

**Santa Clara County Parks & Recreation Department**

# **Volunteer Guidelines**

## **Handbook**



**SANTA CLARA  
COUNTY PARKS**

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## **I. COUNTY PARKS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM INTRODUCTION**

Volunteers are a valuable asset to the Santa Clara County Parks & Recreation Department (SCCPRD) and to the public who enjoy the park system. Since the establishment of the first County Park, Stevens Creek Park in 1924, there have been innumerable volunteers who have given of themselves to serve where there is a need.

Today, the County Parks Volunteer Program has a staff dedicated to volunteerism in Santa Clara County Parks. The Program offers a variety of opportunities for those interesting in contributing their time and talents. Core programs include:

- Adopt-a-Trail Groups
- Camp Host Positions
- Community-Park Colleagues
- Docent Positions
- Park Friends Groups
- Park Stewards
- Trail Crew
- Trail Watch Patrollers

Volunteering can provide multiple opportunities to share and to learn. Volunteers also provide vital services that the community might not otherwise benefit from. Volunteerism reflects who we are as a community, exhibiting a full spectrum of backgrounds, abilities, skills and desires. This strong civil commitment along with the natural beauty of Santa Clara County, help make the place where we live truly the “Valley of Hearts Delight.”

County Park Volunteers help provide services and programs to expand opportunities for the safe enjoyment of our County Parks. The volunteer experience allows participants to make a contribution by utilizing their expertise and talents while enjoying their activities, further ensuring the future of County Parks. Volunteers help protect, enhance, maintain and restore County Parks through education, involvement, and communication with park staff and the community.

This handbook is designed as an informational aid to volunteers.

## **II. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MISSION**

The mission of the Santa Clara County Parks Volunteer Program is to create opportunities for community service, in partnership with park staff, that support successful completion of projects and programs that protect park resources and provide visitors with safe, educational, and enjoyable experiences.

### III. ADMINISTRATION

Program coordination occurs at different levels. Program administration may be contacted at:

Santa Clara County Parks Volunteer Program  
Telephone: (408) 355-2254  
Fax: (408) 356-2025  
Mailing Address: 298 Garden Hill Dr  
Los Gatos, CA 95032  
Email: volunteer@prk.sccgov.org  
Website: www.parkhere.org

Direct work site lead and supervisory functions exist at the Park or Program level:

- Director's Office
- Deputy Director's Office
- Programs
  - Business & Customer Services
  - Maintenance Services Division
  - Operations Division
  - Planning/Engineering/Real Estate
- Parks

Almaden-Quicksilver  
Alviso Marina  
Anderson Lake  
Calero  
Chesbro Reservoir  
Chitactac-Adams  
Coyote Creek  
Coyote Lake  
Ed R. Levin

Field Sports  
Hellyer  
Joseph D. Grant  
Lexington Reservoir  
Los Gatos Creek  
Motorcycle  
Mt. Madonna  
Penitencia Creek  
Rancho San Antonio

Sanborn  
Santa Teresa  
Sunnyvale Baylands  
Stevens Creek  
Uvas Canyon  
Vasona Lake  
Villa Montalvo

#### 1. Volunteer Program Manager

The County Parks' Volunteer Program Manager oversees all program activities under the guidance of the Manager of Park Ranger Operations. Major program components include:

- a. Development of Volunteer Program guidelines.
- b. Overall program advocacy and promotions
- c. Coordination with Volunteer Program Liaisons in promotion, recruitment, operation and evaluation of specific park volunteer activities.
- d. Liaison to the Volunteer Coordinating Council

#### 2. Volunteer Program Liaisons

Volunteer Program Liaisons are permanent employees who oversee the selection, training, and monitoring of volunteer personnel and programs at the park or program level.

### 3. Volunteer Program Volunteer Leaders

When appropriate, volunteers may act as leads under the supervision of a Volunteer Program Liaison. Volunteer Program leads may plan, implement, and evaluate work projects or activities at the park or level.

### 4. Volunteer Program Volunteer Coordinating Council

The Volunteer Coordinating Council (VCC) serves as an advisory board for the Volunteer Program Program. VCC members are approved by the Parks & Recreation Director for two year renewable terms based on selection by the VCC and Volunteer Program Manager. The VCC is responsible for:

- a. Reviewing guidelines and making recommendations to the Volunteer Program Program Manager
- b. Assisting the Volunteer Program Manager by recruiting volunteers from their representative groups for projects and programs as requested by SCCPRD staff.
- c. Promoting the Volunteer Program, and conducting other activities as directed by the Volunteer Program Manager.

