

NOMINATION – BRIAN SPITEK

Traditional Skills and Minimum Tool Leadership

Note: This nomination stretches the definition of this award category. However, in looking at the criteria, the project for which Brian is being nominated fits very well. Please consider this stretch of the category in your selection process. Thanks.!

CRITERIA:

1. Uniqueness or ingenuity displayed in completing the job without the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport

In 2005, Brian led the pack-it-out (human waste) program on Mt. Whitney. This was the second year of a voluntary program to pack out human waste, which totals over 5,000 pounds annually. Two toilets are still in existence, and a desire to completely eliminate the need for the toilets is the purpose behind the pack-it-out program. Although the toilets still exist, and motorized equipment is used to remove toilet waste, 44% of the total human waste was packed to the trailhead by visitors and 35% was packed to trailside receptacles (which still require removal by helicopter, but there was a significant reduction in use of motorized equipment compared to the past twenty years). Brian was instrumental in the success of the program. How?

2. The resurrection or relearning of skills or tools that have been abandoned or nearly lost.

Prior to the initiation of the pack-it-out program, the toilets have been facilitating non-conforming uses in the John Muir Wilderness for over 30 years. Capacity issues plague this popular trail to the highest point in the continental United States, which draws over 20,000 visitors annually. A lottery and quota system is in place to accommodate a reasonable use level. Even so, due to the terrain, use patterns and limits on camping availability have led to unacceptable human waste concentration issues. The facilitation of use and human waste disposal has led to a dependency by the public on the agency. Visitors have not utilized their own skills and have transferred the responsibility to the agency. This has now been turned around with Brian's dedication to this project; a substantial portion of the waste is being carried out primarily by foot.

3. Accomplished a job with traditional skills and tools when approval for motorized equipment could probably be obtained.

Human waste has been carried out by helicopter for over twenty years. There has been on-going regional approval in place for motorized use since the mid 1990s when it was considered to be the only way to manage the human waste issue on Mt. Whitney. The pack-it-out human waste program greatly reduces the forests dependence and reliance on motorized use. As the program continues, it is likely that within a few years, no motorized equipment or mechanical transport will be needed.

4. Difficulty or challenging nature of the task

A precedence has been in place for over thirty years, whereby the general public has relied upon the non conforming uses associated with toilets, structures and motorized equipment to facilitate their wilderness visit. To add to this, the typical Mt. Whitney visitor is not a well seasoned, veteran backcountry user, climber or experienced mountaineer. They are more typically first time backpackers or a visitor seeking the recreational trophy of bagging the highest the peak in the Lower 48. The toilets have accommodated this user type and the dependency is great. Breaking this dependency is a monumental accomplishment.