

Ohio State Parks

**Handbook
for
Volunteers**

Vision Statement

We, the employees of Ohio State Parks, are proud of our incredible natural resources and facilities, and we are devoted to providing fun, safe, clean and friendly places for families and friends to gather and enjoy the great outdoors.

Mission Statement

To provide an outdoor recreation experience for Ohio State Park visitors that exceeds their expectations.

A volunteer is...

...one who offers without compulsion to provide service, help and information, and who grows as a result of this service.

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the Ohio State Parks Team!

You have joined thousands of generous individuals and groups who volunteer their time and talent to help make Ohio's system of state parks a memorable recreation experience for millions of visitors each year. It is our desire to provide you with a rewarding experience that is beneficial to you, the park and our visitors.

This handbook has been designed to orient you to the Ohio State Parks volunteer program. This handbook should answer most questions you may have about volunteering in Ohio State Parks. Those questions that you have that are not addressed in this handbook should be referred to your park manager or to the Public Affairs Group/Community Partnerships Section at central office in Columbus.

Thank you again for offering your services. We are confident your efforts will have a positive impact on our operations and be rewarding for you.

OHIO STATE PARKS OVERVIEW

In the early 1900s, President Theodore Roosevelt inspired Americans with his love of the outdoors and creation of a new national park system. In Ohio, the enthusiasm for conservation was translated into laws that created agencies and purchased land to protect forests, fish and game. In 1949, state lawmakers consolidated these offices by creating the Division of Parks and Recreation in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

Today, there are 74 Ohio State Parks operating in 60 counties. These parks include campgrounds offering primitive and full-service camping as well as a variety of Getaway options – yurts, camper cabins, teepees, RVs, etc. Overnight visitors may also choose to stay in a cozy cottage or at one of nine resort lodges providing luxurious accommodations and featuring fine dining rooms, indoor pools and conference facilities.

Many of our parks are situated along large reservoirs that offer swimming beaches, boating and fishing opportunities. Hundreds of miles of hiking, bridle, mountain biking and backpack trails provide avenues of escape into the natural world in many of our state parks. Other features include professionally designed and managed 18-hole golf courses,

scenic rivers for canoeing, historic and culturally significant buildings and programs, beautiful picnic areas, naturalist programs, accessible facilities and much more. Importantly, Ohio is one of the few states that does not charge entrance fees to visit and enjoy a state park.

The division is operated from a central office located at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources headquarters in Columbus.

Following is more information about Ohio State Parks.

DEFINITIONS

Ohio State Parks has developed an extensive Community Partnership Program that has reached out to thousands of citizens who serve as volunteers in a number of categories. These are:

Volunteer Associations

A number of parks have long-established volunteer associations which have existed before friends groups were started and which function in a very similar manner. They exist to fundraise for making improvements at their individual state park.

Friends Groups

Friends groups are formed as non-profit organizations which have as their primary purpose making improvements to their particular state park and advocating for it with local and state officials. They organize programs and special events, sponsor fundraising activities and through them make improvements to their park. The improvements include, but are not limited to, shelter houses, nature centers, playgrounds, disc golf courses, etc. Friends groups are tied together by the statewide **Friends for the Preservation of Ohio State Parks** (www.fposp.org) which sponsors two annual training meetings, provides a network of email communication between the groups and advocates for the division with elected officials. Friends groups also have access to grants by the independent Ohio State Parks Legacy Foundation (www.osplegacy.org) for projects that improve the parks.

Community Support Groups

There is a statewide network of community support groups, many of which existed before friends groups were started, that as one of their purposes is to advocate for and fundraise for improvements to individual state parks. These include lake improvement groups, civic organizations, etc.

Whether a volunteer is a member of a friends group, community support group or volunteer association, they must be signed up in the division's volunteer program when they are working at a park so they are covered in case of injury through the state workers' compensation program.

PURPOSE OF THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The Volunteers-In-Parks program was created by the Division of Parks and Recreation in 1982 to offer increased public service to visitors of Ohio's state parks. From an initial 60 volunteers the program has grown to include thousands of volunteers who provide hundreds of thousands of service hours to the division each year.

OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the volunteer program are:

- a. Enhancement of the visitor experience offered by the Division of Parks and Recreation.
- b. To allow direct involvement of the public in the daily operation of Ohio State Parks.

