Emerging Models in Environmental Volunteerism: The Domestic Volunteer Vacation

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EMERGING MODELS IN ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERISM: THE DOMESTIC VOLUNTEER VACATION

By

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For well over two decades, land management agencies in the U.S. have experienced trends of flat if not otherwise declining budgets with which to fulfill their respective missions. Consequently, public land management agencies at various levels have sought creative strategies such as using volunteers to extend quality services without incurring added expense. An increasingly popular form of multi-day volunteer engagements, often referred to as a ‘volunteer vacation,’ is nearly absent from the literature when it comes to domestic project settings as opposed to international and often exotic locales.

A qualitative research study was conducted in the summer of 2013 on volunteers participating in weeklong trail maintenance service-trips on National Forest land in Montana and Idaho. Two non-profit organizations (The Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and The Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Wilderness Foundation) allowed researchers to conduct semi-structured interviews with 26 volunteers on their motives, experiences, preferences, and other aspects related to their overall volunteerism.

Results suggest that respondents are motivated to participate for many reasons including: an environmental ethic, a social experience, personal development, immersion in nature, and receiving a facilitated backcountry experience. Understanding these motivations can assist managers and other nonprofits with capacity building objectives such as marketing and retaining volunteers.

Other findings indicate volunteers acknowledge a high degree of self-interest with respect to preferences for project tasks, scheduling, and desired set of experiences before committing to service. This finding supports theories in the volunteerism literature suggesting that contemporary volunteering is trending towards the reflexive and away from the collective. This has recently been denoted by a preference for volunteer engagements that are concentrated and short-term (episodic) as opposed to ongoing (traditional).

This study concludes with a proposal to expand the voluntourism definition to include domestic volunteer vacations in addition to the normative international volunteer vacation models. Also, a recommendation is issued to reconsider the prevailing set of associations for the “new” styles of volunteering. This comes from finding that episodic volunteers may also demonstrate many of the attributes of traditional volunteers such as a desire to form enduring ties to the organization.
Acknowledgements

Producing this thesis has placed me in the debt of many people. Beginning with the volunteers who allowed me to call them away from their service-trip and humbly share the experience of this format of environmental volunteerism, your enthusiasm and interest in this research exceeded all expectations. Hopefully, what your words revealed about your experience will extend the conservation objectives that your labor has already achieved through offering insight to trip providers and land managers.

Without the trust and support of the provider organizations, there would not have been a sample of volunteers whatsoever. Specifically, I would like to acknowledge the Program Directors Eric Melson and Kenzie Carson at The Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, and Rebecca Powell at The Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. Your openness to this research began with the very first conversation and remained throughout the entire data collection phase.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For well over two decades, land management agencies in the United States have experienced trends of flat if not otherwise declining budgets with which to fulfill their respective missions (Propst, Jackson & McDonough, 2003; Silverberg, 2004; Trauntvein, 2011). This trend is anticipated to remain for some time into the future (Cordell & Betz, 2000). In contrast to declining budgets, public use demands for natural resources have only been increasing (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Consequently, public land management agencies at a variety of levels have sought creative strategies to deliver quality services without incurring additional expense. Among the set of adopted strategies is the growing reliance on partner organizations and volunteers to facilitate maintenance and perform services (Silverberg, 2004). The roughly 1.7 million Americans who volunteered for either “environmental or animal care” organizations between September 2012 and September 2013 offers credence to these agencies’ strategy of harnessing available volunteer labor.¹

A sense for the value being attributed to volunteers is evident from the U.S. Forest Service’s “Volunteers” informational webpage. The copy begins, “Volunteers are the heartbeat of the Forest Service.”² Messaging of this tone validates the notion that land management agencies value their volunteers. Add to that statement the agency’s recognition for the role of external partnership organizations. These partners provide a variety of contributing services including the recruitment and management of volunteers. Evidence of this recognition can be heard in the words of current Chief Forester, Tom Tidwell, who remarked that the [USFS], while

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2/25/2014
² (http://www.fs.fed.us/fsjobs/forestservice/volunteers.html, 2/20/2014)
diminished in capacity, is “...more effectively managing wilderness [areas] today than 15 years ago because of partnerships.”

Where budgets are a major concern, cost savings through partnerships and a mobilized volunteer base is attractive. The return on investment is favorable for increasing volunteer capacity for land management agencies. A 2009 USFS produced report addressing volunteer management within the agency listed the total volunteer hours for FY 2008 at just over 3.4 million with a dollar value of roughly $59.2 million. The report continues, noting that while managing volunteers does carry costs, the return on investment per volunteer falls within $2.05 to $21.24 for every $1.57 invested (Machnik, L. & USFS, 2009).

Considering the critical role that volunteers fill for many agencies throughout the world, it follows that the more that is known about the volunteer, the better positioned the coordinating agency will be to recruit, manage, and retain their volunteers (Measham & Barnett, 2008). Some of the aspects related to environmental volunteerism that stand to gain from increased research include motives, experiential understanding, factors of retention, and the benefits received from volunteering. For the purposes of this study, the term “environmental” refers to a segment of volunteerism largely concerned with causes situated in wild lands, parks, preserves, watersheds and otherwise natural or undeveloped settings. With respect to understanding motivations leading to volunteer service engagement, Silverberg (2004) remarks that, “it is vitally important for parks and recreation managers to develop a greater understanding of the motives for volunteering...” (p. 89). It is within this context of increased reliance upon volunteers in resource

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3 From a public address at the University of Montana’s Wilderness Lecture Series, 3/4/2014
management that this study intends to further the understanding on multiple dimensions of environmental volunteerism.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

This research will focus on volunteers who devote roughly a week’s worth of time, typically only once a year during the summer season, to environmental conservation projects. The volunteers in this study spend the week working and living in a remote backcountry setting located within a U.S. National Forest. Both the project and campsite locations are almost always situated within the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), where motorized travel and use of mechanized equipment is strictly prohibited. Work projects are typically more sizeable and technical than a day- or weekend-long volunteer arrangement would permit accomplishing with only hand tools; imagine building a bridge from raw materials with only the best available technology from 1890.

In addition to the technological restrictions, the project locations are remote relative to the geography of the contiguous United States. It would not be uncommon for the trailhead parking area to be 20 miles from the nearest town, with the project site an additional two-hour walk from the trailhead. Most often, pack stock animals (horses and mules) are used to transport supplies, food, and tools from the trailhead to the campsite location. Given the spatiotemporal and technological constraints for these volunteer projects, it would be nearly impossible to accomplish substantive work objectives without extending the project duration over several days. The multi-day aspect to this niche of environmental volunteerism differentiates it from other related formats. The highly immersive though finite

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4 See Wilderness Act of 1964, Section.4.c. http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/legisAct#5
format of these trips bears corollary implications consistent with recent trends in volunteering style preferences, subsequently detailed.

The understudied topics of domestic volunteer tourism, wilderness-based environmental volunteerism, and episodic environmental volunteering were examined through an exploration of multi-day volunteer trips in Montana and Idaho. An extensive review of the extant literature suggests there are limited studies on episodic environmental volunteers (EEVs) in a domestic setting. Episodic volunteerism consists of short duration and occasional volunteering, as compared to traditional volunteerism with more long-term involvement and ongoing participation. Caissie and Halpenny (2003) discuss this gap in the literature related to studies on multi-day environmental volunteerism.

Travel and tourism are significant parts of the episodic environmental volunteer service-trip such as those featured in this study. The trips draw volunteers from within the region and beyond who drive or fly to the project site, incorporating other side-trips and stops along the way. Generally, the further away one travels to reach the project location, the more likely they are to extend their trip through visits to other locales. The area immediately surrounding the project is a draw for many participants but so to are other prominent natural areas such as National Parks and National Monuments.

Beyond expanding the volunteerism literature, this study holds management implications that could prove invaluable to agencies and organizations who utilize environmental volunteers, particularly among the burgeoning wilderness stewardship foundations. Expanded answers to the questions of why people participate in such trips and what management practices they believe are most beneficial will aid the process of enhancing the volunteer’s experience. Hopefully,
this will lead to achieving capacity building goals such as filling all the spots on service-trips and building a reliable pool of volunteers to draw from.

Three factors build a strong case for researching this topic. First, present knowledge on EEVs is limited. Second, there is evidence to suggest that episodic volunteers differ from traditional volunteers in their motivations and reasons for retention (Bryen & Madden, 2006). Therefore, traditional retention strategies and best practices followed by organizations may need to be reconsidered in response to the distinctions between episodic and traditional volunteers. Last, the popularity of this style of volunteering what combines travel and service-work is increasing (Brown, 2008; Wearing & McGehee, 2013).5 This seems especially true in remote backcountry settings where multi-day work projects such as trail clearing and other more specialized maintenance are commonplace as evidenced by the proliferation of this model throughout the U.S.6 If this trend remains, along with the demands from land managers for skilled and specialized volunteers to complete projects, then increased understanding on the demographics, motivations, and expectations of volunteers should prove wholly beneficial.

**STUDY OBJECTIVES**

Several questions remain to be answered pertaining to characteristics of EEVs and their experiences. Within the scope of this study, these questions fall under one of three categories: volunteer profile, motivations and perceived benefits, and drivers of retention. The characteristics category includes all information

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5 Further indication of EEV service trips as trending upward came from Jason Halal, Marketing Manager for Sierra Club National Outings, via interview on 4/23/2014. He said that he has witnessed a significant increase in media attention regarding service trips and volunteer vacations over the course of the five years he has held his position.

6 See range of trips at: American Hiking Society volunteer vacationsit may and also: Sierra Club Service Trips
concerning attributes of EEVs. The motivations and experiences category explored the set of reasons why EEVs decide to volunteer and the set of received experiences. This study also investigated the potential for motivations to change over time. The drivers of retention category addresses reasons why volunteers continue to participate in multiple service trips. This exploratory study sought to answer a variety of questions within the framing of these three broad categories that are outlined on the following page.
Research Questions per Area of Inquiry:

1. Volunteer Profile
   a. What are the basic demographics of these volunteers: age, ethnicity, occupation, extent of volunteering, and distance travelled to reach the project?
   b. What is the full extent of volunteerism among EEV trip participants?
   c. Do volunteer characteristics including motives and preferences change over time, through recurring participation?

2. Motives and Perceived Benefits
   a. Why do people participate in this type of voluntary service?
   b. What is included in the set of experiences for EEVs?
   c. What do people gain from participating in this format of volunteerism?
   d. To what extent does the significance of the project location or place influence the decision to volunteer?
   e. Is designated wilderness of significance to motives or experience?

3. Drivers of Retention
   a. What aspects of service-trips alone keep people volunteering over several years?
   b. What do EEVs prefer in terms of scheduling, trip makeup, tasks and other formatting terms?
   c. Which management practices upheld by volunteer organizations are successful drivers of retention?

Methodology

Qualitative research methods by way of semi-structured interviews and field observation were used in this study. As this study intended to understand the varied and nuanced meanings people associate with the EEV experience, qualitative methods afford the ability to probe beyond popular quantitative methods such as surveying (Warren & Karner, 2010).
A total of 26 interviews with EEVs were conducted at five distinct project sites within designated wilderness areas in the states of Montana and Idaho. Two regional, and one national conservation non-profit organization were responsible for facilitating the service trips visited during the study’s course. Interviews included a standard set of 15 questions, which closely resembled the diction of the research questions previously described. All interviews concluded with an open-ended prompt asking the participant if there was anything else they cared to share concerning the immediate experience or otherwise. Additionally, volunteers were given an optional form to capture basic demographic information like age, occupation, and distance travelled to reach the project site. Interviews were transcribed and then coded for analysis using Nvivo research analysis software.

**THESIS STRUCTURE**

This thesis document will consist of five major sections. It begins with a review of relevant literature on volunteerism with specific indications as to why more research was justified. From there, a detailed explanation of the research methods used to gather data and an expanded description of this particular format of environmental volunteerism will follow. Results and analysis of the research data are presented thereafter. A section containing implications and recommendations for service-trip providers comes next. The final section offers a discussion of the findings and conclusions relevant to the volunteerism discourse.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will open with a discussion on the fundamental concepts of volunteerism. Then, an introduction to the concepts pertaining to this niche form of volunteerism is provided. These topics include: reflexive and episodic volunteering styles, episodic environmental volunteerism, and volunteer tourism. From there research conducted on volunteer motivations and expectations, then studies on retention will follow. There is a brief section on the relevance of place attachment to this topic. The literature review will conclude with calls from recent studies for further research, organized by topic.

General volunteering concepts

From a recently published literature review on volunteerism, Lockstone-Binney et al. (2010) maintain that the origins of volunteering span an array of geographical and temporal boundaries. As a result, the concept of volunteering is “situational and takes on different meanings in different settings” (Handy et al., 2000; Merrill, 2006; Tuan, 2005 as cited by Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010, p. 436). The authors maintain that while there is no agreed definition or resolved conceptualization of what volunteering is, there are at least four core elements of volunteering, each one operating on a continuum of dimensions. An accepted and oft-cited explication of these four dimensions (Holmes & Smith, 2009) comes from Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996, p. 371):

1. Free choice (from free will to an obligation to volunteer)
2. Remuneration (from none at all to none expected, to expense reimbursement up to a stipend or menial wage)
3. Structure (from formal to informal)
4. Anticipated beneficiaries (from helping others, to friends or relatives, or oneself directly)

Cnaan et al. (1996) refer to volunteering forms on this continuum as ranging from ‘pure’ to ‘broad’ to account for various levels of choice, structure, interest, and compensation in an inclusive definition of volunteerism (Holmes & Smith, 2009). A substantive and additionally well-cited definition on the phenomenon of volunteering comes from Van Till’s (1988) articulation of five essential characteristics. Beginning with motivations, people volunteer to satisfy personal and social goals, and needs. With engagement in service, volunteers typically only do so after carefully weighing alternatives. With satisfaction, the full spectrum of voluntary action is complex, whereby different tasks appeal to different motivational forces. Then, an important influence or general ethos among volunteers is a concern for others although not purely altruistic in origin. Last, the motivation to give service is influenced by broader social realities.

Studies specific to volunteering in parks and recreation, natural resources, and other outdoor related sectors are numerous. Among those with significance to this project include: Caldwell and Andereck’s, (1994) motives study of American Zoological Society volunteers, Silverberg et al.’s (2001, 2004) studies on motivations of parks volunteers, Trauntvein’s (2011) research on urban parks and recreation volunteerism, and Hunter’s (2011) study on motivations, satisfaction, and retention of environmental volunteers. Caissie and Halpenny’s (2003) qualitative exploration on the motivations and experiences of volunteers participating in 3 to 17-day conservation projects in Ontario, Canada is the only comparable published work found on the topic. Caissie and Halpenny’s (2003) “Volunteering for nature: Motivations for participating in a biodiversity conservation volunteer program”
explores the topic of episodic environmental volunteerism as situated within a volunteer vacation model. However, instead of looking at motivations, expectations, and phenomenological aspects, the authors focused on determining volunteer attitudes and conceptualizations of ‘nature’. Their results indicated that the volunteer vacation experience did not change volunteers’ perceptions of nature from an ‘external’ or anthropocentric stance to a more ‘internal’ biocentric stance.

**Reflexive and Episodic volunteering styles**

The distinct yet complementary theories of ‘reflexive’ and ‘episodic’ styles of volunteering are evident within this format of environmental volunteerism. Reflexive volunteering is an emerging concept in volunteerism studies, first defined by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003). These authors noted that volunteers are primarily motivated towards service behaviors from the standpoint of self-interest or a potential desire to reconcile biographical discontinuity. An example of this concept in relation to this topic may be evident in the sedentary office worker who longs to labor outdoors or the young urbanite that desires authentic wilderness experiences. Reflexive volunteering is antithetical to ‘collective’ styles of volunteering rooted in a “service ethic and a sense of obligation to the community” (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, 168).

Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) observe that a “growing conviction” of radical change is taking place in the realm of volunteering attributed to broader trends of social transformation. These authors identify significant characteristic transitions in volunteerism from “traditional” and “old” to “modern” and “new,” as well as from “collectivistic” to “individualistic.” Compared with traditional volunteering as a lifelong and demanding commitment, present day volunteer
efforts appear to occur “on a more sporadic, temporary, and non-committal basis” (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 168).

Going further, a manifestation of reflexive volunteerism known as ‘episodic’ volunteerism is described as a trend towards volunteer preferences for short-term, intermittent, or otherwise episode-like forays into voluntary service (Macduff, 2004). The link between the two concepts is that participation in episodic volunteering formats is found to be increasingly preferable over traditional formats in the U.S. as well as other industrialized nations characterized by demands for production, a shortage of surplus time, and cultural secularization (Brudney & Meijs, 2009; Macduff, Netting, & O’Connor, 2009). Episodic volunteerism better enables the fulfillment of the individual’s service oriented desires without incurring a long-term commitment, perceived as incompatible with the frenetic lifestyle of Western Society (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Hustinx, Handy, & Cnaan, 2010). The increasing prevalence of domestic multi-day volunteer trip offerings such as those appearing in this study as well as internationally may be representative of a larger trend occurring within the third sector.

**Episodic Environmental Volunteerism (EEV)**

Viewed independently of any stated reflexive preferences by volunteers, the very nature of these volunteer service trips can be classified as episodic. As indicated previously, the temporary but intensive qualities of multi-day wilderness volunteering is a critical distinction from more traditional formats of environmental volunteering. While the vast majority of all volunteers will begin and end their day at home, these volunteers will remain at the service site for several days, with limited communication with the outside world. A considerable commitment is required from most of these volunteers. Planning demands incumbent upon the
volunteer exceed those of traditional environmental volunteer engagements. Calendars must be blocked out, vacation requests granted by employers, gear acquired, and travel itineraries arranged. While steep on the scale of volunteer commitment, it is important to consider that when compared to traditional volunteering, whereby one volunteers on routine intervals ranging from a few weeks to several years, these volunteer commitments are quite brief. Volunteers are *regular* participants of an *infrequently* occurring event, what Macduff’s (2005) expanded definition of episodic volunteering terms the ‘occasional volunteer’. Offered only occasionally throughout the year, these trips will only permit participating episodically. Multi-day wilderness volunteering, the focus of this study, is an example of episodic environmental volunteering.

**Volunteer tourism**

Yet another emergent category in contemporary volunteerism lies within the scope of this proposed study. Volunteer tourism, or ‘voluntourism’, blends travel and voluntary service and is considered a growth area in both volunteerism and tourism studies (Young, 2008; Holmes & Smith, 2009). It can also be considered a form of episodic volunteering, denoted by the sporadic and occasional participation that aligns with the volunteer’s scheduling needs (Hustinx et al., 2010). The increase in both voluntourism participation and organizations catering to consumer demand is attributed to a larger social movement that is seeking more “authentic experiences and ethical consumption” (Yeoman, 2008 as cited by Holmes & Smith, 2009). Within volunteer tourism lies the ‘volunteer vacation’ or ‘volunteer holiday’ that combines travel, voluntary service, and leisure experience (Brown, 2005). Brown (2005) likens the experience of the volunteer vacation to that of a “volunteer-minded” mission (p. 480).
Motivations, Expectations, and Satisfaction

Silverberg et al. (2001) found in their study of parks and recreation volunteers that satisfaction is a function of both job setting and psychological functions met by volunteering. The combination of the ideal situational qualities being met with attitudes, perceptions, and desires was expected to result in satisfied volunteers. In exploring the theory of psychological contracts in volunteerism with natural resources, outdoor recreation, and environmental management organizations, Jackson et al. (2003) found that volunteers regardless of task or organization expect to have some type of greater influence upon the organization beyond providing free labor.

Bruyere and Rappe (2007) surveyed natural resource volunteers and determined that ‘helping the environment’ was the most common motive for volunteering, followed by improving the specific areas where volunteers themselves recreate. In a multifaceted study examining motivations, satisfaction, and retention of environmental volunteers, Hunter (2011) identified six typologies of volunteer per motivation foci. Hunter’s participants aligned with motives based in either: practicality, idealism, society, career, concern, and intrinsic satisfaction of volunteering.

In a quantitative study exploring motives and perceived benefits of Australian environmental volunteers, Bramston, Pretty, & Zammit (2011) found that people volunteered to develop a sense of belonging, care for the environment, and gain education. Another quantitative study from Asah and Blahna’s (2012) also found similar motives for participation as other studies previously cited. These authors also investigated volunteer retention and concluded that meeting personal
interests was a more significant driver of retention as opposed to a sense of environmental concern as other studies had previously concluded.

**Retention of volunteers**

Numerous volunteerism studies have sought to address the challenge of identifying conditions that lead to an organization’s retention of volunteers. The underlying basis for this effort is the idea that volunteer turnover requires more resource expenditure to recruit and train new volunteers (Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001; Martinez & McMullin, 2004; Hager & Brudeny, 2005; Hunter, 2011). To that end, Brudney and Meijs (2009) equate the volunteer labor pool as a ‘natural resource’ that may either be depleted or sustained depending on the manner of utilization. These authors argue for volunteer management to disengage from preoccupation on recruitment and focus on retention.

Several thematic factors for retention appear in the literature including the emphasis on the volunteer experience being satisfying based on a variety of conditions being met (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). A recent study that describes how satisfaction is often conceptualized comes from Stukas et al. (2009), emphasizing that understanding volunteer motives alone will not result in increased retention unless the volunteer task or context aligns with the volunteer’s unique motivations. Despite the importance attributed to experiences aligning with expectations as a predictor of successful volunteer engagements, other scholars assert that satisfaction alone cannot determine retention likelihood and that there are additional contributing factors (Hunter, 2011). Some authors point to the influence of social relationships and educational fulfillment in the volunteer experience as a predictor of retention (Ryan et al., 2001; Garner & Garner, 2010).
Another theme of retention factors surrounds the organization management practices, both in terms of the volunteer’s perspective of the organization and the outlook of the organization towards their volunteers. Propst et al. (2003) and Trauntvein (2011) suggest that volunteers often expect to influence in some capacity the decisions of both the non-profit organization and the public agency. From the arguments of these authors, it seems that a service contribution alone is inadequate for achieving a sense among volunteers that they have made a difference and will therefore remain engaged over time. Diversity among volunteers and volunteer leaders is another factor of increasing retention identified by Trauntvein (2011). Finally, Hager and Brudney (2005) argue that a collective belief among the organization that volunteers are valuable, not costly and unproductive is a major determinant to retention. Also of note from these aforementioned authors is their finding that smaller organizations had higher rates of retention, possibly attributable to fewer volunteers to manage or a smaller operating budget that makes the need for maintaining a strong volunteer base all the more salient.

**Place attachment and environmental volunteering**

The emotional, cognitive, and functional bonds that people form with places have come to be described as the phenomenon known as place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). While many studies throughout multiple academic disciplines have studied the functions of place attachment, there are limited previous studies on the influence of place attachment as a predictor for civic action in place-specific environmental settings (Halpenny, 2010). However, there appears to be an increased interest in the literature over the last ten years in tracking place attachment to place-specific action such as volunteer engagement. To clarify, these are studies that attempt to go beyond exploring the influence of place attachment as
a determinant of pro-environmental actions or attitudes in general, to determining a correlation with taking action at a specific site or place.

Walker and Chapman (2003) determined that place attachment was a factor in ‘pro-environment behavioral intentions’ including volunteering among visitors to a Canadian national park. A study by Payton, Fulton and Henderson (2005) sought to determine the influence of place attachment and institutional trust leading to volunteer participation at a National Wildlife Refuge. These authors were surprised to have found that emotional place attachment (i.e. associated meanings), not functional place attachment (i.e. activity setting), was more essential to encouraging volunteerism. Despite their surprise in this finding (p. 525), Payton et al. (2005) believe that the positive relationship between emotional place attachment and volunteerism aligns with previous research (Vaske and Kobrin, 2001; Williams, Patterson, and Roggenbuck, 1992 as cited by Payton et al., 2005) suggesting that place attachment can indeed influence civic action. Additionally, Lukacs and Androin (2014) also found place meanings to be a factor leading to civic participation in stream restoration projects.

Halpenny (2010) also emphasized the role of place attachment sub-dimensions, place identity and place affect as factors leading to stronger relationships towards place-specific, pro-environment intentions. Also, in looking at the motivations of environmental volunteers, Bruyere and Rappe (2007) found that ‘improving areas that volunteers use for their own recreation’ was identified by volunteers as the most important motive, second only to ‘helping the environment’ (p. 503).

Other related aspects of place attachment and environmental volunteerism have examined the relationship to volunteer retention. Hunter (2011) and Caissie
and Halpenny (2003) identify personal or emotional attachment to a work project or place as a factor affecting volunteer commitment, though they do not specify to what extent. More related to predictors of retention, Ryan et al. (2001) in looking at factors predicting volunteer commitment in environmental stewardship programs, showed that place attachment to work sites increases as the length of volunteer involvement on that particular site increases.

**Calls in the literature for further research**

There is also an opportunity to expand the discourse on multiple theories situated in this context. Macduff and Netting (2009) note that future studies need to focus on how volunteer programs are changing to capture alternative styles of volunteering and seek to know what strategies are most effective. The nature of the unique sample in this proposed study lends itself well to expanding the discourse on a variety of related subjects. Place attachment, social and civic capital, volunteer tourism, and the idea of a volunteer labor-pool analogous to a natural resource (Brudney & Meijs, 2009) are a few examples of related concepts that might benefit from the findings of this research.

**Reflexive and Episodic styles of volunteerism**

Volunteerism scholars have identified the distinct yet often complementary theories of ‘reflexive’ and ‘episodic’ styles of volunteering as primed for expansion (Bryen & Madden, 2006; Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Wilson, 2012). As a relatively new trend in volunteerism, a full set of implications on episodic volunteerism remains to be developed (Bryen & Madden, 2006; Cnaan & Handy, 2005). One noted area for further consideration is that volunteers may be both episodic and traditional volunteers, with the idea that volunteer commitment can be placed on a continuum
With respect to encouraging retention, or more appropriately, a return among episodic volunteers, different strategies may be required than those used with traditional volunteers to meet preferences for training interests, skill development, and flexibility (Bryen & Madden, 2006). Also, the episodic volunteerism literature concerning volunteering for intermittent events is inclined to focus more on large events such as PGA golf tournaments (Coyne & Coyne, 2001; Pauline, 2011) with much less attention given to lower profile or grassroots volunteerism.

**Retention drivers**

Several studies from the previously mentioned topics in this literature review including episodic volunteerism, volunteer retention, motivations, and experiences of environmental volunteers advocate for further research. Beginning with Lockstone-Binney et al. (2010), who in conclusion of their literature review on leisure volunteering, assert that there remains scope to study volunteer motivation in far greater depth. These authors maintain that questions remain as to why people initiate and continue to volunteer and additionally, that little information exists on how the volunteer experience changes over time. For retention concerns, Propst et al. (2003) call for a greater understanding of what leads to continued participation in volunteerism within natural resources and other additional volunteer settings. Also with regards to retention factors, Bryen and Madden (2006) argue that “little is known about the episodic volunteer and what needs to be done to successfully ‘bounce-back’ or return volunteers for future tasks” (p. 1). Adding to the calls for more studies on episodic volunteerism, Cnaan and Handy (2005) conclude that very little is known about the nature of episodic volunteers as far as where they are volunteering as well as the phenomenon of repeat episodic volunteering.
**Voluntourism, Volunteer Vacations**

Holmes and Smith (2009) indicate that volunteer vacations are often international and consequently, the majority of research has reflected this trend. Additionally, Hustinx, Handy, and Cnaan (2010) include travelling to foreign countries within their definition of voluntourism. Evidence of volunteer tourism being predominately associated with international travel can be seen in the recent literature review on the topic by Wearing and McGehee (2013) who included only studies on international volunteer tourism, and “exclude[d] volunteering at home” (p. 121). There is little within the literature that explores domestic, regional, or even locally focused volunteer vacations. This study, with volunteers hailing from within the country if not the surrounding region, offers an opportunity to expand the normative associations of volunteer tourism as international, costly, and exotic.

**Wilderness-based environmental volunteerism**

Despite a considerable amount of research published specifically on volunteer motives, even studies specifically on parks, recreation, natural resource and environmental volunteers, both in the U.S. (Asah & Blahna, 2012; Bruyere & Rappe, 2007; King & Lynch, 1998; Ryan, Kaplan & Grese, 2001; Silverberg, 2004; Silverberg, Marshall, and Ellis, 2001; Trauntvein, 2011) and abroad, (Bramston et al., 2011; Caissie & Halpenny, 2003; Hunter, A.T., 2011; Measham & Barnett, 2008; Ralston & Rhoden, 2007) several scholars argue that a deficit remains in the literature with respect to volunteers of leisure, parks and recreation, conservation and environment, and other outdoor-based settings (Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Smith, & Baum, 2010). This point may be debatable, as the amount of publications on motives of environmental volunteerism previously listed seems to be reaching saturation. What is more clear however, is the presence of bias within these studies
towards volunteerism in urban settings as opposed to remote or wilderness settings. The recent research completed by Asah and Blahna, (2012), Handelman (2013), and Trauntvein (2011) focusing particularly on urban environmental volunteerism are suggestive of this trend. The void of environmental volunteerism research conducted in backcountry or wilderness settings creates an opportunity to compare findings on various dimensions of volunteerism between the prevailing focus on urban environmental volunteerism.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

METHODOLOGICAL THEORY

Environmental volunteerism research focusing on motives and experiences has employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods, with quantitative methods being slightly more popular. Quantitative studies include: Bramston et al. (2011), Bruyere and Rappe (2007), and Lu & Scheutt (2014) among others. While qualitative studies include: Caissie and Halpenny (2003), Lukacs and Ardoin (2014), and Measham and Barnett (2008) among others. Others (Asah & Blahna, 2010; Guiney & Oberhauser, 2009) have used a mixed method design combining closed- and open-ended survey questions with supplemental interviews. The volume of environmental volunteerism studies demonstrates the range of effective methods used by researchers to study this topic.

