

Volunteers In Action

Backcountry Experiences

Slide 1: Volunteers with backpacks

One of the many benefits of volunteering at a National Wildlife Refuge is getting to visit and sometimes stay in areas of the refuge not open to the general public.

At both Hakalau Forest NWR in Hawaii, and Innoko NWR in Alaska, volunteers work hard on managing invasive plants and are rewarded with learning and recreational opportunities.

Slide 2: Expansive wetlands

Innoko National Wildlife Refuge in west central interior Alaska is remote even for Alaska.

Slide 3: Floatplane

At Innoko NWR, volunteers are flown in on a floatplane to access a backcountry field camp where they stay for three weeks.

Slide 4: Field camp

“The field camp is getting pretty posh these days,” said Steve Kovach, Senior Wildlife Biologist.

Slide 5: Camping

Volunteers also camp in tents at various field sites.

Slide 6: Volunteers photograph plants

For about forty hours a week, volunteers map plantain, pineapple weed, and bluegrass using GPS units. These data will be entered into the computer system back at refuge headquarters to generate invasive plant distribution maps. Volunteers also photograph plants and collect samples for documentation.

Slide 7: Volunteers wearing insect head nets

Despite the mosquitoes, volunteers get a lot of work done and enjoy their time in remote places.

Slide 8: Volunteer with large fish

In the evenings (which are pretty long during the Alaskan summer) and weekends, volunteers can use refuge boats to fish for trophy pike. Without phones or an Internet connection there is plenty of time to camp, hike, and explore the refuge.

Slide 9: Map with location of Hakalau Forest NWR on the island of Hawaii

Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Big Island National Wildlife Complex and is located in northeastern Hawaii. Some of the finest remaining stands of native montane rain forest left in Hawaii are contained in this refuge.

Slide 10: Cabin

Because it is a two hour drive on a dirt road to the refuge site, most volunteers stay overnight in a cabin. The cabin, and the experience in the backcountry of Hakalau Forest NWR, is available only to volunteers.

Slide 11: Volunteers birding with refuge staff

Volunteers are treated to nature walks where they learn about wildlife and the habitat they are helping to restore.

Slide 12: Hawaiian hoary bat

If they are lucky, volunteers may sneak a peak at the elusive Hawaiian hoary bat which is federally listed as an endangered species. Volunteer efforts to restore native plant communities through the removal of invasive species will benefit native species.

Slide 13: Volunteer uprooting gorse

It's not all play, volunteers work hard to uproot gorse. The gorse is also sprayed with an herbicide and burned. "We're having good luck with it," said Refuge Manager Dick Wass.

Slide 14: Volunteers pulling banana poka vines

Banana poka is another plant pulled out by volunteers. "Those volunteers are a lifeline," said Wass. "We like to give them a neat educational experience."

Slide 15: Kilauea Point, Hawaii

Working and recreating in remote areas provides volunteers with unique experiences that they will remember for a lifetime.