



A Trail Work Day for the Record Books

by Sabrina Carlson

Organizing a group of youth to spend the day maintaining trail takes a great deal of skills and planning, no matter what size group you are working with. But when a single middle school class has 90 students, and they all need to arrive to help repair the trail on the same day...the precision with which the adults need to coordinate the details becomes paramount.

In fact, when I first mentioned that I intended to bring a group this large from Mount Elden Middle School to do some trail work on October 23, 2015 there was more than one person who cautioned that it couldn't be done. And despite my belief that we could do it, I confess I was more than a little nervous.

Thankfully, our amazing community of Seeds of Stewardship supporters showed up in force to be examples of volunteerism and community service. With help from the US Forest Service, American Conservation Experience, Arizona Trail stewards and volunteers, and Flagstaff Biking Organization, we had plenty of help to guide these excited youth stewards in digging drains, installing check dams, and back filling eroded trail.



Hauling Logs!

But even with lots of help, gathering enough personal protective equipment and tools for that many trail workers was unlikely. Thankfully, the incredibly talented team of teachers came up with a plan to divide and conquer. It was decided that half the class would work the trail before lunch, and half the class after. Whichever students were not on trail duty would be further divided into other groups to participate in activities.

One of those smaller groups came with me as we worked to identify invasive weeds along the trail corridor and remove them. Another worked with co-leader Richard May to learn about trail design and planning considerations. After discussing such factors as access, intended user groups, erosion prevention and funding sources, the students took their knowledge and used it to construct micro trails made of yarn. Once their trails were built, they gave each other a tour of their new destination. They were invited to explain all of the things they took into account, especially how they planned to fund the building and maintenance of their trail. Answers ranged from "I will pay



Moving Dirt!

for it myself” through “We will hold a fundraiser” to “We plan to charge for people to stay in our nearby resort, and will pay for the trail with that money.” A third group worked with one of their teachers discussing the differences between private land, public land, and the ways in which the two can overlap at times. The students had a variety of opinions on the topic of how public land should or should not be used for private purposes and what rights or responsibilities private land holders might have within the greater community.

Meanwhile, the trail maintenance crews were hard at work. New drains were dug, old ones cleaned out, and badly eroded sections were filled in. Walking past the small groups, leaders could be heard explaining trail design and hydrology to the students and asking them

to reason out the best location and shape of the new drain before they began work.

Running around to each of the groups, redirecting students, providing support, and making sure all of the transitions happened without a hitch was Mr. Craig, the grade 6 team 1 leader. He ensured that everyone had what they needed and everything was running smoothly.

By the end of the day, I was no longer worried how we would manage such a large group. Instead, I was impressed beyond words at how nearly ideal the entire experience had been. Each and every teacher and volunteer was priceless and created a learning experience those students will not soon forget.



It's good to pause for worms.

This outing was made possible by grants from

