

Making it Happen

Working with Volunteers

After you have designed your project, obtained necessary permits, and raised enough money to cover project expenses, you will be ready to add the final ingredients: time, energy, and a lot of sweat. If your project involves a volunteer workday, some last minute planning can keep things running smoothly, help you avoid last-minute crises, and make for a more productive and enjoyable experience for your volunteers. Well-run workdays also make it more likely that volunteers will contribute to future projects.

The critical thing to remember as you prepare for your workday is to have all the pieces in place for your project. Some of the pieces you will have lined up well in advance—permits, for example. Others you can arrange for closer to the workday. The final pieces you will want in place for your project range from necessary tools to sanitary facilities. Be sure that someone has specific responsibility for organizing each of these elements, or you may be missing essential items come the morning of your workday. Seven words that you will never want to hear on a workday are, “but I thought YOU were doing that!”

Materials

You will need to acquire basic materials and be sure that they meet the specifications of your project. Look carefully at all elements in your project design and consult your advisors, so that the necessary materials will be ready for the workday. For example, if you are constructing an instream structure with rock, you should determine what size rocks you will need for the structure to withstand flooding and how much you will need. If you plan to replant vegetation, you need to determine what species of plants to use and obtain the necessary sod, seed, or plantings.

As you think through your material needs, ask yourself where the material is available. Having materials (logs, rocks, stumps, etc.) available at the work site is ideal. Not only are the materials conveniently located, they are natural parts of your watershed and more aesthetically pleas-

ing. Using natural materials also spares you the costs of purchasing and transporting materials from a quarry or lumberyard. If natural materials are available at the work site, check with your advisors to be sure that using them will not otherwise harm the system. If natural materials are not available or appropriate for your project, look to local businesses where you can purchase the materials. Take the time to do a little price shopping; it is a good idea to get at least three bids for comparison. Don't be



Consider involving volunteers.

shy about telling the shopkeeper who you are and what the materials are for—with a good sales pitch and some luck, you may get a substantial discount or donation.

If you need materials from off-site, be sure to make arrangements for transporting the materials to your work site. If you are working in an environmentally sensitive area or at a site with limited access, this can be a significant challenge. It can also get expensive. Transportation concerns may influence your decision on where to obtain materials. You will need to determine whether materials can arrive the day they are needed or if they must be stockpiled in advance. If you stockpile

Make sure you have enough equipment for everyone.



materials at the work site, be sure that they are stowed in a secure place.

Equipment

Few things are more important to a project's success than having the right tools for the job. It is vital to line up all necessary equipment in advance. Some projects will require only a few basic tools, others may have more elaborate needs. Think through the entire project design and determine what equipment you will need. For example, if you are doing a fencing project you may need post hole diggers, fence post pounders, fence pliers, and wire clippers. If you need heavy equipment (such as a backhoe), arrange for it and a skilled operator well in advance.

As with materials, you may be able to get local supporters to donate equipment or provide a discount. Equipment rental is another option. In the case of heavy equipment, local contractors and developers may be willing to donate the use of their machinery and provide trained operators.

If a certain tool is critical for your project, get extras for the workday. You don't want a whole crew standing idle

good traction. You may also want to get plastic hard hats for safety protection. Finally, be sure to have goggles and any other protective gear needed for the safe use of your equipment.

Volunteers

You will also need to recruit volunteer labor. Talk to your county and state Tree Farm committee to see if they would like to help organize a volunteer workday. If your improvement project will benefit a public fishery, members of the local Trout Unlimited chapter may be interested in helping. Volunteer involvement makes Tree Farm projects special—it reflects a community effort to enhance natural resources for present and future generations to enjoy.

You will want to think carefully through the labor requirements for your project. Think both in terms of how many people you will need for specific tasks, and in terms of how many person hours will be needed to complete the project. Also ask yourself if you need volunteers skilled in the use of any particular tools or equipment. If you cannot recruit enough volunteers, you can either reschedule the workday or plan to do lighter tasks that are part of your overall restoration plan.

It is always good to have more people available than the minimum you need; more hands make for lighter (and more enjoyable) work. It also gives you flexibility if someone cancels unexpectedly. However, you can have too much of a good thing. Depending on the scope of your project, you may need to limit the number of participants. In the case of a small project, too many volunteers can lead to people milling around with nothing to do—not the formula for an enjoyable and rewarding workday. Too many volunteers can also get in one another's way,

which may be dangerous. Many jobs also require expert supervision, and the number of knowledgeable supervisors may limit group size. Keeping your group small may be important for projects in an ecologically sensitive area. If you are lucky enough to have the problem of too many volunteers, divide up the workload among different workdays or projects, so that everyone can participate.

Contact potential volunteers several days in advance and confirm their participation. Use your publicity channels to spread the word about your workday and recruit volunteers from within Tree Farm and, where necessary, from other interested groups in the community. Be inclusive—if an interested volunteer cannot carry heavy rocks, put them to work on other areas of the project. You should also invite those who have donated to your project to observe and participate.

Be sure to inform all volunteers of the project location, how to get there, and the time they should arrive. Also let them know of any items they should bring (for example:

Volunteer involvement makes Tree Farm projects special—it reflects a community effort to enhance natural resources for present and future generations to enjoy.

because you have only one sledge, or having to quit when a replacement isn't available for a damaged tool. If you have power tools, be sure to have enough fuel available.

