

*Self-Sustaining Partnerships in Heritage Preservation: The Site Stewards of the Santa Fe National Forest, North-Central New Mexico, USA.* Paper presented in the session “Practicing Public Archaeology: Contemporary Issues of Engagement and Action, Part II,” Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Santa Fe, New Mexico, March 19, 2009.

(**SLIDE**) In both the research and management arenas of archaeology, the mantra of late is that we must increasingly seek outside partners in the community to help us accomplish our goals and objectives. Today, Mike and I would like to share our experience in building a partner organization. Our agency, the Santa Fe National Forest, manages over eight thousand archaeological, historic and traditional cultural properties on approximately 1.6 million acres of forests, mountains and grasslands in north-central New Mexico. (**SLIDE**) Sixty five of these properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and include treasures such as the remains of ancestral and historic Pueblo Indian villages, Spanish colonial townsites, historic fire lookout towers, and some of the oldest rock art in the American Southwest. Despite a full-time staff of eight heritage resource specialists, the Santa Fe Forest has long strained to ensure the preservation and protection of its historic properties. In response for the need to provide consistent monitoring of our most important and sensitive historic and archaeological sites, in 1995, we created a Site Stewards program that enlists volunteers to aid us in our preservation mission.

The development of any outside partnership creates a paradox for the researcher or manager. While partners bring manpower, expertise, and community connections to an archaeological enterprise, with this relationship come new responsibilities and commitments that can drain significant resources from the organization seeking assistance and cooperation from the outside. Therein lies the dilemma of partnership: do the benefits of seeking assistance beyond

the institution outweigh the time and resources needs to forge effective partnerships? The Santa Fe's story provides an example of how to resolve this challenge. First, we'll provide a brief history of the challenges faced by the U.S. Forest Service in accomplishing its mission of protecting and preserving places of historic and cultural importance. Then we'll discuss our experience with the Santa Fe National Forest Site Stewards, and how the organization was transformed from a traditional volunteer program to a self-sustaining partner organization.

Unlike other Federal land management agencies, such as the National Park Service, the management of heritage resources is not a core mission of the Forest Service. **(SLIDE)** Established as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1905, the Forest Service was endowed with only two central objectives: the conservation of timber resources, and the protection of watersheds. Prior to the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (or NHPA) in 1966, the Forest Service had little involvement in historic preservation. As late as 1955, the agency had no budget for cultural resources, and employed no heritage professionals. The Southwestern Region of the Forest Service, which includes New Mexico and Arizona, hired its first archaeologist only in 1966. With passage of NHPA the heritage program within the Forest Service has grown dramatically to accommodate the historic preservation requirements of Section 106 of the Act and other Federal cultural resources and environmental legislation. **(SLIDE)** Today, the agency has about 350 full-time heritage professionals, most of whom are archaeologists, who work at various levels across the nine regions, 175 forests and grasslands, and the 585 ranger districts that make up the National Forest system. While this staffing may seem impressive, it is still small in comparison to the management task faced by the agency. The Forest Service has approximately 325,000 recorded archaeological, historic and cultural sites that are located on the 20 percent of the agency's 78 million hectares (193 million acres) that have

been inventoried for such sites. The Forest Service manages these 78 million hectares, about 10 percent of the land mass of the United States, with a budget of about four and a half billion dollars, which is only slightly more than its parent agency, the Department of Agriculture, paid in 2006 to subsidize cotton farming. **(SLIDE)** Of that four and a half billion dollars, only four-tenths of one percent is dedicated to the heritage program. Not only is the budget for the Forest Service's heritage programs small, but it has declined significantly over the past 15 years. From an inflation-adjusted<sup>1</sup> high of 24.8 million dollars in 1993, the budget for heritage programs declined to only 14.5 million dollars in 2008.

It is in this context of scarce and declining resources that we as an agency and as a program have sought outside partners to help us achieve our management objectives. **(SLIDE)** The Southwestern Region initiated its first site steward program in Arizona in 1987, and in 1989, the Forest Service created the Passport in Time program, which has since employed 28,000 volunteers that have donated some 1.3 million hours of their time on research and preservation projects across the National Forest system. In 2006, volunteers contributed the equivalent of 2.3 million dollars in service to the agency's heritage program, an amount equivalent to about 15 percent of its total budget. **(SLIDE)** However, in 2004 alone, the agency also turned away 38 percent of those seeking to volunteer for heritage projects, citing a lack of manpower and funding to oversee volunteer projects and programs. Herein lies the paradox of partnership: while volunteers will provide valuable labor and resources to a program, the very management of these partnerships can drain manpower from a program already so short of money and staffing that it may be unfeasible for it to take advantage of the opportunity of partnership in the first place.

