

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service
Stanislaus National Forest



Contact: Public Affairs (209) 532-3671 ext.244
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/stanislaus>

Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers Receive National Award

Sonora, Calif. (July 15, 2011)...Stanislaus Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski today announced that the Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers (SWV) have received the 2011 National Wilderness Aldo Leopold Award for Overall Wilderness Stewardship Program from Chief of the Forest Service Tom Tidwell. The award is the highest honor that can be received in recognition of volunteer efforts to assist the Forest Service in accomplishing its mission to manage congressionally designated wilderness for the benefit of the American people. Awards are given in six categories including wilderness education (which SWV won in 2004), traditional skills/minimum tool use, wilderness research, individual and group stewardship, and Line Officer leadership.

“This prestigious award is a well-deserved, high profile recognition for our dedicated wilderness volunteers. It’s a tremendous benefit for the Forest, local community, and visiting public to have such highly motivated, enthusiastic, and professional individuals working together to improve recreational opportunities, and to ensure enduring wilderness values for future generations to enjoy,” said Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski.

The SWV organization is being recognized for sponsoring two wilderness ranger interns to assist the Stanislaus wilderness crew with invasive species management in wilderness areas. The SWV organization started their own wilderness intern program, and increased the group’s capacity to complete wilderness stewardship projects by 20 percent. The SWV is also a leader in wilderness and Leave No Trace education. The organization also secured a grant from the Tides Foundation California Wilderness Grassroots Fund to co-sponsor a Leave No Trace master Educator course in partnership with the Stanislaus National Forest and Yosemite National Park.

The SWV, licensed as a non-profit corporation in May of 2003, has been in existence for nearly two decades as a group of backpacking and equestrian volunteers. The organization is dedicated to the preservation and protection of designated wilderness areas of the Sierra Nevada through education, and by demonstrated example, to ensure that wilderness will always be available for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Under the direction of Forest wilderness managers, the organization provides well trained, enthusiastic, and effective volunteers to help the Forest Service achieve its goals as outlined in the 1964 Wilderness Act. The 61 members listed on the organization's roster along with other volunteers contributed a total of 4,500 hours of service in 2010. The SWV members served as volunteer wilderness educators on foot, horseback mounted patrol, and ranger station front desk information personnel. The SWV members educated visitors about "leave no trace" wilderness ethics, as well as proper backpacking techniques and equestrian use in wilderness. Additionally the SWV maintained hiking trails, restored backcountry campsites, and provided vital, current "boots on-the-ground" information on wilderness trail and weather conditions for backpackers and day hikers.

SWV members share a wide diversity of geographical backgrounds. A number of the members are located in local rural communities and others commute to their wilderness volunteer work from large population centers in the San Joaquin Valley and San Francisco Bay Area. The groups' common goal is to assist the Forest Service in building broad-based support for wilderness management programs.