A few distinctive criteria for the scope of this study influenced the decision to use qualitative methods. The first is that few studies focus on this particular format of environmental volunteering, the domestic volunteer vacation. This gap in the extant literature provides a unique opportunity to present a comprehensive depiction of the meanings participants associate with this niche form of environmental volunteerism. The intended outcome is a greater understanding of the episodic environmental volunteerism format and a foundation for launching future research.

The goals of this research are to understand the range of social constructed meanings associated with this particular format of environmental volunteerism. Social constructionism posits that the social world is “intersubjective,” consisting of “shared meanings and understandings of the people being studied” as well as those
of the researcher (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 6). It also considers the influence of language and social interactions on shaping one’s reality (Andrews, 2012). The format of volunteering researched in this study is dependent on the presence of a social group consisting of organization staff, other volunteers, agency personnel, and other various actors such as members of the general public. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews are best suited to capture and analyze socially constructed meanings and understandings, rather than the numerical frameworks of quantitative methods (Warren & Karner, 2010).

The second reason why qualitative methods were selected for this study was to enable the emergence of findings previously unidentified by quantitative studies. Modifications to, or combinations of Clary et al.’s (1998) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley’s (2002) Volunteer Satisfaction Index, or the compiled questions from Ryan et al. (2001) have been used by many studies on volunteerism in a variety of fields. Typically these research instruments employ a Likert scale questionnaire to gauge respondent preferences. Volunteerism studies reliant upon these and other quantitative methods are typically narrower in scope, seeking most often to determine motives, retention drivers, or attitudes. By contrast, this study sought to understand the complex relationships among motives and perceived benefits, drivers of retention and volunteer preferences, place meanings, values and attitudes, and other potentially unknown dimensions of episodic environmental volunteerism. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was selected with the intention of promoting spontaneous and independent responses from interviewees to facilitate a complete illustration of EEV.
Along with the interview method as advantageous for gathering freely formed responses, interviewing also allowed instantaneous clarification in the event that a respondent was unclear on the question being asked. For example, for unknown reasons, many participants required additional expansion of the question, “Can you describe the experience of participating in a volunteer workweek such as this one?” Instead many were better able to answer in a situational context such as, “How would you describe to a curious friend or family member what it’s like to participate in service-trips such as the one you’re currently participating in?” This example demonstrates the immediacy in clarifying capabilities offered through semi-structured interviewing rather than a rigid survey design. Questions that seemed straightforward to the research team during the design phase and were successfully interpreted in pilot interviews were not always immediately clear to interview participants. Furthermore, responses were often discursive across the major research themes of inquiry. Questions aimed at identifying motives may have triggered a response describing experiences or a discussion of place meanings without any reference to motives. Advantageous to achieving the research goals, the burden of interpretation and analyses was placed upon me as the researcher and not the interview respondent.

**Study Population**

The population of applicability for this study is all participants of multi-day, episodic environmental volunteer service-trips in a domestic setting. Environmental volunteerism has diverse formats and takes place in a range of settings from urban to backcountry. What distinguishes this format from other environmental volunteerism formats is the aspect of multi-day immersion in a backcountry setting.
As previously described in the introduction section, this format bears heightened elements of participant engagement that extend beyond those of a single-day of volunteering in a front-country setting. Many extra steps of preparation, e.g. blocking out a week of one’s time, are required of participants. Therefore, attributes of this volunteer population may differ from other environmental volunteer populations.

This study only included volunteers who were U.S. nationals, some of which were regional residents and the others extra-regional residents. Unlike most studies on multi-day environmental volunteerism, often referred to as “volunteer vacations,” this study excludes elements of international tourism or travel. Calling attention to this detail should not be misconstrued as implying that social constructionist understandings of domestic and international environmental volunteer vacation participants are largely divergent. The emphasis here is simply to call attention to the exact population of interest and issue a caution regarding direct transference of findings.

The population is inclusive of volunteers recruited by both nationally and regionally affiliated service-trip provider organizations. This is worth mentioning because of potential profile distinctions among volunteers who may hold more personal association with one type of provider over the other. In this study for instance, volunteers affiliated with the nationally focused organizations had invested substantially more money in their participation through travel costs and registration fees. The volunteers associated with the regionally focused organizations had paid significantly less in registration fees and on the whole, had travelled from much closer distances to reach the project site.
Depiction of these EEV service-trips

The volunteers interviewed in this study were participating in trail maintenance objectives on lands managed within the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Service-trips began with the volunteer group meeting at a U.S. Forest Service trailhead and then hiking to a pre-determined site that would serve as the basecamp staging area for the remainder of the trip. The following days of the trip were most often devoted to clearing trails of fallen logs to make them passable for future trail users. Other common tasks included removing invasive plant species, restoring eroded sections of trail, and repairing drainage features. One day of the trip, usually in the middle of the week, was a day off from working. Volunteers were free to explore the surrounding area or relax at the campsite during this intentionally unscheduled day. The final day of the trip was devoted to breaking down the campsite and hiking back to the trailhead whereby the trip concluded and all participants dispersed. Important details of the service-trip experience surround the amenities extended by the provider organization. The use of packstock animals to transport food and equipment is standard on service-trips. This allows for a more luxurious experience as the animals have the physical ability to transport large quantities of food and camping equipment into the backcountry. Additionally, depending on the practices of the provider organization, the volunteers may be exempt from food preparation and other chores required for backcountry living. Beyond the service-work portion of the day, volunteers are often free to relax, enjoy the surroundings, and socialize with other volunteers.

The study sample includes 26 respondents from a total of 25 interviews. Respondents were drawn from five separate service-trips. Two of the trips were independently organized through the regionally focused Bob Marshall Wilderness
Foundation. One of the trips was independently organized through the regionally focused Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation. The other two trips were collaborative trips, jointly organized through the each of the previously mentioned regional organizations and the nationally focused Sierra Club.

For the 25 interviews, one interview was conducted with a husband and wife. The remaining 24 interviews were individually conducted. One respondent was a volunteer trip leader. Another two respondents were volunteers, who in addition to performing work on the weeklong service project, also supported the service-trip with the use of their packstock animals to transport equipment to the basecamp. Four respondents were recipients of “young-adult” scholarships awarded by one of the provider organizations to offset the registration fees. Six respondents were attending trips along with their children. All participants were over 18 years of age. A full description of the study respondents is provided in the Respondent Profile section of the Results.

STUDY AREA

Data collection took place in the Northern Rocky Mountain region of the U.S., within the states of Idaho and Montana. Interviews were conducted at various locations within The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Wilderness Area. Actual interviews were conducted at either the backcountry campsite or the project worksite for each of the five service-trips visited.

The study area was selected largely based on the proximity to the researcher’s home in Missoula, MT. The five service-trip sites could all be reached within a single travel day. This included both driving time to the trailhead and
hiking time to reach the volunteers in the backcountry. Additionally, the study area is appropriate for researching this particular topic as the government agencies managing these wilderness areas have embraced partnerships with diverse groups to complete management objectives.7

7 As evidenced by the statements recognizing partners in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex 2013 Newsletter published by a Forest Service District Ranger. Also, the June 2013 Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Newsletter, “Frankly Speaking” prominently features the work accomplished by partner organizations.
The concept of wilderness designation is unique to the United States and influences the study area. Federal land designated as “wilderness” within the NWPS is under management directives to exhibit characteristics of a place that is: untrammeled (i.e. unimpaired by man), undeveloped, natural, and conducive to experiencing solitude. For wilderness lands, there is high import placed on initiatives that preserve the characteristics previously described. The set of these characteristics are often referred to as the components of the “wilderness character” concept. The designation does not however indicate an absence of intentional management through human intervention. In fact, it is posited that, “management is needed to minimize the impacts of the wilderness visitor on the immediate environment and the experience of other visitors.” Thus, the basis for service-trips in these wilderness areas is formed.

**Sampling goals**

The initial research proposal sought to conduct 20 – 25 interviews. This range was determined by time needed to permit data collection and analysis within the time allotted, while retaining a strong potential for significant insight on the research questions to occur (Patterson & Williams, 2002). Another goal was to conduct at least 10 interviews per each provider organization, in order to construct a representative sample from the two parallel but distinct organizations. An a priori goal was also established to conduct interviews with a collaborative service-trip between the Sierra Club and each regional organization to balance the sample.

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8 As presented by Peter Landres of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute from a definition appearing in the USFS publication “Monitoring Selected Conditions Related to Wilderness Character: A National Framework”

9 From the Frequently Asked Questions content on “What is wilderness stewardship” from: [http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/manageIssuesOverview](http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/manageIssuesOverview)
Another significant consideration given to sampling intentions before data collection was to interview study participants in the field on the last full day of their service-trip. The goal for this strategy was to capture EEV dimensions in situ while the trip experience was still underway, yet enough time elapsed for personal reflection to have occurred. The other condition for selecting service-trips for inclusion in the sample was trip durations of four-night minimum. This trip duration, which unequivocally extended beyond a two-day weekend, was operationalized by the research team as an adequate length of time to be considered as a vacation experience.

**Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit interview participants. The initial step was to identify service-trip providers in the surrounding area and then contact them to request interview access with their volunteers. The first two provider organizations contacted were willing to participate in the study. Next, the researcher met with representatives from the provider organizations to identify pending service-trips that would best align with the sampling goals while also meeting logistical requirements. Several trips that were scheduled for the field season either failed to meet the duration requirement, or were beyond a day of travel. For example, some trips would have entailed hiking over 15 miles to reach the basecamp location. Other scheduled trips only had two or three potential interview respondents planning to attend. The five trips ultimately selected and visited for the sample were the best combination of participant likelihood, logistical considerations, and the potential for achieving a representative sample of respondent profiles.
After establishing the sampling itinerary, the researcher worked with the provider organizations to distribute a brief summary and participant invitation to all volunteers registered for the trip selected for sampling. Organizations were requested to contact volunteers and provide a short introduction in their own words explaining the research study intended to take place during their service-trip. Along with this statement, organizations distributed the study summary and invitation provided within the set of informational materials sent to volunteers shortly before their trip.

As a result of these initiatives, volunteers and trip leaders knew the anticipated date and time that the researcher planned to arrive for interviewing. Usually, arrival at the project site was targeted for shortly before the dinner hour, which was a time when group members could likely be found gathered together. Upon arrival, the researcher would give an introduction to the group and confirm the purpose of the visit with everyone present. The researcher would then join the group for dinner to begin building rapport. Joining the group for dinner allowed the researcher to further explain the significance of the research and answer common questions before initiating individual interviews. This practice proved effective in providing a chance for the volunteers to acquaint themselves with the researcher personally before beginning the interviewing process. It was a chance to build a brief yet critical relationship that established some sense of trust in both the researcher and the research objectives.

Typically the researcher attempted to conduct one or two interviews following dinner, depending on the willingness of the volunteers and the number of eligible interviewees in the group. A successful practice for soliciting interviews was to identify one of the more outspoken and social volunteers, and then ask them
to give an interview. From there, volunteers would be approached one at a time until all potential and willing service-trip attendees had provided an interview.

**DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE**

Each interview began with a verbal explanation of the study, followed by an opportunity for the respondent to ask questions about the research purpose or methods. Respondents were then provided with an Informed Consent form stating their rights to decline comment on any question or discontinue the interview at any point (See, Appendix B). After providing their consent to participate, respondents were then asked to complete a short form that collected basic demographic data (See, Results: Volunteer Profile for a table display of this data). Once the respondent confirmed their readiness to begin, the researcher started an audio recorder and commenced with the first interview question. Interviews were conducted near the other trip attendees but beyond earshot to ensure privacy.

Interviews were semi-structured and followed a 14-question interview guide (See, Appendix E). All questions in the guide were directly tied to one of the three major research areas addressing the respondent profile, motives and perceived benefits, or the drivers of retention. The questions were open-ended which promoted freedom in respondents’ interpretation and content of their responses. The semi-structured format also proved advantageous in allowing interviews to take on a conversational tone and style. In this aspect, respondents could speak to whatever they wished following the question being posed. If necessary, questions could be revisited at a later point in the interview if the respondent failed to address the original objectives of the question. Spontaneous

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10 This form was pre-approved by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board.
prompts and follow-up questions were routinely utilized to elicit greater depth of response. As previously mentioned, some respondents required rephrasing or expansion of a question for the sake of their full understanding to a question’s meaning.

**SAMPLE LIMITATIONS**

A recognizable limitation to the sample of this study is the absence of minors and a skewed population towards older-aged respondents. A few minors who were attendees on service-trips visited for sampling expressed interest in participating in the study. Minors were omitted from the study based on concerns of reliability and quality of response content. Also, the Institutional Review Board approving the research would have required additional measures be taken to ensure ethical integrity that may have interfered with the timing of data collection. This process would have placed constraints on receiving a timely approval of the study proposal in exchange for the likelihood of having few if any minors in attendance to be interviewed.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Interview audio recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service. The first phase of analysis was a textual review of four interviews. These interviews were selected for their comprehensiveness along with consideration to variations in respondent profile and diversity of response content. A low-tech process of color-coding and notation was used to identify major thematic responses in each interview. The themes identified in this initial review were used to construct a framework of thematic findings for use in coding all subsequent interview transcripts.
Transcripts were then uploaded into Nvivo 10 research software. Each transcript was fully coded within the framework previously described, along with the addition of new themes encountered while reviewing the transcripts. Approximately 230 themes were produced by the time the 25 interview transcripts were fully reviewed.

The coded data in Nvivo was then reviewed a second time. This second review involved a process of building out an MS Excel spreadsheet for each major research question. A separate spreadsheet was created for the questions on: Motives and Perceived Benefits, Drivers of Retention, Respondent Profile, and Feedback & Preferences for provider organization practices. The 230 themes identified using Nvivo were added as column headers within each respective spreadsheet. During this data migration process, it became evident that several themes were redundant, cross-coded, or inconsequential in relation to the overall study findings. This resulted in an extensive refinement effort to consolidate or eliminate unnecessary themes.

After reaching a resolution on the final themes, all data coded in Nvivo was reassessed and placed under the most appropriate column in the spreadsheet. This step created an opportunity to affirm that data was truly coded to the most applicable theme. By the time this process was completed, many patterns were visible on the social constructionist understandings respondents held regarding their participation in EEV service-trips. The spreadsheets then functioned as the primary environment where an iterative review and analysis of the data occurred. The spreadsheet mapping of the data provided a visual representation of the data similar to a histogram style graph. This was helpful in achieving a “bird’s-eye view” of the data to quickly identify major trends.
The final analysis was a process of grouping similar and dissimilar responses to the interview questions. Where applicable, I was able to identify distinctions among responses based on various demographic considerations such as age, “new” or “returning” volunteer status, and other characteristics of the sample respondents. Respondents associated provider organization was also a defining aspect of the results. The complete findings of this process are displayed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings from the data collection process. Findings are organized according to the primary areas of inquiry through the following sections:

- The Respondent Profile for the study sample
- Motives for, and Perceived Benefits from, participation
- Drivers of Volunteer Retention
- Volunteers’ Preferences for service-trip makeup, and Feedback for the provider organizations
- Significances attributed to Places and the wilderness ideal

The presentation of data will rely heavily on direct quotations from the study participants to best represent their set of constructs regarding EEV service-trips. Within each primary section of inquiry, results will be assembled and analyzed according to thematic relationships.

Respondent Profile

_The people are just the highest quality people in general on service trips because we’re working with people who are volunteering on their vacations._ – R-4

This results section provides a detailed description of the volunteers who composed the sample of respondents for this study. A brief overview description of the 26 respondents will be given, followed by the results from a demographics questionnaire. The remaining data is divided between two thematic sections. “Extent of volunteerism among respondents,” discusses the findings pertaining to
respondents’ perceived availability to volunteer and the preferred style of volunteering with consideration to age. “Values and volunteerism” relates findings pertaining to the set of beliefs held by respondents, the origins of these beliefs, and the influences political ideals concerning environmental volunteerism.

**Overview of Study Participants**

The EEVs that made up the sample of 26 respondents came from five separate service-trips that occurred in wilderness areas on US National Forest. Two local conservation organizations primarily facilitated the service-trips visited for data collection. Both of these local organizations collaborated with the Sierra Club, a prominent nationwide conservation non-profit, to fill two of the trips included in this study. The two collaborative Sierra Club trips fielded volunteers almost entirely from outside the local region. The three independent trips consisted mainly of local or regional (within 300 miles of the project) volunteers. One collaborative trip consisted of volunteers ranging in age from 18-25 who were recipients of Sierra Club “youth scholarships.” Four of these scholarship volunteers participated in the study.

An expanded summary of the sample demographics will follow this section, along with a complete table displaying the results of a demographic questionnaire. Suffice it to say however, that the average respondent interviewed was Caucasian, middle to upper middle-class, a working or retired professional, and an outdoors enthusiast who highly values volunteer service. Roughly two-thirds of respondents were “veteran” volunteers who were returning to the same organization to participate in a service-trip. Six of the respondents were attending trips along with their children.
**RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS**

The sample of 26 respondents varied in all sampled demographic fields except ethnicity, wherein 92% of respondents listed Caucasian as their ethnicity. Among other significant trends for the sample were that 69% of respondents were returning or “veteran” volunteers with the same respective organization. While many (42%) respondents were regional residents, traveling less than 300 miles to reach their project site, another 46% reported travelling at least 500 miles. The reason for this substantial segment of extra-regional respondents is mainly due to The Sierra Club volunteers (46%) who travelled large distances to reach their project site. Older and retired volunteers were most frequently represented in the sample, with 35% above 55-years-old and 27% identifying as retired. Most respondents (77%) volunteer for other causes in addition to EEV service-trips. The sampled gender was nearly split among 12 female and 14 male respondents. The results from the demographic questionnaire completed by volunteers appear on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Respondent Demographics from questionnaire (n = 26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>18 - 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 70</td>
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<tr>
<td>70+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance travelled to reach project site (in miles)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1001 - 2000</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization of participation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Marshall Wilderness Fndn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Club via Bob Marshall Wilderness Fndn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Fndn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Club via Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Fndn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent volunteering beyond service-trips</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conservation only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conservation and other non-conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-conservation causes only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other volunteer service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extent of volunteerism among respondents

Most respondents sampled in this study provided evidence to conclude that volunteerism is both a significant pastime and a personal value. As mentioned above, 77% of respondents participate in some form of voluntary service in addition to EEV service-trips. Their volunteering was often found to extend beyond conservation related causes to other unrelated causes. As one respondent explained:

I’ve always been a volunteer, throughout my life and career. I was part of the Pittsburg Paralegal Association, on the board of directors, and then an officer, did that for years, represented them statewide... I always feel like, somebody’s got to do it, while I would have gladly stepped aside if someone else was interested in running for a position. It’s something I’ve always done and like to do. – R-2

As suggested by this volunteer, respondents are motivated to volunteer not only for their own personal interest but also for altruistic reasons tied to civic responsibility.

Age and perceived capacity to volunteer

Generally, respondents’ perception of being available to volunteer increased with age. Younger respondents could more frequently be heard expressing their perceived difficulty in finding time to devote to volunteering. In answering a question regarding how often he volunteers, a 24-year-old respondent said:

Not very [often]. In the normal workweek, I don’t have the time or energy. My workday used to start at 9 and end at 6. My commute was half an hour both ways, so by the end of the day I didn’t really feel like volunteering. On the weekends, I would be out playing Magic the Gathering, I got really into that, or just doing other things. So volunteering... there’s a lot of time constraints in my normal workweek that I just don’t have the time.

– R-19

A 21-year-old respondent related that he does not volunteer often due to being in school fulltime and then looking for work. He said, “Now that I have pretty steady employment, I’m more open to volunteering. Financial stability helps.”
By contrast, older respondents who have reached retirement made statements describing their perception of volunteering extensively. A 69-year-old respondent began by saying, “I wonder how I ever had time to work. I’m retired now.” He elaborated further, “We’re involved, yeah. We’re very involved in volunteer work. I don’t know how else to say it, we are, and in different aspects. It’s not just in the natural environment.” Furthermore, a 40-year-old respondent discussed her volunteer involvement with a local playhouse saying, “I volunteer there a lot. Like backstage, lights, stuff like that. We usher for any live theater, that sort of stuff.”

**Age and actual volunteer participation**

This trend of respondents’ perceived availability according to age did not necessarily correlate to the actual amount of time that respondents indicated having spent volunteering. Some younger respondents still reported regular volunteering despite others from that same demographic who claimed to be unavailable to volunteer. Likewise, some older retiree volunteers reported no additional volunteering beyond EEV service-trips. For example, of the six respondents who stated no additional volunteering outside or these service-trips, three were from the 56-70 age-group. By comparison, two respondents were from the 18-25 age-group and the remaining respondent was in the 41-55 group. A veteran volunteer from the 56-70 age-group said, “The only thing I volunteer for is the Sierra Club service-trips. I do three a year.” In contrast, a first-time volunteer from the 18-25 age-group said, “Basically every week I volunteer with anything that needs to be done there [church]. I also helped build a house before.” While perceptions of availability to volunteer appeared tied to respondents’ age, there was no conclusive finding to
suggest that actual volunteerism is more or less prevalent among a certain respondent age-group.

**Age and style of volunteering**

While respondents were found to volunteer regardless of age, the preferred style of volunteering as either episodic or traditional was related to age. Respondents who participated in traditional volunteerism with standing long-term commitments tended to be older or retired. Episodic volunteerism was more commonly found among respondents of the middle age-group segments who were working fulltime. One retired respondent discussed his traditional volunteering engagement saying, “I do taxes from February 1st through April 15th almost on a daily basis for that two and a half months.” Similarly, another retired respondent told of his traditional style of volunteering in which he volunteers for the symphony “for four hours, 10 times a year.” A respondent who is employed fulltime as a teacher yet falls within the 56-70 age-group participates in traditional volunteerism by serving as a board member with the Nature Conservancy. Furthermore, another teacher in the same age-group discussed her traditional-style volunteerism through her board president role with a youth music camp.

Among the set of respondents who indicated a preference towards episodic volunteerism was a nurse in the 26-40 age-group who said that he tries, “as much as I can... about twice a month” to volunteer on an ambulance. He noted that it was not a standing commitment. Another volunteer in the same age-group spoke of her episodic participation in an organization that performs a variety of single-instance service projects. She explained her involvement with the organization as, “[a] random volunteer experience I do every once in a while when I get the chance.” A volunteer in the 41-55 age-group talked about participating episodically in a local
trail work project near her home saying, “you kind of sign up every month, so it’s not like you commit and then for three years you have to be there every Saturday. That has been a great format as well.” Other volunteers within this younger and fully employed demographic corroborated this finding that episodic volunteerism is preferable over traditional volunteering formats.

VALUES AND VOLUNTEERISM

The results of this study suggest that episodic environmental volunteers maintain similar values-sets. There is a general view among respondents that volunteering is a virtuous endeavor. Many respondents describe holding values of civic-mindedness or similar themes stemming from a perceived “need to contribute.” Volunteering for a worthwhile cause in this instance is a means of acting upon those values. Respondents called to their upbringing, formal education, social standing, and parenting styles as the basis for holding these values.

Some respondents stated a belief that it is neither possible nor appropriate for the government to attend to all social problems. For them, volunteering is viewed as a one’s civic duty. At the stronger end of the spectrum for holding voluntary service values are the respondents who are motivated towards activist behaviors. A few respondents believed that performing environmental conservation labor is inadequate. These respondents are motivated to engage in political activism such as participating in organized campaigns for environmental legislation, or by encouraging others to participate in voluntary service.

A few respondents made limited references to the personal sacrifice inherent in volunteering. However, most respondents emphasized their eagerness to volunteer for environmental and other causes considered worthwhile.
Civic-minded values

Many respondents ascribed their interest in volunteerism to a belief in making contributions to one’s community. A respondent elucidated this notion in sharing his personal philosophy concerning volunteerism:

...Even before we were retired, we always felt that it [volunteering] was part of a full life and a part of being a community is being active with that community and giving back to the community. We get benefits from bein’ members of a community. – R-12

Respondents across various ages and service-trips echoed semblances of this “involved citizen” portrayal. There was a shared idea that one’s labor objectives should at times, extend beyond personal gains to further a collective good.

Origins of volunteer values

A respondent mentioned having been influenced by philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, whose philanthropy promoting text, *Democracy in America*, is required reading in many high school civics classes. Another respondent carried this theme forward in relating her educational experience at a boarding school that included manual labor in the curriculum. “I already have that ethic, that it’s OK to dig ditches—even though I’m an educated person,” she said. “I’m a composer, most of the composers I know would never do this.” This respondent was careful to make a distinction regarding how philanthropy should occur, noting that “it translates not only into giving money to things, to writing out a check, but to actually pitching in.”

Other respondents pointed to the role of their religious upbringing as the foundation for coming to value voluntary service. One respondent attending a trip with her family relayed that she and her husband had been raised in the
“Mennonite tradition” where volunteerism is “very important.” She described her beliefs saying:

That is one reason that it’s [volunteering] important to me, because we’re all here together. We need to help each other. The more you help someone, something, the more you have a connection with them, the more you see them as having value. The more you work with people instead of just giving money, which we do, you just form more connections, a deeper bond. – R-9

Respondents also perceived of themselves as capable of volunteering because their own needs had been fully met. They recognized their social standing as having all basic needs met and a surplus of resources such as time, energy and finances. “Because I’m fortunate enough that I have all of my needs met, and there’s people in the world who don’t have that,” explained one respondent who volunteers at homeless shelter. She expanded in saying, “so even if it’s for an hour and not a week, even if I can’t give a million dollars or build a shelter, I can give of my time to help them [children] with their homework and such.” Another respondent conveyed similarly:

Regardless of our socioeconomic [status], which is not high, we are very lucky, and acknowledging how lucky we are and what opportunities we have to give back, be it to people, animals, and the environment. I don’t care what area one chooses. Just do it. – R-1

Other respondents also gave indication to their social standing as sufficient to the point where they had surplus resources and consequently felt compelled to volunteer.

**Families and volunteering values**

Respondents who attended trips as families spoke of a desire to impart upon their kids values of service, civic involvement, and the experience of performing manual labor. A father attending a trip with his teenage son explained that his son has never held a job. Through the service-trip experience, the father hoped to show
his son what it is like to work as a laborer. “He’s not thinking he’s gonna do any manual labor in his life,” said the father of his son, “but he’s got to learn that he’s gonna have to do some manual labor in his life before he gets some place he’s not [yet reached in life].” Another respondent also attending a service-trip with her teenage son explained the pride she felt in passing on to her kids her belief that “everyone should volunteer in some capacity.” A veteran volunteer observed the exchange of values occurring when families attend service-trips:

If a young person comes with a family member and experiences this and they’ve had a positive experience and it’s altered their thinking, a lot of the work has already been done. The word is “inculcate.” The parents are inculcating in their children the importance of being involved and being in the environment, being in the natural world, being involved in activities that help to preserve the natural world. ...If a parent is able to show you this world, it’s a way of introducing them, and if the hook is there, then the lesson has been successful and the person [child] says, “All right, I understand.” The chance of success about that person’s involvement in the future increase, no doubt about it. I’m seeing it here, on this trip. – R-7

Another respondent attending a service-trip with his family discussed a trend in American high schools where students are mandated to perform community service in order to graduate. He remarked, “Whether colleges think favorably of that, I don’t really know, but I think it’s a good thing to introduce kids to giving back.”

Meeting unmet needs

A handful of respondents expressed their belief that government alone cannot be expected to resolve all problems facing the public sphere. These respondents presented their belief that volunteerism and civic engagement is necessary in order to fill gaps left open by the state. Succinctly surmised by one respondent:
...There’s just so much to be done, and you can’t depend upon everything to be done—if volunteers don’t do it, who the hell does it? Then you have to expect it to be [done by] some formal structure like government, and it’s not appropriate for government to do everything. – R-13

This same respondent went on to discuss his observation that the government is allocating increasingly less resources for environmental protection, specifically the maintenance of wilderness areas. “We could just step back and say, “That’s for the National Forest Service,” but they can’t do it... we clearly can see that the government is not stepping up to it. It takes volunteers to do it,” he explained. Another longstanding volunteer and trail user reflected this same sentiment in saying, “The Forest Service doesn’t do it [maintain trails] much any more. That’s one thing. We spend some significant amount of time in the backcountry. It’s nice to be able to go out and actually use the trails.”

