

# Indiana Dunes National Park Volunteer Position Description



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## BARK Ranger Ambassadors

### Position Overview

BARK Ranger Ambassadors help educate the public on the park rules and proper etiquette of having a dog in the national park through demonstrating with their own dog while roving the park or at special events. In addition to demonstrating, volunteers will interact with visitors and inform them about the park rules and the B.A.R.K. Ranger program.

The B.A.R.K. program is a nationwide program with the goal of educating pet owners on the park's rules regarding pets and on how to be a responsible and curious pet owner.

**B.A.R.K.** stands for:

- **B**ag your pet's waste
- **A**lways leash your pet
- **R**espect wildlife
- **K**now where you can go

### Minimum Commitment

BARK Ranger Ambassadors are asked to commit to performing 12 Bark Ranger activities per year. These activities include educating the public while roving the park (this could be by visiting a beach or hiking a trail), assisting a ranger on a guided hike (such as the Hike with Your Hound program), or by participating in a Bark Ranger Pop-up event or any of the park's other special events. To ensure the comfort and the safety of the BARK Ranger, the 12 activities can be performed at any time throughout the year. This is to allow owners more options on days and weather conditions that work best for them and their dog.

### Goal / Outcome of Job:

The goal of being a BARK Ranger Ambassador is to demonstrate and educate visitors on proper park pet etiquette and the rules of B.A.R.K. through roving contact, by assisting park rangers on guided hikes, and at pop-up events. The hope is that by spreading awareness, the number of visitors disregarding these rules will decrease.

## **Description of Duties**

- Be familiar with the rules of B.A.R.K. and be able to explain them to a visitor.
- Be familiar with the park and be able to answer visitor's questions.
- Report which area of the park and how many hours were volunteered each month to the Park Connection office at [indu\\_volunteer@nps.gov](mailto:indu_volunteer@nps.gov).
- Properly wear the uniform provided by the Park Connection Office.
- Call 1-800-PARK-TIP for all emergencies or to report a crime.
- Finally, like all other volunteers, Ambassadors must fill out a Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA). Volunteers will also be provided with a Job Hazard Analysis.

## **Knowledge/ Skills Desired**

It is important for BARK Rangers and their handlers to safely interact with visitors in the park:

- BARK Rangers should be well behaved while volunteering.
- Handlers must be able to understand their dog's capabilities and be able to advocate for their dog.
- Handlers must know when to remove their dog from overwhelming or dangerous situations.

In addition to experience with interacting with people and other dogs, a basic understanding of the Indiana Dunes National Park and the BARK Rangers program is desired, though not required. Material will be provided to assist volunteers in developing these skills.

## **Physical Effort**

### Roving

Moderate to high impact. Roving in the park can range from easier trails, like the paved trail at Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk, to more strenuous trails, like the Cowles Bog trail. This is conditional upon the volunteer's choice in trail to rove and their own abilities and abilities of their BARK ranger.

### Special Events

Low to Moderate impact. During special events like festivals and pop-up events, BARK Rangers are needed to greet and interact within the event area. This could range from standing or sitting in a specific location to walking around the event.

## **Working Conditions:**

Roving will occur outdoors, during weather and temperatures that are chosen by the volunteer to ensure the comfort of the BARK Ranger and their handler.

Volunteering at special events and programs may result in less-than-ideal conditions, such as higher or lower temperature than desired or inclement weather, like rain or snow. While it is understandable that not all dogs can handle less than ideal conditions, depending on the health, breed, and age of the dog, it is the handler's responsibility to advocate for their BARK rangers and inform their supervisor if they feel they are unable to attend an event they have signed up for. Events that experience temperature or weather conditions that are hazardous to ALL dogs, regardless of age and breed, will be cancelled.

### **Training / Preparation Required:**

#### **B.A.R.K**

BARK Ranger Ambassadors will need to learn the rules of B.A.R.K. and how they pertain to Indiana Dunes National Park. This can be done through completing the BARK Ranger program. Booklets to complete the program can be obtained at the Visitor Center.

- **Bag your pet's waste**

In addition to making the trails unsanitary and less enjoyable for other visitors, pet waste that is not packed out of the park can harm the multiple rare and delicate eco-systems within the park.

- **Always leash your pet**

All dogs are required to be on 6 ft leash the entire time they are in the park. This protects the wildlife within the park from being attacked or chased by loose dogs in addition to protecting rare plants and vegetation off the trail from being trampled or disturbed.

Keeping dogs leashed also protects the dog by preventing them from wandering off into dangerous situations outside of their owner's control, like onto one of the many roads that intersect the park. Additionally, having all dogs leashed mitigates the risk of dog attacks on visitors or other dogs.

