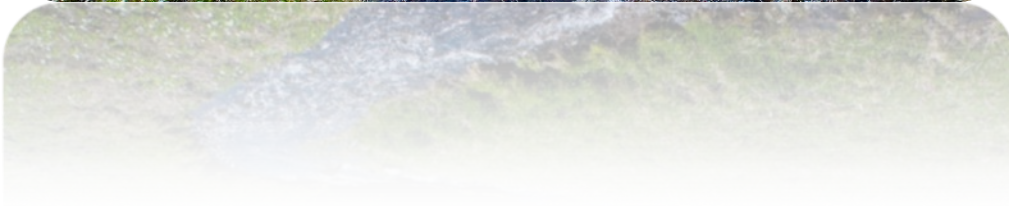




Partnership-Driven Wilderness Stewardship Work 2004-2014



National Forest Foundation in Partnership with Local Partners & the USDA Forest Service

The USDA Forest Service currently manages more than 36 million acres of federally designated Wilderness Areas across 38 individual states and in Puerto Rico. Collectively, the 439 individual Wildernesses managed by the Forest Service cover an area of land roughly equivalent in size to the entire state of Iowa and represent, diverse swaths of culturally, economically, and ecologically critical lands.



As the congressionally chartered nonprofit partner of the Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) engages the public in helping care for the lands, waters, and wildlife of the U.S. National Forest System, including National Forest Wilderness Areas.



This report describes the work accomplished as a result NFF –supported in Forest Service Wilderness Areas between 2004 and 2014.

A Call to Action

Following the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in 2004, the Forest Service found only 18% of their Wilderness Areas managed to a minimum stewardship level. At the recommendation of Forest Service Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group, the agency created the *10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge* (10YWSC) to help bring those special places up to an acceptable baseline management level by the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in 2014. The NFF launched its Wilderness Stewardship Challenge grant program for nonprofit partners to complement 10YWSC. The funding program provided grants to improve the stewardship of National Forest Wilderness Areas and enhance the capacity of partner groups that work with the Forest Service to help care for them.

Other NFF initiatives in subsequent years helped increase the amount of Wilderness stewardship work the NFF was able to help accomplish. The Targeted Wilderness Stewardship award program provided strategically directed funds to nonprofits to help advance 10YWSC in the most critical areas. To support this work, the NFF also held a series of peer learning sessions as technical assistance to help Wilderness stewardship organizations be more effective. Another program, the Wilderness Volunteer Program, was a one-year grant program that provided funds for nonprofits to engage citizen volunteers in the accomplishment of important Wilderness stewardship work.



Helping to Promote a Solution

Wilderness Stewardship Challenge Award Program

The NFF established the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge award program in 2004 to complement the Forest Service 10YWSC. A competitive matching grants program, the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge provided successful applicant nonprofit organizations with funds to help accomplish Wilderness stewardship work. Initially, the program focused on work generally aligned with Wilderness stewardship needs, but did not necessarily advance the 10YWSC. As the 10YWSC progressed, the scores and specific needs of individual Wilderness Areas and supporting elements became clearer, and the NFF refined the grants program in order to focus more closely on the 10YWSC Wildernesses and stewardship elements of greatest need to help fully complete the decade-long initiative. All these grants typically required that applicants raise a 1:1 cash match from nonfederal sources and implement their proposed work within one year of receiving the award. Some additional funding from REI in 2009 was available to reduce matching requirements for some applicants.

Targeted Wilderness Stewardship Award Program

As part of a larger agency-wide emphasis to help meet the 10YWSC, the Forest Service national office dedicated additional funding from 2011-2014 to be re-granted by the NFF to select categories of nonprofit wilderness stewardship groups. Internally called the Targeted Wilderness Stewardship program, funds were available without any cash matching requirements to support lower-capacity stewardship groups that were not able to raise matching funds for 10YWSC work on their own. The funds were also available to larger stewardship groups to work directly on specific low-scoring elements of the 10YWSC in low-scoring Wildernesses. These latter awards were typically to support expansions of an organization's scope of Wilderness stewardship work for which they were unable to raise matching grant funds. Through this strategic approach, competitive and noncompetitive one-year grants helped increase the capacity of wilderness stewardship organizations across the country and helped advance the 10YWSC.

