Getting the work done | Problems faced by Forest Service coordinators of volunteer and hosted program work groups

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Forty Forest Service field crew supervisors from four regions in the United States were interviewed to gain a greater understanding of (1) the current changes in the Forest Service fieldwork culture and (2) the problems new kinds of field crews (i.e. volunteer and hosted work groups) created for supervisors. Several major themes, identified as current problems by supervisors, were discussed during the interviews. Downsizing and budget cuts, branching out, (or the shift in the way the Forest Service mission is carried out), and the onset of new types of work groups consisting of volunteers and hosted program employees were the principal themes. These new types of work groups were identified by supervisors as the new labor force of the Forest Service. Several common safety and liability concerns of supervisors working with hosted programs and volunteers were discussed as well as particular problems associated with specific volunteer and hosted groups. This paper addresses the problems faced by supervisors assigned to these new kinds of work groups. The paper ends with a discussion concerning volunteer and hosted work groups in the Forest Service and a recommendation for a training program for Forest Service employees, teaching them how to organize and coordinate these new kinds of workers.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PAPER AND HISTORY OF PROJECT

This paper is a report of the Forest Service project on the supervision of today’s field crews. The project was a result of a white paper, (Driessen 1997), presented to the Forest Service Washington Office of Safety and Occupational Health. Driessen’s paper recommended an update of the current supervisor training program, *The Supervisor and the Work Crew* (Driessen 1986). This report has two objectives which reflect the principal findings of the project. The first is to identify and describe the new problems resulting from changes occurring in the Forest Service fieldwork culture that directly affect the supervision of changing work groups. The second objective is to recommend new training procedures and perhaps policy changes for the Forest Service supervisors of these new work group arrangements.

A CHANGING FOREST SERVICE WORK CULTURE

This study was important because of the growing instability of fieldwork crews in the Forest Service. In the last twenty years, the role of the United States Forest Service has faced a transformation that affects all Forest Service workers. While discussing these changes, one supervisor said, “It’s more than just timber now.... Everything is branching out.” Branching out is the Forest Service shift from a focus on production goals to more social and educational goals. A supervisor concerned about budget cuts said, “This district used to have a BD [brush disposal] crew, and because of budget constraints it went away.”

Branching out and severe budget cuts for hiring seasonal crews have left work in the field unfinished. The adoption of new kinds of workers such as hosted groups and
volunteers has become necessary to, as one supervisor said, “get the job done.” Hosted programs are work groups formed when outside agencies enter into partnerships with the Forest Service to accomplish specific project work in the field. Hosted employees are paid a base wage by the hosted program, and the Forest Service sometimes matches funds with the outside agency to pay for the work. Hosted programs include the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), the Federal Corrections Institute (FCI), Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), and several others. Volunteers also enter into agreements with the Forest Service to complete fieldwork. Though volunteers are unpaid workers, they are covered by the Office of Worker Compensation Program (OWCP), so the Forest Service is ultimately liable for injuries and accidents that occur on the job. Seniors, students, mountain biking clubs, Boy Scout troops, swim teams, and church groups are some examples of Forest Service volunteers.

Several problems have arisen from using these new kinds of work groups in the Forest Service. Today’s supervisors are faced with different types of crews who work on continually changing projects out in the field. Paramount concerns for current Forest Service field crew leaders are keeping control, completing work tasks, and especially maintaining safety awareness in these new kinds of work groups. Liability for injuries resulting from accidents in field crews is also a principal concern for the Forest Service. The primary rationales behind funding for this project are the increasing safety concerns and the agency’s liability when working with these new kinds of partnerships. To understand the current project, it is necessary to know its history.
HISTORY OF SUPERVISOR PROJECT

In 1986, through the Forest Service’s Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC), a training video, *Supervisor and the Work Crew*, was produced for first-line supervisors of field crews (Driessen 1986). The Forest Service Washington Office of Safety and Occupational Health supported and funded the project.

In 1996, because rapid changes in the makeup of crews led to new safety issues, MTDC produced another training video, *Making a Crew* (Driessen 1996). This video focused on the workers, not the supervisors. While interviewing for the production of *Making a Crew*, Driessen noted that numerous changes had occurred in the fieldwork culture. This lead to the white paper, *A Changing Forest Service Work Culture*, (Driessen 1997). The white paper had two purposes: (1) to present some of the changes taking place in the work culture in the Forest Service; (2) to discuss some sociological reflections on the training of Forest Service crew leaders. The paper concluded by recommending updating the original supervisor training program, *The Supervisor and the Work Crew* (Driessen 1986).

UPDATING THE ORIGINAL SUPERVISOR TRAINING PROGRAM: RECENT PROJECT HISTORY

The project to update the supervisor training program began in January 2000. This training project was also supported and funded by the Forest Service Washington Office of Safety and Occupational Health. The new project team met several times to discuss project history and to set the goals for the first year’s work. Development work on the project began – reading related materials pertaining to the project, interviewing
current Forest Service supervisors, and observing and taking notes in the field.

**Study Methods and Sample**

Like the original supervisor training program, development work for the updated version was based on a qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured, open-ended questions (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Driessen 1997). Interviews with present Forest Service district rangers, supervisors and coordinators were tape-recorded and transcribed. Coordinators are previous Forest Service supervisors currently managing and planning projects and acting as Forest Service representatives or direct supervisors of hosted groups and volunteers. The interviews were coded by using Atlas TI (Muhr 1997) and Topical Analysis (Driessen 1969). This was the database for the professional paper. Major themes and topics found in the database are the focus of this paper.

There are ten Forest Service regions in the United States, and each covers specified public land. In February 2000, the project team began interviewing Forest Service supervisors in the Missoula, Montana area in Region One, the Northern Region. Four interviews were conducted in Missoula. In March 2000, ten interviews were conducted in three districts around Montgomery, Alabama. In June 2000, seven interviews were completed in the Columbia River Scenic Area near Portland, Oregon. Another seven interviews were conducted in districts near Yachats Oregon and the Dunes, one hour south. The final trip for 2000 was to New Mexico in the Southwest Region, Region Three, during the last week of July, where eleven Forest Service fieldwork supervisors from four different districts around Santa Fe and Albuquerque were interviewed.
All together, forty current Forest Service supervisors with several years experience supervising seasonal, volunteer, and hosted crews, were interviewed for the project. In the initial interviews, a broad spectrum of questions was asked to identify the changes in current fieldwork crews and the difficulties faced by supervisors. As the project progressed, supervisors were interviewed to understand more fully the problems they faced leading hosted and volunteer work groups.

Primarily, the project team spoke to coordinators in charge of volunteer and hosted work groups. However, the team also spoke to supervisors of a variety of traditional field crews who were working on science, recreation, fire-management, and timber-marking projects. Due to the diverse makeup of Forest Service supervisors today, minorities, including Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, as well as several women, and seniors were interviewed.

INITIAL FINDINGS

At the onset of this project, the project team planned to identify the changes in seasonal field crews and then design and produce a new training program for seasonal field crew leaders who were working under new conditions. As interviews progressed, the project team found that traditional seasonal crews were almost extinct on districts. Work groups, such as volunteers and hosted programs, were replacing and augmenting these traditional seasonal work crews. Because of this finding, the focus of the project took a different direction.

After traveling to various regions and interviewing a wide variety of supervisors, several general themes became clear. As expected, problems with budget cuts and
downsizing were major concerns for crew leaders. However, early on the project team did not realize how the budget cuts and the continued rapid downsizing in the agency had so dramatically eliminated most seasonal field crews throughout the Forest Service.

The project team found that the mission of the Forest Service to protect the National Forests has not changed, but the manner in which this mission is carried out is changing significantly. The Forest Service is branching out from timber production to an array of additional emphases. The primary example the team found was the Forest Service’s use of hosted programs and volunteers to promote education in communities, as well as help districts complete tasks. These changes affect the composition of work groups and create new problems today for supervision and safety.

For example, the project team found that the few stable crews that do exist today are expected to do multiple tasks. As one supervisor said, “As work comes up we are asked to pull together across traditional boundaries to get the work done.” Another supervisor described the changes this way: “I’m used to the old crew dogs. They went out in the woods and got the job done, and they didn’t have to know how to relate to the public. Now, you’re a crew leader, you have to know how to switch gears all the time.” Crew members and the crew leaders have to learn to adapt to new conditions at a moment’s notice to complete tasks and maintain control of situations.

