



Two decades young: ALDHA-West looks to the future

The board and several veteran ALDHA-West members recently met to discuss the findings of a large member survey, conducted at the end of 2014, and to chart new directions for the organization founded in 1993. Survey results showed general agreement with the Gathering, Triple Crown awards, newly started educational Rucks and appreciation for the efforts of our all-volunteer organization (see below for details of survey results). Improvements were suggested and the board, led by President Whitney "Allgood" LaRuffa and Vice-President Liz "Snorkel" Thomas, is already making some changes -- with more to come (see below President's Letter). As you read and think about the information below, don't hesitate to further comment. In addition, for our growing organization, we need volunteers and participants at our many activities. Please join us in helping out --- and having fun.

Survey Results: Learnings From Members, a Summary

by Josie Pegrum Hazelett

Most of the respondents have a positive attitude toward ALDHA-West. However, the need for more, better and timely communications at all levels emerged as an over riding theme. Some of the ways this was expressed was in the need for a regular newsletter, updated member directory and financial statement. In general, the respondents' comments were engaged, constructive and supportive of current activities.

Question 1: The purpose of ALDHA-West is to a) Provide networking opportunities to its members; b) Provide education/information to its members; c) Educate and invite new hikers into the long distance hiking community; d) Advocate on behalf of the interests of long distance hikers; e) Enhance or maintain access to trails by encouraging members to participate in supportive activities (e.g. trail maintenance, lobbying etc.)

While the majority of the responses fell in the "agree" or "strongly agree" categories for all these options, "Provide education/information to its members" and "Advocate on behalf of the interests of long distance hikers" received slightly higher positive responses overall.

Question 2: Regarding the importance of various events and activities that ALDHA-West sponsors or participates in, the annual Gathering and Triple Crown Award received the highest "strongly agree" responses overall but when combined with "agree" responses were only slightly higher than the other categories (in declining order): ADZPCTKO, social media and newsletter, PCT days, interagency coordination and Ruck Backpacking clinics.

It should be noted that some of these activities, such as the Ruck, held last year for the first time are new and not so well known in the long-distance hiking community.

Question 3: Is there anything ALDHA-West is not doing now, that you would like to see us get involved in?

81 of 233 individuals commented on this question (it was skipped by 152 which implies that people either are not familiar with ALDHA-West or are satisfied with the organization as it is).

Comments from 81 fell into five general categories:

1. Education and networking opportunities for members and outreach to the larger community: suggestions included mentor programs, training and tips for members; health maintenance on the trail, film viewing, talks and presentations; education and outreach to youth, families and other specific groups

2. Trail Education and Advocacy: Collaboration on and promotion of trail maintenance projects coordinated by existing trail organizations (CDT, PCT, PNT, etc.); coordination with ALDHA (east) on education and awards.

3. Member Services: many comments in this category. People want more events and better communication. They want a member directory, which is accessible and current and related to that, a better system for renewing and tracking membership. There were several comments about recognition for more than just the Triple Crown. Comments regarding ALDHA-West as serving as a “clearing house” for information on long distance trails (links to those trails); organizing small gathering/get togethers for members regionally; organizing hikes and events locally for members.

4. Website/Social media: Suggestions for website content included: ALDHA-West history, more and better links to different trails; improved Triple Crown formatting and more photos; more resources, both on the site or links to (e.g. hiking with children, hiking with dogs, avoiding giardia etc) and timely updating of the site.

5. Better Communications: There were a number of comments requesting more timely communications on everything from announcements for awards, contests and the Gathering to request for publishing of a regular newsletter.

Question 4: Do you have any suggestions to improve the September gathering or any other event that we currently organize or participate in (described above)?

75 people of 233 people answered this question.

People want the business meeting to be more business-like: provide an agenda, action items and financial statement before the meeting so members can participate proactively.

Although most respondents agree the Gatherings of recent years have been improving, some people indicated a desire to bring the "educational" component back. Comments were positive about great presenters and good films.

There were many comments about the awards: although overall, this is a highlight of the Gathering for many people, many think the ceremony is too long (maybe break it up?), too focused on the Triple Crown (there are other trails etc); perhaps other trail related activities can be recognized along with trail angels and Triple Crown.

Comments about the location were mostly concerning location--regret that it isn't closer to where the respondent lives (see comments above about desire for regional events). Other comments were that last year's Gathering site (Meany Lodge in Washington) was too small.

Some people want beer served and some don't.

President's Letter: Steps Ahead

by Whitney "Allgood" LaRuffa, ALDHA-West president

Hello ALDHA-West family -- First a big thanks to everyone who voiced their opinion in our member survey at the end of last year. We got great feedback and the board met at the beginning of the year to take action on making ALHA-West even better for the hiking community. Basically, we need to be doing more to lead the great explosion of interest in long-distance hiking, and a lot of that is education. So, we've modified our Mission Statement: "We foster fellowship and education among long-distance hikers and those who support them".

In particular, the board -- listening to your input -- has set some tough goals for ALDHA-West for the next five years. In that time we want to:

- become the "go to" place for learning to hike
- voice and advocate for hiking and hiking adventure
- become a household name for the entire hiking community
- gather and communicate standards and best practices for trail etiquette
- increase the diversity of our membership and grow to 300-500 members (today we are under 200 members)
- sponsor educational Rucks in several states
- change our legal standing to a full non-profit, 501-3(c)

That's a tall order. But you told us that's what you want from your organization, and in order to get there we're going to need your help in many, many ways. We are an **ALL** volunteer group -- which means we need **ALL** to volunteer.

In the months ahead we are going to have many strategic initiatives to make the changes we all want. There will be events and educational services, member outreach and communications, and extensive work with our nonprofit partnerships and business relationships.

Just for starters, think about joining other hikers and helping out at:

- **Feb. 28** - Ruck at Cascade Locks just east of Portland (*the one last Spring was a huge success*). To volunteer contact Chris Sanderson builderbybike@gmail.com
- **March 14** - We'll have our first Rockies Ruck, this one in Golden, Colorado. To volunteer contact Liz Thomas etphonedhome@gmail.com
- **April 22-25** and **April 24-26** - The big PCT kickoff (*two sessions*) always needs members representing ALDHA-West. To volunteer contact Scotland Forbes scothikin@gmail.com or Joe Kisner jkhikes@gmail.com
- **Aug. 28-30** - PCT Days will be in Cascade Locks, Oregon; this has become a major event for ALDHA-West, both for outreach and fund raising (last year we added \$1,500 to our treasury)
- **Sept. 25-27** - And of course our annual Gathering, the really big event for us -- this year at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp. This Gathering will be very special, the 20th anniversary since our 1995 charter.

It's an honor to be your president. I'm proud of our organization. I'm looking forward to seeing ALDHA-West grow and improve over the next months and years. But especially I'm eager to work with you to make that happen. Thanks again for being great members of a great organization.