

Professionalism in the Workforce

Respective Commitments to an Exemplary Volunteers-In-Parks Program on the Ice Age National Scenic Trail

Background

“When a VIP agrees to share his talents, skills and interests with the National Park Service, he is paying us one of the highest compliments possible by offering a most valued possession – his time.”

George B. Hartzog, Jr. made this statement on November 17, 1970 in a letter to all regional directors announcing the new Volunteers-In-Parks program. Director Hartzog led the National Park Service from 1964 to 1972. During his tenure, 70 sites were added to the National Park System and he championed historic preservation, urban recreation, interpretation and environmental education. Director Hartzog recognized the need to make it easier for citizens to donate, without compensation, their time and talents to the NPS and pushed through legislation creating the Volunteers-In-Parks Program.

Director’s Order #7 addresses the Volunteers-In-Parks Program on a service-wide level of the NPS. It professionalizes the volunteer workforce, and provides volunteers access to some of the same benefits enjoyed by regular government employees—specifically injury and tort protection.

NPS managers have a commitment to volunteers to provide orientation, training, and other support in volunteer’s efforts to help accomplish the NPS Mission. Volunteers have a commitment to NPS managers to follow established policies and procedures while engaged in these activities.

The Ice Age NST’s Volunteers-In-Parks Program is unique in its composition and execution when compared to other national parks. Because the trail is so widespread, volunteer numbers so large, and direct interaction between NPS staff and volunteers so limited, the Ice Age NST places an extremely high level of trust in all volunteers to work and act autonomously while meeting the professional standards of the NPS. When volunteers are on the Trail and in the surrounding communities, they represent not only themselves, their trail chapter or The Alliance—they represent the NPS as well. The Ice Age NST and the volunteers must forever strive to support and assist one another to maintain professional standards in all that we collectively do.

Policy Statement

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail respects and values all volunteers as equal partners in accomplishing the mission of the Trail. Accordingly, opportunities as well as responsibilities exist for employees and volunteers alike. The Ice Age NST's commitment to volunteers is to maximize the quantity and quality of training opportunities, make all efforts to provide for a safe and productive work environment, and to maintain standards of conduct for the benefit of everyone. The volunteer's commitment to the Ice Age NST is to demonstrate good faith effort in adhering to NPS policies and procedures, and conduct themselves in manners befitting the NPS Volunteers-In-Parks Program. This includes not only to general conduct and/or safety related issues, but behaviors related to maintaining a harassment-free work environment as outlined in Directors Order #16E: NPS Anti-Harassment Policy, and the corresponding Reference Manual #16E, found at:

(https://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/RM-16E_Signed_2018_04_Combined_508_040218.pdf)

Procedures

Although infrequent, there exists the potential for volunteers to act outside of established policies—either innocently or deliberately.

It is the responsibility of all volunteers to assist one another in communicating and fostering a positive work environment in keeping with established policies, which creates an exemplary Volunteers-In-Parks Program for all involved. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Superintendent to ensure application and adherence to policies, in order to maintain a safe, professional and productive work environment.

NPS Operational Leadership, and the related *Trail Safe!* program, define behavioral “errors” in language that is recognized and accepted throughout the National Park Service, demonstrates the causal relationship between errors and accidents, and outlines the responsibilities of management in addressing various errors. Volunteers are encouraged to review video Lesson 3 of *Trail Safe!*, “Error & Accident Causation,” found online at: <https://www.nps.gov/iatr/trail-safe.htm>

Accordingly, the NPS-Ice Age NST, in concert with the Ice Age Trail Alliance, will rely upon the following general guidelines in addressing volunteer workforce issues.

In cases of simple “Human Error” (i.e.: unintentional mistakes, failure to recognize risks, unfamiliar with approved practices or standards, etc.), upon discovery:

1. The activity shall be immediately stopped to ensure safety
2. All “near miss” accidents shall be reported to the NPS Volunteer Coordinator for documentation in the NPS’ Safety Management Information System (SMIS). Near miss accidents are also explained in Lesson 3 of *Trail Safe!*
3. Reports of such issues are not a form of punishment. They will help identify potential trends where further orientation or training may benefit all volunteers through an anonymous “Lessons Learned” format
4. Corrective action in the form of on-the-spot counseling, further training, or review of policy should be sufficient in correcting the problem. On site crew leaders (including volunteer leaders) shall initiate these actions whenever they are present, with support and assistance from IATA staff and/or NPS Volunteer Coordinator as needed

In cases of “Reckless Conduct” (i.e.: the conscience disregard of a visible, significant risk) or “Intentional Rule Violation” (i.e.: anti-authority behavior), upon discovery:

1. The activity shall be immediately stopped to ensure safety
2. Anyone with knowledge of the problem shall report it to the IATA and/or NPS, and those organizations will share such reports with each other. The IATA Executive Director and NPS Superintendent shall consult on the appropriate course of action
3. Disciplinary action is appropriate in cases where known, significant risks are disregarded, or rules are intentionally violated
4. The degree of response to such violations is at the Superintendent’s discretion. Corrective actions may include verbal warnings, written warnings, or removal from NPS Volunteer-In-Parks status

In cases of harassing conduct, volunteers shall immediately report the allegations to the National Park Service at 608-798-8690. The National Park Service will follow Director’s Order #16E and the corresponding Reference Manual #16E in responding to any report of harassing conduct.

