



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

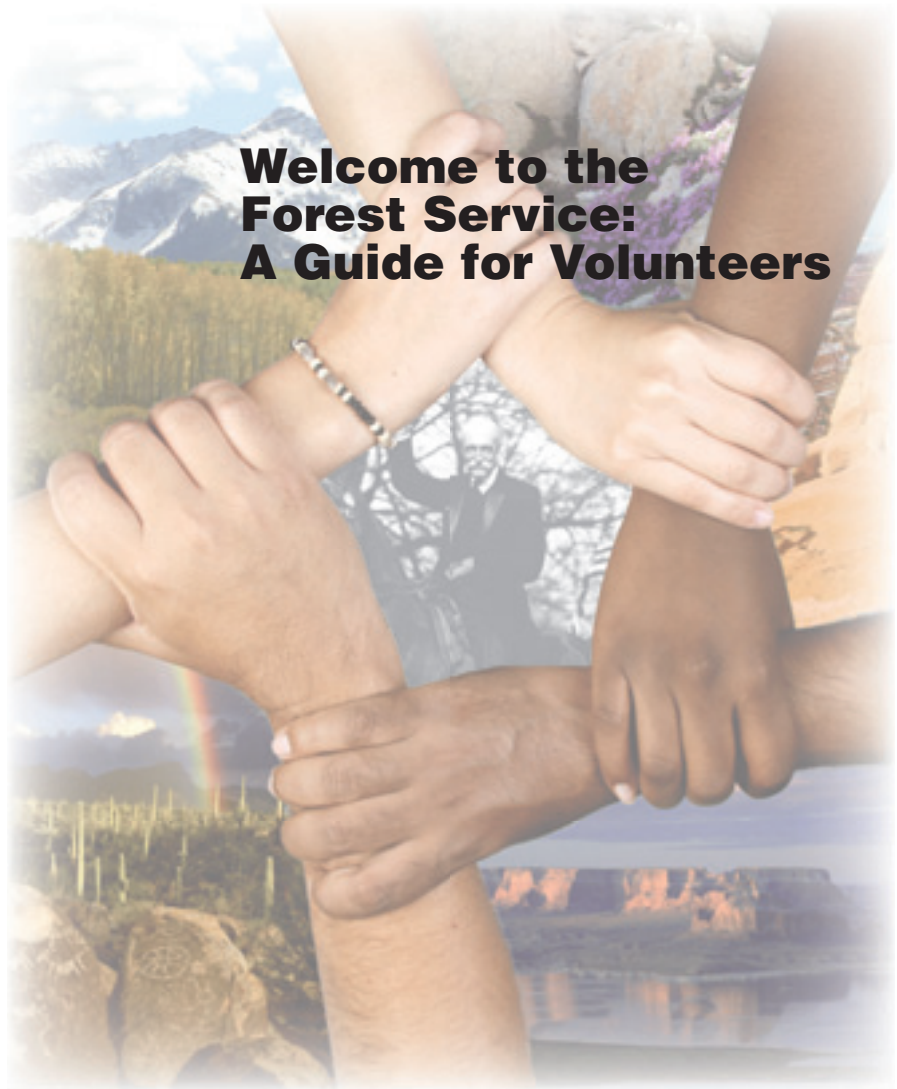
Technology &
Development
Program

6700–Safety and Health
2300–Recreation

February 2009
0967–2813–MTDC

Welcome to the Forest Service: A Guide for Volunteers





Welcome to the Forest Service: A Guide for Volunteers

Lisa Outka-Perkins
Project Leader

USDA Forest Service
Technology and Development Program
Missoula, MT

2E22H52 Training Program for Hosted Programs

February 2009

The Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), has developed this information for the guidance of its employees, its contractors, and its cooperating Federal and State agencies, and is not responsible for the interpretation or use of this information by anyone except its own employees. The use of trade, firm, or corporation names in this document is for the information and convenience of the reader, and does not constitute an endorsement by the Department of any product or service to the exclusion of others that may be suitable.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Contents