Politics, activism and EEV service-trips

Political concerns surrounding one’s conservation ethic were occasionally cited as a basis for valuing volunteerism. Respondents mentioned that service trips consistently attract people who hold similar political ideals concerning environmental causes. Some within this set of respondents indicated that their political interests with regard to conservation drive their activist behavior. Also cited was the desire to influence change through various channels. These respondents gave specific mention to the importance of volunteering for the environment as a demonstration of their political values. Still, a few respondents stated their preference for service-trips to remain free of political conversation or influence, preferring an apolitical conception of the service-trip experience.
Manifesting political beliefs

A respondent described the social climate typically found on EEV service-trips as one of commonly held political views where conservation is concerned. In comparing Sierra Club service-trip participants with regular Sierra Club recreational trip participants, a volunteer observed a difference in political involvement.

It seems that the people who do volunteer trips are even more committed to the environment than the others. Everyone else who does volunteer trips feels the same way. It just goes one step beyond, people who like the outdoors and people who are willing to go one step further for the outdoors. It’s a different type of person. – R-5

Another respondent on the same Sierra Club trip supported her statement, expressing his view:

One of the most important things right now is that more people are caring for our planet... getting out and helping preserve some of the wild places is an important legacy to not just me but my kids and future generations. It’s nice to know that there’s big patches of wild land left and to help maintain and preserve some of that is important. – R-6

Once more, from another participant of the same trip came, “I’m not a very political person, but I guess to the extent that I ever do anything political, this is political... it is a form of activism for me, yes.”

On a more specific level, volunteers expressed a need within themselves to validate their political stance through active participation in conservation efforts. A respondent conveyed this in saying, “I’m showing that what I appreciate, I’m willing to give my time to help support. There’s talk the talk and then there’s walk the talk. I want to make sure that I’m walking the talk when I talk to people about environmental issues.” More to that idea from another respondent, “by putting my body where my mouth is, I try to not just think that but do something about it.”
Activism & influence

Respondents also spoke of a desire to influence others towards participation in environmental volunteerism. When asked to envision the conditions of an ideal volunteering experience, one respondent stated directly that the setting would be visible to the general public. Under these conditions he believed it possible for informative conservations to occur with observers to the effect of, “Hey, this is what we’re doing. This is what we’re about.” Another respondent recognized benefits in being publicly visible in her volunteerism to “set an example for others.” In this manner, “when they [other people] have the time or the chance to do somethin’ like this, maybe they will.”

A respondent who works for a federal land management agency revealed his longing for an increased culture of voluntary service within his office. He said:

So that’s one of my motivations, to get some internal interest as well in the forest and get people out here doing volunteer work. I don’t see a lot of that spirit of volunteerism in the workforce, so I’m trying to lead by example. I got one guy to go, and that’s kind of a success. Earlier this year, he walked up to me. [He said], “I signed up for a trip, I’m goin’!” I was like, “Good for you!” – R-25&26

Other respondents talked about the enjoyment derived from telling friends and family about their service-trip experience upon its completion, acknowledging the potential for their recruitment on future trips.

A respondent on one of the independent service-trips explained that volunteering strengthens his belief in a particular cause. At a certain point, he feels compelled towards political activism such as letter writing, fundraising, and campaigning for supportive legislation. He explained how this process occurs:

Once we’ve done this [participate in service-trips], we can’t say, “I’m only involved in conservation efforts for a week or two in the summer, and this is what I do, I fix trails.” It’s more. It makes it more a part of that life-view of things. And other volunteer experiences do the same thing. I volunteer for
the symphony. That’s what I do for four hours 10 times a year. But then when the symphony needs support, then we write letters to the editor or we help with the fundraising. The same with The Bob [Marshall Wilderness Foundation]. We do fundraising for The Bob or we contribute ourselves because of it. So reinforcement helps extend the commitment. – R-13

No other respondents described this direct connection for themselves between volunteerism and other activist behaviors. Despite that, several referred indirectly to this idea of reinforcement and enhanced engagement by relating their interest in volunteering for multiple causes.

**Motives and Perceived Benefits**

*To describe it, it’s enjoying nature and having it disguised as work.*

– R-17

This section of results explores the reasons people participate in episodic environmental volunteer (EEV) service-trips. In the data analysis process, it was readily apparent that respondents emphasized the favorable aspects of their experience rather than the less favorable or negatively perceived aspects. A full discussion as to why this is will take place in the Discussion section, but a summary explanation is that people attend service-trips because it is personally interesting and beneficial. Regardless of whether the volunteer is a first-time or veteran participant, they are anticipating a positive experience despite any setbacks that may transpire during their trip. Consequently, it is more appropriate to view the terms of their participation on the whole as *perceived benefits* instead of an unbiased telling of experiences.

Two questions at the beginning of each interview sought to better understand the experiences of EEV service-trips. These questions were:

1. “Can you tell me about what a typical day has been like?”
2. “Can you describe the experience of participating in a volunteer workweek such as this one?”

If volunteers were unclear on the question, they were prompted to explain the experience to a curious friend or family member that has no prior knowledge of an EEV service-trip. The next question asked of respondents was, “What motivates you to participate in volunteer workweeks such as this one with [organization X]?”

Respondents’ answers to these first three questions were discursively relayed. Motives leading to participation could often be heard interspersed within descriptions of the experience. In the same manner, respondents often described service-trip experiences when asked about their motives to participate. The results suggest a close relationship exists for respondents among the sought after set of experiences, i.e. motives, the actual experience in situ, and the perceived benefits derived from the experience. Based on the interrelated nature of respondents’ stated participatory motives and perceived benefits, it is fitting to present all relevant results in the same section. In so doing, the prospect of redundant data presentation will be minimized.

The majority of responses regarding the motives and perceived benefits of participating in EEV service-trips have been categorized into one of the main themes in this section. The opening theme will provide an overview description of the service-trip experience. From there, six major themes will be examined on: 1) the social and community structures 2) the factors resulting in a rewarding experience, 3) the significance of the natural setting, 4) the personal development that occurs through participation 5) the insight, perspective, and inspiration respondents gain, and 6) the altruistic motives stemming from an environmental ethic.
Experience Overview: Working Vacation, Facilitated Backcountry Experience, Enjoyable Adventure

Q: Is it fun?
A: This? At times I’ll be like, “Why am I doing this to myself?” But no, I think it is fun... Yeah, I would say it’s fun. You better. – R-23

Many respondents seem challenged when asked to describe the experience of EEV service-trips in wilderness settings. As to why this was remains unclear. One theory would implicate the multidimensional quality of service-trips and a diverse set of social constructionist understandings towards participation.

Facilitated backcountry trip

The collective response painted a picture of the service-trip experience as a working vacation. In this construct, respondents reported an inexpensive guided backcountry trip with other like-minded participants, one that blends both recreation and manual labor activities. All respondents indicated that participation in these trips is enjoyable, despite some who conveyed that trips are often physically demanding and challenging.

Respondents explained that for them, this volunteering format meets a variety of needs and interests, resulting in an overall “fun” experience. For example:

“I don’t want to get out here and have a bad time, ‘cause I am on vacation,” explained a respondent. “But the concept of a working vacation like this really fits well with my personality and my needs. I’m not really good at relaxing. So gettin’ to be out here and hikin’ and camping and bein’ in the woods, but also gettin’ to do some stuff that improves the resource and protects [resources].” – R-25&26

Similarly, other volunteers described it as a “working vacation” involving a travel experience where you are able to “earn your keep” through completing voluntary service work. For instance, “It was a vacation and contributing, and it
was inexpensive" stated one respondent. A popular motive and perceived benefit of participation was having the planning and preparation fall almost entirely on the provider organization. Respondents indicated that to safely embark on a weeklong venture into the wilderness requires many things including: maps and familiarity with the geography of the given area, backcountry skills, camping gear, and first aid training. Aside from these things, respondents explained that finding a trip companion is the most critical and often times most difficult requirement to meet for a safe backcountry trip. Consider one respondent’s explanation on the facilitated benefit of service-trips:

I would never have an opportunity to backpack like this, ‘cause I don’t know people and I don’t have all the gear, stove, and I don’t have the know-how, so I wouldn’t be doing this on my own. I don’t necessarily know how to read a map well. And I’ve camped some, and I’ve backpacked before, but always with other people who know more. So to go with someone who has the know-how and that I could learn from was huge. It gives me an opportunity that I wouldn’t have otherwise. – R-1

Another volunteered added to this idea saying, “...not having to handle all the details. That’s a really big plus for me. ‘Cause I can get wrapped around the axle with the details when it’s time to plan a trip.” For many respondents, the perceived constraints of such an endeavor can seem insurmountable.

The service-trips offer the benefits of a fully supported backcountry trip without the expense of hiring a commercial outfitter or guide service. Of the three organizations included in this study, only one charged volunteers above a nominal deposit fee to secure their spot on the trip. The Sierra Club trip participants had paid fees within the range of $250 - $500, still substantially less than the several thousand dollars that a commercial outfitter would typically charge for a guided
Respondents viewed their labor and fees as adequate payment in exchange for the services provided by the organization. “It’s like paying for a vacation, but not having to pay for it,” disclosed one respondent before acknowledging that, “well, you pay for it by holding a shovel for a little while.” Respondents provided numerous statements highlighting the relative ease of participating in these trips by extension of the provider organization’s support. “It’s an opportunity to get into the wilderness without packing in my own food” said one respondent. “It’s a week of letting somebody else cook for you.” Especially significant for these trips is the use of packstock to bring in heavy tools, camping equipment, and enough fresh food to feed 8 – 12 physically active adults for an entire week. As one respondent described:

The bang for the buck’s amazing. I give them my application fee and they keep it and I come out here and eat as much food as I want and work all day and sit around and shoot the [breeze] and read books. It’s pretty good. It’s [a] good value. I don’t want to make it sound like they’re providing a service. Essentially they are, but we’ve got skin in the game, which is cool.

– R-25&26

Adding to that idea, another respondent concluded, “I guess it makes all of this a little more accessible. You just show up. Everything else is there.” A respondent in his early 70’s explained that the service-trip model “saves me a lot of work, ‘cau I can’t pack what I used to. It gives me another option and allows me to continue [accessing the backcountry] longer than I normally could physically.”

Safety & security

Accessing remote wilderness destinations while feeling safe and secure was another significant theme falling within this perceived benefit of facilitated trips.

Older respondents in particular emphasized this benefit, although younger respondents also acknowledged the comfort attributed to being in a group. “For me, coming into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, I wouldn’t come in here by myself,” explained a 50-year-old male respondent. He added, “I’m too uncomfortable bein’ in bear country and doing that. Being with the group makes going into the wilderness feel a lot safer.” Another respondent’s explanation adds to that idea by further describing the security benefits as:

...I get this incredible experience, this opportunity, and I do it in a safe manner and in a healthy manner. Safety for me is an important thing when I’m out. You’ve got trained people, you’ve got a trained crew leader, particularly, and he has the back-country first aid and probably some of ‘em even have first responder training. You get the safety of the group. And we’re in bear country, so we like that. – R-13

Other respondents, mainly retirees, told of situations where their significant other, family, or friends are either physically unable to go backpacking or simply uninterested in the activity altogether. A 71-year-old respondent explained this condition in his own life:

As I got older, my friend moved and my other friends that I’d been doin’ it with had [become] either physically unable, and some of ‘em can’t because one of ‘em, his wife has bad health, so he has to stay near her. It gives me a way to go out without goin’ by myself. – R-14

These respondents explained that service-trips provide them with the companionship they otherwise would not have. The service-trips serve to remove this barrier for these respondents, enabling them to fulfill a desire to access wilderness settings for multi-day periods.

Skills acquisition makes personal trips safer

Younger respondents recognized their inexperience as a vulnerability that the service-trip format helped to offset. From a 21-year-old male respondent, “[I’m]
still getting my backpacking expertise and confidence, still building on that. It’s nice to have a group setting so I could hone my skills while having a safety net, just in case.” A 24-year-old respondent conveyed that while the service-trip format may not be his ideal experience, it offers an introduction to multi-day backpacking and a chance to learn essential skills. He conveyed:

I’m not ready to do a 10-day hike on my own, or me and my sister, or me and a couple of buddies. So what appealed to me about this one was, it was gonna be out in the wild and that it was gonna be led, so there were gonna be people there who knew more than me who could teach me a lot. –R-17

A 43-year-old female respondent stated similarly on behalf of her family, “We wanted to get out to some back country and practice doing a long backpacking trip, even though it was aided, we still got some experience.” Service-trips for these young to middle-aged respondents were a means of training up to a perceived level of self-sufficiency in backcountry skills.

**Perceived level of difficulty**

While respondents viewed the service-trip experience as enjoyable overall, the perceptions surrounding the degree of difficulty varied mildly. The majority of respondents, particularly younger volunteers, veteran participants, or those with relevant work experience diminished qualities of difficulty in describing the experience. “It is a bit labor-intensive sometimes, but it’s not like sweatshop stuff,” explained one respondent in his early twenties who was participating in a trip for the first time. Additionally, a respondent compared the workload encountered on an EEV service-trip to that of her past career experience as a wildland firefighter saying that, “comparatively, it hardly counts.”
Difficulty is subjective

In contrast to the majority perception that trips are relatively easy, a few older or less physically fit respondents did indicate that the experience is often strenuous. A 60-year-old volunteer who has participated in one or two trips per year for several years running described the trip week as, “probably one of the hardest I put in all year physically.” A 19-year-old respondent who was a first-time participant portrayed her experience of the eight-mile, gradual uphill hike into basecamp on the first day of the trip in saying:

I didn’t know what I was gonna get myself into… It was hard. I never thought I would carry 30 pounds nine miles. ‘Cause at home, running a mile, that’s easy. But out here, walking with bags, a mile is hard, and going up the mountain is just—my goodness. – R-20

One veteran volunteer in his early-70s related his previous attempts to recruit friends and the emphasis he places on the physical fitness level required of participants. “I’ve seen over the years people sign up for more than they’re prepared to do, and it becomes not a fun project, it becomes a real problem for ‘em…,” he believed. Despite these statements, a volunteer leader for the Sierra Club spoke of the goal for the intended difficulty level when constructing trips in saying:

...Volunteers should not be overworked. You don’t want people going back [home] exhausted and have a bad experience. You want them to feel [like], “I accomplished something,” because it’s most people’s vacation time. “I went on vacation and I came back exhausted from vacation.” Most people don’t want to say that. But if they can come back and say, “I did work hard. I accomplished a lot, and I had fun, too,” that makes a difference. – R-7

As this respondent alluded to in his response, that EEV trips are considered to be “fun” or overall enjoyable seemed to be the balancing force that offset any perceived hardship incurred by the workload encountered.
Enjoyable experience

Often respondents were tentative in relating details of the EEV experience and prompting by the researcher was required. The volunteer might be asked a short follow-up question to the effect of: “Would you say that it’s difficult, fun, boring, exciting, enjoyable, etc.?” Responses to this prompt varied, yet frequently, the experience was said to be laborious while simultaneously fun and enjoyable. “You work hard, but that’s fun. That’s part of it. I’ve gone on trips where I felt I wasn’t working hard enough, and then I felt, “Why am I here?” explained one respondent. Another volunteer justified their participation by saying, “…it is challenging, but that’s what I came out here for, with the expectation that I will be tired at the end of the day.” There was acknowledgement among respondents that hard work and physical fatigue was a major component of these trips, even welcomed as a benefit of participation.

Aside from enjoying the manual labor, respondents are motivated by adventure, travel, and novel experiences. Respondents spoke of the service-trips as a means of seeing new places, including both the project-site and the places en route to reaching the project-site. Younger respondents could more frequently be heard expressing their desire to have an adventure and experience something altogether new. Many respondents conveyed that part of the allure for signing up to do the service-trip was that it was in a location they had not previously visited. For some, getting a considerable distance away from home was also appealing.

Respondents identified social conditions, being in nature, and the work itself as the primary drivers leading to a “fun” or enjoyable experience. “I just like being out in the middle of nowhere doing hard work,” said one respondent; “It’s fun for me.” Another respondent conveyed that “it’s nice to get out, and in between
working, it’s nice to look up and see your surroundings. It’s enjoyable, just the setting, the backdrop for most of the day.” Among those who specifically used the term “fun” in describing their experience, several alluded to the social dynamic as being an essential factor.

…Maybe it’s just the natural way it works out when a group of people get together and go backpacking, but we created a fun environment. We really enjoyed the experience, just ‘cause maybe we were a group of people who had similar interests because we’d all been out doing the same thing. We created kind of our own environment that we really enjoyed. It was a good time. – R-6

Similarly, a husband and wife set of respondents who attend service-trips as a family described the experience as fun because “…it doesn’t feel like work. We like doin’ this stuff… We’ve got other people to mix it up with the kids a little bit. It’s a great vacation for us.” More to the idea of ‘building community’ as a source of fun, another respondent said, “There was a lot of joking around and teasing and things like that. It was a fun group.”

**New experiences and adventure**

Seeing and experiencing something new through EEV service-trips was found to be a significant motive to participate as well as a driver towards having an enjoyable experience. Locally based respondents often expressed their interest in gaining more familiarity with certain parts of an area. One locally based respondent stated his interest in seeing the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex as he had “heard so much about [it]” and the service-trip offered a chance “to go see what all the fuss is about.” Relating his experience from the previous year, he said:

It’s [the wilderness area] a big pile, and there’s little needles in it, in the haystack, and you can find ‘em. Like, those peaks we climbed last year, I’d have never gone and done that, but we happened to be camped right by ‘em. I was like, “You could link those two summits up in a day, easy.” I went up
there, and they’re not the tallest peaks, not the best-known, but man, it was fun. So the opportunity to do that when I wouldn’t. – R-25&26

Another local respondent said that she is motivated to see and experience different places in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. She remarked that it was intriguing that, “the trees are so much bigger than on the east slopes, so it’s a totally different atmosphere.” One respondent expressed his disappointment by having returned to the same project-site for second trip. He related:

I don’t try to go on the same project twice. They [the organization] offer enough variety that I’ve been able to do that over the years. I just want to see as much as possible… seeing new country. That’s important to me, to see new areas. – R-14

Other respondents who were locally or regionally based expressed similar desires to acquaint themselves either for the first time, or repeatedly with areas near them that were renown for their natural splendor.

Among the respondents that came from outside of the surrounding area, a common theme emerged suggesting an adventurous desire to see a totally new place. Consider one response from a volunteer who travelled from Pennsylvania to Montana:

There are places I could go around me and not even have to travel, but I don’t want to be in a local national park, I want to be far away. I love mountains.
Q: What is it about the distance that’s appealing?
Just adventure, I guess. I like it to be an adventure. I’ll do things out [here] that I might be afraid to do at home, in my own local area. It challenges you. The farther you get away from the comforts of home, the more you’re challenged and the more you’re going to do. – R-5

A respondent added to this theme in saying, “I live in Reno, Nevada, so the Sierras are in my back yard, but I came here mostly because I’m curious about other areas.”
This respondent also noted of her motivation that, “Part of it’s selfish, I like to see
different parts of the country. It’s not all about self-sacrifice.” Yet another respondent described this motive in telling:

I haven’t gone camping in such a long time. I wanted an adventure. I had done four years of college and two years of working, and I hadn’t gone outdoors in a very, very long time. I’m about to start graduate school, so I really wanted an adventure, preferably one without my parents. – R-19

One other respondent explained that the service-trip for her was “something I needed to do.” It was adventurous in the sense that it was, “something way off of what I’ve [done] before. I’d never—I’ve never experienced this before” she said.

Tourism related motives were attractive to a respondent attending a trip with her family. “We went with this one [service-trip] specifically because we had never been to Montana, [we] wanted to get to the Glacier area.” This respondent’s husband in a separate interview contributed to her response. In their cross-country drive from North Carolina to Montana, he said, “some of our route was gonna be based on some people we wanted to see, and we were goin’ right through Chicago. If we’re goin’ through Chicago, might as well pick up one museum.” More to this motive of tourism, a veteran volunteer from Iowa who said he always drives to the project-sites in the Rocky Mountains said, “I had fun because I camped in western Nebraska and saw all kinds of water birds the first night, and then I camped in the Bighorn Mountains the second night and got to hike somewhat in the Cloud Peak Wilderness.” He added that for him, driving out to the project is “half the experience” of participating in service-trips. Lastly, a first-time trip participant coming from California said:

I got my adventure that I wanted. I like seeing different parts of the world. I’ve never been to Montana, so even though I knew nothing about it, I was looking forward to this trip. I got a day on each end of the trip to get to know the city of Missoula a little better. I’ve seen a new place and got healthier.

– R-19
Beyond the experience of visiting a new place, the opportunity to build new relationships was also a significant motive among respondents. The next section will explore the perceived benefits and motives related to the social conditions of service-trips.

**SOCIAL DYNAMICS: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, A COMMUNITY OF RELIANCE**

[Service-trips] are really good for that, and [they’re] also good for meeting people. On this trip I’ve opened up a lot more than I thought I would. I’ve talked to people more, made more conversation. I’ve just been more open. – R-18

Carrying forth the emphasis on social virtues, the key-phrase “like-minded” was used by many respondents in describing the overall social climate of EEV service-trips. The statement, “I gain the opportunity to be around like-minded people and to share the experience with other people,” captures the general sentiment of respondents’ social experience. Respondents expressed that the opportunities for meeting and volunteering alongside other environmentally minded people is a motive for participation. As one respondent put it, “It’s nice to meet other people from all over the U.S. who have the same interest in wild places that you do.” The belief among respondents that people who hold common environmental values attend service-trips is the basis for a number of social benefits discussed in this section.

**Relationship building**

An oft-mentioned motive and perceived benefit of EEV participation was building new relationships over the course of a service-trip. This occurrence was not limited to just new relationships and friendships with other volunteers, but also
included forming relationships with personnel from the provider organization and land management agency. This finding is heard herein:

More important than [the satisfaction of completing work and being recognized], it’s the people you work with, including often the Forest Service trail crews. They’re just the greatest people I’ve ever met. And the Sierra Club people are also just fantastic. They’re individuals, each one is so different, coming from different backgrounds, different states. – R-4

Study results suggest that participants form close bonds with other participants and staff, analogous at times to a familial relationship. Respondents attributed the drivers of this phenomenon to the aspects of a “shared experience” and a setting uniquely conducive to relating with other people. “Today it’s really hard to meet people unless you have a common interest, and this is a good common interest,” said one respondent. “And then you learn about them and their lives and where they live, what part of the country, that sort of thing. The social aspect is a big part of it.” Many other respondents, particularly veteran volunteers, made statements consistent with this idea of relationship building being a desirable component of the service-trip experience. “I like all my friends, but I like to meet new people,” said a veteran volunteer respondent. “I’ve made a few friends I still keep in touch with from doin’ it for three years.”

**Familial quality**

A few respondents who have returned to volunteer with the same organization over several years went as far as likening the quality of relationships built with staff to a familial level.

I know the organization, I know the people. Over time, you develop—I feel like I’m part of this organization. The people who are running it are almost like family. I wouldn’t be opposed to doing something for another organization, but I don’t seek out those opportunities. – R-21
Respondents indicated that the EEV format lends itself to relationship building more so than other vacation formats for a number of reasons. Among those reasons, a condition of consistent intimacy came up repeatedly.

It’s a new experience. Everybody wants to talk about what they’ve done and what their life’s like. You get to learn what other people have done and what’s makin’ them happy, where their family’s gone on vacations, and learned things. As opposed to a vacation, where you’re gonna go be in a resort hotel, you may meet somebody or you might not. Here you’re gonna get to know 13 people. – R-8

When asked how it is possible to come to know someone in such a short period of time, one volunteer replied, “working together, eating together, watching out for each other, that kind of stuff. Each group is different, of course. Some groups mesh more than others. I’ve never had a group that didn’t mesh.” The bonds formed over the course of the project week can seem significant as indicated by a respondent who said, “…and by the end of the trip, you know people probably as well as people you’ve known all your life…”

Shared experiences

The act of laboring together, both on the work project and also for camping chores, was another attribute of service-trips respondents perceived as beneficial to relationship building. Respondents described a culture of camaraderie and bonding that resulted from engaging in physical labor with other volunteers. A respondent related this cultural norm in saying, “Every year I’ve done it, it’s basically getting together with a really large group of people that I don’t know. You build camaraderie. There’s a teamwork that I enjoy.” Likewise, from another respondent:

...And both times that I’ve been on SBFC trips, by the end of the trip, you get to know the people and realize you’ve really enjoyed spending the week with them, even though you may not have known them beforehand, and form relationships that you never would have had the opportunity to form,
which is because you’re working together. It forms a bond that wouldn’t otherwise form. – R-24

Succinctly stated by a respondent, “I think the real value is [a] shared common experience. It builds human relationships.” This respondent later expanded to say that in this process of sharing a variety of experiences, people come to know and appreciate each other beyond superficial appearances or social constructs, such as one’s occupational title among other examples.

An atmosphere conducive to socializing

Some respondents identified EEV service-trips as beneficial to relationship building by virtue of the absence of technology, believing that it promotes direct interpersonal interaction and creativity in leisure time interactions. This finding is demonstrated through the following anecdote:

…It’s really good to be disconnecting from all that [electronic communication/technology] and get to know somebody face-to-face, get to talk to some people and laugh. T__ was teaching everybody how to play this Roman game last night. To sit down and have men and younger adolescents in a friendly-natured competition, that’s really different than doin’ World of Warcraft or Halo or whatever. It’s a chance to have that face-to-face, real interaction with people and get back to being creative. – R-6

Further related to the undeveloped environment as conducive to relationship building, the experience of being surrounded by nature was also identified by volunteers as a socially unifying influence. In describing a moonlit hike with three other volunteers, a respondent observed that, “It was perfect solitude…minimal talking. You don’t have to talk to each other. All the speaking’s being done by the experience itself.”

Also, respondents conveyed that there is a human longing for companionship and people have limits to being socially isolated. While respondents reported enjoying multi-day backcountry excursions, they also indicated that they
wouldn’t be interested in being alone for that long. As wilderness is by default unpopulated with people, it is desirable to have a group to socialize with. One respondent touched on this point, saying that, “you can’t really come out to a place like this by yourself for this long. I wouldn’t. I’ve done one or two nights in the wilderness by myself, but I don’t know. I’m not John Muir.”

Community as critical

Respondents spoke of the culture consistently found on these service-trips as one of a shared desire for social cohesion, respect, and mutual reliance. One respondent described this phenomenon in detail:

...part of what’s fun about being out here is experiencing the kind of self-reliance that you get in combination with other people... you’re just living in a really small group, not in a city, not in a family, not in any of the groups that we’re necessarily used to in our modern American society. People chip in together. They all have different skills, abilities, temperaments, personalities. You learn a lot from the others and you get a certain satisfaction out of getting through the day, doing all the chores and tasks that are necessary for survival, cooperation. That’s a good feeling, too, being able to solve problems as a group, take care of each other. – R-11

Other respondents indicated that the service-trip experience can encourage a healthy reliance on one’s fellow volunteers as is discussed below.

Appreciation for others

Many of the themes previously detailed pertaining to the social benefits of EEV service-trips lay the groundwork for a greater acceptance of diversity and appreciation for other people. A respondent who had attended multiple service-trips noticed this manifestation within herself. “I learn how to get along and understand people who, when you first meet them, you have one opinion of them,

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12 Muir is renown for his extensive solo expeditions into great expanses of American wilderness (SEE: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Muir)
but those are the ones you probably want to talk to the most and try to understand.” From the standpoint of being less assuming regarding other participants’ abilities, a first-time volunteer remarked that, “it’s made me more patient and open-minded. I knew that some of the folks up here had never done this kind of stuff, and I was a little worried that they would slow us down a lot, and they haven’t. I’ve been pleasantly surprised.” Summarized by one respondent, this aspect of service-trips might be rooted in the idea that, “there is value in interpersonal relations, learning to get along with people.”

Other respondents contributed to this theme, describing the uniqueness of the situation as one where you suspend judgment and criticism about other participants’ behaviors or personality traits. While some frustration with others’ behaviors may occur over the course of the week, there is an understanding that everyone is there to rally around environmental conservation. Tolerance for diversity in personality traits and ideals was for some respondents, a tacit requirement of participation.

**REWARDING: GRATIFICATION, SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT OR CONTRIBUTION, POSITIVE EMOTIONS**

*It just felt so rewarding. It’s hard to put into words. I didn’t really think that I would feel this way. I thought I’d be kind of like, “Ugh, I can’t wait for the week to be over,” and today I got up and I’m like, “Oh! We have to go home!” I’m a little surprised. {laughs}*

− R-10

Work on EEV projects is physically demanding, often tedious, yet frequently described as a highly gratifying experience. Most respondents mentioned this theme, usually through such terms as “rewarding,” providing a sense of
“accomplishment” or “contribution,” or the perception of “making a difference.” As put by one respondent, “I would say that it’s highly rewarding because you are making a difference, but also because most people do give of themselves.” The investment of self-sacrificing labor and the receipt of markedly improved trail conditions explicated the origins of this perceived benefit.

The range of positive emotions that respondents reported experiencing during their service-trip can also be linked to a rewarding experience. Pride, joy, excitement, gratitude, happiness, and a general “feel good” sentimentality were among the many emotions that respondents mentioned in responding to inquiries about what it is like to participate in this format of volunteering. This section will explore the meanings behind these primary emotions and other more nuanced perceptions of the experience that result in a rewarding experience.