## **IV. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM CORE OPPORTUNITIES**

The following are the core programs currently operating within the Volunteer Program:

### 1. Adopt-a-Trail Groups

Adopt-a-Trail volunteers, upon completion of Department training, take care of a trail or section of trail within a County Park. Adopt-a-Trail volunteers conduct trail brushing/pruning, litter/debris removal, routine trail tread/drainage clearing and monitor trail conditions. Participants groups that meet the program guidelines will receive in-park signage acknowledging their commitment.

### 2. Camp Host Positions

Hosts receive a full-utility campsite in exchange for 20-hours per week of volunteer service. Duties may include site security, camp/restroom maintenance, and assisting park staff with educational programs.

### 3. Community-Park Colleagues

Community-Park Colleagues are individuals and groups who perform a variety of project related tasks.

- a. Group examples include: Eagle Scout projects and service club projects.
- b. Project examples include: building/rehabilitating trails, one-time litter removals, and special events. These projects are generally short term in nature (less than one month).
- c. Department sponsored projects fall into this category.

### 4. Docent Positions

Docents assist park staff in conducting educational program, and staffing visitor facilities at the following locations: Chitactac-Adams, New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum, Santa Teresa Historic Area, Stevens Creek Visitor Center, Sanborn Park Visitor Center, and the Junior Ranger Program. Docent positions are also available in the Outdoor Recreation Program.

### 5. Park Friends Groups

Park Friends groups are currently operating at Almaden Quicksilver, Penitencia Creek, Joseph D. Grant, Ed Levin, and Motorcycle Metcalf, Santa Teresa, Stevens Creek, and Chitactac-Adams parks. Park Friends help with various projects at their designated park(s) throughout the year.

## 6. Trail Crew Leads

Trail Crew Lead Volunteers assist park staff with Trail Days and other major trail projects. Trail Crew Volunteers work at different parks doing skilled trail building, repair, and restoration projects.

## 7. Trail Watch Patrollers

Trail Watch volunteers patrol County Park trails on horseback, on bicycle, and on foot. They provide visitors with park information; provide minor First-Aid assistance, correct minor trail hazards, report major trail hazards, and document trail use activity for park staff.

# V. VOLUNTEER ELIGIBILITY

Volunteers are recruited and placed without regard to race, religion, color, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, age, creed, national origin, ethnicity, or physical disability.

Volunteers must be able to physically perform their accepted assignment(s).

Volunteers must be United States citizens, or documented aliens.

Volunteers must be 14 years of age or older, except for Trail Watch volunteers who must be 18 years of age. Persons under age 18 must obtain written consent from a parent or legal guardian to volunteer, and must have adult supervision at all times. Appropriate federal, state, and local labor laws governing the work of a minor must be followed.

The Federal Labor Standards Act prohibits SCCPRD employees from volunteering to do the same activities that they are normally paid to perform. SCCPRD employees may, however, perform activities not significantly related to their paid positions. SCCPRD employees must complete a Volunteer Application/Agreement Form, and must document their volunteer work separately from their paid work. SCCPRD cannot assign themselves, or their immediate family members as volunteers. SCCPRD volunteers are subject to the same standards of conduct expected of paid employees under the Santa Clara County Policy and Procedures Manual.

# VI. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM LIABILITY

## 1. General Use Liability

Volunteers may be utilized to accomplish SCCPRD goals in many areas. Volunteers cannot, however, replace existing paid County employees. The Parks Volunteer Program Manager can assist you as to whether a proposed volunteer task or project is appropriate. Final determination rests with the SCCPRD Director.

## 2. Medical Insurance Coverage

If an injury occurs at the workplace while a person is performing volunteer duties, the incident is to be reported to a SCCPRD employee, and must be documented. The volunteer's primary medical, hospital or accident insurance coverage is to be used unless:

- The volunteer incurs expenses not covered by his/her policy.
- The volunteer has no insurance coverage.

In such cases, the volunteer will be covered by the Santa Clara County Excess Policy to a limit of \$5,000 per occurrence.

## **VII. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM RISK MANAGEMENT**

Prevention is the key here. The Santa Clara County Risk Management Policy applies to both volunteers and paid staff. Risk Management guidelines that apply specifically to volunteers include the following:

- Safe work practices and potential hazards identification must be addressed prior to commencing any assignment.
- All volunteers must be properly trained prior to commencing any assignment.
- All work-related injuries/illnesses must be immediately documented and analyzed per County, Cal-OSHA and USA-OSHA policy.
- Qualified staff will document the training and use of motor vehicles or power equipment by volunteers. Minors are not authorized to use any motor vehicles or power equipment.