Introduction	1
Establishment of the Forest Service	1
National Forest System	1
National Level	2
Regions	2
National Forests and Grasslands	2
Ranger Districts	2
International Institute of Tropical Forestry	3
Research and Development	3
State and Private Forestry	3
Volunteers in the National Forests Program	4
Volunteers in the National Forests Act	4
USDA Nondiscrimination Statement	4
Volunteer Work	5
Volunteer Agreements	6
Difference Between Individual and Sponsored Volunteer Agreements	6
What are Partnerships?	7
Volunteer Qualifications	7
Supervision and Work Performance	7
Training	7
Uniforms	7
Timekeeping	8
Expenses and Reimbursement	8
Responsibility and Conduct	8
Volunteer Rights	9
Safety	10
Personal Safety	10
Travel	11

Vehicles	11
Foot Travel	11
Horses and Packstock	12
All-Terrain and Utility Terrain Vehicles (ATVs and UTVs)	13
Weather	15
Hot Weather Conditions	15
Cold Weather Conditions	16
Lightning	16
Plants, Insects, and Snakes	17
Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac	18
Ticks	19
Chiggers	20
Bees, Wasps, and Fire Ants	20
Snakes	21
Spiders and Scorpions	22
Chopping Tools	23
Cutting Tools	24
Chain Saws and Crosscut Saws	24
Bow Saws	24
Files	25
Prying and Tamping Bars	25
Shovels	25
Lifting and Carrying	25
Office Safety	26
Injuries	27



Introduction

Welcome to the Forest Service, the largest agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As a volunteer, you will be helping manage resources that are increasingly important to our Nation.

In recent years, the Forest Service has relied on volunteers to maintain trails, serve as hosts at campgrounds, and perform many other valuable services. Without volunteers, these services would not be performed as well or might not be performed at all.

This guide will provide you with a brief history of the Forest Service, an overview of the volunteer program, and some information you will need to work safely and productively for the agency. We hope it helps you become at ease in your new position.

Volunteer coordinators can refer to a more comprehensive guide:

“Volunteers in the Forest Service: A Coordinator’s Desk Guide” (Tech. Rep. 0967–2814–MTDC).

Establishment of the Forest Service

When the first European settlers arrived on American soil, forests covered nearly all the land from the Eastern Seaboard to the Great Plains. Due to concern about deforestation and unregulated cutting, laws to protect timber stands were passed as early as 1807. Such laws were virtually ignored.

In 1891, Congress gave the President the power to establish forest reserves from the public domain to protect timber and to ensure a regular flow of water in streams. The forest reserves were placed under the administration of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

In 1905, management of the forest reserves was transferred to a new agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot was named the first Chief (figure 1). Other land management agencies, such as the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management, are in the U.S. Department of the Interior. In a letter dated February 1, 1905, Secretary of Agriculture James



Figure 1—Gifford Pinchot, Governor of Pennsylvania (Chief of the Forest Service, 1905 to 1910), rides up Pennsylvania Avenue in President Coolidge’s 1925 inaugural parade.

Wilson laid out the guiding principles of the Forest Service to the new Chief. An excerpt of the letter follows:

“In the administration of the forest reserves, it must be clearly borne in mind that all land is to be devoted to the most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people and not for the temporary benefit of individuals or companies.... You will see to it that the water, wood, and forage of the reserves are conserved and wisely used under businesslike regulations enforced with promptness, effectiveness, and common sense.... Where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run....”—James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture 1897 to 1913

National Forest System

The National Forest System includes 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands (figure 2), covering 193 million acres of land in 44 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These lands represent some of the Nation’s greatest assets and have major economic, environmental, and social significance for millions of Americans.

As directed by Congress, renewable forest resources—water, timber, forage, wildlife, and recreation—are managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Multiple use means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment. Sustained yield means that resources are managed to provide services and products at a level that can be sustained without harming the land’s ability to continue producing those services and products.



Figure 2—Wildflowers in Franklin Basin along a road north of the Utah-Idaho State line, July 16, 2004. *Courtesy of Ann Keysor, Caribou-Targhee National Forest (includes Curlew National Grasslands)*

National Level

The highest level of the National Forest System is the national level, commonly called the Washington Office. The person who oversees the entire Forest Service is called the Chief or the Chief Forester of the United States. The Chief, a Federal employee, reports to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment in the USDA. The Chief’s staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works with the President’s administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments, and monitors the agency’s activities.