**Drivers of gratification**

There were four central factors identified in the results that can be attributed to volunteers feeling gratified. In large part, the results of the work are highly tangible and almost instantly recognizable. Respondents noted this particular aspect of the work as positive because there is minimal latency in realizing the final product of their labor. Respondents also indicated feeling gratified in receiving positive verbal feedback from agency personnel and other trail users thanking them for their effort and praising the quality of the work accomplished. The third factor found as a driver of gratification came out of respondents’ fulfilling their own desires to volunteer or contribute to a worthwhile cause.
Immediately apparent accomplishments

Several volunteers spoke to the immediacy with which the impact of their efforts was made apparent in clearing log-strewn trails or other maintenance work. “One of the reasons I do it is that at the end of the day you can see what you’ve accomplished. You’ve cleared a trail, dug a trail. It’s rewarding that way,” explained one respondent. Satisfaction derived from visible results of the work was significant for many respondents, who conveyed feeling gratified in their efforts. For example:

It’s kind of an immediate gratification. It’s like painting a room. As soon as you do a bit, you go, “Wow, that looks good.” You work your way down a trail, sawing for four hours in the afternoon, and you get to walk through that on your way home, you say, “Man, this was a mess when we were eatin’ lunch and now we’ve got this beautiful trail opened up.” – R-21

Recognition and affirmation

External affirmations from other trail users and local agency personnel alike were found to be a driver leading to gratifying emotions. Particularly, one group of Sierra Club volunteers working in a high-use region of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex indicated their appreciation for being recognized as contributors.

It was great to have people riding by on the trail saying, “Thank you for doing this.” …One of the people who rode by on the pack train had been the lead Forest Ranger for this area, had ridden past some of the work, and said it was great. It was great. – R-9

Another respondent on that same trip expressed accordingly:

We often hear from the people who are supervising us, “Man, you guys are fast. We never thought you’d get this project done in one day when it was supposed to take three days.” That gives you a real sense of satisfaction, when you hear that. – R-4

Other respondents on separate trips also alluded to external affirmations as personally meaningful. “To know that I’m contributing,” expressed one
respondent, “...like these horse people who came in said they went up to Twin Lakes Trail and it was nice and clear. Well, we did that. It was pretty cool.”

**Internal satisfaction**

Beyond external affirmation statements as drivers of satisfaction, respondents also told of an internally derived sense of satisfaction in perceiving that their service is making a worthwhile contribution to a good cause. This perception of contributing was tied to factors such as: helping out an “underfunded” public agency, enabling access to other trail users, resolving a problem, and supporting environmental or conservation objectives. As put by one respondent, “I like feeling that I’m doing something that is more than just using up resources ...I do feel like I’m contributing to being part of the solution to bettering the planet, to helping preserve some of the wild places.” In that light, a respondent further articulated, “What I gain is a sense of accomplishment, a sense of value in my own life, that I know I’ve done something worth doing.”

One Sierra Club trip volunteer, who has participated in over a dozen service-trips with that organization, explained her process of coming to participate in service-trips after having first been gifted with one of the club’s ‘recreational’ trips. “No. I just don’t see any reason,” she replied to the question of whether or not she still participates in the Sierra Club’s recreational trips. “These are so much more rewarding. I feel like I would be wimping out if I did one of the others.”

**Diversion from one’s routine**

A subtheme emerged that found respondents identifying the contrasts between the service-trip milieu and that of their daily life. “In the world, you get bogged down by your daily stuff,” a respondent said, “but out here, you’re still
doing hard work, but you’re happy to be here. And even if maybe for a second you think you might not be, you readjust and you think, “It’s cool.” Also to this point, a respondent said, “It’s not the day I do of sittin’ at a desk, it’s a day of outdoors and working and feeling like I’ve done something. That’s fantastic.” Furthermore:

When I come out here, no aches, pains, headaches, anything. When you get away from your everyday life, it’s really great. You don’t realize how much everyday life puts a strain on you. I don’t have a bad life, at all, believe me, but you just have all these things that you have to do. And then when you get out here, it’s basically survival and what somebody tells you to do. It’s pretty great. – R-5

Having the opportunity to break from habitual behaviors was also seen as a driver of positive emotions. A respondent suggested that as a result of participating in the service-trip, she had achieved the effects she otherwise gains through controlled substance use. “It’s just to feel good, being a part of something like this. That’s my drinking and my smoking. That’s what feels good, being here and helping this [environment],” she indicated. As this respondent alluded to, the setting plays a role in the experience of EEV service-trips. The next section will be entirely devoted to discussing the perceived benefits of spending time in aesthetically beautiful, undeveloped landscapes.

**THE SETTING: REPRIEVE FROM CIVILIZATION, RENEWAL FROM WILDERNESS, SPENDING TIME IN “THE OUTDOORS’**

*There’s no pressure, there’s no phones. I haven’t thought of work this entire week. You just feel a little bit freer, one with this. – R-10*

The multi-day immersion into a wilderness environment encompassed an array of perceived benefits and motives among respondents. Foremost among them included: observing superlative beauty, psychological renewal, spiritual fulfillment,
relaxation, and reprieve from stressors or stimuli. A departure from modern civilization, including technology and consumerism, was also hailed as a benefit of service-trip participation. As one respondent explained:

> It’s fulfilling because of the wonderful location, the natural beauty—in this case being the wilderness—you have a chance to experience the diversity of wildlife that’s around, to get away from the confinement of man’s structures. That’s both social structures as well as physical structures. The whole perspective, not only about what’s around you, but the environment and maybe even life itself shifts a little bit. Being out in nature has a reconnection and a refreshing component. These tend to rejuvenate me. – R-7

Responses often overlapped regarding the lack of human structure on the landscape and the ensuing positive emotional responses.

A central motive persisting throughout this study is respondents’ desire to simply be surrounded by nature. Several respondents emphasized their interest in being “out in nature” as their chief motive for participating in service-trips. This can be heard in one respondent’s answer to the question asked as to whether the social experience was the main motivator for participation upon her emphasis of the social factors of participation. “No,” she said. “The big picture is the outdoors, because I absolutely love being in the outdoors.” Another respondent conveyed this motive in describing the service-trip experience:

> I would say that it’s nice to have that as a focus, but obviously, everyone out here knows that we come out here to also take in the woods and to be in the mountains and to get away from lights and civilization and all that, to breathe the nice air. –R-17

Other respondents echoed this motive that service-trips offer “another opportunity to get back out[side]... and enjoy [one]self.”

Respondents appreciated the wilderness setting for being devoid of electricity, technological connectivity, and consumerism, both independently and as a contributing factor to other benefits discussed in this section. The wilderness
environment was found by respondents to oblige “disconnect[ion]” from their daily routine. “It’s just good to take a break from modern conveniences every once in a while,” said a respondent. Essentially, respondents noted that there is no other choice but to experience the surrounding environment or to interact with other trip participants.

**Disconnectivity**

A businessman who attended a trip with his son spoke to the gains realized for both he and his son in being completely removed from connections to electronic technology and also his workplace. He explained:

> It’s gotten both of us away. He does too much gaming on the computer, and this was an opportunity for him to socialize and get away. And he’s liked it...It’s nice from that perspective, ‘cause any other vacation, if you start thinkin’ about [work or business] and get worried about it, you get on the phone and do emails. Here you can’t do that. You’ve got to decompress… It’s a complete change that you can’t get any other way. – R-8

This respondent continued to say that for him, it is nearly impossible to abstain from looking at his work email or voicemail while on vacation if there is a means of connectivity. Other respondents echoed similar sentiments, adding that the multi-day trip format extending over multiple days, serves to embolden the sense of disconnectivity from work and other responsibilities.

**Psychological and spiritual wellbeing**

Mental and spiritual health benefits were often alluded to in responses about what is gained from participating in service-trips. Respondents reported achieving “piece of mind,” “feeling calm,” and being “relaxed.” A young respondent spoke to this finding in saying:

> I don’t know how to describe it…it’s—the way this makes you feel, it makes you feel calm. It makes you feel like not thinking about anything outside of
this, like job-wise or home-wise. You’re just calm and you’re accepting of nature. It feels good. – R-20

Other subthemes falling under psychological perceived benefits respondents called to were nature as therapeutic and nature as a spiritual environment.

One respondent described the natural setting as possessing healing properties. “There’s something therapeutic about it,” he said. “It’s a nice reprieve from the noise of common civilization. There’s plenty of sound, like birds and wind and trees and water, but there’s no noise, like car engines or sirens or jet engines.” This respondent explained that mechanized noises throughout his normal working day tend to fatigue him. He stated explicitly that the service-trip offered him an escape from the soundtrack of the modern world.

Some respondents connected the relaxing effect of EEV service-trips as beneficial to mental clarity and internal resolution. “Right now in my life, it personally has helped me to relax a little bit and get some perspective on things so that I’ll be better able to move forward in my life when I come out of the wilderness” said one respondent. Another respondent explained her motive in relation to this idea, saying, “You do it to help out with the trail work, but also for me, to come out and soul-search and get clarity. So you’re working and volunteering, but it’s also [meeting] personal needs for me.”

In conjunction with perceived mental health benefits, results suggest that EEV holds significance towards spiritual fulfillment. Respondents attributed achieving spiritual fulfillment from being in a wilderness environment in likening the landscape to a sanctuary. Overcoming adversity encountered during the trip was also cited as a source of spiritual fulfillment or inspiration for one respondent. In regards to the theme, ‘perseverance as spiritual,’ a participant who accidently forgot the poles to her tent on an especially rainy trip reasoned that, “[it’s a]
spiritually fulfilling thing to be able to plow through somethin’ and not start the whining…take all the things that are thrown in your path and gracefully deal with them and move on.”

**Humans as nature**

Some respondents went as far as identifying EEV trips in wilderness settings as serving to reaffirm for participants that they as human beings, are in fact, a part of nature. “When you come to these areas,” said a respondent, “it has a way of stripping away some of the artifice of social life and civilization.” The respondent went on to assert that while modern conveniences aren’t always bad, “they create a sense of artificial identity” which results in “draw[ing] us away from out natural world.” In support of this position that being in wilderness on EEV trips is seen as a way of connecting to a different world, another respondent identified the essence of this perceived benefit:

> It’s nice to see the world in a different view, other than just being in town. It’s nice to see the natural world. It’s nice to get more of a—more connected to the physical, one with the physical labor, but also in such a living community, being able to take life a little bit more basically instead of the modern world. – R-12

The importance of one’s physical location addressed in the previous statement was seen as significant to the underlying perceived benefit of reconnecting to the natural world. One’s physical presence being distanced from developed civilization and immersed within wilderness was considered necessary to realize the benefits described throughout this section. As one respondent declared, “I’ve lived in the city, but I don’t want to lose that connection to the wilderness.” The next section will discuss findings also concerning physical benefits. The distinction will be perceived benefits and motives related to physical
health and wellness, self-growth, and other aspects related to personal development.

**Personal Development: Health & Wellness, Personal Growth & Confidence, Education & Skills**

*I honestly didn’t think I was gonna enjoy it as much, especially using the potty, [laughs] ‘cause I’ve never done that. When we were digging the trench, I was like, “Oh, my God, this is crazy!” But it doesn’t bother me now. It’s cool. – R-10*

Many volunteers when asked the question, “What do you gain from participating in these trips?” included some aspect related to personal improvement. Physical conditioning and leading a healthy lifestyle included mentions to improved fitness or the desire to maintain a level of physical conditioning to ensure future participation. Learning about the natural environment, or the conservation and land management fields, included references made to gaining greater scientific understanding or on the management practices of public natural resources and wilderness areas. Developing new technical skills includes responses about increased knowledge on performing trail-work and living in a backcountry setting. Last, biographical construction is any reference concerning personal growth, self-actualization, and increased confidence from having completed new experiences.

Results further showed that personal development is a major motivator for service-trip participants. Respondents were incentivized by the hope of gaining technical skills that might empower their confidence in future backcountry trips. Some younger respondents were motivated to participate largely for relevant career experience in the natural resources field. This demographic also expressed interest
in personal biographical construction or shaping by obtaining an experience otherwise absent from their life’s history. The chance to learn about other people, places, and the natural world was an additional motive related to personal development.

**Health & Wellness**

Health and wellness related benefits were a common set of responses provided by volunteers as to what they gain by participating in EEV service-trips in addition to motives for participation. Respondents of varying ages and gender specifically called to physical fitness by way of enhanced strength and stamina as a benefit. This theme is heard in a response from a respondent who stated, “I gain the physical—in this particular thing, the physical exercise, the sense of physical well-being. When I’m done with this I’m tired, but I feel energized.” This idea is echoed by a 70-year-old female who identified the health benefits of participating in saying, “…and you know you get stronger by the day.”

**Retaining youthful physique**

Older respondents in particular viewed their ongoing participation in service-trips as a means of retaining physical fitness. “You want to challenge yourself to try and stay young” said a 67-year-old female respondent. From a 69-year-old female:

To be out here, you have to be really physically fit. To do this work, you have to be really physically fit. That’s why as you age—I hope to be still doin’ this kind of stuff 20 years from now—but there’s a good chance that somethin’ else is gonna occur and I might not be able to do it, so I’m gonna do it while I can. I like the challenge of it and tryin’ to keep myself fit. – R-2

Then, from a 71-year-old male respondent, “Another reason I do it is, it keeps you in physically fit condition. And at my age, that’s important.”
As noted previously, there is an expectation among participants that physical fatigue will be experienced over the course of the trip. Respondents also suggested that this form of volunteer work, almost entirely calling upon one’s physical capacities, is a welcome contrast to their regular day-jobs.

The physical labor is actually something I really enjoy, ‘cause in my normal 9 to 5 job I don’t get that. I’m inside doing non-manual labor and have to think about my job and stress about circumstances. Out here, they give me a shovel or loppers and I don’t have to think. It’s mindless manual labor that feels really good for a little while, and just to use my body, use my muscles. – R-24

Another respondent stated a similar incentive regarding the welcomed physical challenge.

It’s physically demanding for me, but that is one of the things I wanted out of it, just because I work in IT and pretty much all I do every day is sit at my computer and go to meetings. It’s been physically demanding, but it’s completely worth it. Very, very enjoyable. – R-9

**Test physical capacities**

Some younger males were motivated by the prospect of the service-trip affording a challenging experience. From one such respondent, “I’m a young male in the prime of my youth, so I want to get out and use all my strength. That’s what’s interesting to me right now.” Correspondingly from another young male, “I would say one of the reasons I came out here was, I did want to push myself physically.”

**Inspiring healthy behaviors**

A diverse range of volunteer profiles also alluded to service-trip participation as a motivator to make healthy lifestyle choices upon returning home. “I used to smoke cigarettes and I used to drink a lot,” explained a 19-year-old female respondent. “So now, hikin’, it’s like, “Why did I even smoke cigarettes?” I love breathing this air. I used to smoke a lot, but this has given me a really big boost
to stop smoking.” This idea of ceasing unhealthy behaviors was also cited by a 23-year-old male respondent looking to depart from daily drug use. “I imagine it’s cheaper than a detox camp,” he remarked in revealing his motive to participate in the trip as a way to “get clean again, for at least a week.” Also within the frame of service-trips inspiring healthy lifestyle behaviors, a 45-year-old female respondent who attended a trip with her family believed that the trip marked the beginning of her being more active. As she put it, “hopefully it will be a motivator for me to just get out more and try and keep that ability, and improve upon it to be able to do even more strenuous trips [in the future].”

**Personal growth**

Respondents identified a number of benefits received from participation related to personal growth such as increased self-confidence, self-awareness, and perseverance capacities. First time participants were most frequently found to mention a perceived benefit related to these aforementioned personal development themes. As one respondent suggested in regards to spending time in wilderness environments, “it has a way of uncovering for people maybe some essential truths about themselves.” In that regard, a 40-year-old female participating for the first time in a service-trip stated, “when I arrived, I wasn’t really into it. And then we hiked here [to the campsite] and I thought, “This isn’t bad.” I don’t know. I’m surprised that I enjoyed it this much. I just didn’t know I had it in me.” Another respondent explained the process of acquiring these benefits through surmounting adversity encountered during the trips. “I guess it’s just the whole deal of challenging yourself to see if you can not only do the task but also take all the things that are thrown in your path, gracefully deal with them, and move on.”
Biographical construction

Within this theme of personal growth, some respondents were motivated to participate by a desire to shape their identity by having a set of desirable experiences. Some respondents sought out EEV service-trips from a strong desire to redirect the current trajectory of their life. A respondent described this occurrence:

I went through a very difficult time, I went through a divorce. I was like, “I’ve got to do something.” And a friend of mine was like, “Have you ever heard of volunteer vacations?” I was like, “Sure, I have, but I’ve never looked into it.” So I Googled “volunteer vacations” and I found where you go pick olives in Tuscany or you can go rescue sea turtles on the coast, and then there was the Bob Marshall. I’m very interested in the outdoors, so that’s how I ended up here last year, bein’ out in the woods and then the work and everything. That’s what’s inspired me. – R-3

Respondents in this arena seemed to be in transitional phases of their lives. A young respondent told of recent life events where she had stopped attending college, returned home and was trying to find some direction. She relayed a recent conservation she had with her mom:

So I came to Kansas, and I was tellin’ her, “I need to find something to where it would motivate me to get back to school or get back on track. Not even back, just get on a new track and see if I can do somethin’ different, ‘cause whatever I’m doin’, I’m runnin’ insanity with myself.” I just know that it [the service-trip] was something I needed to do, something way off of what I’ve never did before. I’d never—I’ve never experienced this before. – R-20

Another young first-time respondent stated that part of his motivation to try a service-trip was to add to his biography a challenging outdoor experience set in the Western U.S. This respondent told of the influence that the biographies of Theodore Roosevelt and his own grandfather have had on him, and his goal to add similar “virtues to [his] own character” if possible. As he elucidated:

I’ve grown up in the city, lived in the city most of my life. I’d go to summer camp, but I don’t have that much outdoors experience. I guess Teddy Roosevelt’s a personal hero of mine. He was a city boy who came out on his own and was a young man in his twenties. If you read his biographies, you
get the sense the West formed him in a lot of important ways, physically and also his mentality and what was important to him. Honestly, I buy into the idea that a lot of the American character is forged in the West, that meeting of America with the wild is—there’s somethin’ to that, there’s somethin’ important goin’ on. In the back of your mind you have this feeling that if you spend all your time in the city there might be a little softness, and that you at least have to find out what’s out there. –R-17

This respondent went on to explain that he saw himself in the midst of his “peak physical years,” the appropriate time to “find out what your limit is” before he was to begin graduate school for statistics. He said that he, “liked the idea that there’s work to be done” on the service-trip model as opposed to other trip models he considered. He explained that the other more adventure focused trips were “expensive, and more overt, ..I didn’t want anyone clapping when I got to the top of a mountain or something.”

Building confidence

To some respondents, the work and setting of the trips were analogous to a proving ground for testing their abilities. One first-time participant, a 24-year-old male introduced this finding in saying that, “I think there’s somethin’ to the idea that the wild is where you test yourself, one of the places where you can test yourself.” The result of this condition was reflected in responses pointing towards an increase in self-confidence. The same respondent explained that, “some of those doubts in the back of your head about whether you could handle it that stack up have been removed.”

From a first-time volunteer, “Yeah, it can be hard, but at the end, it’s just like, “Wow, I could do anything!” Then, a veteran volunteer who was concerned about her physical fitness level said, “I was a little worried about whether I could actually make the hike in and work three days and not feel awful. [laughs] It kind of felt good to be able to do that.” Lastly, a 48-year-old male first-time participant who
reported having some previous backcountry experience though lacked confidence to enter the wilderness without support, said his participation in the trip showed him that such an endeavor is within his reach. “I think it would be reasonable to go on maybe a three- or four-day backpacking trip with our family, even in bear country. Maybe. [laughs] Probably not 10 or 12 days. So it’s influenced me in that way.” This finding on confidence building was more pronounced in first-time EEV participants such as those previously cited.

**Education and skill development**

Learning new information and acquiring new technical skills were found to be both strong motives leading to participation as well as a perceived benefit for having participated in service-trips. Respondents reported gaining geographic and environmental knowledge of the project-site area. Also, respondents spoke of learning how to conduct trail work and live in a backcountry setting for an extended duration. As summarized by one respondent, “You gain knowledge of the area. You gain knowledge on how to camp in different environments. You even gain knowledge of how to create a water bar on a trail.”

Further contributing to the development of this theme, a respondent expressed, “I’m interested in the place, but also in the science behind whatever the research is or [whatever] I’m interested in learning—I’ve learned a lot from [the staff leader], just basic logical things that you do in the woods.” In that same idea, a respondent explained that service trips afford, “the convenience of gaining knowledge of how to live in the wilderness.” As indicated by this respondent, service-trips can be favorable settings for the exchange of ideas and skills acquisition. “It’s nice,” said a respondent, further expanding that, “one of the benefits of having others around is learning new things, but in a nice setting where
ideas can flow easily, observations. More material-based knowledge learned.” One other respondent provided an example of this exchange of ideas during the service-trip. He said:

Some of the values that are cool that they teach out here is, if you need something, there’s no going to a store to get it. If you need to do something, you can’t Google it or call somebody. You can ask somebody around you for help, but there’s no other sources of aid. – R-17

This respondent’s idea of experiencing and developing self-reliance was found appealing to other respondents as well.

Respondents talked about a preference for vacations that present learning opportunities. One respondent described this preference for her vacation style:

That’s what I look for, too. Do I have an opportunity to enhance my knowledge base and my experience base by doing something? Would I go lay on a beach in Hawaii? No. Would I go cycle through Hawaii, do something more active, then lay on the beach? Yes. – R-1

A veteran volunteer also expressed this preference for educational experiences as a motive for his participation. “For me it’s always an educational experience to come here,” he said. “The motivation is to experience it first-hand. There’s nothing like experiencing it first-hand.”

Land management understanding

A few respondents expressed their interest in learning about U.S. federal land management policy and practice, notably the distinction of NWPS lands apart from other federal lands designations. At the most basic level of understandings about public lands in the U.S., one young respondent coming to the West for the first time from Kansas proclaimed, “I want to learn more about the mountains and I want to know more about the U.S. I really didn’t think there was nothin’ like this in the U.S.” Getting more specific about understanding land management
designations, a respondent said, “It’s teaching me the difference between wilderness [and other federal land classifications].” She continued on to explain, “I always thought it [federally managed land] was national park or national forest… I didn’t know what wilderness meant compared to forest, because I’ve worked in National Forest and National Park [lands].” One respondent, a longtime visitor to the area where he was volunteering, spoke to his participation on service-trips as a means for him to better understand the management decisions for that particular U.S. Forest management district. He said that he enjoys, “figuring out what’s goin’ on with the Forest Service, the political things involved with how decisions are made, like[s] catchin’ up on that stuff.”

Relatedly, respondents also expressed attainment of a better understanding for the work involved in land management objectives such as trails management. An example of this occurrence can be heard in the following statement, “[The experience] made me definitely more appreciative of the [W]ilderness [A]reas, the people who take care of the [W]ilderness, the hard work it is to maintain a trail.”

**Technical skills**

Enjoyment found through learning and advancement of technical work and backcountry skills was a significant perceived benefit among many respondents. One respondent explained that while work techniques are not overly complex, they still require some degree of learning. “Other things that I gain” this respondent said, “clearly, how to use a saw, how to walk on a log. Those things weren’t difficult to learn, you just had to actually learn them.” More to that same point, a respondent said that by participating in service-trips, one gains “a knowledge of how to do it. Don’t ask me why, but I kind of like being familiar with how to do trail work. It’s kind of nice.” Also, a respondent showed appreciation for the
primitive qualities of the tools and work techniques utilized, how they are effective at accomplishing work objectives while “preserving the quite around us.” He explained his increased appreciation for specialized hand-tools through becoming more familiar with them through volunteering. “People have talked about the cross-cut [saw] and the Pulaski [tool] that you don’t have a use for in town. But it’s just in passing. And then from using it, it’s like, this is a really effective tool. I’m glad it’s around.”

Many respondents expressed a variety of new insights gleaned from their participation. The next section will review the extent of insights, perspectives, and inspirations that respondents identified from having attended an EEV service-trip.

**Career Development**

A few respondents were motivated to participate and perceived benefits of the experience related to furthering their career goals. One respondent in particular was participating in a number of service-trips over the season to fulfill practicum requirements for earning a bachelor’s degree. In his words:

I don’t really like the camping scene, but my motivational core for coming out here is for my degree. Just getting experience for that. There might be some aspects that I don’t find completely enjoyable, but I’m getting recognized for the work hours. – R-1

Another respondent, an earth science teacher, explained the professional relevance for him in being surrounded by interesting geologic specimens while in the backcountry setting. He elaborated in saying:

It makes my professional experience so much more real and tangible. If I’m gonna be talking about sedimentary rocks, having these up close and personal experiences with it, I wish I could take all my students out to a place like this to teach my class. But as an earth science teacher particularly, professionally it relates to this passion of really filling a need. – R-6
One more respondent who worked as a scientist for a land management agency viewed the service-trip as a chance to learn about volunteer management should he ever find himself leading volunteers at some point during his career. He said:

And one day I hope seein’ how this example works and how their [the organization] success is, if I’m ever in a program or a position that needs to cultivate those kinds of collaborative volunteer-based relationships, I’ll have some framework to work with, from a professional development side of things. I’m not havin’ to learn it right then, I’ll have some framework. – R-16

The next section, concerning insights that volunteers receive, will expand the scope on how personal growth relates to EEV beyond the set of objective considerations in this section.

**INSIGHT: NEW PERSPECTIVES, INSPIRATION, REINFORCEMENT OF BELIEFS**

...The first mountain that I’ve been to, really, backpacking. It’s gonna be a big part of my life. This changed a lot of my thinking. It’s opened a lot of my mind to a lot of things. This is one of the places that changed my life.

– R-20

To uncover the potential influences or perspectives achieved from participating in EEV service-trips, study participants were asked the question, “How do you think this experience influenced you as a person?” Responses to this inquiry varied widely. Several respondents spoke to new perspectives concerning an enhanced appreciation for nature, certain types of landscapes, or even how the land is managed. Further still, others recognized a desire to strengthen their conservation ethic through future EEV trips, local environmental volunteerism, and lifestyle choices. Additionally, appreciation for other people and an increased acceptance of differing personalities was also reported. Moreover, some respondents touched on the volunteering and immersion in the wilderness
experiences as having reaffirmed their priorities and values. However, many respondents maintained that EEV participation, at least for them, does more to reinforce and reaffirm existing perspectives about the world than it does to inspire new ones. This section will present responses for these subthemes under the banner of ‘acquiring insight’ through EEV service-trip participation.

**Perspectives on the natural environment**

Gaining an intensified appreciation for the natural world came up in several interviews. One first-time trip participant described how this process unfolded for her.

“I never really took it [the natural environment] in,” she said. “I’ve just looked around. I’m gonna go home and get a book and figure out what wildflowers are in Florida, trees and stuff like that. We discuss it here on the trail. That inspired me to know what’s around me.” – R-10

In a similar vein, a high school earth sciences teacher reflected, “I’m gonna have to go back and process more of this kind of stuff, do more reading of the geologic history of this area. I’ll have to go back and hit some books and figure out what I looked at.”

To this idea that participants come to value a certain type of landscape in a new way, a respondent said, “I guess I didn’t realize that it would be such a burned-out area. But I’ve discovered that it’s actually really beautiful in its own way.” Building on this process of increased recognition for various landscapes, one respondent spoke of gaining perspective as to how changes were occurring on one specific U.S. Forest, the Selway-Bitterroot. She responded to the question on what it is she takes away from the service-trip with, “…being in the wilderness on the Selway [National Forest], how it’s changing, what it’s dealing with.”

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Inspiration

Several respondents expressed coming away from their service-trip inspired to pursue new experiences. Among them, the desire to travel and explore other natural areas was mentioned repeatedly. In reference to hearing about other locales from fellow participants, a respondent explained that she felt “inspired to go see other places people are talkin’ about.” Also pertaining to the inspiration to see new places, a young respondent concluded, “I’d always seen myself as staying on the West Coast. I think it’s the greatest place... But I guess I’m more likely now to keep going out and seeing new places.” More to this point of traveling and welcoming new experiences, a respondent said she felt inspired to pursue “just anything that has to do with something I never did before. I don’t know, it was just—I like traveling. I like a challenge. I like things that are different.” This same respondent also expressed her inspiration to consider pursuing a career in natural resources, or at least consider relevant opportunities. She explained, “I’m havin’ a difficult time figuring out what I want to do, so this is actually helping me know that there is a lot of things out here to do.” From conversations she had with the trip leader, she said, “they were tellin’ me about the national parks and how I can go into a career with that. I think I want to do that.”

