

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
VOLUNTEERS**

3.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter establishes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) policy on training, travel, uniforms, housing, awards, reimbursements, and other administrative matters pertaining to volunteers.

3.2 What is the scope of this chapter? This chapter applies to personnel working with individuals and groups who dedicate time and skills as volunteers to assist the Service.

3.3 What resources are available to Service employees who are establishing and operating volunteer programs? We offer several resources to help employees work with volunteers, Friends organizations, and partners. They include:

A. Handbooks: [Working with Volunteers, Friends Organizations, and Community Partnerships E-Guide](#).

B. Training: Offered through the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), our training provides an introduction (Volunteer Recruitment and Management), as well as an advanced course (Advanced Volunteer Management).

3.4 What orientation and training must Service employees provide to volunteers?

A. Project Leaders/supervisors or their designees who work with volunteers:

(1) Must give them an orientation to the mission and goals of the Service, information on the function of the Service office or program where they will work, and any training they need to perform their assigned responsibilities. Orientation must also include site-specific safety and health program information consisting of the requirements found in 240 FW 3, *Safety and Health Training*, and 240 FW 9, *Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants*.

(2) May use appropriated funds to pay for training and related travel for volunteers.

B. Although orientation and general information is the responsibility of the Service office or program where the volunteer is working, the volunteer's direct supervisor must provide specific job-related training. Volunteers may attend other training as appropriate.

3.5 What are the requirements related to uniforms for volunteers?

A. Volunteers may not wear Service uniforms or dress in a manner that attempts to duplicate the appearance of the Service uniform (see [041 FW 4](#)).

B. Volunteer uniform components, which help the visiting public easily recognize volunteers, are available through our uniform vendor. Volunteers must be appropriately dressed and reflect well on the Service. Volunteer uniform colors are navy blue and light blue.

C. Project Leaders/supervisors must pay for the volunteer uniform components using duty station funds. The components can be purchased as follows:

(1) You can use the current year's uniform catalogue and the [uniform ordering Web site](#).

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(2) When purchasing volunteer uniform components not available in the uniform catalogue, the official Service volunteer logo must be applied. Any volunteer uniform components purchased outside the uniform contract must be navy blue or light blue, which are the official colors of the Service's volunteer program.

C. Volunteers must not wear the uniform components off duty.

3.6 When is it appropriate to provide housing for volunteers?

A. All of the following conditions must be met before we can provide a volunteer with Service housing:

(1) The volunteer may not displace a Government employee.

(2) The volunteer must be an adult (18 years of age or older).

(3) The volunteer may not live within a 50-mile commute of the volunteer duty station (see 265 FW 6).

(4) The volunteer must work a minimum of 20 hours a week to qualify for housing and onsite amenities.

(a) If a couple volunteers, at least one must work a minimum of 20 hours.

(b) Amenities may include, but are not limited to, trailer pad with hookup, propane gas, laundry, and internet.

(5) The Project Leader/supervisor must use Form DI 1871, Justification for New or Replacement Housing, to justify housing volunteers in Service quarters. The need to house volunteers is an acceptable justification.

(6) Volunteers need to sign Form DI 1881, Quarters Assignment Agreement. This agreement is their lease and states the terms of their occupancy. The Project Leader/supervisor must report their names and occupancy and vacancy dates to the Regional Quarters Officer within 30 days of the tenant occupying or leaving the quarters.

B. Also see 371 FW 5, *Housing for Volunteers*.

3.7 How does the Service determine what rent to charge volunteers for Government-furnished quarters that the Service owns?

A. The Project Leader/supervisor may set rent for volunteers anywhere from \$0 up to the market value.

B. The rent should be no less than the market value of the rent of the quarters less the market value of the services the volunteer provides. The value of services can be determined by using either the minimum wage or comparable series pay.

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C. The Project Leader/supervisor may use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjusted base rental rate of the quarters as an indication of the local market value of rent (see 371 FW 5 for detailed information on how to set rental rates).

3.8 May the Service provide housing that is not Government-owned to volunteers?

A. We may provide non-Government housing to volunteers at a reasonable cost when station housing is not available.

B. The Project Leader/supervisor may require that:

(1) The volunteer pay the rent directly to the landlord and ask the Service for reimbursement, or

(2) A leasing Contracting Officer pay the rent using Service funds (see 371 FW 5).

3.9 May volunteers operate Service-owned or leased motorized vehicles and equipment?

To operate any vehicles or equipment on behalf of the Service, volunteers must have a signed and up-to-date Volunteer Service Agreement (OF 301A) for liability reasons. (Also see 150 FW 2, section 2.5).

A. Volunteers who are 18 years old or older and hold a valid State driver's license may operate Government sedans and light-duty vehicles.

B. Project Leaders/supervisors must give the volunteer authorization to operate a vehicle by filling out FWS Form 3-2267, Authorization for Operation of Motor Vehicles and/or Equipment, before a volunteer begins such a task.

