



V.I.P.

**VOLUNTEERS
IN PARKS**

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



WELCOME

Congratulations on being selected as a Volunteer in Parks (VIP)! As you know, national parks are special places. They are, in fact, protected elements of our national heritage, as unique and as varied as wilderness mountains, city playgrounds, and sites commemorating the history of our country. As a "VIP" you will provide a valuable service by helping to preserve these treasures while providing for their use and enjoyment by visitors. You will be among thousands of VIP's who contribute hundreds of thousands of hours each year in a great variety of services ranging from leading tours of historic buildings to riding on horseback patrols and from conducting underwater surveys to assisting with trail maintenance.

This booklet will give you information you need to get started as a volunteer. We're delighted to have you on the National Park Service team. Welcome and good luck.

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The national park idea was born in 1872, when President Ulysses S. Grant signed legislation that authorized the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. In 1916, when the Department of the Interior managed nearly 30 national parks and national monuments, Congress established a new agency, the National Park Service, to administer them all. Today, the system includes over 330 sites totalling almost 80,000,000 acres. The diversity of these parks is reflected in the variety of designations given to them. Among the more than 20 types of units in the park system are national historic sites, national monuments, national seashores, national battlefields, national recreation areas and, of course, national parks.

The legislation that established the National Park Service stated that the agency's purpose was to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations." The paradox thus given the National Park Service, to "provide for the enjoyment" and to "preserve," has been as rewarding as it has been challenging.



Today, under the Department of the Interior, the National Park Service coordinates the parks from headquarters in Washington D.C., through ten regional offices from Boston to Anchorage. Each park has considerable autonomy. Park superintendents handle daily operations through the primary divisions of Administration, Maintenance, Interpretation and Protection. In addition, some parks have separate divisions to identify and deal with special park needs.

As a volunteer, you will be working with one or more of the divisions in your park. The Administration Division manages the park's overall staff and fiscal resources, including personnel and concessions. The Maintenance Division provides for the regular upkeep of park buildings, utilities, grounds, roads, and hiking trails and also contributes to major preservation and park development projects.

Visitors are most likely to have personal contact with people in the Divisions of Protection and Interpretation. The Division of Protection is responsible for the well being of both park resources and park visitors. Activities range from advice and instruction to law enforcement to search and rescue to first aid. The Division of Interpretation helps visitors know and understand the cultural and natural history of the



park through a variety of techniques including displays, movies, slide shows, demonstrations, campfire talks and interpretive walks.

VOLUNTEERS IN PARKS

Throughout the history of the national parks, volunteers have carried on a proud tradition. Many parks owe their very existence to the efforts of volunteer conservationists, including the well publicized efforts of Nathaniel P. Langford to establish Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming (1872) and John Muir to establish Yosemite National Park in California (1890). Countless others worked successfully to establish such parks as Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee, Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona, Crater Lake National Park in Oregon, and the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area in Ohio. Much of the work was done in public meetings and in writing books and articles in order to attract public interest and support for the parks. Often the work continued long after the park was established.

Though volunteers have been part of the Park Service family since the beginning, the association turned into a full partnership in 1970 when Congress authorized the Volunteers in the Parks program. The authorization officially sanctioned comprehensive volunteer assistance in managing and operating the parks and, for the first time, included provisions for liability protection and medical coverage of volunteers.

Finally, men and women who were eager to assist the parks without pay, were encouraged to do so. They could provide interpretive services, perform backcountry patrols, help with wildlife and timber management activities. More recently, volunteer work has been expanded to include maintenance activities that help keep the parks clean, safe, and attractive for visitors. Today, volunteers are involved in every aspect of park operations.

Coordination of the entire VIP program is the responsibility of a servicewide VIP program manager in the Division of Visitor Services in the Washington Office of the National Park Service. Next in line are VIP Coordinators (Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services) for each region. At the park level, a VIP Coordinator develops and manages a park specific volunteer program that touches on all aspects of the program including recruiting, training and supervision of volunteers, performance review of programs and recognition of individual accomplishments and achievements.

SEE HOW YOU'RE GROWING

From a small but notable beginning, volunteers have become an important means of providing broad public service and of preserving the priceless gems of our national heritage.

In recent years, several factors have contributed to growth in the number of Volunteers in Parks. The most obvious factor is, simply, that more people are being asked to volunteer. At the same time, more people are discovering the variety of volunteer work and learning opportunities available to them in the parks. They are also finding that it is not necessary to have special training (though many do) to qualify for important jobs in our national parks. Just as important to the program, park managers are



discovering that many volunteers are uniquely qualified to do jobs that may not otherwise get done. Also volunteers can free paid staff to do work that makes the best use of their particular experience and skill.

The first year after the 1970 legislation went into effect, 855 VIPs contributed some 40,000 hours of service in our national parks. By 1983,

some 22,000 volunteers contributed over a million hours of service to our parks. The continued hard work of these VIPs and the paid employees of the Service means that our national parks will be properly cared for both now and for the "enjoyment of future generations."

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

Of course, as a VIP, you will get no salary. Nevertheless, there are many rewards for working in the national park system. Some are priceless. For example, only when you have had the experience can you fully feel the glow of satisfaction from spending your workday within view, or easy reach of, a prized area of spectacular scenery or a historic site that helped bring our nation to its modern greatness.

While there are obvious aesthetic benefits of working in the parks, there are also practical benefits. These include opportunities to learn skills, meet good people, and challenge your ability to do jobs that need to be done.

For starters, your National Park Service supervisor will see that you have the training necessary to do the job. Training opportunities may



range from a brief orientation session on schedules and basic ground rules to a more formal training program attended also by seasonal or permanent paid staff.

You can also expect to have your job summarized in a written job description which spells out your duties and responsibilities. You will be given one or more worthwhile, challenging assignments.

In some parks, depending upon availability and need, you may be provided housing.

As a VIP, you can receive first aid and medical care for on the job injuries. Also, if a visitor suffers loss or injury while you are providing the services expected of you, you will be protected from liability claims filed against you.

In some parks, volunteers with a valid state driver's license and safe driving record may be permitted to drive park vehicles as the job requires.

As a VIP, you have a right to be recognized as a volunteer member of the park staff. In most cases, you will be wearing a name tag or decal or volunteer uniform identifying you as a volunteer. At other times, you may be wearing historical period clothing to enable you to portray

the life and times demonstrated as part of the park's interpretive program.

Finally, though you will not be paid a salary for the services you provide, you may be reimbursed for some out-of-pocket expenses you incur as a result of your voluntary employment. Also, please note that some "reasonable" out of pocket expenses for which you are not reimbursed are tax deductible.

WHAT THE PARK SERVICE EXPECTS

Now that you are a VIP, the National Park Service has some expectations of you. The National Park Service has been given responsibilities by the Congress and by the people of the United States to preserve our parks and to provide for their enjoyment. To fulfill those responsibilities, the Service performs many maintenance and visitor service tasks for which it has an enviable reputation for excellence.

To help maintain our high standards, you are expected to:

- *be reliable* in fulfilling your part of any work agreement;
- *seek and accept the guidance and support* needed to complete assignments;
- *present a positive public image* that speaks well of the National Park Service;
- *actively participate as a team member* with others on the staff of your park;
- *abide by the basic operational and safety rules* that exist at your park.

A FINAL NOTE

We are both pleased and proud that you have chosen to donate your time and talents to the National Park Service. We hope you will find your work stimulating and educational as you get to know more about the agency, the parks, and the park visitors we serve. Please call on us if you have questions or comments on any aspect of your work. We know we will benefit from your unique background and skills. Again, our sincere thanks for your help. Welcome aboard!