Increased conservation ethic

The time spent living within and caring for a pristine environment over the course of the service-trip led some respondents to observe a strengthening in their conservation or environmental ethic. One respondent provided evidence of this process occurring within herself, through the telling of a conversation she had with the trip leader over the need to treat drinking water from a nearby tributary.
You know the one thing I was thinkin’ about was, [being] a little bit more environmentally aware. I’m not a green person, but I do my part in recycling newspapers. But just—like the river, I was asking [the trip leader], “Do we need to filter that water?” And he said, “For our purposes, yes, but other non-organized people probably will drink it ‘cause it’s so pristine.” So thinking twice about just dumping water out, or straining and using the sump. Just being more environmentally conscious. – R-1

This statement and others like it indicate that EEV trips can be opportunities for the exchange of pro-environmental behaviors. Another supporting example of this occurrence can be drawn from a volunteer who said that the effort made by the crew leader and other group members to recycle had influenced her to extend more effort in recycling upon returning home. As she described, “We recycle, but not with every little thing. And here, I made sure to pick up every piece. If I saw anything, I picked it up. I want to go home and recycle more.” When asked why she felt increased motivation to recycle, she stated, “...[be]cause I see that they’re [other participants] so passionate about it. I figured, I’ll just do it.”

Influential culture

One veteran service-trip participant and volunteer crew leader articulated the process by which people are influenced towards pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors through their participation.

For some people, they begin to develop a sense that this kind of setting is very important and maybe some effort needs to be [undertaken] to preserve it. Some are motivated to say, “What can I do? Should I give to the Nature Conservancy? Work for the Nature Conservancy? Go on a Sierra Club trip and experience what volunteerism is about? What environmental volunteerism is about?” Because these areas are disappearing. – R-7

Another respondent called to a specific aspect of the trip format that encourages personal reflection on what items are truly essential for living versus a desire for material possessions. “That’s a huge part of this experience,” he explained. “It
forces that [prioritization of needs vs. wants], ‘cause you’re packin’ in, so you bring what you need.”

Outlooks on life

In accordance with this finding that service-trips can encourage prioritization of values, results also indicate that participation can elucidate aspects of one’s life that are the most meaningful. Consider one example from a father who attends trips with his two young children. He made the following observation during his interview session while his kids played nearby.

It’s nice to see these guys havin’ fun. They’re rolling over a piece of Bear Grass right now, doing cartwheels and somersaults. I like that part. They can create whatever they want out here, have their own sense of—they don’t need anything else. They’re not missing anything right now. I like that part. You remember you don’t need all the stuff that people think you need every day, or it’s all right here. – R-25

On that note, a respondent who attended a service-trip with his teenage son answered the question on how the trip has influenced him by stating a desire to pursue more backcountry experiences with his family. “I’d say that I’ve got to spend more time with my son and daughters just doing something that is off the grid, an immersion. I’ve never done that with my daughters.” Replying to a follow-up question as to whether he felt inspired to do more similar trips with his family, in which he was disconnected from work, he answered, “Yeah, absolutely.”

Reinforcement of beliefs

Many respondents maintained a position that service-trip participation does more to reinforce their existing beliefs and perspectives than it does to inspire new ones. This sentiment is best captured by a respondent who said, “I don’t think it changes my perspective or outlook. I think that I’m here because of my outlook and my perspective. It just reinforces it more.” Similar to that idea, a respondent said, “I
think in my case my ethic is so strong to begin with that it just reinforces it, so the benefit of it is maybe more personal, because I’m already a pretty devoted conservationist, and trying to find more ways I can be useful in furthering the cause of conservation.” On a related though slightly different level of this theme, a respondent explained that her participation helps maintain or reinvigorate the factors keeping her inspired towards environmental volunteerism. In her phrasing, “Well, it sends you back—sometimes you can get worn down by everyday stuff. It reinvigorates you that the things you believe in are important. It’s good to keep believing in ‘em, and hoping that more people think it’s good.” One respondent remarked that the reinforcement of values derived from his participation in service-trips helps solidify his basis for political activism surrounding environmental issues. As he said:

I don’t think it so much [as] changes, but it reinforces, and therefore when the time comes for the need for advocacy, like for legislation or when it comes time for being an advocate, or even monetary contributions, I continue with it. It reinforces my commitment.” – R-13

It is worth noting that the respondents quoted here, who see their participation reinforcing existing beliefs as opposed to inspiring new beliefs, are all veteran participants. This finding did not occur among first-time participants.

ALTRUISTIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOTIVES: RECIPROCATION FOR ONE’S OWN USE, ENABLING ACCESS FOR OTHERS, STEWARDSHIP AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

So when we come out and do this work, we’re helping to maintain the home, and we’re learning, too. So the potential to serve to the environment, to serve others, to serve future generations. That must be acknowledged. – R-7
Results presented in this section will highlight respondents’ motives to engage in EEV based on altruistic values. Many respondents emphasized that service-trips are an opportunity to serve a cause they are passionate about, the conservation of wild landscapes. Some altruistic motives that are more pertinent to building out a depiction of the study’s respondents will not appear here but instead within the Respondent Profile section of the results. The statements in this section will adhere closely to respondents’ specific motives for helping the environment. This includes motives for helping others gain access to experience superlative natural landscapes both now and in the future.

**Reciprocity for personal use**

Several respondents addressed a motive for volunteering through helping to maintain the places where they themselves recreate. A respondent gave a full explanation of this motive:

> It’s a value of mine from a couple of different points of view. From my own use, I know the benefit. When I go up a trail, if I get into a trail that’s got a whole bunch of deadfall on it and the tread is bad and it’s all overgrown, it’s a more challenging experience. I don’t think the wilderness has to be pavement, but just the safety of it, when I get into an area that’s all blowdown and I have to crawl over logs and balance myself. – R-13

Respondents recognized the practical value of having trails maintained for their own enjoyment. Another volunteer said he’s interested in the upkeep of the area because, “in terms of using it, and I’ve used it recreationally, too, it’s nice to know that the trails are gonna be maintained.” One respondent explained this motive for himself based on extensive enjoyment derived from one wilderness area. He said:

> Part of it is giving back. Like I’ve told you before, this is my favorite place on earth, The Bob Marshall Wilderness [Complex]. I’ve done 12 trips with my brothers, and most of them have been just utterly spectacular, seeing sights you wouldn’t believe, the beautiful mountains, one beautiful lake in “The Bob.” – R-4
One respondent recognized the dualism that exists within this motive, that it’s partly altruistic and partly selfish. She explained:

A little bit of it is perhaps altruistic, like, “Oh, I’m doing good for the environment and creating better trails for hikers.” Although that’s also a little selfish, because I like the trails better for me, as much as anybody else.
– R-24

The service-trip, seen as a means of repaying a debt for past and ongoing use enjoyment, was a significant motive reported by many respondents.

Enabling access for others

Findings also revealed that respondents wanted to volunteer to improve conditions for other trail users as a way of increasing public support for preserving public recreation lands. There was a concern that without ways to safely access backcountry landscapes, i.e. open trails, a condition of cultural disinterest would unfold. The risk of this disinterest was seen as a loss of public support for safeguarding wilderness areas and other currently undeveloped public land. A respondent addressed this idea by saying:

I think the access encourages people who are new to the experience to know that they can do that and not have those kinds of challenges. That’s the access piece. I think then once people have access and they have the experience, they’re more likely themselves to be advocates for resources to support the wilderness. – R-13

From the question, “What do you think would be the risks if it was not maintained, if the trails weren’t cleared out?” came the answer:

F: No access.
M: Once people quit usin’ it, there’s no support for it. You’ve got to have some use, even though we want to come out here for solitude and try to find places where we’re not gonna run into people. You have to have people back in town talkin’ about it.
M: You’ve got to have use to have genuine support. And without trails, you can’t use it as well. – R-25
One more respondent stated her motive in this same regard, that “because I like just being out-of-doors, I also have this idea that it would be nice to help others be out-of-doors by making the trails friendlier, just giving back a little bit.”

More to this idea of enabling others’ access to wilderness, a volunteer trip leader explained the importance for him in serving as a “sort of gatekeeper” of the service-trip experience for other volunteers. In his words:

The motivating force is to try to help other people come out here. To be a leader on these trips, there’s work to be done. Somebody on the trip said they’d thought about being a leader but didn’t want to deal with the aggravation. They didn’t want to deal with the paperwork, the issues that can come up, the human issues that come up. That’s part of the aggravation, but in the end, the benefit is that you’re in some way helping people experience something that’s very special. – R-7

Stewardship and protection of natural resources

Related to the motive of enabling others to access a natural landscape was the motive to safeguard such places in perpetuity for future generations’ benefit. A respondent asserted that he and other service-trip volunteers are “very aware, either consciously or subconsciously, they’ve got a tickling in their mind that they’re serving the future.” He concluded that, “we have to serve the future.”

Another respondent said:

I think it’s important that the next generation has an opportunity to experience the same things that I’ve experienced that have meant so much to me. Not that it’s that big of a deal to fix one water bar on a trail in Montana, but it’s something. It makes me feel like I’m doing a little positive thing, rather than just giving up. – R-11

Some respondents purported an obligation to engage in environmental conservation. For example:

Basically I do believe that we have a responsibility to the next generation, and I have a big concern for what they’re going to be faced with. If there’s
one thing that you can keep that is somethin’ that is really pure and wholesome to pass on, that’s our responsibility. I do believe it. – R-2

Other respondents emphasized concerns of urgency in safeguarding resources for future generations due to perceptions that, “we are pushing a lot of limits” such as in the “atmosphere.”

Conservation and support of the wilderness ideal

Many respondents stated that taking part in environmental conservation was a general motive for their participation. Some were more specific in their conservation interests, looking to preserve certain aspects that define a wilderness area as situated with the NWPS. On a general note concerning her motives, a respondent said, “I think we have several reasons. Of course conservation is some of it, just giving back.” Respondents identified that they volunteer to support the organization’s mission, which is ultimately to protect and improve access to wilderness areas. A respondent stated:

The first motivation is just to support that Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, because I believe in what they do in improving access to the wilderness and in their role of bein’ an advocate for wilderness. So by volunteering, I’m doing something that supports their work and their mission. That’s number one. – R-13

For another respondent, who works for a land management agency, volunteering was a way he could express his environmental values independent from his workplace. He said, “This is a way I can come out here and do this work and benefit the forest, benefit this foundation, benefit the wilderness and the resource, and not have that baggage. I’m not out here wearin’ the shield. That’s a good feeling.”

As noted in the above examples, some respondents are particularly motivated to preserve the integrity of the wilderness ideal. The qualities of this
ideal were described by one respondent as, “a place that remains tranquil, untrammeled, free from the hustle and bustle of the daily life... to commune with nature as it had been for centuries.” This respondent concluded in saying that volunteering on one wilderness area may be only one individual “place, but it’s representative of that concept. So when we’re working, we’re helping with that concept.” Adding to this viewpoint, another respondent described his motive to “preserve the quiet around us” by helping to maintain a portion of a wilderness area. These examples demonstrate the motivations respondents held towards protecting wilderness areas and their associative meanings. A full expansion of these meanings will be presented in the coming results section on place and wilderness meanings.

**Place and Wilderness Significances**

Included within the scope of this study was an effort to better understand the role of place and wilderness meanings in relation to the EEV format. It was postulated that volunteers’ relationships to places might be a factor in their interest to participate and potentially remain as such on an enduring basis. Also, because the study area was set within the NWPS, it was an ideal opportunity to explore the potential for any significance related to wilderness concepts.

Two interview questions were designed in order to extract potential meanings on place and wilderness. The first question asked was, “Does this particular project site hold any significance to you over another project site or volunteer opportunity?” Following that, volunteers were asked, “What does this particular wilderness area mean to you? Results indicated that overall, place
meanings were not particularly important to this sample of EEVs. Wilderness, on the other hand, was valued highly by some respondents, and seen as a contributing factor in their interest to volunteer.

**Wilderness Significances:**

At various points during the interview, not just when directly questioned, respondents were compelled to offer up opinions on the characteristics and value of wilderness lands and the ideals of wilderness. Responses can be grouped into either subjective descriptions on semblances of wilderness area landscapes or, the perceived benefits from being in wilderness areas. Descriptions of wilderness aligned most closely with one of the following categories: superlative place, primitive/wild/"the other", pure and unspoiled, and vast. Perceived benefits derived from spending time in wilderness areas best fit within categories of: a necessity, a liberating place, uncrowded, and a sanctuary.

**Superlative place**

Respondents often described wilderness as a place of great beauty or a superlative natural place. A statement such as, “the preservation of this place is huge because there’s just no place like a wilderness,” is representative of this finding. Expanding a bit from there, “it’s just an awesome place. The beauty and the grandeur of it, besides the size.” Other descriptions noted the abundance of wildlife and, beautiful “mountain, forests, and wildflowers.” More to that quality, a respondent said, “to describe this place? Beautiful. Pretty prairie. I was blown away with the flowers. And the butterflies, I know it sounds corny, but just walking and
butterflies are flying.” Another respondent described the wilderness area’s “big mountains and beautiful, lush valleys,” remarking that “it is spectacular.”

**Primitive, Wild, and “The Other”**

The absence of development and civilization, often referred to as “the other” by wilderness scholars, was another thematic finding respondents used in describing aspects of wilderness. Respondents expressed an ideal that wilderness areas are examples of how the world would look without humans. One respondent explained that, “True wilderness means that it’s basically been untouched by man. It’s the way nature was before man showed up.” Another respondent said, “I imagine this is what the rest of the world was like before human development.” Yet again from another respondent, “it’s that opportunity to really commune with nature as it had been for centuries, that makes it very significant.” Lastly, “Wilderness Areas are special, and I like them. I like the fact that you can get out in something that has a minimal human impact.”

The desire to reconnect with a bygone era can be heard in several of the previous statements as well as in the following response.

It’s back to [a] more simple time out here, especially in wilderness. Primitive tools are a lot more enjoyable to use than mechanized, ‘cause you’re doing the work, and it’s definitely more of a tool than a machine, where you’re just operating it. It does take some effort, but it’s nice to share what’s been going on for at least the past hundred years, but a little bit further, too. – R-12

More to that same sense of nostalgia, a respondent spoke of, “the natural state and the fact that this is a wilderness area. Just to take a chain saw, you can’t. It’s non-motorized, non-mechanized. It’s just good old-fashioned hard labor.”
Wilderness was also seen by respondents as a place left unmarred by human development, as pure and deserving of continued protection. From one respondent’s telling:

The air is really pure and great. I hope I can remember the air. On our off day we hiked up to Pack Box Pass, and up there, we took in the whole view and you smelled everything. There’s a crispness because of the elevation. That’s the thing, I can feel it right now, and I hope I can keep it with me. If I could bottle it, I would. I couldn’t have imagined something this pure and unblemished. – R-17

Another respondent said of the wilderness area she was volunteering within:

It’s a cool place, and I’m glad it exists, and I’m glad it’s a wilderness area, that it’s gonna be kept pristine and non-developed or [logged] or [mined] or anything like that. That it’s here for people to enjoy with minimal intrusion. I’m glad that it’s here. – R-1

**Vast, Expansive, Awesome**

An additional quality of wilderness called to by respondents was that it is vast in scale. “There are several places that I’d like to get into and see deeper, but it’s such a vast area,” explained one respondent. He believed that in order to accomplish this goal “you’d need to spend at least a week gettin’ in on foot to get deep in.” More to that point from a different respondent, “This place is so vast and I want to know more about it.”

A respondent described having a large amount of land in between himself and development as emblematic of being in wilderness. He added to his description, “…knowing that it’s not just this area but if I go further downtrail and over the ridge, it’s gonna be more of the same.” That notion of a seemingly infinite amount of undeveloped space can be heard from another respondent who viewed it as, “this great wilderness that just goes on forever and ever.” Just the idea that wilderness is expansive seemed reassuring to some respondents. For example, a
respondent said, “To me, it’s really neat that there’s this huge chunk of land right in the middle of our state, and in this country. I like that. And I like it out here. I feel happy out here.”

**Liberating, Unregulated, Uncommercialized**

An appealing characteristic of wilderness that respondents perceived as particularly beneficial is that it’s an unrestricted, liberating environment. Respondents saw the management practices of wilderness to be beneficially distinctive to other public land such as National Parks. “If I were to come here alone, with compass in hand and backpack, I’d take off on one of the trails,” said a respondent. He explained that, “This is open country. You don’t have to follow a trail. I do not like national parks, often. Trust me. Heavily regulated. When I’m in the wilderness, it’s like, “All right, let’s try that. Let see what this is like.” Similarly, another respondent said in regards to government oversight and the wilderness area where he currently was, “There’s some of that here, don’t get me wrong, but it does have the draw because it often is pretty unpopulated and you’re not dealin’ with the administrative side of things like you do in [Glacier] National Park which is a drag.”

One respondent found the absence of commercialization in wilderness areas to be a perceived benefit. Regarding his expectations about how the week would go, he said:

The expectations panned out. I don’t know how the expectations couldn’t pan out. It’s not like going on a cruise ship and have the toilets back up. There’s nothin’ that could go wrong here that you wouldn’t expect in the wilderness. There’s nothin’ man-made [to have breakdown]. The park doesn’t close down, the boat doesn’t go, you don’t [not] see a manatee. It’s just nature. – R-8
For this respondent, there is an ideal that experiences in wilderness are devoid of commerce. As such, there is no agent manipulating realities that could result in a potential disappointment of services purchased or promised.

**Sanctuary, Peaceful, Spiritual, Healing**

Wilderness, for some respondents, was likened to a sanctuary or a therapeutic place favorable for healing to occur. One veteran respondent shared:

> For me, it’s just peace and serenity, just a place to be without all the trappings. And I don’t know how many people that’s important to, but there are a few of us, and that’s why I think everybody’s out here. I don’t know how to explain it any further. It just feels good to be out here. It just feels good. – R-15

Others articulated that wilderness can be a spiritual place for them. “I really love the wilderness. It’s like my temple, I guess you could say” said a respondent. “So I come out here to—I guess it’s kind of a religious experience you could say, for me.” Another respondent found wilderness beneficial for personal reflection. He said:

> Sitting and meditating and thinking. This is a really good environment to do that. There are no distractions except for maybe the insects. It’s a meditative environment. When you’re not working. But for some people that’s also meditative. – R-18

One respondent believed that service-trips in wilderness would be advantageous for people coming out of substance abuse rehabilitation programs. She said:

> It’ll help them not go back to their bad habits. ‘Cause once they leave rehab, “OK, you’ve got a present for graduating. You’re going to this [the wilderness].” And then they come out here and they see that there’s more out [t]here to life than drugs or anything. They’re gonna not want to go back. It’s gonna open their minds, make them feel like they can do anything. – R-20

While this idea may be seen as impractical, another respondent’s conviction that wilderness can offer a variety of things depending on what one is in need of
might offer some further validation to the previous respondent’s idea. This respondent, who was a career artist, explained, “...and sometimes I get ideas for things from my trips. Not always. Sometimes I just come to forget. It just depends. I find that the wilderness can give me a lot of different things, depending on what’s going on in my life at any given time.”

**PLACE-BASED SIGNIFICANCES: PLACE ATTACHMENT AND THE REFUTATION OF PLACE ATTACHMENT**

Results pertaining to place meanings and place attachment were not especially prevalent. The most significant trend in the data would be respondents’ renunciation to any significance of place. Logistics such as scheduling and travel distance were of greater concern to respondents in deciding on their service-trip than were setting-based attributes. Also, there was more interest placed on National Wilderness Preservation System lands en masse, rather than any one particular wilderness area. One respondent offers an acute rationalization to demonstrate this finding. He said:

> ...As an icon, it [The Bob Marshall Wilderness area] stands for a whole concept ...it’s significant in the fact that it stands for the bigger picture of that. It’s one place, but it’s representative of that concept. So when we’re working, we’re helping with that concept. – R-13

There was a sense among respondents that improving one small part of one wilderness area was an action expressing support for the whole NWPS and its various connotations.

Where stronger opinions on place matters were given, a geographic relationship was found. The closer the respondent’s residence was to the project area, the greater the scale of specificity on a given place. From there, the most
normative form of place attachment found was related to place dependence. Some respondents spoke to certain regions or wilderness areas as irreplaceable in meeting their interests. Then, while most respondents diminished the import of place, some observed an increase in place attachment that occurred through their service-trip experience.

**Scalar relationships**

A geographic scalar relationship existed with respondents’ place recognition and attachment. Essentially, the nearer a respondent’s home residence was to the project-site, the greater the magnification upon the place of import. Respondents who resided within the state or region often held micro-level place relationships. They may have called to the nearby wilderness area or a specific part of the wilderness area where they were volunteering as the place of import. Conversely, respondents residing outside of the region often regarded place relationships at a macro-level. These extra-regional respondents would often focus on the entire state (i.e. Montana) or the entire geographic region (i.e. “The West”). There were two anomalous findings that deviated from the scalar relationship trend that is detailed below.

**Micro**

The micro-level results are compiled from respondents whose primary residence was within 350 miles or less from their work-site. There was one exception to this, seen in a respondent whom at one point lived near the work-site but had since relocated 500 miles away. That particular respondent described his curiosity regarding the wilderness area He said, “I’d lived in Montana. I’d lived near Glacier, and I’d always wanted to know what this place was like. I found out it
was a wonderful place like I thought it would be.” The desire to familiarize oneself with a nearby wilderness area that is of regional significance was heard in other respondents’ statements. For example, one respondent said that the Bob Marshall wilderness area was a priority destination for him after hearing it mentioned in social settings. As to why it was a personal priority, he said:

...Because of the reputation of it, and since coming out here, I’m starting to see it. I just think the whole complex usually gets talked about collectively. It’s a really beautiful area. These short excursions in allow me to see some regions of it and then I hope next summer to take some time off and just backpack the whole thing. It’d be nice to have some places that I’ve been to and can revisit or go near and have previous knowledge of the area. – R-12

And once more to this same idea, a respondent answered a question on whether she would be interested in doing a service-trip in a different location by saying “yeah, just to see a different area.” She added to that:

I know Oregon has one and Montana has one. But mostly we would try to get back to the Frank Church [River of No Return wilderness area]. That’s the closest one to us, so it would be probably the most meaningful to work in ...[because] it’s our backyard. Something that I’d like to explore more.
– R-23

Interest in volunteering near one’s home was also heard from a first-time participant who travelled from Florida to Montana for a service-trip. When asked if she would do another service-trip in the future, she said, “I think next time [I’d do one] around home. See what we can do in our area, how we can help out there ...see how we can help our home, Florida.”

Respondents who were already familiar with the wilderness area where they were volunteering described various place attachment dimensions. One respondent, who had been visiting the wilderness area since childhood where he was volunteering, explained the effect of familiarity on place meanings. “This is the backcountry to me. Everything else I compare to this.” When asked whether he was
referring to a portion or the whole wilderness area, he answered that it was only the northern half. Another respondent described his increased protectionist motives about the wilderness area where he has been consistently visiting and volunteering for several years. When asked what the wilderness area meant to him, he replied:

Selway-Bitterroot in particular, we have one of the greatest wilderness areas in the lower 48 states, only a couple hours’ drive from home. That’s pretty important to me, to have it here and keep it up a little bit and take care of it ... it’s kind of like my backyard. - R-21

This same respondent also made a distinction between the types of activity he would pursue if he were to visit another natural area equidistant from his home as the one where he was currently volunteering. In regards to his place attachment to that area, he said:

I wouldn’t feel as attached. They’re in another state. That’s not a deal-breaker ...and I still would go to the Wallowas or the North Cascades, but I probably wouldn’t sign on to do a trip or do a lot of work there. I’d probably save that for this area. This feels a little bit more like mine, just ‘cause I’ve spent a lot of time here. – R-21

For the previous two respondents, a temporal relationship was driving their place attachment along with their geographic proximity.

**Macro**

Respondents who held macro-level relationships to their project-site came from outside of the region, even up to several thousand miles away. These respondents when asked about the significance of the project-site pulled back their scalar focus to the state level. A respondent who came from New York City for his service-trip in Montana responded in saying:

Specifically when I said Montana to people, people said, “Oh, Montana, that’s really out there, that’s wild.” I have a cousin who’s a little older than me and has done more outdoorsy things. When he heard Montana, he said, “Oh, wow, that’s more wild and rustic than Colorado. – R-17
For him, describing to his immediate social network where he would be going for his service-trip required him to scale outwards to the state level. Another respondent when asked if the particular site held significance over another explained that she had heard of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex from peers. She then scaled outwards in concluding, “I’d never been to Montana, so I thought it’d give it a whirl.”

One respondent from Pittsburg explained the alluring folklore surrounding Montana when asked the same question about the significance of the particular project site within the Bob Marshal Wilderness Complex He expounded:

This is Montana. It’s a special state, always has been in my mind, for a number of reasons. The mountains, the big sky, living in Arizona, I was part of the big sky experience. I understand quite well what it is to experience Big Sky Country. Also, one of my favorite texts, the setting of it is in Montana, Seeley Lake, off the Big Blackfoot [River]. It’s a novella written by Norman Maclean called A River Runs Through It. That book has always had a certain spell for me, greatly because it’s a work of literature, but also the way he describes the country, what the country means to him. So that also has been a romantic draw for me. Those are two primary reasons. – R-7

This respondent’s macro-level place attachment was acquired through secondary experiences in folklore and pop culture narratives. This secondary origin of this respondent’s macro-level place attachment to the place stands contrary to the origins of respondents with micro-level place attachment. Respondent with micro-level place attachment were found to have developed this relationship through primary experiences acquired from previous visits.

Anomalies

An anomaly to this geographic relationship with place attachment was found on each end of the scalar spectrum. A respondent who resided in Iowa reported strong attachment to one particular wilderness area He said, “this is my favorite
place on earth, Bob Marshall [wilderness area]. I’ve done 12 trips with my brothers, and most of them have been just utterly spectacular, seeing sights you wouldn’t believe.” While this respondent diverged from the trend by living a considerable distance away from the place of attachment, he did align with the trend of micro-scale respondents who also had spent considerable amounts of time in the place.

To the opposite effect, a respondent who was a Montana resident reported having almost no place attachment to the area where she had returned to volunteer for a second year in a row. For her, choosing the project site was mainly about logistical considerations that shortened her drive time. When asked if that particular site held significance to her, she said, “No. I didn’t even know what the Bob Marshall [wilderness area] was until last year. I’ve been in Montana 15 years, and I’ve camped in [various areas surrounding Billings, MT] but I don’t know this area.

**Place Dependence**

Some respondents indicated that there is only one particular place capable of fully meeting their preferences. One example can be seen in the following interview dialogue:

Researcher: Would you consider volunteering like this with a different agency?
Respondent: Yes, I would consider it.
Researcher: Where?
Respondent: Rocky Mountains anywhere.
Researcher: What about a different location in the U.S., different type of work?
Respondent: Not really.
Researcher: It’s the big mountains, that’s where you want to be?
Respondent: Definitely. – R-4

The respondent went on to say that, “the quality of project isn’t very important to me. The location is of major importance. Basically I love the Rocky
Mountains.” From these and previous statements, it was apparent that this respondent was strongly tied to attending service-trips specifically in the Rocky Mountain Range.

Another respondent, a longtime visitor to the area where he was volunteering, remarked how that place is analogous to a benchmark in his mind for what is truly a backcountry setting. “For me,” he explained, “I’m always comparing [other natural areas visited] to the Selway. That’s always new country to me, whereas this [the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area] is the backcountry.”

For one set of married respondents, there was a dependence placed on the state where the project was located. Even though there were closer areas in other states where they could have volunteered, it was important that the service-trip be in their home state.

**Service-trips as driver of place relationships**

Several respondents reported holding no place attachment to their project-site or location prior the service-trip. However, respondents reported having developed place attachment over the course of the week while volunteering. One respondent gave a detailed description for how this process transpires and where there may be unrealized voluntourism opportunities. As he saw the situation:

I’m up here [Northern Rockies Region] in this Mecca of recreation. People come from around the country and the globe to check it out. People want to connect with a place. They want to fall in love with somethin’. You have somethin’ that has all those qualities that people want to fall in love with. [Service-trips could] give them the opportunity to build the relationship with the sweat equity, that personal connection with the ground and the landscape, because [service-trips] have the ability to do that. – R-25&26

This respondent’s idea may indeed be valid if the findings in this section are any indication of a larger trend.
Many of the respondents who reported developing place relationships to their project area were first-time volunteers from outside of the region. Take for example the following response on whether the particular wilderness area held meaning for one young respondent.

Before it didn’t have much meaning, I just knew it was some place up there in Montana. Now, one day before I leave, it really has made an impact on me. I’ve also seen some pretty good sights that I didn’t know were here. I’ll have plenty of things to tell my parents about. I’m an artist. I’ve gotten a few ideas for maybe painting or drawings or certain situations. It’s been influential. – R-18

In a similar light regarding the place and experience as being influential, another first-time participant had this to say about the significance of the wilderness area where she was volunteering. “I’d never heard of it before” she said. “It’s gonna be a big part of my life. This changed a lot of my thinking. This is one of the places that changed my life.”

Other respondents within this same demographic expressed an enhanced level for the project area’s significance. One of them said, “I would have been fine with never having visited Montana, to be quite honest. But now that I’m here, I do appreciate it more.” By the same token, “Before this trip, absolutely nothing. I’d never heard of it, though I like the name Bitterroot. Now I think of it as my own little private Lake Tahoe.” One more respondent explained this process of building place relationships through experience. He said, “this is my first summer of actually experiencing it [the particular wilderness area], so I’m laying the foundation for experiences to be built [upon.] This is the beginning of the sense of place kind of thing.” To conclude this finding in relation to first-time participants, a middle-aged respondent stated that, “Having an experience like this gives me a personal connection. It becomes part of the fabric of who I am. If it’s been a week, it’s been a
week. But I have a connection to this place now.

