

**International Volunteers**  
**Working Directly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

O Who is considered an international volunteer?

Anyone from outside the United States who is not a US citizen or a legal resident.

O Who can participate?

International government officials, researchers, specialists and students who have been issued an official invitation will be considered for participation. Additionally, foreign nationals must have the appropriate Visa type for the specific program, sufficient funding for living expenses and adequate insurance for the duration of the program. In some instances, housing and a small living allowance can be provided by the hosting site.

O To volunteer in the United States at a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) site, what type of Visa is required?

Most foreign nationals coming to the United States (US) to volunteer directly with the FWS will need to obtain a J1 Visa. Foreign nationals currently residing in the US attending university who have F1 Visas are also eligible, with the appropriate authorization from a Designated School Official. There is also a B1/B2 Visa which is explained below, but it should be noted that a B1/B2 cannot be used with volunteers unless they are volunteering through a recognized religious or nonprofit charitable organization.

O What are the difference between a J1, B1, B2 and F1 Visa?

The J1 Visa (Exchange Visitor) is a special entry Visa sponsored by the US Department of State International Exchange Visitor Program. The objective of the J1 Visa is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the US and people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges. FWS volunteers on a J1 Visa are eligible to receive reimbursements.

The F1 Visa (Student) is issued to foreign nationals currently enrolled in accredited universities. They may be able to volunteer by arranging an internship for the summer or at the end of their program through their university's foreign student advisor (Designated School Official or DSO) and the FWS site.

The B1 Visa (Business) is appropriate for a foreign national entering the US for a very short period of time for meetings, conferences, or observations.

The B2 Visa (Tourist) is issued strictly for personal visits or travel for leisure.

The FWS may only reimburse foreign nationals if they have a J1 or F1 Visa. F1 students may only be reimbursed if they are in an approved internship coordinated through their university.

O I am living in the US and am a permanent resident with a Green Card. Can I volunteer?

Yes, as long as you present the proper documentation (Form 551 – Green Card). Because you are a permanent resident you do not need a J1 or F1 Visa.

O Do I have to return to my country right after my Visa expires or can I stay and tour the US?

If you have a J1 Visa you are allowed to remain in the US an extra 30 days past the date on your DS 2019 form. You may also enter the US up to 30 days prior to the start of your volunteer activities.

O What is a DS 2019?

This is a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J1) Status. This form, along with the official invitation letter, is mailed to you from the site where you will be volunteering. You will need to take the DS 2019 to the US Embassy/Consulate in your country to obtain a J1 Visa.

O What is needed from the foreign national?

A resume or curriculum vitae in English, a completed visitor application (can be found at [www.fed.us/global/visitor\\_program/arrival.htm](http://www.fed.us/global/visitor_program/arrival.htm)), copy of academic transcripts and diplomas (if applicable), passport (copy of photo page), proof of health insurance and proof funding.

O What expenses are involved?

The visitor is responsible for the cost of the Visa appointment (DS-160 application fee). The cost varies, but should be approximately \$160. The SEVIS I-901 fee, paid by most J1 Visa applicants, is waived for Government-sponsored visitors.

If you are required to wear a uniform at your site, this will be provided at no expense.

All foreign nationals must have sufficient funds or financial support to cover living expenses and insurance for their entire stay. The minimum is \$1150/month, in addition to the cost of round-trip travel to the US.

All foreign nationals must provide proof of health insurance. Health insurance meeting US State Department minimum requirements is mandatory for all J1 Visa holders;

<http://j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/how-to-administer-a-program/>.

O What security precautions are taken?

Prior to issuing a DS-2019, the FWS's partnering organization, the US Forest Service, International Programs, submits information on the foreign national for a required security clearance. Upon applying for a Visa at a US Embassy/Consulate abroad, the applicant may be subject to additional security checks.

The Forest Service must enter all J1 volunteers into SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) tracking system. This system allows the US Government to track Visa holders from start to finish. The FWS host site must notify the US Forest Service when the volunteer arrives to begin their volunteer work and when they finish.

O In my spare time, can I find a part-time job to earn extra money?

No. The J1 Visa does not allow you to work or study outside the scope of your pre-determined and approved program activities.

O Can I travel outside the US during my volunteer time?

J1 Visa holders must have their DS-2019 form endorsed by their Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) and have approval from the host site before traveling outside the US if they intend to return in J1 status. Additionally, the visitor must have a current, multiple-entry Visa in order to return to the US, and must possess the necessary Visa type for the destination country (if different from country of origin.)

O Where can I learn more about the FWS and the site that will be hosting me during my volunteer tenure?

To learn more about the FWS, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). To learn more about a particular refuge, click on [www.fws.gov/refuges](http://www.fws.gov/refuges), and to learn more about a national fish hatchery visit [www.fws.gov/fisheries/nfhs](http://www.fws.gov/fisheries/nfhs).

For additional information on the J1 Exchange Visitor Program and procedures, please visit: [www.fs.fed.us/global/visitor\\_program.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/global/visitor_program.htm)