C. To operate a commercial vehicle, a volunteer must be at least 21 years old and have a valid Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

D. Operation of vehicles, heavy duty vehicles, and specialized equipment requires compliance with Service policy in [Parts 243, 321, and 322 of the Service Manual](#).

E. Volunteers who are 18 years old or older may operate private vehicles to perform official business. Volunteers under the age of 18 may not operate private vehicles to perform official Service business (see 240 FW 9, *Safety for Volunteer and Youth/Collegiate Program Participants*).

F. There is no age limit for a volunteer to operate a motorized boat. However, the volunteer must first take the Service's Motorboat Operator Certification Course and comply with the requirements in 241 FW 1, *Watercraft Safety*.

G. We highly recommend defensive driving training for those volunteers who will be operating vehicles on official Government business. Check with your Regional Safety Manager for your Region's requirements (see Exhibit 1 of 321 FW 1).

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3.10 For what expenses can the Service reimburse volunteers?

A. Actual transportation expenses: The Project Leader/supervisor decides whether or not to reimburse a volunteer for actual transportation (non-temporary duty travel (TDY)) expenses. These include, but are not limited to, mileage, taxis, tolls, and parking directly related to Service work assignments. The Volunteer Service Agreement must specify the kind and amount of reimbursement that is allowable.

(1) When reimbursing volunteers for actual expenses, use FWS Form 3-2373, Claim for Reimbursement for Volunteer Expenses, and attach appropriate documentation.

(2) Use the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) volunteer mileage rate to pay for mileage if reimbursing travel to/from the duty station.

(3) We may reimburse volunteers for these types of transportation expenses regardless of the volunteer's place of residence.

B. Miscellaneous expenses: The Project Leader/supervisor also decides whether or not to reimburse a volunteer for miscellaneous expenses directly related to Service work (e.g., for tools they buy with personal funds).

(1) When reimbursing volunteers for miscellaneous expenses, use FWS Form 3-2373, Claim for Reimbursement for Volunteer Expenses, and attach appropriate documentation.

(2) We may reimburse volunteers for miscellaneous expenses regardless of the volunteer's place of residence.

C. Travel expenses: When a volunteer is on official Government travel (TDY), the Project Leader/supervisor must reimburse them in the same manner as they would an employee.

D. Salaries, stipends, and living allowances: The Service must not pay a volunteer a salary, stipend, or living allowance. See 301 DM 6.

E. Honorariums. An honorarium is an ex gratia payment (i.e., payment made out of good will) made to a person for their services in a volunteer capacity or for services for which fees are not traditionally required. Honorariums are subject to Federal (and in some instances, State) income tax. Because an honorarium is a form of payment for services rendered, the Service must not pay honorariums to volunteers.

3.11 How does a volunteer submit his/her expenses for reimbursement?

A. At least once a month and no more often than weekly, volunteers should submit requests for reimbursement for expenses (see section 3.10 for those that are allowable) using FWS Form 3-2373 to the Project Leader/supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator.

B. The Project Leader/supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator completes the "FWS Vendor Updating Document" so that they can reimburse volunteers. They can obtain this document

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from their Regional Finance office. Encourage volunteers to use Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), the same primary payment mechanism our employees use.

(1) If the volunteer cannot use the EFT system, the Service may grant him/her a blanket waiver by contacting the Chief, Financial Assistance Policy and Oversight Branch in the Office of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration.

(2) The request for a waiver must include the volunteer's name and social security number.

(3) We may not deny or delay payment because the volunteer is not using the EFT system.

3.12 When are volunteer expenses deductible on his/her Federal taxes? Volunteers may deduct expenses for which they were not reimbursed (e.g., local travel, meals, travel expenses, lodging, supplies, and mileage for a personal vehicle used for volunteer work) on Federal income tax returns. The value of the volunteer's service performed or time spent volunteering is not considered deductible by the IRS. The volunteer should retain a copy of the [Volunteer Service Agreement](#) and use it to support any claims. [IRS Publication 526, "Charitable Contributions,"](#) provides information on the subject.

3.13 What are appropriate methods of recognizing volunteer contributions to the Service? We strongly encourage Project Leaders/supervisors or Volunteer Coordinators to recognize and award volunteers. Using sound professional judgment and providing proper justification and documentation should give managers the flexibility they need to ensure they're recognizing volunteers in the most effective way.

A. Nonmonetary awards: Nonmonetary recognition awards are granted to employees and volunteers to recognize their contributions to the Service. Managers should be careful when selecting an appropriate item for the nonmonetary recognition of a volunteer to avoid any potential appearance of misuse of Government funds (see [224 FW 5](#), Nonmonetary Recognition and Informal Honors).

