

Make a Difference Week

Event Host FAQ and Fact Sheet

This document provides information about how you can plan and host a local volunteer restoration event as a part of SER's *Make a Difference Week*. If you have questions after reviewing the information presented here, please contact info@ser.org.

In this document, we will be referring to the Principles in the **International Principles and Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration, 2 ed.** where applicable. In text, they will be represented in bold: **(Principle 1)**, for example. If you are not already familiar with the Standards, please refer to the **Principles and Standards for MADW** and **Resources** sections below, or to our [download page](#) for more information.

When is *Make a Difference Week*?

Make a Difference Week will run from **June 1 to June 9, 2024**.

What kind of event can I organize?

Make a Difference Week events do not need to be any different from a typical volunteer restoration event, and can take place on any day during the week of June 1-9, 2024. Some ideas for events include: restoration plantings, seed collection and seedball making, invasive plant pulls, citizen science monitoring of restoration sites, or any other restorative activity that positively impacts the ecology of your region.

Volunteer restoration events are great opportunities for community members to reconnect with their local ecosystems, become invested in and supportive of restoration activities, and make a significant positive impact on their environment **(Principle 1)**. As you start to plan your event, be sure to keep these questions in mind:

Where will the event take place? The choice of your event location determines what activities are possible and who will be likely to participate. If you are interested in planning an event but aren't sure what to do, consider reaching out to local government agencies or environmental groups for suggestions on potential activities. These organizations might also be interested in co-hosting an event with you.

What will the activity be? What type of restorative activity do you have the capacity and funding to organize? Some volunteer events require no funding (e.g., weed pulls), whereas some might require materials that must be donated or purchased (e.g., seedlings). Make sure you decide exactly what volunteers will be doing, where they will be doing it, what supplies and materials they will need, and what the volunteers can realistically accomplish during your event.

Past event activities have included:

- restoration plantings,
- seed collection and spreading
- invasive plant pulls or treatment,
- citizen science monitoring (e.g. Bioblitzes!)
- many more...

The main requirement for a volunteer event to be included in MADW is that it is restorative, and therefore that it has a positive impact on the local ecology. Nevertheless, we recommend you consider how to design your volunteer project to achieve the greatest possible impact.

Who will participate? Next, you should consider how many and what type of volunteers you will need to accomplish your planned activities. Volunteer events can benefit by engaging with diverse groups of people (**Principle 1**). Small events might have 3-5 volunteers, while larger events might host hundreds.

You should also consider if your volunteers will need any training to participate, if the event will be accessible to people of all ages and physical abilities, and/or if you will require volunteers with specific skillsets. While SER's Make a Difference Week website provides a platform for people from across the world to find your event, it is critically important for you to do local outreach to attract volunteers. Check out our [Digital Asset Toolkit](#) for resources to support online outreach!

When will the event start and end? You can host a volunteer event on any day during *Make a Difference Week* (June 1-9). It is important to consider local holidays when scheduling an event. It is also relevant to consider what time of day might be best for your activity and your participants. We expect that most events will take place on the weekends, which is why we stretched the "week" to include two weekends. You are also welcome to host an event on a weekday if that is most likely to work best for your volunteers. It is entirely up to you.

Why volunteer? Finally, make sure you can explain to your volunteers why their participation matters. A good introduction to the history of the site, local ecology, and the expected outcome of their actions will go a long way towards giving volunteers a sense of engagement with the project and your local ecosystem. By participating in *Make a Difference Week*, people will be part of a local restoration event with a global impact.

You should also think about how you'll measure your achievements and acknowledge your volunteers' labor. If you're removing an invasive species, you could measure by number of garbage bags filled or the number or weight of organisms removed. If you're planting or seeding, you could measure the area treated, the number of seedlings planted, or the weight of seed spread. How will your event's activities contribute to the recovery of the ecosystem (**Principle 5**).

