

NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE

Volunteer Handbook



Approved by the Board of Directors - March 24, 2009

Volunteer Handbook

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Volunteer Handbook

WELCOME

To our new volunteers, we offer a warm welcome to this special organization. And to our current volunteers, we are always grateful for the outstanding work you do.

The Volunteer Committee has developed this handbook to provide you with information about the Trail Conference. We especially hope that it helps you understand the key role that volunteers have, and how you and your specific role fit into the broader mission. In addition, the handbook provides you with an understanding of our expectations as well as various guidelines for different situations that you might encounter.

Our efforts to accomplish the mission (described on the next page) rely on the ongoing joint work of staff, volunteers, and our various partners, such as park staff, state and local government representatives, and other organizations with common interests. Because the Trail Conference is so volunteer- directed, we depend on the high quality and timely work done by each volunteer. We have been incredibly successful over the years because volunteers have carried out their responsibilities with care and pride.

Volunteers serve in a variety of jobs including trail building and trail maintenance, advocacy, publishing (books and maps), providing office and clerical services, serving on committees, and serving on the board. All volunteers, regardless of role, focus on our mission, always with safety and work quality as key priorities.

We thank you for volunteering for the Trail Conference and hope that your experience will be a satisfying one.

Volunteer Committee

ABOUT THE TRAIL CONFERENCE

Mission

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a federation of member clubs and individuals dedicated to providing recreational hiking opportunities in the region and to representing the interests and concerns of the hiking community. The Trail Conference is a volunteer-directed public service organization committed to:

- Developing, building, and maintaining hiking trails
- Protecting hiking trail lands through support and advocacy
- Educating the public in the responsible use of trails and the natural environment

Vision

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference will maintain its position as the leading hiking trail organization in the region. In pursuit of that goal, the Trail Conference will:

1. Continue programs of developing, building and maintaining hiking trails.
2. Expand its role as an advocate for better stewardship of trail lands.
3. Enhance efforts to preserve and protect trail lands.
4. Increase visibility and cooperation with member clubs, partners and the public.
5. Sustain a high level of quality volunteer participation.
6. Produce high-quality publications.
7. Broaden the demographic base of its membership.
8. Strengthen the financial base of its operation.

Brief History

In 1920, the NY-NJ Trail Conference was formed when local hiking clubs gathered to plan a system of marked hiking trails to make Harriman-Bear Mountain State park more accessible to the public. In this same park, Trail Conference founders constructed and opened the first section of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in 1923. During the 1930s, more trails were built and a system of trail maintenance was developed, giving each hiking club a share of the responsibility.

By the 1970s, the Trail Conference began to do more than just maintain trails. For example, it began to publish hiking maps beginning with Bear Mountain/Harriman State Parks. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Trail Conference moved the AT off roads and onto National Park Service (NPS) property purchased to permanently protect it. The efforts to protect the AT marked the beginning of expanding the number of miles of trails the Trail Conference maintained.

Today, this maintenance network covers over 1,700 miles of foot trails from the Delaware Water Gap north to beyond the Catskills. The Trail Conference is also involved with other not-for-profits and governmental units to ensure public access to hiking trails.

Funding and Support

Our work is supported through membership dues, publication sales, and private donations. In addition, our volunteers have devoted tens of thousands of hours to projects and issues affecting hiking trails.

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Trail Conference Structure

The Board of Directors, staff, committees, and member volunteers are committed to developing, building, and maintaining hiking trails, protecting hiking trail lands through support and advocacy, and educating the public in the responsible use of trails and the natural environment. The work is done in partnership with government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and over 100 member organizations.

- Board of Directors

The 15 members of the Board of Directors serve 3-year terms, with five members being elected every year. The Board elects the chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer from the Board members every year. In addition to serving on the Board, all Board members are expected to take active roles as volunteers. Board members serve on committees, often, but not necessarily as chairs.

- Staff

Under the direction of the Executive Director, staff conducts the day-to-day operations. They work in conjunction with volunteers in all aspects of the organization. Office volunteers complement and supplement the duties of staff.

- Partners

Trail Conference representatives work with government and not-for-profit organizations with which we share common interests. They attend meetings as an advisor, active participant or observer, and testify at public hearings. In addition, volunteers serve on short term advisory committees dealing with issues such as parkway management plans, park unit master plans, location of cell towers, etc.

See page 8 for a list of some of these agencies along with their abbreviations. If you work on trails, the abbreviations will help you determine what insurance benefits apply (see insurance grid in the insurance section).

