



**CONSERVATION EDUCATION — Success Story**  
White Mountain National Forest/AMC Alpine Stewards

**INTRODUCTION** — The White Mountain National Forest contains the largest alpine area east of the Rockies and south of northern Quebec. Home to many rare, threatened or endangered species, it also provides some of the finest hiking in the northeast, including the Franconia and Presidential Ranges. In 2000 the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) and the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) joined forces to provide volunteer alpine stewards to serve as ambassadors for the alpine zone. With help from a conservation education grant, in 2001 we were able to reach thousands of hikers with a message to help protect the beautiful and easily damaged alpine zone.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION** — Through a USDA Forest Service, conservation education, *Alpine Steward* grant, we received \$7,000 to:

- Increase the hiking public’s awareness of the unique alpine ecosystem of the White Mountains
- Reduce visitor impacts within the alpine zone
- Foster a stewardship ethic related to the alpine zone

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS & PARTNERSHIPS** — Under agreements with the Forest Service, 10 volunteers were organized, trained and managed by the AMC to provide one-on-one education to hikers and backpackers above tree line. Three of the volunteers also joined the Forest Service in attending a regional alpine managers gathering in Stowe, Vermont.

In a partnership between the WMNF and the AMC, some training help from the Nature Conservancy and support from the Appalachian Trail Conference we were able to give our volunteer stewards training in plant identification, interpretation, visitor contact and Leave No Trace.

We made sure our volunteers were properly attired with identifying patches from the Forest Service and AMC as well as shirts and gear made to withstand rough mountain weather. Once they were trained up and ready to go they hit the trails with enthusiasm and dedication!

During the 20-weeks from June through mid-October there was a steward on the Franconia Ridge almost every Saturday and Sunday. The numbers of hikers contacted varied from 200 to 1100 each day with an average of 140 quality contacts (more than a passing hello) per weekend, or 5600 hundred hikers over the course of the summer and early fall.



*Volunteer Alpine Steward Scott Monroe along the Franconia Ridge, White Mountain National Forest.*  
Photo: Allison Nelson

Topics of discussion included: trail and mountain information, safety, Leave No Trace and, of course, information on the alpine zone. Many people are surprised and interested to hear that despite the harsh environment in which they grow, alpine plants can be permanently damaged by hiker trampling.

Our alpine stewards spent an average of 6 ½ hours on the ridge each day—not including the time it took them to hike the 1mile from Greenleaf Hut to the summit of Mt. Lafayette or the 4 miles to hike up from the nearest road.

In addition to contacts on the ridge, the stewards presented programs to over 300 overnight guests at AMC's Greenleaf Hut.

**CONCLUSION** — We plan to continue the volunteer alpine steward program well into the future. Some new efforts include:

- Improving and building upon our existing volunteer training
- Expanding our efforts to include members of the Girl Scouts' Swift River Council
- Creating bilingual (French-English) trail and trailhead signing
- Perhaps eventually expanding to include stewards in the Presidential Range
- Developing ways to better monitor the program's effectiveness

We have tremendously dedicated volunteers working on this program as well as fantastic efforts on the part of AMC staff. The conservation grant we received made it possible for us to get the Alpine Steward program up and running on solid ground.

The Alpine Steward program is a great example of how conservation education, recreation and protecting threatened and endangered species can all work together.

*"I stayed at Little Haystack and eventually made my way to Mt. Lincoln and finally arrived at Mt. Lafayette around 11:00 where I stayed until about three. Even though it was windy and quite chilly, it was very busy - standing room only most of the time ...I found one couple lounging very comfortably on the thick alpine plants about ten feet beyond the scree wall just below the summit... They were very apologetic and moved at once when I spoke to them, explaining the fragile nature, etc. All told I probably spoke to 200 people, but there were probably over 600 on the ridge that day..."*

*From a report by Volunteer Alpine Steward Steve Dugas*

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