Regions

The Forest Service has 9 regions, numbered 1 through 6 and 8 through 10. Region 7 was eliminated some years ago to standardize the size of regions. The forests in Region 7 were divided among Regions 8 and 9. Each region is composed of several national forests and usually includes several States. The person in charge of each region is called the regional forester. The regional office allocates budgets to the forests, coordinates activities between forests, monitors activities on the forests, and provides guidance for each forest plan.

National Forests and Grasslands

Each forest or grassland is composed of several ranger districts. The person in charge of a national forest or grassland is called the forest or grassland supervisor. The supervisor’s office coordinates activities between ranger districts, allocates the budget, and provides technical support to each district.

Ranger Districts

There are more than 600 ranger districts. The district ranger and district staff are usually the public’s first point of contact with the Forest Service. Each district has a staff of 10 to 100 people. On-the-ground activities at the districts include trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds, and management of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

International Institute of Tropical Forestry

The International Institute of Tropical Forestry is part of the Forest Service. The institute is located in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, on the grounds of the University of Puerto Rico's Agricultural Experimental Station. The institute is dedicated to tropical forestry on an international level. Within the Forest Service's mission of caring for the land and serving people, the institute's mission is to: Develop and exchange knowledge critical to sustaining tropical ecosystem benefits for humankind.

Research and Development

The research and development (R&D) arm of the Forest Service works at the forefront of science to improve the health and use of our Nation's forests and grasslands. Research has been part of the Forest Service mission since the agency's inception in 1905. Today, some 500-plus Forest Service researchers work in a range of biological (figure 3), physical, and social science fields to promote sustainable



Figure 3—Respiratory and circulatory data were collected from this black bear during wildlife research. *Courtesy of Scott Anderson, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest*

management of the Nation's diverse forests and rangelands. Their research covers a lot of territory, with programs in all 50 States, U.S. territories, and commonwealths. The research focuses on informing policy and land management decisions, whether the research addresses invasive insects, degraded river ecosystems, or sustainable ways to harvest forest products. The researchers work independently and with a range of partners, including other agencies, academia, nonprofit groups, and industry. The information and technology produced through basic and applied science programs is available to the public.

State and Private Forestry

The State and Private Forestry (S&PF) arm of the Forest Service reaches across the boundaries of national forests to States, Tribes, communities, and nonindustrial private landowners. State and Private Forestry is the Federal leader in providing technical and financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the Nation's forests and protect communities and the environment from wildland fires.

State and Private Forestry programs bring forest management assistance and expertise to a diversity of landowners, including the owners of small woodlots and Tribal, State, and Federal Governments, through cost-effective, nonregulatory partnerships. The staffs play a key role, along with others within the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior, in implementing the National Fire Plan to manage the impacts of wildland fires on communities and the environment.



Volunteers in the National Forests Program



Courtesy of Arthur Herzog

“We live in a society that always has depended on volunteers of different kinds, some who can give money, others who give time and a great many who will freely give their special skills, full time or part time. If you look closely you will see that almost anything that really matters to us, anything that embodies our deepest commitment to the way human life should be lived and cared for depended on some form—more often, many forms—of volunteerism.”

Margaret Mead and Rhoda Metraux,
“Aspects of the Present” (1980)

Volunteers in the National Forests Act

The Volunteers in the National Forests (VIF) program is authorized by the Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972. Before passage of the act, the Forest Service did not have the authority to accept voluntary services or to reimburse individuals for associated personal expenses. The Volunteers in the National Forests Act recognized the public’s interest in giving time and skills for community service. Volunteers are enrolled by the Forest Service under this act. Volunteers receive no salary or wages from the Forest Service and give their time and talents to further the agency’s mission (figure 4).



Figure 4—A volunteer helps the Forest Service with wildlife viewing.
Courtesy of Ginger Hamilton, Forest Service, Northern Region

A volunteer is not considered a Federal employee and is not subject to the provisions of laws relating to Federal employment except for the purpose of tort claims or work-related injuries (Federal Employees Compensation Act of 1974).

