

Nominee for the One Club Award

Nominee:

Didi Toaspern

Group: Yahi Group

Chapter: Mother Load Chapter

Chapter Chair: Dale Stocking

ExComm support: no (or unknown)

The nominee deserves this award because:

The Sierra Club website says that the One Club Award: 'Honors club members at any level who have used outings as a way to protect or improve public lands, instill an interest in conservation, increase membership in the Sierra Club, or increase awareness of the Sierra Club'.

I believe that Didi Toaspern's work with the National Outings Service Committee over a 25 year period fulfills all four criteria and qualifies her for this award.

Protecting and Improving Public Lands

This is the very essence of what service trips do. Participants build trails, help to gather scientific and management data, restore habitat, rebuild or restore historic structures, and perform many other tasks to 'protect and improve public lands'.

Since 1987 Didi Toaspern has led or been cook, trainee or instructor on 40 Sierra Club national service trips. After years of working on national service trips she stepped up to be National Outings Service Subcommittee Chair in January 2001--a position she still holds. As chair she is ultimately responsible for the success and effectiveness of the overall service program. Her interactions with trip leaders and participants and with land agencies are judged to be outstanding as demonstrated by the letters of support.

As Chair she manages a large subcommittee of about 144 members. It is a time-consuming job requiring energy, dedication, executive ability, and tact. An 8-person executive committee runs the subcommittee:

Didi is the Subcommittee Chair who gets the tough problems.

Three Equipment Officers keep, maintain, and distribute all the equipment necessary to field the roughly 30 trips a year.

One Conservation Officer works to insure that every trip has a conservation message.

One Finance Officer works with trip staff to develop trip budgets and final financial reports.

Two Quality Officers administer the subcommittee's after trip evaluation system.

The Service Subcommittee fields about 30 trips a year, each with a trip leader and a cook. In addition, some of the trips have an assistant leader or a trainee. Didi has to find between 60 and 90 people to staff the 30 trips each year. Remember these are one-week trips and many of the volunteer are working with limited vacation time. Matching up leaders and trips is not easy. There are always changes to deal with. If a staff member has an emergency and cannot do the trip, a replacement must be found or the trip must be cancelled. Changes in weather or agency staff may also force a trip to change location or scheduled time. All changes involve the subcommittee chair and are a significant problem.

David Simon, the previous Service Subcommittee Chair writes:

'I was the Service Subcommittee Chair for 13 years, at the time the longest tenure in that position ever' [Didi is coming up on that record].

It's a huge job. Even if you have an equipment chair, a stove chair, a training chair, a first aid chair, a scheduling chair, and an environmental chair, it's overwhelming. Before email had really taken over, I had a second phone line in my house that was ONLY for the service trip program; without that, I could never have received any personal calls, because my personal line would always have been tied up. I suspect if I were doing the job now, I'd have a separate email account for the same reason.'

Letters from Mollie Dean and Alison Campbell, members of the Service Subcommittee Executive Committee speak to Didi's effectiveness as subcommittee chair and trip leader. They provide specific examples of her leadership, her work with land agencies, her support of trip staff, and interactions with trip participants.

Let me give you an idea of the number of volunteer hours worked on public lands by the 40 trips that Didi has staffed to date. There were 40 trips, about 10 volunteers per trip, about 4 workdays per one-week trip, and about 7 hours per participant per day. This result is: 40 x 10 x 4 x 7 or 11,200 hours of volunteer work.

According to Outing Department records, the Subcommittee has run 367 trips during the time that Didi has chaired the subcommittee. A similar calculation to the above (367 trips x 10 participants x 4 work days x 7 work hours per day) produces 102,760 hours of volunteer labor helping to maintain or improve our national parks, national forests, and other public lands.

In his February 25, 2012 supporting letter, Bill Flower, Chair of the Outing Committee provides strong support for Didi's nomination for the One Club Award. Bill quotes some of the Club members who have been fortunate enough to go into the field with Didi to work on service projects.

One participant writes, 'I expected to do some good work in the great outdoors; the entire trip was so far beyond what I could have expected. 'I have not had such a good leader in ages'. [Didi] was excellent all day, every day. I plan on letting others know about this excellent opportunity to do service work in the most magnificent way possible.'

Another Club member who went on one of Didi's trips writes, 'We did a variety of work- some of it demanding, all of it reasonable. We were proud of our contribution and were repeatedly thanked.'

Finally, one Club member who worked with Didi on a service project sums up his experience as follows: 'The trip surpassed my expectations -- which were already very high -- first and foremost because Didi is a talented service trip leader. She set the tone by being authentic and creating an atmosphere of trust that allowed people to work hard, have fun and simply be themselves. I learned about the qualities of outstanding leadership by her example.'

The supporting documentation also details the excellent relationships that Didi cultivates with the land agencies.

Ken Owen, Executive Director of the Channel Islands Restoration wrote on February 20, 2012. 'Didi Toasperm has impressed me as a true environmental leader. She spent four days with us on Santa Cruz Island [in 2011], where I had the chance to learn about the great work she does for the Sierra Club. We've been honored that Didi has helped build and maintain a close relationship between Sierra Club and Channel Islands Restoration. Our project on Santa Cruz Island has benefited in many significant ways because Didi has taken personal interest in having Sierra Club groups work with us almost every year for the last six years. Without Didi's interest, our project would have never benefited from the ongoing, generous support of Sierra Club.'

Heather Boothe, Volunteer Program Manager of Yosemite National Park wrote on February 28, 2012: 'Because Yosemite's bureaucracy is so complex, Didi's high level of professionalism and concern for logistics has been incredibly helpful to me. Whether addressing who is the best work leader and cook for a given project, making sure equipment gets where it is needed, adjusting to campsite changes, giving great constructive feedback or showing concern for her participants, Didi's attitude is always great. I can practically hear her smiling when we're talking on the phone.'

