



Northwest  
Watershed Institute

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# *How to Run a* PLANT-A-THON

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“It’s important to teach children about environmental problems, but even more important to give them a chance to solve them.”

— Jude Rubin

# Welcome!

To date, Northwest Watershed Institute and over 1,000 volunteers from partner schools have planted more than 56,000 trees to restore 65 acres of streamside salmon habitat. Seven schools have collectively raised over \$180,000 through the sale of honorary tree cards and business sponsorships. In this guide we share everything you need to know to raise money by planting trees with volunteers.

You’ll learn how NWI runs The **Plant-A-Thon**, get ideas for adapting it to your locale, see examples of articles, and cringe at our bloopers—the big mistakes we made, that you can avoid.

The **Plant-A-Thon** began in Tarboo Creek, on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. The project has been a vital part of the Tarboo Watershed Program, now a nationally recognized effort to restore salmon and wildlife from headwaters to bay.

Originally the land of the Coast Salish people for thousands of years, the **Port Gamble S’Klallam, Jamestown S’Klallam, Lower Elwha S’Klallam, and Skokomish Tribes** retain treaty rights to hunt and gather in their Usual and Accustomed Area under international law. We honor the Native American people, whose cultures and traditions have been deeply rooted in this place since the beginning of time.

We offer what we know best from our experience in rural Pacific Northwest USA with an understanding that this

model won’t work everywhere. **Your** setting—your culture, ecology and economy—may be completely different from ours. **So please feel free to adapt The Plant-A-Thon model to your unique place.**

Once you’ve read this guide, you should be able to run a **Plant-A-Thon** locally!

Our dream is to make honorary tree-planting as familiar as girl scout cookies, and we are looking for partners. So if you work in a large “multiplier” organization, like a school district, national environmental group, or, well, the Scouts of America, *you will need more than this guide can provide*. Contact Northwest Watershed Institute for professional consultation to help launch The **Plant-A-Thon** at a larger scale.

In order to get your shovels in the ground as soon as possible, NWI has removed many barriers including copyrights to photos, artwork, text and materials when used for running a **Plant-A-Thon**. You may also share this online document—free of charge—with anyone.

In exchange, we ask that you follow all protocols in [How to Use This Guide](#). Read it carefully before running your **Plant-A-Thon**!

Wishing you success,

— Jude Rubin, Founder The **Plant-A-Thon**



# What Exactly is The Plant-A-Thon?

This **VIDEO** explains The **Plant-A-Thon** in 90 seconds. Share with potential partners to quickly explain the idea.

Prefer listening to reading? This **PODCAST** takes the listener into the field for Crew Leader Training, and Planting Day.

In the **Plant-A-Thon** model, one **Restoration Group**, and one (or more) **Volunteer Group** work together to create a large tree-planting event that raises money for the volunteer group through the sale of Honorary Tree Cards.

Each card sold represents one tree planted. It is sent in honor or memory of someone; the recipient is designated (written in) by whoever sends it.

The **Restoration Group** can be a natural resource agency, non-profit environmental organization (501c3) or tribe. This group is responsible for all ecological planning and logistics, including tree species selection, on-site planning, volunteer education and crew leader training.

The **Volunteer Group** such as a school, a group of schools, civic group, church, or any special interest group that wants to raise money, organizes all of the volunteer management, including transportation, communications and food.

The **Volunteer Group** sells Honorary Tree Cards. Then, with help from the restoration group, a large group of volunteers plants the trees.

One of these two groups will also act as the **Project Manager** coordinating the **Plant-A-Thon** activities behind the scenes. In our version, Northwest Watershed

Institute (NWI), which is a non-profit 501(c)(3), served as both the restoration group and the Project Manager.

Both groups benefit financially and socially from **Plant-A-Thon**:

The **Volunteer Group** runs a fundraiser by selling Honorary Tree Cards, and by soliciting additional business donations. Planting together fulfills their need to do community service and group activities.

The **Restoration Group** earns income by “leveraging” the value of the volunteers’ hours as an in-kind match for federal, state or private grants, and by attracting new donors.

In our program, each Honorary Tree Card is priced at \$5–\$10 (sliding scale). Since Northwest Watershed Institute already raises grant money to complete restoration projects, *and since our own children attended participating schools*, we consider the **Plant-A-Thon** a gift to the community; 100% of funds raised go to the schools. This has become our tradition. The financial model can be structured differently.



# History of The Plant-A-Thon, and Keys to Success

It was 2004, and the first school funding cuts under the “No Child Left Behind Act” had parents in a panic: no librarian, PE, arts, or field trips.

Meanwhile, as parents scrambled to fill gaping holes in school budgets, my organization, Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI), was recruiting for volunteers to help replant a forest on a gigantic 300-acre stream restoration project. Despite efforts to find individual volunteers, NWI’s Executive Director Peter Bahls said wryly, “the same three guys kept showing up.”

That year, our daughter was starting grade school, and we had our eye on an alternative public program. Prospective parents had to attend a fundraising meeting. I listened from a tiny chair as parents batted around ideas like selling raw cookie dough and running a car wash.

I sat quietly, knees jammed up against my chin. There was no way parents could spackle this funding gap with cookie dough. Also, there was an ideological disconnect between classroom values and these fundraising plans.

In the middle of that night, I was awakened by a cinematic vision of the **Plant-A-Thon** downloading through my dreams. There were fields of kids and parents planting trees, and raising money at the same time. “If they can sell cookie dough, why can’t they ‘sell’ [the act of planting] trees?”

The next week at another parent meeting, I proposed planting 2,000 trees along Tarboo Creek. Right then and there, the parents approved.

So, the first success was to pair up two established groups that filled each others’ needs. NWI would get dozens of new tree-planting volunteers, while schools could patch up their budgets.

Moving ahead, I suggested the typical “(Whatever)-A-Thon” fundraising model we’d all grown up with. Well, the idea of planting trees energized the parents. They wanted to do something useful outside with their kids. And they saw a chance to earn thousand—rather than hundreds—of dollars.

But they hated the fundraising model. So they simplified it. By matching each of the 2,000 trees with one “Honorary Tree Card,” if sold for \$5 each, could earn the schools up to \$10,000. Much more with business sponsorships.

Most importantly, this school—called OPEPO—held cooperation as its highest value. So they eliminated all competition and prizes. “Just have everyone do what they enjoy, and do that task as much as they can. Some people will sell a lot of cards, others will sell a few. Some will plant a lot of trees, some will plant a few.” Here was an inclusive approach that encouraged everyone to use their natural talents and skills to help the natural world. “*It will all work out,*” they said.

“Use your natural talents to help the natural world.”

— Jude Rubin



Writing up the card text, we included an explanation of the bigger ecological picture, and described NWI's Tar-boo Watershed Project. We wanted be sure that whoever received the Honorary Tree Card knew exactly where—and why—their tree was planted.

Maintaining a very high standard of ecological integrity was another key to our success.

Next, a parent designed art for the card. She considered every detail and made a simple image that wordlessly conveyed something complex. Her artwork increased the emotional impact and the dollar value of Honorary Tree Cards.

Almost as an afterthought, we added a line at the top of the text. It said: “In Honor of \_\_\_\_\_ a tree is being planted...” Suddenly, our little tree-planting was much bigger than ourselves. And bigger than our stream. It was significant. Sacred, even.

Planting “in honor of someone special” would also motivate a much broader group of people to buy cards. You didn't have to see yourself as an environmentalist to buy the Tree Cards. Our **Plant-A-Thon** now had universal meaning and wide appeal.

But before sending kids out onto the streets to sell Honorary Tree Cards, NWI visited all of their classrooms with an interactive watershed model, and explained the deeper reasons why “Salmon Grow on Trees and Trees Grow on Salmon.” In other words, how forests and salmon co-evolved in stream corridors of the temperate rainforest.

The anticipation of both planting trees and selling tree cards was a powerful, natural motivator.

