

Guy Waterman Alpine Steward Fund End of Project Reporting Form

Project Title: Welch Mountain Steward

Organization Name:
White Mountain National Forest
Pemigewasset Ranger District
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Holderness, NH 03245

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The major accomplishments of this project were educational, ecological, and scientific.

The rehabilitation of islands of outcrop vegetation communities on the popular ledges at Welch Mountain in Waterville Valley re-instituted a project that had lapsed for more than a decade. Rock and log scree walls had been installed to guide hikers around fragile plants in 1992. While these barriers were still helping to protect some areas, the project, including educational material about the vegetation, was in a state of neglect.

This past summer's work saw the complete rehabilitation of the outcrop community scree walls and clear channeling of hiker traffic. Parking lot and on-site kiosk material engaged many passers-by in the project, leading to broader education of the recreating public.

Perhaps most valuable is the mapping of vegetation density and the planned establishment of permanent monitoring sites to allow data collected over time to show us what works in regards to protecting soil islands on a heavily impacted area.

Dick Fortin, who initiated the project and the steward, Chris Hilke were both excellent to work with and if there were setbacks I was not aware of them. The kiosk development at the parking lot and ledge approach was informative and interesting and went up in a timely fashion.

There was no other monetary contribution unless you consider that time is money. The Forest was in a budget ebb and was able to support the project with a cost share, but put in some time patrolling the site and supporting Chris' efforts in minor ways. The fledgling Welch Advisory Board consists of several knowledgeable and experienced individuals from within and external to the Forest Service volunteered their services to help make sure the course taken with the project was the best possible.

The results of studying where people walked and what dissuading they would or would not respond to do reveal that people need to be alerted to the erosion traffic causes on thinly covered ledge, and to the space needs of large hiking groups. It is easy to forget

that those new to hiking will not realize that where they step has ecological consequences. Seasoned hikers and individuals regularly using the Welch/Dickey loop for a fitness hike become automatic in their movements or distracted by conversation and benefit from a reminder to hike in a low impact manner.

What comes as no surprise is the necessity to make the efforts toward rehabilitation of this area sustainable. Local interest in the scientific data-gathering potential of the plots to be installed this season is keen, and as permanent plots will be established the data can be collected and compiled into the future regardless of fluctuations in site maintenance or varied types of impacts. A new local partnership has been developed between the Pemigewasset district and the Center for Mountain Stewardship directed by Nat Scrimshaw, who will hire a Welch steward this season and potentially for seasons to come. The district trails program has committed to patrolling the site and maintaining the soil island barriers as part of regular maintenance a minimum of 3 times per year. AMC's Alpine Stewards program has also expressed interest in the developments the Waterman Fund helped make happen and plans to tour the ledges project as part of it's volunteer steward program training.

As Trails Coordinator I feel confident that the gains made for conservation because of last year's Welch project will continue into the future bringing great and measurable benefit to the area. Recreating visitors will see expansion in their opportunities to learn about conservation and witness the aesthetic improvements the work will bring to the ledges. Local interested parties will feel ownership of a monitoring site so well known and relatively accessible. It is a very successful project that I am pleased to see revived and look forward to helping administer for years to come.