- Member Organizations

Various organizations are members of the Trail Conference, and they contribute to our mission according to their own unique charters. For example, some lead hikes or provide other social opportunities for their members, some help preserve the environment, and others engage in related activities. The combined total membership of these organizations is about 100,000, giving the Trail Conference a larger voice as an advocate for trails.

Trail Conference Committees

Most of the work of the Trail Conference is carried out by the volunteer committees. Typically, these are chaired by a board member and have a staff person assigned to attend meetings and carry out some of the tasks. The committees have a charge set forth by the By-Laws, a directive from the board, or the committee's governing document.

VOLUNTEERS

The Trail Conference is an organization with a long history of major accomplishments driven by its talented, dedicated volunteers who have partnered with capable and dedicated staff. Our volunteers fill a wide spectrum of jobs from maintaining trails to serving on our Board and its committees.

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The Trail Conference is only as strong as its volunteers. To that end, we strive to recruit and, in a sense, “hire” volunteers for jobs suited to their skills, interests and abilities. From time to time volunteers may “resign” a position or be asked to leave a position when the match does not work effectively.

Volunteer Responsibilities and Expectations

The Trail Conference expects its volunteers to approach their assignments in a professional manner. Although volunteers are not paid, they are expected to approach their assignments with the same level of professionalism and enthusiasm as a paid employee. Volunteers are expected to meet deadlines, treat fellow volunteers and employees with courtesy and respect, and represent the interests of the Trail Conference in good faith.

Depending on the position, every volunteer is asked to report his/her hours donated to the Trail Conference. Trail volunteers submit semi-annual reporting forms to their supervisors, while non-trail volunteers are expected to complete a time sheet for each of the projects and committees they work with.

Equal Opportunity in Volunteering

In order to assure equality in volunteering and advancement opportunities to all individuals, volunteer assignment decisions at the Trail Conference are based on merit, qualifications, and abilities. The Trail Conference does not discriminate in volunteer opportunities or practices based on race, color, religion, sex, marital status, national origin, age, physical or mental disability or handicap, sexual orientation, or as otherwise prohibited by applicable federal, state and/or local law.

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Harassment-Free Work Environment

The Trail Conference is committed to ensuring that volunteers and employees have a work environment free from unwelcome or inappropriate speech or conduct and is committed to addressing complaints of harassment of any kind.

In the event that an individual feels s/he has reason for complaint, it should be reported immediately either to their Committee Chair (e.g. Trails Chair, Publications Chair), their supervisor, the Executive Director, or Board chair. It is not necessary for a volunteer to discuss such a matter with his/her immediate supervisor unless he/she is comfortable doing so. Volunteer leaders and staff are responsible for making the Executive Director immediately aware of any such situation brought to their attention. The Trail Conference will investigate the complaint and, where warranted by the results of the investigation, will take appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

When such complaints are made, the issue of confidentiality will be raised with the volunteer, and every effort will be made to respect the volunteer's preferences in this regard. It may not be possible to reconcile the Trail Conference's responsibility to identify and eliminate harassment in the workplace with the volunteer's preferences for confidentiality. When it appears that this is the case, this issue will be raised with the volunteer before any disclosures are made.

Sexual Harassment

The Trail Conference prohibits sexual harassment in any work capacity. Sexual harassment is conduct of a sexual nature that is offensive to an employee or volunteer who is subjected to that conduct. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature by any employee, any volunteer, or any non-employee (including vendors and others who engage in business with the Trail Conference) constitute sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for decisions affecting that volunteer; or such conduct has the purpose or the effect of unreasonably interfering with the volunteer's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

All employees and volunteers should understand that what one person may think is good-natured kidding of a sexual nature may be perceived as hostile, intimidating or offensive by others.

Sexual harassment is against the law. It has been and remains the policy of the Trail Conference to prohibit sexual harassment of its employees and volunteers and to investigate and remedy sexual harassment whenever such conduct comes to management's attention. It has also been and remains the policy of the Trail Conference to support employees and volunteers asserting their rights under this policy. Retaliatory conduct by any employee/volunteer of the Trail Conference against any other employee or volunteer complaining of harassment of any kind, or cooperating in the Trail Conference's investigation of harassment will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

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Volunteer Eligibility/Membership Requirements

Edit: As of September 16, 2019, as approved by the board, membership is no longer required for volunteers. The Trail Conference has repealed its long-time policy that volunteers must purchase membership in order to hold positions as Trail Maintainers, Supervisors, Chairs, or Crew Leaders.