A respondent who had been a frequent visitor to one portion of a wilderness area spoke to acquiring an increased appreciation for a portion she hadn’t previously visited until her service-trip took place. She relayed this process of familiarizing herself:

Before this week it [the whole wilderness area] meant the east side of the Divide. The Bitterroot [Valley] has such easy access, and that’s what I knew of the Selway-Bitterroot, when I hit the wilderness boundary coming in from the east. This is the first time I’ve ever really been into the wilderness from this side. And I’m really glad I have, because I wouldn’t have known all this is back here otherwise. So really, this particular area didn’t mean much to me to begin with, it was that side that I had more of a connection with, but hopefully now that’s changed. – R-24

This respondent, a frequent visitor to one particular part of the wilderness area, provides a small indication that developing place attachment through service-trips is not limited to just first-time volunteers.

**Refutation of Place Attachment**

The most frequently occurring result on place attachment was that respondents were actually *not* found to attach significance to their service-trip project locations. Respondents expressed a variety of reasons for this lack of place attachment, spanning from a desire to see other locations within a wilderness area to harboring prejudices about place reputations. Most often, respondents were more influenced by scheduling logistics than place descriptions in selecting their service-trip. Additionally, respondents emphasized more desire to support the general idea of the NWPS rather than one particular wilderness area

A set of veteran volunteer respondents expressed that while they do return to the same wilderness area for service-trips, they are not necessarily attached to any particular project-site. Answering in the negative about a site’s significance, a
respondent said, “This is my first time in this site. It’s beautiful and wonderful. But every site I’ve been in has been beautiful and wonderful. They’re all different.” Another respondent who had volunteered several times in approximately the same location said he was “not really” connected to the place. He said, “I do get a little bit of a feel for the lay of the land, but I’m certainly not locked in.” A different respondent specifically stated that he tries to avoid returning to the same project-site as this would interfere with his goal to see as much of the wilderness area as possible. He conveyed his approach to attending service-trips saying:

I wouldn’t have signed up for it this year, but my friend wanted to and he talked me into it. My object is to see as much of the [wilderness area] as possible, and this doesn’t fulfill that, because I’ve seen it before. So I don’t try to go on the same project twice. They offer enough variety that I’ve been able to do that over the years. This is the first project I’ve ever done twice. – R-14

It may be argued that these volunteers do possess some place attachment values with the particular wilderness Area, evidenced by their persistence in returning to volunteer. However, the critical finding is their stated indifference to any one location within that wilderness area

One respondent renounced having place attachment to one particular wilderness area based on his prejudices for what he perceived the area has come to symbolize in the regional culture. He explained:

I have a real love-hate relationship with this place, to be honest, because of the emphasis on horseman use and the emphasis on that kind of traditional wilderness cowboy crap, which I think is given a little too much—it’s really put up on a pedestal. Like, you see the Bob Marshall Wilderness [Montana license] plate, and what is it? A pack string. I’m like, “Yeah, great. They’ve got a million acres of some pretty cool country, and all everybody cares about is that?” – R-25&26

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He went on to describe that part of his motivation for participation was to overcome his prejudices through the service-trip experience. He said of the service-trip:

“[it] kind of forces my hand to get out here and experience that place and to try to get some kind of connection, ‘cause this place, for a lot of people I work with, it means a lot to them, and I’m just like, “It’s all right.” So I’m trying to learn to appreciate their love of this place, is the way to say it, so I’m not so dismissive.” – R-25&26

Logistics over locus

When respondents were asked if the project-site held significance to them over others, many answered that they selected the project based primarily on their scheduling needs. Some examples of this finding include, “No, it [the location] didn’t [matter] at all. It was a scheduling thing.” Also from another respondent, “Do I have a personal attachment? No. If this was in the Beartooth [Wilderness] I would have done it, as long as proximity and dates and all that other stuff [coincided].” Furthermore, “No, not really. I was just looking at the catalog, and I chose this trip mostly because of the timing and that there was a scholarship available. That’s the only reason why I picked it. The place meant nothing to me. I knew nothing about Montana.”

A husband and wife set of respondents travelling with their family explained that their process of selecting a service-trip was based on the location in relation to their primary destination of Glacier National Park as opposed to any other place significance. From the wife:

As far as previous experience of it [the project location] having an existing significance, not really, other than it was near Glacier. In fact, I had never even heard of it before we read through the—or I didn’t remember that I’d heard of it before we read through the descriptions. – R-9

And then from the husband:
We heard that it was outside of Glacier National Park. We had not been to Glacier. Before looking at this trip, I think I had heard of Bob Marshall Wilderness [Complex] once, because the person who led our Sierra [Club] trip two years ago was going to do another trip here last year. I’ve read a little bit about it in some geology stuff. I know about the northern Rockies, the Chinese Wall, the ancient reef system here. I’ve read a little bit of the geology of the area. But in terms of having any real sense of what the Bob Marshall wilderness area is, I basically came into this blind. – R-6

Based on these respondents’ statements, the service-trip location itself is not so much of a concern as whether or not it will align with one’s other interests and logistical constraints.

“The Wilderness” vs. a Wilderness Area

One emergent subtheme within the larger denial of place attachment theme was respondents interest in working to support the whole Wilderness ideal and the NWPS, rather than a select wilderness area or specific site. A terse example of this finding is heard from a respondent who said it was “just [the Wilderness Area’s] existence” that held significance. Another respondent added to this idea in responding to a follow-up question as to why the trip is ideal for her. She said it was the “location and organization,” clarifying that it was “not the location like Colt Creek [the project-site], but the Wilderness.” Then, from another respondent on this subtheme, “It’s the wilderness. It just happens to be the Bob Marshall [Wilderness Complex], but it’s the Wilderness in general.”

One respondent explained the significance of one wilderness area in context with the broader management significance as opposed to standalone place significance for him personally. He said:

Comin’ up here, the uniqueness of this place is the fact that it’s a large contiguous area of productive forestland that is not being managed that way, which is rare in the West. Typically most of the wilderness areas are the unproductive areas, just rock and ice and water and tiny trees. So it’s nice to know that there’s big chunks of contiguous productive montane and
subalpine forest that are here, but from an aesthetic or a personal satisfaction side of things, it doesn’t have much draw. – R-25&26

More on the significances found concerning wilderness will follow in the next half of this results section.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRIP PROVIDERS

This section of results addresses preferences and ideals respondents held for their service-trip experience. It also presents the feedback and suggestions for improving trip offerings as conveyed by respondents. Provider organizations and agency volunteer coordinators in particular may find the content in this section useful in shaping their offerings to further their mission.

The main question that yielded feedback statements from respondents was, “How has it been working with [organization X]?” The series of follow-up questions: “Have your needs and expectations been met?” and, “Are there any areas for improvement?” also returned statements containing feedback for service-trip providers. Study respondents supplied an array of both affirming and constructive feedback on the management and operational practices for provider organization. It is worth mentioning however, that responses of praise and positive feedback significantly outweighed critical remarks directed towards organizations. Findings suggest that on the whole, respondents were pleased with their service-trip experience and the current practices of providers.

To better understand EEV’s preferences for service-trip design, respondents were asked a series of questions on the circumstances and criteria considered to be most appealing. This included the type of work-tasks, the schedule and timing of the trip, and other aspects such as group makeup and cost. Respondents revealed that while they are indeed motivated to volunteer based on altruistic motives, earning their participation will require providers to meet a number of self-interested terms. Conditions related to work tasks, scheduling, and trip-design
were some of the major areas for which respondents were found to hold preferences.

**Feedback on provider organizations’ practices**

Respondent observations concerning the operating practices of service-trip provider organizations are housed in this results section. Statements have been categorized into four sections related to the themes: leadership and staff, safety and trust, capacity-building practices, and inter-organizational partnerships.

**Leadership**

Of all the provider organization’s staff, volunteers will likely have the most interaction with the trip leaders in lieu of spending several days together in the field. Respondents’ feedback concerning the organization reflected this condition. A great deal of praise and emphasis was placed on the role of the trip leader in determining the successful outcome of a service-trip experience. The spirit of this finding is representative in the following respondent statement:

> I’ve been amazed at how competent these young men and women have been who are the group leaders, in every way. Physically, in terms of safety and medical... There’s a certain social thing, they know how to keep the group together. They watch out for you. They also give you a lot of independence [while working on the project]. – R-21

As this respondent noted, the leader assumes a critical and multifaceted place within the group. They must ensure safety and supervision, encourage healthy socialization, and empower volunteers to work independently in routinely hazardous conditions. “A leader,” stated one respondent, “maybe a charismatic leader, who is excited about the work and excited about the trip, makes a huge difference to the attitude of every participant.”
Leadership characteristics

Respondents regarded a good leader as befitting a certain set of personality traits. A respondent had this to say about their trip leader, “He’s great. You have to be a certain person, I think, to be a trail leader, and he is. You can tell. He gets along well with the young people, with the other people [as well].” Other respondents identified ideal leadership characteristics such as being “great with people,” “knowledgeable,” “fun” and “easygoing,” yet still able to “get the job done.” Some respondents lauded the virtuous motives of trip leaders in taking on the job as pay is typically low and the work is only seasonally available. A respondent relayed:

I know what these people get paid. They’re working for basically peanuts. But they’re dedicated to what they do, and they do a great job doin’ it. And a lot of ‘em come back year after year. You don’t do that for the money. It’s ‘cause you love the job. – R-14

More to that same idea from another respondent, “You can tell that the team leaders I’ve had experience with really believe in their mission and are really enthusiastic about it and enjoy it. It’s kind of contagious that way."

Competency and the ability to quickly gain control over the group were also said to be essential traits of a good trip leader. One respondent told of the research she conducts on the trip leader before committing to a project. She said that typically she will look for Sierra Club trips where she already knows the leader, but in cases where the leader is unknown, she will read their posted background and make an assessment to their competency level. She said:

When you’re out there, you want somebody who’s gonna be able to control the group. I’ve had a couple really super leaders, probably because of what they’ve done in the past, too, and what their occupation is. They could just control a group with no problem, no bossiness, just really under control. I like that, good group control. – R-5
Another respondent observed of his trip leader, “What’s also cool is that we have a 26-year-old instructor, she’s the expert and everyone, whatever their age or experience, they all listen to her. That’s what I noticed.”

Safety and Trust

Respondents stated an appreciation for leaders and organizations that promote a culture of safety throughout the trip. A volunteer trip leader explained the importance of making trips a safe experience. He said,

My primary concern is their [the volunteers’] safety. They’re out here to volunteer, to help, they should not go back with any kind of injury. To perpetuate involvement, I want to make sure they are in good health when they’re on the trip and when they go back, they remember that. – R-7

Another respondent who had work history with the government in field-based settings expressed his appreciation for the contrast in management styles. He conveyed that the provider organizations are, “really concerned with people’s comfort and well-being.” He added that, “There’s a real sense of care for the volunteers, which was very refreshing for me to see.” Another respondent related an anecdote about his trip leader’s central message for the week.

He [the trip leader] says, “The number one issue that I have with you people is safety. If somebody gets injured, that can ruin the whole trip. And the number two issue is, I want you to have fun.” That’s a fun boss to work with. “And the number three is the work project. It’s by far—it should be like number 10 compared to one and two, safety and fun.” – R-4

A respondent on the same trip validated this cultural condition of safety through an anecdotal example of her own. She said, “for instance, yesterday, we quit sooner than we probably would have because we ran out of water. They’re very conscious of that.”
From start to finish, a coordinated experience

An additional point of emphasis among respondents regarding the functional aspects of the service-trip was effective coordination from start to finish. Respondents valued informative, accurate, and consistent communication throughout the course of their interactions with the provider. Interactions began with the initial inquiries into the trip and receiving registration confirmation, up through arrival at the project-site.

The role of the provider organization’s website for disseminating information along with the appropriate use of emails was important to respondents. Where critical feedback was heard concerning communication, a few respondents conveyed the importance of ensuring that the advertised trip description is very close to what actually ends up occurring on the trip. Respondents acknowledged that issues will arise beyond the control of the organization. It is the manner of addressing these issues in an appropriate and timely fashion that makes the critical difference.

Strong communication practices

Along with strong leadership practices, respondents stressed their appreciation for strong communication in advance of their trip and also through directives during the actual trip. A volunteer described his take on the communication throughout his experience saying:

The objectives are always very well laid out. I haven’t had that situation like, “What are we doin’?” Communication’s really good. I don’t know if they stress it in their training, but they do a really good job of communicating the objectives, the expectations, the safety hazards, all that stuff. To me, that’s tantamount to success. Because once everybody knows what they’re doin’, everybody can be pullin’ in the same direction, workin.’ You’re not havin’ all this stoppage due to questions and stuff. – R-25&26
Another respondent spoke to the importance of receiving advance communication via email before the trip begins. “They [the organization] were on top of it. The emails had us prepared, our little supplies list that I looked at one week before. They seem pretty organized.” Also, with consideration to reliance on the organization’s website for information, a respondent said, “They have a good website, and then the program coordinator, is pretty involved with emails and making sure everybody’s on the same page. I definitely felt prepared. They sent all the information and stuff like that.”

One respondent criticized one of the local organizations for lacking details of the service-trip on their website. “They’re not very descriptive on the foundation’s website on what the trip [entails]. It isn’t very descriptive on what the trail condition’s like, what it’s gonna be like. Sometimes that’s a little hard.

**Importance of accurate and thorough trip descriptions**

As the respondent above noted, having detailed and accurate descriptions about the terms of the service-trip in advance is crucial. Volunteers’ high level of interest in the posted trip description content can be heard in the following response:

They’re [the trip descriptions] very accurate. They scout, the leaders, the Forest Service or somebody has scouted the trail... They’re very good about the distances, they tell you how far you’re hiking into base camp, they tell you how long the trail is that you’re gonna work on, they tell you what you’re gonna do on the trail. Of course there are unexpected things, that’s life, that come up. – R-15

When breakdown occurs between the originally described trip plan and what actual happens in the field, respondents expressed concern for how such a situation is handled. In one of the service-trips visited for this study, an itinerary change occurred close to the trip’s start date. The basecamp location was changed
due to a reprioritization of work areas. As a result, the hiking distance from the
trailhead increased. A respondent explained how this event affected her:

This one [trip] was said to be moderate, and initially it was an 8.7 [mile] hike in, and it was only changed, like, the week before, after all the arrangements were made, to 11 or 12 miles. That was challenging, 'cause I personally wouldn’t have signed up for a 12-mile backpack[ing hike]. I made it and it was fine, but it was way too hard. It was way too hard for me. So I’m a little bit frustrated with the change of information and the communication of it. This had significance early on that it was a moderate 8.7 miles. OK, I could do that. But I wouldn’t have signed up had I known it would have been a little more strenuous and 12 miles. – R-1

Another volunteer on this trip expressed similar frustration with how the news of this itinerary change was communicated. She related:

They didn’t even say that the mileage changed, but they changed the mileage. They didn’t even say the location changed, but they changed the location. None of this was like, “OK, heads up, people!” That was kind of disconcerting. I don’t think that’s certainly gonna cause a downfall or turn people away, but when you have the expectation that you’re gonna be hiking 8.7 miles in, and it turns to 11.7 [miles], for some people that could be huge. – R-2

Despite this example, it should be noted that respondents’ are cognizant that changes to the itinerary are often likely to occur. As one respondent stated on this topic, “It might not be 100% accurate on the activities, ‘cause you get out here, and they’re workin’ off of scouting reports that oftentimes the Forest has given them, and then you get out here and there’s just not that many trees to buck, so you’ve got to switch gears.” Suggestions on the managerial response to situations of this nature will be discussed in the Implications & Recommendations section at the end of this study.

Organized experience

In conjunction with a general tone of safety and maintaining situational control, respondents also stated the importance of perceiving the trip to be highly
organized. A respondent described conditions leading to an ideal experience by first stating, “organization, being organized, so the planning’s laid out. Obviously things change throughout the day, but someone [a leader] who can plan and adjust to whatever needs to be done so there’s not chaos.” Another respondent supported this finding in stating that a good service-trip should be:

...well-organized. I’ve been in experiences where you get there and it’s just a cluster. You’re like, “What? Does anybody know what we’re doin’ next?” A well-organized experience is important, one that has some definition to it, so I know what I’m gonna be doing. – R-13

More to this theme from another respondent, “it [the service-trip] seems to be organized, flexible, those good qualities that you look for in somethin’ that you want to get behind.”

**Recruitment and Capacity Building**

A: It’s a desire people have that they don’t even know they have, and they don’t even know there’s a way to do it. It’s all, how do you get that out and get people knowing that this exists? It’s not so much that it’s an option, they don’t even know, I get the feeling that people don’t know that this is an option. – R-25&26

Many respondents wanted the organization they were volunteering with to grow in capacity and succeed in fulfilling their publicized mission statement. When asked if they had feedback for the organization, respondents often thought about strategies for recruiting new volunteers. A consistently held belief among respondents was that a segment of the general public exists that would be interested in trying a service-trip if only they were aware of such an opportunity. “I don’t know how anybody would hear about it unless they’re in the circle,” said one veteran volunteer. His awareness of the organization’s marketing methods was
limited to their website and a series of fundraising events, adding that, “I don’t know how else it’s advertised.” This volunteer, who along with his two young children has attended two service-trips, suggested that organizations engage families as potential participants.

Aside from appealing to families, other areas that respondents called to for recruiting volunteers and building organizational capacity included: developing partnerships with other organizations, encouraging peer-to-peer recruitment, maintaining a strong presence on the internet, releasing project descriptions as early and as detailed as possible, and maintaining contact with alumni volunteers through the off-season.

**Partnerships**

A few respondents gave mention to the potential gains from service-trip organizations partnering with other organizations with overlapping values. At the time of data collection, the three organizations studied all had partnerships with other organizations to fill service-trips. Respondents encouraged the continuation of this practice. One respondent identified student outdoor clubs at surrounding colleges and universities as potential partners. Another respondent, a teacher, suggested provider organizations market themselves to high school seniors contemplating a “gap-year” experience prior to attending their first year of college. A respondent who had previously been a Boy Scout proposed that organizations engage the Boy Scots of America as a potential partner. He said:

I’d been thinking about it for a little bit, and one of the most immediate things you could do for [Organization X] or other conservation movements who are looking for volunteer labor is, you could go to a local Boy Scout troop and say, “If you’re looking for a good way to get your volunteer hours, practice some skills, you could come with us and see if you like it. Our principles align closely with yours.” – R-19
This same respondent also suggested appealing to young urbanites, enticing them with the opportunity to experience a backcountry adventure.

**Network recruiting**

Several respondents indicated a barrier they overcame in the process of committing to participate in a service-trip. They stated that their decision to volunteer required a leap of faith, entrusting the organization to provide them with a positive experience. These respondents believed that a referral from a trusted peer (friend, colleague, or family member) could remove this barrier to volunteer commitment. The strategy of encouraging alumni service-trip participants to recruit other volunteers was identified. One respondent explained the basis of this strategy in saying:

I don’t think somebody who’s not familiar is gonna find the website and find the activities and sign up. I think it needs to be somebody you know who says, “Hey, I’ve got this great trip, you ought to sign up,” and they find out more about it and say, “OK, I’ll go with you.” Just goin’ to a website you don’t know anything about is not gonna probably be very effective. – R-21

This same volunteer explained that without a friend’s initial encouragement, he personally would not have committed to participating. Since his inaugural service-trip, he has since managed to recruit several other volunteer participants by issuing snowball-style invitations within his social network. He reiterated his belief in the strategy of “…more active [recruitment] rather than waiting for people to bite. You don’t need to hit it hard, but a real concentrated effort.”

Another respondent told the story of how he came to register for his first service-trip. The respondent said, “I heard about this [EEV service trips] from a person I work with. He had done a service trip like this in the Four Corners area. He had a great time. He said it was an opportunity to meet people, talk with other
people, be around them.” In further support of this finding, another respondent related his own network recruiting efforts:

So what I do, I can only do so much, but it’s just tellin’ people about it. Word of mouth is huge for this kind of organization. People go and tell their friends, “I did a [Organization X] trip and it was fantastic. I got to go to the second-largest contiguous wilderness area in the Lower 48, and I got to work all week and they fed me and I got to see the horses.” Some people like that. “I stayed in a historic cabin and there was horses packin’ us in. I got to do all this great work.” – R-25&26

Other respondents gave mention to knowing people in their network who might be interested in volunteering if they only understood what the service-trip experience entailed.

**Online presence**

Respondents acknowledged the important role that the internet plays in an organization’s recruitment strategy. Maintaining a visible presence on the internet, both by having an easily found website through Google searches and using popular social media tools, were practices named by volunteers. A respondent’s telling of how she came to find the organization is indicative of the need to be visible online. When asked if she would ever volunteer for another similar organization, she said:

I just don’t know of any other type of opportunities. I haven’t looked. I literally Googled “volunteer opportunities Montana,” and this came up, that’s how I found it. Last year I signed up I think two weeks before we left. It was just a last-minute sort of thing last year. – R-1

Other respondents suggested social media be used to recruit and retain volunteers, particularly younger segments of the population. One longstanding volunteer observed what he considered to be a concern in bringing younger volunteers into the organization. He suggested that organizations boost their public relations effort by using “things like Facebook or Twitter.” “These things,”
he believed, “get a younger audience. ‘Cause over the years, most of the volunteers have been older folks, retired folks.

**Detailed and timely descriptions**

Maintaining a visible web presence was considered to be important but so too was the quality of content on the organization’s website. Specifically, respondents identified how recruitment is affected by the quality of service-trip descriptions and the timing of their release. A respondent who volunteers as a service-trip leader explained:

> Given what’s going on with governmental agencies, it’s sometimes tough to get information. Finding out what it is we’re gonna be doing and how we’re gonna be used can be challenging, because the more pertinent information you put on and a level of specificity, the better it is to attract people to it. If they’re paying to work, you want to make sure they know what they’re paying to work for and about. – R-7

Concerning the importance of timeliness in releasing project details, a respondent explained how the earlier in the season that information is released the more ideal it is for committing to volunteer. He said:

> With my work, I need a number of months to let work know that I need to take off. I was hoping in—I don’t know when I emailed the foundation, in early spring, asking what the summer projects would be, and they were kind of iffy on the dates, so it was a little while until May [or] June when they had a definite schedule. It kind of limited what projects we could fit in. – R-22

Also to the benefits of releasing service-trip dates as early as possible, a respondent said:

> As far as fitting it in, we really went through the list of available trips and looked at what we thought was reasonable according to our schedules. It was great that they have trips scheduled all the way from early spring to late fall. – R-9

More on respondents’ preferences for scheduling and timing of service trips will be presented in the Preferences section. It is important to point out here however, that
the way in which information is released has the potential to affect volunteer recruitment outcomes.

**Year around engagement and personal outreach efforts**

Results suggest that maintaining contact with volunteer alumni during the off-season may help to retain volunteers. Also, respondents mentioned the impact that personal contact had on their willingness to register for a trip. One respondent talked about how he was introduced to service-trip volunteerism through meeting a representative for a provider organization that was tabling at an event in his city. He had this to say of that method’s efficacy in recruiting him and his spouse: “It was great. We talked with one of the directors who gave us great information. I think it was a lot on our part to have the desire to come back here and see the country and do the work.”

A respondent volunteering with the same organization as the previously quoted respondent provided feedback on the idea of maintaining contact through the off-season.

I was kind of surprised that after I went on one trip and it was successful, they didn’t maybe email me the next summer and say: “Hey, would you be interested in a trip again?” Both times it has been self-initiated on our part. They’ve done nothing to recruit us for the volunteer trips, which kind of surprised me, that they wouldn’t actively recruit after you’d been on one trip already. Obviously, you’ve done it once, why wouldn’t you do it again?

– R-24

More findings related to factors promoting volunteer retention are located within the Drivers of Volunteer Retention section of the results.

**Inter-organizational Partnerships**

Respondents participating on service-trips where two provider organizations had partnered were either in favor of the model or held no opinion. Some
respondents saw having a leader from each organization as a complimentary dynamic in this instance.

We have a representative from the [Organization X] leadership and a representative from [Organization Y], and so I imagine that could be great or it could be not so great. Right now I think [Leader X] is doing a great job as overall trip leader and coordinator. I think [Leader Y’s] doin’ a great job as our crew boss and representative from [Organization Y]. I really can say a lot of positive things about both of them. I think a lot of that has to do with the chemistry of the people and their nature and willingness to work and solve problems and troubleshoot. – R-6

Also to that effect from another volunteer on the same service-trip:

And there’s different expectations between [Leader Y] and [Leader X]. As far as [Leader Y], our leader from [Organization Y], [he] wants to have fun and make it more enjoyable, and [Leader X] is a more driven guy who’s done this a lot of times, he’s more precise on it. But they work together and everybody’s very kind. – R-8

One veteran volunteer who had extensive service-trip experience in both a leadership and participant role believed that collaborative partnerships between conservation organizations as well as government agencies was “essential to preserving this land.” He saw benefits in merging his background and experience with the regionally based leader’s intimate knowledge of the area. He explained:

It’s helpful. I cannot become a catalog of knowledge about one space within a year’s time. So having someone who has that knowledge in the field with us is greatly beneficial. That’s good. So if there’s something to do, if some [local or regional] organizations were to read this and reach out to [national] volunteer organizations, let them know that we need help. Don’t wait for an organization to come and say, “Can we help you?” Reach out to the [national] organization and say, “Hey, we have some work to be done. Do you have volunteers who might be interested in coming?” – R-7

He concluded in saying that “these service trips only happen with strong partnerships” by way of good communication between parties.
Professionalism

A few respondents emphasized the importance of organization staffers behaving as professionals throughout the service trip and especially towards volunteers. There did not seem to be a particular incident that triggered this feedback among respondents. One respondent conveyed the importance of staff refraining from venting their frustrations with their job while in the presence of volunteers. She empathized with the staff in terms of being frustrated with an employer but asserted that, “everything you do and say on one of these trips represents the [organization] and just keep that in mind.”

Relatedly, another respondent volunteering with a separate organization in this study stressed the importance of staff not bringing their frustration with their job into interactions with volunteers. The respondent perceived that there was some communication difficulty occurring between the field and office staff during the course of her service-trip. She too empathized with the staff in this case but said, “you can sense there’s friction and maybe a mix-up in communication in the organization, maybe more so this year than last year.” She expanded on this occurrence, saying:

You can see when [the trip leader] is frustrated because they haven’t communicated with him, and you can sense as a volunteer, if you sense the stress of the crew leader, he’s not speaking it, but you can feel it, because of the lack of communication, because some of the stuff [the leader] didn’t know until one of the other volunteers told [the leader]. – R-3

Beyond these two statements, respondents reported that the staff and provider organizations are high functioning and professional. Most respondents gave statements regarding the organization staff to the tune of, “They’re really nice. All of them are very bright and intelligent. I never got so much education out here.
They know a lot of their stuff. I like them, and they’re funny. They’re easy to work with.”

Drivers of Volunteer Retention

*It was a really smooth trip. Everything went really well. It was a lot of fun. No bad memories. So why not do it again? – R-23*

This research attempted to understand the factors driving volunteers’ continued participation with the same provider organization. To understand this information, each respondent who was a veteran volunteer (n = 18), i.e. a returning volunteer, was asked, “What factors contributed to your decision to continue volunteering over multiple seasons with [organization X]? Other secondary lines of questioning which contributed to uncovering drivers of volunteer retention included:

- How likely would you say the chances are that you will return for another volunteer workweek with [organization X] in the future?
  o What about a similar conservation service-trip with a different organization in a different location?
- How has it been working with [organization X], and have your needs and expectations been met?

From these questions, the main driver of retention reported by respondents was the role of the provider organization in delivering an excellent service-trip experience. More precisely, respondents identified the role of the trip leader and other staff as critical to a successful outcome and enjoyable experience. Volunteers’ loyalty and trust in the organization was also found to be a supporting driver of
retention. Relatedly, some respondents reported a “sense of community” or “belonging” within a provider organization as a retention factor.

After factors surrounding the merits of the organization and leadership, respondents listed a broad-spectrum of statements related to having a positive experience on previous trips as the reason for their return. From there, the importance of believing that their contribution during previous service-trips was legitimate and meaningful was listed. These statements are presented in the table on below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table2: Drivers of Volunteer Retention</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Driver</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provider org. &amp; Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trip leader &amp; staff</td>
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<td><strong>Loyalty &amp; Trust</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Q: Would you guys ever look into doin’ this with another organization? Is this where your investment lies?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community &amp; Belonging</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Drivers of Volunteer Retention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
<td>We chose [to return to organization X] because we’ve been here, [had] a great experience and we wanted to come back. – R-22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I ended up on my first trip. I didn’t even know it was a Selway-Bitterroot Foundation trip at the time. I just knew there was this organization that did some trail work and they were gonna feed you. What the heck? And it was such a good experience that I thought, “I’m gonna sign on next year.” – R-21</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It was a good experience, so we were interested in coming back. – R-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaningful contribution</td>
<td>...you get a sense of accomplishment, you really felt like it was worth doing. I could see the trail in better shape by the time we left, before we even left. So it’s a sense of accomplishment and a contribution. – R-13</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A lot of those goals that I just mentioned, feeling like we were contributing, feeling like we were giving back, helping out. – R-6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What I was just talking about, wanting to keep doing it because I felt it was a worthwhile thing the first time. Afterwards I felt really good about it, like I had done something positive. – R-11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>And I contributed. I felt like I personally did help and make a difference. They certainly could have done it without me, don’t get me wrong, but my work on the saws contributed to clearing the trail. That felt good. – R-1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Overall, most respondents said they would most likely plan to return for another service-trip with the same organization in the future. Respondents who specifically stated a desire to volunteer with a different organization gave reasons rooted in
better fitting their motives to the experience. These respondents believed other organizations would be more likely to fulfill their interests, such as the desire for a more challenging or rugged experience, a chance to see new places, or the opportunity to take on a leadership role.

