



KNOWLEDGE POINT NETWORK

*The Sam Houston National Forest is situated 50 miles north of the Energy Capital of the World. The 163,030 acres designated in Sam Houston's Forest is often referred to as "The Piney Woods of East Texas". It is the permanent home of natural species. Permanent only if we can manage the encroachments of urbanization. Some visitors literally traveled the globe to see and experience this forest. Diverse as its visitors are, the Volunteers maintain access to get you (the visitor) closer to "the place". Over 275 miles of trails afford access to the gateway. The gateway I am referring is more a feeling than a location. It's a bit difficult to explain, maybe impossible. This is what's so compelling about this situation. The experience is different for each and is achieved through what is referred to as recreation. In order to arrive at "that moment" each element of recreation makes strong connections to something. It has or will have deep meaning on an individual basis. Regardless of your perspective you will experience it. The question is what you do after.*

*The difference in the person is evident in the degree to which they are compelled to share and protect. This is a story about those that wish to share. There is no greater gift than to afford another the feeling that brings you closer to that which replenishes your spirit. Equally there is no greater opportunity for dispute over whose form of recreation is better. Hikers, equestrians, cyclist, and motorize riders have access. How can we strike a balance? As protective as we are of our personal freedoms, we humans are equally protective of our species. I think it's called love and it's powerful. This is a conversation about sustaining though an energy more powerful than wind, water and fossil fuels. There is an energy in an advocacy that moves mountains, and in this case we are destine to keep a parcel. That parcel of land is called the Sam Houston National Forest. Oil and gas is an assumed source for the Houston area in accomplishing great things. However there is the nearby national forest that can supply that which money could never possibly buy. The forest is the green gem of the concrete jungle, and both are mighty and to be revered to give balance and peace to life.*

*Surprising as it sounds the 275 miles of recreational trail in the Sam Houston National forest is maintained as a volunteer effort. The federal budget cutbacks placed the burden of maintenance at the feet of the volunteer. For generations this maintenance and care has occurred with a labor of love by families having cleared a path. From all over the world, Hikers, cyclists, equestrians and motorized have embraced these piney woods. Each group has perspectives. I refer to them as elements of recreation or "elements". We all have very different perspectives. We even have separate trails. You can hike, ride your bicycle, or ride a horse*

*independent of each element of recreation. We all combine our talents and resources to maintain the Multiuse trail or as we call it the motorized portion of the trail system.*

*We are not divided in this endeavor to sustain access into the forest. A cooperative vision was initiated through the National Forest in 2010. A call to duty was presented to the various groups and clubs. The choice was clear. We needed to unite because we unknowingly were undermining the very purpose we individually agreed with. An organization was formed that facilitates the priorities of each element through a transparent set of checks and balances. Each individual, club or group utilizing the forest meet several times a year at the Ranger Station. We all convene through the Sam Houston Trails Coalition. Each element has a common purpose that ensures our collaboration. "How do we afford access while sustaining the forest, and of particular focus the actual trail of choice for our particular members"? The National Forest resources are dwindling at a rapid rate. The lack of resources has ignited the alliance. Members of each faction of recreation appoint a leader. These Representatives are elevated for their ability to break down barriers and misconceptions. They get things done with and through the support of the Sam Houston National Forest. The only way we will sustain is to first educate. Through training we gain perspective followed by techniques to manage the impact we are having on the forest. It's taken a few years but we are definitely having an impact on individuals and action is focused on specific trail issues. This will result in ongoing sustainability of our trail.*

*Phase one:*

*The process of identifying and removing fallen trees is well established. Sawyers maintain REQUIRED certifications independent of action of the SHNF but in compliance to the National Forest guidelines. Trails Coalition Volunteers now operate with little required of the Forest but with significant communication to the recreational Trails Coordinator. First Aid compliance, safety equipment, saw operation, training, planning and organizing. We execute all necessary to remove fallen trees in accordance to the highest standards. Possibly we are "creating" standards because our passion is so intense. A model to be replicated is our aim and we are moving in this direction faster with each year.*

*We ponder the richness of the fallen tree and wonder how to harvest its greatest potential. Because of our diverse perspective and education we have THE highest potential to design a systemic approach that meets the highest standards of all interested parties. Is a log lying in the forest that important? It is to this group and we aim to do more with this resource so stay tuned to find out.*

*Phase two:*

*Priority number one are the bridges. Like the trees that fall across our trails in endless supply we now have a created an endless labor to sustain our bridges and boardwalks. We were stabilized for a period of time, then we started slipping a bit. The benefit to the historical flooding that has happened North of Houston is that our volunteers are uniting unlike never before. The*

*harder the chore the more we collaborate. The labor is endless and we worry about sustaining the energy of the volunteer. More to the point, we know the key is found in the next generation and now we have a goal to invest time to envelope the projects with youth. We are on a path to channel this energy of the Volunteer (FAMILY) and we know the fuel is education. Mother nature is powerful in the moment. She can whisk our bridge down stream in a flash. Our passion is deep and it motivates us to persevere. Although some may never recreate we need to provide the option to do so though trails. It must always be there!*

*Phase three:*

*Next we will dive into our largest challenge. We must address erosion that naturally occurs in our region. We have done a bit but there's much to do. That first step is well underway. We are destined to replenish the trail with the material washed away. We are training on how to manage water in conjunction with trails. Elevation changes are rewarding for all however the energy created by water traveling down the grade of a trail should be viewed as a serious issue. We are learning and training as fast as possible. Soon we will have certificates to operate equipment and with luck we will find funds to supply the fuel and materials.*

*You will discover greater detail outlined in a "Great Trails Book" link on our website. It underpins and documents the standards. The gap of resources is being filled with the support of Volunteers but in order to sustain indefinitely we must be wise beyond our individual perspectives. Provided we operate as a Coalition we will not fail.*

*All this above combined is the foundation of our Trail Management plan. The actions and tasks that follow the guidelines are essential. They must be efficient. No Volunteer wishes to save the same bridge over and over. None of the activity should displace a species. Bridges reduce impact on the water-born balance and the trail can be moved to accommodate our endangered RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER.*

*The forest is OURS and we have discovered it's better to love it and share it than to have it taken away.*

*Perhaps the most essential component of the endeavor is the conversion of "that moment". It's relatively easy to invite one to recreate. Surprisingly few get into the outdoors. Just because you "build it, does not mean they will come". Fewer still will convert to a volunteer. I have searched and have yet to discover words that have been written. What is it that compels some to give so much more with no path to a reward. They give in the purest sense. They give because they love that much. Bravery is fostered when you pick a date to work on the trail. You hope your buddies will show and if you're lucky a few new faces. Valor is inviting different perspectives and no one showing up and then doing it until they do.*

*val·or*

*'valər/*

*noun*

*noun: valour; noun: valor*

*bravery, courage, nerve, daring, fearlessness, audacity, boldness, dauntlessness, stout-heartedness, heroism, backbone, spirit;*

*Note from the Community: We broadcast this opportunity to our Friends, Factors, Facilitators and Fellows. This submission is the only sanctioned response on behalf of the community we serve as element representatives.*