



NEWS RELEASE

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Las Cruces BLM Volunteers Win National Awards

Two of Nine National Awards Presented to New Mexico Volunteers

LAS CRUCES – The U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Washington, D.C., has selected volunteers at the BLM’s Las Cruces field office to receive two of nine national volunteer awards, according to Amy Lueders, BLM-Las Cruces field office manager.

John and Sherry Gerrish have won a “Making A Difference” award for their contributions as caretakers at the BLM’s Three Rivers Petroglyph Site and Recreation Area. The site, about 17 miles north of Tularosa on U.S. Highway 54, includes a camping/picnic area, 960 acres containing more than 20,000 petroglyphs and a prehistoric village of the Jornada Mogollon culture. According to the award citation, the Garrishes assist 21,000 visitors year.

The Gerrishes have taken a personal interest in caring for the recreation site and improving the camp host’s accommodations, according to the BLM. Last year, the couple worked five- to seven-days a week. They are frequently required to assist visitors and campers after a full eight-hour workday, according to BLM-Las Cruces Volunteer Coordinator Cheryl Howard.

In addition to opening and closing the recreation area, the Gerrishes staff the information desk, perform the majority of the maintenance work, pick up trash, clean the restrooms, groom the campground and help visitors by answering questions and explaining the rules of the area, according to Howard.

During the past eight years, the couple has assisted approximately 170,000 visitors and collected more than \$100,000 in recreation fees for BLM. “With their support, BLM has been able to establish a visitor’s center, provide accessible facilities, construct an RV campground site and preserve remnants of the Jornada Mogollon culture for future generations,” Howard said.

The BLM has selected the BLM-Las Cruces Mimbres Archaeological Team, consisting of an archaeological site monitoring/patrol team and an archaeological research team, for a second national award to Las Cruces area BLM volunteers.

The six-member monitoring team includes retired citizens dedicated to preserving cultural resources. "They monitor the condition of more than 100 significant archaeological and historic sites considered eligible for -- or listed on -- the National Register of Historic Places and monitor the sites for vandalism and/or surface collecting," Howard said. The team also has begun collecting global positioning information for selected sites as part of BLM's signage initiatives.

The archaeological research team's core includes retired professional archaeologists who have conducted large surveys of archaeological sites within the BLM-Las Cruces 5.4 million-acre area of responsibility in southwestern New Mexico.

The group presented professional papers last year at the 12th Mogollon Meetings in Las Cruces and in 2003 plan to present the 13th conference in El Paso. Both teams provide support in identifying significant heritage resources and in preservation planning and logistics.

The monitoring team has contributed 1,750 volunteer hours; the research team has contributed another 1,800 hours, for total service in excess of 3,500 hours, valued by BLM at \$56,175.

The national awards will be presented May 8 at the U.S. Department of the Interior in Washington D.C.

"The 2003 winners are some of our nation's most enthusiastic volunteers, having donated significant time and effort in the year 2002 on behalf of America's 262 million acres of BLM-managed public lands and natural/cultural resources," Lueders said.

BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, recruits 17,000-20,000 volunteers each year to perform a variety of jobs, from campground host to archaeologist to educator. In many instances, volunteers serve as BLM's first point of contact with the public, playing an important ambassadorial role for the agency. In some remote areas, campgrounds and other recreation sites would be closed were it not for volunteers, Lueders added.