Volunteers can experience firsthand the rewards of working on behalf of Ohio State Parks. In return, volunteers bring with them a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience that allows an extension of park services that may not otherwise be possible. Also, volunteers become advocates for Ohio State Parks' policies and positions and are an effective voice in support of its programs and services.

This handbook serves as the official guideline for the Ohio State Parks Volunteer-In-Parks Program.

ROLES OF DIVISION PERSONNEL

In order for any park volunteer program to operate efficiently, it is important to understand the roles of various division personnel directly involved in the program.

Park Manager

The park manager or his designee is responsible for the recruitment, training, supervision

and evaluation of volunteers at the park level. The park manager maintains the park volunteer program within the parameters of established division policy. It is important that one person in the park be designated as the contact person for the local volunteer program. This will foster clear, effective communication with the volunteers, park management and central office.

Central Office Volunteer Coordinator

The central office volunteer coordinator is the manager of the Community Partnerships Section of the Public Affairs Group and provides assistance to park managers and staff at all levels of the volunteer program. The volunteer coordinator offers advice in problem-solving, recruiting, training and other aspects of the program to park staff and volunteers. The coordinator organizes the production and ordering of supplies for the program and answers questions regarding program guidelines and direction.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The type of volunteer program developed for each state park is a reflection of the park's needs and the skills of the applicants. While volunteer programs will vary from park to park, they all operate within the framework of the following guidelines.

1. All volunteers must be 18 years of age or older, unless they are Green Teens or Junior volunteers.
2. A volunteer must be in good health and physically able to carry out assigned duties.
3. The volunteer is not considered an employee by definition except for the purpose of Workers' Compensation coverage.
4. All volunteers are supervised by permanent members of the park staff.
5. Volunteers are expected to conduct themselves in the same courteous and professional manner as Ohio State Parks employees. Volunteers are to provide a high level of customer service to help ensure that park visitors have a pleasant visit and leave with a positive image of the park.
6. All volunteers must have a signed and completed volunteer agreement on file in the park, central office and in their personal possession.

7. Volunteers may be subject to background checks before beginning the service at the park.
8. Uniform requirements are at the discretion of the park manager, but all volunteers should wear some sort of identification that indicates to visitors their status and affiliation with the division.

RESTRICTIONS

Because the volunteers are not actual employees, the division must take certain precautions in assigning their duties and defining their responsibilities.

1. A volunteer may not be used as a substitute to replace or eliminate any authorized park staff positions. The volunteer's role is to *assist* park employees.
2. A volunteer may not be placed in any duty situation considered hazardous. A volunteer may not be involved in law enforcement of any kind. Volunteers are not to enforce rules or approach visitors who are violating rules, but should report such infractions to park staff, officers or management who are on duty.
3. Volunteers are not to be involved with collection of fees or handling park money.
4. Volunteers are prohibited from participating individually in programs or activities that involve children. Volunteers must be accompanied by at least one other volunteer or be directly supervised by a staff member at all times when working with children.
5. A volunteer's personal property is not covered by the state if lost or stolen, even if used in the line of duty. Therefore, a volunteer should use state equipment, when available, or insure their personal property/equipment.
6. Only volunteers with valid Ohio driver's licenses may operate motorized equipment such as lawn mowers, golf carts and weed-trimmers. A motor vehicle liability form must be completed by the park and sent to central office.

BENEFITS

Volunteers enjoy a host of benefits in addition to the satisfaction of completing a task well done. These include:

1. Coverage under Ohio Workers' Compensation in case of an injury while performing volunteer duties at the park.
2. Tax benefits as allowed under the charitable tax benefit contributions provisions of the Internal Revenue Code. (Details on these tax benefits available from local offices of the IRS – ask for Publication 526, or on the IRS web site).
3. Recognition certificates and service pins for 5, 10, 15 and 20 years of service.
4. Complimentary campsites at the Annual Statewide Volunteer Campout held at a different park each year. The weekend includes park tours, visits to area historic and cultural attractions, activities and entertainment.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In the event a problem arises between a volunteer and park personnel, the following process has been designed to resolve the situation. Follow these steps:

STEP I

The park manager and volunteer are to meet to try and resolve the problem.