An additional finding, and the main focus of this paper, is the emergence of a variety of new partnerships in fieldwork groups. These new partnerships raise a broad spectrum of supervisory challenges. Several of these new work groups do dangerous jobs, like trail maintenance and tree planting projects, that were previously done by work-
savvy stable seasonal crews. This leads to increased concerns for coordinators about the safety of the new work groups and the liability issues for the Forest Service.

**DIRECTION OF THIS PAPER**

This paper will present current problems faced by Forest Service supervisors who coordinate volunteer and hosted work groups. The first section will identify and describe problems that have a major impact on safety and liability. The second section will explore other safety problems and more specific problems that influence the way supervisors get the job done. This is followed by a discussion of the effects of these new work groups on the Forest Service. The paper ends with recommendations to terminate the current training program, *Supervisor and the Work Crew Project*, and begin a new training project to create more relevant tools to help Forest Service coordinators safely organize and supervise volunteers and hosted work groups.

**CURRENT PROBLEMS FACED BY FOREST SERVICE COORDINATORS OF VOLUNTEER AND HOSTED WORK GROUPS**

**MAJOR SAFETY AND LIABILITY PROBLEMS FACED BY COORDINATORS**

Safety and Forest Service liability are supervisors’ primary concerns when working with new and shifting hosted and volunteer crews. The increase of such work groups has created numerous difficulties for coordinators, but the following problems are the most pressing because they directly affect the safety of the work crews and the liability of the Forest Service.
Multiple Roles of Coordinators

The problems that existed on traditional seasonal crews, such as crew members getting along and the work ethic of individual crew members, also exist on volunteer and hosted groups. The supervisory skills necessary to deal with these problems are outlined in Driessen’s (1986) training program, Supervisor and the Work Crew. However, new difficulties have arisen from using hosted and volunteer work groups in the Forest Service. One major difficulty is the changing role of the first-line supervisor. During the interview process the project team found remnants of the old “crew dogs” who were supervisors in charge of specific crews, such as trail or timber crews, for an entire season. However, Forest Service employees who are placed in charge of hosted programs and volunteers no longer serve in one supervisory capacity. They take on multiple roles as managers, planners, coordinators, liaisons, and Forest Service representatives. For the remainder of this paper, all the Forest Service employees placed in charge of hosted or volunteer groups will be referred to as “coordinators.”

As managers, coordinators organize and plan the projects that need to be completed in the field. As coordinators, they work with hosted programs and volunteers, setting up times and dates, and working with other staff to arrange suitable projects for the work groups. While coordinators work as liaisons, they act as technical advisors for hosted programs. In this capacity they train the crews on job skills and safety. At times, however, liaisons are placed in situations where they have to take on the role of supervisor in volunteer and hosted work groups. This happens when crews split up or when the hosted group crew leader is unable to maintain control of the crew. Finally, a
coordinator’s role as a Forest Service representative is to observe crews directly to make sure they are following Forest Service policies, specifically safety regulations.

Coordinators often assume two or more of the above roles which creates ambiguous job responsibility and severely increases concern for safety. For example, the same Forest Service employee that manages and plans projects often acts as coordinator and is responsible for direct supervision of crews to make sure work groups follow Forest Service policy. A coordinator in Region Six told the project team that she was the direct supervisor and manager for forty volunteers. “Our system of supervision has changed considerably in practice,” said a Forest Service safety coordinator from Region Three who went on to explain how the coordinator’s job description was unclear. Safety was this coordinator’s major concern.

*Multi-Tasking and Being Spread Thin: Collateral Duty Overload and Burnout*

In most circumstances, Forest Service employees placed in charge of volunteer and hosted groups have several other unrelated responsibilities. All of the coordinators interviewed by the project team said that managing and working with hosted employees and volunteers was only one of their many responsibilities. For most of these coordinators, working with these groups is a collateral duty in addition to their primary responsibilities.

Nearly all coordinators said they were overworked and spread thin. A coordinator
from Region Three spoke to us about her job responsibilities:

My job isn't just working with these forty volunteers. ... I have mailing lists. I have to be developing interpretive programs and educational programs for the district. I have to do bunches of different things. And like anybody else on the district... go out and pick up trash myself and give programs and arrange special events and stuff. So I can't do all of that on my own.

Because budget cuts lead to cuts in personnel, Forest Service coordinators have become multi-tasked. A coordinator from Region Three told the project team that

volunteer work groups are only part of his many responsibilities:

I try to coordinate that [volunteer programs] amongst my other duties. ...[W]e downsized from the two 11's, the 9, the 7 to just now an 11 and a 7. So I'm doing all the special-use recreation permits. When I came here that wasn't even part of my job. That's a whole job in itself. That's been added along with the trails, the development, the wilderness. I have to try to juggle all these things, and now the volunteers. I could whine like this all day, but I know I'm not the only one.

At times, some of the Forest Service workers who oversee these new crews are not field-crew coordinators but members of traditional seasonal crews. One coordinator from Region Six described what is happening to the “old trail-dogs” on his district:

Now these are old trail-dogs, they used to work with me in the past on the trails. These guys are no longer working as a single crew during the summer. They're split up, each of them going out, one or two of them, and working with these other type of interagency crews. They're no longer just trail-dogs who would work for the one supervisor, but each of them is acting as a liaison or as sort of a leader.

Most coordinators feel they are spread so thin that they usually cannot directly oversee hosted and volunteer crews working on projects out in the field. They said crews are often left unsupervised by any Forest Service employee. One safety coordinator from the West Coast said that the primary role of coordinators is no longer direct supervision. He said they are usually involved with planning the project, and
supervision is a collateral duty. Volunteer or hosted groups often choose someone from their own group to be in charge. "A lot of them are not prepared to provide the kind of classic supervision that motivates employees to be safe and monitors the behavior and corrects it," he said.

Multi-tasked coordinators who are spread thin can burnout. Pressure and stress from the job create an increased risk factor. All coordinators said that working with hosted programs and volunteers is stressful. One coordinator from Region Six spoke about the pressure of his job and why he transferred to a different area in the Forest Service:

I'm away from all of that because the pressure of that life, I got real stressed out and I just really couldn't do it any more because it is stressful, especially when you're doing the corrections part and Forest Service part and working back and forth with so many different objectives. I'd been into it and wasn't getting the cooperation that I believed I needed from management to survive and all of a sudden I was spending three or four days out of my week in the office trying to put out fires instead of working out in the field with crews like I loved.

**Insufficient Training**

Many coordinators talked about the lack of sufficient training for working with new types of crews. They were trained to work with traditional seasonal crews who most often completed one project before moving onto the next. Hosted and volunteer crews vary greatly from traditional seasonal crews, and coordinators lack experience to supervise these new crews. All of the interviewed coordinators said they received minimal to no training before working with hosted and volunteer crews. A Region Six
coordinator spoke in depth about the minimal training he received:

I was given the manual, the guy that was the coordinator for that program gave me the manual, said, "here's the manual, here's the van, here's a crew of ten corrections people that are staying over at the house and you're their crew leader and here's the job. Go do it." That was the training I had.... By the next year I was the coordinator teaching other people how to do the job, but there was no training. Since then I've had to put on training sessions for people in the Forest Service to work on a multi-cultural basis with people who are coming from a corrections background.

Working with new types of work groups can be intimidating for a Forest Service coordinator, especially since most, if not all coordinators have not received proper training. One coordinator stated that she had not been trained to work specifically with convict crews: "They hired me to run that program and work those guys. They did not have that when I started here, when I took the job." She said she wanted the position, so she accepted, and her training consisted of a lot of on-the-job trial and error. She said the job continues to be a "learning process."

**Ambiguous Contractual Agreements**

Several coordinators expressed the lack of formal procedures when working with hosted programs and volunteer groups. Most coordinators said there is no formal contract for hosted groups working with the Forest Service. On some districts, the form used for hiring seasonal contract crews is also used for making partnerships with hosted programs. A volunteer contract agreement in the Forest Service does exist and, in almost all districts, volunteers sign the agreement. This printed agreement between volunteers and the Forest District, however, leaves many issues up in the air. When asked about this contract, a West Coast coordinator expressed her feelings: "There's no contract other than 'I'll come and work these hours and I will do this for you and you will pay me my
mileage or whatever.' You don't have that black and white contract with them.”

