U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Volunteers

Helping Us Help Wildlife

With close to 38,000 volunteers contributing in excess of 1.4 million hours of their time, skills and talents last year, the Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) volunteer program is robust and continues to grow. Volunteers play a vital role in helping the FWS fulfill its mission of conserving, protecting and enhancing America's fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats.

What is the Volunteer Program?
The volunteer program within the FWS provides people with hands-on opportunities to engage in wildlife conservation on lands that belong to them. The program was formally initiated in 1982, and began receiving congressionally appropriated funding in 1991. The program is as diverse as the individuals who comprise it. Whether volunteers are working at wildlife refuges, fish hatcheries, wetland management districts, regional offices, or ecological service offices, each one helps the National Wildlife Refuge System and other FWS programs reach their full potential.

What authorizes the FWS to accept volunteers?
The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956 (16 U.S.C. 742), as amended by the Fish and Wildlife Improvement Act of 1978 (Pub. L. 95616) and the National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105242), authorizes us to accept volunteer services.

Volunteers at Eastern Neck NWR (MD) work on completing the interpretive Bayview Butterfly Trail.

Who are our volunteers?
Our volunteers are individuals who want to give back to their communities, parents who want to be good stewards of the land and set examples for their children, retired people willing to share their wealth of knowledge, concerned citizens of all ages who want to learn more about conservation, and passionate people who enjoy the outdoors and want to spread the word about America's greatest natural treasures.

What do our volunteers do?
Volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks. Some work full time, some just a few hours a week or month or during a particular season or special event. Some typical volunteer opportunities may involve:

- conducting fish and wildlife population surveys
- leading tours and providing information and interpretation to the visiting public and school groups
- assisting with laboratory research
- taking part in special projects, such as bird banding
- assisting with habitat improvement projects, such as re-establishing native plants to a river bank
- performing clerical and administrative duties
- working with computers and other technical equipment
- photographing a variety of natural and cultural resources

Generally, no special skills are required to be a volunteer. Any on-the-job training is provided if needed. Individual talents and skills are matched with volunteer interests and work opportunities.

How do I find out about volunteer opportunities with the FWS?
Volunteer opportunities with the FWS can be found at http://www.volunteer.gov/gov, an interagency web site of national volunteer opportunities. At this site, prospective volunteers can also apply to opportunities of interest.

A volunteer at the Northeast Fishery Center (PA) holds a 6-year old Atlantic sturgeon as she prepares to study the fish in its natural habitat.

Volunteer of all ages assist Sherburne NWR (MN) with their pest plant program

Volunteer at Agassiz NWR (MN) with captured American Bittern

Volunteers at Chincoteague NWR (VA) reconstruct a wildlife observation platform on the refuge's marsh trail.

The FWS encourages volunteerism and supports the Take Pride in America program which recognizes outstanding volunteers.

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