

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
VOLUNTEERS**

**Volunteers**

**Part 150 Volunteer Services Program**

**Chapter 1 Policy, Procedures, and Responsibilities for Volunteers**

**150 FW 1**

**1.1 What is the purpose of this chapter?** This chapter establishes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policies, procedures, and responsibilities for working with volunteers.

**1.2 What is the scope of this chapter?** This chapter applies to personnel working with individuals and groups who volunteer by dedicating their time and skills to assist the Service.

**1.3 What is the Service's definition of a volunteer?** Volunteers are individuals or groups who perform hours of service for a public agency for civic, charitable, or humanitarian reasons, without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered (see 29 CFR 553.101). Volunteers must meet our eligibility requirements and complete and sign Volunteer Service Agreements before they begin work (see 150 FW 2 for details).

**1.4 How do volunteers assist the Service?** Volunteers of all ages and abilities provide a wide array of vital services, working side by side with Service staff, to help achieve agency goals within every program at every job level. We recognize the value of time and skills that those individuals and groups contribute in a volunteer capacity.

**1.5 Why does the Service involve volunteers in its activities?** We involve volunteers to:

- A.** Give people opportunities to help us accomplish our mission by contributing to the preservation and conservation of our natural and cultural resources.
- B.** Enhance our performance through the creativity and innovations, labor, and expertise contributed by volunteers.
- C.** Give students and others the opportunity to gain experience in areas of interest for future careers.
- D.** Help us with projects and other work that we would not otherwise accomplish without the use of volunteers.
- E.** Encourage stewardship of wild lands, wildlife, and other natural and cultural resources through public participation in, and contribution to Service programs and operations.

**1.6 What authorities allow the Service to accept volunteer services?**

- A.** National Wildlife Refuge System Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998 (16 U.S.C. 742f, formerly Public Law (P.L.) 105-242).
- B.** The National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006 ([16 U.S.C. 760aa, 1-4](#)).
- C.** Volunteer Service (5 CFR Part 308).
- D.** The Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-154).

**1.7 Who is responsible for the volunteer program?** See Table 1-1.

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<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for the Service's volunteer program</b>	
<b>These employees . . .</b>	<b>Are responsible for . . .</b>
<b>A. The Director</b>	Making sure the Service has a program and policy in place that helps establish an effective working relationship with volunteers.
<b>B. The Chief – National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS)</b>	Overseeing the Service's volunteer program, which resides under his/her management authority.
<b>C. The National Volunteer Coordinator</b> , who is appointed by the Chief – NWRS	<p><b>(1)</b> Planning, developing, and overseeing the Service's volunteer program, policy, and procedures;</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Providing guidance and assisting other Service programs and the Regions with their volunteer programs;</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Developing and updating required forms, a guidebook, and other appropriate media for operating a volunteer program;</p> <p><b>(4)</b> Coordinating with the National Conservation Training Center to help them provide volunteer-related training to programs and the Regions;</p> <p><b>(5)</b> Coordinating efforts to make volunteer opportunities known to the public through various media sources;</p> <p><b>(6)</b> Representing the Service when working with other Federal, State, and private organizations regarding the Service's volunteer program; and</p> <p><b>(7)</b> Preparing an annual report that includes a breakdown of volunteer numbers, costs, and benefits.</p>
<b>D. Regional Volunteer Coordinators</b> , who are appointed by their Regional Directors or their designees	<p><b>(1)</b> Implementing and coordinating the Regional volunteer program;</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Providing guidance and assisting Regional programs and field stations with their volunteer programs;</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Assisting programs and field stations to coordinate efforts to make Regional volunteer</p>

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<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for the Service's volunteer program</b>	
<b>These employees . . .</b>	<b>Are responsible for . . .</b>
	<p>opportunities known to the public;</p> <p><b>(4)</b> Assisting programs and field stations to coordinate volunteer training opportunities;</p> <p><b>(5)</b> Disseminating relevant volunteer information to programs and field stations;</p> <p><b>(6)</b> Participating in Regional station reviews, visitor services evaluations, and other Regional programs that are related to volunteers; and</p> <p><b>(7)</b> Preparing a Regional annual report that includes a breakdown of volunteer numbers, costs, and benefits and sending it to the National Coordinator.</p>
<b>E. Project Leaders/Supervisors</b>	<p><b>(1)</b> Effectively using volunteer services to enhance their programs;</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Implementing and adhering to Service policy for volunteer programs;</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Ensuring volunteers comply with all safety training requirements (Service Manual Parts 240-244), especially 240 FW 9, <i>Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants</i>; and</p> <p><b>(4)</b> Designating a field station employee to oversee their station's volunteer program.</p>
<b>F. Field Station Volunteer Coordinator</b>	<p><b>(1)</b> Marketing volunteer opportunities,</p> <p><b>(2)</b> Giving an orientation to the field station for new volunteers,</p> <p><b>(3)</b> Providing or coordinating any training volunteers may need to do their jobs,</p> <p><b>(4)</b> When appropriate, recognizing volunteers for the work they have contributed on behalf of the field station,</p> <p><b>(5)</b> Giving volunteers a performance evaluation at the</p>

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<b>Table 1-1: Responsibilities for the Service’s volunteer program</b>	
These employees . . .	Are responsible for . . .
	end of their work assignment, and  <b>(6)</b> As part of the Service’s annual volunteer report, compiling and sending volunteer accomplishments to the Regional Volunteer Coordinator.

