



TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

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# State Parks Host Manual

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The mission of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and provide hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

# Purpose of the Host Manual

The purpose of the Texas State Parks Host Manual is to provide potential and current hosts with information about the Texas State Parks Host Program. This manual sets forth policies and procedures that apply to host placements statewide. Once placed in a host opportunity, volunteers will receive additional materials, training, orientation, and resources specific to that park and host opportunity.

## Welcome To Texas State Parks

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Welcome to the Texas State Parks host volunteer experience! The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) operates and maintains a system of public lands, including state parks, historic sites, fish hatcheries and wildlife management areas, comprising 1.4 million acres that are managed in the public trust for recreation and conservation. Texas State Parks offer a remarkable diversity of landscapes, beauty, and recreational opportunities that attract more than 8 million visitors annually. As the population of Texas continues to grow and TPWD continues working to ensure that all Texans have access to the outdoors for education, recreation, and rejuvenation, our parks face a unique challenge to seek alternative ways to manage park operations and provide programming for visitors. Engaging volunteers in our work is essential to the sustainability and ongoing success of TPWD. Your contribution helps protect our valuable resources and creates a strong link between our parks and our community. The impression hosts make on visitors and staff can last a lifetime and we hope your experience of hosting creates joyous memories that also last a lifetime!

### Park Structure

State Parks is one of eleven divisions of TPWD. Texas State Parks has a director and deputy director that provide leadership and oversight statewide. The division has a statewide volunteer coordinator who provides guidance and resources to individuals who manage volunteers (email: [StateParksVolunteers@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:StateParksVolunteers@tpwd.texas.gov)). State Parks is divided into six regions. Each region has a regional support team and regional director. Each state park is managed by a park superintendent. Each park has a staff member designated to the role of host/volunteer coordinator (this may be the park superintendent, assistant superintendent, park interpreter, park police officer or other designated staff member depending on park size and structure). The host coordinator tracks the application process, assignment, orientation, and exit of hosts. This person often supervises the hosts, as well. However, host supervision responsibilities may be given to another staff depending on host job duties. Host program coordination duties are in addition to other job responsibilities.

# Chapter 1: Park Host

*Being a park host is an important and rewarding experience.*

## **What is a Park Host?**

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Park hosts volunteer as representatives and stewards of Texas State Parks providing operational support to the park and information to the visiting public. Given the diversity of Texas landscapes and the varying size, structure, and needs of state parks, specific host tasks vary from park to park. However, all hosts are expected to provide excellent customer service to park visitors, support staff in day-to-day operations, and act as additional eyes and ears in the park. In exchange for volunteer service, hosts are provided with an RV site during the tenure of their host placement.

**To fully understand host duties, expectations, amenities, and policies of the park, hosts are expected to carefully review the volunteer opportunity posting and talk directly with the host coordinator at the park prior to accepting an assignment.**

## **Duties & Responsibilities**

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Hosts supplement park staff in the operations of the park. All hosts are responsible for greeting the visiting public and providing information on the park facilities, resources, park rules, and attractions. Most host opportunities also include light maintenance work around the park, such as picking up litter and checking and servicing restrooms and camp loops.

Further, as representatives of TPWD, all hosts are expected to:

- Respond to visitor inquiries in a courteous and thoughtful manner,
- Maintain a model campsite, keeping the area clean and orderly at all times,
- Wear the approved host uniform during duty hours,
- Be available during scheduled duty hours,
- Comply with all park regulations and safety guidelines, and
- Log volunteer hours.

Specific duties and responsibilities will vary to meet the current needs of the park and to match the skills and interests of the host and may include providing interpretive programming, fee collection, or maintenance work. See [Appendix A](#) for job description samples (general, customer service, maintenance, and education/interpretation) and talk with the park host coordinator for specific information about job duties.

## **Limitations of Duties**

Hosts may be authorized to provide non-law enforcement information about park rules to campers, i.e. letting a camper know that gathering firewood is not allowed or informing them of the requirement to keep pets on leash. **Hosts shall never perform law enforcement duties** and should not engage with a visitor that is agitated or approach a camper more than once about the same rule. Any violations, illegal activity, or emergencies observed by hosts or visitors should be reported using the appropriate method of communication (radioing the park police officer, calling 911, or calling non-emergency police number). Appropriate methods of communication at your park will be reviewed with you during your host orientation.

Hosts shall not use park equipment without first receiving proper training and sign-off. Parks may have limitations on whether volunteers are permitted to use specific types of equipment. See [Chapter 3: Safety Standards and Emergency Procedures](#) for additional information.

Further, hosts shall not perform tasks that appear harmful or hazardous. If hosts are uncomfortable with a task or job duty or feel like they have not received sufficient training, then they should talk with their host supervisor prior to performing the task. If a host is uncomfortable raising a concern with their volunteer supervisor, they should contact the park superintendent, regional director or State Parks statewide volunteer coordinator.

## **Requirements**

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### **Eligibility**

Hosts must be a minimum of 18 years old. Hosts are required to pass an annual criminal background check (CBC). Co-residents living with the host who are 18 or over are also required to pass an annual CBC. Hosts must meet the requirements of the host position they apply to and must have skills and experiences that qualify them for the position. Parks may have additional eligibility requirements based on the opening.

### **Application & Selection Process**

Each park manages their own application and selection process. Available opportunities are posted to the TPWD volunteer website at [www.tpwd.texas.gov/volunteer](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/volunteer). Potential hosts can search by park, region, or search term to find opportunities listed in their area of interest. Each opportunity includes the contact information of the host coordinator for the position. Call or email if you need additional information prior to applying. Once you find an opportunity/ies of interest, apply to the opening/s via the online system. First time applicants will need to complete a full application. Volunteers that have applied or been placed in opportunities previously will need to login and then submit their application to the opportunity of interest. If applying as a couple, each member of the couple will need to submit an application. Co-residents (18+) must also complete an application so a CBC can be done. For additional details on how to apply, check out this tool: [How to Apply Online to Texas State Parks](http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/cs_1f_p4000_2113.pdf) ([http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/cs\\_1f\\_p4000\\_2113.pdf](http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/cs_1f_p4000_2113.pdf)).

