



Standing with Takoda the Bear, the Sunriver Resort mascot: Joseph "Mark" Evans, Sarah Hurth, Victor Hernandez Triana, Frances Munkenbeck, Shanilka deSoyza, Mark W. Scott (in back), Stuart C Vaughters, Robyn Greenlund, and kneeling in front, Abby Morris.

SERV-OR Advanced Team Goes to Oregon Prepared | *Stuart C Vaughters & Abby Morris**

The Oregon Prepared Conference is an annual event hosted by the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) that brings together hundreds of emergency management and preparedness professionals from across the state and beyond. The conference held at the Sunriver Resort is a three-day event focused on strengthening collaboration, advancing innovation, and building a ready and resilient Oregon where over 300 Tribal, local, state, federal, nonprofit and private sector partners gather, to share best practices and address the evolving challenges regarding disaster readiness and resilience.

This year for the first time, thanks to funds provided by the MRC STTRONG (State, Territory and Tribal Nations, Representative Organizations for Next Generation)

grant, the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) sponsored volunteers who are part of the SERV-OR Advanced Team to attend Oregon Prepared.

The SERV-OR Advanced Team (A-Team) is a pilot effort to develop volunteer leadership that can provide de-centralized coordination of deployments across the state. Of the 18 A-Team members, seven were able to attend the 2026 Oregon Prepared Conference along with Abby Morris, SERV-OR Volunteer Manager & Oregon MRC State Coordinator and Stuart C Vaughters, SERV-OR Volunteer Engagement and Communications AmeriCorps VISTA.

The theme this year, Communication, Collaboration, and Community, was reflected throughout the conference during plenary, training, and information sessions, workshops, breakout groups, and networking opportunities. Over the course of the event, we expanded our knowledge of emergency management trends and statewide happenings and strengthened our ability to use this understanding to support communities during preparedness and response efforts. Oregon Prepared created space to learn from agencies and partners across Oregon and to better understand how volunteer programs like SERV-OR fit into the broader picture of emergency management.

For most of the A-Team members this was their first time attending Oregon Prepared. And because they live in different regions of the state the conference was an opportunity for them to meet and interact with each other in person, as well meet and network with other attendees from a range of emergency management and preparedness backgrounds while attending sessions on a variety of subjects.

Of the 33 sessions over the three-day event, there were many standouts. One highlight was the discussion on Special Districts and Community Lifelines. Learning about the different governance structures of Oregon's Special Districts and the essential services they oversee offered valuable insight into how these entities operate during emergencies. This was helpful to understand how SERV-OR volunteers may be able to support these districts during emergencies, particularly when disruptions to water systems, sanitation, or public works affect entire communities.

A-Team member, Dr. Frances Munkenbeck, shared, "The conference helped me become more familiar with the different roles OEM plays in our everyday lives in preventing/managing various potential disasters and how OEM is evolving over time to meet the changing landscape. The conference also taught me that planning such as designing a layout of a neighborhood can mitigate or easily make worse the effects of a disaster. I now look at the streets/neighborhoods where I live differently." Another A-Team member, Dr. Joseph "Mark" Evans, said, "I really enjoyed the session *Exponential Collaboration: Getting the Most Out of Meetings*. Knowledgeable speakers and plenty of time for questions. Great venue as well."

SERV-OR Volunteer Manager & Oregon MRC State Coordinator, Abby had this to say, "I was reminded at Oregon Prepared about how valuable volunteers are. Whether you support medical deployments, help staff call centers, assist with resource coordination, or contribute in any other way, your service helps ensure Oregon is supported when emergencies happen. Your commitment makes a tangible difference in the lives of people across the state, and we are grateful for the expertise, compassion, and steadiness you bring to the program."

Oregon Prepared offered meaningful opportunities to bring back new knowledge that will enhance how SERV-OR supports communities in both preparedness and response. The experience left the Team informed, motivated, and proud to represent a volunteer community as dedicated and capable as SERV-OR.

* Stuart C Vaughters, leads the Bulletin Development Team as the SERV-OR Volunteer Engagement and Communications AmeriCorps VISTA & Abby Morris is the SERV-OR Volunteer Manager & Oregon MRC State Coordinator.