

Planning a Successful Work Bee

Proper planning for a work bee can make all the difference in having a successful work bee or not. When volunteers have made the effort to attend, they appreciate a well planned for and organized work bee which makes the most of their labor and time. Follow these tips to best utilize volunteers for your trail work needs.

Identify Areas that need Attention - Is your work going to be in one centralized area or will there be multiple areas that you will need to send volunteer groups to for trail work? If it includes multiple areas throughout the trail system, be sure to scout the trail system for any areas that need attention. Take a printed map along or utilize a trail app and mark the map with symbols that stand for hand work (H), chain saw/downfall (X) or pole saw needed (O). This helps assign groups to each area as you get closer to the work bee.

Advertise Work Bee and ask for RSVP - Create a post/event on social media, share with your members via email and submit to MHTA for the event calendar. Share the invitation for the work bee often. Make it friendly, fun and informative. Let volunteers know what they can bring as far as tools. Remind them to bring safety gear, boots, gloves (leather if they'll be working with pickers), bug spray, sunscreen if needed. If you will be providing snacks, drinks, lunch or anything else, also let them know this. Ask for an RSVP so you can assign teams ahead of time.

Know your volunteers - Ask your volunteers what tools they will be bringing if you don't already know. Are they allowed to and do they have the ability to bring an ORV or side x side? These can be incredibly helpful to have at work bees to transport volunteers and keep volunteers from having to carry all the necessary equipment by hand. Let volunteers know if they will need trail permits for ORV and any safety gear such as helmets. Identify which volunteers can be team leaders. Ask if any of your volunteers have medical needs that may arise on the trail. If they are allergic to bee stings, find out where their epi pen is kept and make sure their team knows where it is on the trail. Identify which volunteers have mobility or disability issues that will need considerations. Some volunteers can help pick up food for volunteers, can stay behind to sign volunteers in, assign late arriving volunteers to a team, be available for any emergencies, etc. Some will be able to do the clearing, but cannot walk far into the trails so they should be assigned to teams with transportation to their area or near an access site.

Assign volunteers to teams and areas of the trail - You have identified on the map which areas need what type of tools and which volunteers will be bringing what type of tools. Organize teams into the number of volunteers appropriate for the size of the area that needs work, usually a group of 3-5 is plenty for a section of trail and will allow everyone to remain busy and also complete the work so they feel successful at the end of the day. This is important, always try to make sure an area can be completed in the time given if at all possible. And give them additional options for clearing if they finish their assigned section and still have time left. Maybe they can go join another team who had a larger, more complicated section. Make sure you have one leader in each group that knows the plan and can keep everyone focused on the task at hand and is aware of the emergency needs of their team members. Be mindful of volunteers'

special considerations mentioned above and assign them to where they will be the most successful, this will keep everyone happy. For trail cleaning work bees, you may want to have teams that will drive around the trails with an ORV, chainsaw and pole saw to clear downfall and random branches which are overhanging the trail, these areas should also have been marked on the map. Others teams may be assigned to clearing overgrowth from sections of trail where loppers, and pole saws are of the most help. Identify the best access points for each team, you may be able to direct them to parking which will make walking into their section easier or transport them if it's not an easy walk from an access site.

What to Bring as the Organizer - Volunteers love when organizers provide food and water. At the very least, provide water (cold if it's a hot day), trail mix, granola bars, etc., being mindful of nut and gluten allergies. Volunteers will stay longer on the trail if you keep them full and hydrated. Make sure you have the necessary permits, waivers, sign in sheets to help track volunteer hours, maps, membership forms, clipboards, and pens. Provide your volunteers with bug spray and encourage them to use it, especially for ticks. Don't forget the sunscreen and first aid kit too, make sure that includes benadryl. Bring extra loppers and gloves for volunteers who may not have any. If you will be providing lunch, have a volunteer assigned to make lunch, order and pick it up or accept delivery at a specified time.

Day Of - Make sure you have maps for each team and a plan for how to get the teams to their areas. As volunteers arrive, assign them to their groups, introduce everyone, identify the leader, go over any trail clearing, safety and health information. Have them sign any necessary documents, offer them bug spray, sunscreen, tools, gloves and snacks. Be willing to be flexible, don't make a team wait for a very late member, reassign teams on the fly as needed to keep everyone happy and put them to work as quickly as possible. Transporting or leading teams to their areas is recommended to make sure the areas you've identified are the ones that will get the attention they need. Give the teams a secondary plan in case they finish their first section. Let the teams know when you'll be back for them if you did transport them or tell them what time to be back for lunch if you are providing it. Usually 3 hours is a good block of time for a work bee with lunch being at noon or 1pm. This allows the volunteers to get some real work done, but doesn't wear them out or take up their whole day. Many times volunteers will want to saddle up that afternoon and go ride the sections they worked on to admire their work, encourage this. If you have volunteers who want to do more work, have a plan for them, but make sure they get the food and drinks they need to keep them fueled for the day. Don't forget to snap photos throughout the day to share the work the volunteers have done.

After Work Bee - Lunch is a great time to get group photos and celebrate the work accomplished. Be sure to profusely thank attendees for their efforts and remind them that their help allows us to have the trails. Running a positive, welcoming, fun, and efficient work bee is a great way to make sure the volunteers come back to help again. Post on social media and via your membership email a thank you to everyone, share what was accomplished and any photos you have too. If you had a large work bee, be sure to share the number of attendees. Compile the work bee hours onto your tracking sheet and remember to include all the prep work you and others did to make this work bee happen. Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the trails!