(SLIDE) In the late 1980s, the Santa Fe National Forest made a first attempt at creating a site stewards program. So little was recorded about the program, and its longevity was so short that the memory of it is about all that is left. What that first attempt at creating a program did do, however, was persist in the mind of an interested public. It planted the seed of possibility in certain segments of the community sufficient enough that a decade later, certain individuals wondered of the possibility of such a program being developed on the Forest at a more opportune time.

Although the Santa Fe's early program was not successful, in the early 1990s the New Mexico State Land Office (SLO), developed a site stewardship program with the support of Ray Powell, State Land Commissioner, and under the guidance of Norm Nelson, the State Land Office archaeologist. Unlike for the Santa Fe, the time was ripe for development of a program at the State Land Office. Developed in response to vandalism and natural deterioration of some of the most significant archaeological and historic sites on State trust lands, the program succeeded in drawing a cadre of interested citizens who were willing to be trained and work on those resources. Nelson's mentoring of the program resulted in a large number of volunteers being trained in site inspection techniques. Land Office stewards were also enlisted in the stabilization of several large sites. However, the program languished after Nelson's departure in 1998. With the loss of his leadership, along with a change in Land Office administration, the program entered a hibernation that lasted until its revival as the basis of the very successful state-wide New Mexico Site Watch program early in the current decade, under the leadership of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

That same year, Santa Fe National Forest Supervisor Leonard Atencio was asked by the Sangre de Cristo Chapter of the Sierra Club to speak on the current condition of the Forest. At

the meeting, attendees raised the issue of site protection on the forest and asked why it lacked a site steward program. Presumably their interest in asking the question was either a familiarity with the nascent program attempted in the 1980s or more likely with the robust and successful programs that were in place with the New Mexico State Land Office and the program in Arizona. Atencio politely responded that he did not know why the Forest did not have a site steward program but that he would initiate one the next day. Although well intentioned Atencio did not know what he was setting in motion nor was he aware of the commitment he was making. He did get those present at the meeting to say that they would come listen to a presentation by the Forest Archaeologist on the newly formed Forest program, and if interested they would form the base of volunteers for the organization. The next day Atencio notified the Forest Archaeologist, Mike Bremer, that the Santa Fe National Forest had just initiated a site steward program. Implicit within this notification was the Forest Supervisor's support for the program. However, Atencio was not aware of the amount of work necessary to initiate and maintain such a program.

Upon receiving his marching orders from the Forest Supervisor, Mike initiated a recruitment drive with an outreach to volunteer and archaeological avocational organizations that there was an opportunity for individuals to receive training as stewards. He also used a small cadre of volunteers who were already involved with the Santa Fe's heritage programs, in particular, the Passport in Time program. **(SLIDE)** Two individuals, Terry Ballone and Wayne Nelson, in particular, deserve special mention in that they participated in the State Land Office steward training with Bremer as a way to see what a basic site steward training program would look like. They formed the core of the group that, through their social and community networks, solicited additional volunteers, and then developed the first stewards training program on the Santa Fe. That spring, the Forest trained the first class of 20 stewards. **(SLIDE)** It modeled

itself after the training conducted by the State Land Office and consisted of a single day of training with classroom lectures in the morning and a field exercise at a “mock” site in the afternoon.

The Forest developed a list of sites that needed inspection and assigned stewards to sites. Trained stewards were oriented to sites with site visits conducted most often with the Forest Archaeologist. By the end of the first training around ten sites were included in the program and were being monitored at least once a month. Subsequent trainings were held at the rate of one a year until April of 2000. By then, around 60 people had been trained in the program and around 35 committed stewards were retained inspecting 25 or more sites. Big rules the Forest required stewards to follow included absolutely no firearms in the possession of a steward while performing their duties, no pets were allowed in the field, no untrained visitors could accompany stewards in the field, no contact was to be made between stewards and encountered any visitors encountered on sites, stewards were required to check out and check in, and they were required to report on the results of their site inspections.