Potential hosts should include applicable work/volunteer experience and reference information on the application. Hosts and co-residents (18+) must give authorization for a CBC during the online application process. The park host coordinator or a designated park staff uses the following process to select hosts that best match the park's openings:

- Reviews applicant's background and qualifications submitted via the online application,
- Verifies that applicant has passed the CBC (HR will notify applicant of criminal history discoveries that lead to ineligibility and applicant will be given opportunity to appeal; applicant will not be eligible to volunteer during this process; volunteer coordinator will be notified of ineligible statuses),
- Conducts an interview with applicant to discuss availability, interests, skills, and experience (this is also an excellent opportunity for potential hosts to ask questions and learn more about the park and position), and
- Completes reference checks.

Prior to accepting a placement, make sure that you fully understand the job functions, basic schedule, and park policies.



## **Hours & Scheduling**

The minimum number of hours required per site for the host position is 24 hours a week. Parks may require up to 32 hours per site per week. In exchange for these hours, the normal fees for the host campsite with hook-ups are waived. The park host coordinator provides a schedule for each host. Host placements may include weekend, holiday, and early morning or evening hours. There is no expectation that hosts work above the required hours; if extra hours are desired, then hosts should coordinate additional tasks with the host coordinator and log all hours served. Talk with the host coordinator to receive additional information about hour requirements and schedules at the park before accepting the assignment.

Due to the location of host sites and the nature of the position, hosts should expect to receive questions from visitors whether on or off duty. When off-duty, hosts are still expected to engage with the public in a positive, friendly, and helpful manner and to notify staff of any issues in the park. If the host campsite has an off-duty sign, hosts should post the sign during their off-duty hours. Hosts must inform their supervisor if they cannot be available as scheduled due to illness or other reasons.

### **Logging hours**

State Parks recognizes that most volunteers do not donate their time and energy for recognition, but because they have a strong desire to give back to the state parks system. However, an accurate reporting of hours is not only a host job requirement and important in terms of recognition, but supports the ongoing viability of the volunteer program. It helps to fully demonstrate the amazing impact that hosts and other volunteers are making statewide and guarantees there is accurate data to report to the Texas Legislature so that State Parks can continue to maintain current volunteer program resources and advocate for additional support.

As part of basic job duties, hosts are expected to track hours through TPWD's online system. Hours should be submitted as soon as possible via the online portal at [www.tpwd.texas.gov/volunteer](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/volunteer). The system will not accept hours more than 45 days after the service was completed. Check out the How to Log Hours video at: <https://youtu.be/DXjTN9ISzJI>.

## **Length of Stay**

Host assignments are temporary and do not establish a host as a semi-permanent or permanent resident of the park, or create an expectation of future hosting assignments. Park host opportunities vary in length depending on the park needs. Hosts are required to serve a minimum of one month. A park may require a longer minimum based on the training requirements of the opening and needs of the park (this information will be included in the opportunity posting). Hosts may serve a maximum of six consecutive months at a park. The host placement may be extended with approval from the superintendent. The maximum unbroken length of service at a park is capped at 2 years. After an assignment, hosts must vacate that park for a minimum of one month prior to returning for a host opportunity at that same park.

Hosts shall give the park as much notice as possible when shortening or cancelling a placement.

## **Host Site**

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In exchange for service, hosts are provided with an assigned campsite and hookups at no cost. Hosts are generally assigned a site where they are clearly visible to the public and where they can provide the best service in relation to their assigned duties. Sites will be clearly marked as camp host sites.

## **Amenities**

Host sites have water and electrical hookups and most furnish sewer hookups. Access to laundry facilities, wi-fi availability, and other amenities vary from park to park. Talk with the park host coordinator about specific amenities prior to accepting a placement.

## **Occupancy**

Host site occupancy cannot exceed the maximum occupancy of the assigned site. If hosts will have additional adults (18+) residing with them during any part of their host tenure, they must receive prior approval from the host coordinator and the additional adults are subject to a criminal background check. Further, additional volunteer hours may be required for additional adults staying on site. Hosts must have reliable transportation to move their RV/trailer and must be able to move their RV/trailer at any time for work, scheduling, or emergency purposes. Park hosts may not use the park address as their residency address when applying to or updating their driver's license or other government-issued identification.

### **Hosts with minor children**

Hosts with guardianship of minor children may have their children reside with them at their host site during their host tenure. In accordance with state park regulations, a person younger than 15 years old who enters a state park, must be supervised by a parent, legal guardian, or other responsible adult over the age of 17 at all times.

Children may volunteer alongside their parent/guardian with the following limitations:

- Children's volunteer hours will not count towards the park host requirements, but can be logged under their name (for college applications, etc).
- Parents must sign an [Alternative Workforce Agreement](#) and [Parental Release and Waiver](#) for every child that will participate in volunteer activities.
- Children 15 and under must have a guardian/parent with them at all times when volunteering and may not operate any equipment.
- Children 17 and under may not drive or use any heavy equipment (including but not limited to chainsaws, state vehicles, UTVs, power-driven woodworking machines) or participate in any activity that may be deemed hazardous (roofing, etc.) in accordance with child labor laws.
- Children 16 and 17 may be approved to use light motor-driven equipment (lawn mowers, weed wackers, etc.) once they have received all necessary training.
- Children are expected to comply with all park rules and regulations and safety requirements.

### **Guests**

As outlined in the Texas State Parks Fiscal Control Management Handbook, State Park volunteers that reside in the park and their guests receive waived non-recreational entrance fees.