Many Forest Service coordinators are confused about how to treat volunteers and what types of projects to assign them. A coordinator in Region Three expressed her difficulties with this issue:

That's probably the hardest thing, for me to train seasonals to do work with volunteers making them understand that the volunteers are there to do work, not to sit around and talk with them, not to just kick back and watch the seasonals work.

Another hosted program and volunteer coordinator in Region Eight discussed how unclear policies for volunteers led to a potentially serious problem when a volunteer carried his gun while working on her district:

I said you can't play Barney Fife. Then I told my supervisor we need to put something down in writing and have this person sign it to cover...to make sure that it's on record that he's been told, or whatever. So that was that thing. Well, a couple of them quit, "Well, we don't want to volunteer anymore since we can't do this and we can't do that." But at least I did what I had to do.

Unclear Lines of Authority and Work Group Supervision

Coordinators have problems understanding the degree of control the Forest Service maintains over hosted programs and volunteer workers. Hosted and volunteer crews cannot be supervised the same as traditional seasonal field crews. Individuals working on hosted crews often have a set of rules imposed by their own agency. Examples of such crews would be Federal Correction Institute (FCI) or inner-city youth work groups. Both programs have strict rules and regulations governing their crews. Outside agencies also may be matching employment funds with the Forest Service. Some hosted agencies are paying the entire employment costs and have separate
regulations governing workers. The members on FCI crews are paid entirely by the state. One coordinator talked about these regulations of hosted and volunteer crews:

Some of the crews have their own way of doing things, completely separate. Like, if we have a group from Marlen,¹ which is a state school for boys in Saul, they have real tight security... They only do their work in a certain way and they are not going to modify from that. So we have to be real compromising with that... Not as far as safety standards, but just in terms of how they get things done.

One coordinator from the Northwest recalled a story of a co-worker who was a traditional seasonal employee for the Forest Service. This coordinator had a problem with an inner-city youth crew slacking off on the job. However, he was working with the crew as a liaison for the Forest Service and did not have direct authority over the crew:

My buddy J.R., who no longer works for the Forest Service, was working with an inner-city crew out here that was basically almost all black and they typically, if they got tired during the day, would go sit in the van for half the day. J.R blew up. He's been around for years, was raised over here in Eastern Washington, was very conservative, if you didn't work you got canned... They just told him basically to stick it where the sun don't shine, they'd do what they want to do... He was just a liaison, he wasn't really their boss. So he was really upset and he came and talked to a bunch of us that afternoon back at the work center.

The same coordinator discussed how crew leaders dealt with problem employees in the past and how these old techniques are no longer an option with hosted crews:

A lot of issues where you might normally get in somebody's face and try to solve it, if you were on an old BD crew, you would've just stood up and said, "Get your ass back to work or you're history buddy." You know, that sort of stuff doesn't necessarily work anymore and so some of that stuff kind of needed to be put on hold.

¹ All references to people and places have been changed to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of Forest Service Employees.
The coordinator continued to explain that the major problems liaisons have with hosted employees have to be taken to the coordinator (if the coordinator is separate from the liaison) and the coordinator will discuss it with the hosted group crew leader and the hosted organization.

Sometimes the individuals employed by hosted programs to supervise their own crews are not qualified for the job. This makes working with these crews even more difficult for the Forest Service coordinator who is acting as a liaison. When describing some of the external crew leaders, one coordinator stated they were “not very swift with what's going on.”

Several coordinators said volunteer and hosted work groups are frequently left without a supervisor or a Forest Service representative because the coordinator is unable to go into the field and directly oversee the crew. A coordinator explained the limited contact he has with some of the work groups on his district:

They tell me, "Well, there will be a group tomorrow coming in. Meet them up there, take them all the bags. ... They are going to be doing the trails. So I’ll go up there and give them that and they're gone. Sometimes I don't even see them, I just leave the stuff there with the host and I'm gone to do something else.

Unsuitable leaders are often chosen in these hosted and volunteer programs because coordinators are spread so thin. When volunteer groups and hosted programs choose their own leaders from within their group, problems often develop. One coordinator said, “Sometimes groups kind of think they have a leader, but they ain't. And that gets pretty touchy.” He stated that such situations call for “delicate negotiations.”
He gave the following example in which a volunteer was not suited to lead a crew:

We've got a group and we've got an individual that is the, he's kind of coordinated this volunteer effort for probably five or six years now. And he's very good at getting people, coming out, doing the work, getting them excited about the work. But he doesn't have a very good work ethic, and so when he comes out he's kind of the natural leader of the group... But when it comes to working, common sense isn't one of his big points.

Because volunteers are not paid, situations involving authority over volunteers is frustrating for many coordinators. A coordinator from Region Six stated, "You can't take anything away from them and say, 'If you don't shape up...''" That same coordinator told of a situation in which she was having difficulties with a volunteer who was giving misinformation to visitors and not helping the other volunteers:

It's really hard to fire a volunteer. You can't just say, "This is your performance. It's not acceptable. We're going to have to part ways here." With a volunteer it's a whole different thing because they are giving you their time,... there's nothing like salary to deal with. There's no arbitration point... We can't take anything away from them.

The coordinator said the situation was ambiguous and she felt confused about how to treat the problem.

On some districts however, volunteers are disciplined the same as seasonal and full-time employees. A coordinator from the West Coast spoke about how a district near hers had a "military-run volunteer program." If the volunteers did not pull their weight they had to leave and sometimes volunteers in this district were given performance ratings.

**Crew Makeup Variation and Turnover: Constant Training**

Coordinators are continuously dealing with a variety of outside crews. These
crews come and go and generate many different safety and liability issues. Diverse types of crews make it difficult for coordinators to train crew members to do the job and do it safely. Also, production is slowed down significantly due to the constant amount of daily training required. A coordinator from the Southwest described what happens when different types of groups want to come and work on her district and what kind of safety hazards coordinators have to look for with such a diverse influx of people:

We have church groups that want to come out, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, swim teams, but that's what I get on a constant basis. I have four classes of 4th graders that want to come out and do public service. Well, you know with 4th graders on a field trip their basic thing is just to go out and run. They don't want to be doing work.... "No, we don't want you picking up any hypodermic needles or condoms or something like that in a campground." That's just going to blow past them. How do you guarantee the greatest amount of safety and minimize risk for all these groups? So you have people that are trained, the crew coordinators for each one of these groups has to recognize that it's constant turnover, that it's constant reintroducing those safety aspects with every group, and you can't assume that people know what to do.

Crew members of hosted programs and volunteer groups frequently change as some members leave and others join. Sometimes the individuals on crews will vary from day to day. This problem forces Forest Service coordinators to retrain crews sometimes daily during a project. One coordinator said, "It can be very complicated, I think, working with all these people, that some of them only work twice a month and some work once a week or twice a week all season long. It's a wide variety of people." Obviously, these sorts or work groups have little, if any cohesion. This is a critical element in work group safety (Driessen 1986, 1996).

Planning is a critical element of completing a project out in the field. Safety depends on planning, especially when coping with the continuous variety of work groups.
As one safety coordinator said:

Where you've got a mixed crew coming together, to take time to give them a proper safety orientation is critical. You can't do it if you don't have a good plan in place. And then you have to take enough time to really let them know what their responsibilities are, what's expected of them. And all of that takes time. When you have crews mixing and matching and you don't have a system for orienting somebody before they go out to work that day or the next day, it's a mess. And so the easiest thing is to ignore it.

Crews habitually in flux present major liability issues for the Forest Service and for the field-crew leader. A coordinator from the Northwest told the project team how easy it is for a coordinator to neglect major safety precautions with crew variation:

Your liability and your control for safety just gets more and more diluted because of the variation, and also for the volunteer groups... These aren't people that are coming back year to year. If you get a [FCI] work group... they are different guys every week. Their community service is up last week so there's a new guy, so you're training them again.

She continued to explain that it is the coordinator's responsibility to recognize any new people on a hosted crew. If there are any new folks, the safety training has to be repeated, over and over; a very time consuming job.