From its inception management and coordination of the program was through the Heritage Program in the Forest’s Supervisor’s Office. A centralized program allowed Mike Bremer, the Forest Archeologist, to stay aware of the stewards’ accomplishments, and communicate the benefits of the program to Forest staff. Centralization also meant, however, that Mike alone did not have the resources available to deal with the demands of 35 committed volunteers. Prior to 2000 he and the other Heritage staff on the Forest were able to keep track of steward visits and reports but were not always able to be available to answer Steward questions and assist in field issues. Despite the insufficient funds and scarce attention, the program was surprisingly successful. The 35 volunteers with the program were monitoring around 40 sites on

the Forest and providing volunteer services well in excess of any funding the Forest was appropriated for such activity. Almost all of the success was the result of the commitment of the volunteers. In 1999, the dedication and hard work of the Santa Fe Site Stewards were recognized with a New Mexico Historic Preservation award. By that time the SLO program was dormant and the Santa Fe National Forest's program was the most visible site steward program in the state.

In April of 2000 the Forest held a site steward training for 20 additional volunteers. This new cadre was distinguished by a large number of very motivated and dynamic people who anticipated completing their training in time to begin visiting sites during the summer of 2000. But on May 4th, Bandelier National Monument began a prescribed burn in the vicinity of Cerro Grande on the east side of the Jemez Mountains, between the Santa Fe National Forest and the Los Alamos National Laboratory. **(SLIDE)** By May 8th the prescribed burn had jumped its containment lines, and quickly grew into a catastrophic wildfire that eventually burned over 19 thousand hectares, engulfing the town of Los Alamos and destroying over 200 homes. To complicate matters, a second wildfire started in the southern end of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the eastern portion of the Santa Fe National Forest. This fire, the Viveash Fire, scorched an additional almost 12 thousand hectares, and was one of the most intense wildfires on record in the Southwest. Together, the two fires and their aftermath severely taxed the resources of the Forest's heritage team for over a year.

The fires had immediate consequences for the Site Stewards program. Forest personnel were unable to orient the newly trained stewards to their sites, and were also unable to administer the activities of existing stewards. **(SLIDE)** As Forest Archaeologist, Mike Bremer made the decision to temporarily discontinue the activities of the Site Stewards program until the

emergency conditions associated with the two fires passed. Recovery efforts for both fires were anticipated to take more than a year. The existing and the newly trained stewards were sympathetic to the plight of the Forest's heritage team, but were also concerned that their training would go to waste. By the fall of 2000 it was becoming clear to both Mike and the stewards that the Site Steward program on the Santa Fe National Forest was in faced possible disintegration. A group of stewards composed of existing and newly trained stewards approached the Forest with a proposal that the stewards themselves take over responsibility for management of the program. **(SLIDE)** There did not appear to be any precedent for stewards running their own program and Mike's first reaction to the proposal was not favorable. Upon further reflection however, he realized that the Stewards and the Forest were treading on new potentially fertile new ground. While fearful that a self-administered program would mean a loss of control over the stewards by the Forest's heritage program, Mike also recognized that he had been unable to devote sufficient resources to administering the program even before thousands of hectares and hundreds of heritage sites had been burned by the Cerro Grande and Viveash Fires. Ultimately, he came to the realization that for the Forest's heritage program, there was little to lose and much to gain.

During the fall and winter of 2000 and 2001 a committee of volunteers came together and developed a proposal for the Forest. **(SLIDE)** At its core, the proposal consisted of forming a governing council that would be responsible for administering the site steward program on the Santa Fe National Forest. The Council would be responsible for developing governance documents and an organization consisting of committees that would oversee site stewardship on the Forest with the Forest Archaeologist and the Forest Supervisor having oversight on recommendations made by the Council. **(SLIDE)** The Council proposed dividing the Forest into

areas that would be administered by Area Team Leaders and Assistant Area Team Leaders who would be responsible for the day-to-day monitoring and inspection activities in those areas. Governance documents provided a mission statement, a code of ethics and operational guidelines for the Area and Assistant Area Team Leaders. In addition, the Council developed guidelines and standards for steward training and conduct, and took on the task of training stewards themselves. Within a year the Council had provided the Forest with the opportunity to continue the site stewardship program by taking on many of the responsibilities formerly held by the Forest. The Council served as an extension of the Forest's heritage program and provided a much needed support mechanism that the Forest did not on its own have the resources to provide.

(**SLIDE**) By the end of 2001 the Santa Fe National Forest Site Steward Council was a viable organization that had re-energized the site steward program and was responsible for getting stewards back in to the field visiting sites and reporting site conditions. A large part of the program's success came from the ability of the members of the Council to work together and their commitment to a positive outcome. The original Council consisted of many members with lifelong experience working with large bureaucratic organizations, and who had a vision for how a successful volunteer service organization should function. Their experience and commitment resulted in an unusually workable and successful program that thrives to the present.

