

December 5, 2012

Field Maintenance Volunteer Position Description

The purpose of the Field Maintenance position is to:

- Assist staff in carrying out necessary maintenance to outlying structures on Refuge lands.
- Assist staff with other field projects, including biology projects, as needed.

There are cabins in three locations that need maintenance. One cabin is on an island in Becharof Lake and is in the Becharof Wilderness of Becharof National Wildlife Refuge. No generators may be used, so work will be accomplished with battery-powered equipment and hand tools. Another cluster of cabins, also located in the Becharof Wilderness, have the same restrictions. The third site is located on Mother Goose Lake in the Alaska Peninsula NWR. Likely projects include roofing, replacement of walls, framing and installing windows, painting, replacement of rotten wood, work on foundations, etc. Brushing around cabins and along the historic Kanatak Trail is also likely, again done with hand tools.

Due to the expense and difficulty of travel, once you are out in the field, you may not return to headquarters for weeks at a time. You must be willing to camp for long periods of time and be without communication other than daily radio call-ins. The Alaska Peninsula is a remote, wild, roadless place, a de facto wilderness even where the official designation is not applied. Wildlife is abundant, living in an intact ecosystem. Weather rules everything: even when you may have plans to move to another location or return to base, you may have to wait for the weather and winds to change. This tremendously challenging landscape provides a rare experience of true isolation.

Description of work environment:

Some work is likely to take place in or near the Refuge office. The office is a two-story building facing the Naknek River, a very short walk from the airport and visitor center. Additional storage and work areas are located in other buildings within the Refuge complex. Some of these other structures are heated, and some are not.

For work in the field, it will be usually be necessary to fly in small aircraft to reach the site. Airplanes are usually small, seating as few as two people. Safety equipment is supplied and required to be used. This includes helmet, jump suit, first aid and survival equipment, and other items. Some flights may involve low-elevation flying, landings on water or rough terrain, and other hazards of small aircraft patrols.

Weather can be cold, wet, and windy at any time of year. Water conditions can be rough, cold, and wet. Insects can be challenging in summer. Plan to bring mosquito netting, insect repellent, and other similar gear for protection. Sturdy shoes and rubber boots are both essential for travel in rough, uneven, soggy terrain.

Brown bears are a constant hazard. Bear spray will be issued for personal protection. Volunteer must be accompanied while in the field by a Refuge employee or volunteer armed with a shotgun and appropriate training; or must take the required training to be able to carry a shotgun.

Communication in the field is via handheld radio and/or satellite telephone. Daily contact must be made with headquarters or a designated contact person. No one works alone in the field; at least two people must travel together.

Work in the field requires sometimes extensive travel on foot through tundra and rocky terrain, heavy brush, and other challenging conditions. Work in the field also entails lifting heavy (approx. 50 pound) weights at least occasionally. Care should be taken that all work is done safely. If a task seems unsafe or dangerous, stop and contact headquarters for guidance and/or assistance.

Required training:

Aircraft safety training is required and must be completed before any flight is undertaken. Dunker training (conducted in a swimming pool) is now required for floatplane use (this training teaches self-rescue techniques for water-based accidents). Bear safety training is supplied and required. Shotgun training may not be required, since you will be accompanied by Refuge staff; but it is highly recommended. First Aid and CPR training are required. Required training may be available at the Refuge when you arrive; but some training, like dunker training, is only available at certain times and locations. Plan ahead, and work with your contact at the Refuge, to get the training you need.

Description of housing:

When in King Salmon, Refuge housing will be provided free of charge. Housing is shared, with both shared and private room options usually available. Housing is provided on a flexible first-come, first-served basis, according to staffing needs. Access is available to shared telephone service. In some housing, a television and DVD and/or VHS player may be provided. Laundry machines are available, and soap is supplied.

Kitchens are fully stocked with dishes, pots, pans, utensils, dishcloths, and dishsoap. Food left behind by other occupants is available for use; but food supplies are the responsibility of the user. A small grocery store is present in King Salmon, and a larger one in Naknek. Local food prices are generally substantially higher than in Anchorage or in other states. One restaurant is located in King Salmon year-round. One or two others open for the summer season.

There is a post office in King Salmon, two miles from the Refuge office. Mail is picked up each weekday afternoon. Personal mail with postage attached may be left in the office mailroom to be dropped off at the post office. The Administrative Assistant usually welcomes ride-alongs, too. Personal mail may be addressed for delivery to the Refuge: Attn.: (your name), Alaska Peninsula/Becharof NWR, P.O. Box 277, King Salmon, AK, 99613. UPS delivers to the office at the following address: 4 Bear Road, King Salmon, AK, 99613. Federal Express does not serve King Salmon.

Internet access (usually free) is available at local businesses during the summer, both through WiFi and local computer stations. Internet access on government computers can only be obtained by going through a background check. This must be planned well in advance of your arrival, if you would like this option.

Government vehicles may be available to check out when not in use for work purposes. This must be cleared through the Refuge Manager. Bicycles may be provided for use.

When in the field, housing is likely to be in tents or cabins. There will be no running water, and limited electricity can be generated with portable solar-charged batteries. Food and items with odors (such as toothpaste) must be stored in properly sealed bear-resistant containers at all times. Kitchen equipment will be supplied. Tents, sleeping bags, and other similar gear will be supplied. Tent camps will be surrounded by a portable electric fence to deter bears and other wildlife.

Refuge commitments:

Airfare to and from the initial city of your choice will be paid by the Refuge. Baggage and excess baggage fees will be reimbursed by the Refuge. Taxi fare associated with travel will be reimbursed with receipts. Miscellaneous expenses may be reimbursed with receipts. Refuge housing will be provided free of charge. Daily living allowances are no longer allowed, according to federal policy; but some kind of system will be in place to help defray the cost of food. Likely this will entail keeping receipts for later reimbursement. Any specialized equipment, such as waders or heavy-duty raingear, will be supplied by the Refuge. When required training is not available through the Refuge, some costs for attending the training may be reimbursed.