We realized that every parent and student would have to read the statement about ecology dozens of times as they sold the tree cards, reinforcing their own understanding, and revving up anticipation for the event.

Selling the Honorary Tree Cards helped volunteers articulate the message, and get excited for the upcoming planting event.

NWI's original rationale for tree-planting was to restore freshwater salmon habitat. By (naively) proposing to plant 2,000 trees the first year, NWI sent up a cry for “all hands on deck.” Sensing true need, everyone wanted to pitch in to tackle this big problem.

Next, another school came on board. We would need to divide up the big tasks to succeed as a group. So each school took up part of work to prepare for the event. They ran the fundraising campaign, arranged transportation and planned a big feast. Meanwhile, NWI handled the technical side: planning, ordering plants, and preparing the site.

Did I mention food? Where we live, trees are planted in the rainy winter season. A big hot lunch and hot drinks would be essential to keep volunteers happy. We wanted a zero-waste feast. Food unites people as a community, and keeps them going.





At our first **Plant-A-Thon**, we hoped for a few dozen people, but 120 showed up! Not only did food run out, but we had a fiasco. NWI had trained an Americorps team as crew leaders. But on planting day, a completely different group showed up! Ever since then, NWI has relied on local crew leaders; they retain local knowledge and return year after year.

Some youth crew leaders later asked NWI for professional letters of reference, and sent us copies of college application essays that explained how the **Plant-A-Thon** changed their idea of what's possible, when people collaborate. Many young people crave responsibility, and want to be part of the solution. We had unwittingly created a way to empower young adults.

NWI was so impressed by these teens that we created another program: **The Youth Environmental Stewards (YES!) Program**. But that's another guidebook...

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Since our first meeting in 2004 sitting on tiny classroom chairs, NWI and partnering schools have **planted more than 51,000 trees** to **restore 65 acres** of streamside salmon habitat. And seven schools have collectively **raised over \$180,000** through the sale of honorary tree cards and business sponsorships.

To date, more than **1,000 participants** of all ages—many of whom return every year—have learned to identify and plant trees. Of these, two hundred teens and adults have served as crew leaders who define themselves as environmental leaders.

# Keys To Success

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- 1 Enable partners to solve each other's problems.** Restoration Groups need volunteers, and Volunteer Groups need community service fundraisers.
  - 2 “Use your natural talents to help the natural world.”** Find ways to make the most of everyone's skills.
  - 3 Be ecologically accurate.** Make sure a restoration ecologist or other expert oversees everything, including tree cards, planting plans, teaching, crew leader training and PR. Don't attempt a **Plant-A-Thon** without an expert.
  - 4 Connect to something bigger.** Honorary Tree Planting improves the bond between people and the trees they plant, and brings tree-planters into their “highest selves.”
  - 5 Art wordlessly explains the **Plant-A-Thon**.**
  - 6 Volunteers become community teachers.** Honorary Tree Cards are “accidental” teaching tools that help everyone who buys or sells them to understand why we plant trees.
  - 7 Tackle a big goal together.** Most people want to solve environmental problems, but feel overwhelmed. Working together empowers a group to achieve something that nobody can do alone.
  - 8 Delegate, train and trust people.** Don't overprotect volunteers by hogging all the work yourself.
  - 9 Make it festive.** A feast creates community and keeps people happy.
  - 10 Trust and train local adults and teens as crew leaders.** Support teens with mentors, and clear training. Remove the three barriers to youth participation by providing *transportation, gear and food*.

**MISSION CRITICAL:**

Essential to the success of your **Plant-A-Thon**.



**PRO TIPS:** Insights and details to help your **Plant-A-Thon** run smoothly.



**EXAMPLES:** Links to useful reference documents.



**TWISTS:** Ideas to help you match this project to your local culture, ecology and economy.



**BLOOPERS:** NWI's big, flaming mistakes, and how to avoid them.

Ok, let's get started!

# How To Use This Guide

Our goal is to spread The **Plant-A-Thon** model as widely as possible.

You won't find copyrights on use of the program name, artwork, photos, or text used in communications, grant proposals or news articles.

**In exchange, we ask that you respect all of these rules:**

**YES:** You may use everything you find here to get kids and families planting trees, and learning about their home ecosystems, as soon as possible.

**YES:** Always credit the original authors, photographers and artists.

**NO:** Do not copyright any of this information yourself, nor claim the **Plant-A-Thon** model or this guide as your own invention.

**MAYBE:** Tree Card Artwork: 1) **The only approved use the artwork provided here is by a non-profit organization conducting a **Plant-A-Thon**. Use of artwork or photography is expressly prohibited for commercial or for-profit activities.** To obtain permission for using the artwork and/or photography in this guide in a commercial endeavor, you must [contact the artist directly](#).

*Northwest Watershed Institute does **not** condone or pre-approve the commercial use of the art and photography in this guide.* 2) Only use the artwork provided if you are working within the Pacific Northwest ecosystem, where salmon are a keystone species. This seems obvious, but if your ecosystem is different—say, a mangrove, a deciduous forest, or savannah—this artwork won't accurately reflect the place you're trying to restore.

**SPELLING:** Always spell it this way: **The Plant-A-Thon**. Note capitalization and hyphens. No quotation marks! **Do not use** “plantathon,” “Plantathon,” or “Plant-a-thon.”

**Credit where credit is due:** In press releases and/or social media, include the phrase, “**The Plant-A-Thon, a program developed by Northwest Watershed Institute in Washington State.**”

**Please refer to the [PLANT-A-THON TIMELINE](#) to learn the order of events and who does what.** Click on a task to find it in the guide.





# Why Plant Trees?

## TREES:



Enhance or create wildlife habitat.

Provide shade.



Cool rivers & wetlands.

Sequester carbon dioxide, a leading greenhouse gas.

CO<sub>2</sub>



Restore degraded soils.

[For more about trees, click here](#)

## Does every site need trees?

No, trees do not necessarily belong everywhere. In areas that were historically grassland, mangroves, or deserts, it may be unhelpful to plant trees.

Ask local experts before starting a new project! Call your conservation district, local land trust, or nearest chapter of the Nature Conservancy.

Check in with groups called “Friends of” the waterway or natural area you hope to restore, and find out whether they need to plant trees. They may already have a project underway that a **Volunteer Group** can simply join.

# Who Does What?



## RESTORATION GROUP

This group knows how to plant trees. Local ecology experts, also called restoration practitioners, do the site-planning, order saplings and other materials, train crew leaders and educate volunteers.

⚠ The **Restoration Group** must have the capacity to complete a large restoration project and engage with a large group of volunteers (even if this is their first time). This group already has a project planned for the upcoming planting season, and needs volunteers.

💡 The **Restoration Group** should also be willing to work as an informal educator with the volunteers before they begin selling cards. NWI created a curriculum called, “How Salmon Grow on Trees, and Trees Grow on Salmon,” to teach volunteers how planting trees helps restore fish and wildlife habitat.



## VOLUNTEER GROUP

This group needs to raise money; their mission aligns with community service, and hopefully “helping the environment.” The **Volunteer Group** may be a school, club, business, and/or religious organization. NWI teams up with schools.

⚠ The **Volunteer Group** **must** have both a strong base of capable, willing tree-planting volunteers, good systems in place to communicate with their members.

💡 The **Volunteer Group** chooses ONE POINT PERSON ONLY who communicates with the **Project Manager**. We call these invaluable folks “School Coordinators,” and their job is to communicate with the rest of the **Volunteer Group’s** members. In our case, students’ families.



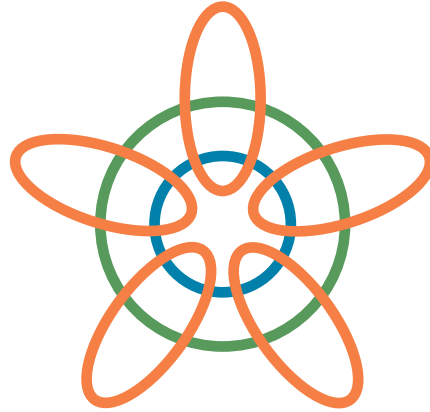
## PROJECT MANAGER

This person is the overall organizer for the whole **Plant-A-Thon** Program. S/he tracks all tasks and timing, interacts with sponsors, handles media, and keeps everyone on task. This person may be part of the **Restoration Group** or **Volunteer Group**, or perhaps be unaffiliated with either group.

