

Forest Service volunteer of the year hopes more will join his cause!

Joel Starr's idea of a good time is sawing apart felled logs and brush blocking a trail in the forest.

"I like to feel like I've accomplished something," Starr said.

Starr's accomplished quite a lot when it comes to keeping recreation areas maintained for the public.

As trail boss for the Oregon Equestrian Trails' mid-valley chapter, Starr has helped the group organize from 10 to 12 trail cleanups a year, both locally and throughout the Pacific Northwest. He's worked on Marys Peak, Bald Hill and the McDonald Forest as well as the Willamette, Deschutes, Siuslaw and Mount Hood national forests.

The 100-member chapter typically logs 2,400 volunteer hours each year clearing trails.

In recognition of his efforts, the U.S. Forest Service has named Starr its national individual volunteer of the year - as well as its individual volunteer of the year on Region 6, which covers Oregon and Washington.

Jennifer Velez, a spokesperson with the Willamette National Forest, said that Starr recently was honored for his Region 6 contributions at Willamette's Sweet Home Ranger Station. Plans still are in the works for his national recognition award ceremony.

Starr began clearing trails in 1995, but these days, he's also teaching the skill to others. He is one of only five people in the Pacific Northwest who are certified to train prospective volunteers in the use of both a crosscut saw and a chain saw to clear trails.

And because no motorized vehicles or chain saws are allowed in many parts of Forest Service land, Starr has also learned how to sharpen crosscut saws - a three-hour chore he does once a year. He's even built a few cross-cut saws himself, but Starr said his own creations don't compare to the cross-cut saws used by early-20th century loggers.

"They haven't made decent crosscut saws (since) 1950," Starr said.

A former process engineer, Starr's talent for organization is evident in the Oregon Equestrian Trails chapter's supply trailer, which is parked on his Philomath property. It's well-stocked with shovels, hard hats and other equipment needed to clear trails. A work party can equip itself at his trailer and be ready to go in 30 minutes or less.

"We never have to say, 'Where's the shovels?'" Starr said.

During work parties, Starr likes to get volunteers of many talents involved in his trail-clearing excursions. In addition to those who can cut up felled logs, volunteers are needed who know fire prevention and who are CPR- and first aid-certified.

"We have the attitude that everyone has something to offer," he said.

Also a member of the Pacific Crest Trail Association and Back Country Horseman of Oregon, Starr has worked with several other groups on equestrian trail work parties who've also volunteered to clear forestland trails, such as AmeriCorps' Northwest Youth Corps and the Sierra Club.

Starr, who is 65, is hoping to get enough people motivated and involved so that he can pass along his mission of keeping public recreation areas accessible to a new generation of volunteers.

"If they want this when they're older, they'll need to get proactive," Starr said.

Volunteers are filling a vital role in maintaining recreation areas - a task no longer adequately funded, Starr said.

The Forest Service administers 193 million acres of forestland and grassland with an overall fiscal year 2012 budget of \$5.9 billion - or, around \$30.57 per acre. That total is down from \$6.13 billion in 2011.

Within those 193 million acres are miles of recreation trails. For example, the Willamette National Forest's south Santiam travel corridor, found along Highway 20, includes more than 30 day-use hiking and horse trails.

"For people to enjoy the legacy that we have, volunteers have got to maintain it," Starr said.