Peer Learning Sessions

As a related component of the Targeted Wilderness Stewardship program in 2012, the NFF provided technical assistance to wilderness stewardship groups to help them be more effective when implementing work that advanced the 10YWSC. Provided as peer-learning sessions, these discussion-driven webinars helped organizations learn best practices for wilderness stewardship from their nonprofit peers in other parts of the country and Forest Service agency leaders. Ranging from topics such as completing recreation site inventories to managing invasive species in Wilderness, these sessions helped organizations learn from the successes and

challenges of others. With this knowledge in hand, the organization were able to spend less time developing new protocols and processes, and more time getting work done well.

Wilderness Volunteer Program

In response to a challenge from REI to help increase the number of citizen volunteers engaged in wilderness stewardship, the NFF established the Wilderness Volunteer Program. This nationally competitive grant program provided support for nonprofit organizations to engage Americans in the stewardship of Forest Service Wilderness Areas. Active in 2006, the program provided one-year grants without any matching requirements to involve citizens in a variety of on-the-ground initiatives benefitting Wilderness.



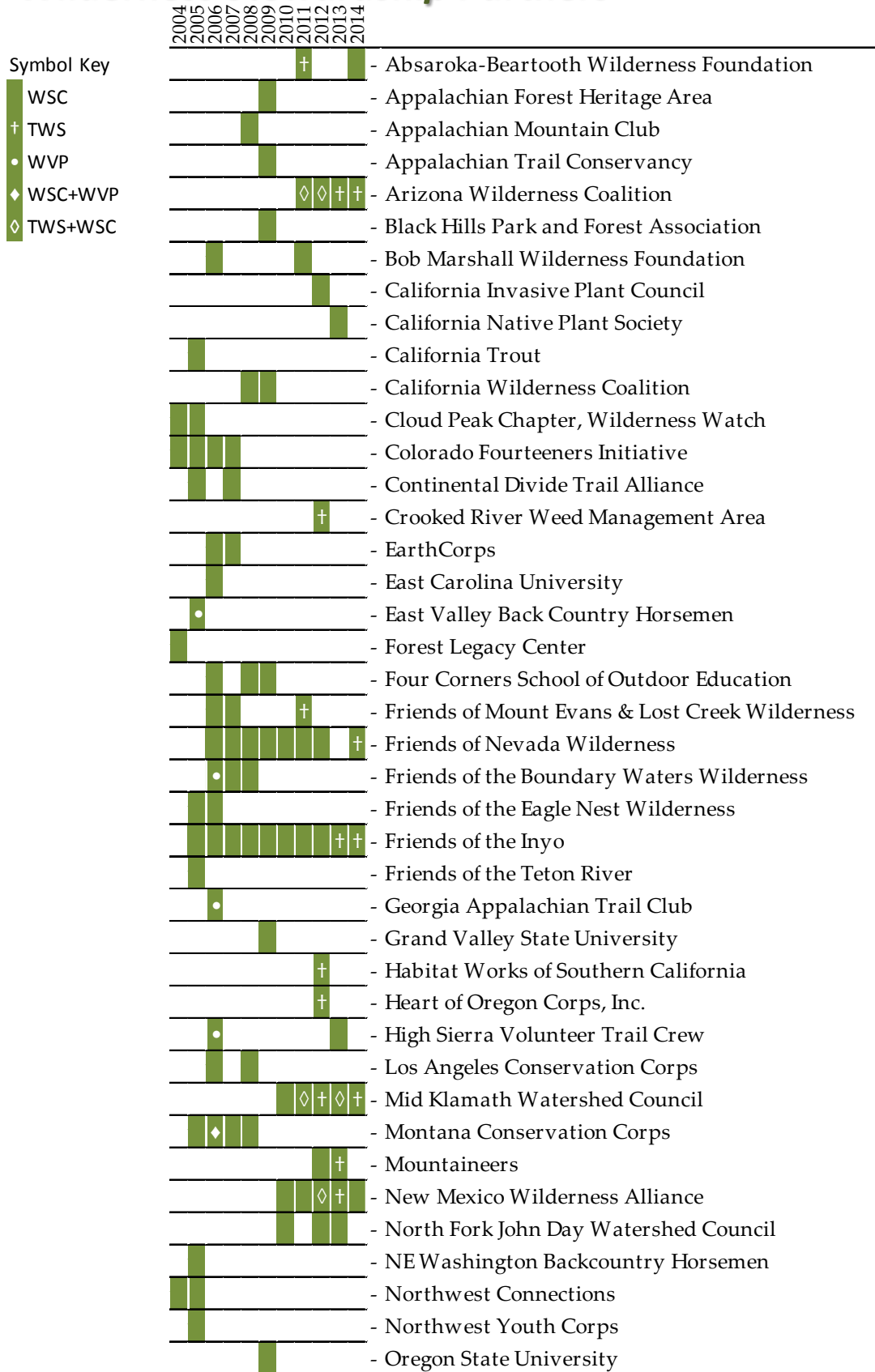
Accomplishments

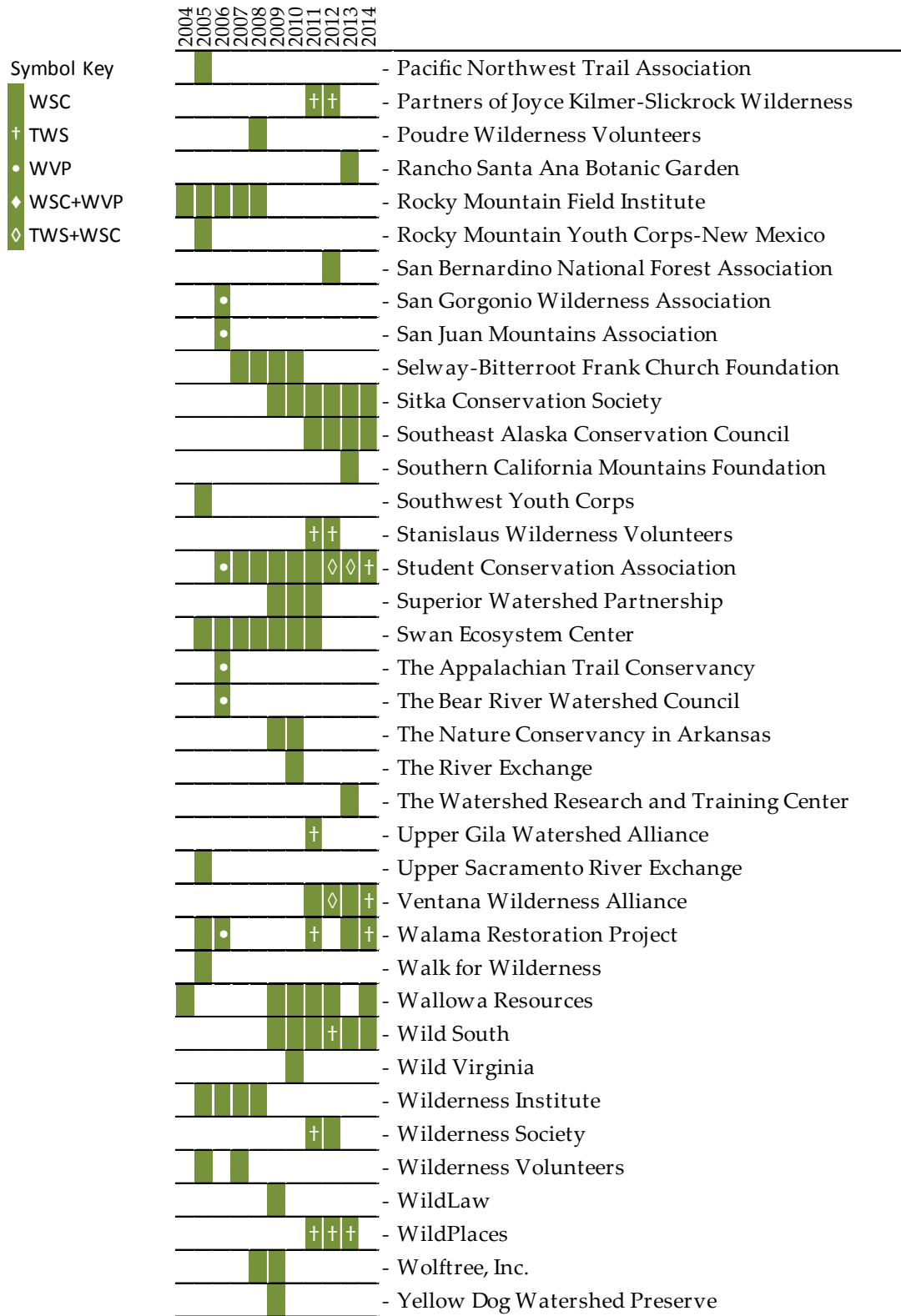
Making a Difference

From 2004 through 2014, the NFF funded unique stewardship projects through dedicated Wilderness stewardship programs. These programs also helped build the capacity of nonprofit partner groups that help the Forest Service care for these culturally, ecologically, and economically important areas. Through the three granting programs, the NFF awarded 203 individual grants to 80 different partner groups to implement projects in all nine Forest Service regions.