We will be asking all hosts to share this information (in addition to photos and videos of the event) with SER so that we can report on the collective global impact of *Make a Difference Week* (**Principle 7**)!

Event Safety Considerations

Start with a walkthrough of your site. Note any hazards (e.g. rough terrain, slopes, traffic, wildlife, exposure to weather). Inform your volunteers of any hazards. Tell them what clothing or supplies they'll need to bring. Monitor the weather before your event and be ready to reschedule if the conditions are unsafe. Bring water and a first aid kit, and consider condition-specific safety (e.g. sunscreen). If your site is remote, be sure to have an emergency evacuation plan in place.

If your volunteers include minors or other vulnerable groups, take time to ensure that you are considering all safety issues and concerns that may affect them. Be clear that bullying and harassment in any form (e.g. sexual, class, race, gender), is not acceptable and is grounds for expulsion from the activity. Finally, consider the use of a liability waiver. This document is important to protect your organization from liability in the case where a volunteer is harmed during your event. It should be consented to and signed by all participants.

Event Logistics

Promotion: Make sure volunteers know about your event! In addition to adding your event to SER's *Make a Difference Week* website, you should plan to advertise your event through social media, websites, newsletters, flyers in community centers, direct outreach to groups who might be interested, or press releases sent to your local media stations. When you submit your event to the *Make a Difference Week* website, it will be displayed on an interactive map that helps volunteers find and register for it.



Registration: How will local volunteers register for your event? Will you set up an online registration system, should people email you, or will you be promoting the event without registration?

Structure for the day: Make sure you plan the overall course of the day and your activities. What are your goals for the day? Setting measurable targets helps motivate volunteers, and also simplifies reporting (see **Event Reporting**) (**Principle 5**).

Be prepared for volunteers to show up both early and late. Make a plan for introducing volunteers to the site, the event, and each other. If training is required, have it prepared for when your volunteers arrive. In particularly hot or cold climates, make sure you plan breaks for people to drink water and cool off, or have a chance to warm up. Be prepared for either more and fewer people than expected (some people who sign up may not attend, some people may attend who didn't sign up).

Cost: While it is possible to host a volunteer restoration event at no cost, it's important to consider the potential cost of materials, tools, permits, and water/snacks for volunteers. There are many options available for local event sponsorship. Local businesses or municipalities may be able to contribute to your event – often by supplying refreshments or lending tools to your team. For more funding ideas and resources please see the **Funding** and **Resources** sections of this document.

Materials: Consider what types of materials you might need and how you will provide them. Assign someone to be responsible for gathering any materials and bringing them to your volunteer site on time for the day of the event. Remember to plan for their return if they are loaned. If your project involves the removal of material (e.g. garbage or invasive species), make a plan for where this material will go, for having collection bags for the materials, and for safe and legal disposal after the event.

If you are planting or seeding, consider where your plant material is coming from. Are you using native species? Planting non-native species is not appropriate for ecological restoration projects. Is it from an appropriately local source? Are the species you're using the best ones for your site? If possible, take some time assessing a similar local ecosystem to learn more about the species assemblages you'll be working towards (**Principle 3**).

Accessibility: How will your volunteers get to your site? Are there limitations on the number of vehicles that can park at the site, or the type of vehicle needed to access it? Are there any limitations to site access or event participation for people with physical disabilities?

If volunteers need transportation, be sure to plan for this ahead of time. Make sure all of your volunteers know when and where to meet. Tell your volunteers about the site conditions to prepare them for any challenges they may face in moving around the site.

When thinking about event accessibility it may also help to consider who may be prevented from participating. Are there language barriers between you and local communities? What changes can be made to make it easier for people with disabilities to participate?

Refreshments: If you're providing water and snacks, plan for where they will come from and how you will dispose of any waste. Assign someone to be responsible for the refreshments. If you don't have a budget for water and snacks, remind your volunteers to bring their own, but still plan to have extra water on hand in case anyone forgets.