**Service-Trip Preferences**

This section will explore the responses collected from asking study participants to describe their ideal volunteering experience. The inquiry into volunteer preferences on the terms and conditions of EEV service-trips revealed a dualism present in this format of volunteerism. As is presented in the Motives and Perceived Benefits section of results, volunteers do simultaneously hold both selfish and selfless motives for volunteering. One respondent articulated this phenomenon saying:

> There’s a selfless and a selfish aspect of volunteering. I know that I’m doing it for selfish reasons, ‘cause I feel good about lookin’ at [a] big old tree that I helped cut. There’s a sense of gratification. And then selfless as well, that you’re giving of your time and your energy and some resources to make things happen. I think it’s both. I don’t think any volunteer with the exception of maybe Mother Theresa is truly altruistic. There’s always a self-serving motivation, in my opinion. – R-1

Volunteers’ preferences for how service-trips are composed further support this finding. Many respondents conveyed that they commit to volunteering only if certain preferential conditions are satisfied. These conditions encompass aspects of purposeful objectives, scheduling, cost, and the perceived level of physical difficulty. Statements pertaining to scheduling and timing aspects of service-trips, the most emphasized preference, are displayed in the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Age-group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Availability &amp; Scheduling</strong></td>
<td>That alone was pretty good incentive, the timing of it. It’s in between work and school. It’s fairly convenient for me. – R-19</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…It wouldn’t get in the way of my work for too long. – R-18</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Q: What’s the significance of this project site, of choosing this location instead of somewhere else? A: This was the only week that we could mesh up with our schedules. – R-23</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probably the main thing that’s obviously becoming a theme as I talk is scheduling, if it’s gonna work into my schedule, if I have the time to do it. – R-24</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Q: When you’re looking for different things to volunteer for, what types of criteria or what circumstances need to be in place? A: Time. Do I have the time to do it? Will I enjoy it? I guess that’s it. – R-10</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It’s got to fit my schedule. Since I’m a teacher, I have summers off, so this aligns itself with that. It’s got to work in my life, but I’ve changed my life to make it work, too. – R-1</td>
<td>41 – 55</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>I can’t take off a lot of time from work, so I was looking for shorter weekend trips. …so getting these shorter trips made it available to me. – R-12</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Q: If you could go on another volunteer vacation next summer, what would be the ideal setup be for you? A: Let’s say another week like this, probably three days of working is enough in the outdoors. That’s a six-day trip with a day off. That’s about all I’d want to do in that period of time. Just basically a week trip. – R-8</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I was thinkin’ about that actually today, that it could be a little bit shorter. For me, this has been almost too long. It could shorten up. Hike in, work three days, and hike out. I don’t know that that would be beneficial to The Bob or the sponsoring organization, but it could be a little bit shorter. – R-1</td>
<td>41 – 55</td>
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<td></td>
<td>…10-day, 14-day trips. It just doesn’t work for people. The club offered them, and they were falling out of favor. People parse their time a little more tightly now. A week seems to be</td>
<td>56 – 70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table 3: Scheduling &amp; Timing</td>
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<tr>
<td>** preferred. Most people can go a week fairly well. It gives them a break, and then they can return to the conveniences that they have. I’ve not done a Sierra Club trip for 10 days, so I don’t know what it’s like, but it seems like most people are geared to doing something like this for a week at a time. – R-7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>** I think our [the Sierra Club] trips are scheduled a bit better because they do allow enough time to experience others, the project, and being in the outdoors. [Three-day trips] ...It’s not enough. It’s too short. – R-7</td>
<td>56 – 70</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>** Notice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>** It would have to be convenient enough, and I would need to know about it so I could make time for it. – R-19</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** With my work, I need a number of months to let work know that I need to take off. I was hoping in— I don’t know when I emailed the foundation, in early spring, asking what the summer projects would be, and they were kind of iffy on the dates, so it was a little while until May-June when they had a definite schedule. It kind of limited what projects we could fit in. – R-22</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Almost as soon as possible. If I don’t get it in soon enough, I’m not gonna get the time off. – R-22</td>
<td>26 – 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** In needs to be in the winter or early spring. It gives us time to put in there [the calendar] for real. – R-25</td>
<td>41 – 55</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>** But it wasn’t too hard to take the time off, partly because you have to plan it so far in advance to actually even get in the trip. It’s a known quantity. It wasn’t bad. – R-9</td>
<td>41 – 55</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>** We schedule around our other commitments. When we make a commitment, we put it on our calendars, and that’s what we follow for the year. We’re usually six months out in scheduling. – R-15</td>
<td>56 – 70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** So the ability to plan the experience is a plus for us, because then it fits in with our lifestyle. We have a busy lifestyle. - R-13</td>
<td>56 -70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Format</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** But as far as fitting into your life, I think it’s great that people can have a choice of week-long, half a day, a couple hours, a day every week. – R-9</td>
<td>41 – 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Scheduling & Timing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This one’s just kind of an official one. It’s on the books, it’s a week long. Havin’ that formal schedule is good ‘cause you just plan on it and count on it and do it. You don’t make—somethin’ doesn’t come up at the last minute and throw it off. Just the fact that it’s such a structured, formal kind of trip, I like that part of it. – R-25</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41 – 55</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I guess it’s preferable, I guess it’s our lifestyle. I’m not just sitting around with a lot of free time. You get the rest of your life that goes on. So to be able to say, “I know I’m gonna give this week and this second week,” I can put that in there. I know what it’s gonna take for my preparation, for my being there. I can plan my other activities around it. So having that—and that’s a big plus for The Bob. They come out with a schedule. It isn’t like you get a phone call that says, “Hey, we’re gonna need some help out on the Middle Fork, can you make it?” It’s there, and we can plan. – R-13</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56 – 70</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you like more of the see it in the future, schedule it, do it once? A: That’s more my type. I can control that better. If I see somethin’ I like, there’s an anticipation as you go forward. It’s just more control. If you’re workin’ every day 1 to 4, that’s like a job. I want to avoid that. I may actually work more, but it’s my preference, not ‘cause I have to be down a So-and-so’s at such-and-such. – R-14</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>70+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tasks & Work

Respondents’ voiced strong preferences for “engaging” work tasks and an aversion to “tedious” types of tasks. Out of all the respondents, very few expressed indifference towards performing mundane tasks. Respondents preferred tasks that have a “tangible” outcome, in which progress is immediately apparent. Another task related preference was including a variety of different tasks into the service-trip and regularly rotating jobs among volunteers. Results further suggest that a
relationship exists between a volunteers’ age and their task preference. Respondents’ tasks and preferences are displayed in the following table.

### Table 4: Tasks & Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging v. tedious task types</td>
<td>You wouldn’t want to stick a volunteer crew on grubbin’ (digging) trail all day. That’s hard, heavy work. We don’t do much of that on these trips. – R-25&amp;26</td>
<td>41 - 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I like doing cross-cut sawing the best. That’s a lot of fun. Part of the trips are usually that, part of it’s brushing. There’s a lot of things you do. This particular trip there’s been very little sawing and a lot of brushing. That wouldn’t be my favorite thing. – R-21</td>
<td>56 - 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t have any preference. I’m willing to do everything. I know some people like to do the exciting things. But I’m also up here just to get away, and the mundane and boring is fine with me. – R-22</td>
<td>26 - 40</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It really doesn’t matter to me. I like trail work. Invasive species is fine with me. I did not prefer camp maintenance, it was not my favorite. It was not as exciting. – R-5</td>
<td>56 - 70</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I’m not so interested in the weed aspect. [The provider organization] offers weeding trips for the spotted knapweed or whatever. To me, that doesn’t sound appealing. But otherwise, no. – R-1</td>
<td>41 - 55</td>
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<td></td>
<td>One of our tasks, we separated seeds. [laughs] That was not my thing. Too tedious. I’d prefer not to do archaeological work. I did a dig, which was interesting, but I did that and I won’t choose that again. I like to dig in the real dirt, not just be real careful and sifting. That’s just not my thing. – R-5</td>
<td>56 - 70</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We chose this trip partially, too, because of the nature of the work that was billed. We’re doing invasive species control</td>
<td>41 - 55</td>
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<td>Table 4: Tasks &amp; Work</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>today, which I think might be a little bit of a letdown for my son and daughter. – R-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attainable &amp; tangible results</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would also probably look for something that’s a project, where there’s a goal and something needs to be completed and you hope to complete it by the end of your time doing it. The tangibility aspect is appealing. The other part, about a project with an end goal, is that it ends. You can hopefully have a feeling of completion because you’ve finished it. – R-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>I definitely want it to be something that has a tangible result. Yeah, exactly. My job is such that it’s all data collection, analysis, and report-writing. It’s tangible, but it’s not concrete. It’s just, I’m makin’ widgets and gettin’ ’em in on time. Whereas this, that sense of accomplishment, of improving something and doing it as a group and a team. – R-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every now and then I would like to see a result, something that I can feel or see. I’ve done some computer work, and it’s frustrating at the end of the day when you haven’t made much headway. – R-19</td>
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<td>M: But I’d say a good mix of trail work with the cross-cutting, and then you can walk back through what you cut. It’s real nice to see. You can see what you’ve done, really. F: See results. M: That’s nice, even with the brushing. F: Yeah, it’s fun to walk back down the trail and see what you’ve done. – R-25 &amp; 26</td>
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<tr>
<td>So a variety of work that people would not do normally that they can look back on and say, “Wow, look what I did!” – R-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
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<tr>
<td>It depends on what it is. If I’m bending over pulling weeds, that’s not as enjoyable. But if it’s varied and if I’m out here for long enough collectively days and my muscles build</td>
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<tr>
<td>Table 4: Tasks &amp; Work</td>
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<td>around the use of these tools. – R-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>A variety of work, enough variety of the work. This is light work, mixed with hard work. I think that’s good. Projects that give people a chance to do something they don’t normally do. It’s very natural for males to want to do the muscle work, but there’s a lot of females who come on these trips, and I know they want to do this work. They want to swing a pick or a Pulaski. They want to do heavier work. So finding space for them to do that and at the same time allowing the guys to do what they want to do. - R-7</td>
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<td>Yeah, prevent boredom when we’re up on the trail lopping for eight hours straight. It’s never actually eight hours straight, but — [laughs] We’ve actually done a pretty good job this trip of switching out people midday to go to a different task. That’s kind of nice. – R-25&amp;26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age Specific</td>
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<td>I guess the task is important. I’m a little worried about the physical strain of this kind of work, because I’m not a spring chicken any more. Even just pulling the weeds today makes my elbows, my joints, feel weird, and I’m a musician, so I have to be careful about what I do with my arms. – R-11</td>
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<td>It’s more the location, and at this point in time, we choose things that are moderate. I can no longer hike 12 miles and then work. That’s for the younger folks. So choosing a moderate trip in distance and elevation gain and those kinds of things is part of what I do now, because of age. As much as I would like to go to some of the places where they’re going, I wouldn’t sign up for something strenuous because it would not be fair to them, nor to me. – R-15</td>
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<td>Last year we did a 12-mile hike on our day off, and it’s like, man, I’m a year older and a year tireder [sic], and I’m not gonna kill myself. – R-1</td>
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<td>I haven’t been on a really intensive trip yet, but I’m a young male in the prime of my youth, so I want to get out and use all my strength. That’s what’s interesting to me right now. – R-12</td>
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Trip Design: social makeup, families, cost

The features and details of how service-trips are composed was also an area beholden to preferences. Respondents held opinions about the ideal social composition including the group size and blend of charter traits with physical capabilities. In this area, a subtheme emerged concerning the significance of families participating in service-trips. For other more technical matters of designing good trips, respondents held preferences for trip options that are affordable to attend. A complete set of responses related to service-trip design are listed in the table below.

Table 5: Trip Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group size &amp; social makeup</td>
<td>The other part of the experience I would include is that at least this one specifically is a nice size, eight or ten. It’s not too big, you get to know everyone and everyone does everything together, but at the same time, you’re not stuck talking to the same two or three people the whole time. While you’re working, you’re usually just working with the same one or two people, so you spend all your time working, you’re on your own doing that. But when you’re on the trail or back at camp, it’s a nice little group. You can have one conversation with the whole group or you can have two conversations goin’ on at the same time. – R-17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>One of the things that appealed about this group when I found it, what we discovered was that most people on the trip were in their early twenties. That’s nice, ’cause the older people on this trip are great, but it would be weird if it was me and six people in their 40s and 50s. – R-17</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I don’t like to camp in groups. But yeah, group size is pretty good. I’d say four-plus, three or less is kind of a small group, and it could</td>
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### Table 5: Trip Design

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<th>Table 5: Trip Design</th>
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<td>not be as enjoyable just because you don’t get—if you don’t immediately click with somebody, there’s less options. How many do we have on this trip? Six, plus a crew leader. That’s a pretty good count. – R-12</td>
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<td>And also, I do feel kind of held back from just having older retired people in the group, usually. There’s usually some down time on trail, just because a lot of times we’ll have more people than work. I don’t really know how to remedy that. – R-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maybe a slightly smaller group would be good. This [12 volunteers] is a pretty big group. It’s a little unwieldy. – R-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m happy to have the chance to be working alongside people who are more fit than I am, more strong, and even some who are less strong. I don’t mind that. – R-11</td>
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<td>Family &amp; multi-gen. trips For instance, when I first saw this group, I knew there were a couple families, but I wasn’t sure how I was gonna feel about working with teenagers—and they’re great! [laughs] So that’s a good thing, but it could have turned out the opposite, but obviously people who are bringing their children out here have trained them the right way. They’re great. It’s been nice. – R-5</td>
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<td>An ideal experience might be to have several other families that were of similar like-mindedness. But on the flip side, it’s really great that B___ is hanging out with my daughter. They’re great people. And they went on the big hike together. I was totally cool with that. I felt good about the fact that she’s making relationships on her own with great people. Sometimes I think it might be neat to see some other family experience, but it’s good. It’s a nice place. – R-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you really want to keep people comin’ back, it probably would be good to include—I know they have the family specifically multi-generation trips, but I think it is important to try and have families come, because it exposes the younger generation to those kinds of things. But in the same respect, like I mentioned early on, it’s not really volunteerism if your parents make you go. So there’s a delicate balance there. – R-9</td>
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<td>F: This maybe isn’t related to that question, maybe I’m biased</td>
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Table 5: Trip Design

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<th>Reason</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<td>because I feel like our kids are pretty good kids, but it’s kind of neat to have the kids interacting with the adults, too. Sometimes maybe at first everyone’s a little tentative, they’re like, “Uh-oh, kids are here!”</td>
<td>M: Yeah, definitely some people are. “I came on this trip, and I didn’t expect to have to babysit a couple little kids.” We try to be respectful of that with ‘em, too, and not let ‘em dominate, and get ‘em out in the evenings and give ‘em an extra hour or so after we go to bed, trying to be a little respectful that way. They know how to sit around and let people talk, too. – R-25</td>
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<tr>
<td>One, I wanted to bring my son out and do something with him that was giving back. That was probably the key, when I saw this trip versus another type Sierra trip where you would socialize with people and be traveling. This was a work trip. That attracted me. And then I always wanted to go to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. I knew of it and had been around it, but never been there. – R-8</td>
<td>It was specifically an intergenerational trip, and we wanted to move away from that because—I don’t want to sound snooty, but our family has a pretty decent work ethic, and we just felt like we wanted to be in a group that had people who were really serious about volunteering and really doing the work. – R-9</td>
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<td>I never did take my children on a trip like this, but I can see that there are other people on the trip who’ve done that, and it’s great to do that on a family vacation. It’s really been wonderful having families on the trip. I’ve really enjoyed the kids. A: And I’m not sure everybody would think so ahead of time. If they don’t have a family of their own, they might not enjoy being with families. I certainly do – R-11</td>
<td>Affordable Through Googling, they were—price was a big deal. I didn’t want to spent $4,000, Air fare alone is expensive enough. And also, you end up investing in equipment, too. – R-17</td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s affordable. Affordability is a big thing. All they ask is for the $75 deposit, and you get that back. We never take it back, that’s ridiculous. But it’s affordable. If we were to hire packers to help us, it would be—I don’t know how much. I never looked into it. – R-13</td>
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Table 5: Trip Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tr>
<td>They provide a good majority of—therefore it’s free, is a big seller… – R-22</td>
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<td>This was affordable in terms of Sierra Club trips. I think that’s great, that they make the service trips more affordable than, say, just a straight Sierra Club trip. I kind of wish they had—I do wish they had a program, maybe they have a program where they can—where people can apply to be able to come at a reduced rate if they don’t have the monetary resources, because it’s important to have people of all demographics working together and getting to know each other. – R-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether it’s with the Bob Marshall this year or—the one thing is, in this day and age, pretty much with everybody, cost is a consideration. There are other organizations out there that do it, but they charge a lot more. – R-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations for Trip Providers

As illustrated by the section above, volunteers do have preferences as to what constitutes good service-trip experiences. In addition to those points, this section will summarize the set of applied recommendations for EEV provider organizations and others who manage environmental volunteers. Recommendations have been grouped within “marketing and recruiting” or “management and operating practices” though some crossover of applications may exist.

Marketing and recruiting

*Appeal to the prevailing set of motives and perceived benefits.*

A delicate balance is required when promoting altruistic environmental perceived benefits of service-trips alongside egoistic personal gains of participation.
Certainly, the motives to participate in EEV are not solely tied to either altruism or egoism but instead occur along a continuum as many volunteer motives studies have concluded (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). There may also be a cultural tendency within the realm of volunteerism to subdue or deny the presence of egoistic motives based out of a perception that true volunteering should be purely selfless. However, the results of this study and many others suggest a reality in which people volunteer to help themselves and other entities alike. The risk of ignoring this finding, choosing to appeal mainly to altruistic motives in marketing, is a failure to engage a large number of potential volunteers.

Marketing campaigns must find a way to tell the compelling narratives of service-trips for the experience that participants actually see them as: a low-cost facilitated backcountry trip with both recreation and service aspects. Volunteers find the trips highly rewarding, fun, and enjoyable. They gain valuable skills and sought-after knowledge. Enduring friendships are formed and re-formed year after year. Marketing materials should promote images and narratives of these experiences. A fully representative depiction of the service-trip experience, not just a portion, will entice more people to participate in this unique format of environmental volunteerism.

*Enlist volunteers in informal recruitment and capacity building efforts.*

Many respondents noted that trusting an unknown organization with a week of one’s time was a significant barrier they overcame in initiating participation. These respondents also said the key factor in winning their trust was the referral from a trusted peer. Respondents who had participated in multiple trips were eager to help the organization grow and fulfill its mission. Provider organizations should call on this set of highly satisfied volunteers to identify people in their social
networks who may be interested in trying a service-trip. Nothing said by the organization will be as powerful as testimony from alumni who are passionate about the experience. This process could be entirely informal. Alums could be asked at the end of their service-trip or through other communication channels to explain what the experience is like to at least one person in their network during the next six months. More formally, organizations could supply alums with specific marketing materials and suggestions for local outreach.

_Publish pending trip details as early as possible and update as more information is received._

It may be difficult to receive much of any details from land management agencies early in the calendar year. Winter storms have yet to take their full toll on resources, work assessments need to be made, and budgets are still being finalized. However, the off-season is a prime time to capitalize on the cabin fever that many outdoor recreationists experience. Some veteran volunteer respondents told of how they mark their calendars for the date when the provider organization releases the yearly trip schedule. Publishing whatever details may be available for the coming field season transmits excitement and anticipation for the service-trip adventures that lie ahead. The segment of the population that participates in EEV trips are likely involved in a number of other activities and commitments throughout the year. At least getting some dates blocked out on their calendar early in the year may help solidify their commitment.

At the same time, risk management practices must be undertaken to avoid the hasty release of pending trip details that are still unknown, especially concerning physical difficulty requirements. The danger here is having a respondent sign up for a trip that is beyond their physical limits and increasing the potential for injury during the trip. In these situations, it may be best to err on the
side of announcing pending trips as more demanding than they likely will be, and then reducing the difficulty level once more information has been acquired. It is critical that trip descriptions give a breakdown of the topography and the physical demands required by both the hike into basecamp and the daily tasks. Any changes to the trip itinerary at any point prior to the start date need to be immediately communicated to volunteers.

Consider families within the volunteer-base.

The potential gains of including families within the base of potential volunteers could be tremendous. This captures a segment of the population that are physically strong and capable and may not immediately think of service-trips as a vacation option. Organizations whose mission statements include developing the next generation of environmental stewards could make advances towards this goal by engaging families with adolescent and teenage children. Additionally, bringing in families could help resolve so-called “aging out” issues provider organizations may be facing. Just as many other volunteers pointed out, service-trips are an excellent opportunity to safely access the backcountry with inexpensive support. Service-trips could very readily be positioned in the marketplace as an appealing family vacation.

Results of this study indicate that blending families in with regular service-trips rather than designated “family” service-trips may be preferable. Respondents who had previously attended a “multigenerational” trip felt disappointed by the lack of rigor in the project expectations. Indeed, certain dynamics will need to be considered such as age requirements, task restrictions, and other liability considerations. Though there may be some challenges in opening up service-trips to families, ignoring this segment of the market seems counterproductive.
Maintain a visible online presence.

Potential volunteers who are interested in service trips will turn to the Internet to research opportunities. Having a strong online presence will be critical for allowing these potential volunteers to find the organization in their research process. Provider organizations should optimize their websites to appear prominently in search engine rankings for key search terms such as: “volunteer vacation,” “voluntourism,” “environmental service trips” and others that may be more specific to the particular offerings or location. A professionally designed website with accurate and up to date content will be the most successful in conveying legitimacy when potential volunteers do find the organization’s website.

Respondents also saw websites as the organization’s communication hub. The more relevant and current the content, the more potential volunteers will likely be satisfied and place their trust in the organization. Effective use of social media tools may also help keep volunteers engaged during the off-season by keeping them abreast of the latest organization news.

Consider pairing additional education and trainings with service-trips.

Education, career, and skill building were significant motives of participation held by volunteers. There may be opportunities to add value to the experience by designing trips to include structured trainings and education. Some examples of potential offerings include: leadership development, first aid, wilderness survival, natural history, and field-based science courses.

Engage the tourism industry.

As seen through respondents in this study, there may be opportunities to capture volunteers who are looking to combine service work with other vacation objectives. Both Idaho and Montana offer an array of established and world-
renowned natural tourist attractions. A segment of this tourist market may be ideal candidates for participating in a service-trip. Provider organizations could engage with representatives from local and regional tourism bureaus to explore the potentials of service-trips as a tourist attraction.

**Management and operating practices**

*Leaders are seen as crucial to a successful experience.*

A good leader was characterized as a dynamic and talented individual with the ability to foster a fun and safe experience for all trip participants. Respondents want leaders who carry themselves with professionalism, competency, and are able to easily take control of situations with relative ease and without being condescending or bossy. Leaders must remain mindful that volunteers may not immediately have the strength and skills required of certain tasks. Respondents stated that these situations must be met with more patience, not frustration.

*Good provider organizations promote a culture of safety and demonstrate a concern for the volunteers’ health.*

Since many respondents see a perceived benefit in service-trips as safer than other options for accessing the wilderness, it is imperative that organizations work to provide an overall safe experience. Participants trust the provider organization to make important judgment calls in many aspects related to the trip, not least of which is safety. Responses reflected an appreciation for instances where a conscious effort had been applied towards safety and group welfare.

*A coordinated and well-organized experience is critical.*

This included effective communication practices in advance of the trip with the dissemination of timely and accurate information. Respondents emphasized the critical role that trip descriptions have on their willingness to commit to
participating. Detailed and advance posting of trip descriptions on project websites may positively influence recruitment, as trust in the organization is likely to increase. When trip itineraries change, those changes should be swiftly communicated to all effected parties including volunteers and staff.

Recruitment and capacity building efforts were of concern to respondents who conveyed the desire to see the provider organizations flourish in their mission.

A few respondents saw partnerships with parallel organizations to be a good strategy. Several respondents thought that “targeted,” or recruitment done by volunteers within their network, would help to overcome trust barriers for first-time participants. Several respondents thought that more people would be keen to participate in the service-trip experience if they only understood what it actually entailed. Some respondents saw web-based marketing to be an important consideration to recruitment as they themselves had found EEV service-trips through Google searches. A few respondents thought that provider organizations should be working to keep alums engaged throughout the off-season with occasional correspondence and even a personal contact if possible.

Volunteering in general must be personally interesting, meaningful, or considered worthwhile.

As noted previously, there are a multitude of motives that people seek to fulfill through volunteering. Generally though, respondents indicated the importance of working on projects that seem legitimately necessary with real results.

Small gestures of recognition can go a long way.

Most respondents did not emphasize feeling a need for verbal recognition though when it was received, a great deal of appreciation was expressed. More to
that, a small affirmation by a representative from the land management agency, regardless of rank, was found to hold even more gravity among respondents.

*The most desirable work projects offer variation in tasks, can be swiftly accomplished, and have highly visible results.*

A few older respondents called to a need for task offerings on service-trips that meet various physical abilities. Most respondents expressed a preference for tasks they consider engaging and not tedious. Tedious tasks shared qualities of repetition, have few observable results, and are generally mundane. A frequently mentioned tedious task was invasive plant removal.

*Most respondents saw a range of 5 – 7 days as the most appropriate amount of time for a service-trip.*

This was believed sufficient time for accomplishing work and receiving a wilderness experience, but still meeting scheduling constraints. Scheduling time to volunteer was considered to be challenging across all respondent demographics. Some respondents indicated that even shorter trips, 3 or 4 days, might work better to meet people’s scheduling constraints.

*The ideal group size was in the range of 6 – 8 participants and had a blend of personalities.*

A small contingency of younger volunteers desired trips that were composed exclusively of younger-aged volunteers. It was found that families might actually prefer to participate in regular service trips as opposed to designated family trips for a more authentic service experience. Likewise, other trip participants expressed enjoyment for having families as part of the social dynamic.

*Be ready to engage the subset of highly committed volunteers.*

Familiarity and loyalty were found to be major drivers of volunteer retention. If volunteers can get past the initial trust barriers and then have a positive
first experience, results suggest there is a good chance they will return to the same organization should they decide to do another service-trip. Some volunteers with high levels of organizational loyalty may be looking for opportunities to contribute their time and skills to the organization beyond service-trips. Keeping a list of potential tasks at the ready, or even posted on the website, may be an effective strategy to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome for the volunteer and the organization.

Recognize volunteers in meaningful ways.

Affirming the contributions of volunteers on a consistent basis through verbal and written communication has important implications for boosting retention and general morale. Honoring a particularly dedicated volunteer with a “Volunteer of the Year” award or similar was found to carry weight among volunteers in this study. Respondents also appreciated organization staff expressing sincere recognition for a job well done during the service-trip. However, being recognized by the land management agency where project was taking place was highly regarded by respondents. Whenever possible, have a uniformed employee from the land management agency visit the group in the field to show interest and express appreciation for the volunteers’ contribution. Beyond gestures of gratitude, share with volunteers the metrics and reports of the work accomplished during the service-trip at the close of the trip. The organization website, or better still, social media channels, would be a prime outlets for showcasing before and after images and short reports from recently completed service-trips.

Solicit and incorporate volunteers’ feedback
Service-trip participants often have opinions on aspects of their experience that may be valuable for improving operations and policies. New and first-time volunteers may have useful critiques concerning recruitment and capacity building practices. Veteran volunteers who have extensive history with the organization may be able to offer insight about trends they have observed throughout the course of their involvement. Organizations could benefit by requesting written feedback from volunteers at the end of their service-trip, provided there are available resources to compile and analyze their remarks. Another option would be creating an online feedback survey and then emailing a volunteer a link to the survey shortly following their trip. Based on the manner of response from participants in this study, questions targeting specific aspects of the trip and the organization will likely yield higher quality feedback than from generalized prompts.

*Build and maintain collaborative partnerships*

This study found it beneficial for service-trip provider organizations operating at various scales that share similar missions to partner in trip offerings. The study sample, which included participants from two collaborative trips, demonstrated the advantages of such arrangements. A representative from the Sierra Club’s National Outings program underscored the benefits to these partnerships saying, “each organization brings different things to the table and [we] don’t see any downsides to cross-collaboration.”\(^\text{13}\) He explained that the Sierra Club has long valued partnering with local groups and believes that “there’s no replacement for that local knowledge.” On the other end of the spectrum, a program coordinator with one of the local organizations was also in support of

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\(^{13}\) From an interview on 4/23/2014 with Jason Halal, Marketing Manager for National Outings, Sierra Club.
partnerships of this kind.\textsuperscript{14} This program coordinator addressed benefits gained by his organization such as recruitment and exposure to audiences outside of the local region.