**Limited Resources**

Several coordinators expressed working with hosted programs and volunteers often creates “more hassle than it is worth.” Previously mentioned was how budget cuts have left the Forest Service without the resources and personnel to supervise these groups. Many times coordinators have to tell the hosted groups that the district cannot work with them because they do not have the safety equipment or a supervisor for the crew. A coordinator in Region Six explained how working with hosted groups and
volunteers can be more costly than beneficial:

    We used to work with Job Corps.; that was just too much hassle. We didn't have the time to spend with them that they needed when they came up to work. If they brought a crew boss with them that was a whole different thing, but it just didn't time wise, it wasn't beneficial for either one of us.

    Another coordinator in Region Six also expressed her feelings concerning the time and energy required for hosted and volunteer groups:

    So you have maybe a six-hour day that you're holding this Forest Service person for this project, and to get somebody that can do that, that has the time to do that is really precious. You just don't get a lot of people that are doing that anymore.

    Because Forest Service employees are spread thin, many members of hosted groups and volunteers become, as one coordinator stated, "the supervisor on the spot." In several districts, hosted employees supervise their own groups as well as other hosted program groups. One such group is the Federal Corrections Institute program, (FCI). A coordinator discussed the types of circumstances in which seniors on her district could be placed in charge of FCI individuals:

    If their job has some intense labor or something, then I'm going to send some inmates along in that truck to get the labor-intense work done and then the seniors will then become the driver and then they tell the inmates what to do and instruct how to do it... If we've got a recreation area that's been closed down for three months for the winter season, we've got leaves to burn off. If we've got split rope fence to replace, holes to dig, if we've got pressure washing to do, painting, scraping, sanding, I'll just give them [the seniors] a list and tell them who [FCI members] to take, name out the ones that they need to take because that clears up any confusion and then let them go.

    The coordinator said that she would go and check on the work group when she was able to find the time and the seniors could reach her by radio.

    Because today there are very few seasonal Forest Service crews left to complete
necessary projects, youth crews are needed, especially Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). YCC is also in high demand in rural areas because these districts lack the volunteer pool to maintain campgrounds and trails. One district coordinator said his YCC crew is a precious commodity which has to be shared by other coordinators to complete necessary projects. Because support and resources for youth crews are limited, coordinators and communities have to take responsibility for funding. A campground project coordinator explained how one YCC project was funded and supported on his district:

Yesterday they put [up] all the barriers, and the tablespops and the benches and now they're doing that thanks to the community [director] that convinced somebody to give them some money for these kids to work. And we give them the transportation and everything, bring them back and forth.

The same coordinator explained how low funding was forcing his district to use their maintenance man rather than a trained crew leader as a YCC supervisor: “He cuts all the boards and does everything for them and shows them how to put them up. The kids all carry them up. We've got 20 kids carrying them up, and some painting.” A maintenance man, with no supervisory training or experience, in charge of twenty people leads to obvious safety and liability issues.

A bigger concern for many coordinators is the safety of their volunteers who are hosting campgrounds. Due to limited resources some campground hosts do not have telephones or any other way to contact the Forest Service or the police in an emergency. Certain districts do not have the money to pay for phone lines, and volunteers only have radio access, which does not work at night. One coordinator explained the situation
on his district:

I've got volunteers in the campground, the campground hosts, that are in danger... We are hiring them, we're keeping them in the campgrounds, we're giving them a spot, but what happens at night? The host is there, the people come knocking on his door at 2 a.m., those guys are drinking and throwing rocks at each other. What's a guy going to do? He doesn't have communications. He has a radio, but there's no dispatch out here where they can call and get a cop or anything. So those guys are liable to get hurt eventually. And that's happened, they got one beat up last year. And this year we had a guy get shot at twenty times. And we use volunteers to do our work and we're not giving them the adequate support.

Volunteer campground hosts could choose to leave the campground if they felt unsafe.

However, one coordinator said some of the campground hosts on his district are homeless and do not want to leave. He discussed his concern for several of the volunteers living on campgrounds in his district:

Some of them don't have telephones at all, nothing at all. They can be killed out there and by the time somebody goes out there, you won't know nothing until the next morning... But something is going to happen eventually and it's going to turn, that's the way the system works. Until something happens, things aren't going to change.

The coordinator said that he feels these campground hosts' lives were in danger because the Forest Service could not supply phone lines.

**Liability: Lack of a Physical Presence**

Every coordinator interviewed by the project team discussed the increasing liability for the agency due to hosted and volunteer groups. When speaking about his experience with outside groups, one coordinator from the Southwest stated, "Well, if they sign up with us... legally we've got to pay for them. Whatever happens out there, if they get hurt... we've got to pay for them." Another coordinator from the West Coast discussed his concern for Forest Service liability with the changing role of the field
crew coordinator:

Well, it's getting less and less clear in practice who is responsible for the safety of the employees. Obviously, this person [the coordinator] would not have been able to provide the direct supervision and observing the people working to make sure they're safe... So he was depending on some more experienced people to pay attention to what's going on. But that is nowhere in the system of assigned responsibilities. That's an informal system that's developed to try to deal with it.

The Forest Service is responsible for enforcing its safety rules. If a Forest Service representative is not observing a work group at all times and someone is harmed, the agency has been neglectful and is responsible for not enforcing its own safety regulations. This is true when working with any kind of outside organization, including contract crews. The Forest Service is solely responsible for training all crew members about Forest Service standards and enforcing those standards. Many coordinators express major apprehension when working with volunteers and hosted groups because they cannot “watch them all of the time.” One coordinator spoke about her reluctance for taking on volunteer crews due to liability:

I don't have the people. We probably have four project managers doing the work of 15 people right now, and there's no way that they are going to come in for a group that probably isn't going to get a lot of work done anyway — sacrifice their time. And because they are signed up as volunteers, we're assuming risk for them. We're assuming liability for anyone that gets hurt. Is it worth it? They've already told me, “No way, Jose. Not going to assume that.”... If some volunteer comes out and they are cleaning up a campsite and they are doing two hours worth of work and all of a sudden they get hurt and they put on a workman's comp claim, my project is dead in the water. I'm not going to assume that. I'd rather not get the work done.

A coordinator described an incident where safety was not monitored because a
Forest Service supervisor was not present:

We had an incident that happened on the District here about three weeks ago where we had to fire two people. One was a YCC kid and the other was an older American. And some of the stuff that's going on is because there's not a supervisor that can actually know the rules and regulations of the Forest Service to guide these people.

In all the districts visited by the project team, there were not enough Forest Service employees to oversee the work of hosted or volunteer groups. The possibility of accidents happening in volunteer and hosted work groups increases significantly when Forest Service representatives are not present to intervene immediately in unsafe work conditions and unsafe acts.

**Lack of Managerial Support**

Most of the coordinators said they were not getting the support from management they need to work with hosted employees and volunteers. Lack of support from management affected coordinators and their ability to do their jobs. A coordinator from Region One explained one reason misunderstandings about support occur in the Forest Service chain of command:

I think some of these things have been in labor and management forever... many times they don't really know what the people are having to deal with to get a job and maybe they come out and they start giving some of their observations and many times they are not quite right because they just come out for a day.

Support from management is critical when dealing with hosted and volunteer crews. “Hopefully, you have a supervisor or someone above you that will back you up,” was a statement made by a coordinator from Region Eight. Many coordinators spoke about their supervisors not “going to bat” for them and feeling alienated from the Forest Service. The story of J.R. illustrates this problem. J.R., a Forest Service liaison, was
having work ethic problems with an inner-city youth group. After discussing the issue with several of his co-workers, one co-worker suggested that he and J.R. switch crews. The co-worker was working with a hosted group that J.R. had worked with in the past. The co-worker telling the story stated management’s reaction to the plan:

Somebody in management figured out what we were doing and called J.R. the next morning and said, "J.R., you gotta go back up there with the crew. What are they going to think?" What that crew thought was more important than what J.R., who had worked for years, thought. Political implications that those people had driven this guy up the wall and he needed to leave was more important. J.R. was supposed to swallow his pride, swallow his work ethic and go back and accept that because a guy in the office was more concerned about the political implications. I see that a lot.

A coordinator from Region Three spoke about the problems he had filling necessary positions for the new work groups:

We're kind of handcuffed with the certain number of positions we do have, and I don't know why that is. We still have, nobody has ever given me a straight answer. What I'm trying to do here on this district is I'm trying to build an organization that's needed to do this, to do this type of thing, [work with volunteers and hosted programs] and it's difficult to do it if you don't get the support from management and everywhere else.

