

Fire and Forest

The Epitome of Volunteerism... Woodies...

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Volunteerism, there are several definitions of this, the act or practice of doing volunteer work in community service, the principle of donating time and energy for the benefit of other people in the community as a social responsibility rather than for any financial reward, and: the policy or practice of volunteering one's time or talents for charitable, educational or other worthwhile activities, especially in one's community.

When looking at our local community it is easy to find a group, organization or worthy cause to volunteer one's time toward. Many people here are involved in one or more of these groups.

One of these organizations that were formed back in 2001 was the Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council. It was initially charged with educating the local public about fire abatement practices that could defend or save their homes in the event of a fire. It was soon realized that education alone did not go far enough. A push for thinning of the forest and overgrowth of vegetation within the community was begun.

A group of additional volunteers within the MCFSC was formed in 2002 and became known as the "Woodies". This group of dedicated 20-30 people, who used many of their own chain saws, splitters and equipment trailers to facilitate the removal of trees on private property. A local gentleman by the name of Lee Salgren was the first person who took on the role as leader of this group. One of the first projects this group tackled was several large piles of 12'-16' logs, at what is the present site of the "Grinding Station" below town on Hwy 243. These were once "Penny Pine" trees that were planted some 15-20 years earlier at this site. It

was formally the local dumpsite. The theory for the tree mortality was that the methane gas from the abandoned dump was too toxic for the tree's survival. This group cut, split and distributed this wood locally.

In the Spring of 2004, with the permission and planning of the United States Forest Service, the MCFSC and with the labor of the volunteer "Woodies" began the work of thinning and constructing the "Pine Cove Shaded Fuel Break". The purpose of this particular project was to complete a portion of unfinished fuel break that would connect to the existing "Strawberry Fuel Break" to the west. This fuel break was 300'- 800' wide and some 3/4 of a mile long. It is a protection buffer for the south side of Pine Cove. The "Woodies" worked two days a week for some six months on this effort knowing that when completed this might provide a great defense to this area.

As time went on, the MCFSC applied and to this day receives grant monies that is used toward assistance for fire abatement and public education programs. The "Woodies" formed a partnership with the Idyllwild Help Center where they receive wood from local tree contractors to cut and split. This split wood is then passed on to the Center to distribute to their needy clients as fuel for winter warmth. During the Spring and Summer months these volunteers take a break from wood cutting and splitting to do private property fire abatement in the community for those who qualify for assistance. This volunteer group usually works for 4 hours every Friday morning throughout the year. Snow and rain are about the only thing that might alter their schedule. Most members of this group are retired from other careers that are not at all related to this kind of work, aren't afraid to get dirty and the average age is close to 70. Last year alone this group cut and split some 75 cords of wood and donated approximately 1337 hours of time toward these and other efforts to make this community a little better place to live.

Remember when you hear the term "Woodies" around Idyllwild, that it is not a vintage auto that might carry a surfboard. But is a group that is the true meaning of volunteerism.