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited basis apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call 800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-5382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.”—USDA Equal Employment Opportunity Policy Statement

Volunteer Work

Volunteers are at the very heart of the Forest Service. You may assist in any Forest Service program or activity but cannot perform law enforcement activities or fight fire. A variety of jobs are available, ranging from office work to vigorous physical labor outdoors. Some typical volunteer activities include:

- Maintaining and hosting campgrounds
- Answering phones, greeting visitors, and answering mail at Forest Service visitor centers and ranger stations
- Working with computers in Forest Service administrative offices
- Taking photographs
- Planting trees and seeding damaged areas (figure 5)



Figure 5—Volunteers help with plant restoration on the Hiawatha National Forest. *Courtesy of Gary Morgan, Forest Service, Eastern Region*

- Presenting environmental education programs
- Building and repairing fences, nest boxes (figure 6), picnic tables, and other structures



Figure 6—Local volunteers help with a nest box, a wildlife opening, and structure maintenance project for the wildlife program. *Courtesy of Art Henderson, Talladega National Forest*

- Building barrier-free campsites, docks, and trails
- Restoring damaged streambanks and burned areas
- Building and maintaining trails (figure 7)



Figure 7—Volunteers work on the Forks Area Trail System, one of the premier mountain bike trails in the Southeast. *Courtesy of Elizabeth Meadows, Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests*

You may work part time or full time and can participate in a daylong project or serve over several months, seasons, or years. You are limited only by your willingness to serve. However, such service must benefit the Forest Service.

Volunteer Agreements

The three types of volunteer agreements are:

- FS 1800-6 for international volunteers
- FS 1800-7 for individual volunteers
- FS 1800-8 for sponsored or group voluntary service.

These agreements allow the Forest Service to accept your services and work. In essence, the agreement is the contract between you and the Forest Service. You may not begin work or travel on an assignment until the agreement is signed.

The volunteer agreement can be modified at any time with the written consent of each party. The existing agreement can be terminated, a new agreement can be developed, or a signed and dated amendment can be attached to the existing agreement.

Difference Between Individual and Sponsored Volunteer Agreements

The individual volunteer agreement is used for people who want to donate their time and talent to the Forest Service and are not associated with an organized group (figure 8).

A sponsored volunteer agreement is used for people who belong to or are supervised by another institution or organization or by a unit of State or local government. Some of these groups include the Florida Trail Association, Girl or Boy Scouts (figure 9), and the Back Country Horsemen. These groups recruit, train, and host volunteers along with or in partnership with the Forest Service. These volunteers are documented as a group under the name of their sponsor

organization on the sponsored volunteer agreement. In addition to the Forest Service guidelines and regulations, volunteers working under a sponsored volunteer agreement may be provided with guidance from their sponsoring organization. If you are working under a sponsored volunteer agreement, you will need to check with your host organization as well as your Forest Service volunteer coordinator to make sure you have all of the information needed to make your experience fruitful and enjoyable.



Figure 8—A volunteer at the International Institute of Tropical Forestry sorts organic litter. *Courtesy of Elizabeth (Liza) Hernandez, Forest Service, International Institute of Tropical Forestry*



Figure 9—A local Boy Scout helps with a National Trails Day habitat restoration project for the NatureWatch program. *Courtesy of Heather Hundt, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest*

What are Partnerships?

The words “partnership” and “partners” are used in a broad way to describe relationships between the people, organizations, agencies, and communities that work together and share interests. The Forest Service regularly works in partnership with other entities, including Tribes, States, Federal agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and communities.

The word “partnership” also has a precise meaning. Federal policy defines partnerships as “arrangements that are voluntary, mutually beneficial, and entered into for the purpose of mutually agreed upon objectives.” In this definition, “mutual benefit” specifically means that each partner shares in the benefits the project provides.

Volunteer Qualifications

The Forest Service officer negotiating and approving volunteer agreements determines the qualifications for each volunteer assignment. Your job description/essential eligibility criteria will be in the volunteer agreement. These criteria establish the nondiscriminatory basic functions and abilities required for volunteer service in the individual position or project. To be selected for and retained in the position or project, you must be able to meet all of the elements within the job description/essential eligibility criteria for that position or project. If you have a history of allergic reactions to bee stings or other insect stings, or may be affected by certain types of work, you need to inform your supervisor.