STEP II

If the park manager and volunteer do not agree on a mutual solution either party may request a Step II meeting with the central office volunteer coordinator. The meeting will include the volunteer, park manager and volunteer coordinator. Step II is the final grievance step. At this meeting, all parties will try to agree on a solution. The solution will be written up at the meeting and signed by all parties present and copies of the agreement will be given to each party.

TERMINATION

A volunteer contract may be terminated by the park manager for a number of reasons. For example:

1. Conduct that does not conform to division standards.
2. Desire of volunteer to terminate services.

3. Mutual agreement to terminate services.
4. No longer an operational need for the services.
5. Unforeseen emergencies (e.g., illness, death in family, etc.).

The decision to terminate a volunteer's contract is the responsibility of the park manager. As it states in the volunteer contract, "... the Chief of the Division of Parks and Recreation or his designee, shall decide on all questions which may arise as to quality fitness, promptness and acceptability of service provided by the volunteer and that the Chief or his designee may void or cancel this agreement by giving written notice to the volunteer"

VOLUNTEER JOB CATEGORIES

Campground Host

Campground Hosts serve primarily as public relations liaisons providing information, assisting campers, helping with special events and performing other assorted functions.

Examples of duties include:

- Welcome campers.
- Acquaint visitors with the park and surrounding area.
- Explain regulations to visitors.
- Light maintenance work (e.g., replacing light bulbs, weeding, etc.).
- Sweep, monitor conditions of, and stock restrooms.
- Set a good example by maintaining a neat and orderly campsite.
- Report necessary repairs to park staff.
- Assist with special programs and campground activities.

New Campground Hosts initially serve for a 28-day probationary period. Upon

successful completion of this trial period, a Campground Host can be signed to a one calendar year contract.

Campground Hosts typically work in the park five days a week (including weekends and holidays), an average of four hours per day. Reduced schedules may be arranged depending upon operational needs at the discretion of the park manager. The minimum weekly work schedule is two days. Hosts are considered “on call” while they are in residence at the campground.

Campground Hosts must provide their own camping equipment and will be provided a complimentary campsite in return for services provided. The location of the site is at the discretion of the manager.

While on duty the Campground Host is expected to wear a volunteer ball cap/visor and nametag. Other uniform requirements are at the discretion of the park manager.

Some parks have found it necessary to restrict traffic in camping areas and issue paid car passes. A maximum two complimentary passes are issued per Campground Host site for personal use; visitors to Host sites must pay for their passes.

Individual Volunteers

A number of parks utilize Individual volunteers in a variety of ways. Some Individual volunteers perform special service projects; others assist naturalists with interpretive programs; some provide assistance in conducting special park events.

All Individual volunteers are required to complete an agreement that is valid for up to two years. Those under 18 years of age must complete a release and waiver for minor form and are enrolled as Green Teens or Junior volunteers.

The Individual volunteer must wear a volunteer nametag while performing duties that entail public contact. Other required uniform items are left to the discretion of the park manager.

Group Volunteers

A number of organized groups are on contract with the division to provide a variety of services. Groups may be signed-up for one-time projects (e.g., Ohio Heritage Days, lake clean up) or on-going projects (e.g., trail work).

All members of the group must sign the Group volunteer sign-up sheets. Group contracts

are valid up to two years. Group volunteers must wear a volunteer nametag when performing public contact functions. Other required uniform items are left to the discretion of the park manager.

Green Teens

The Green Teens program was started to encourage young people aged 16 - 18 to get involved in the care of a state park. Green Teens may become active through a school club or scouting organization, or they may become involved as an individual.

All Green Teens complete an Individual volunteer agreement and the release and waiver for minor form on the back of the contract signed by themselves and a parent/guardian. The contract may run for up to two years. Green Teens wear volunteers nametags while on duty and other apparel is the choice of the park.

Junior Volunteers

The Junior volunteer program is designed for families that would like to include their children who are 5 - 15 years of age in their volunteer efforts. Junior volunteers must be accompanied by their parents or guardians who are responsible for the child's supervision. They are only permitted to perform duties that match their level of ability and should be limited to duties that involve full family participation. Junior volunteers may not volunteer during regular school hours and breaks or rest periods must be provided.