Event Reporting

To share the impact of *Make a Difference Week*, we're going to need some data! During your event, please take lots of photos and videos (with the consent of your volunteers). Remember to record how many volunteers you had and your measures of success. We will be collecting and combining all of this data into a final report, so measurements that are easy to combine between projects are helpful. Ideas for common measurements include: area treated, number of seedlings planted, or weight of invasive species removed. Once *Make a Difference Week* is over, we will provide you with a simple form to help you collect/report this basic data. You may choose to collect additional information as well. Please make sure to record the number of volunteers that attend your event.

Regional Leads

Do you want to do more? We are looking for organizations who are willing to be Regional Leads to help us promote MADW in their region!

A Regional Lead is an organization that is looking to increase their participation in MADW. To qualify to be a Regional Lead, the organization must support the registration of at least 10 events in their region.

Regional Leads will be responsible for:

- Using their personal and professional networks, social media platforms, community events and meetings, or other methods to identify potential event hosts in their region, and to promote MADW to these organizations
- Advocating for the vision and objectives of MADW, and acting as an ambassador for MADW locally
- Offering guidance and support to local event hosts who would like to plan and register MADW events
- Communicating with SER regarding local event host identification and engagement

Regional Leads will have access to all of the benefits and support that local events host will receive, as well as the following:

- Organizational promotion, including recognition on makeadifferenceweek.org, and use of our specific Regional Lead logo
- The opportunity to nominate a representative to sit on the MADW Organizing Committee
- Additional opportunities to network with other event hosts and Regional Leads from around the world

If you're interested in becoming a Regional Lead, or have any questions about this role, please contact Keith MacCallum at keith@ser.org.

Working Together

Make a Difference Week is planned every year to align with **World Environment Day**. We encourage all Make a Difference Week Event Hosts and volunteers to consider this year's theme when planning and engaging with local volunteer events.

The 2024 World Environment Day theme is: **accelerating land restoration, drought resilience and desertification progress**.

SER is also a **Global Partner on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration**. The UN Decade encourages everyone to help reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent. This can help to end poverty, combat climate change, and prevent mass extinction. It will only succeed if we all play a part.

Large-scale ecological action is needed to achieve the aims of the UN Decade. We hope that Make a Difference Week will show you how possible it is to take this action, and inspire you to pursue these goals all year!



Photo: Wilmar Ovaes, 2021

Principles and Standards for MADW



SER released the **International Principles and Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration, 2 ed.** in 2019. They are a framework to guide restoration projects and to improve ecological restoration practice across all sectors and ecosystems. Standards-based restoration practices can reduce uncertainty and increase restoration effectiveness both ecologically and economically.

This guide is an adaptation of the Standards for use in planning *Make a Difference Week* events. We recognize that many events are part of existing projects that may already use the Standards.

Depending on where your project falls on the restorative continuum, you may also want to refer to the [UN Decade Standards of Practice \(2024\)](#), which provide a suite of standards for implementing restoration across the entirety of the continuum.

PRINCIPLE 1

ENGAGES STAKEHOLDERS

When planning your MADW event, ask yourself if you've considered everyone who might care about the ecosystem you're working in. Is there anyone missing? Your volunteers are also stakeholders. MADW events create opportunities to rebuild relationship between people and nature.

PRINCIPLE 2

DRAWS ON MANY TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Stakeholders and volunteers may have insights or priorities that you may not have considered. Will your volunteers have a chance to voice their opinions of your event's workplan? Has your community been able to share input on your event's priorities?

PRINCIPLE 3

IS INFORMED BY NATIVE REFERENCE ECOSYSTEMS, WHILE CONSIDERING ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

What ecosystem existed at your site before degradation? Are there sites nearby that are still in a similar state? Designing your project after an appropriate native reference ecosystem is important for restoring native biodiversity. Sharing this information with your volunteers is a great opportunity to give meaning to the work they will do during your event.