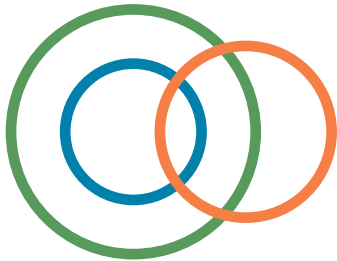
💡 To avoid confusion and resentment, NWI asks **Volunteer Groups** to sign a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**, a non-legal document that clearly outlines everyone’s responsibilities.

🌀 More than one **Volunteer Group** can work on the same planting project. NWI works as a **Project Manager** with five schools per year. Warning: the need for organization increases with project complexity!

# Partnering Models



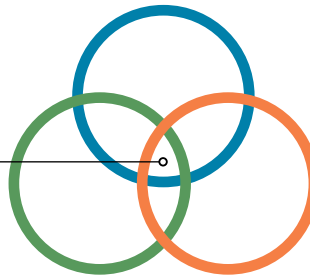
In our program, NWI serves as both **Project Manager** and **Restoration Group**. We now work with five schools (**Volunteer Groups**) per year. We started with two, but others asked to join. Note: this takes a lot of coordination time. A good option for “Friends of Trees” or organizations that have many trees to plant!



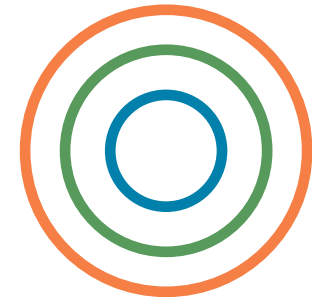
Here is a great way to start! A **Restoration Group** with capacity to manage volunteers serves as the **Project Manager** and works with one **Volunteer Group**.



Planting Event



Maybe you live in a fantasy village, where an organization exists just to keep other groups' projects on track? As long as an outside **Project Manager** is close enough to the content, this model can work, especially for multiplier organizations.



NWI tried this the first year—we were the **Project Manager**, **Restoration Group** and the **Volunteer Group** at our daughter's school. *It was too much work for one person.*



## Plant-a-Thon TIMELINE

DATE	Based on Planting date of February 5th	TASK Description	PAGE #	Restoration Group	Volunteer Group	Project Manager
<b>BEFORE EVENT</b>						
Ideally completed before first partners meeting	August	Define a Cooperative Group Culture	14		X	X
Ideally completed before first partners meeting	August	Raise Money for Staffing and Materials	15–16	X		X
Before first partners meeting	August	Assemble <b>Plant-A-Thon</b> Team	17			X
At first meeting	Late August/Early September	Choose Clear Goals—Write Your “News Headline”	18	X	X	X
Prior to forming partnership—confirm at first partners meeting	By August	Choose A Tree Planting Site Location	19	X		
Prior to forming partnership—confirm at first partners meeting	By August	How Many Trees and Why Plant Them?	20–21	X		
Prior to forming partnership—confirm at first partners meeting	Negotiate at first meeting	How Many Volunteers?	22–24	X	X	
Soon after first meeting	Early September	Event Sponsors and Funding	25		X	X
Soon after first meeting	Early September	Compile Contact Information for Core Leadership Team	26			X
8–10 weeks before printing Honorary Tree Cards	Late August/Early September	First Meeting of Core Leadership Team	27–28	X	X	X
At first meeting	Late August/Early September	Define and Delegate Large EVENT Tasks	27		X	X
Timing varies, depending on artist’s availability	September–November	Select/Commission Artist	29		X	X
Three months before planting	Before Thanksgiving	Launch Tree Card Fundraising Campaign	30		X	X
4–5 months before planting	September	Design Planting Plan & Order Plants and Materials	31	X		

Plant-a-Thon TIMELINE (continued)						
DATE	Based on Planting date of February 5th	TASK Description	PAGE #	Restoration Group	Volunteer Group	Project Manager
<b>DURING</b>						
3 months before planting event	By November 10	Print Honorary Tree Cards	32		X	
2.5–3 months before planting event	Nov 10–Thanksgiving	CAMPAIGN KICK OFF	33–35	X	X	X
Booking lead time depends on person's availability	November/December	Arrange Special Guest Speaker or Musician for Event Day	36			X
4-6 weeks prior to event	November/December	Recruit Adult and Youth Crew Leaders	37		X	X
4-6 weeks prior to event	November/December	Recruit Tree Planters	38		X	
January/One month prior to Plant-A-Thon	January	Organize Food and Other Essentials for Plant-A-Thon Event Day	39–40		X	
January/One month prior to Plant-A-Thon	January	Prepare the Planting Site (professionals)	41–42	X		
Weekend before event	Last Saturday in January	Train Crew Leaders	43–45	X	X	X
Three days before event	Thursday before event	Pre-Event Check List	46	X		X
Planting Event!	First Saturday in February	Plant-A-Thon EVENT DAY	47–49	X	X	X
<b>AFTER</b>						
Immediately following event	Monday after the event	Media Promotion #2	50		X	X
ASAP after articles are published	Depends on publishing date	Promote in Social Media	50	X	X	X
ASAP after articles are published	ASAP after event	Thank Donors and Sponsors	50	X	X	X
3 months after event	Late May	Site Check Up: Monitoring and Maintenance	51	X	X	
ASAP after all tasks are complete	June	Submit Grant Reports & Reimburse partners	52	X		X

# Define A Cooperative Social Culture

## Create a Cooperative Group Ethic

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When you openly share a vision for how everyone will interact during The **Plant-A-Thon**, people shift into high level of collaboration, and effectiveness.

Try it!

The theme of 'All for one, one for all,' is reflected in our program in many ways: no one gets extra recognition for selling the most cards or planting the most trees. Everyone is expected to participate to their fullest ability, whether that means planting hundreds of trees, being a Crew Leader, driving vans, or serving food.

Here is what we say at our first meeting of key organizers, and again at Crew Leader training:

*Trust your own style and language. Get the group into silence before you begin. Keep it brief.*

"Look, whatever role you play in this project, I ask that you do it 'in your highest self.' Everyone here has tremendous gifts and talents, including you. You chose to be here and I trust that you'll be a huge help. Whether you are good with trees, good with food, good with kids, or good at selling cards, there is room for you and your skills here. So please share yourself generously with this group, the project, and with the natural environment itself. I am really happy you've decided to unleash your talents on [restoring stream habitat for salmon]. Thank you for using your natural talents to help the natural world."

"We're all here to help one another out. *All for one, and one for all.* We might be rivals in sports, or have our different views. But on this project, none of that matters. We're just here to help each other plant trees. And we have a lot of them. Let's do it."



# Raise Money for Staffing and Materials

Even before you get started, you may need to raise some money for plants, project management and educating volunteers.

If the restoration organization was already planning to replant an area it is likely they already have funding for trees and materials in hand. If not, you may need to write a grant or ask for individual donations to buy seedlings and other supplies.

If the **Project Manager** is already engaging volunteers as part of his or her normal work, it may be possible to fold this program into normal operations. If not, this group writes a grant or gets a donation from a local agency or bank, to ensure that the **Project Manager** is paid.

Each year, NWI writes grant proposals, solicit donations and in-kind support from local businesses to run **Plant-A-Thon**. You will need to start with a [budget](#).



Partner with local businesses to “Raise \$ to plant a tree for every [item] sold.” Our local Food Co-op donates a dollar for every box of oranges sold during winter, an approach that brings in about \$1,200 annually.