Another coordinator from Region Three discussed problems getting supplies and equipment for his hosted groups and volunteer workers: “I don't think that I have the support that I should have... Why do we have all this [referring to hosted and volunteer groups] if we can’t afford to do what we have to do?” He described having to tell volunteers and hosted groups that they could not have the specific items they needed because there was no money.
Further Safety Concerns Pertaining to the Members of Hosted and Volunteer Work Groups

Levels of Work Expectation. Hosted programs and volunteer groups are made up of a variety of individuals with different levels of training and experience. Workers range in ages from children to senior citizens. Also, most individuals participating in hosted programs are paid minimum wage or less. Because of the diversity of these crews and their pay, coordinators must organize and plan projects preformed by these groups according to their individual levels of work expectation so the groups, as one coordinator stated, “are able to perform safely within the limits of their skill.”

Working with very young people, such as Boy Scouts troops, creates work-expectation problems for coordinators. One supervisor said the purpose of working with very young people was not production, but to maintain good community relations. The Forest Service is fully liable for all youth working on a campground or trail. Extra safety precautions have to be taken to make sure children are not injured. A coordinator from Region Three spoke about limiting groups like Boy Scouts to the simple task of picking up trash on the campgrounds. Even then the Forest Service coordinators have to make sure the younger workers do not touch glass or needles.

Work expectation for seniors is also a major safety concern. Some seniors are pushed much too hard and forced to do jobs they can not handle. Many of these people quit because the level of work expectation is too high. A coordinator discussed this
problem on his district:

I lost five foremen with the concessionaire because they were people that were hired that were too old. One had a hernia trying to unload a barrel, so he quit. The other one had a nervous breakdown because it was too much work for him. The other one, I don't know what happened to him, but he left.

A Region Three coordinator voiced her views on the safety of seniors working on projects which were too physically demanding:

Some of our folks are well into their 70s and some of them are extremely fit and can go work on trails if they really wanted to, but others have some physical disabilities and impairments that it wouldn't be practical for them to be out on the trail. In fact, it would be dangerous and a safety hazard to have them out on the trail maintaining it, digging water bars or whatever.

Unlike volunteer seniors, seniors on the Senior Community Service Employment Program are paid. Many coordinators, however, question whether SCSEP seniors are making enough money to justify the type of work they do. A coordinator from Region Three puts it this way: “Five dollars an hour, doing GS5 and GS4 work. I think the Forest Service has robbed those people for many years of their wages.” A coordinator from Region Six agreed pay should match work expectation in the SCSEP program:

You've got a guy that does some lawn mowing for us and stuff, now should I think of him and base that he should do the same thing as a wage grade two laborer who's making $11 or $12 an hour or should I...[think] okay, this guy's at a lower wage level and we should have a different type of expectation for him.

Occasionally seniors in this program are expected to do things they do not want to do or cannot do safely. They feel they need to do the tasks because they need the job. A coordinator discussed this problem. For years he had seen old men being pushed beyond their limits and being forced to quit. He had men falling asleep while driving. Some
seniors do not feel comfortable driving the trucks, but they have to do it to keep the job.

Lack of Knowledge of Forest Service Safety Standards. Though members of hosted or volunteer groups may have a great deal of work experience, they are not always aware of standards for safety established by the Forest Service. A safety coordinator from Region Three discussed some of the common difficulties crew leaders have with hosted and volunteer groups who do not know the Forest Service safety standards and/or do not have the proper training:

You might have some senior citizens that are coming out to work and they have a lifetime of painting their house or whatever and they figure they know how to paint, but they don't know what safety standards are for painting and they may have had some very unsafe practices that have become part of their way of doing things. So it gets very complicated very fast, and that's really typical.

Another coordinator expressed how he deals with such safety issues on his district:

Of course, chain saws, no one runs a chain saw unless they've got a card. I'm sure everywhere else in the world is just like this place - everybody's an expert with a chain saw. We get these volunteer groups coming up and they are all bummed out that they can't run the saw. And I'm one of the teachers for saw safety here so I put on a number of courses throughout the year and if they don't go through my course and get the certification, they ain't going to run a saw.

During safety training, it is difficult for Forest Service coordinators to know how detailed the information should be so these groups understand the risks and can complete projects safely. One coordinator expressed concerns when planning safety information for a volunteer group that would clean up a burned trail:

I was writing this stuff up, these safety topics, and I put some stuff in there about hazard trees. But then I started thinking, "That's almost like a whole half-day training session - how to identify a hazard tree." You've got to actually look at them from the backside and you've got to walk around what you are looking at. And I'm realizing these volunteers, they may not know what I'm talking about.
Because of limited resources and the many collateral duties of coordinators in the Forest Service, some districts have used members from volunteer and hosted groups to train the rest of their group about safety and use of equipment at the work site. Coordinators pointed out that often the training was not properly directed, and the members of the group did not learn correct safety procedures. One coordinator described how someone on his district was harmed due to poor training:

They were teaching the crew leaders how to use the tools and then relying on those crew leaders of the volunteer groups or whatever groups to teach their own folks. It turns out that didn't work very well. The crew leader wasn't a very good teacher and an individual was injured. Not seriously, you know, cut on the leg from a polaski, but training wasn't done properly.

The coordinator told the project team that after this incident occurred, all training was relocated to the station. He said the coordinators now spend an hour to an hour and a half on the safety handling of basic tools.

Crews Working in Close Proximity. Many hosted and volunteer crews work out in the field. Often, these crew members work in close proximity to each other. Sometimes members on hosted crews do not understand and/or follow the instructions from supervisors, and safety hazards are created. One such situation, involving a convict crew and Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) crew, was discussed by a safety coordinator in Region Six:

A YCC crew was also designated to be in the same area doing another section of the trail. Well, the YCC work ethic... is incredible, if they saw something wrong they want to fix it. If they were walking on a trail they'd want to fix it. Well as they were coming through they were supposed to walk past this Bulita County crew and go on down to another section. Well, they saw a bunch of stuff that they wanted to fix. So,
all of a sudden there are two crews working in close proximity to each other and it was on a slope. So these people [YCC crew] are rolling stuff down on these people [convict crew] that are working here and the supervisor was up on the road talking with the Forest Service liaison person.

The safety coordinator said that she just happened to walk through the area. She stopped both work groups and had a discussion with the crew leaders about the safety of their crews.

Safety is the primary issue for all coordinators. Multiple roles, multi-tasking, insufficient training, lose arrangements, ambiguous authority, crew variation, limited resources, liability, lack of managerial support, levels of work expectation, lack of knowledge of work groups, and crews working in close proximity are all charged with safety hazards. These problems are direct safety and liability concerns for Forest Service coordinators. Following are concerns which indirectly influence safety, problems that coordinators have to cope with when working with hosted and volunteer work groups.

OTHER PROBLEMS FACED BY COORDINATORS

Leadership Style Transition and Production Versus Social/Educational Goals

In the last ten to twenty years, field crew supervision has changed in the Forest Service, and it continues to change. Traditional seasonal crew leaders have had to switch gears and adjust to new situations, different from those for which they were originally trained. One coordinator from Region Eight reflected, “There's always going to be a need for leadership. The leadership role is changing and it's becoming a little bit more dynamic, more complex.” Another coordinator from Region Six expressed his views about the current state of leadership in the Forest Service, and the affects the shift towards
eductional and social goals has had on crew leadership:

It is nothing you can put your finger on because it's leadership in a state of flux. It's like we were discussing, you have the good ol' boys who have the skills base, and you have the newer different ways of viewing cultural groups and the ideas that maybe just the work project itself is not all that's going on there, but there's the education of groups of people that may affect the future of the forest and whatever else. Twenty years ago you could tell me this is what a crew leader is, this is what a crew leader does and this is the way you respond in a given situation. It's not that way anymore because you have so many different situations. You need to be able to respond, and like I said in the beginning, switch gears. It's not always going to be the same. So a crew leader is nothing you can really define right now.

The same coordinator stated his beliefs that coordinators today need to learn to be open to change and be able to roll with the punches:

So I think that becomes really pertinent with crew leaders that as the expectations change you have to be a changeable being. You can't learn the job and then say, "I've got it learned and I don't have to learn anything anymore." That was kind of the traditional fire crews and the old trails crews is you worked your way up and once you became the top dog everybody else had to learn from you. That's not the way it is anymore. You have to keep learning to stay up there and know how to deal with the new situations.