Clothing is another important part of the equipment picture. Every volunteer should have a good pair of work gloves to protect their hands. Provide extras for those who don't have their own or forget them. For instream projects, people should bring chest waders, hip boots, or dress to wade wet. If you will be moving heavy objects (rocks, logs, etc.), encourage volunteers to wear work boots that will protect their feet. Boots should also offer

work gloves, tools, a bag lunch if food is not provided, water, sunscreen, insect repellent if mosquitoes are a problem, etc.).

Advisors

In addition to general manpower, you will need to arrange for any necessary technical advisors to attend. Biologists and stream ecologists from the state fisheries agency and your other partner agencies can provide valuable advice to help make your workday efforts more effective and environmentally sound. Their participation on your workday can also strengthen their ownership in the project, making them more likely to support future conservation and restoration efforts. If possible, it is also helpful to have stream restoration veterans from Trout Unlimited or other groups on hand. Their practical experience can be a great help to restoration novices at the workday.

The Important Extras

Be sure to address the “comfort factors” that help make a workday more pleasant and safe. Plan to have an advance party go to the project site early to get these things in place before the volunteers arrive. A few of the major considerations:

- Begin the day with a short briefing prior to the start of work. During the briefing you should explain the project’s purpose, outline the day’s activities, describe precautions that should be taken, and identify safety zones around heavy equipment. Above all, stress the need to work carefully!
- Bring plenty of liquid refreshments. Always have an adequate supply of water, and supplement it with fruit juices or soft drinks. Stream restoration can be thirsty work (especially on hot days) and dehydration can be a danger if volunteers don’t drink plenty of liquids. As a common-sense safety precaution, do not serve alcoholic beverages.
- Plan to have food for your crew if the work will last for half a day or longer. Often, you can find a local restaurant or store that will donate food. A couple of willing volunteers can be given responsibility for preparing lunch for the crew.
- Always bring a good first-aid kit and have people present who are competent in basic first-aid. Also know how to reach emergency help—a cellular phone can be a lifesaver in an emergency. If appropriate safeguards are taken these precautions should prove unnecessary, but accidents can happen on even the best-planned workdays. Be prepared.
- Make advance arrangements for parking at the work site (or for other transport to the site, such as carpools, if there is too little space). Provide good directions so your volunteers know where to go! If appropriate, you can post signs.
- Make arrangements for sanitary facilities. If rest rooms are accessible, announce the location. If not, let volun-

teers use standard backwoods procedure.

- Have a rest station set up for volunteers who need a break from the hard physical work. On hot days, this should be a cool, shaded spot.
- When the day is over, be sure that you leave the project site as clean or cleaner than when you arrived. Most clean-up can be done by your volunteers as they finish for the day, but it is also a good idea to have a clean-up crew go on a final walk-through before leaving the work site.
- Consider a post-project event such as a barbecue. Your volunteers can relax after a job well done and enjoy each other’s company.

Taking care of these important extras will help make your workday more enjoyable for everyone, and make your volunteers more likely to participate in future projects and support chapter efforts. Successful and enjoyable workdays can be one of the best tools in building and revitalizing a chapter. They can provide the small victories that you need to keep chapter morale high.

Documentation

When your planning and preparation is complete and you head out to the stream, be sure to have a camera along to take photos documenting your activities. As you take your restoration efforts to new audiences in the community and to potential contributors and volunteers,



photos can help you tell the story. Pictures are also good for keeping a record of Tree Farm activities. This record can be helpful both in sharing your experiences with other conservation groups who can learn from your Tree Farm, and for letting your volunteers look back on their accomplishments.

Project documentation should include a series of photographs taken from the photo points you have identified for your project area. Ideally, you should have slides, color prints, and black-and-white prints of your project. If you have access to a video camera, you can also tape footage of the project. First, you should have pictures of the sites before restoration work is begun. Next, you will

More hands make for lighter work.



Remember to take photographs of your efforts.

want pictures from the workdays, showing the project as it is being conducted and after it has been completed. Workday photos should document your efforts on the project, but they should also show your volunteers having a good time! Take shots of your post-project event if you hold one. These pictures can help capture the spirit of fellowship and community that is as much a part of workdays as the project itself.

Finally, you should take pictures from your photo points on a regular basis (yearly, for example) after the project is completed. These post-project photos will document the long-term impacts of your project. This can be a valuable part of an ongoing assessment program, allowing the chapter to learn from its stream restoration successes and failures. Also, before-and-after shots of successful projects can be extremely effective images in presentations to potential partners and interested members of the community.

Photo documentation should be supplemented by sketches showing project design, maps, and any other available data recording what was done, where it was done, and the costs involved. This information can be useful in planning future projects.

If the local media reports on your project, keep clippings or videos of the coverage. As with photos, these reports can be valuable records of your accomplishments and help in your efforts to recruit new partners.

You can also send letters to your congressional delegation, state representatives, and local politicians telling them about your project and how volunteers worked together with your partners to enhance local resources. A photo or clipping may be a good insert with this letter. This communication will accomplish two major goals. First, it will remind your representatives of the importance of Tree Farm's role in enhancing aquatic resources in your community. When a group of people is willing to dedicate their time and energy, without pay, to improve a stream, it says a great deal about the importance of natural resource conservation. Second, you will likely get a response commending you and Tree Farm on your efforts. The response can be run in state newsletters or your local newspaper, giving yourself, Tree Farm, and volunteers some well-deserved recognition and positive feedback. You can also use these letters as attachments to grant applications; they make great endorsements of your state committee and its projects!