- **Respect wildlife**

Dogs can still disturb wildlife even when they're on a leash. It is important for owners to stay alert of their surrounding and to ensure that there is no wildlife on the trail/ nearby that their dog could potentially harm.

This also applies to the farm animals that live within the park at Chellberg Farm. The chickens and cows at the farm can easily overstimulate dogs that are unfamiliar with seeing these kinds of animals. While these animals see a large number of visitors every day, including dogs, it is still important for the welfare of these animals that owners of overstimulated, barking, or out-of-control dogs remove them from the situation to allow both animals to calm down.

- **Know where you can go**

The only trail in the Indiana Dunes National Park where dogs are NOT allowed is the Glenwood Dunes trail. Glenwood Dunes is a horse trail for most of the year. Due to the risk of dogs spooking the horses, dogs are prohibited.

During the summer, dogs are not allowed in the lifeguard area at West Beach. Dogs are allowed to walk through the lifeguard area to access the trails and other parks of the beach. However, to ensure that lifeguards do not have any added obstacles or tripping hazard in the case of emergency, dogs are not allowed to spend an extensive amount of time in the lifeguard area.

Inside the bog at Pinhook Bog, there is a restricted area that is only accessible on a ranger guided hike. This is also off limits to dogs due to the frailty of the bog's acidity, plants, and ecology. However, dogs are allowed on the Upland Trail off the Pinhook Bog parking lot.

### Knowing the Park

It is also important that volunteers are educated on the park. This can be done by viewing the park movie, *Nature's Masterpiece*, and by reviewing the "Frequently Asked Questions" guide.

### Roving Contact with Bark Rangers

- When approaching visitors to provide them with information on the park, try to present yourself in an inviting manner. An example of this could be to smile and use a warm tonality when speaking, if possible.
- Make sure your BARK Ranger companion is calm and under control before approaching a visitor.
- Always take the visitor's body language into consideration before approaching to avoid making visitors who may prefer to avoid dogs more comfortable. If visitors are avoiding eye contact, seem closed off, turn away, or are making any effort to physically avoid you, they may not be interested in being approached. If this is unclear, you can attempt to communicate with the visitor from a distance by projecting your voice, though be careful not to yell at the visitor.
- A great way to start contact with a visitor is by greeting them (Good morning, Hello, etc.) then engaging them with a question (Can I help you find anything? Do you have any questions about the park? Are you enjoying your hike?) Or if they have a dog (Are you interested in doing our Bark Ranger program?) Map and Bark Ranger booklets are available at the Visitor Center and are a great tool to carry and hand out to visitors while roving the park.

## Contact With Other Dogs

- Before approaching visitors with dogs, be mindful of both your dog's and the visitor's dog's body language.
- Make sure your dog is under control throughout the interaction and do not allow the dogs to interact closely enough that either dog could be in range to bite the other dog (e.g., no nose to nose).

## Examples of Dog Body Language

If a dog is showing signs of negative body language, respect what the dog is telling you and give it space when passing or go a different direction.

Shy and fearful behavior can include some or a combination of the following behaviors:

- Ears that are pinned back.
- Eyes that are wide or a fixed, hard, stare.
- Tail that is curled between their legs or a low, slow, wagging tail.
- A hunched posture or lowered head.
- Growling, snarling, or showing their teeth.
- Low barks or growling.

## Interacting With Visitors Not Following the Park Rules or the Rules of B.A.R.K.

- As a BARK Ranger Ambassador, it is the volunteer's duty to educate visitors that are not following the rules of B.A.R.K. or the park rules about these guidelines and how they can follow them. For example, this can be as simple as reminding a person that their dogs are required to be on a leash. It is important that these reminders are given in a polite and unaccusatory tone, and not to shame or scold visitors that may not be aware of these rules.
- In cases where visitors become hostile or obstinate about the rules after being informed, do not engage with them any further and walk away. Avoid escalating the situation.
- If you feel that you or other visitors are in danger, call 1-800-PARKTIP (1-800-727-5847) to report this dangerous behavior. Be prepared to give information like the location the visitor is in, their description, and what they are wearing.
- In cases where you feel immediate danger for yourself or another person, call 911.

## **Uniform**

The BARK Ranger Ambassadors uniform is a blue volunteer t-shirt and brown VIP hat for the owner and a yellow bandana for the BARK Ranger. The uniform is provided by the park. The uniform needs to be clean, wrinkle free, and free of any holes. Volunteers should also wear closed-toe shoes that allow them the needed stability when walking a dog. Dogs should be on a solid, six-foot leash (not a retractable leash).

Email [indu\\_volunteer@nps.gov](mailto:indu_volunteer@nps.gov) to receive the uniform pieces.