### **Pets**

House pets are permitted. Hosts must receive superintendent approval to have more than two pets at their site. Hosts must abide by all park regulations related to leash/restraint requirements and restricted areas. No dog pens or similar facilities for pets are allowed outside of the RV. Pets must be controlled at all times and hosts should be mindful of how pets may impact the visitor experience. Hosts must have proof of current rabies vaccinations for any cats or dogs accompanying them while residing in the park. These records must be ready for inspection upon orientation to the park and readily available if requested by park staff.

## Condition

Hosts are considered model campers for park visitors and must maintain a clean and organized campsite. RVs and cars cannot be cleaned on park property due to grey water runoff. The host cannot make any alterations or repairs to the site without receiving prior approval from the superintendent. No personal gardens or bird feeders are allowed at the park host campsite. Hosts must remove all personal property when vacating the site.

## Orientation, Training & Evaluation

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To be effective, hosts must be knowledgeable of park facilities, programs, and attractions. Hosts receive an initial orientation and ongoing training and evaluation.

### Orientation

The host supervisor will provide hosts with a tour and introduction to the park. Hosts should read all materials provided by the park, tour the park independently, and ask questions to become knowledgeable of the park. Hosts should become familiar with the area around the park, including local attractions and nearby grocery and shopping areas, so they can better answer visitor questions. Hosts will be introduced to park staff and other volunteers and will receive a list of staff contact information.

Hosts will receive the following materials as part of their orientation packet:

- General park map and brochure,
- Park specific brochures, including trail map, interpretive programming schedule, and park rules and regulations,
- Park Organizational Chart and staff contact information,
- Current fee sheet with camping/cabin cost information,
- Area resources list,
- After hours and emergency protocol, and
- Texas State Parks Guide.

Talk with the host supervisor if you have questions or need additional information. See [Appendix B: Park Arrival & Departure Checklist](#) for more information.

### Training

Hosts will receive a job description or job duty list. Hosts are trained by the host coordinator or their job supervisor regarding the specifics of their job duties. Safety training and sign-off is required before hosts begin using equipment. Experienced hosts may have received training at a previous park location, but will receive a review of specialized fiscal or equipment training. Depending on job duties, hosts may receive training in: customer service, cleaning procedures, opening and closing procedures, use of park radios, cash handling/fiscal procedures, and/or standard operating procedures (SOPs) for vehicles and equipment.

### Evaluation

Hosts will be evaluated informally throughout their assignment and receive a formal evaluation at least once during the host assignment. This allows the host coordinator to recognize successes and support hosts in areas where they need improvement or additional training. Hosts are encouraged to participate in evaluating the host program and to provide feedback to their coordinator.

### **Termination**

TPWD or the host may terminate the host placement at any time for any reason. Potential reasons for termination by the park may include: violation of state or federal laws, non-compliance with park rules and regulations, unwillingness or inability of host to perform duties or be a positive representative of the park, failure to fulfill hours of service commitment, or sudden unavailability of the site or position due to maintenance or mechanical issues or acts of nature. There are times when the park hosts and park/employees are not a good fit and therefore the hosts may not be asked to return to that particular park. Depending on the nature and severity of the cause for termination, a host may lose their eligibility to volunteer with TPWD.

### **Uniform**

Hosts will be provided with uniform items (uniform shirt, vest, hats, patches, and/or name badges) to clearly identify them as volunteers. Uniform shirts and vests provided by the park are State Park property and must be returned to the park at the end of service at that park. Hosts may keep hats and personalized name badges for future host assignments.

Restrictions for uniformed volunteers:

- Hosts shall not wear the uniform outside of duty hours. This does not apply to personal time required to commute to and from their assignment or for breaks taken during duty hours.
- Hosts shall not attend political meetings in uniform items, unless attending as a representative of State Parks as assigned by their supervisor.
- Hosts shall not wear uniform items while purchasing or consuming alcohol.
- Hosts shall keep all uniform items clean and in like-new condition to the best of their abilities. Remember, you are representing Texas State Parks. Wear your uniform with pride.
- Clothing items (i.e. pants/shorts/shoes) worn with uniform items must be professional, appropriate, and safe for the assigned volunteer duties as determined by the volunteer supervisor and/or superintendent. Hosts should wear closed toed and closed back shoes.

## Chapter 2: Policies & Procedures

*All volunteers and staff are expected to adhere to federal, state, and local laws and TPWD rules, policies, procedures, and regulations.*

### **Discrimination & Sexual Harassment Policy**

TPWD does not tolerate harassment or discrimination due to an employee's or volunteer's race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability, or involving retaliation for complaining or opposing such harassment or discrimination. Remarks, jokes, or other behavior, speech or action that could reasonably be determined to be derogatory or discriminatory are prohibited and will not be tolerated.

The Department will not tolerate sexual harassment of any employee or volunteer by another volunteer, employee, supervisor or other person with whom the individual may have contact as part of his or her duties. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature if:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's service to TPWD,
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Additionally, remarks, gestures, pictures, jokes, slurs or communications of a sexual nature, including sexual orientation, may be offensive to others. Such conduct is prohibited. If an employee or volunteer is given notice by any person that the content of any such communication is unwelcome, the communication must cease immediately upon notice.

For complaints regarding harassment or discrimination, please contact the host coordinator or superintendent immediately. If you do not feel comfortable notifying the coordinator or superintendent, please contact the Human Resources division at 512-389-8411 or 800-792-1112 and ask for Employee Relations.