Currently the Council oversees approximately 60 volunteers on the Forest that monitor around 150 sites on the Forest. Through the current organization stewards get from their Area Team Leaders much more immediate regarding site issues and field methods. (**SLIDE**) The Council hosts educational lectures and field trips for the stewards, and continue to work with the

Forest to improve stewardship practices. Each year there is an annual meeting of site stewards on the Forest coordinated by the Council. Through both networking and events, the Council strives to keep stewards involved in the program and provides a community that reaches far beyond the Forest's heritage program. And the strength of the program has paid dividends back to the Forest. Since the inception of the Council the value of volunteer contributions in time alone have ranged between 150 and 200 thousand dollars annually. This contribution always matches or exceeds the annual funds appropriated to the Forest directly for the management of heritage resources.

The synergy of the Council has also resulted in benefits to stewards outside of their relationship with the Santa Fe National Forest. Early on the Council was concerned about the monetary expenses of volunteers for gas and equipment, and asked questions about tax free donations. The solution at that time appeared to be development of a nonprofit organization or 501 (C) 3 that the stewards could use as the basis for making tax free donations. Legally, it was not possible for volunteers of the Forest to form such an organization through the site steward program. Eventually, Council members and interested stewards developed an independent nonprofit organization whose mission was to address site steward activities region-wide called the Site Steward Foundation that is not affiliated with the Santa Fe National Forest. The organization's larger mission is to encourage responsible site stewardship across the Southwest and provide a mechanism to support stewardship programs throughout the region. In addition to the Foundation, the Council has also provided the stewards with access to the New Mexico Site Watch and other volunteer organizations. It has always been the intent of the Council to provide the stewards with the widest access to stewardship and preservation activities throughout the southwest with the idea that doing so increases a steward's commitment and interest.

Prior to 2000, the Santa Fe National Forest's site steward was slipping onto the tracks of the partnership paradox, and was heading towards the fate of many previous efforts derailed by a lack of the administrative resources needed to foster a successful partner organization. That it survived and prospered rather than failed when faced with catastrophe suggests that there are ways out of the partnership paradox for researchers and managers. These are the lessons we've learned.

**(SLIDE)** First, don't just create a program; create an organization. Most volunteer partnerships start with the vision and commitment of a single individual who serves as a central point for an organization. While that individual is a fulcrum of strength, she or he also serves as a point of potential failure, and many organizations have failed with the departure of their leaders, as the State Land Office's site steward program did in the late 1990s. At the Santa Fe, the site stewards took control of the program from the Forest Archeologist and distributed it across a large group of volunteers, including the members of the council and the Area and Assistant Area Team Leaders. Over the years, the Santa Fe Site Stewards has lost some of its most dedicated members; some have moved on to other opportunities, while others have passed on. But no one member remains critical to the organization. And the organization does not rely on the Forest Archeologist. While there has been no turnover in that position since the inception of the program, the self-governing and self-sustaining nature of the program means that it will continue to function even as a new Forest Archeologist seeks to learn her or his relationship to the stewards.

Second, leverage the expertise of your partners. The initial focus of the stewards program was training volunteers on ethics, safety, methods and the history and archeology of the Forest. Little was asked from the volunteers other than they have a high clearance vehicle. After

the formation of the council, however, the lifetimes worth of expertise the stewards brought to the organization emerged. Administration, networking, advertising, reporting, and accounting skills were all brought to bear in creating and sustaining governing and fundraising organizations in ways that could have never been done by the Forest's heritage staff.

Third, let your partners own their organization. As the stewards became stakeholders in their organization, they also developed a greater sense of ownership over the sites they were assigned to monitor and protect. Of course, they had always been owners of these sites—as heritage sites on Federal lands, we all own them. But the sense of independence generated by self-governance has fostered a preservation ethic that is independent of the directives of agency, and has given the stewards the sense that they are protecting these sites not so much just for the Forest Service, but for themselves, for their communities, and for their country.

And fourth, create real partnerships, where relationships between volunteers on one hand and researchers and managers on the other are equal. This is an easy thing to assert, but is the most difficult to practice. As researchers and managers, our tendency is to take charge and maintain control, but this impulse is usually unhelpful. We found that when we relinquished control of our volunteers, they created not just one but two organizations that we lacked both the vision to conceive and resources to construct. As partners, they now give back to the agency far more than they could have as mere volunteers in an agency-run and agency-administered program. In these uncertain times, we don't know what the future will hold for the heritage program on the Santa Fe National Forest. But we have confidence that whatever comes our way, the site stewards will be there to help us accomplish our mission of protecting the past for the future.

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