<https://www.foodcoop.coop/blog/2018/11/15/nw-watershed-plant-a-thon-fundraiser>



Try movie tickets, tools, or any other popular goods and services.



The **Restoration Group** can leverage funding by counting all volunteer labor as an in-kind donation for grant proposals.

**Example:** If volunteer labor is valued at a \$15/hour.

**150 people x 5 hours @ \$15/hour  
= \$11,250 match  
for materials and supplies.**

You can also count donated food, services, and transportation as a match.



Ensure that all volunteers sign a blanket liability form and listing their name, contact information, number in their group, hours they worked, and an agreement to release photos. [Sign-in forms](#) will also serve as “proof of hours worked” to a granting agency for reporting.



[Sign-in Forms](#)

# Raise Money for Staffing and Materials

## (More Tips for Success)

Grants are a good source of funding for restoration supplies, and education. It is hard to find grant money for staffing.



Seek project sponsors, like banks, real estate agents, doctors, regional corporations, and foundations.



Increase membership, donors and volunteers by collecting participants' contact information on your sign-in sheet, which doubles as a waiver. After the event, reach out through email, social media or a thank-you call. If you have a membership drive or annual fund request, add these volunteers to your list.



Remember that some individuals, businesses or agencies might increase support to your restoration group if you are working with local youth and families. Include photos in updates and year-end reports, and social media; you may gain new supporters.



NWI started out with funding for a large restoration project. But the following year, after money for that project was spent, our school partners still expected **Plant-A-Thon** to continue. Now, NWI continues to raise about \$30,000 annually in grants and donations to run **The Plant-A-Thon**, while the schools keep the proceeds from sale of Tree Cards. Although this funding model is a terrific gift to our community, NWI has yet to find a truly sustainable source of funds.



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## Assemble Your Plant-A-Thon Team

1

Find an expert  
**Restoration Group**  
a **Volunteer Group(s)**,  
and a **Project Manager**.

2

Draft a Memorandum  
of Understanding  
between groups, so  
everyone has a clear  
picture of their  
responsibilities.



# Choose Clear Goals— Write Your “News Headline”

## CREATE YOUR VERSION:

This year (#) volunteers from (name of volunteer organization/s) will plant (# of) trees at (Location or watershed name) to help (name of restoration group) to (ecological reason for planting). The **Plant-A-Thon** is a partnership between (names of groups). Sponsored by (major funder/s); the proceeds from the sale of Tree Cards benefit (Name of group or cause).



Your first task as a team is to write a “dummy” version of a front-page article for a national newspaper. What, exactly, did your **Plant-A-Thon** accomplish?

### INCLUDE:

- What is the exact tree planting site location?
- How many trees, and why plant them?
- How many volunteers?
- Event sponsors & funding sources
- List of participating partners (Core Leadership Team)

“This February, 180 students and family members from five schools on the Olympic Peninsula, WA, are planting 3,000 native trees along a newly-restored reach of Tarboo Creek to help Northwest Watershed Institute reforest stream buffers. The growing forest we plant will shade the stream and benefit salmon and wildlife in perpetuity. **Plant-A-Thon** is a partnership between five local schools [list] and Northwest Watershed Institute. Sponsored by a grant from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Clif Bar Family Foundation and Kitsap Bank. All proceeds from the sale of Tree Cards benefit participating schools.”

# Choose A Tree Planting Site Location

**Find an appropriate site for a large tree-planting. Ideally this is part of a larger restoration program in your region.**

## 1 Special considerations for large **Volunteer Groups**:

- **Parking**—Is there enough parking space? If not, volunteers will need busses.
- **Access**—How far will volunteers need to walk?
- **Lunch**—Is there a good flat area, or a building on site?
- **Running water**—You will need a hose with potable water to wash hands and and fill water bottles. Or bring large water containers.

## 2 Get landowner permission.

- Be sure to get signed permission beforehand to hold the event. Find out whether the landowner wants to be recognized in media and at the event.
- Acquire a conservation easement, if possible. This legal agreement protects the land and your trees forever.



**Liability.** Which organization has volunteer insurance? If the volunteer group is a large established one, like 4H Club, volunteers may already be covered. The restoration group also may have “volunteer insurance.” Make sure participants sign a waiver that clearly states they are planting at their own risk.

# How Many Trees and Why Plant Them?



If local experts say, “No trees are needed here,” believe them! Then ask what they DO need. You can still use the basic idea: a **Volunteer Group** earns donations by taking on environmental projects.

**When deciding on your tree goal and ecological rationale, consider two things:**

## 1 How many trees will you plant?

Factors for the restoration expert to consider:

- Number of plantable acres on site
- Average spacing needed between trees
- Typical expected tree survival rate, if available. E.g. If 75% of trees usually survive, use .75 as a multiplier.

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$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \# \text{ plantable} & & & & & & \text{maximum \#} \\ \text{acres} & \times & \text{average \#} & \times & \text{tree survival} & = & \text{trees to} \\ & & \text{trees per acre} & & \text{rate/acre} & & \text{plant at} \\ & & & & & & \text{Plant-A-Thon} \end{array}$$

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## 2 Why are you planting trees here?



Take your planting goals directly from the restoration professional. If local experts don't normally plant trees in your region, stop and think twice about whether this project is ecologically suited to your place. If trees ARE part of the native ecosystem, craft a simple two-sentence reason for planting them.



# How Many Trees and Why Plant Them?

## (continued)

R



Different trees need different spacing. Use a weighted average spacing for calculating tree totals, but take care in the field to install them at the correct distances for each species. Large trees like Western Red Cedar may have 10' spacing, while shrubs like Red Osier Dogwood or Willow are planted 3' apart.

PM



Make sure your project is the right scale for your group. If you are in an urban area, plant 20 trees in a public park and call it a win! This can still work—just increase the per-tree sponsorship cost—perhaps to \$100 (or more) per tree—and encourage businesses or families to sponsor each tree as a major life tribute to someone.

R



If possible, choose a challenging number of trees. In addition to helping with reforestation, this psyches up the volunteer base. In the first year, NWI's partners planted 2,000 trees, because the site required it. **Volunteer Groups** rose to the challenge.

“When a group of people decide to take on a seemingly insurmountable project that benefits the greater good, the challenge has the potential to bring out the best in each person. It is a gift to the children who witness the adults in their lives struggle, find solutions, and ultimately emerge joyously.”

— Diane Rowley  
Portland Waldorf School Chair  
(retired)



# How Many Volunteers?


$$\begin{array}{l} \text{average \# trees} \\ \text{per volunteer} \\ \text{per hour} \end{array} \times \begin{array}{l} \text{\# hours of} \\ \text{the event} \end{array} \times \begin{array}{l} \text{\# volunteers} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{\# volunteer} \\ \text{hours} \end{array}$$

---

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{\# volunteer hours/} \\ \text{\# hours at event} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{\# volunteers} \\ \text{you will need} \\ \text{to recruit} \end{array}$$

---

Our average tree planting volunteer can install 20 bare root trees in four hours of planting time—a rate of 5 trees/hour. *This average includes **all ages**, from pre-school children to adults, including crew leaders.*

**EXAMPLE:**

$$\begin{array}{l} 5 \text{ trees} \\ \text{per hour} \end{array} \times 4 \text{ hours} \times 180 \text{ volunteers} = 3,600 \text{ volunteer hours}$$

**NOTE:** The four (4) hours of actual tree-planting work is based on a day-long event (10AM-4PM), where extra time is needed for opening remarks, lunch, and socializing.

# How Many Volunteers? (continued)

R



When you are deciding how many trees to plant, consider:

- **Planting methods**—Potted plants or live stakes will be faster than bare root plants.
- **Age and ability of Volunteers**—Strong, agile volunteers can plant more trees per person, while very young children, elders, and people with disabilities may plant fewer. With good crew leadership and realistic goals, small children and their families can plant a lot of trees. Expect young children (3–7) to leave after lunch. Encourage other volunteers to plant till dusk.
- **Crew Leaders** must focus on teaching, managing their crew, and quality control. They will plant *fewer* trees than average tree-planter!
- **Soil conditions**—Speaking the obvious here: In compact soils or thick turf, digging takes longer.
- **Site terrain**—If sites are hard to reach, decrease the expected number of plants per person-hour.
- **Prior site preparation**—Who will sort and haul plants and plant protectors into the planting zones on site: volunteers, crew leaders, or professional field crew? If volunteers, then decrease planting numbers/person.