### **Tobacco, Drug, & Alcohol Policy**

Smoking is prohibited in all State Park offices and other enclosed spaces, including state vehicles. The use, sale, manufacture, or distribution of a controlled substance on TPWD owned or controlled property or any other place within the scope of TPWD activities is strictly prohibited. Volunteers will not use or possess alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs while on duty or on any state owned or controlled property, including state vehicles. Hosts may consume alcohol in their RV when they are off duty, not in uniform, and not in view of the public. If a host has consumed alcohol, the host shall not return to work or assist visitors. If alcohol consumption interferes with the hosts' duties or schedule, the park host may be terminated.

### **Park Regulations**

Hosts must comply with all park rules and regulations. Violation of any rule or law may be grounds for termination. The most up to date statewide park regulations are available at [http://tpwd.texas.gov/spdest/parkinfo/rules\\_and\\_regulations](http://tpwd.texas.gov/spdest/parkinfo/rules_and_regulations). The park will provide hosts with information about additional park specific rules and regulations. Hosts may be authorized to provide non-

law enforcement information about park rules to campers but should never threaten consequences for not abiding by rules and should not approach a visitor about the same park rule more than once. If a host sees a violation occurring, they should contact staff immediately.

### **Artifacts and Archeology**

Many state parks contain historic or prehistoric artifacts. If an artifact is found, including but not limited to flint shards, arrowheads, historic bottles, or pottery, hosts shall leave it in place (location, depth, etc. are important archaeological information) and let park staff know immediately. If a visitor approaches with an artifact that has already been removed, the host should contact staff and request that the visitor show the location of where the object was found. Metal detecting in state parks is illegal.

### **Wildlife**

It is a violation of state law to feed or harass the wildlife in the park. At the discretion of the park superintendent, park hosts can inform visitors of this and shall encourage visitors to store food appropriately and maintain safe distance from wildlife. If hosts encounter a nuisance animal that is venturing close to visitors or entering buildings or tents, they should not approach the animal and should contact park staff immediately.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship refers to the responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. Hosts play a critical role in park stewardship by: being model campers; interpreting wildlife; teaching respect and proper distance, rather than perpetuating fear of insects or animals; sharing information and education about park resources and no trace practices; and informing staff of issues, concerns, or rule violations.

## **Use of State Property & Other State Resources**

Any equipment issued to a host (radio, transportation, keys, tools, etc.) remains the property of TPWD and may be redistributed by park staff as needed. State law and TPWD policy prohibit personal use of state property or other state resources. Hosts shall not use specialized equipment (transportation, tools, motorized equipment, etc.) without receiving proper training and sign off from designated staff.

When cell phones or cell service is unavailable, hosts may use TPWD desk phones for limited duration personal calls. For long distance calls, hosts must use calling cards. Further, hosts without access to Wi-Fi or a device with Wi-Fi may use a TPWD computer to log volunteer hours and apply to future host placements, and for personal use in short duration.

### **Use of TPWD Vehicles**

State Park volunteers who have a valid driver's license may operate TPWD-owned vehicles, at the discretion of the park superintendent, when it is part of their assigned volunteer duties and they have successfully completed all agency requirements, including training and review of safety procedures. Volunteers may only use TPWD-owned vehicles for carrying out TPWD business. A park may not have adequate vehicles to provide to hosts. Hosts may use their personal vehicle to carry out volunteer activities, if they are willing.

Volunteers are required to report all driving violations, incidents, or accidents that occur while operating state-owned vehicles. Driving a TPWD-owned vehicle is a responsibility and privilege, not a right. Volunteers must follow all procedures and protocols as directed by the park superintendent or designee to include vehicle safety, maintenance, operational use, and reporting (e.g. mileage and fuel). A volunteer's authorized driver status may be revoked at any time.

Pets are not allowed to ride in state vehicles, including UTVs, in order to reduce driver distraction, maintain cleanliness of vehicles, and reduce potential issues with other pets or visitors. Exceptions may be made for service animals, in emergency situations or when visitors require rides (lost/injured/stranded).

## **Open Carry**

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Hosts shall abide by the TPWD open carry policy for volunteers as follows:

**General Policy-** Members of the public are authorized to carry handguns in accordance with Texas state law in the areas of the Department that are generally accessible to the public. Department volunteers will not take actions to discourage members of the public from the lawful carrying of handguns in areas of the Department that are generally accessible to the public.

**On-Duty Prohibition for Volunteer Open Carry-** On-duty volunteers shall not openly carry handguns either on Department premises or while on-duty for the Department unless the volunteer has specific volunteer duties that require handgun handling and the volunteer is handling the handgun in the manner required for performing those volunteer duties. A non-commissioned volunteer holding a handgun license under Government Code Chapter 411 may possess a handgun on Department property if carried in a manner in which the presence of the handgun is not openly discernible to the ordinary observation of a reasonable person.

**Prohibition Relating to Department Clothing and Weapons-** A volunteer, whether on or off-duty, shall not wear any clothing, identification card, or other items identifying the volunteer as a Department volunteer while openly carrying a handgun. A volunteer with a job duty that requires the handling or transportation of handguns or other handgun equipment may possess that equipment while wearing an approved uniform or Department identification in a manner approved by a volunteer supervisor.

**Visitors to Non-Public Secure Portions of Department Facilities-** The Department may post signs designating non-public secure areas of Department facilities pursuant to Government code 411.207. Non-commissioned visitors to the designated non-public secure areas shall be directed to secure any personally owned weapons in their locked personal vehicle prior to entering a secure area.

Hosts are permitted to openly carry handguns during their off-duty hours. If a host is openly carrying during off duty hours, s/he:

- Must fully abide by the uniform prohibition in the open carry policy above and cannot have on any item that represents them as a park volunteer, including hats or pins.
- Must turn their host sign to off-duty, if applicable.
- Cannot use any vehicle or equipment that is TPWD property or that displays a TPWD logo or insignia (i.e personal vehicle with a park host magnet, rearview mirror hanger, etc.).
- Cannot be in the park with the intent of engaging with the public. A host may answer a question if approached, but should not approach members of the public while openly carrying. If responding to a question requires the host to engage in on-duty responsibilities (i.e. restocking toilet paper, assisting

with campsite needs, etc.) then the host must inform the visitor that s/he is off-duty and direct them to staff or other hosts. Alternatively, if the host decides to engage in on-duty activities, s/he should choose to inform the visitor that the issue will be taken care of and then proceed to conceal or place the handgun in a secure location (ex: in glovebox, in locked personal vehicle) and fulfill the request.

