

Safety and Emergency Procedures

The following apply to the work done on any Refuge within the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Ridgefield, Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake, and Pierce), as well as any off-site work done in representation of one or all of these sites.

The purpose of these rules is not to restrict the rights of anyone, but to define and protect the rights of all and ensure the cooperation and safety of everyone. Violation may be sufficient grounds for termination of the agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the volunteer.

These policies are to be read and signed off by volunteers as well as staff and partners that work with volunteers. (Updated 4/2017)

Safety Rules for Volunteers, Staff, and Partners.

- No one will be permitted to work under the influence of, or possess intoxicants or narcotics.
- Firearms, dangerous weapons, or fireworks are not permitted while working or volunteering.
- No one is to operate any defective equipment. If you suspect defective equipment, report it to staff immediately.
- Equipment safety guards are to remain on and in working condition at all times. Proper safety equipment must be worn when operating equipment that requires protection.
- Horseplay and fighting are prohibited.
- Walk; do not run, unless an emergency requires speed.
- Tools will be transferred hand-to-hand from one person to another, or by suitable rope or cable. Tools will not be thrown or dropped to one another.
- No volunteer will operate Service vehicles without possessing a valid State driver's license and filling out appropriate forms according to the station procedures.
- Volunteers under the age of 18 will not do hazardous work projects. Adult volunteers will not do hazardous duties unless safety instruction has been received and the volunteer is informed of proper measures to ensure safety.
- Volunteers must report all personal injuries immediately to the volunteer coordinator or staff supervising the project.
- Volunteers are not to attempt to enforce refuge regulations or local laws. (see the Law Enforcement section in the chapter for more details)
- Volunteers will comply with all other policies and safety rules of the Refuge.

Medical Emergencies

If a visitor requests minor first-aid supplies such as Band-Aids etc., these items may be pulled from the supply kits but the visitor is to administer the first aid to themselves or those in their party. Only those with first aid and/or CPR training should try to administer aid; however no one is required to do so and should never attempt first-aid without proper equipment and training. Safety is the most important and if anyone feels they are unsafe or needs emergency assistance they are not to hesitate in calling 911.

First Aid Supplies

First-aid kits are in all vehicles and buildings. Project supervisors should advise all volunteers and partners of the locations of these at each work site. Volunteers and partners should ask of the locations of first-aid supplies if they are not sure. Those working on their own away from Refuge vehicles and buildings are encouraged to have a first-aid kit in their vehicle or on their person. If they do not, one will be available to check out during their volunteer shift. Bug spray and sun screen may also available for use upon request. Please notify staff when supplies run low.

Refuge Operations

Shifts and duties

All work and shifts must be pre-approved by staff. Anyone working on projects in closed areas or without supervision must check in with staff before and after their shift to ensure compatibility, safety and public communication.

Volunteering after hours

The policy of all refuges in this Complex is that no volunteer is to work alone on the refuge the hour before dusk (gate closing time for those with public use programs), or in closed areas, without special arrangements with staff. This includes both weekdays and weekends.

Some work on the Refuge includes working hours that refuge staff is not present or available, including nights, weekends, and holidays. Volunteers and partners provide a great service by helping visitors and improving habitat when staff is not available to do so. However, anyone working alone can be vulnerable to accidents or even crime. Criminal activity against people on refuges is very rare and this Refuge Complex prides itself on the continued safety of its visitors. However, it is important that volunteers, partners and staff do not put themselves in a position that may invite dangerous behavior.

Law Enforcement

The inherent dangers of law enforcement duties are quite apparent, especially when working alone in isolation from others. Only credentialed officers will perform active law enforcement duties on the Refuge. If you see a violation of Refuge rules, do not attempt to enforce* the rules. Document all details that you can obtain safely and report it to the office in writing. If there is a crime in progress, get to a safe place and call the police. Then call the Refuge office or staff cell phones.

For this purpose a crime is defined as something that is against state or federal law (such as harming person or property), not a regulation of the refuge (such as being out of a vehicle, walking a dog or riding your bicycle). Disregard for refuge regulations does not warrant a call to the police unless it is an emergency. However, it should be well documented and turned into a staff member.

Volunteers and Partners are not to enforce* Refuge rules, policies or laws.

*** Approach visitors to EDUCATE not to enforce.**

A volunteer's job is to greet and educate the public about the refuge and its importance and create a welcoming and rewarding atmosphere for everyone. Volunteers are NOT responsible to ensure that rules are followed. When approaching visitors volunteers must always have this education-theme in mind. No one is to go out of their way to chase down a visitor who is violating the rules. This creates anxiety and a negative atmosphere that can lead to a very uncomfortable or even dangerous situation. Instead make sure you greet all visitors in a friendly way and start a conversation before *educating* them about the rules on the refuge and why. It is then up to them if they choose to adhere to the regulation or to risk getting a ticket from law enforcement.