## **VIII. VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES**

The following are constraints that the Volunteer Program places on the assignment of volunteers:

1. All persons must complete a Volunteer Application before volunteering. A park staff member must authorize this form prior to the volunteer commencing any work. The volunteer's application form will then be filed at the Volunteer Program Office.
2. Volunteers will not be assigned work that they not trained for, comfortable with or willing to perform.
3. Prior to operating motor vehicles or equipment volunteers must first be trained and demonstrate proficiency in the operation of such vehicles/equipment to the satisfaction of qualified SCCPRD staff. Volunteers must also observe the same safety precautions as paid staff.
4. Volunteers shall not perform law enforcement duties.
5. Case-by-case analysis of potentially hazardous work assignments will be considered, taking into account, the volunteer's skills and background.
6. Certain tasks cannot be performed by minors (persons under 18 years of age). These include operation of Department motor vehicles and power equipment. Minors who perform construction tasks involving tool use must be under the direct supervision of a qualified adult. Should questions arise, contact the Volunteer Program Manager.
7. Under California State Law, some positions may require that a volunteer be fingerprinted and undergo a background check. Should questions arise, contact the Volunteer Program Manager.

## **IX. VOLUNTEER STANDARDS OF CONDUCT**

The following are standards of conduct that all volunteers must abide by while performing duties as County Parks Volunteers:

1. Drug or alcohol use is prohibited while on duty.
2. Smoking is allowed only in designated areas. Check with your volunteer liaison.
3. Volunteers are expected to treat visitors and staff in a pleasant, professional manner.
4. Direct all complaints, and any question you cannot answer, to park staff.
5. Volunteers must obey all park rules, regulations, and ordinances.
6. Volunteers are not allowed to accept any gifts or gratuities.

## **X. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM PROPERTY USE**

### **1. Vehicle Use Authorization**

At the request of the Volunteer Program Liaison, volunteers may use County vehicles if they are adults, if they possess a valid California driving license with a good driving record and obtain a County Driver's Permit. The permit must be granted prior to driving County vehicles. Minors, and persons with poor driving records, can only perform work which does not have driving as a requirement. Volunteers driving County vehicles are subject to the same restrictions as paid staff as outlined in the Santa Clara County Policy & Procedures Manual. Volunteers who wish to use private vehicles as part of their volunteer service must obtain written authorization from the appropriate Regional Park or Program Manager. This authorization must be placed in the volunteer's file at the Volunteer Program Office.

### **2. Non-Vehicular Equipment Use Authorization**

The use of power equipment by volunteers is restricted to those individuals who are assessed and authorized by SCCPRD staff qualified in the proper use of that specific equipment. This authorization must be submitted in writing on a County Memorandum detailing the volunteer's name, date of training/authorization, specific items of equipment that the volunteer is authorized to use, and the authorizing staff's name, signature and date. The Volunteer Program Manager will place this authorization in the volunteer's file at the Volunteer Program Office.

### **3. Use of Personal Property**

Volunteers using personal property while volunteering do so at their own risk. The Department will not reimburse volunteers for items that are lost, stolen, damaged, or destroyed. A volunteer is not authorized to use any personal items that extend his/her duty beyond the scope of work in his/her Needs Assessment/Job Description.

### **4. Park Use Provisions**

Volunteers will not be charged park use fees on dates they perform their work assignment. All long-term volunteers will be issued an identification card as proof they are volunteers, once they complete a Volunteer Orientation.

## **XI. VOLUNTEER PROGRAM OPERATIONS**

Volunteers shall be treated with the same attention and respect as SCCPRD paid staff. Staff shall ensure that volunteers know what his/her job is.

Volunteers should also know they work at the discretion of the Department. Their duties and/or work location may change at the discretion of the Department. When this occurs, staff or the Volunteer Program Manager will provide sufficient notice, typically two weeks.

## **XII. GENERAL ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES**

### **1. Volunteer Scheduling**

Volunteers should establish an assignment schedule with park staff prior to volunteering. This can be done by telephone, or in person. When a volunteer reports for assignment, he/she should meet with park staff regarding their duties for the day. At this time qualified volunteers will also pick up a radio, or any equipment and materials needed to perform their assignment. At the end of their shift, the volunteer should again meet with park staff to return any park equipment or material, to schedule their next shift and to record their hours. Since it may not always be possible to meet with park staff a volunteer should make arrangements with staff by telephone.

### **2. Conflict Resolution**

Conflict should be resolved at the lowest level possible. Conflicts or problems should be immediately brought to the attention of the volunteer and to the volunteer's supervisor. Conflict between the volunteer and their supervisor should be worked out between the two parties. If this is not possible, it should be brought to the attention of the Volunteer Program Manager for resolution.

### **3. Separation**

Volunteers can be separated from the Volunteer Program by dismissal by the Volunteer Program Manager, or by the volunteer's resignation. This separation must be detailed on the volunteer's Application/Agreement Form during a telephone or in-person interview conducted by the Volunteer Program Manager. Upon separation, the affected program/park will be notified in writing, and the volunteer's records will be placed in an inactive file for a period of three years. Both parties must be given sufficient written notice, typically two weeks, when separation occurs.