**Please note that different rules apply to Atlanta, Cedar Hill, Choke Canyon, Cooper Lake, Eisenhower, Lake Somerville, Lake Whitney, Martin Dies Jr., Ray Roberts and San Angelo State Parks.** Since these properties are under the authority of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, all volunteers and hosts at these parks must abide by the regulations located in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Register as follows:

327.13 Explosives, firearms, other weapons and fireworks.

(a) The possession of loaded firearms, ammunition, loaded projectile firing devices, bows and arrows, crossbows, or other weapons is prohibited unless:

- (1) In the possession of a Federal, state or local law enforcement officer;
- (2) Being used for hunting or fishing as permitted under § 327.8, with devices being unloaded when transported to, from or between hunting and fishing sites;
- (3) Being used at authorized shooting ranges; or
- (4) Written permission has been received from the District Commander.

Talk with the host coordinator for additional information about TPWD's open carry policy.

## **Confidentiality**

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Hosts may have access to sensitive data or confidential information concerning resources, finances, volunteers, employees, and park users, and hosts are expected to protect such information. Unauthorized use and/or disclosure of certain confidential or sensitive information may create legal liability, put natural and cultural resources at risk, and cause a loss of public confidence in TPWD. For the "Confidentiality Agreement for Volunteers," go to [http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdforms/media/pwd\\_1385\\_p4000\\_confidentiality\\_agreement\\_for\\_volunteers.pdf](http://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdforms/media/pwd_1385_p4000_confidentiality_agreement_for_volunteers.pdf).

## **Social Media Use**

Any posts that hosts make to social media websites (Facebook, blogs, Instagram, etc.) must not disclose information that is confidential or sensitive in nature. Hosts shall refrain from posting information about park emergencies, search and rescue operations, disciplinary actions, health issues, financial information, complaints or other information covered in the Confidentiality Agreement that refers to the park or TPWD.

## **Staff Relations**

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Hosts are part of the park team. A positive work environment helps to create a feeling of cooperation, respect, and open communication. Hosts shall abide by the following guidelines to help maintain positive staff relations:

- Hosts shall refrain from gossip. If a host is having a conflict or is confused or upset about something, then s/he should contact his/her volunteer supervisor or the park superintendent.
- Hosts are part of a team effort to operate, maintain, and steward the park. There is no task that belongs specifically to one host. Duties, vehicles, and equipment may be reassigned at any time based on park needs.



- Hosts shall only supervise or direct other volunteers or hosts when it part of their assigned job duties.
- Hosts shall be considerate of staff time. Host coordinators manage the host program as part of a much larger set of duties. Hosts shall schedule a meeting time with the coordinators to discuss any concerns or recommendations.

# Chapter 3: Safety Standards and Emergency Procedures

*Safety is the responsibility of all employees and volunteers.*

## Risk Management

Hosts are expected to comply with all TPWD safety standards and guidelines. The TPWD Safety Program is committed to preventing death, injury and illness of employees, volunteers and the visiting public through accountability, commitment and training by providing the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge to prevent personal injuries and damage to or loss of state property. **Activities that violate accepted safety standards are prohibited and may be grounds for immediate termination.**

Park hosts shall read the TPWD Safety Program Manual. The park safety officer or other designated staff will review all applicable sections of the TPWD Safety Manual with the park host in greater detail. Initial and ongoing training is mandatory to help ensure that hosts are familiar with safe work practices. Specialized training must be completed and records maintained for hosts using motor driven vehicles or specialized equipment, such as chainsaws.

Basic safety protocol that hosts are expected to follow:

- Get training. Prior to using equipment, hosts must learn the standard operating procedures (SOP) for that equipment and demonstrate proficiency in use of equipment. Designated staff will review the SOP with hosts and provide training on appropriate use and required personal protective equipment (PPE) when operating the equipment.
- Always use necessary PPE. The park will provide necessary PPE to hosts (i.e. gloves, protective glasses, etc.). If hosts are unsure of what PPE an assignment requires, they should talk with staff. If hosts do not follow SOP and PPE protocol, they may be prohibited from future use of equipment and will receive disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- Be smart and be aware. Hosts shall become informed of environmental hazards (i.e. wildlife, extreme weather, falling trees, or similar) and any current restrictions (i.e. burn bans, closed trails, etc.). If hosts see an unsafe or hazardous condition, they should notify staff immediately.
- Ask when unsure. If hosts believe they need re-training or additional training, are unsure of a rule or regulation, feel like a job task is outside of their capabilities, or have a question about safety, they should talk with their supervisor.
- Take care of yourself. Hosts should be prepared for weather conditions, stay well hydrated, use sunscreen and bug spray, and rest when needed.
- Know the plan. Hosts should read and become familiar with each park's Emergency Plan.

Parks will provide information on park-specific emergency procedures, emergency phone numbers, and after hours protocol. See [Appendix C: Stay Safe Checklist](#) for more safety tips.

## Environmental Hazards

Each park and each season comes with unique environmental hazards. Hosts will receive information on hazards specific to their park environment (i.e. excessive poison ivy, falling trees, flood zones, etc.) and should monitor environmental conditions carefully. Heat and weather emergencies are environmental

hazards that impact all parks and are reviewed below – talk with staff to receive additional information about these and other environmental hazards.