X

In 2006, one person sorted and hauled all 2,000 tree seedlings to their zones *alone*. Get help from a professional field crew and/or crew leaders a day or so before the event!

# How Many Volunteers? (continued)



Many planting sites have difficult digging conditions. Have a professional field crew remove the top layer of turf, and place a bamboo pole and plant protector to mark each desired planting location. That way, volunteers can get right down to planting.



**Weather:** A cold, rainy morning ensures that many well-intentioned people will stay in bed! So, invoke the rain date if the weather looks really bad, or be left with more plants than the group can reasonably install.



At one **Plant-A-Thon**, wind gusts of 25 MPH blew bare root saplings right out of volunteers' hands as they went to plant them. The Port-O-Potty even blew over. Cancel three days in advance if the weather forecast looks foreboding, and invoke the rain date.



Encourage participants to share childcare so that some parents focus entirely on planting trees. Acknowledge that caregivers are key to the overall success of the project; remember to thank them for making an important contribution.



# Event Sponsors and Funding

Brainstorm a list of likely business donors in your area. Create a “Funding Request Package” including a sample Honorary Tree Card and clear statement about the benefit of your tree-planting event. Determine who in the **Volunteer Group** has close relationships with business owners or decision makers. Call first to set up an appointment, then using the ask packet, request a contribution.



No Double asks. To ensure each business is only asked by ONE volunteer, create a master list, and assign volunteers to each business.



If the **Volunteer Group** is a 501(c)(3), within one week of receiving a donation from a sponsor, follow up with a thank you letter, including your tax ID number.



[Business Sponsor  
Request Letter .DOC](#)  
(Editable file)



[Business Sponsor  
Request Letter .PDF](#)



# Participating Partners: Compile Contact Information for Core Leadership Team

Create a Master List including each participating Group's:

- Name
- Affiliation—Name of Organization
- Cell #
- Email
- Organization's Logo
- Organization's Mission



**Project Manager:** get each organization's logo and official mission statement at the first meeting or sooner. These will be printed on the back of Tree Cards, and in all **Plant-A-Thon** publicity. Preparing these early saves time and stress later.



Honorary Tree Card Text

# First Meeting

You've built a Core Leadership Team, and established clear goals. It's time to gather at a local venue, face-to-face. This will be the first of only two or three meetings. All other planning can be done online.

**1** **PM** Write an agenda and a schedule of events for the duration of the project.

**R** **V** Turn in MOUs to **Project Manager**.

**2** **PM** **V** If there is more than one **Volunteer Group**, delegate these major asks among the groups:

- Print Honorary Tree Cards
- Organize Transportation
- Recruit Adult and Teen Crew Leaders
- Organize Food for the Planting Event
- Greeting, Parking, Check In, and Waivers
- Photography


**3** **PM** **R** **V** Schedule the **FUNDRAISING KICK OFF** Date, **EVENT** Date, and **RAIN** Date.

# First Meeting (continued)

**4** **R** **V** Identify a week when the **Restoration Group** can provide classes or educational sessions to teach the volunteer base about local ecology, right before the fundraising **KICK OFF** date.

---

**5** **PM** **V** Set a price point or sliding scale for Honorary Tree Cards.

**PM**  Our community can support the program at \$5–10 sliding scale. **CAUTION:** High price point could alienate low-income populations. Be sensitive to the local economy.

---

**6** **PM** Schedule a “card sorting party.”

Divide up cards among volunteers. In our case, all five school coordinators get together over dinner and create “take home packets” for each family to sell. Often they bring along extra volunteers to help. The party makes this chore festive.

---

**7** **V** Divide potential business sponsors.

If your project involves multiple **Volunteer Group**—like two schools, three churches or five scout troops—take time at this meeting to divide up potential business sponsors to avoid double asks.



“Including local art gives the project...wings”

— Amanda Kingsley

CLICK CARD  
TO SEE FULL  
SIZED IMAGE



Amanda Kingsley



Richard Jesse Watson



Max Grover

# Select and Commission Artist to Create Image for the Honorary Tree Card

The **Volunteer Group** and **Project Manager** choose an artist to design an image for the Honorary Tree Card. The **Volunteer Group** prints and distributes cards for the fundraiser. You can decide whether to ask a local artist, or use the images provided here.

We featured new artists and images each year. For the first five years, local artist Amanda Kingsley donated her work.



**Restoration Group** works with the artist to review art for ecological accuracy. Artist may need the restoration expert to help find images of local native flora and fauna. Correct any depictions of non-native species!



**Pay it forward.** In 2010, a famous artist, Max Grover, created the card artwork, and decided to auction off his original to “pay it forward” so next year’s artist could earn a stipend. This worked for a few years as other artists did the same. However...



The art auction was a beautiful gesture, but was very time-consuming. It over-extended NWI’s small staff. Only hold an art auction if you have a volunteer to lead it, and a wealthy base of donors to buy art.



You can include the original artwork auction item within an existing fundraiser at your organization.



If you live in the Pacific Northwest USA, feel free to use one of NWI’s designs. The artists have generously given us permission to reprint them for use in non-profit **Plant-A-Thons** only. *Reprinting is expressly prohibited for any other purpose.*

But—hey, New Jersey and New Zealand, this means you—these cards make won’t make sense in other ecosystems; you will want to create a new image, with YOUR iconic wildlife and trees.



# Launch Tree Card Fundraising Campaign

## Volunteers sell Honorary Tree Cards in various ways:

- **Face to face** to families, friends and neighbors.
- **Public events:** Farmer's Market, Holiday Gift Fairs, outside the supermarket.
- **Kiosks:** Willing business owners set up small wooden kiosks to sell cards.
- **Online:** Create a website to sell cards.  
<https://squareup.com/store/plant-a-thon/>



Time the sale of cards with winter holidays, including Christmas, Chanukah, Solstice and Kwanzaa.



The old saying, "People don't give to causes, they give to people" is true. Public markets and other face-to-face sales were the most successful!



We imagined that online sales option would be wildly popular, card buyers preferred to have contact with the person who would be planting their special tree, and/or benefit from their donation.



**Option: Create a web-based sales page.** Square-up and Paypal worked well. Online is a good option for long-distance sales, but it was not as popular as expected.



# Design Planting Plan & Order Plants and Materials

Create a master plan, divided into the number of zones suitable for crew leaders to manage 10–15 people per zone.

Order plants and materials 3–4 months in advance.

NWI works with about 180 volunteers per year, divided into ten zones. Each zone is .5 acre, and contains between 200–400 trees. Since 30 are crew leaders, We roughly calculate fifteen (15) tree-planters working for five hours will plant twenty (20) trees each, or about 300 plants per .5 acre zone.



Identify special zones, so your volunteer tree-planters and crew leaders can choose where they want to work. “Kid zones” for age 7 and under are close to bathroom and away from obvious danger. “Adventure zones” are farthest from bathroom, across rough terrain, and hard to dig.



Order plants 4 months in advance of your planting date, or as early as possible. Choose genetically adapted stock, collected from near your location and elevation. When buying seedlings, check your state’s **conservation district nursery** for bulk discounts.



Grow your own tree seedlings the year before the planting. This requires significant commitment and organization. The Green Belt Movement in Kenya started this way, and has now planted 35 million trees.



