

Professionalism in the Workforce

Respective Commitments to an Exemplary Volunteers-In-Parks Program on the North Country 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 volunteers’ 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 North Country National Scenic Trail (NST) 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 North Country 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 affiliate group—they represent the NPS as well. The North Country NST and the volunteers must forever strive to support and assist one another to maintain professional standards in all that we individually and collectively do.

Policy Statement

The North Country NST respects and values all volunteers as equal partners in accomplishing the mission of the Trail. The North Country 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 volunteers’ commitment to the North Country NST is to demonstrate good faith effort in adhering to NPS policies, standards and procedures, and conduct themselves in manners befitting the NPS Volunteers-In-Parks Program.

Procedures

Although infrequent, there exists the potential for volunteers to act outside of established policies—either innocently or deliberately. Volunteers must realize it is not an option to volunteer on the NCNST and ignore these policies.

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.

In cases of simple human error (i.e., unintentional mistakes, failure to recognize risks, unfamiliarity with approved practices or standards, etc.), upon discovery:

1. The activity shall be immediately stopped to ensure safety.
2. 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 shall perform these actions whenever they are present.
3. An email report of the activity and corrective action taken shall be provided to the NCNST Volunteer Coordinator, who shall review the situation and offer recommendations, if necessary, to reinforce a satisfactory outcome.
4. 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.

In cases of reckless conduct (i.e., the conscientious disregard of a visible, significant risk) or intentional rule violation (i.e., anti-authoritative behavior), upon discovery:

1. The activity shall be immediately stopped to ensure safety.
2. The activity shall be immediately reported to the Chapter or Affiliate President who shall immediately forward a written report to the NCNST Volunteer Coordinator.
3. The NCNST Volunteer Coordinator will document the incident and inform the NCNST Superintendent.
4. The volunteer(s) involved will be notified in writing by the NPS (letter or email) of the violation(s) and instructed as to the proper course of corrective action required.
5. The degree of response to such violations is at the NCNST Superintendent's discretion and may result in removal of NPS Volunteer-In-Parks status, or other actions deemed appropriate by the NCNST Superintendent.

Mark Weaver, North Country National Scenic Trail Superintendent

Date