



The Open Space Division hosts trail work events like the Foot-hills Cleanup Series, which will run every Saturday in April.

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Before she was an employee for the city of Albuquerque's Open Space Division, Jenny Blackmore did her part to help maintain the areas she frequented.

It was certainly a labor of love, but that "work" also paved the way for a future career: Today, Blackmore serves as the volunteer program coordinator for Open Space.

"I volunteered for Open Space for about seven years," Blackmore said. "... I have done a lot of cleanups and especially trail maintenance, trail work. That's where I like to be, out working on the trail. It was a good fit when I settled on this job."

Not everyone is destined for a position with Open Space, but there are plenty who do take the opportunity to help out where they can through the volunteer program. The Trail Watch volunteers are described as the "foundation" of the program, but there are a number of other ways to get involved, including participating as a Fire Watch volunteer or showing up for trail work events throughout the year.

"Most volunteers love the being outside aspect of it, the feeling of giving something back, contributing something to Open Space," Blackmore said.

Blackmore estimates that about 100 people currently participate in the Trail Watch program by reporting on observations of plants and wildlife, informing Open Space employees of maintenance needs and law enforcement issues, and assisting with various conservation projects.

"We have very limited trail staff at Open Space, and we have over 30,000 acres of Open Space (land)," Blackmore said. "It's really helpful to have volunteers able to be, as we call it, 'the eyes and ears' for Open Space where they report back — whether it's trash or interesting wildlife or trail maintenance needs. It is hard to overestimate the value of the volunteers to Open Space because they do what we don't always have the capacity to do."

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COURTESY OF THE ALBUQUERQUE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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A GROUP EFFORT

Open Space volunteers help keep an eye on the outdoors
— and you can join them



Trail Watch program volunteers help by reporting on observations of plants and wildlife, informing Open Space employees of maintenance needs and law enforcement issues, and assisting with various conservation projects.

also complete two additional trainings or programs of their choosing. The volunteers are also subject to a background check. These requirements tend to be relatively easy to meet because much of the work is something the volunteers might be doing anyway.

"That's I think one of the things that people really enjoy about being a Trail Watch volunteer," Blackmore said. "They're out there anyway, hiking and enjoying the trails, so they can add a little productivity to those hikes."

Some people have been Trail Watch volunteers for a

decade or more. After the first 25 hours are completed, they receive some type of apparel from Open Space, which could be a T-shirt or hat. Those who put in more work receive commemorative pins at 100 hours and 500 hours, Blackmore says. Those are something of a badge of honor for long-term volunteers.

"I don't have numbers, but we see a lot of people coming back year after year," Blackmore said. "... Some people are motivated by having those goals to stretch for, but I think most people just really enjoy



Trail Watch volunteers help monitor over 30,000 acres of land and are "the eyes and ears" for the Open Space Division.

being out there and feeling helpful when they report back. And they are very helpful."

One doesn't need to be nearly as involved to take part in the trail work events held by Open Space. These can be attended by as many as 100 people on a single weekend and don't require a 25-hour minimum or a background check to participate. One such upcoming event is the Foot-hills Cleanup Series, which will run every Saturday in April.

"It's hard to put an exact number on those people because some people will attend our larger events, maybe once a year," Blackmore said. "And other people will show up almost every Saturday to do trail work."