

Consider the San Juan Public Lands Center as a Resource

By Alan Peterson, SJMA Director of Visitor Services and Bookstore Operations

Are you planning a backpack trip and looking for some first-hand knowledge about a National Forest or BLM trail to explore? Do you need a developed campground where your horse would also have some accommodations nearby? Do you need to register your off highway vehicle (OHV) and don't want to drive all the way to a State Park? Well, we have the solution for you ~ stop by the San Juan Public Lands Center and get your questions and needs met.

The San Juan Public Lands Center is Service-First oriented with a combined visitor front desk of San Juan National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and their non-profit 501 (c) 3 support partner, San Juan Mountains Association.

“People often seem surprised and impressed when they stop by the office and see everything we have to offer,” says Agency Visitor Information Specialist Art Sanchez. “I think people are expecting more of a normal government office, but you see their faces light up, often commenting on it too, when they see all the brochures, displays and products. It's not unusual for folks to spend a half an hour or more just browsing.”

The San Juan Public Lands Center (SJPLC) is becoming known as a one-stop shop for public land needs as increasing numbers of visitors and locals alike stop by each year.

The visitor front desk is comprised of Agency and San Juan Mountains Association (SJMA) staff, along with top-notch volunteers known as the San Juan Public Land Ambassadors. All blend together offering first-hand knowledge with visitor information questions on all types of recreational activities and other multiple-use issues.

With growing visitation to public lands and limited staff, the San Juan Ambassador volunteers have become essential to helping staff provide the high quality customer service that visitors have come to expect. The SJPLC Ambassadors are informed individuals who actively enjoy our surrounding lands and each brings their own unique knowledge and a background of professional experience, from marketing to computer expertise, organization, artistic awareness and store front design.

The SJMA Bookstore draws visitors' attention as you walk through the door, stocked with guide books, maps, OHV registrations, Colorado Search and Rescue Cards, interpretive clothing, and Southwest Colorado's largest supply of Smokey Bear memorabilia. Public Land products and permits are also sold ranging from fuelwood, Christmas tree cutting, decorative rock and transplant permits to America the Beautiful interagency cards.

Have you ever seen wildlife scat when on a hike and wondered what it's from? The visitor area has an interpretive display on scats and tracks, and wildlife skulls, as well as public lands brochures ranging from camping, wilderness, volunteering, trail sheets and educational field seminars, to information on mining claims, protecting cultural sites, to

encountering wildlife and noxious weeds. Also, one of the key items visitors receive are land stewardship messages.

If you are in need of current road closure, campground status, fire restrictions or snow level information and don't have the time to stop by the SJPLC or maybe its after hours, you can phone the San Juan Outdoor Recreation Hotline at 970.247.8187 for weekly updates from May through October. This hotline is sponsored by Pine Needle Mountaineering, SJPLC and San Juan Mountains Association. You can also check out our websites: www.fs.fed.us/r2/sanjuan, www.co.blm.gov/sjra and www.sjma.org. For more information please contact us at 970.247.4874.

(Left to Right): Seasonal Agency Visitor Information Assistant Bob Estelle and San Juan Public Lands Ambassador Volunteer Sue Fedelchak collaborate to provide assistance and 'top notch customer service,' which visitors to the San Juan Public Lands Center have come to expect . The office is located _ mile west of Durango in the Durango Tech Center on 15 Burnett Court.