



Volunteers

In Parks

Volunteer Handbook

Mississippi National River and Recreation Area





About the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Established in 1988, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is a national park that includes 72 miles of the Mississippi River stretching from the cities of Dayton and Ramsey to just south of Hastings, Minnesota. The segment of the river flowing through the park has always been of major significance as a spiritual site, a place for recreation, and a tourist attraction.

The park also works closely with the Mississippi River Fund, the charitable partner of the park. The fund engages the community to support the activities of the National Park Service (NPS) and its partners to enhance the Mississippi River.

Volunteers-in-Parks Program

The Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) Program offers individuals and groups unique opportunities to make personal connections with the Mississippi River and America's National Park System.

Volunteers at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area work alongside park rangers on a wide variety of events and projects. Volunteers provide valuable assistance in restoring native landscapes, providing learning opportunities for school groups, staffing events, and assisting visitors with recreational opportunities along the river. Group volunteering is a great way to connect with co-workers, church groups, or social club members.

Applying

The National Park Service has a wide variety of established opportunities and experiences available to appeal to all interests and talents. In order to understand better how you can become involved, and to provide the NPS with information about your skills, you will be asked to complete a volunteer application and participate in an interview. Once completed, applications and agreements will be kept on file. Some programs require volunteers to go through a formal screening process.

Volunteer Benefits

There are many reasons to volunteer at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. Through your work, you will:

- Contribute to the protection of America's heritage
- Add to the visitor experience
- Make new friends
- Share your knowledge, talent, and experience with others
- Find a potential future paying position
- Develop new skills or brush up old ones
- Receive the volunteer newsletter and be placed on park mailing lists
- Be a guest of honor at an annual volunteer recognition event
- Receive volunteer recognition awards based on hours and length of service

Contact us:

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Recognition

Each year, thousands of volunteers contribute thousands more hours for the national park. Volunteers are an integral part of our programming and support the efforts of our park rangers daily. Through the time and commitment of our generous volunteers, we are better able to protect and preserve vital resources for the future. Volunteers are formally recognized each year at events hosted by the park and its partners.

Our Pledge

As a VIP, you have the right to:

- Receive adequate training, guidance, and direction
- Develop skills and have a clear understanding of what is expected
- Have risks explained
- Have time used effectively and be offered a variety of experiences
- Freely discuss problems, ask questions, or make suggestions
- Receive the same fair personnel practices as paid staff
- Be recognized for your contributions
- Receive professional references
- Receive prompt responses and feedback

Training

All volunteers should visit the Mississippi River Visitor Center at the Science Museum of Minnesota or the park's website www.nps.gov/miss to learn more about the park's and programs. -There is also an opportunity to participate in a Mississippi River orientation during the summer.

You should receive information about your volunteer position before your arrival or on your first day in the park. -You will also receive documentation of any required safety training or any other formal training that results in a certificate. A copy of these certificates will be maintained in your personnel file. You should never participate in a duty for which you feel ill prepared, particularly if the duty has safety hazards. You will receive credit towards your volunteer hours for those hours spent in training.

All VIPs are also invited to take free online courses through the Eppley Institute. Free courses include three different *Introduction to the National Park Service* courses, and *Foundations of Interpretation*. These are great training opportunities for all volunteers and the *Foundations of Interpretation* is especially useful for those volunteers providing programs, staffing visitor centers, or in some way communicating the stories of the park to visitors. If you are interested in taking a course, go to <http://www.eppley.org/>.

Volunteer Recognition Awards:

River Steward (25 hours)

River 72 (72 hours)

River 150 (150 hours)

River Guardian (250 hours)

10, 15, 20, and 25 Year Service Awards

Every 250 hours- Interagency pass

VIP of the Year

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*Additional appreciation awards are given based on significant milestones in the volunteer's service career.*



Ned is a Volunteer Restoration Crew Leader



## Important Policies

### *Uniforms*

Depending on your volunteer position, you may receive a special volunteer uniform. This information should be provided to you by your supervisor. Often this uniform consists of clothing that makes you readily identifiable as an NPS volunteer and may include a t-shirt, nametag, or other specialized outerwear. If you are volunteering on a biking or canoeing program, you must wear safety gear like a helmet or personal floatation device (pfd) for safety. If you do not have your own gear, it will be provided to you. If your position does not have a uniform, please dress in clothing that is neat, clean, and does not portray a negative image, such as inappropriate images or wording on t-shirts, hats, or other clothing.

### *Gratuities*

Occasionally, park visitors offer a tip to volunteers after providing assistance or education. You should politely refuse the gratuity. If the visitor is insistent, you may accept the gratuity with the explanation that it will be given to the Mississippi River Fund, the park's charitable partner, or be placed in the Mississippi River Visitor Center donation box.