Some operational considerations may need to be resolved in advance of the actual rollout of trips to better the chances of meeting needs for all stakeholders. One consideration concerns leadership arrangements in cases where both organizations supply a leader. A predetermined hierarchy or division of leadership duties agreed upon by the organizations and the trip leaders should help mitigate potential conflicts that may otherwise arise during the trip. Distributing fees paid by volunteers for participation costs may also need to be decided upon in advance.

\textsuperscript{14} From a conversation on 1/31/2014 with Eric Melson, Program Coordinator for The Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study and the environmental volunteerism discourse

The dimensions of episodic environmental volunteer service-trips as determined through this study existed largely in accordance with other formats of environmental volunteerism. Both the motives for participation and the drivers of retention for EEV frequently coincided with the findings from other environmental volunteerism studies conducted in a variety of settings and formats. This research offers a confirmation that many conclusions and recommendations from other environmental volunteerism studies could likely apply to the EEV format.

Resemblances aside, there were a handful of areas where results deviated from the prevailing set of extant conclusions on environmental volunteerism inclusively. This study found egoistic participation motives slightly more significant than altruistic motives. Only a few other environmental volunteerism studies (Asah & Blahna, 2012; Ryan, Kaplan, & Grese, 2001) arrived at a similar conclusion. The use of qualitative methods is a likely explanation for arriving at this finding. Respondents were largely free to emphasize aspects of their experience for which they considered to be most important. Consequently, more respondents chose to emphasize the personally gratifying and enticing qualities of service-trips over the benefits given to the resource or collective community.

The other main area of divergence from the dominant set of conclusions concerned place attachment. While other studies found place attachment to be a participation motive (Lukacs & Ardin, 2014; Walker & Chapman, 2003) and a driver of volunteer retention (Caissie & Halpenny, 2003; Hunter, 2010), this study
found that volunteers prefer to work at new sites on every trip. The episodic aspect of the format itself, along with the motive many volunteers have to see and experience different places may explain this occurrence. Rather than forming bonds with one particular area from repeated participation as is often the case with single-day and urban environmental volunteers, these volunteers were more interested in working a new location with each service-trip.

Beyond divergent conclusions from extant studies, the void in the literature on the EEV format leaves little from which to base fully comprehensive comparisons. Particularly, the blending of domestic travel and tourism attributes with environmental service work adds an almost entirely new dimension to the discourse. The wilderness setting, the multi-day duration, and the social intimacy are additional contextual dimensions absent from other studies related to this topic. In turn, a specific set of motives, perceived benefits, and preferences surfaced that are otherwise nonexistent in single-day environmental volunteerism.

**General concepts of volunteerism**

Overall results of this study adhere closely to Van Til’s (1988) five essential characteristics of the volunteering phenomenon. For the first essential characteristic, volunteers sampled were motivated to “satisfy both personal and social goals.” The numerous motives found on both personal development and the desire to improve the environment offer evidence to this first characteristic. Second, many volunteers could be seen befitting the behavioral tendency to carefully consider alternatives before committing to a service-project. Volunteers’ advance vetting of leaders and careful selection of trips that best fit their schedules are examples of this finding aligning with Van Till’s second essential characteristic. Third, results demonstrated that the realm of voluntary action is one of complexity, whereby different
organizational tasks appeal to different motives. The various motives and perceived benefits of the EEV format identified are representative of this characteristic. Fourth, a concern for others was seen in respondents’ stewardship motives and desire to help enable access to the backcountry for other people. Fifth, respondents’ motivation to volunteer was influenced by broader social realities. Stewardship, continued preservation of wilderness areas, and civic engagement are a few examples offering support that EEV’s motives align with this fifth characteristic.

Respondents indicated simultaneously having a wide range of motives for participation and usually did not specify which was most important. This occurrence is consistent with the conclusions from Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991) that no single motive can be isolated and declared the most significant. These authors and this study alike found that volunteer motives overlap and that rarely are volunteers singly motivated. Clary et al. (1996) further support this conclusion that volunteers hold multiple motives for volunteering.

“New” styles of volunteerism

With concern to new styles of volunteerism, namely reflexive and episodic volunteering, this study upholds many of the trends identified within the literature of the past ten years. In accordance with Macduff (2004), study respondents from various age-groups and service-trip provider affiliations stated a preference for volunteering in defined and occasional intervals as opposed to persistent and routine volunteer commitments. Additionally consistent with the episodic volunteerism characteristics, reflexive and egoistic motives were more frequently identified by respondents. This further supports the claim by Macduff (2004) and others (Bryen & Madden, 2006; Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Hustinx & Lammertyn,
within the discourse that episodic styles of volunteering continue to grow in popularity amidst the conditions of postmodern industrialized societies.

The results of this study are in agreement with Cnaan and Handy (2005) who see manifestations of volunteerism occurring along a continuum. On one end of the spectrum sits the “one-time” or “ad-hoc” volunteer (p. 30) that could be considered a “true” episodic volunteer. In the middle are those who volunteer a few times a year, routinely yet still infrequently. On the other end of the continuum is daily or weekly volunteer participation that most likely involves committing to a standing schedule. A few of the volunteers interviewed here are examples of “true” episodic volunteers. They align closely with reflexive characteristics identified by Macduff (2004) of being predominately self-interested, reluctant to commit, and unlikely to form a lasting relationship with the organization. However, the majority of this study’s respondents were situated in the middle of the continuum. Representative of Cnaan and Handy’s (2005) “repeat” episodic volunteers, these volunteers may still be categorized as episodic volunteers based on their stated preference for service-trips and other volunteer engagements that are short-term with identifiable start and end times. Similarly, they also fall within Macduff’s (2005) sub-category of “occasional” episodic volunteers who volunteer for one particular project on roughly an annual or semi-annual schedule (51).

While study respondents likely participate in only one or two service-trips annually, they expressed moderate to strong interest in community membership within the provider organization. Loyalty and interpersonal relationship building were found to increase as volunteers repeated service-trips with the same provider organization. This interest in forming relationships with the organization from an advocacy standpoint as well as with staff and other volunteers offers a significant
departure from the notion that episodic volunteers are predominately driven by individualistic motives. In further support to this claim, many volunteers expressed an interest in contributing to collective ideals such as the NWPS and the maintenance of federal recreation lands for the benefit of the general public. The results of this study suggest that some manifestations of episodic volunteering do in fact contain elements of collectivism and lasting affiliation.

Based on this finding, “new volunteerism” as surmised by Hustinx, Cnaan, and Handy (2010, 426) as inclusive of reflexive and episodic volunteering and “weaker organizational attachments,” should be re-evaluated. Instead of a clearly delineated shift away from the “traditional” or “collective” towards the “modern” or “individualized” volunteering styles, the EEVs in this study uphold aspects of both traditional and modern styles of volunteering. They offer evidence that episodic volunteers can be at once predominately motivated by “modern” reflexive characteristics while still interested in forming the traditional bonds and community memberships within and surrounding the organization. These “traditional” style bonds and the satisfaction derived from meeting “individualized” needs appear to be the main driver of repeated participation among these episodic environmental volunteers.

Demographics and new styles of volunteerism

Results did not reveal consistent correlation between age and actual levels of volunteering; yet, there may be some indication that respondents of all ages prefer episodic styles to traditional styles of volunteering. Younger respondents often stated a preference for episodic styles of volunteering as it offered greater flexibility in participation commitment. This finding is consistent with Handy et al. (2010), whose volunteerism study on an international sample of college students concluded
that episodic volunteerism was preferable over traditional volunteering formats by this particular demographic. These authors’ finding may serve to explain why this demographic of respondents was also more likely to perceive of themselves as being less available to volunteer.

It also cannot be said that older respondents necessarily prefer traditional styles of volunteering or for that matter, even volunteer with greater frequency than other segments of the respondent sample. In fact, some retired respondents in this study explicitly stated a preference to avoid standing volunteer commitments that resemble a job. While some retired respondents volunteered extensively with multiple organizations, there were others who did not volunteer beyond environmental service-trips. Wilson’s (2012) literature review of volunteerism research found that episodic volunteering formats are now preferred in the U.S. This conclusion is likely based on the same conditions that contributed to the results of this study, that volunteers are looking to avoid long-term commitments and satisfy personal interests.

Regardless of age, the most apparent trend regarding volunteering frequency is that respondents who participated in traditional styles of volunteering were more likely to also be participants in episodic volunteering. Those who stated participating mainly in episodic volunteer engagements were less likely to also participate in traditional volunteer engagements. This finding is directly consistent with that of Cnaan and Handy (2005) who found that participant crossover between the two volunteer styles is unidirectional. This unidirectional pattern of traditional volunteers also engaging in episodic volunteering is likely due to the higher level of civic participation required of traditional-style volunteering. Adding in a few episodic volunteer engagements throughout the year may seem relatively
insignificant for someone who is already volunteering on a routine basis. The inverse requires taking on commitments beyond a few isolated instances.

A small subset of respondents identified civic duty for volunteering to fulfill public needs that remain unmet by the state. This subset also viewed environmental volunteering as a manifestation of their politics. Also, some respondents were motivated towards activist behaviors after ongoing EEV participation. These select respondents explained that the field-based efforts toward environmental protection had a spillover effect into political action. Volunteers in this subset are certainly at the high-end of the civic engagement spectrum and it would be unlikely for the majority of volunteers to assume activist behaviors. Hustinx and Meijs, (2011) note that empirical evidence has shown people prefer to “de-politicize” volunteer work and focus more on aspects of virtuous behavior. Despite this dominant ideal to separate politics from the experience, provider organizations that are politically active should be mindful that this subset exists and consider the possibilities of harnessing their activist energy.

**Motives and Perceived Benefits**

The core set of perceived benefits identified in this study closely resembles those found by Bramston et al. (2011). Developing a sense of belonging, helping the environment, and learning were prominent overlapping findings shared by this study and Bramston’s. Respondents frequently identified motives and perceived benefits within those three categories, though the full range of perceived benefits discovered extended beyond Bramston. The multiple personal development benefits such as health and wellness, biographical construction, and character growth are among the set of additional perceived benefits found in this research. Arguably though, it is the perceived benefits uniquely posited through the EEV
format such as the low-cost facilitated backcountry trip and the immersion within a natural setting that most distinguish this research from other studies on environmental volunteering.

This study’s findings on EEVs’ motives and perceived benefits support Silverberg et al.’s (2001) finding that satisfaction is a function of both the setting and the psychological effects derived from volunteering. However, the motives most commonly emphasized by respondents for participation were not actually found to be helping the environment as Bruyere and Rappe (2007) found in their motives survey of natural resource volunteers. Results further diverged from Bruyere and Rappe in that improving the specific areas where volunteers themselves recreate was not a significant motive of participation. An explanation for this divergence would point to the reflexive trends in volunteerism and this format of volunteering as inherently episodic. Participants stated they prefer to volunteer at a new project area for each service-trip.

Another contrasting finding of this study and that of Jackson et al. (2003) pertained to environmental volunteers expressing a desire to have a greater influence upon the provider organization’s operations. The respondents in this study did not convey sharing this same interest. The episodic participation is the most likely explanation for this finding. Volunteers do want to make a meaningful contribution but do so in a concentrated timeframe. An attempt at influencing the greater operations of an organization would require ongoing involvement.

Asah and Blahna’s (2012) conclusion that the most significant motives of urban environmental volunteers were personal and social rather than environmental are consistent with the findings of this study. Ryan et al. (2001) also recognized social motives and personal development as a perceived benefit of
environmental volunteerism. Similar to these results, they too found that social perceived benefits were more prominent among volunteers with higher levels of commitment. Also in agreement with this study, these authors found that “having time for personal reflection” was a perceived benefit of participation. By comparison however, they did not find it to be as significant as did this study. Their reasoning for this low significance was that the volunteer format in their study was described as a fairly uninterrupted social experience, with minimal time available for introspection. The multi-day format of EEV service-trips might explain the higher significance of reflection as a perceived benefit in this study, since volunteers likely have substantially more time to be alone.

**Drivers of Volunteer Retention**

The primary driver of retention found was the efficacy of the provider organization in delivering a high quality experience, both before and during the service-trip. The trip leader and other staff were the most instrumental in determining the success of the experience. Ryan et al. (2001) also found it significant that volunteers considered the project to be “well organized,” with a strong leader, and effective communication practices. In accordance with Ryan et al. (2001) and Garner and Garner (2010), findings do support the conclusion that the influence of social relationships and educational fulfillment are predictors of retention. Respondents also cited trust and familiarity with the organization, which increased over time, as a factor driving retention. This could best be described as organizational loyalty. Within this finding, respondents developed a sense of community and belonging with other volunteers and organization personnel that inspired their return. The presence of long-term organizational loyalty within the sample runs contrary to findings from Hustinx et al. (2010) who suggest that
“diminished long-term” loyalty is characteristic of episodic volunteerism. Additionally divergent from the literature, there was no suggestive evidence to support claims made by Propst et al. (2003) and Trauntvein (2011) that retention is enhanced by meeting volunteers’ expectation to exert influence on the decisions of the provider organization and the public agency.

Four satisfaction drivers and volunteer retention

The four satisfaction drivers that Galindo-Kuhn and Guzle (2001) found, organizational support, participation efficacy, empowerment, and group integration, were directly aligned with respondents’ reasons for being satisfied with their experience and their willingness to return. Having “good” or “positive” experiences on previous trips was an umbrella response provided to inquiries on retention factors. The perception of having made a worthwhile contribution was a central factor to a trip being considered a “good” overall experience. Several respondents spoke to the importance of coming away from the experience with the feeling of having made a truly valuable contribution. In further agreement with Galindo-Kuhn and Guzle, respondents also expressed appreciation for being able to work “independently” on tasks. The other two factors’ importance to respondents of this study, organizational support and group integration, were already highlighted in the previous section on motives and perceived benefits.

Fulfilling volunteers’ motives

Additionally, the retention drivers found by Bryen and Madden (2006) with episodic volunteers emphasized the importance of meeting volunteer needs. While their results differed in suggesting that motives were primarily altruistic and secondarily egoistic, the converse to this study’s results, their finding that
volunteers return based on a perception of having made a worthwhile contribution is consistent with this study’s findings. A few respondents did express a desire to volunteer elsewhere. Their reasons were to seek out a certain type of trip experience that better served egoistic interests such as career development and biographical construction. This offers additional support to Bryen and Madden’s conclusion regarding the meeting of one’s needs as a determinant of retention. With career oriented motives in particular, Garner and Garner (2010) observed a negative relationship to retention, theorizing that these volunteers will move on until their goals have been met. Other research (Clary et al., 1998; Garner & Garner, 2010; Ryan et al. 2001) has come to a similar conclusion on the importance of volunteer motives being fulfilled as a determinant of retention.

**Place and Wilderness Significances**

Respondents on the whole did not assign a great deal of meaning to places and reported minimal place attachment values. In terms of the service-trip selection process, respondents said that scheduling and travel distance to reach the project were more significant than the physical features of a particular project-site. There was no evidence to support the notion that volunteers continue participation with an organization because of an attachment to a particular work-site or project as found by Hunter (2011) and Caissie and Halpenny (2003). In fact, volunteers were found to have an attitude of detachment to any single project-site, instead preferring to see a new place with each service-trip. Even among those volunteers who had volunteered in the same area multiple times, there was not strong indication of enhanced place attachment as found by Ryan et al. (2001).

Respondents in this study were more interested in returning to the social environment, the natural setting, and having the trip coincide with their scheduling
needs than to revisit a certain place. The lack of place attachment found in the sample may be explained by episodic conditions and reflexive trends in volunteering. This cannot yet be conclusively stated and further research is warranted to explore the relationship between place attachment and episodic styles of volunteering.

Respondents who did assign significance to places showed a relationship between the scalar specificity for the locus of recognition with the distance to the respondent’s residence. In other words, the closer the respondent lived to the project area, the greater the specificity of scale in place recognition. Lukacs and Androin’s (2014) finding that issues of scale matter with specific place associations are corroborated by the results of this study. These authors though, did not conclude to the same extent as this study in suggesting the presence of a relationship between the distance of the volunteer’s residence and scalar specificity.

Only a small amount of place dependence was observed within the sample. A few respondents expressed that a particular wilderness area was irreplaceable in degree of personal significance. The common attribute shared by these respondents was a history of numerous past visits to the particular wilderness area. There was mild support to the finding that volunteers are incentivized to give back to an area where they have previously benefited from through recreational pursuits as Bruyere and Rappe (2007) found.

This research found that service-trips can lead to the establishment of place relationships among participants. Mainly among first-time volunteers, the project site and surrounding area took on personal meaning by the conclusion of the trip. Lukacs and Androin’s (2014) results are also supportive of first-time visitors developing relationships with places through intimate experiences.
Respondents expressed more interest in working to benefit the ideal of wilderness and the overall wilderness area system rather than any one particular wilderness area. Payton, Fulton and Henderson’s (2005) conclusion that emotional place attachment, seen as associated meanings, is more significant among volunteers than functional place attachment is consistent with this study’s findings. Volunteers placed more significance on wilderness areas en masse than any one particular wilderness area. Ryan et al. (2001) also found this tendency for volunteers to hold attachments to general areas as opposed to specific sites.

**LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of this study are primarily consequences arising from using qualitative research methods. As explained previously in the Methods section, qualitative methods were selected to capture a variety of dimensions on the episodic environmental volunteerism phenomenon. The goal was to provide a comprehensive depiction of a niche and emerging form of environmental volunteerism. Despite these intentions, the inherent demands for time in the data collection and analysis phases or the research process place limits on the scope of what can be realized.

Sample size is one example of an area that is limited due to the time required to conduct semi-structured interviews. To reach the field areas where potential respondents were located often consumed a full day. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The outcome for these time requirements is a smaller total sample size. Ultimately, this has a limiting effect on what constitutes the full set of social constructionist understandings for the EEV format.
This does not necessarily imply a deficit in the results where validity, reliability, and generalizability are concerned. For those considerations, qualitative research is not reliant upon meeting a certain sample size as is often required by quantitative research studies (Warren & Karner, 2010). Instead, the portrayal of EEV service-trips is confined to what was communicated of it by the 26 interview respondents volunteering with two local and one national provider organizations. Another limitation arose in seeking to answer a question regarding whether dimensions of EEV evolve over time. While the sample did include both first-time and veteran volunteers with noticeable trend differences, it proved difficult to isolate these demographics in such a way as to state concrete conclusions. Furthermore, any meanings expressed by respondents are subjectivist understandings specific to their experience. To really strike at the core of this question, a longitudinal study design where the same sample of volunteers could be tracked from their first service-trip through several seasons of participation should be deployed.

**Future research suggestions**

Mixed methods designs in future studies could be utilized to overcome the limited sample size and further expand on the dimensions found through this study. Adding surveys to expand the sample size and incorporate volunteers from other regions of the country could supplement interviews. Another design idea would be to use ethnography. Researchers could attend a service-trip and make detailed observations regarding how volunteers behave and interact with one another. Combining this method along with interviews might elucidate any
differences between what volunteers perceive of the experience and how they actually behave during the experience.

Another methodological strategy that may best address how constructionist understandings evolve over on-going participation would be a longitudinal study. A set of volunteers could be tracked over an extended period of time to track changes in motives and perceived benefits. This would also present an opportunity to explore why EEVs choose to either leave or remain volunteering with organizations. Relatedly, it would also be interesting to research the effects on volunteers from staff and leader turnover at the provider organization.

Creating a comparison between domestic and international volunteer vacations is another area worthy of investigation. Questions remain to be answered on similarities and differences of the participants themselves and the dimensions of participation in these respective formats. More research is also warranted on volunteers’ motives and perceived benefits to better understand where the EEV format lies on the egoistic-altruistic continuum.

Research focusing on the provider organizations instead of the volunteers is another area that could benefit from investigation. A study that investigates the viability of families as trip participants would be a reasonable starting point. Collaborative arrangements and inter-organization partnerships is another area that could be investigated. Both partnerships between parallel non-profit organizations as well as non-profits and government agencies could serve as research topics. A comparison study could be conducted on the EEV experience between inter-/national and regional/local organizations with particular consideration to participation fees and other potential barriers of participation.
Conclusion

Environmental volunteerism has been trending upward in many developed countries for several decades. Effective use of volunteers to overcome budget deficits and involve constituents has secured a place within the strategic toolkit of land management agencies. Additionally, environmental volunteering has been found to be an immensely fulfilling pastime among those who participate.

More recently, an immersive multi-day format of environmental volunteerism that occurs on an occasional basis has been growing in popularity. Termed ‘episodic environmental volunteerism’ by this exploratory study, this format is a unique amalgamation of the following elements: manual labor, recreation, travel and tourism, social bonding, and personal development. The format has established a particular foothold in remote backcountry settings and larger scaled projects that often require multiple days to access and complete.

Episodic environmental volunteerism in the form of service-trips falls within the broader volunteer vacation or voluntourism models. The prevailing definition of voluntourism within the literature includes an aspect of “traveling outside of one’s country to volunteer in foreign locations” (Hustinx et al., 2010). In finding that travel and tourism within one’s country are significant motives held by episodic environmental volunteers, this study argues for the expansion of the conceptual definition of voluntourism to include domestic volunteer vacations. In so doing, the recruitment practices of volunteers may be repositioned to address motives incorporating service work with domestic travel.

The EEV service-trip format adheres to many conventions within the extant volunteering literature, although some divergent dimensions were identified. This study proposes that egoistic motives and perceived benefits of the experience
surpass altruistic motives for participation. In the case of this study, participants perceive of the experience as a way to safely and affordably access remote wilderness while simultaneously taking steps towards ensuring its preservation. Based on this finding, it is recommended that providers of service-trips appeal not only to altruistic motives in their recruitment campaigns and trip designs, but also to the known egoistic interests of volunteers. Purveyors and benefactors of environmental service-trips looking to build capacity should take notice of these non-traditional and often under-emphasized environmental volunteer motives.

Also noteworthy, relationships formed with other volunteers and organization staff, not necessarily with particular work-projects or places, were the main reason why people continue volunteering with the same organization. Place attachment was insignificant as a determinant of initial commitment or retention.

Respondents expressed their desire to form meaningful and enduring bonds with the provider organization. This finding deviates from the prevailing connotations of episodic volunteerism, where forming bonds and remaining loyal to one organization is considered atypical. From this outcome, the normative definition of episodic volunteerism should be reconsidered to allow for the contingency of volunteers who do prefer occasional volunteer engagements yet desire a lasting connection with the organization’s mission, staff, and overall volunteer community.

These conclusions come at an early point in the proliferation of domestic environmental volunteer vacations. There remains ample opportunity to expand what little is known of this unique and burgeoning model of environmental volunteerism.
REFERENCES


Patterson, M. E., & Williams, D. R. (2002). Collecting and analyzing qualitative data: Hermeneutic principles, methods and case examples.


APPENDIX MATERIALS

APPENDIX A: STUDY EXPLANATION AND PARTICIPANT INVITATION

Project: Dimensions of environmental volunteer participation in domestic volunteer vacations

Dear Conservation Volunteer:

I would like to invite you to participate in a study on volunteering for multi-day conservation service projects. This study is being conducted as a master’s degree thesis project through the University of Montana’s College of Forestry & Conservation. The ultimate goal is to provide the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, and other similar organizations with information to help improve their volunteer program operations and the overall experience extended to volunteers. Hopefully, the results of the study will lead to even greater success in achieving conservation goals through a series of recommendations and better understanding of the conservation volunteer experience.

Your participation in this study will consist of a face-to-face interview, taking place at the project site towards the end of the project week. The interview may take up to an hour and will be tape-recorded. Interview questions will focus on your motivations for volunteering and other aspects regarding your experience as a conservation volunteer.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question at any point during the interview or discontinue your involvement entirely. Your identity will remain anonymous in all written or published reports of the study findings. Any personal information will be kept completely confidential throughout the study.

If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact me at: john.stegmaier@umontana.edu, [phone number], or my supervisor, Dr. Libby Metcalf (elizabeth.metcalf@umontana.edu, [phone number]). Additionally, BMWF volunteers may contact Program Director Rebecca Powell (program@bmwf.org) and SBFC volunteers may contact Program Directors Eric Melson (emelson@selwaybitterroot.org) or Kenzie Carson (kcarson@selwaybitterroot.org) with questions. I very much appreciate your consideration of participating in this study.

Thanks for your time,

John Stegmaier
MS Candidate in Recreation Management
College of Forestry & Conservation
University of Montana
APPENDIX B: SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Dimensions of environmental volunteer participation in domestic volunteer vacations

Investigator(s):

John Stegmaier
MS Candidate
CHB 462
College of Forestry and Conservation
32 Campus Drive
Missoula, MT 59812.
[phone number]

Elizabeth Covelli Metcalf
Assistant Professor
Department of Society and Conservation
College of Forestry and Conservation
32 Campus Drive
Missoula, MT 59812
[phone number]

Special Instructions:
This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to determine the motivating factors and experiential aspects of participation in multi-day environmental volunteer projects. Also, this study will explore volunteer retention influences and the relationship of place meanings to environmental volunteerism.

Procedures:
You will be asked a series of questions about participating in environmental volunteer vacations through a tape-recorded one-on-one interview. You will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire on your personal characteristics such as gender, age, employment status, and distance traveled to the project site.

Risks/Discomforts:
There is no anticipated discomfort for those contributing to this study, so risk to participants is minimal. Some questions may be interpreted as personal and mildly embarrassing. You may be uncomfortable about being recorded during the interview.

Benefits:
You may come away from the interview with a better understanding of your involvement in environmental volunteering. Also, your responses will provide information that can be used to create recommendations for improving the volunteer vacation experience and furthering conservation stewardship goals.

Confidentiality:
Your records will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Your identity will be kept private, known only to Mr. Stegmaier and Dr. Metcalf. If the results of this study are written in a scholarly journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Your signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The audiotape will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The tape will then be erased.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may leave the study at any time, for any reason.

Questions:
If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact: John Stegmaier at [phone number]. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UM Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [phone number].

Statement of Your Consent:
I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

____________________________________________
Printed Name of Subject

____________________________________________
Subject's Signature

Date

Statement of Consent to be Audio Recorded
I consent to being audio recorded. I understand that audio recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and that no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

____________________________________________
Subject's Signature

Date
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
FWA 00000078
Research & Creative Scholarship
University Hall 116
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone 406-243-6672 | Fax 406-243-6330

Date: June 3, 2013

To: John Stegmaier, Society & Conservation
   Elizabeth Metcalf, Society & Conservation

From: Paula Baker, IRB Coordinator
      Dan Corti, IRB Chair

RE: IRB 115-13: "Dimensions of environmental volunteer participation in domestic volunteer vacations"

Your IRB proposal cited above has been approved under the Exempt category of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

☐ (b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Under the Federal exempt category of review, obtaining written consent is not required but is optional. If you do use the written form, please use the stamped copy sent with this approval notice as a master.

University of Montana IRB policy does not require you to file an annual Continuation Report for exempt studies as there is no expiration date on the approval. However, you are required to notify the IRB of the following:

Amendments: Any changes to the originally-approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before being made (unless extremely minor). Requests must be submitted using Form RA-110.

Unanticipated or Adverse Events: You are required to timely notify the IRB if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw from the study or register complaints about the study. Use Form RA-111.

Please contact the IRB office with any questions at (406) 243-6672 or email irb@umontana.edu.
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Date:
Project:

Interviewee: ________________________

Age: _________

Gender: _________

Ethnicity/race: _____________________

Primary occupation: ___________________________

Other volunteer affiliations:

_______________________________________________________________

Distance traveled to reach project site: Miles _________ Time _________
### APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) Can you tell me about what a typical day has been like?

2) Can you describe the experience of participating in a volunteer workweek such as this one?

3) What motivates you to participate in volunteer workweeks such as this one with [agency name]?

4) (For veteran vols only) What factors contributed to your decision to continue volunteering with [agency name] or other similar styled volunteer projects over multiple seasons?

5) Does this particular project site hold any significance to you over another project site or volunteer opportunity? Why or why not?

6) What does this [Name] Wilderness Area mean to you?

7) How often do you volunteer?
   a) What circumstances or criteria do you seek for volunteer engagements?

8) Do you have a preference for specific tasks in terms of volunteering?
   a) What about specific times or scheduling?

9) What would be your ideal volunteering experience and how would this fit around your current lifestyle?

10) What were your expectations for your experience heading into this week?
    a) To what extent were your expectations met?

11) What do you gain from your work as a volunteer in this setting?

12) How do you think this experience influenced you as a person?

13) How has it been working with [organization name]?
    a) Have your needs and expectations been met?
    b) Any areas for improvement?
14) How likely would you say the chance of your returning for another volunteer workweek with [agency name] in the future?
   a) What about a similar conservation workweek with another agency in a different location?

15) Is there anything else you want to tell me about, either related to this experience of volunteering in general?