If you are under the age of 18, you must have the written consent of one of your parents or guardians to enroll as a volunteer. Child labor laws pertain to those under 18. Some work cannot be performed by youth who are under the age of 18.

Supervision and Work Performance

Your responsibility is to perform the work as described and agreed to in the volunteer agreement. The Forest Service’s responsibility is to provide adequate supervision (figure 10). A Forest Service supervisor should always be appointed for volunteers even if the supervisor can’t provide supervision every day. If the daily supervisor cannot be a Forest Service official, a qualified individual within the volunteer group or under the partnership agreement may provide daily supervision. Supervisors must be fully trained in all aspects of the project work and be familiar with Forest Service policies and procedures.



Figure 10—Volunteers prepare to do stream surveys, part of a mine site restoration project for the NatureWatch program. *Courtesy of Scott Spaulding, Lolo National Forest*

Training

You will receive the basic knowledge and skills needed to do the job adequately and safely.

Uniforms

You may need to wear a uniform if you have significant, frequent, or recurring contact with the public or when the uniform is important to establish your authority or to identify

you as an agency representative (figure 11). Uniform policies for volunteers are covered in the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH). See FSM 1833.4; FSH 6509.11k, sections 48.03a and 48.03b-4.



Figure 11—A volunteer ranger working near Skunk Cabbage Meadows in the San Jacinto Mountains. *Courtesy of Brad Eells, Forest Service Volunteer Association, San Bernardino National Forest, San Jacinto Ranger District*

Most volunteers will wear the volunteer uniform, which consists of a volunteer vest, volunteer windbreaker, and/or volunteer cap (FSH 6509.11k, sections 48.1-6 and 48.7, exhibit 03). Depending on the work, line officers may determine that a regular uniform is more appropriate for some volunteers (FSH 6509.11k, sec. 48.03b-4). If you will be wearing the regular uniform, it will be furnished.

You must wear the uniform properly (FSH 6509.11k, sec. 48.03d). This means the uniform must be neat, clean, and tidy. The field uniform must be complete in its components and cannot be mixed and matched with street clothes. For example, a uniform shirt cannot be worn with blue jeans and a district baseball cap.

Timekeeping

It is important for you to record the number of hours you work and the amount of work accomplished. This responsibility may be assigned to you or may be assigned to your leader if you are working with a group of volunteers.

Expenses and Reimbursement

You do not receive a salary from the Forest Service, but may be eligible to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses (figure 12) related to transportation, food, lodging, and certain miscellaneous expenses that are “necessary, reasonable, and arise as a result of the voluntary work.” It is not possible to reimburse you for all of the out-of-pocket expenses you might incur and the intent is not to provide compensation or a stipend for volunteering. Reimbursement for expenses is negotiated on a case-by-case basis.



Figure 12—An Indian Boundary campground host uses his personal tractor to rip and grade Indian Boundary Beach. *Courtesy of Mary Jane Burnette, Cherokee National Forest, Tellico Ranger District*

Responsibility and Conduct

The Forest Service expects all its representatives to adhere to civic-minded principles in their personal conduct and to exhibit a high degree of personal integrity. Acceptable conduct involves sincere respect for the rights and feelings of others and the assurance their personal conduct will not harm or be considered discriminatory to other volunteers, employees, or the Forest Service—or cause an unfavorable reaction from the public.

While you are on duty you may not:

- Possess or use firearms except when authorized
- Consume intoxicating beverages
- Possess or use any illegal drugs
- Use Government-owned or Government-leased vehicles, property, tools, equipment, or telephones for personal purposes
- Fight, use derogatory language, or participate in discrimination, sexual harassment, or violent or threatening behavior
- Have pets with you without special permission of the district ranger
- Violate any State game and fish regulation
- Violate any Federal, State, or local law
- Sell or distribute nonagency products or literature
- Disclose confidential information

Violation of any of the above prohibitions may constitute grounds for dismissal or other appropriate action.

Volunteer Rights

You, as a volunteer, have rights. These rights include:

- The right to be treated with respect
- The right to a workplace free of harassment
- The right to a workplace free of hostile conditions
- The right to a suitable assignment
- The right to training
- The right to qualified supervision
- The right to safe working conditions