PRINCIPLE 4

SUPPORTS ECOSYSTEM RECOVERY PROCESSES

Your event may only take place during one day, but its impact can last much longer. Are you designing your project to partner with nature, e.g. through assisted natural regeneration or other approaches that help put your site on a restorative trajectory?

PRINCIPLE 5

IS ASSESSED AGAINST CLEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, USING MEASURABLE INDICATORS

What are the goals for your event? Do you want to plant 1000 seedlings or collect a kg of native seed? If the event is part of a larger project, how do these goals fit into existing project goals?

PRINCIPLE 6

SEEKS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF ECOSYSTEM RECOVERY POSSIBLE

It may be difficult to see how your event can assist an entire ecosystem in recovery, but it can help to think of it as one step on the path. If you're planting native plants, will it provide habitat for future native animal reintroductions? Every step in the right direction can make the next step easier.

PRINCIPLE 7

GAINS CUMULATIVE VALUE WHEN APPLIED AT LARGE SCALES

This is what *Make a Difference Week* is all about! Your team will have an incredible local impact, but you'll also be part of a global initiative. Together we will accomplish far more than each of our events could accomplish alone.

PRINCIPLE 8

IS PART OF A CONTINUUM OF RESTORATIVE ACTIVITIES

Many different activities can be restorative and all restorative activities, no matter the scale, are important and valuable. Your MADW activity can fall anywhere on the restorative continuum as long as it is contributing to recovery of the ecosystem. Examples include: citizen science and data collection, adding soil amendments, controlling or removing invasive species, or planting and seeding native species to provide habitat, stabilize soils, or restore ecosystem processes.

THE RESTORATIVE CONTINUUM

Improving biodiversity, ecosystem health, and ecosystem services



Funding

We recognize that even volunteer events come with costs and that many of our event hosts are small, community-based, often non-profit organizations that operate on limited resources. Please take a look at the following resources for information and opportunities to further fund your MADW event and other activities:

- **Local Financing Mechanisms for Forest and Landscape Restoration**: produced by the FAO and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
- **Grassroots International**: an international grantmaking organization, primarily aiming to support organizations in the US and the Global South
- **WWF's Conservation Grant Directory**
- **The International Monetary Fund's Grant Program**
- **GlobalGiving**: an international non-profit that works to connect other non-profits with funding



Photo: Congo Environnement et Nature, 2022

If you have any questions, please contact us at info@ser.org.

Resources

International Principles and Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration, 2 ed.: This groundbreaking publication provides updated guidance on the practice of ecological restoration.

Make a Difference Week digital toolkit: This kit contains logos, images, and text that you can share through your social media accounts or website.

SER Website: Information about SER's activities, membership with the Society, and more!

World Environment Day Website: Visit this website to learn more about World Environment Day (June 5th)! *Make a Difference Week* events can also be registered as WED events!

The UN Decade Guiding Principles on Ecosystem Restoration: Principles to underpin restorative activities in support of the UN Decade.

The UN Decade Standards of Practice to Guide Ecosystem Restoration: This document provides recommendations to facilitate the implementation of the UN Decade Guiding Principles.

IUCN Community Organizing Toolkit on Ecosystem Restoration: This toolkit provides valuable guidance to community organizers.

UNDP Learning for Nature Ecosystem Restoration Course: A free, online course on how to plan and apply ecological restoration solutions.

Field Safety Plan: Casual but informative video from the Ecological Society of America

One Tree Planted - How to Plant a Tree: A tree-planting guide from an organization that has planted over 100,000,000 trees.

Taking Photos at Community Events: a handy guide by the Resource Centre UK on considerations to take into account before taking photos at events.

Ocean Conservancy's Volunteer Ocean Trash Data Form: for events that are collecting ocean trash and would like to contribute their data to a worldwide citizen science initiative.