

22 Years of Trail Work With WTA

WTA's trail maintenance program has been around for 25 years. It's taken a lot of volunteers and staff to get it started and keep it going. One of those folks, Alan Carter Mortimer, is now one of WTA's field program managers, but he started out as a volunteer.

It all began when he saw an ad for WTA work parties in "Backpacker" magazine.

"They were looking for people to come do trail work. I thought it sounded fun, so I signed up. I'd worked at Glacier National Park doing maintenance and I liked trail work. Once I got to know the other volunteers, I came back because I liked seeing them on the trail," he said.

As the volunteer program flourished, WTA hired staff to support it. A field director position was created, followed by field managers. Then, in 2007, field director Jenny Blake called Alan. He had been volunteering for 11 years.

"I thought it was about more volunteering opportunities, but she said, 'Do you want a job?' I said, 'Sure.'" But, he remembers, "I did have to ask my wife first." It meant leaving a career as a GIS consultant to work at a burgeoning nonprofit.

He joined the trail team, which at the time was just a few years old.

"It was just Tim (Van Beek) working on volunteer vacations; Jenny Blake, Alyssa Kreider, the volunteer coordinator. Krista Dooley was running the youth program, then there was me," Alan recalls.

That small, dedicated staff guided the trail maintenance program through its infancy, working overtime to help create what is now the country's largest state-based volunteer trail maintenance organization, supported by a full staff and passionate volunteers.

But field managers can't be everywhere at once, which became clear as WTA was asked to work in more and more places in Washington. So we hired regional managers in key parts of Washington to support our work, both on the trail and as advocates to speak up for trails in Olympia.

Having those support roles was essential to the trail program. Much more work can get done with more staff to rely on.

"Investing in those positions meant we could focus better in more areas. These days we rely on paid staff and volunteer crew leaders and assistant crew leaders to run work parties and manage volunteers all over Washington," Alan said.

More employees means more people can experience the joy of working on trail. And sharing that is one of the things Alan likes about his work. His ideal day consists of being in the field, as well as designing and working on construction projects.

"I like bridge work, crosscut sawing and teaching new folks those skills," he said.

New enthusiasm encouraged by longtime dedication is a powerful combination. It's what brought Alan to WTA 22 years ago, and it's what's keeping WTA's volunteer program going strong 25 years after its founding.