The 186 completed projects represented an investment of \$3,408,157 in NFF federal and private funds. Partners leveraged these with additional resources for an estimated direct conservation impact of \$12,142,267. Because of the unique role that Wilderness plays in America, the true value of this work is difficult to quantify.

NFF Wilderness Stewardship Partners





Results

Overall Results

Across all NFF wilderness-specific programs, the NFF and partners achieved:

203	Grants Awarded
80	Direct Grant Recipients
186	Currently Completed Projects
\$3,408,157	Invested in Completed Projects
\$12,142,267	Estimated Value of Completed Projects
1,696	Youth Employed or Engaged
9,457	Volunteers
262,589	Volunteer Hours
2,510	Miles of Trail Work
1,429	Miles of Stream Surveyed
2,688	Acres Treated for Invasive Species
878	Acres of Recreation Damage Restored
6000	Campsites Obliterated or Maintained
4	Peer Learning Sessions Held
114	Peer Learning Session Participants

Wilderness Stewardship Challenge Award Program

Through the Wilderness Stewardship Challenge award program, the NFF provided 66 nonprofit partners 153 grants to advance the 10YWSC and support stewardship of National Forest Wilderness Areas. All grants required a 1:1 nonfederal cash match. Work typically included activities such treatment of invasive weeds, campsite inventories, solitude monitoring, and trail work. Initially the grant program supported wilderness stewardship in general, including trail maintenance, but also provided some support to advance the 10YWSC. Over time, the program's focus aligned fully with 10YWSC to help the Forest Service meet this substantial goal. Funding for trail work remained available through other NFF granting programs.

These awards currently consist of 145 completed grants from 2004-2013, expending a total of \$2,865,938 in NFF funds. An eight currently open projects account for an additional \$241,129 in funding. This reflects a projected total investment of \$3,107,067 in NFF funding over the 2004-2014 period. Federally appropriated funds constituted the vast majority of the total funds granted, with a smaller portion of additional private funding generously contributed by REI.

Spotlight: New Mexico Wilderness Alliance



New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NMWA) has been a NFF Wilderness partner since 2010. As a statewide Wilderness stewardship and advocacy organization, they utilize a grassroots, community-based approach to help protect and care for all federal Wildernesses in New Mexico. NMWA has completed six Wilderness Stewardship Challenge and Targeted Wilderness Stewardship grants in nine New Mexico Wilderness Areas. Their more than 400 volunteers contributed in excess of 5,000 hours of service for Wilderness stewardship.

NMWA worked in close partnership with the Wilderness managers of New Mexico National Forests to coordinate their work and resources in areas of greatest need. Through this partnership and direct work by the Forest Service and other partner groups, those nine Wilderness Areas increased their average 10YWSC score from 22 to 64, out of 100 possible points. This met the 60-point minimum baseline requirement for all but two Wildernesses, with 2014 scores presently untallied.

Targeted Wilderness Stewardship Award Program

As a special initiative of the Forest Service Washington Office, highly targeted funding was provided to 20 nonprofit partner organizations to implement 36 individual projects from 2011-2014. Unlike Wilderness Stewardship Challenge grants, these funds allowed an in-kind match partners to have a cash match. They were initially restricted for use by lower-capacity Wilderness Stewardship groups implementing work to help advance the 10YWSC and increase their capacity to implement similar projects. The program scope expanded to include other partners working in Wilderness Areas not meeting 10YWSC baseline management levels or working on eligible 10YWSC elements not at standard. In coordination with the Forest Service, the NFF awarded project funds on competitive and noncompetitive bases. Award decisions were coordinated with internal Forest Service funding programs to cover needed areas but reduce duplication of effort.

The Targeted Wilderness Stewardship awards consist of 27 completed grants from 2011-2013 expending a total of \$492,164. There are nine currently open grants awarded in 2014 that account for an additional \$227,677 in funding. This reflects a total projected investment of \$719,841.