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INSURANCE

While the Trail Conference makes every effort to emphasize safety, the nature of the work we do may result in accidents. If you are injured, you or your designee (e.g. supervisor, crew leader or family member) should notify the Trail Conference's staff responsible for volunteer programs of injury within 24 hours or on the next business day. If you cannot establish direct contact, make sure to leave a message.

Because of our consistent focus on safety, we have been fortunate that accidents have been few and minor. It is nonetheless important for volunteers, especially those who work on lands supported by the Trail Conference, to be aware of insurance provisions. Because the various entities with whom we work have different insurance provisions, this is a complex topic that requires your careful attention.

The grid on the next page gives you an outline of coverage in the various entities that comprise our work area. See below the grid for agency names and acronyms.

The following points are critical for you to understand and require your compliance for you to have the optimal coverage:

Trail Conference accident insurance does not cover volunteers working on AT/NPS or New York State (NYS)-owned lands because you are eligible for federal or NYS worker's compensation coverage. Those volunteering on OPRHP-owned lands must complete, sign, and submit the Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA) annually. If you do not submit this form, you may not work on OPRHP-owned lands and may not be eligible for NYS worker's compensation coverage.

Those working on AT/NPS or NYS-owned lands should check with their own medical policies to determine if filing for Worker's Compensation is required. If a volunteer chooses to use his/her own medical insurance, worker's compensation will not provide treatment for the same injury at the same time or subsequently.

For volunteers who do not work on AT/NPS or NYS-owned lands and do not have their own health insurance, the Trail Conference's policy provides limited medical expense benefits on a primary basis, up to the limit noted in the Volunteer Insurance Coverage grid on the next page.

To be eligible for liability, medical, and Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) coverage under the Trail Conference's insurance policies, an individual must be either a member of a club or other group that is a Trail Conference member organization, or listed on file with the Trail Conference as a registered volunteer.

Clubs must identify their outings as "work trips" in order for their members to be covered under Trail Conference insurance policies. Club hiking trips are not covered.

Not being a club member or registered volunteer does not prohibit an individual from accompanying a volunteer on a work trip; it does however, prevent that person from being covered by Trail Conference insurance policies.

Any questions regarding insurance should be referred to the staff member responsible for volunteer programs at the Trail Conference office. Trails supervisors and trail crew leaders, while very knowledgeable on matters of trail maintenance and construction, are not authorized to provide information on matters relating to insurance coverage.

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Volunteer Insurance Coverage (as of June 2008)			
	AT/NPS Volunteers	New York OPRHP/PIPC/DEC Volunteers	All Other Volunteers
Who is Covered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NY/NJ AT • Delaware Water Gap Nat'l Rec. Area (DWGNRA) • Morristown Nat'l Historic Park (MNHP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes: • Harriman/Bear Mountain SP; Sterling Forest SP; Storm King SP; Schunemunk SP; Minnewaska SP; Hudson Highlands SP; Taconic SP; Fahnestock SP; Tallman SP; Wonder Lake SP • Catskill Forest Preserve • Long Path on DEC Lands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Trail Volunteers (e.g. office, publications, etc.) • Trail volunteers (e.g. maintainer, crew worker, chain sawyer) in NJ not in column 1, and NJ and NY county, private and municipal lands
Liability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immunity from liability and from personal property damage claims under VIP program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYS to defend and indemnify negligence claims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYNJTC to defend and indemnify negligence claims up to \$1M • NYNJTC to defend and indemnify wrongful act (errors and omissions) claims up to \$1M
Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary Medical Expenses under VIP program¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary Medical Expenses under • NY Worker's Compensation Law² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Expenses up to \$25,000 for volunteers without personal medical coverage
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash benefit for permanent impairment for set number of weeks under VIP program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash benefit under NY Worker's Compensation Law for temporary total, temporary partial, permanent total and permanent partial disabilities • Based on 2/3 NY average weekly wage (NYAWW) x y % of disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not Available
Death and Dismemberment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash death benefit under VIP program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death benefit under NY Worker's Compensation Law equal to 2/3 x NYAWW for year before accident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to \$75,000 depending on nature of loss
Eligibility Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AT: On record with NYNJTC as volunteer • DWGNRA/ MNHP: On record with park as volunteer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPRHP/PIPC: Volunteer for each calendar year to sign and send Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA) to PIPC (if west of Hudson) or Taconic Regional Office (if east of Hudson) • DEC: Catskill Trails Chair submits names to DEC Regional Offices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On record with NYNJTC as volunteer

Insurance Table Abbreviations

ATC	Appalachian Trail Conservancy
DEC	Department of Environmental Conservation
DWGNRA	Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area
MNHP	Morristown National Historic Park
NPS	National Park Service

¹ If the volunteer elects VIP coverage, there is no ability to choose physician/hospital.