### **Heat related illness or emergencies**

The best defense against heat related illness or emergency is prevention. Hosts should stay well hydrated and should encourage visitors to drink water and carry sufficient water during recreation activities. During high heat seasons, hosts should restrict outdoor tasks to cooler morning or evening hours and should cease work immediately if they are feeling overheated.

### **Weather emergencies or natural disasters**

If a state park ranger perceives a potential threat to life and/or property, the host must comply with all orders, including immediate evacuation.

## **Accidents and Injuries**

If a host witnesses or is informed of a visitor, volunteer, or staff injury:

- For serious or life threatening injuries or illnesses, call 911 first. Once emergency services have been notified, contact the park law enforcement officer or park staff.
- For minor injuries or accidents, contact the park law enforcement officer on duty or the park headquarters. If the event happens after hours, hosts should follow the after-hours protocol provided by the park. If staff are not present, hosts should collect the who (including contact information of involved parties), what, when, why, and where of an accident or injury, so that staff can follow-up if needed and an accurate incident report can be completed.

Hosts involved in a serious or life threatening accident themselves should call 911 and inform park staff as soon as reasonably possible after receiving care. For minor injuries, hosts should notify park staff and seek necessary care. It is very important that hosts notify staff as soon as possible so that an incident report can be completed.

If an injury or accident occurred because of an environmental hazard or equipment issue, hosts should notify staff immediately and monitor or mark the area/equipment, if possible, to reduce risk of additional injury. Park staff will complete an incident report for all injuries and accidents.

If hosts are involved in an equipment or structural accident that does not cause injury, they should halt work and notify staff immediately. Equipment should be inspected prior to re-use. For vehicle accidents, hosts should follow the procedures outlined in the Driver Safety Program.

## **Insurance and Legal Immunity**

Volunteers are not employees of TPWD or the State of Texas and thus are not covered by worker's compensation. However, TPWD purchases insurance policies to provide protection to volunteers engaged in approved activities. TPWD maintains a medical accident policy and a liability policy for volunteers who are injured while performing volunteer work or who cause damage to a third party, respectively. It is important to note that these policies only provide excess coverage for expenses not covered by the volunteer's own insurance. Additionally, the law provides volunteers with immunity from liability in some circumstances. These options are explained below:

**Volunteer Medical Accident Policy**

This policy provides coverage for designated or registered volunteers for most medical expenses and most types of accidental bodily injuries that occur while the volunteer is engaged in a TPWD supervised and sponsored activity.

**Volunteer Excess Liability Policy**

This policy provides coverage in situations where a registered volunteer is liable to a third party for damages (bodily injury, property damage, personal injury) from a covered accident or injury; the coverage includes damages and legal defense of the volunteer.

**Statutory Liability & Immunity**

Texas Parks and Wildlife Code §11.0281 provides that TPWD is liable for property damages, personal injury, or death caused by volunteers operating TPWD motor-driven vehicles or motor-driven equipment in the scope of their volunteer activities. Volunteers are immune from liability, unless their conduct is intentional, willfully negligent, or done with conscious indifference or reckless disregard for the safety of others. TPWD will pay up to \$100,000 for each single occurrence for property damage, and up to \$250,000 for each person and \$500,000 for each single occurrence for bodily injury or death.

For additional information on volunteer insurance policies or liability, see [Appendix D](#). Report all injuries and accidents to park staff and talk with your volunteer supervisor or the park superintendent if you need to file a claim.

# Appendix A: Park Host Job Duties

All hosts are expected to:

- Represent Texas State Parks in a positive manner and supplement the work of park staff;
- Provide excellent customer service to park visitors, including providing information about the park and local resources;
- Maintain cleanliness of assigned areas, including keeping assigned bathrooms cleaned and stocked and collecting trash from assigned camp loops; and
- Maintain safety standards of the park and abide by all rules and regulations.

In addition to the above tasks, hosts may assist in more specialized roles based on park needs, the skills of the park host, and at the discretion of the park superintendent. These may include but are not limited to the following:

**Park Maintenance (general)** – This position’s primary focus is to assist the park maintenance team in performing routine park maintenance. Duties may include but are not limited to mowing, landscaping, trail maintenance, minor repair and painting projects, cleaning of restrooms, campsites, and other facilities, and picking up litter in the park.

**Park Maintenance (specific)** - This position’s primary focus is to assist the park maintenance team in performing skilled park maintenance and will also include general park maintenance tasks listed above. Based on experience, skills, interest, and need, hosts may be assigned to one specific work category or assist with a variety of projects. State law requires certain licensures for specific tasks such as electrical and/or plumbing repairs. Host must receive staff approval prior to working on specialized projects. Duties may include:

Mechanic – performs routine skilled mechanic work on park vehicles, heavy equipment, and small engine equipment. This position requires professional level knowledge, skills, and abilities related to performing mechanical repairs. The host inspects and maintains park vehicles and equipment to include monitoring fluid levels, performing oil changes, and ensuring equipment is clean, safe and ready for use.

Carpenter – performs skilled labor by maintaining park structures including buildings, boardwalks, decks, docks, and fishing piers. This position requires professional level knowledge, skills, and abilities related to performing carpentry and woodwork.

Plumber – performs skilled labor by maintaining park restrooms, water, and wastewater systems. This position requires professional level knowledge, skills, and abilities related to performing plumbing, to include knowledge of commonly used plumbing tools and repair techniques, ability to sweat copper lines, ability to change plumbing fixtures and flush valves, and the ability to perform physical labor such as digging holes and repairing water lines.

Painter - performs skilled labor by maintaining, staining, and painting interior and exterior structures. This position requires professional level knowledge, skills, and abilities related to painting and the necessary preparatory work to maintain aesthetics and prevent deterioration of structures. The host should be able to use all painting equipment including airless sprayers and texturing equipment, understand various methods for making repairs to sheetrock and deteriorated wood, understand how to properly prepare a surface for treatment, and understand caulking and weather sealing.