Most traditional Forest Service coordinators were hired for production purposes and were trained to get the job done. They referred to this as reaching "hard targets."

Now they are having to adjust to new crews and new social and educational goals, which they refer to as "soft targets." Traditionally Forest Service seasonal crew members were not easily able to get away with slacking off or not following orders to accomplish hard target goals.

Today, the main goals of working with many of the hosted and volunteer crews are educational or social welfare goals, soft targets. The Senior Community Service Employment Program, which is found in nearly every region, is set up to aid seniors with
job skills and experience. Often senior citizens cannot produce as much as traditional trails crews. Production is not the primary intent for the SCSEP program. YCC, Jobs Plus, youth groups, schools, church groups, and others are set up for educational or community welfare purposes. A coordinator from Region Six described his difficulty shifting to soft targets:

I work with some of these youth crews. They're really upset because they don't get as much done in a day as one of the old trail-dog crews would. We consider maybe we're educating some city people, some inner-city kids about what the woods are about and some of the funding that's going on for that project may relate to that. And we may have taught them how to get up regularly and go to work on a daily basis, being dressed prepared for work. What kind of social value does that have for our society and for people being put back into the criminal justice system five years from now. So there's a whole lot of things that go on that are not production.

The coordinator however, concluded by stating the need for balance between soft and hard targets and the need for the Forest Service to remain geared for production.

**Multi Cultural Problems With Gender, Perceptual Differences and Generation Gaps**

Historically, field crews in the Forest Service were mostly made up of young, white men. There have always been personality problems on field crews, but with increasing diversity even more issues have appeared. The multi cultural issues that come up when working with such diverse crews has made it very difficult for many coordinators to communicate, teach, and supervise. A coordinator from Region Three discussed his concern with multi cultural issues when working with hosted groups:

Well, you need to be able to be directing somebody how to do a work project, but then if all of a sudden you realize you may have a cultural issue going on because you have somebody from a different background, you need to step back and think, "Okay, am I communicating right?" When it was just a whole bunch of us white boys in the field,
we didn't have to deal with cultural issues as much. Now all of a sudden you need to be aware that that person may have other issues on how you're telling them to do the work and you need to make sure that you're communicating in an appropriate manner from somebody who may have a totally different background.

Some of the people-skill troubles coordinators have with diverse members on crews are personality and language barriers. For example, when working with senior volunteers, one coordinator said, "My complaint would be...you have to be a psychologist to pull this off. You have to deal with all these different personalities."

Another coordinator told a story about learning to communicate with inner-city youth. He dealt with language barriers due to different styles of speech. He would often have to explain things several times to the young work groups:

It's just like, my god, dealing with some of these youth crews, the language changes. They are not speaking English, not the English that I thought I learned. Every year. And if I just said, "Speak my English or I don't want to talk to you," I wouldn't get very far with them. The respect would go away. That doesn't mean I have to learn to speak the same slang that they do, but I at least need to realize that they've got their rights to talk their way.

**Gender Issues.** Female coordinators have expressed having more difficulties than men with older male employees. Senior male hosted employees and volunteers were identified by several female coordinators as an added and irritating difficulty when working with these work groups. A coordinator discussed gender problems on her district and the response when she was first hired: "When I first came aboard, it was completely negative kind of vibes... They would go to my supervisor and just go right over my head."

A Region Eight coordinator explained why she believes she has had difficulties
with male seniors on her district. She also talked about how she confronts gender issues:

The seniors have been doing the same job for years and then I come in, especially younger, female. With your seniors you may have some folks that have been to the old school and...[it] is kind of hard for them to take directions from a female. So you have to kind of learn how to do that with, I guess, not offending and getting the job done and pleasing them at the same time. That's difficult. Sometimes you just don't get the respect.

Gender-based problems are serious because they can escalate to dangerous situations. A coordinator from Region Six discussed a situation where a SCSEP employee presented a risk to his female supervisor. She said he "had an issue with women supervisors...and at times would just have outbursts, angry, angry outbursts... to the point, that [it] was definitely workplace violence." The coordinator said that the supervisor did not deal with the situation. "It had become a safety issue and it should never have gone that far," she said. Another coordinator expressed the quick and to-the-point way she handles gender-based difficulties with senior citizens:

I say, "You can either listen to me or...you have a choice. You can do it my way or you have the alternative of going back to camp, going home, or wherever, because the work here has got to be done and I'm the one that's passing it on." You cut to the chase and get right to the point and say this is it.

Perceptual Differences. Historically, most seasonal trail and timber crews understood the work ethic and commitment that came with working in the agency. They were trained in the Forest Service and became part of what several coordinators called the "Forest Service family." These crews understood how the Forest Service worked and they developed a sense of loyalty and responsibility to the agency.

Hosted and volunteer groups have little to no experience working in the Forest
Service. Therefore, these groups frequently have difficulty understanding and following safety regulations and accepting how the Forest Service undertakes projects in the field. A safety coordinator from Region Six explained what she saw happening:

What we've found with the hosted crews, particularly like the Bulta County work crew, the con crews or crews that come up with their own supervisor, that it takes a lot of work working with them so that they understand our work ethic in terms of safety behavior because they kind of come with a whole different maybe outlook. Or maybe they've never done the project before and they are just going to implement the bull through it type of stuff. So what we've tried to do with those crews is have the Forest Service Project Manager meet with their supervisor and work with them for the first week or so, ideally.

**Generational Differences.** Several coordinators indicated problems with youth crews due to differences in generational values, especially the way youth perceived their work in the Forest Service. A coordinator from Region Six gave her views on youth-crew issues and discussed how she copes with environmental value differences:

It's a different generation than when I came into the Forest Service twenty-three years ago... They've been raised with the environmental movement from their adolescent years all the way into their early 20's. They are raised in the Northwest media and what they've heard from the media about the environmental movement. One of the things that I try to do is to let them have their opinions, but they come to work for the Forest Service and this is our job... You are American, you can think anything that you want to think. But you signed on the dotted line to a certain job... This is the job and this is what the job requires. If it goes against your ethics and your morals then that's your problem... You have to decide. Can you do this job or not?

Youth sometimes have a different understanding of what is acceptable and not acceptable in a working situation. A coordinator from Region One said, "These younger attitudes come in here and think they can say or do whatever they want, and that's totally inappropriate." Some coordinators believe that youth today expect more for less in a work environment. A coordinator from Region Six said, "They are raised in a different
generation where they expect more from an agency who they work for. They expect to be
what's the word I'm looking for - coddled.”

**Emotional Work With Volunteers and Hosted Work Groups**

Most of the Forest Service coordinators expressed difficulty when working with
volunteers and hosted programs because of the “emotional work” that is inherent when
working with seniors, and employment programs. Often outside issues come up that have
to be worked through. Nurturing and taking care of members of volunteer and hosted
groups is often considered part of a coordinators job. One coordinator from the West
Coast explained how she nurtures the volunteers on her district:

It seems to me, and I've certainly experienced that, a lot of taking care of volunteers is
just flat out listening to them, showing concern for them. "How are you doing today?
How is that daughter? How is she doing at home?" That kind of thing. That's been the
biggest thing here.

The same coordinator explained some of the ways she found she could help the
members of the SCSEP program in her district “get back on their feet:”

When you are fifty-five years old and you are looking for a part-time job at minimum
wage, you've had some things happen to you, you really have. So it's trying to help
them get back on a track or encourage them or something like that to get going again...
They were down and this was something that they grabbed onto, and our job then is to
go right there with them, right side by side and make sure that we can give them all we
can give them, whether it's emotional support or if you need the glasses or the boots or
whatever. Making sure that they can get those so that they can do a good job here and
then looking for things, looking for training for them... Getting them involved in even
little things like First Aid, CPR, just getting as much training as we can get to them...
That's the kind of thing I'm talking about. Just helping them get back on their feet
again.

Coordinators say that emotional work with hosted groups and volunteers takes up
valuable time and energy, which they do not have. Their focus must be on the work.
However, they feel some time must be set aside for meeting the emotional needs of the hosted employees and volunteers.