### *Workers Compensation*

Volunteers who have a current, signed volunteer agreement form on file (Form 301A), and who have been trained for specific duties receive the same benefits and protection as NPS employees under the Federal Employees Compensation Act and the Federal Tort Claims Act. Volunteers are entitled to first aid and medical care for on-the-job injuries when necessary. You are not covered if you are operating outside of the scope of your position, if you are off duty, or if the injury was the result of your own unsafe or negligent actions. All accidents and injuries should be reported to your supervisor.



Volunteering is a great family activity!

## Volunteer Responsibilities

All volunteers should:

- Be courteous and helpful to park visitors at all times and act professionally
- Provide a notice of absence and be punctual
- Respect confidentiality
- Participate in any training required to perform their job
- Follow the park's policies and guidelines and understand its organizational structure
- Accept only realistic assignments and have a clear understanding of the job
- Discuss satisfactions, dissatisfactions, and suggestions for improving or changing the volunteer program and offer only constructive criticism, rather than mere criticism
- Wear provided uniform when working with the public or when required by supervisor
- Report injuries and accidents to their supervisor immediately

The following are examples of unacceptable behavior:

- Use of illegal substances
- Falsifying reports, records, or expenses
- Physical or sexual harassment
- Negligent or willful damage of property
- Theft
- Unlawful discrimination
- Smoking while performing volunteer duties
- Any personal use of other park equipment or supplies other than those items provided for you
- Unfriendly or uncooperative attitude in dealing with visitors, staff members, or park neighbors
- Willfully endangering the safety of others



## **Volunteer Opportunities in the National Park:**

**Big River Journey:** Volunteers on Big River Journey provide students in grades 4–6 opportunities to explore the science and heritage of the Mississippi River directly. The core of the Big River Journey is a set of educational field trips on the Mississippi River between Harriet Island in St. Paul and Fort Snelling State Park at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. -Volunteers board riverboats to assist park rangers as they teach students about cultural and historical features along the river in Saint Paul.



Volunteer Nete on Big River Journey

**Journey to the Falls (JTF):** JTF connects 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students with Saint Anthony Falls and the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. Volunteers board riverboats to assist park rangers as they teach students about the history of the river and Saint Anthony Falls. Students experience the falls through hands-on learning stations, journaling, land-based lessons, a simulated archaeological dig, and passage through a lock on a riverboat.

**Bike with a Ranger:** A great way to get exercise, breathe some fresh air, and learn about the human and natural history of the Mississippi River. Volunteers work with park rangers leading groups of bicyclists along Mississippi River trails.

**Biking River Rovers:** Ride trails along the river, greet visitors, and provide information on weekends and weeknights.

**Trails and Rails:** Ride Amtrak's Empire Builder train between St. Paul and Columbus, WI and provide river interpretation to fellow travelers.



Trails and Rails volunteers talk about the park on Amtrak trains

**Restoration Crew Leader:** Volunteers assist park rangers or work in pairs supervising 15–20 volunteers in habitat restoration projects throughout the spring, summer, and fall.

**Habitat Restoration Events:** Throughout the summer season, groups of volunteers are needed to clear invasive species, clean up trash, and plant native plants along the Mississippi River's shore. These events are good for individuals or groups looking for single-day volunteer opportunities.

**Special Events:** Assist park rangers at special events. Events may include the fishing events, the Big River Art Contest, the Children's Water Festival, and more! Volunteers sign up for events that best fit their schedule. This opportunity is perfect for short-term commitments. Volunteers help interpret the Mississippi River, and help with registration, logistics, and more.

**Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA):** An outdoor canoe program focused on getting Twin Cities youth on the Mississippi River. Each UWCA trip provides students an opportunity to experience the Mississippi River uniquely while strengthening their outdoor skills and encouraging an active lifestyle outdoors. The UWCA volunteer will assist with interpretation and steering of a 24-foot Voyageur canoe on daytrips on the Mississippi River. The volunteer will stern, register participants, fit participants for pfd's and paddles, and assist participants in getting in and out of Voyageur canoes at public events. -Canoe safety training is provided.



On UWCA, volunteers work with kids in canoes on the river

**River Action Volunteer Events (RAVEs):** Volunteers participate in a habitat restoration project and recreational activity like canoeing or biking. RAVEs are a fun way to explore the river and learn about the National Park from park rangers. These half-day activities usually include about 2 hours of trash clean up, native seed planting and collection, or invasive species removal.

**Mississippi River Visitor Center:** This interpretive position is a great way to interact with a wide variety of people. The visitor center is at the Science Museum of Minnesota and offers volunteers a unique opportunity to introduce people to the Mississippi River and the National Park Service.

**Corporate Volunteer Events:** Corporate groups have a unique opportunity to make a difference within the community. Bringing large groups of volunteers together to do significant habitat restoration makes a big difference in the park, and many companies see it as great opportunity for employees. Projects can be customized for age, location, group size, and date to meet the needs of your group. Group projects can be for employees only or for families if desired. Specialized Corporate River Action Volunteer Events are also available for a fee and allow employees to combine boating and volunteerism.

**Specials Skills:** We may be able to customize a position for those with skills or talents not listed above. Let us know what you would like to do!