Remember, you have the ability to create conservationists and Refuge supporters out of any visitor OR chase them away and give them a negative experience that will not lead to their continued support or connection to nature.

Equipment

Vehicles are used extensively during daily operations on the Refuge and for transportation within the Complex. Most hazards are associated with off-refuge travel. Volunteers and Partners are to only drive vehicles they have been authorized to drive and in places that have been approved. These details must be documented on the volunteers Vehicle Authorization Form and Position Description. Everyone is required to wear seat belts at all times and have headlights turned on, both on and off of the Refuge. Maximum driving speed on the Refuge is 15 m.p.h. No one is to drive off maintained roads unless instructed to do so.

When projects require specific equipment such as tractors, ATVs, etc., special training will be provided before using that equipment. No one is to operate any vehicle or equipment that he or she does not have a license and/or Service specific training for.

All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV)

ATVs are a valuable asset for accessing certain areas of our refuges; however, they create an impact to wildlife, habitat, and visitors. The public's perception of ATV use can be negative. Visitors may perceive an ATV rider as an authority figure or someone breaking the rules, rather than as someone working to enhance their wildlife resources.

In contrast, ATV use has enabled better law enforcement coverage, more biological research, removal of large debris, and saved countless volunteer and staff hours. To respond to the public's concerns and lessen the cumulative impacts of ATV use, these guidelines will be followed by staff and volunteers:

- ATVs will be used only when necessary to do a specific duty and with permission of a staff person.
- Training in ATV use will be given before using the ATV and the volunteer will follow all manufacturer and station safety instructions and policies.
- ATV riders will follow posted speed limits or maintain speeds of less than 15 mph when off-road to enable the rider to see and avoid visitors or wildlife in their path. Emergency situations are exempt from this speed limit.
- To reduce the cumulative impacts of ATV use on the Refuge, any volunteer use of an ATV will be scheduled by the staff person in charge of the project.
- After using the ATV, spray off all vegetation and seeds in shop and fill the gas tank so that it is always prepared for the next use.

Fire Extinguishers

Fire extinguishers are in all Refuge buildings and vehicles. All volunteers and partners are encouraged to become familiar with the extinguishers in the area that they work in and check them regularly to make sure all maintenance services are up to date. Extinguishers should be shaken once a month and documented on the tag attached with the person's initials and date. Participation in the annual fire extinguisher safety training along with staff is also available to volunteers and partners. If you have questions about this, please talk to your volunteer supervisor.

Biological Procedures

Cases of disease transmission from wildlife to humans have been documented in the past and should not be taken lightly. Large species of wildlife can also cause injury to people by using their beaks or jaws and talons or feet.

Never handle wildlife, regardless of circumstances.

Dead or Injured Wildlife

What if a visitor reports a dead or injured animal on the Refuge? Although the Refuge is very concerned over the loss of or injury to the wildlife inhabiting the Refuge, caring for every injured animal is impossible. Nothing goes to waste on the Refuge. Every animal that dies becomes food so another animal can live. Unless otherwise notified, all dead animals are left where they are found as long as there are no safety concerns to people accessing the area. In the event that someone finds an injured animal or carcass that is a threat to public safety they are to notify the office and **NOT HANDLE** the animal. Staff will determine the best course of action. If there is a concern about a strange circumstance (i.e. an animal that looks harmed by people, the death or injury of many animals in one area, or the death or injury of a threatened or endangered species) notify staff as soon as you can.

Immediate Needs and Questions

As you know, we have a small but very dedicated staff. That is why volunteers are needed to help greet and educate visitors while staff manage programs. We do our best to be available to you via phone at all times and are more than happy to answer any questions that you have. However, as staff must dedicate themselves to personal and family commitments during non-work days, they may not be available to take your call immediately.

Make sure that you leave a detailed message with your name, contact information, and the location of the issue. Once you have done that, the best thing that you can do is notify the public of the temporary inconvenience and that staff will take care of it as soon as they can. People are very understanding, especially when they are notified by a friendly and patient volunteer. Thank you all for your help, understanding, and support!

In the event of urgent questions, supply needs, maintenance issues, and other things you may be unsure about, call your volunteer supervisor or other staff contacts listed in your onsite volunteer manual or at our [Contact Us Page](#) on the website.