² If volunteer submits VSA form, then worker's compensation may apply; see page 8.

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OPRHP	Office of Parks, Recreations and Historic Preservation
PIPC	Palisades Interstate Park Commission
VIP	Volunteers In Parks

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TRAINING

The Trail Conference provides training in a variety of areas for its volunteers. Training is offered in numerous formats. Formal workshops and training seminars are offered for a variety of program areas, such as Trails, Publications, and Science. Additionally, “on the job training” is provided to Trail Conference volunteers by staff and experienced volunteer leaders. Training certification is required for chain-sawyers, and first aid/CPR training is recommended for crew chiefs and required for chain-sawyers. When warranted, Trail Conference volunteers are given the opportunity to attend workshops or seminars offered by other organizations.

TOOLS

Most volunteers who maintain trails use their own equipment (e.g. clippers, bow saws). Other tools, which are typically used for construction or heavy work, are maintained in an inventory of tools and equipment that may be borrowed by volunteers. All equipment must be signed out by the individual borrowing the equipment with the proper representative. The person who signed out the equipment must replace items that are lost or damaged due to negligence or misuse.

In the interest of safety, it is critical that all personal as well as Trail Conference tools be in good working order and be used only for the work that they were designed to perform. Only those volunteers properly trained in the use of potentially dangerous tools (e.g. power tools) should use them. Volunteers may not use chain saws on behalf of the Trail Conference unless they are certified.

REIMBURSEMENTS

Committee Chairs, Project Managers, Trail Crew Chiefs, Trail Crew Leaders, Trails Chairs, and Trail Supervisors are eligible to be reimbursed for expenses incurred while performing Trail Conference business. Expenses that are eligible for reimbursement include mileage, tolls, parking, phone, office supplies, tools, and construction materials. Mileage is reimbursed at the current IRS rate, the same value that is allowed to be taken if the value of the mileage were to be taken as a tax-deductible gift. For reimbursements, volunteers should consult the project manager or committee chair overseeing the project for which the expenses were incurred. Although the Trail Conference provides reimbursements, we strongly encourage volunteers to donate their expenses as a tax-deductible gift if they are financially able to do so.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

Electronic media and services provided by the Trail Conference are Trail Conference property and are provided solely to facilitate Trail Conference activities. The Trail Conference has a right to information used and communicated via such communication vehicles.

All communication devices, including the telephone, voice mail, e-mail, faxes, web etc. are Trail Conference tools provided for business use. It is expected that the primary use of these communication vehicles be for Trail Conference related purposes. However, the Trail Conference also understands that volunteers may need to use these vehicles for occasional, brief personal purposes. The Trail Conference is concerned not about legitimate use but abusive practices that exceed reasonable limits.

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The confidentiality of any message or communication should not be assumed. Even when a message is erased, it is still possible to retrieve and read that message in many situations. E-mail, Internet, and voice mail messages should be treated as paper files, with the expectation that anything in them is available for review. In addition to internal review, such review could include review by external authorities as in litigious situations.

Volunteers are responsible for ensuring that telephonic and electronic communications vehicles are used in an efficient, ethical and lawful manner. The Trail Conference prohibits any activity that involves sexually oriented, obscene, offensive, threatening, harassing or intimidating material whether or not it violates federal or state law. It also prohibits using these vehicles to solicit or proselytize for commercial ventures, religious or political causes, outside organizations, or other non-job-related solicitations.

No software application may be electronically transferred to or copied to any Trail Conference computer without approval of the Executive Director.

The use of 900 numbers is prohibited.

Violations of any of these guidelines are serious and may result in limiting or ending a volunteer's access to such communication vehicles.

CONFIDENTIALITY

From time to time volunteers in certain positions will have access to confidential information that the Trail Conference regards as extremely sensitive. Volunteers with access to confidential information must sign a Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement and return it to the staff member responsible for volunteer programs. In accordance with Confidentiality Agreement, no confidential information may be disclosed to any other organization or to anyone else without a legitimate reason related to Trail Conference work, as approved in writing by the Executive Director. This includes, but is not limited to, information about Trail Conference policies, systems, strategies, methods of operation, contractual agreements and software, any confidential information related to volunteers, customers, contributors, and other proprietary matters. By signing the Confidentiality Agreement and continuing volunteer activities with the Trail Conference, all volunteers agree not to make any such disclosure during or after their involvement with the Trail Conference.

Disclosing confidential information in violation of this policy will result in severing the Trail Conference's relationship with the volunteer.

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