**Park Host - Safety** - This position's primary focus is to assist the Park Manager/Additional Duty Safety Officer in performing routine safety duties. Duties include but are not limited to performing site and structure safety checks in accordance with the site's safety manual. This position requires general knowledge related to evaluating conditions within structures for proper function and the ability to clearly communicate both verbally and in writing regarding facility condition.

**Customer Service Host** - This position's primary focus is to assist the office staff in performing customer service and clerk duties. Duties include but are not limited to acting as a front line resource for customer service, answering phone calls, monitoring self-pay stations after hours, collecting fees, stocking and selling merchandise, and renting equipment to park visitors. This position requires experience in customer service, money handling, multiline phone use, and computer proficiency.

**Interpretive Park Host** - This position's primary focus is to assist the park interpreter with interpretive and outreach duties. Duties include but are not limited to acting as a front line resource for customer service, preparing and presenting thematic programs to visitors, and performing roving interpretation. This position requires experience with public speaking and knowledge of or willingness to learn park-specific interpretive themes.

**Outreach/ Diversity & Inclusion Ambassador Park Host** - This position's primary focus is to assist park management in performing community relations and outreach duties. Duties include but are not limited to acting as a front line resource for customer service, preparing and presenting outreach presentations in the local community, and attending local event, public schools, technical schools, colleges, job fairs, and other avenues to reach a broad and diverse audience as a representative of the Texas State Parks system. This position requires general knowledge related to interacting with the public in a courteous manner, public speaking, and knowledge of outreach to broad and diverse audiences.

## Appendix B: Park Arrival & Departure Checklist

Each hosting experience is a new and exciting learning and serving experience. Use this checklist to get acquainted with your park and the hosting experience. Even if you are a host returning to the same park, this checklist is a great tool to guarantee you have the most updated information.

### Prior to your start date:

- Thoroughly review the Texas State Parks Host Manual.
- Talk with park's host coordinator to fully understand host duties, expectations, amenities, and policies of the park.
- Communicate immediately with the host coordinator if your availability changes.

### When you arrive:

- Receive and review the following materials (talk with your coordinator if you don't receive something on this list):
  - Park maps and brochure
  - Interpretive Programming Schedule and park interpretive guide/materials, if park has one.
  - Park specific rules and regulations
  - Park organizational chart and staff contact information
  - Current fee sheet with camping/cabin cost information
  - Info on after hours protocol and emergency protocol, including emergency contact numbers
  - Texas State Parks Guide
  - Area resources list
- Receive a park tour with a staff member, including introduction to staff and other volunteers.
- Take a park tour on your own. Get to know the resources and layout of the park both in the day and nighttime. The better you know the park, the better you can explain it to others.
- Tour the local area. Get to know the area resources and attractions. The better you know the area, the better you can explain it to others.
- Receive uniform items and keys.

### Ongoing:

- Provide excellent customer service to park visitors. When you don't know an answer, find someone who does.
- Complete assigned tasks and adhere to assigned schedule.
- Abide by host policies and procedures, park rules and regulations, federal, state, and local laws, and park safety guidelines. Ask if you have questions.
- Receive ongoing training on equipment or tasks related to your job duty.
- Maintain a clean host site.
- Log volunteer service hours.
- Serve, learn, live, and have a great time volunteering at the park!

### When you leave:

- Clean your campsite.
- Return any items that were checked out to you (uniform shirts, keys, etc.).
- Receive and give feedback about your hosting experience.
- Head to your next adventure!

*Thank you for your service to Texas State Parks!*

# Appendix C: Stay Safe Checklist

## *Always Plan Ahead AND Know & Express Your Limitations*

### 1. Know Your Limit:

- a. Sprains and strains, as well as slips, trips and falls are the most common workplace injuries at TPWD. You will earn respect, better health and productivity for following this guidance:
  - i. Do you know how to **properly and safely** lift, hold and carry whatever you are working with or will be working with? Always ask for a demonstration.
  - ii. Have you learned how to lift, hold and carry?
  - iii. Have you asked for help to lift, hold and carry?
  - iv. Have you informed your supervisor of any limitations you have that might impact your ability to perform certain duties?

### 2. Respect Your Gear:

- a. Do you know the right tools for the job you are about to perform? Do you know how to **properly and safely** use them?
- b. Do you know what the right vehicle is for the job you are about to perform? Do you know how to **properly and safely** use it?
- c. Do you know how to **properly and safely** clean and maintain these tools?
- d. Do you know how to **properly and safely** clean and maintain these vehicles?
- e. Did you return the right tool to the right place?
- f. Did you return the right vehicle to the right place?
- g. Is everything secure? Safely stowed? Not within range of anything hazardous or dangerous? Look up, down and all around to make sure. Ask for help if unsure.

### 3. Keep an Eye on Safety:

- a. **Plan ahead:** what is your route and destination? When will you arrive and return? Does your supervisor know? How will others reach you if you have not checked in regularly? Use radios (are they charged up?); do not rely on cell phones only.
- b. Are you wearing protective head, eye, ear, snake boots and other body gear?
- c. Where is the first aid kit? What will you do if you get injured?
- d. Assess potential hazards: know the terrain – do you have a map? compass? flashlight? GPS?
- e. Do you have enough water and food?
- f. Do you know of other sources of water at or near your route or destination?

### 4. Are You Good to Go?

- a. Have you inspected your vehicle? Fluids and tire pressure ok? Lights, brakes and horn work ok? Is the key in a secure place so you won't lose it?
- b. Have you inspected your gear? Are blades sheathed? Gear secured so it will not fly off?