**1.8 What activities are appropriate for volunteers, and what policies must volunteers be aware of when performing that work?**

**A.** Volunteers may participate in almost any capacity in Service work. They may conduct fish and wildlife population surveys, band birds, lead tours and educational activities for school groups and other visitors, do laboratory research, help and identify cultural resources, perform administrative duties, work with computers and other technical equipment, maintain Service facilities, and much more. They may work full- or part-time, give a few hours a week or month, or just provide support during special events.

**B.** All Department and Service safety and health policies apply to volunteer services. Additional information on occupational safety and health can be found in Parts 240-244 of the Service Manual. The Service-specific safety policy for volunteers is 240 FW 9, *Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants*.

**C.** Depending on their access to facilities, systems, and information, volunteers must undergo required Privacy Act and Federal Information Systems Security Awareness training. For example, a volunteer must undergo a background check before handling sensitive documents, such as investigative reports and other Law Enforcement (LE) files, personnel files, and financial disclosure forms. Also see section 1.13.

**D.** Volunteers may assist with the operation of Friends nature stores as long as they have a signed Friends organization volunteer agreement. This agreement is required in addition to the signed Volunteer Service Agreement – Natural and Cultural Resources (Optional Form (OF) 301A). In this situation, the Friends organization is responsible for tort and liability claims.

**1.9 When is the use of volunteer services not appropriate?**

**A.** Volunteers must not displace an employee in a position that is part of the program/station’s approved organizational chart, nor may we use volunteers in place of authorized service-type contracts.

**B.** Volunteers must not collect fees or handle money owed to the United States Government except for recreation fees, which they are allowed to collect under 16 U.S.C. 6810(a) and 16 U.S.C. 3911(g). Volunteers collecting fees should be designated as Collection Officers under 261 FW 1, Cash Accountability, and complete FWS Form 3-2157. Recreation fees include those for the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Pass, Refuge-specific annual and daily entrance fees, and the Federal Duck Stamp.

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**C.** We must not use volunteers for Law Enforcement (LE) activities. Volunteers must not issue citations or carry firearms for LE activities (see 240 FW 9, *Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants*). However, volunteers may observe and report problems to Service LE officers.

**1.10 What other requirements must employees keep in mind when establishing working relationships with volunteers?**

**A.** Employees may not directly supervise family members who are volunteering.

**B.** Volunteers must not represent themselves as official spokespersons for the Federal Government or the Service.

**C.** A volunteer who is also a member of a Friends organization cannot count their volunteer hours when:

**(1)** Performing work directly related to the operation and administration of the Friends organization; or

**(2)** Engaging in lobbying, solicitation of donations, or gambling activities.

**D.** If an active volunteer serves as a member of a Friend's board, he/she must be mindful of and keep formal board activities separate from official Service volunteer activities (see our Friends policy at 633 FW 1-4).

**1.11 Are there any activities that volunteers can perform that require special training?**

**A.** Yes. Only with the required Federal training and certificates can volunteers participate in hazardous jobs, such as firefighting; operating heavy equipment, watercraft, off-road utility vehicles, and chainsaws; rocket netting; or using explosives. Volunteers must comply with all safety training requirements in Parts 240 through 244 of the Service Manual. For specific volunteer safety requirements, see 240 FW 9, *Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants*.

**(1)** Operation of regular Government vehicles, heavy duty vehicles, and specialized equipment requires compliance with our policy in 150 FW 3, and Parts 243, 321, and 322 of the Service Manual.

**(2)** Firefighting and public safety is our first priority, and all fire management plans and activities must reflect this commitment. Every supervisor, employee, and volunteer is responsible for safe work practices and procedures during fire management activities, as well as identifying and reporting unsafe conditions.

**(a)** Before volunteers may participate in fire management activities, they must have signed a Volunteer Service Agreement (OF 301A) and meet all the qualification standards for whatever fire position they are occupying.

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(b) Fire training requirements are covered in 621 FW 1, Fire Management Program.

