

## **BLM'S 2014 "MAKING A DIFFERENCE" NATIONAL VOLUNTEER AWARD WINNERS**

### **VOLUNTEER WINNERS: OUTSTANDING YOUTH**

**MARK KREIDER, ANCHORAGE DISTRICT OFFICE, AK:** Newly graduated from a rural Kansas high school, Mark Kreider came to the Anchorage District Office in the summer of 2013 as a one-year volunteer through the Mennonite Service Adventure Program. Since then, Mark has been volunteering 40 hours a week as a maintenance technician on the BLM's Campbell Tract, 730 acres of public lands in the heart of Anchorage. Mark mended doors and cabinets at the Campbell Creek Science Center and performed many other maintenance tasks necessary for the safe functioning of the educational facility. He repaired mowers and landscaping equipment; maintained snowmachines and groomers; put chains on tractors and the road grader for winter use; and assisted in rebuilding, setting up, and testing the sanding unit for winter road maintenance. Mark was also a great help in preparing the Campbell Tract for the annual Iditarod Ceremonial Start, a popular event that draws thousands of spectators for the opening leg of the Iditarod, the world's longest sled dog race. Mark plowed snow to create parking for spectators and sled dog vehicles, helped develop traffic flow and safety plans, crafted hundreds of souvenir wood plaques for volunteers and youth education programs, and devoted a Saturday to working the actual event. Mark has demonstrated a wide range of skills, an admirable work ethic, and a sense of responsibility far beyond his years. He always finds ways to effectively pitch in on any task or a project, working in a polite and diplomatic manner regardless of the environment, job, or unique personalities he encounters. No doubt this remarkable young man will continue to impress as he works toward completion of his BLM volunteer service in July 2014.

**JUPITER ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND FIELD STUDIES ACADEMY (JERFSA), JUPITER INLET OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA, FL:** Students from Jupiter High School's Environmental Research and Field Studies Academy (JERFSA) have contributed more than 10,000 hours of volunteer service over the past 10 years at the BLM's Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse Outstanding Natural Area (ONA). By providing special training in ecology, earth sciences, marine biology, and water resources, the academy equips high school students with the knowledge for environmental leadership and with academic and field skills that will open doors to environmental careers. Since 2004, JERFSA students have assisted in massive exotic plant removals, general tract clean-ups, the reintroduction of native plant species, an ongoing tidal wetlands construction project, tortoise burrow monitoring, and planting of over 10,000 mangrove seedlings. Recently, the ONA was designated as a formal outdoor classroom for the academy. Students have since established long-term monitoring plots in prescribed burn areas and in the new wetlands, where they use custom-designed nets to sample fish species that use the area. Many restoration projects have been completed and BLM management goals reached since these high school students began to volunteer at Jupiter Inlet; without them, the ONA would not be the place it is today. The academy is making a difference in the lives of local high school students and they, in turn, are making a difference in their community.

## **VOLUNTEER WINNERS: OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT**

**STAN SHAW, YUMA FIELD OFFICE, AZ:** Stan Shaw and his wife, Judy, began volunteering with the BLM Yuma Field Office (YFO) in 2007, first as seasonal volunteers, then as year-round participants. Stan soon identified components of the field office Recreation Program that he believed could benefit from targeted attention. He therefore offered to take on additional responsibilities, with special emphasis on office-wide public and employee safety and enhanced customer service. Stan's efforts began to pay immediate and tangible dividends for public land visitors, fellow volunteers, the YFO Recreation Program, and other field office programs. Stan helped to correct several safety, health, and environmental deficiencies at the La Posa Long-Term Visitor Area (LTVA), and created an improved "look" for LTVA contact stations. Stan also improved the operation of many of the LTVA campground infrastructure components and facilities, improving the quality and safety of the public's recreational experiences while maximizing all available resources. During the past year, Stan has also worked with BLM park rangers and law enforcement personnel to clear numerous abandoned vehicles and several tons of litter from public lands. He helped BLM Colorado River District wildland fire/prevention staff construct public advisory "Smokey Bear" signs, which provide information on current wildland fire hazard conditions. Another of Stan's many notable achievements was his implementation of "green energy" choices in everything from appliance replacements to light bulb purchases for contact stations. The volunteer service Stan provides plays a critical role in the day-to-day management, cost suppression, and operation of one of the BLM's largest recreation fee programs; it is estimated that his work has saved the YFO more than \$65,000 to date. Stan's efforts to provide quality public land experiences have made YFO recreation sites prime vacation destinations.