Specific Coordinator Problems With Volunteers, Employment Programs and FCI

The common troubles coordinators have with volunteer and hosted groups are numerous and manifest in a variety of ways. Many of these problems occur simultaneously, creating a greater amount of confusion and stress for coordinators. However, coordinators also face problems specific to the groups they work with which interfere with their ability to complete work safely.

Volunteers. Using increasing numbers of volunteers seems to be the wave of the future for the Forest service. One coordinator from Region Three said, “It's getting harder and harder to do our job, and I think volunteers are more and more important.” Another coordinator from Region Six stated, “Our doors would not be open if it weren't for volunteers.” Coordinators are grateful for the volunteers on their districts. Volunteers are able to do work that cannot be completed by the downsized staffs and seasonal employees on Forest Districts.

The Forest Service fully supports this volunteer movement, but many coordinators said they have more volunteers than they can handle. Frequently, only one person on a district is able to coordinate and work with volunteers. Because working with volunteers is one of many additional duties assigned to Forest Service employees, they are unable to find the time, and often, the resources, to set up projects for the many groups wanting to
volunteer. A Forest Service employee from Region Three describes his situation:

I have, I think, six groups, volunteer groups I work with and... I'm the only contact. I work with them and there's no such thing as a volunteer coordinator here, not even at the Supervisor's Office. Yet there is a vast number of people out there that are willing to work for free, and we don't even take that seriously as a way to tap into that and really use that. I try to coordinate that amongst my other duties.

Another problem for coordinators is the tremendous variety of volunteers. People who are young and old and poor and wealthy come to the forests to clear and improve trails and campgrounds, put signs up, and work at visitor centers. A coordinator from Region Six explained her views by stating, “What I think about volunteers, it's one of the hardest programs ever to run because of the nature of the people involved in it.” One coordinator discussed common assumptions made about the type of people that volunteer and described volunteers on her district: “Some people have often thought that it's older people, Caucasian people, rich people, wealthy, well off, and it's not true. You have more volunteers from the lower socioeconomic classes than you do from the upper ones.”

All sorts of organizations and groups come to volunteer for the Forest Service. Volunteers groups come from churches, schools, youth groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, environmental organizations, recreation clubs, and many other sources. A coordinator from Region Three described the variety of volunteer groups on his district:

I've got the Back Country Horsemen which are all middle-aged, some of them retired even, the Los Alamos Nordic cross-country ski club, they are all a bunch of gray beards, same thing at the Norski, [a] cross country ski club, they each have a little trail head they volunteer and work on, and all of those groups, there is not new blood coming into them. The Tough Rider Mountain Bike Club, they are pretty young, well, I'd say some young-middle-aged, and they are a real active bunch, done a lot of volunteer work with them. It's hard finding the time really to coordinate more, like I'd like to.
One of the differences between volunteers and hosted groups is that volunteers do not get paid a wage and have more free choice about working – at any time they can leave. A coordinator from Region Three talked about how the differences between hosted groups and volunteers affect supervision:

The difference I can see,... is that our volunteer groups do not have to be with us...With a convict crew,... they want to be out there getting work skills, they want to be out of jail, they want to be out doing. There's different motives... With the convict crews there's real limited choices that they could be making.

The same coordinator voiced the need for taking the time to understand individual motivations for volunteering in order to manage volunteers:

You have to know why those folks are up there and you usually do that because we interview them before. We don't just say, "Yeah, if you want to volunteer go on up there and we'll take care of you." It's like why are these people volunteering? Are they volunteering because they want to work with the Forest Service some day? Or are they retired and had always wanted to be ranger so it fulfills some kind of dream for them? Do they just truly love the mountain? Are they there to learn new skills? All these different things. So you're kind of trying to figure that out in their conversation and gear them towards something.

Volunteers want to feel respected and that they are part of a team effort. They need to know they are doing something important and relevant. Meeting these expectations can be difficult for many coordinators when planning projects for volunteer groups and placing individual volunteers. As one volunteer coordinator said, "[You have] to try to match the right group to the right project." Another coordinator who supervises forty volunteers discussed the importance of relevancy and team membership
when working with volunteers:

The volunteers are volunteering because they want to work, and it has to be relevant work. They have to be learning, they have to be feeling that they are a part of your team because they are a part of your team and that is really hard to get across to people [Forest Service representatives], and it's probably the hardest thing. But one of the most important things is the relevancy of what they are doing.

Another coordinator explained how giving respect and creating a sense of team membership are important factors for keeping valuable volunteers interested:

If you want to keep the volunteers coming back you need someone from the upper ranks coming down. I'm just the supervisor of this group, but quite often I'll get the ranger to come out and work part of a day with us. Because that's showing our commitment to them also. It's a chance for them to watch the ranger swing a tool and interact. But you know, if we can get a ten-or twelve-person crew, we can compound our labor force by four or five times, and that's pretty cheap. The half day the ranger spends or the day I have to spend from doing some other...what other people might think is important, I can compound my labor by about four or five times. That's a pretty good deal.

Volunteers are used to augment the work of the seasonal and full-time crews; however, some Forest Service employees do not see it this way. Downsizing in the Forest Service has lead to the loss of many seasonal and full-time positions. Volunteers are seen by many seasonal employees as the people who took their jobs because the volunteers are doing work previously carried out by paid Forest Service employees.

Some coordinators prefer to use volunteers for specific projects because of limited budgets. One coordinator described volunteers by saying, “They're a cheap source of labor, obviously, they're volunteers... They're able to do the grunt work, they actually get a whole lot of trail built.” Another coordinator said he decided to use volunteers because he had problems with the work ethic of previous paid crews: “I soon realized that I could
go out with a volunteer group on a few weekends a summer and get more work done than
my paid crew got done all season.... I don't think that's proper use of funds.”

**Employment Programs: Senior Citizens and Jobs Plus.** Hosted Programs such as
Senior Community Service Employment Program, Jobs Plus and many others were
created to help people in the communities gain job skills and job placements. SCSEP is a
federally subsidized senior citizen employment program for part-time work (between
twenty to twenty-five hours a week) at minimum wage rates. The goals of the program
are to create part-time community-service jobs in both the public and private non-profit
sectors for able-bodied elders. Jobs Plus is another kind of employment program. That
provides training and employment for people of all ages who are in financial need.

Employment programs are advantageous for both local communities and Forest
Service districts. They nevertheless present problems for coordinators. Some of the
individuals employed by these programs have pre-existing problems, which inevitably
become problems in the working environment. Many of the individuals employed in
these programs do not live in environments that support changes in their lives. A Region
Six coordinator discussed one such situation:

> I mean we really, really tried to get her to go back to school,...because she could've
gotten Pell Grants. She could've gotten everything and she was bright. She was good
with numbers, and we just about had her enrolled. But when you live in that kind of an
environment, where there's no support, it's really scary. You're here for six, eight
hours, but then you go home for the rest of the day and night to a family that doesn't
support that, and it's real hard to buck that system.

Some of the individuals participating in these programs have little previous work
experience and do not understand what an employer expects from an employee. A
coordinator discussed a situation in which a woman was consistently missing or leaving work because of childcare issues:

The woman with the four kids, there were a lot of childcare issues with her and we had to finally come to the point with her in saying, "Look, if you had a real job nobody would put up with this. You need to learn how to deal with your children and come to work. If you have a babysitting issue you need to take care of that. You can't just stay home for that day." So she had to learn how to prioritize her life basically and her time... Actually have a plan B. Who's your second-in-line babysitter? If your kids get sick who do they call? You've got to get that lined up so that you can work at a job. Because it's not going to work for you to leave all the time or not show up.

Federal Corrections Institute (FCI). The Federal Corrections Program is a program in which the State and the Forest Service enter into a partnership. Both youth and adult offenders of nonviolent crimes make up crews and complete field projects for local Forest Districts. Working for the Forest Service is voluntary. The offenders make a small wage and are heavily regulated.

