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A Funny Peculiar Opportunity

By Steven E. Jungst

1. the opportunity to work with experienced professionals,
2. the opportunity to see and explore scenic mountain, river and forest country, and
3. the opportunity to earn college credit while making a meaningful contribution to the preservation of forest lands.

The reasons that ISU forestry students have not leaped at such opportunities appear to be twofold. First, since the ISU Forestry Department has, for many years, required students to have this kind of experience before they can graduate, the benefits extolled are not new to students, but the idea of not getting paid is. Secondly, because of other curriculum requirements, there is no way for ISU students to earn college credit for the experience. It is true that almost all volunteer work does fulfill the requirement for summer experience, but that is simply a requirement that is checked off on the student's senior requirement sheet and does not carry any actual credit.

The agency which provides the volunteer positions also suffers some disadvantages. Perhaps the most serious, but least obvious, is that only those students who can afford to go to school all winter and work without pay during the summer will volunteer. And, those students do not necessarily include the ones who could do the best job for the agency.

The picture is not completely black, however. During the spring of 1983, I had had more volunteer announcements come in than I can possibly fill. It is relatively easy for students to obtain work in the volunteer program, and as the announcements say, it is work experience that can count toward future employment. Last year, we had only a few students employed in volunteer positions. This year, at least two of them have been hired back in paying summer jobs. When that happens, I can find little fault with the volunteer program. Whether this practice becomes widespread remains to be seen.

We will continue to hope that agencies using volunteer programs will revert to paid employment as soon as possible for the benefit of all concerned. Until they do, students who can afford to volunteer will gain valuable experience and have a somewhat funny peculiar opportunity to demonstrate their abilities to potential future employers.