**JACK HAILMAN, JUPITER INLET OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA, FL:** Dr. Jack Hailman is Professor Emeritus of Zoology at the University of Wisconsin, and a Research Associate at Florida's Archbold Biological Station. For the past 6 years, Dr. Hailman and his wife, Liz, have conducted formal monthly surveys at Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse ONA, starting primarily with the documentation of bird use at the site. Their work soon extended to other vertebrates, invertebrates, flowering and non-flowering plants, and lichens, expanding the ONA's impressive species count to 224. Over the years, Dr. Hailman has coordinated monthly species inventories with other subject-matter experts and partners, starting in the pre-dawn hours and working through all types of weather, including hurricanes. In addition to his field work, Dr. Hailman has spent many hours organizing notes, performing difficult identifications, taking and cataloging photos, and organizing and maintaining the site's extensive species list. The photo data base is expected to serve as a readily downloadable reference for ONA visitors. Dr. Hailman's collaboration with experts across Florida has resulted in an increased understanding of and appreciation for this remnant tract of imperiled Florida scrub, tropical hardwood hammock, and tidal mangrove swamp. The data he has generated will provide a basis for the future management of the site, and will be invaluable in the expansion of environmental education and public outreach efforts at the ONA. The value of Dr. Hailman's work is estimated at \$25,000 for 2013 alone, for a total of \$150,000 over the past six years. It is noteworthy that not once in that term of BLM service has Dr. Hailman requested or accepted reimbursement for any expenses incurred during his volunteer work.

## **VOLUNTEER WINNERS: LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT**

**VERNA PRATT, CAMPBELL CREEK SCIENCE CENTER, AK:** There is no stronger advocate for Alaska native plants on the BLM's Campbell Tract than volunteer Verna Pratt. Situated in Anchorage, the Campbell Tract's 730 acres are crisscrossed by some of the most heavily used recreation trails in the state. For more than 20 years, Verna—the author of several field guides to Alaska's native plants and an expert on Alaska's wildflowers—has helped to identify and inventory both native and non-native species on the tract. She has advised BLM staff on which native species to use for revegetation projects, mentored volunteers in plant-related service projects, and helped educate countless people about the importance of native plants. In 1996, after construction of the Science Center was complete, the building stood surrounded by construction-grade soil and fields of weeds, with no funding available to make landscaping improvements. Over the years, to the delight of the 40,000 visitors who come to the Science Center annually, Verna helped turn that construction site into a showcase for Alaska's native wildflowers. She weeds the Science Center's gardens every other week during summer, spruces them up each June on National Trails Day, and puts them to rest each September on National Public Lands Day. Year after year, she has put together lists of plants needed for the Center and helped BLM staff obtain native plant seedlings from a local wildflower garden club. She has also donated countless plants grown in her own greenhouse and gardens. Verna continues to volunteer to this day, surrounded by the fruits of her labor: healthy woods, stable creek banks, and the riot of colorful native flowers that surrounds the Center each year.

**(POSTHUMOUS) MARK HESSE, MONTICELLO FIELD OFFICE, UT:** Mark Hesse was a visionary and leader in the stewardship of public lands. In the decades he devoted to public lands conservation, he was an outspoken proponent of the need to both protect and enjoy the nation's magnificent natural landscapes. In 1989, Mark catalyzed a group of friends and fellow climbers and began building trails and restoring impacted areas in Indian Creek Canyon, an internationally renowned climbing mecca managed by the BLM's Monticello Field Office. Over the next decade, Mark and his grassroots organization, which eventually became the Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI), protected acres of sensitive terrain by closing roads leading into side canyons, established a sustainable trail and camping infrastructure, and raised the awareness of climbers and land owners in the area. Mark and RMFI joined forces with the Monticello Field Office as official partners in 1996. Since its inception, RMFI has engaged 16,000 volunteers, who have contributed 200,000 hours to BLM public land stewardship projects. These efforts have provided a value of over \$4 million in on-the-ground restoration efforts. Regrettably, Mark passed away on January 27, 2014, while doing what he was so passionate about: climbing. He leaves a remarkable legacy of service to both the climbing community and the public lands.