Spotlight: Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers & Stanislaus National Forest

The Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers (SWV) is an example of successful capacity building supported by NFF. SWV is a small all-volunteer organization focused on wilderness stewardship in the Stanislaus National Forest. The group only has about 50 members, no paid staff, and typically contributes about 3,000 hours of volunteer time to the Forest Service annually. Over the past six years, SWV was able to increase the number of volunteer hours worked by 50% through the sponsorship of two Wilderness ranger interns who worked as part of the Stanislaus National Forest Wilderness crew. Initially, SWV took advantage of the more flexible in-kind Targeted Wilderness Stewardship match available to stewardship groups with small operating budgets. In the two years they received Targeted Wilderness Stewardship Funds, SWV saw the tremendous benefit of sponsoring interns and committed to raising funds to their work through another NFF grant program. SWV raised the needed funds and now continues to support Wilderness stewardship at this higher level. The Forest Service directly attributes this increase in partner capacity to the initial Targeted Wilderness Stewardship funding, which lowered perceived barriers to small organizations competing for grant funds.

SWV performed stewardship work in the Carson-Iceberg and Emigrant Wilderness Areas. The NFF also provided grant funds to two other partner organizations to complete work in these Wildernesses, namely, Friends of the Inyo and the Student Conservation Association. Through eight individual grants, all three groups completed stewardship work in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. Out of a possible 100 points in the 10YWSC, its score went from 14 points in 2005 to 66 points in 2013, surpassing the 60-point minimum requirement. The Student Conservation Association and SWV completed stewardship work in the Emigrant Wilderness through four distinct grants. This work helped move the Wilderness' 10YWSC score from a 67 in 2005 to an 80 in 2013.

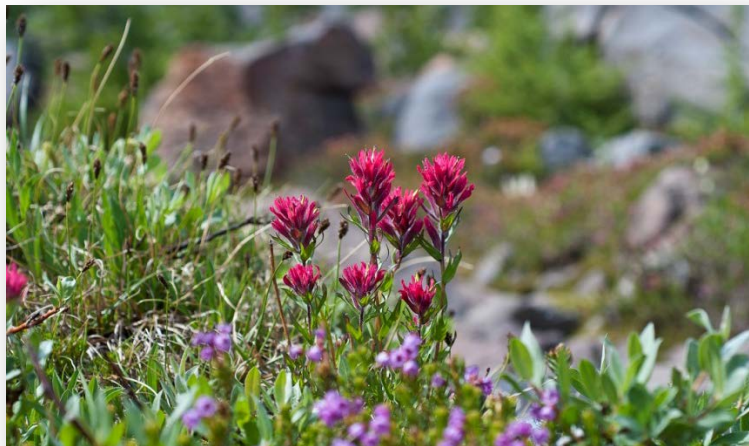


Peer Learning Sessions

As a component of the Targeted Wilderness Stewardship partnership with the Forest Service, the NFF offered a series of peer learning sessions in 2012. These interactive webinars served to connect wilderness stewardship practitioners from nonprofits with other nonprofit and agency practitioners in order to share best practices and lessons learned on important stewardship issues surrounding the 10YWSC. The sessions were:

- Best Practices for Recreation Site Inventories
- Unique Ways Nonprofits Can Contribute to the 10YWSC
- Invasive Species Inventory, Treatment, and Monitoring
- After the 10YWSC: What's Next?

The four peer-learning sessions had great attendance and provoked rich discussion among attendees. An average of 29 participants engaged in each session, with 114 participants in total. Of the attendees that completed a post-webinar survey, 2/3 rated the sessions as either very useful or extremely useful.



Wilderness Volunteer Program

Through the Wilderness Volunteer Program, the NFF provided 14 grants to 11 different organizations to implement volunteer stewardship projects in 20 National Forest Wilderness Areas nationwide. Projects included trail maintenance, obliteration of campsites, and treatment of noxious weeds. These projects engaged 358 volunteers, who contributed 16,680 hours of service— nearly 47 hours per person on average.

Partners significantly leveraged \$99,227 in NFF funding from the Forest Service and REI with nearly \$250,000 in additional contributions for a total conservation value of \$347,119.

Acknowledgements

The National Forest Foundation would like to acknowledge the U.S. Forest Service National Partnership Office, and the Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Protected Areas Program, which provided federal funds essential to the implementation of the work described in this report. REI provided additional private stewardship funding, for which we are immensely grateful.

Special thanks are due to Steve Boutcher and the Forest Service Regional Wilderness Coordinators who provided valuable guidance and support over the life of the program. Thanks are also due to Adam Barnett who provided the capacity information about the Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers.

The greatest gratitude of all is due to the nonprofit partner organizations, including their staff and volunteers, who tirelessly gave of themselves to help care for America's Wilderness.



Photo Credits

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