**B.** Volunteers may use firearms if their supervisor authorizes it and:

(1) The volunteer is 18 years of age or older;

(2) Only in the following circumstances:

(a) In bear or other dangerous animal habitat to protect themselves or members of their work team, and

(b) For other official duties, such as management of nuisance or invasive animals; and

(3) When the volunteer has documentation of successful completion of a Regionally-approved firearms training course and meets any additional Regional requirements.

**1.12 What is a Job Hazard Assessment and when is it required.**

**A.** Project Leaders/supervisors are responsible for evaluating volunteer assignments that may pose safety hazards. On a case-by-case basis, they must develop a Job Hazard Assessment for any hazardous activities in accordance with policy in 240 FW 1 and for any activity for which we report an injury or accident (see 240 FW 7).

(1) We consider a high risk assignment as one with the potential to cause injury or illness, or one where there's a likelihood that a person may be harmed or suffer adverse health effects if exposed to a hazard.

(2) The Job Hazard Assessment is a process we use to identify existing or potential safety and occupational health hazards associated with operations or job tasks.

**B.** Project Leaders/supervisors must use FWS Form 3-2279, Job Hazard Assessment, to assess any operation that could result in serious injury or death to employees, volunteers, Youth Conservation Corps members, students, or others who come in contact with Service operations and activities.

**C.** Every task that requires Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must have a Job Hazard Assessment. The assessment must identify the mandatory or recommended PPE and training to accomplish the work in a safe and healthy manner.

**D.** If the activity requires operational and safety training, certification, or equipment, the Project Leader/supervisor must not allow the volunteer to perform the job until they complete the requirements.

**1.13 When is it necessary for a volunteer to undergo a background investigation?** It depends on the volunteer's duties and the anticipated length of service. In 2004, Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) established Federal standards for secure and

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reliable identification that Federal agencies must issue to their employees, contractors, and volunteers (also see 5 U.S.C. 2105). Following are the requirements (also see Exhibit 1):

**A.** Many volunteers are not affected by HSPD-12 as they do not typically need to access Service facilities, information systems, or sensitive information without supervision. For example, we typically do not have to conduct a background investigation or get fingerprints for a volunteer who is engaged exclusively in on-the-ground habitat restoration or landscaping work.

**(1) *Unsupervised*** means a volunteer is not working directly with their supervisor or another Service employee; instead, they are working on their own.

**(2) *Supervised*** means a volunteer is working directly with their supervisor or another Service employee. This means they are looking at the same computer screen together, reviewing the same physical documents together, going to the same meetings together, or accessing the same secure areas together. The volunteer is not left alone.

**(3) *Service facilities*** are Government-owned or leased offices or buildings.

**(4) *Service information systems*** include any computer or other access point connected and accessible to our internal network servers and electronic files.

**(5) *Sensitive information*** is information not available to the public. This includes Privacy Act information.

**B.** If a volunteer will have access to public areas only, and not to Service facilities or information systems, a background investigation, otherwise known as a National Agency Check with Inquiries (NACI), is not required.

**(1) *Public areas*** are those areas where the public does not have access to any computer or other access point connected and accessible to our internal network servers and electronic files, as well as sensitive information.

**(2) *Non-public areas*** are any areas where the public cannot roam free because of Service information systems and sensitive information.

**C.** The costs of obtaining fingerprint checks or a NACI must be covered by the program or field station.

**D.** If a volunteer has unsupervised access to Service facilities or information systems **for 120 consecutive calendar days (4 months) or less**, he/she must:

**(1)** Undergo a fingerprint check, and

**(2)** Obtain a Personal Identity Verification (PIV)/Department of the Interior (Departmental) access card.

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**E.** If a volunteer has unsupervised access to Service facilities or information systems **for more than 120 calendar days**, he/she must:

- (1)** Undergo a NACI, and
- (2)** Obtain a PIV/Departmental access card.

**F.** If a volunteer will be working unsupervised with a minor(s), he/she must undergo, at a minimum, a fingerprint check, and at a maximum, a Childcare National Agency Check with Inquiries (CNACI). The extent of the inquiry depends on how long the volunteer will be providing services to the Government.

**1.14 How long a period of time does a NACI cover, and what happens to a volunteer's personal information?**

**A. Length of time:**

**(1)** A NACI is approved for a 15-year period, except under the following circumstances:

- (a)** If a volunteer does not volunteer for the Service for more than 2 years, or
- (b)** If a volunteer moves into a position that requires a higher security review level, such as a secret or top secret security clearance.

**(2)** A NACI is reciprocal among Federal agencies. For example, if a volunteer obtains a NACI to work with the National Park Service and then volunteers later with us, no additional security clearance is necessary.

**B. Volunteer's personal information:** Protecting personal privacy is a requirement. We protect information we receive as part of a NACI in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552a (Privacy Act of 1974).

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DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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