in another program with the Forest Service, attend the free Awareness Session on March 28th from 6-8 p.m. at the Pease Public Library.

Contact John Marunowski for more details at [jmarunowski@fs.fed.us](mailto:jmarunowski@fs.fed.us).



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