# Print Honorary Tree Planting Cards

- **Size:** We use a 5"x 7" folded card with an opening. The front of the card has the artist's image. Inside left panel remains blank for the sender to write a personal message. The right panel contains space for personal dedication "in honor of" and the ecological message. The back of the card describes the mission of the volunteer group, includes the **Restoration Group's** logo, and credits the artist.
- **Materials:** We use a glossy finish on the front, and matte paper inside, to avoid ink smudges when the buyer writes inside the card. High "post-consumer" fiber content for cards and envelopes helps preserve trees. Request plant-based, non-toxic inks.



Ask your local printer for a significant discount in exchange for sponsorship and logo on the back Honorary Tree Cards.



Put business/corporate sponsors' logos on back.



Don't forget the envelopes.



# Campaign Kick Off

There are three parts to the **Plant-A-Thon KICK OFF**:



## **R V** Educate the volunteer base

Volunteers want to understand the ecological importance of trees in the “big picture.” As a local expert, the restoration specialist understands critical ecological connections—and the reasons why tree-planting is a good strategy in your region.

Volunteer participants need to know: “WHY PLANT THESE PARTICULAR TREES HERE IN THIS PARTICULAR PLACE” before they can sell honorary tree cards and plant the trees. The more they understand, the better tree-planters they will be.

- R** In November, before launching the card sales, NWI presents classes at every participating school to help student and teacher volunteers learn about the important relationships between trees, salmon, and other issues.



# Campaign Kick Off (continued)

We chose our launch date to coincide with wild salmon returning to local streams, and Thanksgiving, an easy time to sell cards. The majority of cards are purchased during the winter holiday season!

Using a curriculum called, “How Salmon Grow on Tree...and Trees Grow on Salmon,” NWI explains the co-evolution of salmon and temperate rainforests to children aged four to eighteen.

Kindergarteners, see a gentle puppet play that explains how salmon need and the stream need each other, and shows figuratively how a stream differs with and without trees.

For grades 1–8, students use an interactive watershed model to demonstrate the critical role of trees play at every stage of the salmon life cycle. At the high school level, we add information about the chemistry and physics of trees in stream channels, and look at how spawning salmon nourish old growth forests with marine nutrients.

The teachers themselves integrate The **Plant-A-Thon** into their curriculum to meet state standards for science, technology, environmental literacy, native culture and math.



Many people do not think about nature in ways that experts consider to be very basic! Take time to break down scientific jargon. Volunteers are a mouthpiece for your message, so keep yours clear, exciting, and understandable.



# Campaign Kick Off (continued)

**V** Distribute Tree Cards; begin sales.

For details: See page 30

**PM** Press Release/Media event #1: Honorary Tree Cards & Artist Profile

People are hungry for climate-friendly, environmentally sustainable, meaningful gifts. Let your community know how Honorary Tree Cards meet their needs. Write an article for the local or regional newspaper; ask for color printing in the Arts Section. When published, link to social media.



Provide specific contact information about where, and how, to buy cards. Include basic contact information of the volunteer organization, sales events like Farmer's Market, and businesses where kiosks are located. Head's up! This requires tight coordination between **Volunteer Group** selling cards and the **Project Manager** writing the press release.

**PM**

**V**



Emphasize the fundraising aspect and special role of the artist in this article, and talk more about the ecological importance of planting trees in your later press release, after the event.

**PM**

**V**



Fewer people read local news or use social media on Thanksgiving weekend; avoid publishing on the holiday weekend.



# Arrange Special Guest Speaker or Musician for Event Day

Well in advance, invite a special guest to welcome participants and inspire the group.

PM



Your guest should be local! Someone authentic and genuine is best. NWI's founding board member is Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Elder Gene Jones. Each year, Gene and his wife Marilyn sing a native blessing prayer and welcome participants. [Gene's comments and song are at 25:13.](#)

PM



You can invite a singer, politician or popular figure. If they speak at the Opening Circle, keep comments short; volunteers are eager to get planting! Save longer performances for lunchtime or an after-party.

Special Guest Speaker





# Recruit Adult and Youth Crew Leaders

PM



## Recruit Adult and Youth Crew Leaders

Recruit responsible adults from the **Volunteer Group**. Teens can come from the same group, and/ or from outdoor and service clubs. Look for local “Students for Sustainability,” Scout Groups, High School Science classes, church youth groups, and Interact Club (Rotary International)..



Recruit twice as many teen Crew Leaders as adults.

PM



The first year (2005), NWI trained a crew of Americorps volunteers as Crew Leaders on the day before the planting event. The following day, we went to greet the van, and out walked a completely different team of (untrained) people “ready” to be Crew Leaders!

That day, NWI staff members ran around trying to answer 120 volunteers, all asking: “Where should I plant this tree?” We learned two lessons: 1) Never assume anything and 2) Train LOCAL Crew Leaders who can maintain a body of local knowledge year after year!

PM



To avoid short-staffing at your event, recruit several extra Crew Leaders. Teens are busy. Some kids’ schedules are out of their control. While we emphasize honoring one’s commitments, the truth is that a few Crew Leaders must cancel between training and the **Plant-A-Thon** event itself. Train about five more than you need!

3 Crew Leaders  
per half-acre  
zone

X

10  
zones

=

30 Crew Leaders  
(10 adult, 20 teen)  
for a 5-acre site

+

5  
extra

=

35



# Recruit Tree Planters



Ask members of your group to come plant trees.



Post sign-up posters with time, date, rain date, and location.



Put the planting event, and rain date, onto your group's annual calendar at least 3 months in advance. If schools, put it on in August!



Talk it up at group meetings. **Volunteer Group** leader should explain that everyone in the **Volunteer Group** is expected to do their part, whether tree planting, serving food, childcare, or helping with welcome and sign-in.



After **FUNDRAISING KICK OFF**, send reminder notifications every 2–3 weeks about the event in email newsletters, or on social media platforms your group is accustomed to using.



The best way to is to ask in person!



Offer free, group childcare if the **Volunteer Group** has a high number of tots.



# Organize Food and Other Essentials for **Plant-A-Thon** Event Day



Do whatever you can to prepare a nice spread of food for participants! A feast unites people as friends, and it makes The **Plant-A-Thon** into a celebration.



Have one main volunteer coordinate a small team to provide the food.



Menu planning: make it hot and filling, with no need for cutlery, and provide some food choices for everyone.



NWI's no-fail **Plant-A-Thon Nearly Zero-Waste Feast**: Burritos (meat/veggie), hand held fruit, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, brownies and cookies, hot cauldron of tea, and plenty of coffee.



The first year, volunteers brought hot soup and propane burners. Many more planters than expected showed up, and volunteers ran short. People were hungry, and volunteers brought home mountains of dirty dishes. Take-aways: More food, no dishes.



# Organize Food and Other Essentials for Event Day (continued)

V



Ask restaurants and suppliers to discount food in exchange for sponsorship. Even if you are on a very tight budget, hold a vision for an abundant, colorful lunch. Volunteers really love this part of **Plant-A-Thon**.

V



Make your food festive and local! Respect and lift up your culture: BBQ? Fish fry? Vegan? If you are a native tribe, serve traditional foods.

PM

R



If you are using donations as an in-kind match for a grant, track receipts and submit them to the **Restoration Group**.

V



Go “Zero Waste” by asking volunteers bring their own plates, mugs and cutlery. Have disposable paper items on hand for volunteers who forget.

PM



Take your group picture after lunch, when everyone is happy.

PM



A few weeks before the event, arrange for deliveries and solicit donations of needed outdoor gear. NWI always provides a Port O’ Potty, sponsorship Banner, and asks a local hardware store for 50 work gloves.



If you are working in a low income community, make sure to have some shovels, boots and rain gear to lend.

# Prepare the Planting Site (Professionals)

These preparations are for Northwest Watershed Institute's typical **Plant-A-Thon** where we are assuming:

- 150-200 volunteers will be coming, with each person, on average, planting 20 trees or shrubs
- Groups of 15–20 people will be in each planting zone
- Total planting area is approximately 5 acres.

