



Swarms of insects can't stop John and Marny from clearing trails in the Hiawatha National Forest. *Photo Courtesy of John Weting*

Volunteering in the Hiawatha

One volunteer's story of dedicated service in the vast UP wilderness

Hiawatha National Forest, Schoolcraft County, Michigan-

The Hiawatha National Forest is unique, remote, and gets used by people who have varying degrees of sensitivity to the environment. That's according to John Weting, who meets all sorts during his time volunteering in the forest.

"The people I would like to see in the woods are people who are willing to leave this behind," says Weting, pointing at his cell phone. "People should be satisfied experiencing nature for what nature can offer."

Weting and his wife, Marny, work as volunteers with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in the Hiawatha National Forest. Together, they have seen all the unnecessary 'necessities' that weekend campers attempt to bring into the remote area of the forest that they monitor.

"I would have never thought of bringing all this stuff in," Weting said. "You should experience nature without bringing in a boatload of extra 'necessities.'"

"Before you retire, the hours of your life between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. are totally taken care of. When you retire, you can be busy with the things that you choose." John Weting

For Weting, retirement offered him the chance to busy himself with the things he and his wife were passionate about: canoeing, hiking, camping and volunteering. Having volunteered with organizations like his local Rotary Club for most of his life, when Weting found that the USFS was looking for volunteers, he jumped at the chance.



Some areas of the Hiawatha do not allow motorized equipment of any kind. Trees often need to be cut with a saw. *Photo Courtesy of John Weting*

Weting's daily tasks as a volunteer include both 'official' and 'unofficial' duties. He monitors a select group of trails within the Hiawatha National Forest and interviews users of the trail system. On top of checking campsites and picking up litter, he essentially operates as the eyes and ears of the forest service. Often, this requires Weting and his wife to operate outside their normal scope of duties, including trail maintenance and wildlife observation.

"It would require a [USFS] employee to probably kill half a day to come take care of maybe one tree that has fallen across the trail. It just makes more sense to have me do it as long as I'm able," Weting said.

Unfortunately, much of John and Marny's work is dedicated to reversing damage done by campers and trail users who don't follow the 'leave no trace' mantra. From leaving campsites littered with trash to needlessly damaging plants and wildlife, some people simply have no respect for the beauty of nature, Weting explains. Yet, even the best-intentioned campers can leave an impact; as it is very difficult to actually leave no trace.

Weting is in his ninth season volunteering for the USFS, and in 2015, he and his wife, Marny, were honored as USFS volunteers of the year in the Enduring Service category. Volunteers are crucial in maintaining hiking and camping areas across the Upper Peninsula. As budgets get cut, the workload for USFS employees does not. More often than not, volunteers are needed to step in and help keep Michigan's natural areas pristine for future generations.

"I encourage people to volunteer in whatever you love doing. You can actually do some good and feel good about it. No matter what it is, someone is going to benefit from your good deed," Weting said.

How to Volunteer

The USFS is always looking for volunteers for a wide variety of tasks. Most communities, Weting says, have a great need for volunteers. Prospective volunteers can check out opportunities with the Hiawatha [Here](#) or <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/hiawatha/workingtogether/volunteering>.



In 2015, John and Marny were recognized for their enduring service by the USFS. They are currently in their 9th year of volunteer service. "We absolutely love it," Weting said. *Photo Courtesy of John Weting*