Heather concludes, 'Clearly, the Sierra Club's Service Outings have blossomed under Didi's leadership. The beneficiaries include all the agencies on whose land work has been completed, all the participants on the trips, and the Sierra Club itself in building a positive brand and constituency. Didi truly deserves to be recognized for her achievements.'

Instilling Appreciation for Conservation and Environmental Awareness

Debra Asher, Inner City Outings Administrator, also wrote a message supporting Didi's nomination for the One Club Award and documenting how an appreciation for conversation and environmental awareness are instilled in the ICO participants. It is included in the binder of supporting documents.

Debra talks about how ICO has used a bequest to enable 25 ICO teen participants and 9 ICO leaders to participate in 8 Service Subcommittee trips. Debra concludes, 'Now, both ICO and the Service Trips Subcommittee have made this partnership a regular part of our summer programming. We have learned that it not only brings youthful energy and diverse populations

to the Club's service outings, but it provides ICO participants with an opportunity to go on a variety of outings, hone their outdoor leadership skills, and learn how they can improve wilderness accessibility and forest preservation in a new environment.'

Debra also includes some quotes from ICO participants and from Service Subcommittee Staff:

'I've always wanted to get involved with the Sierra Club but never knew how, so this was an amazing opportunity. I learned so much, including how to survive in the wilderness. The trip really broadened my horizons about the world around me and the earth I live on. It was an awesome, awesome trip!--Kia Lor, Minnesota ICO participant describing our Marble Mountains service trip.

'All in all, this was a great opportunity for some members of ICO to get a broader view of the Sierra Club, and for some Club leaders and members to learn more about ICO, and for all of us to give something back as well.' -- Erhard Konerding, Hartford ICO leader

'Rizik (and his sisters) were excellent young people. I felt honored to have them along. Service and ICO do great things together!' - Jim Nicholas, leader, Maroon Bells trip

A member of the Service Subcommittee Executive Committee, Lelia Heading, points out that local environmental issues are always a component of service trips and that Didi has expanded the scope of service trips to include senior trips, woman's trips, multi-generational trips, and parent-teen trips to expose as many people as possible in working to protect the environment.

Increase Membership in the Sierra Club

Tony Rango of the Sierra Club Outing Department told me in a Mar. 5 message that the Sierra Club gets about 500 new members a year from all national outings (i.e., people who initially join the Club in order to go on an outing). The total national outings program for 2012 is offering 336 trips with a 4,419 person capacity. The 2012 Service Subcommittee program is offering 32 trips with a capacity of 405 people. This is about 10% of the whole national outing program, so it looks like the Service Subcommittee brings in about 50 new members a year.

In his supporting message Dave Garcia says that he has been leading Sierra Club Service Trips for 7 years. He has led 13 Service Subcommittee trips with over 180 participants. He estimates that over 1/3 of the participants (over 60) were new members who joined to go on the Sierra Club trip.

Increase Awareness of the Sierra Club

In addition to the increase in memberships resulting from the Service trips, Dave Garcia noted Didi's efforts to increase awareness of the Sierra Club, another of the criteria for the One Club Award. Dave calls attention to two articles written about his 2011 trips. Didi recommended his 2011 service trip 'Secrets of the Big Sur Coast, Limekiln State park' to the Outing Department for inclusion in a Sunset Magazine article, 'Volunteer Vacations' by Samantha Schoech. A copy of the article is in the supporting binder, but you can Google it as 'volunteer vacation' at sunset.com

Didi also recommended Dave Garcia's October 2011 service trip 'Lilting Lighthouse Lore and Labor, Big Sur' to the Outing Department for a Wall Street Journal article, . 'Our picks for the best in volunteer travel in 2012', written by Anne Tergesen in the December 19, 2011 issue. A copy of this article is in the supporting documents binder, but you can find it in the Wall Street Journal web site with the title 'Saving the World -- One Vacation at a Time'.

Marjorie Richman, Chair of the Southeast Subcommittee made an interesting point in her message supporting Didi: 'Particularly in these times of tight government budgets, our service trips consistently contribute to the protection and preservation of our national parks and forests. Didi has been instrumental in ensuring that the Sierra Club's contribution will continue to be important. As a result of her work, and the work of her subcommittee, we have meaningful relationships with many public land administrators thereby ensuring the awareness and reputation of Sierra Club as a protector of the environment.'

In addition to the people mentioned above, there are also supporting testimonial messages from: Kathryn Hannay, Sarah O'Gara, Richard DiSammartino, David Stern, Katherine Brock, Howard Kellog, and Linda Gerdenich are included in the package of supporting document.

I believe this nomination package for Didi Toaspern fully documents her work in all four of the areas described above. She chairs the subcommittee and her work is instrumental in fielding about 30 service trips a year taking about 400 people out to work on a variety of service projects in our public lands. In addition to working to improve public lands, each trip has a conservation component, which usually covers a local conservation issue. The service trip program certainly increases membership as non-members have to join to go on the trips and some of them will continue their memberships. Finally, the publicity received in national magazines, newspapers, and chapter newsletters about the service trip program increases the awareness of the Sierra Club as does the service trips' work with land agencies.

Previous recognition

no (or unknown)

Local newspapers to notify:

ChicoER.com Chico Enterprise Record, 400 E. Park Ave, Chico, CA 95928, City Editor Steve Schoonover, 530-896-7750, sschoonover@chicoer.com

Group Newsletter:

Sierra Club, Yahi Group Newsletter
P.O. Box 2012, Chico, CA, 95927,

Chapter Newsletter:

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