

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE--February 12, 2010

Alliance Volunteers Receive National Stewardship Award

It's not every day you get something in the mail from the White House. But last week, a large envelope arrived with that return address, bearing a letter to volunteers of the Kaibab Vermilion Cliffs Heritage Alliance. It was signed by First Lady Michele Obama.

The letter announced the designation of the group as a Preserve America Steward, "for all that you do to care for our Nation's important historical resources." The award went on to say "President Obama and I are proud of your efforts and we applaud your achievement."

The Kaibab Vermilion Cliffs Heritage Alliance is a nonprofit, public-private partnership whose mission is to help preserve and protect the cultural resources of the eastern Arizona Strip region. Part of that effort involves lending a hand to land-management agencies on archaeological field projects. A dedicated group of site stewards, volunteers, and students serve as crew on the projects with the Arizona Strip District of the Bureau of Land Management, North Kaibab District of the U.S. Forest Service, Grand Canyon National Park, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The Flagstaff-based conservation group, Grand Canyon Trust, provides logistical support.

In six field projects during the Alliance's first three years of existence, volunteers have given more than 2,500 hours of time, and covered several thousand acres of land. After receiving orientation from professional archaeologists, volunteers typically walk many miles each day, sometimes in challenging terrain and weather, camping at night under less-than-luxurious conditions. Still, they keep coming back, their loyalty and labors essential to learning about and ultimately protecting irreplaceable cultural sites over the vast acreage of the Arizona Strip.

Coconino County Supervisor Carl Taylor, who first came up with the idea of the Alliance, said in support of the stewardship application: "I am more than heartened by the response to this idea. People care deeply about this amazing place and its cultural heritage. Professionals and volunteers alike have given more than their fair share of time, energy, and concern toward preserving this unique heritage."

The Preserve America Stewards program is part of a national initiative of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, U.S. Department of Interior, and other federal agencies. For more on the Alliance, go to www.grandcanyontrust.org/programs/kaibab-vermilion-cliffs.php.

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