Task	Description	Timeframe
Planting Plan	Restoration ecologist/botanist (R) gets to know the restoration site intimately; walking it at different seasons, checking soil types, flooding areas, and existing vegetation types. Divide the planting area into 10 relatively equally sized planting zones and estimate size of each with the help of GIS or other maps. Flag the boundaries of each zone in the field and put a cardboard sign with zone number on a stake in each zone. Determine appropriate spacing between plants and calculate the number of plants per zone. With the typical <b>Plant-A-Thon</b> mentioned above, we generally plant 200-300 plants in each of the ten zones. Then, prepare planting plan in a spreadsheet listing number of each species and type (bare root, potted, live stakes) in each zone.	1 year to 6 months before <b>Plant-A-Thon</b> event
Ordering plants	Important: put in plant order at least several months early, to reserve plants far in advance while supplies last.	6 months before
Initial site prep	Field crew removes invasive weeds, builds rough boardwalks as needed on travel routes through wet areas, removes old fencing and other debris, and installs new livestock fencing as needed.	1–2 months before
Storing plants	After delivery of bare root plants, field crew “heels” them in a delivered load of compost soil to keep roots wet and to prevent freezing. Field crew locally gathers other plants or live stakes that will be used in planting.	2 months before
Field staking the planting areas	After the field crew knows the number of trees needed in each zone and the correct spacing from the planting plan, they place the correct number of planting stakes zip-tied to plant protectors in each zone, with tree protector stuck up in the air to flag each place that indicate a tree-planting site to volunteers. The actual number of stakes that will fit in each zone often differs from the original planting plan estimate, so make adjustments as needed to determine exact number of trees to be planted in each zone.	At least 2 weeks before



# Prepare the Planting Site (Professionals)

## (continued)



Task	Description	Timeframe
Remove sod from each tree-planting site	The field crew then uses broad blade hoes or picks to remove the turf layer from each staked planting site, making about a 2'x2' bare dirt area to reduce grass competition.	A few weeks to few days before
Set out trees	Restoration ecologist and field crew refer to the final planting plan to stockpile the correct plants at a central location in each planting zone. Bare root plants may need to be brought out the morning of the event to avoid freezing roots.	Day before event
Preparing for visitors	<b>Project Manager</b> posts cardboard signs to direct people in to the parking area and makes any arrangements needed for group lunch site and bathroom site (such as getting port-a-pottys delivered).	A few days before
Quality control after <b>Plant-A-Thon</b>	The Crew Leaders move through each planting zone, checking each plant to make sure plant, protector and stake are installed properly. Professional Crew may need to return later and plant out incomplete areas. While in each zone, volunteers clean up pots, debris, and lost tools.	Within a few days after event
Protective fencing	At some sites, the Professional Field Crew may need to fence the recently planted trees individually or install a line of temporary fencing between the creek and planting area to protect against beaver or deer browsing.	A few days to weeks after
Walk-through and follow-up	Final inspection of the site and if on private land, accompanied by the landowner if possible. Do any remaining cleanup work, such as re-seeding parking grass that may have been damaged.	A few days to weeks after

# Train Crew Leaders

On planting day, Crew Leaders extend the local restoration expert's knowledge to all the other volunteer tree-planting volunteers. Teach Crew Leaders technical skills so they can show volunteers how to plant trees correctly! Provide peer and mentor support.

NWI requires a half-day Crew Leader training one week before the **Plant-A-Thon** event. We tour the site and run through technical planting skills, but training also doubles as a dress rehearsal—a time to coordinate logistics with the Crew leaders before the big day.

Use the “Group Mind” during training by soliciting a lot of ideas from the group. This keeps crew leaders engaged and active. Balance restoration staff's expertise with input from Crew Leaders. We encourage all trainees to be as verbal and active as possible. This holds their interest and builds confidence in their ability to lead.



Teens are a lot more engaged when you value their contributions and welcome their questions. After teaching Crew Leaders a new skill, ask them to immediately practice it by teaching it to each other. That way, they practice everything at least once before planting day.

## Crew Leader Training Topics include:

- Site Orientation & Ecology
- Native Plant ID
- Right Plant/Right Place
- Planting Methods
- Other Protocols: Plant Protectors, Fencing
- Quality Control
- How to Keep Your Volunteers Happy
- Public Speaking Basics
- Safety and First Aid Protocols
- Emergency Protocols

# Train Crew Leaders (continued)

R



Establish a culture of **complete respect for teens**, by treating them as adults during the planting event. Crew Leader teams have an ideal ratio of 2 teens: 1 adult per planting zone. Allow these teams to get to know each other for a few minutes during training, and decide which aspects they will each teach during the planting event. Combining teens with adults allows the teens to experience leadership, within the safety of a supportive mentor.

---

R



Emphasize that safety is the #1 concern. This event involves dangerous tools, sharp sticks, mud and open water. NWI has not had an accident since 2004 because we provide enough Crew Leaders to effectively monitor volunteers.

---

Crew Leaders should ask their volunteers teams to generate safety rules themselves! If volunteers forget something, Crew Leaders can add a rule. This way, the volunteers know that everyone is responsible for enforcing the safety rules—not just Crew Leaders.

---

R



Identify and spread the skills of Crew Leaders across all zones. Place those with appropriate skills into your special planting zones.

- Good native plant identification skills
- Previous tree-planting experience
- First aid certification
- Enjoys working with young kids
- Confident public speaker

**Note:** Placing unacquainted people together can encourage teens to try on a new leadership approach.



# Train Crew Leaders (continued)

R



Mark the planting area boundaries and number each zone clearly before you start planting. If places like open water are “off limits” make sure Crew Leaders tell volunteers.

R



Take a few minutes for a snack break at Crew Leader Training. If you are working with teens, snacks make all the difference.

R



Wrap up Crew Leader training with a quiz show to test both skills and understanding. Divide trainees into two teams to compete for a small prize. Ask about 10–15 review questions. Keep it light-hearted, but hit all the critical points about tree-planting methods, ecology and logistics. Toss the winners a big bag of chocolate.

R



Check in to make sure teens have gear like boots, raingear, and warm clothes. Especially important for youth-at-risk!

R



Avoid problems by heading them off at the pass! A small error will be multiplied by hundreds, or thousands! After volunteers plant their first tree, have Crew leaders do quality control. One year, Crew Leaders forgot to tell volunteers to press down plant protectors. A wind gust the next day set thousands of plants on a 45 degree angle! Our professional crew had to go back over the whole site, correcting this problem.





## Pre-Event Checklist:

1 Check-in: waivers, clipboards and pens

2 Gloves for volunteers

3 Sponsor list

4 Thank you list

5 Flagging

6 Banner or sign

7 Parking cones

8 Gifts for Core Leadership Team and Landowner

9 Schedule for the day

10 Your own personal gear

# Plant-A-Thon EVENT DAY



V R 8:30

PM 9:00

PM 10:00

Crew Leaders Arrive & Orient to the Site and their Zones

Greet Landowner

Opening Circle

- Welcome.
- Introduce special guest (optional).
- Thank all sponsors and donors.
- Thank Core Leadership Team from Volunteer Group/s, Restoration Group, others.
- Thank leaders of special jobs, e.g. cooks, parking people, childcare.
- Point out comforts: Port-O-Potty, Hand Wash, First Aid, Warm-up station.
- Introduce the Crew Leaders!
- Briefly describe any “Special Zones.”
- Divide volunteers into Zones.

V R 10:30–12:30

V 12:30–1:00

R V PM 1:00

R V 1:15

R V 1:30–4:00

PM 1:30–4:00

R V PM 4:00

R V PM 4:30

Plant Trees!

LUNCH

Group Photo

Crew Leader Check-in & Huddle

Plant More Trees!