**FLOYD AND OPAL JENSEN, SALEM DISTRICT OFFICE, OR:** The Jensens, who live in Merced, California, during the off-season, have volunteered at BLM-Oregon's Fishermen's Bend Recreation Site for the past 11 years, serving as camp hosts under three successive site managers. They prepare and maintain the area, greet visitors with a warm welcome, and coordinate camper check-in and check-out. They sell and deliver firewood, clean restrooms, collect litter, and keep roadways clear of debris. Floyd and Opal are so good at what they do that they also train new volunteer camp hosts for the BLM. Over the course of their 11 seasons as BLM volunteers,

Floyd and Opal have contributed approximately 17,050 hours of volunteer services valued at more than \$370,000. And this great team is still going: to the relief of Salem District staff and Fisherman's Bend recreationists alike, Floyd and Opal have decided not to "retire" from their BLM volunteer duties as they had announced last year. Their positive approach, professionalism, friendly nature, and "can do" attitude have enhanced visitor experiences and elevated the BLM in the eyes of the local community. As if all that weren't enough, each year the Jensens make the 1,300-mile round-trip from Merced to Fisherman's Bend and back entirely at their own expense.

**FRIENDS OF POMPEYS PILLAR, POMPEYS PILLAR NATIONAL MONUMENT, MT:** Located near the Yellowstone River, Pompeys Pillar is a sandstone butte where Captain William Clark carved his name and the date on which the Lewis and Clark expedition party stopped there in 1806. This inscription is the only remaining physical evidence of the expedition on its actual route. When the BLM acquired Pompeys Pillar and other nearby acreage in 1991, the members of the non-profit Pompeys Pillar Historical Association were among the first volunteers to step up. For more than 20 years, this organization, now known as the Friends of Pompeys Pillar, has provided hundreds of volunteers who have contributed thousands of hours of service each year to Pompeys Pillar, which was designated a BLM national monument in 2001. Volunteers have supported interpretive and educational programs, founded youth shadowing programs, produced educational and interpretive publications, assisted in restoration and rehabilitation efforts, supported emergency responses (including evacuation of historical resources during floods), run the gift store, served as visitor center greeters and docents, conducted special events, and been integral in site maintenance and landscaping. In 2013 alone, more than 40 regular volunteers put in over 4,000 hours of service at the monument. These volunteers made contact with almost 30,000 visitors, more than 2,000 of whom were students. From attaining status as a public land site through becoming a premier destination within the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, Pompeys Pillar National Monument owes much of its success to the continued dedication and support of its special "Friends."

### **EMPLOYEE WINNER**

**ROB SWEETEN, UTAH STATE OFFICE:** Since 2009, Rob Sweeten, BLM-Utah's Historic Trail Program Lead, has mentored six students, most of whom began as BLM volunteers. In that capacity, the students worked exclusively with Rob on visual inventory work for several BLM-Utah field offices as well as Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Under Rob's supervision, the young volunteers entered field data into the national BLM Geographic Information System database, which included digitizing map data and creating visibility analyses. As a result of Rob's engaging student volunteers rather than paying a contractor, he enabled the BLM to realize a savings of \$100,000 on one project alone. Rob ultimately worked to convert these students to temporary-employment status within the BLM or to secure them conservation corps internships with the American Conservation Experience youth organization. Rob's reputation for providing excellent training is widely recognized in the private sector as well as within the agency. In fact, two of his students were offered full-time positions with private industry even before their internships were completed. Rob has made it a personal goal to provide positive experiences to his student volunteers because he himself began his career as a BLM intern while attending Utah State University (USU). Rob feels a personal responsibility to

lend a hand to students in an effort to repay the BLM for the mentorship that former BLM employees provided him. He spends many hours strengthening BLM-Utah's partnership with USU by speaking to classes and meeting with professors to explain the BLM's mission and promote available career paths. Rob embodies the best qualities of a volunteer supervisor, displaying excellence in mentoring, coaching, and leadership. He truly continues to make a difference, for both the BLM and the students who have blossomed under his guidance.