Working with FCI crews can be very difficult for Forest Service coordinators. The programs can be confusing for other Forest Service employees as well. A coordinator described how the corrections program on his District was abolished due to a personnel problem: "The office of personnel management couldn't figure out how to do job descriptions so it became such a nightmare that we finally gave it up." Another coordinator from Region Six explained giving up his coordinator position because of the high pressure of the job. He was consistently having to cope with safety, political, financial and training issues that came with corrections crews:

They're screened, they're nonviolent offenders, but there's still a potential of violence and things going wrong, and training people how to work with these crews. That got kind of stressful, especially the political parts... I ended up giving up that job and getting into trails patrol.
Several things must be considered by Forest Service coordinators when working with Federal Corrections crews. Politically and legally convict crews are “highly sensitive.” Also, crew members are multiracial and mult-cultural. One coordinator expressed the degree to which liaisons of corrections crews should be informed and trained about sensitive issues:

They have to understand that these people had been screened, they were non-violent offenders, they were there voluntarily and what you would do if they decided not to work because you didn't have to force them to work. You would just inform the crew boss and then later on they would be taken out of the program and have to go back and deal with the judge. But you would also be explaining some of the racial issues, cultural issues and explaining terminology.

The coordinator emphasized the need for heightened sensitivity when working with convict crews and suggested a more thorough training program for coordinators of such crews. Further study is necessary for a full and accurate understanding of the difficulties coordinators face with corrections crews due to the limited information gathered by the project team.

**DISCUSSION: USING HOSTED GROUPS AND VOLUNTEERS AS WORKERS IN THE FOREST SERVICE**

Quite early on in the project, it became apparent that the problems confronting today’s coordinators no longer related to leadership of traditional Forest Service seasonal field crews. An updated version of the training program *Supervisor and the Work Crew* was deemed unnecessary for field-crew supervisors. When confronted with the changing makeup of field crews, the project team redirected its focus toward the problems volunteer and hosted work groups created for assigned coordinators. The objective of the
project became gaining a better understanding of the new problems for coordinators and the ongoing changes occurring in the Forest Service fieldwork culture that directly affect the supervision of new kinds of work groups. Several major themes concerning these new work groups were pulled from interviews with volunteer and hosted crew coordinators. Previous and current literature in the areas of downsizing and cutbacks, inter-organizational relationships, and occupational role conflict may help to further clarify the project’s findings.

**DOWNSIZING AND CUTBACKS INFLUENCING ALL ASPECTS OF THE WORK CULTURE**

Organizational downsizing and cutbacks have important implications for understanding changes in the labor force (Curtis 1989). Cutbacks are a common phenomenon in both public and private agencies. They tend to amplify the existing problems especially concerning trust, morale, productivity and depression. Cutbacks hinder authority relations, employee placements and directives such as the job descriptions of remaining personnel (Rubin 1984). Due to downsizing, the modern workplace has been characterized by the growing use of temporary labor on an as-needed basis to perform specific jobs for single projects and the widespread use of subcontracting to other agencies to provide services which once were completed by in-house employees (Leicht 1998). This project team found a number of these problems in today’s Forest Service fieldwork culture.
COORDINATORS STRESSED, SPREAD THIN AND MULTI-TASKED

Shaw and Barrett (1997) discussed a need for a multilevel stress-based approach to downsizing. With this approach, organizations, work groups and individuals are examined simultaneously. In the stress-based model, downsizing is described as a collection of stressors focusing on pressures for labor force reductions which increase demands upon the organization, work groups and individual employees. The model allows us to look at the problems faced by volunteer and hosted group coordinators through a job-stress lens. A major theme from the recent project findings is the multitasking and spreading thin of field crew coordinators, who are given the job of hosted program and/or volunteer coordinators as a collateral duty. These overworked and over-tasked employees are unable to give their hosted and volunteer groups much time or attention, and as a result safety hazards are created and Forest Service liability increases.

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS (IOR): NOT A NEW IDEA

Hosted partnerships with other organizations and using volunteers are not just the result of downsizing. The literature refers to such partnerships as inter-organizational relationships called IORs (Hall 1991). All organizations have relationships with other outside agencies. Some are trivial and others are very important for the mission of the organization. IORs are designed so organizations can help each other and present a means of adapting to, rather than simply responding to, surrounding pressures (Metcalf 1976). Several reasons for the development of IORs have been identified in previous research. These reasons include legal, political, technical, economic, demographic, and cultural (Hall 1991).
WEAK RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

As budget cuts and downsizing continue to create turbulence, the number of IORs increases (Hall 1991), and as the number of relationships with IORs rises in an organization (such as Forest Service coordinators working with multiple types of hosted programs and volunteer groups) the quality of each relationship is weakened. This problem is illustrated by limited resources. There are very few Forest Service employees able to work with these new work groups. Other resources, such as money, tools, and safety equipment are limited. Most IORs in the Forest Service are not receiving the attention or help they need.

RESEARCH SPECIFIC TO VOLUNTEERS AND HOSTED PROGRAMS

Previous and current research has explored specific issues related to the IORs affiliated with the Forest Service, such as volunteers and employment programs for seniors, youth groups, and criminal offenders. A great deal of research has explored volunteer motivation and retention in organizations (Gora 1991; Clary, Snyder, and Ridge 1992; Grube and Piliavin 2000). Literature has also focused the vulnerability of older Americans to insufficient wages and other exploitation in the work environment. (Soumerai and Avon 1893; Golden, 1990; Morrison, 1986; Kahne 1985). Youth group community-based programs (Wardell 1988) and work-release programs for juvenile and adult offenders (Turner and Petersilia 1996) have also received a fair amount of attention. Although this research is valid and an important aspect of this project, it is not the focal point of our findings and will not be discussed in further detail.
COORDINATORS' WORK ROLES UNCLEARLY DEFINED CREATING MORE JOB STRESS

The most pressing issue indicated by the project’s findings was the undefined and confusing role of hosted program and volunteer coordinators. All coordinators expressed role ambiguity due to lack of training and multiple collateral duties. Role ambiguity and role conflict have been demonstrated indicators of job stress (e.g., O’Driscoll and Beehr 1994) and of unsatisfactory outcomes, such as safety errors (Toffler 1981). Role ambiguity is the result of lack of clear information for employees about what is expected as far as tasks, responsibility and behavioral norms connected to the position. Role conflict occurs when the expectations of the organization have been communicated, but the expectations are incongruent with those of the role occupant or the expectations of each role are incompatible (Kahn et al. 1964; Graen 1976; Van Sell, Brief, and Schuler 1977). Organizations are found to reduce stress through such practices as clearly defining tasks, objectives, and job responsibilities, and setting realistic goals for the employee (Bryan 1996).

DECREASING JOB STRESS, MAINTAINING SAFETY AND REDUCING LIABILITY IN THE FOREST SERVICE

The primary functions carried out by coordinators are often unrelated to working with volunteers and hosted work groups. Forest Service coordinators say their roles are not well-defined. Examining the relationship between the coordinators’ perceptions of their roles and how these roles are defined formally on Forest Districts is the first step. Revealing how a coordinator’s role relates to volunteer and hosted programs is the second
step. Clarifying the volunteer and hosted program coordinator’s role is a major stage in
decreasing risks for safety and liability out in the field.

Working with hosted crews and volunteers is often collateral to the primary duties
of coordinators. For most, it is not an assigned role but a variety of tasks that appointed
coordinators do when they can find the time. The findings of this project and past
research indicate that more attention needs to be directed toward defining the
coordinator’s role and clarifying how the coordinator fits into volunteer and hosted
programs. The main findings of the project all point to the critical importance of the
relationship between the volunteer and hosted programs and the overall effectiveness of
the coordinator to establish safety standards through training and enforcement in order to
complete projects safely in the field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the completion of this phase of the project, the recommendations to the Forest
Service for this project are brief and to the point:

(1) The original project, The Supervisor and the Work Crew Update, should be
terminated. Since the inception of the original project, the traditional seasonal workforce
has all but disappeared in the Forest Service. Districts are now relying almost exclusively
on hosted groups and volunteers to get work done. Few people are now supervising
seasonal crews. Therefore, that type of training program is currently not needed.

(2) The primary concern of Forest Service field-crew coordinators has shifted to
the problem of managing hosted and volunteer labor on districts. Therefore, the project
team recommends a new project to create a handbook and possibly a video as tools to
train Forest Service employees how to coordinate and organize these new kinds of workers. Clarification of the multiple roles of coordinators should be addressed in these training materials, as well as the other safety and liability problems faced by coordinators of hosted and volunteer work groups. The program should especially focus on program development and role responsibilities of Forest Service employees assigned to these duties on their districts.*

*On March 20, 2001 in Denver Colorado, the Forest Service National Steering Committee on Safety and Health ranked this recommendation their number one funding priority. Work to produce the training programs will start October 1, 2001.
References