Meet Reporters

Site Clean Up, Volunteers leave

Closing Circle: Crew Leader Debrief

# Plant-A-Thon EVENT DAY (continued)

## What do Crew Leaders teach their planting crew?

- Introductions
- Orient volunteers to ecology: water bodies, important land features
- Reason for planting trees, history of impacts
- Tree and sapling identification
- Right Plant, Right Place—where to plant each species
- Planting methods, and how to install tree protectors correctly!
- How to protect and handle seedlings
- Safety rules, especially for young children

PM



**Opening Circle:** Call out all the names of all the professional field staff working behind the scenes, volunteer leadership team, and Crew Leaders.

After working hard behind the scenes, your key volunteers will be tired. People love to be recognized publicly by name, and they will be more likely to volunteer the following year. If you are using names, take care not to omit anyone!

R



Explain any special zone types, such as “Kidzone,” and “Adventure Zone” to enable tree planters to choose an appropriate level of challenge and support.

R



Match leaders with the volunteer populations they prefer. If ‘youth at risk’ are coming to work off juvenile detention service hours, or elders are coming from a church group, ask which Crew Leaders want to work with each population. Make sure crew leaders are ready to adapt to differing needs of these groups!

R

PM



Working with a large group, one challenge is to distribute the volunteer tree planters equally among zones. Avoid this problem by dividing the tree-planters equally at the end of Opening Circle. **After years of inefficient bungling, here is our approach:**

Going zone by zone, a Crew Leader spokesperson (teen!) announces their special zone type (if any) and asks for the right number of volunteers to join that zone.

“Hi, I’m Seth, and I am leading Zone #1, the Kidzone. We will be close to the bathroom, and we love to plant trees with little kids. I can take 15 volunteers with me. So if you’ve got kids younger than age seven, come with me!”

Zone #2:  
“Hi, I’m Cara, and I am leading zone #2, the Adventure Zone. If you are up for a challenging walk through some mud, and can handle steeper terrain, I need 15 really strong people. Let’s go!”





# Plant-A-Thon EVENT DAY (continued)



This is a small but important detail: choose a teen (Youth Crew Leader) as the zone spokesperson at the opening circle and lunchtime “regroup huddle,” rather than an adult. *This is likely their first opportunity to speak in their community in the role of an environmental leader.*

After lunch or snack, we gather all participants for a group photo, taken from above.

We put up cards to spell out **Plant-A-Thon + YEAR** for four reasons: 1) Great for media, 2) Photo enables us to do a head count after the event and compare number of volunteers to sign-in sheets, 3) Posterity, and 4) It enables the **Project Manager** to make any needed announcements while folks are gathered together.

**Crew Leader Huddle:** Immediately after the photo, call the Crew Leaders for a re-group. Circle up and request an update from each zone. “How is your zone doing, and what do you need?” This way, you can shuffle plants, volunteers and materials, as needed. Make this pretty quick—10 minutes—and send crews off to plant for the afternoon.

**Closing Circle:** After volunteers leave the planting event, gather Crew Leaders again for a closing circle. Ask, “What went well, and what could we do better next time?” They will have great suggestions.





# Media Promotion #2; Plant-A-Thon Event

After the Tree-Planting event, release a long newspaper article with photos and a Thank You Ad to publicize the successful outcome, and thank sponsors & donors.


Try for front page coverage in your local paper, or at least front page B section, with a huge article and color photos. Provide engaging photos and testimonials from participants. Include your “Headline Statement” as well as a clear, solid ecological explanation from your restoration partner about why you are planting trees.


## Peninsula Daily News Article

## Port Townsend Jefferson County Leader News Article

**PM** **CAUTION!:** Social media is tricky. Some people don’t want to be posted or tagged, some do. If you plan to use social media, put this permission explicitly on your sign-in/waiver form, and make sure people understand your photography and posting policy.

**V** **PM** **THANK DONORS:** Thank donors and sponsors frequently: at the opening circle, in news articles, within the **Restoration Group** and **Volunteer Group’s** emails and newsletters, and on social media.

**V** **PM** **R**  Don’t leave any donors out. Double-check all spellings. List “in-kind” donations of goods and services, as well as cash.

**V** **PM** **R**  Send tax donation letters to all cash or in-kind donors from a 501(c)(3).

**PM** **X** Once NWI completely forgot to thank fiscal sponsors at an event. Keep a running tally of sponsors and donors on a clipboard, and bring it to the event.

# Site Check Up: Monitoring and Maintenance

Nothing's been gained if the trees don't live!

In the springtime, NWI re-visits the planting site with students from participating schools to monitor tree survival. We use professional techniques, including random sampling, and teach students the difference between dormant and dead trees. Then students go back to their schools and “crunch the numbers.”

NWI tolerates a 75% survival threshold, so we ask students to get back to us with their calculations and hypotheses about why certain species or areas lived or died. Occasionally, a teacher will really run with this, and invite NWI to hear student presentations.

NWI also conducts professional monitoring and site maintenance, which involves weed whacking around plants twice in summertime.





# Submit Grant Reports

Be sure to complete grants by reporting in to your sponsors with complete narrative, photos and other requirements.

Often, a good final report leads to funding for the next round.

When we first got started, NWI did not foresee that the schools would want to run this event annually.

But our community never wanted to miss a year...!

Caution—**The Plant-A-Thon** may be habit forming!



# Acknowledgements:

Opal and Katherine –  
First **Plant-A-Thon** (2005)



The **Plant-A-Thon** began in Tarboo Creek, on the Olympic Peninsula, WA. Originally the land of the Coast Salish people for thousands of years, the **Port Gamble S'Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Lower Elwha S'Klallam, and Skokomish Tribes** retain treaty rights to hunt and gather in their Usual and Accustomed Area under international law. We honor the Native American people, whose cultures and traditions have been deeply rooted in this place since the beginning of time.

Thank you to our partner schools for your dedication and spirited collaboration; you co-created **The Plant-A-Thon: Swan School, Port Townsend OPEPO Program, Port Townsend OCEAN Program, Port Townsend High School Students For Sustainability Club, Chimacum Pi Program, the Quilcene School District, Jefferson Community School, and Sunfield Land for Learning.**

Special thanks to science teacher **Kit Pennell** for perfect suggestions, dogged persistence, and poetic encouragement.

To the Honorary Tree Card artists: Thank you for sharing your extraordinary talents. I extend my warmest gratitude to **Amanda Kingsley**, whose high standards in the first five years set a standard for integrity and excellence for all the incredible artists who followed, including the phenomenal: **Max Grover, Audrey Miles Cherney, Lucy Congdon Hanson, Richard Jesse Watson, Don Tiller, Jesse Joshua Watson, and Hanna Viano.**

Thank you to the many local, state, national and private sponsors who supported this program, most notably **Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's ALEA Program, Clif Bar Foundation, US Fish and Wildlife Service,** and some very generous donors.

Northwest Watershed Institute is indebted to ongoing financial contributions from **Keta Legacy Foundation** of Seattle, WA, who funded many a **Plant-A-Thon**, and the creation of this Guide. Thank you for your steadfast support!

Food, gloves, and Port-O-Potties! Hats off to **The Port Townsend Food Coop, Henery Hardware, and GoodMan Sanitation,** who donated every single year, and to the dozens of other local businesses who always pitch in.

To the **administrative staff of Northwest Watershed Institute:** you are behind-the-scenes heroes.

Opal and Katherine –  
Ten years later!





# Acknowledgements: (continued)

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Without **Cecilia Bahls** and **Hannah Bahls**, I'd never have wondered whether school children could plant trees, or sat at a parent meeting in a very small chair. Your parents have an strange idea of fun on a cold, rainy Saturday. We love you.

Thanks to the tens of thousands of people worldwide who bought, sent, and received Honorary Tree Cards. Your trees are here, and they are growing. Come visit!

To those who are reading this and getting ready to run a **Plant-A-Thon**: This guidebook is for you. Thank you for caring about the natural world. I can't wait to hear how your **Plant-A-Thon** turns out. Whatever your situation, as Wangari Maathai says, "do the best you can."



This guide is dedicated to the memory of Nobel Peace Prize recipient **Wangari Maathai**, Founder of the Green Belt Movement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHtFM1XEXas>

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