- c. Have you been in this part of Texas before? If not, have someone explain the potential hazards of terrain, animals, reptiles, vegetation, etc. Have a knowledgeable staff or volunteer show you the way first.
- d. Will you be located in an area where cell phone or radio communications are possible? Make sure to have properly functioning communications equipment, with adequate battery charge and reception.
- e. If you will be in a remote location, consider traveling and working with another person.

## Appendix D: TPWD Volunteer Insurance Coverage & Statutory Liability Protection

**NOTE:** This summary of coverage is based on policies in effect from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017, and legislation that became effective on September 1, 2015. This summary does not replace, alter or amend the coverage provided by policies currently in effect. Coverage is subject to change after the current policy period; please consult with Division Volunteer Coordinator with questions.

### INSURANCE

**Volunteer Medical Accident Policy** - covers designated or registered volunteers for most medical expenses and most types of accidental bodily injuries that occur while the volunteer is engaged in a TPWD supervised and sponsored activity.

#### ***Limits:***

- Maximum benefit per accident is \$50,000
- Treatment for dental services, including repair or replacement of dentures, is limited to \$5,000, up to \$250 a tooth
- Physical therapy is limited to \$100 per office visit, up to \$2,500
- Accidental death and dismemberment benefit of up to \$10,000

#### ***Exclusions (not all listed):***

- Pre-existing conditions are not covered.
- Eyeglasses, contact lenses, hearings aids, dentures bridges and orthodontic equipment are not covered.
- Treatment for hernia, appendicitis, cardiac conditions or disease and “congenital weakness” are not covered.
- Accidents that occur while a volunteer is traveling from home to a volunteer assignment are not covered.
- Volunteers operating equipment as part of their volunteer services must have any required licenses or certifications.
- The initial treatment or service must be within 90 days of a covered accident; treatment or services taking place more than a year after the accident are not covered.

**Volunteer Excess Liability** - covers situations where a “registered volunteer” is liable to a third party for damages (bodily injury, property damage, personal injury) from a covered accident or injury; the coverage includes damages and legal defense of the volunteer. A registered volunteer is one who has been accepted to perform volunteer services and whose name has been recorded on a TPWD roster of volunteers.

#### ***Limits:***

- Each occurrence limit of \$1,000,000
- Annual aggregate limit of \$3,000,000

#### ***Exclusions (not all listed):***

- Auto accidents, even if a volunteer is driving his or her personal auto
- Operation of recreational vehicles (e.g. golf carts, All-Terrain Vehicles, riding lawnmowers, etc.)
- Operation of watercraft
- Damages to the volunteer’s property
- Inmates or individuals on a work release program

**Statutory Liability & Immunity** – Senate Bill 381, which passed during the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session in 2015, enacted Parks & Wildlife Code §11.0281. Section 11.0281 provides that TPWD is liable for property damages, personal injury, or death caused by volunteers operating TPWD motor-driven vehicles or motor-driven equipment in the scope of their volunteer activities. Volunteers are **immune** from liability, unless their conduct is intentional, willfully negligent, or done with conscious indifference or reckless disregard for the safety of others. TPWD will pay up to \$100,000 for each single occurrence for property damage, and up to \$250,000 for each person and \$500,000 for each single occurrence for bodily injury or death. This is sometimes referred to as TPWD being “self-insured.”

**FAQs**

**What does “excess coverage” mean?** Excess coverage is “extra” coverage beyond what a volunteer already has coverage for under their personal insurance. A volunteer will be reimbursed within the limits of the volunteer policies for covered expenses that exceed the volunteer’s own insurance coverage.

**How does the claims process work?** If the damages result from a volunteer’s operation of a TPWD motor-driven vehicle or motor-driven equipment, the supervisor should contact the Legal Division. The appropriate attorney will assist with forwarding the claim to the Office of the Attorney General.

For other types of damages, including injuries suffered by the volunteer, the supervisor should work with the Division Volunteer Coordinator to fill out the appropriate claim form and submit it through the State Office of Risk Management (SORM).

**Is a volunteer covered while operating their personal vehicle for a volunteer assignment?** Yes and no. TPWD has no insurance coverage or statutory protection for volunteers who cause damages to others while operating their personal vehicle. However, if the volunteer is injured, they can submit a claim under the Medical Accident Policy.

**Is a volunteer covered while operating a TPWD All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV), Utility-Type Vehicle (UTV), or Neighborhood Electric Vehicle (NEV)?\*** Generally yes. If the ATV, UTV, or NEV is motor-driven, then the volunteer is immune from liability for damages caused while operating it, and TPWD would be liable for the damages. Additionally, if the volunteer is injured while operating it, they can submit a claim under the Medical Accident Policy. *\*Some divisions may prohibit volunteers from using ATVs, UTVs, etc. without prior approvals and/or training. Contact your division volunteer coordinator for additional information.*

**Is a volunteer covered if operating mobile equipment such as lawnmowers, forklifts, backhoes, tractors?** Generally yes. If the equipment is motor-driven, then the volunteer is immune from liability for damages caused while operating it, and TPWD would be liable for the damages. Additionally, if the volunteer is injured while operating the equipment, they can submit a claim under the Medical Accident Policy.

**Can a volunteer operate a TPWD-owned watercraft?** No, unless the volunteer shows proof of liability insurance applicable to a government-owned watercraft. There is no insurance coverage or statutory protection for volunteers who cause damages to others while operating a TPWD watercraft. A volunteer would be covered under the Medical Accident Policy for his or her own injuries, up to the \$50,000 limit, but not for injuries or liability to others. As a result, volunteers should not be allowed to operate TPWD-owned watercraft without providing proof of liability insurance that is applicable to a government-owned watercraft.

**Can a volunteer operate his or her personally owned watercraft?** Yes. The excess liability policy will cover a volunteer operating personally owned (non-TPWD) watercraft that are less than 26 feet long, as long as they are not carrying passengers for a charge.