(1) The upper limit for an item used for nonmonetary recognition is a \$50.00 cash value annually per volunteer.

(2) Items that exceed the \$50.00 cash value limit may be provided to volunteers with the appropriate level of approval. See [224 FW 5](#) for information about what approvals are required.

B. Gift cards. You must not award gift cards or other items that can be easily converted to cash (i.e., gift certificates, gift cards, U.S. Savings Bonds, tickets, or similar items) (see [224 FW 5](#)).

C. Interagency Volunteer Pass. As a sign of appreciation for those who volunteer, Congress authorized the issuance of an annual Interagency Volunteer Pass. The Interagency Volunteer Pass may be issued free of charge to volunteers who accrue 250 volunteer hours. It is good for 1 year. This pass can be obtained through your Regional Fee Coordinator.

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D. Award Plaques and Certificates of Appreciation. Award plaques and certificates of appreciation are a great way to recognize volunteers, especially when they're given during a staff meeting, a volunteer luncheon, or a dinner.

3.14 May the Service use appropriated funds to buy awards and recognition items or to host a luncheon/dinner to honor volunteers?

A. You may use appropriated funds to pay for nonmonetary awards, such as award plaques and certificates of appreciation.

B. You may also host a volunteer recognition luncheon or dinner and use appropriated funds to buy food and non-alcoholic beverages for the volunteers. Employees attending the awards luncheon or dinner must pay for their own meal.

C. The National Wildlife Refuge System's Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998, as well as the National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006, allow us to recognize volunteers with nonmonetary awards, the Interagency Volunteer Pass, and award plaques and certificates of appreciation under these circumstances.

3.15 May the Service give monetary awards to volunteers, and if so, what are the requirements? You may recognize a volunteer with a monetary award if the volunteer's contribution substantially benefits the mission of the Service (see 224 FW 4). The National Wildlife Refuge System's Volunteer and Community Partnership Enhancement Act of 1998, and the National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006, allow us to recognize volunteers with a monetary award under these circumstances.

A. Limitations on monetary awards:

(1) The yearly (fiscal year) limit per volunteer is \$1,500. A volunteer may not be recognized for the same job twice in 1 year.

(2) Service employees who volunteer are not eligible to receive monetary awards for volunteering.

B. Tax implications: Monetary awards may affect the volunteer's status with the IRS. Monetary awards may also jeopardize a person's status as a volunteer under Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) regulations. It is up to the Project Leader/supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator to inform the volunteer about a potential taxable liability. They should also suggest that the volunteer consult their tax advisors with any questions on monetary awards and their tax status.

C. Process: Use FWS Form 3-2177, Volunteer Monetary Award Certification, to give monetary awards to volunteers. You must include a justification summarizing the specific accomplishment(s) you are recognizing.

(1) Complete [FWS Form 3-2177](#) and attach a copy of the Volunteer Service Agreement ([OF 301A](#)). The Interior Business Center (IBC) will not process the award unless you attach the agreement.

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(2) If the volunteer chooses to receive payment electronically, complete the FWS Vendor Updating Document. If the volunteer chooses not to receive payment electronically, we may grant him/her a blanket waiver (see section 3.11B).

(3) Send all forms to IBC for processing. This is important to ensure payment of the award and the generation of IRS Form 1099, MISC Income, at the end of the calendar year. Failure to follow approved procedures may result in fines and penalties to the volunteer and the Service. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to properly report the funds received to the IRS.

D. Approvals required:

(1) For monetary awards up to \$100, the Project Leader/supervisor of the duty station giving the award must approve it.

(2) Approval by the second level manager/supervisor is required when giving a monetary award exceeding \$100.

(3) Approval by the second level manager/supervisor is required when giving a monetary award to a family member of any Service employee.

E. Appropriate presentation: Project Leaders/supervisors and Volunteer Coordinators must present all monetary awards publicly (i.e., in the presence of employees or others) to avoid any appearance of impropriety or conflict of interest. For example, appropriate venues include staff meetings where there are more than two people in attendance, volunteer award dinners, or any other public meetings where recognition is meaningful. Public presentation of the award also reinforces the sincerity of our gratitude by sharing the volunteer's achievement with others.

3.16 What annual reports are required for volunteer programs? All Service duty stations must submit their volunteer numbers and hours by the end of each fiscal year to their Regional or the National Volunteer Coordinator, depending on the duty station or program. The Regional Volunteer Coordinators also capture highlights and send them to the National Volunteer Coordinator in Headquarters (HQ).

A. The National Volunteer Coordinator captures these numbers for refuges through the Refuge Annual Performance Plan (RAPP).

B. Fisheries staff at HQ captures these numbers for fisheries duty stations through the Fisheries Information System (FIS).

C. All other national program data is captured through a data call. We share the annual report with the Service Directorate, other bureaus, and our Service partners.

/sgd/ Stephen Guertin
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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