



Volunteer Program Action Plan

General Recommendations

As identified in the park's Strategic Plan 2019–2023, the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (CHOH) will engage volunteers and other stakeholders who are focused on the implementation of shared priorities that align with the park's vision, goals, and capacity. The Strategic Plan directs the park to “*Assess existing and proposed volunteer programs and operations to ensure alignment with the park goals and strategies, including best practices*” (Goal 3, Strategy 2, Action 1).

In order to focus resources and staff capacity on individual volunteer programs that have the highest level of alignment with the park's strategic plan and provide the highest level of visitor service, the park will make adjustments to the volunteer program. These adjustments can be found in Appendix A.

A top priority for the park is to bring its volunteer program into full compliance with current law and policy, specifically Director's Order #7: Volunteers-In-Parks (DO-7) and its corresponding Reference Manual #7 (RM-7). The park has already begun implementing recommendations from the National Capital Area's June 24, 2019 Volunteer Program Assessment Report (VPA) to ensure compliance and is committing to have all of the law and policy recommendations in place by no later than September 1, 2020. A second priority for the park is to continue strengthening the program by implementing the best management practices listed in the VPA.

This action plan will review the key recommendations in the areas of supervision, communication and recognition, job descriptions, training, and safety and oversight. The action plan also includes a schedule for implementing the recommendations that are based on current law and policy. Throughout the action plan, the park will focus on the quality of the volunteer program rather than the quantity of volunteers; staff will recruit and retain a volunteer workforce aligned with park needs and goals.

Supervision

All NPS staff, volunteers, and partners deserve to have an effective supervisor. The park is committed to ensuring that all volunteers have appropriate supervision. Supervisors will be properly trained in how to manage volunteers and how NPS policy relates to volunteers. Supervisors will be given enough time to appropriately manage volunteers.

In order to ensure volunteers have effective supervisors, supervisory training will be recommended for all staff that supervise volunteers, and will be required for staff that supervise volunteers whose combined hours of service equals or exceeds 6,261 hours per year (i.e., those of three full time employees).

The park will refocus its efforts to strengthen the individual volunteer programs that most directly support the park's strategic plan and corresponding visitor needs. This summer, the park's management team will make sure volunteer programs are aligned with the correct division and assign an NPS staff person to supervise the volunteers in that program. The park's organization chart and a clear chain of command will be communicated to the volunteers.

In order to help staff prioritize their time working with volunteers, all staff that supervise volunteers will have volunteer coordination added to their employee performance appraisal plan (EPAP), as well as their division's annual work plan. Additionally, the park will reclassify the position description of the volunteer coordinator in the Palisades District to allow that staff person to spend up to 80% of their time on volunteer coordination.

For many years, the park focused on simply increasing the number of volunteers. While the park has been successful for many years with this strategy, it also had drawbacks. Now, the park is refocusing and will work to strengthen and improve the quality of each program. By providing structure and a team atmosphere between park staff and volunteers, our hope is that the volunteers will have a more enjoyable and deeper connection to the park. To create the structure necessary for the volunteer program to be successful, the span of control will be reduced to meet NPS staff capacity. Supervisors of volunteers will create regular schedules for the volunteer programs and require a certain number of hours for each type of volunteer position. These requirements will ensure the park's resources are focused on peak visitor times and will provide improved visitor services. Appendix B of this action plan details the maximum staffing levels for specific volunteer programs, as well as the individual volunteer time commitment for those programs.

Communication and Recognition

The park recognizes the need to improve two-way communication between the park and volunteers. Therefore, the park will develop a communication strategy to ensure effective communication at all levels of the volunteer program. This communication strategy may include the use of newsletters, annual meetings, a listserv, website updates, social media posts, and monthly email updates. Since the volunteer program is spread across a large area, and in several different divisions, the most effective means of communicating with volunteers may vary based on the individual program.

Each NPS supervisor of volunteers will develop and maintain an email list of volunteers in their programs. This will allow supervisors to have regular direct communication with volunteers. To

provide as much timely and accurate information as possible, NPS staff will communicate directly with volunteers, rather than using the volunteer Gmail accounts.

All volunteer programs will hold an annual meeting. The annual meetings will be an opportunity for NPS staff to recognize volunteers for their accomplishments, provide park updates and refresher training, review position descriptions, review program performance, and allow volunteers to provide feedback in person.

In addition to regular communication and the annual meeting, NPS staff that work with volunteers will spend at least one immersion day per year in the field with each program they supervise. For example, NPS staff that work with the Bike Patrol will spend a day patrolling with the volunteers; NPS staff that work with the Weed Warriors will spend a day removing invasive vegetation with the volunteers; etc.

Job Descriptions

Job descriptions, commonly called position descriptions by the park, are a key part of the Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA or OF-301a). The park's volunteer position descriptions will be standardized to include at least the job title, supervisor(s), location, minimum hours requirement, goals of the job, job duties, skills needed, training requirements, benefits to the volunteer, and how the volunteer will be evaluated. VSAs also include contact and emergency contact information, liability and other legal information, job hazard analysis (if applicable), and other pertinent information. The park will develop professional and ethical standards of the workplace that will be attached to each VSA and reviewed with each volunteer annually. The park will reach out to other parks, such as Jewel Cave National Monument, for examples of standards that are already established or are being established.

VSAs will be valid for one year and will be reviewed annually by park staff to ensure that the position is still relevant and meets a park need. Additionally, the position description attached to the VSA, will be reviewed annually by park staff to ensure it correctly captures the scope of the specific volunteer position. Each volunteer's performance will be evaluated in person annually, allowing for important two-way feedback.

Other recommendations in this section of the Volunteer Program Assessment Report are addressed in the "Supervision" and "Communication and Recognition" sections of the park's action plan.

Training

Training is essential to ensure volunteers are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. Training happens in many ways: formally and informally, in the classroom and on the job, and both in writing and verbally.

NPS supervisors of volunteers will review and update existing volunteer training and develop new volunteer training as necessary. NPS supervisors of volunteers will participate in volunteer training sessions as much as possible. When appropriate, volunteers will be approved to lead training in coordination with NPS supervisors of volunteers. The training materials and guidelines will be housed in a shared drive so that as NPS staff transition, the materials will be readily available to new staff.

The park will require a “CHOH 101” training for all new volunteers and will offer the training as a refresher to current volunteers. This training will include basic park information, history, safety, volunteer policies, and other information appropriate to each program. Volunteers will also continue to be trained in how to use a park radio and how to communicate with Dispatch and local emergency services (911).

The park will continue to offer continuing developmental opportunities to current volunteers in the form of the VIP Speaker Series and training sessions at the different volunteer program annual meetings. These trainings will help volunteers develop skills applicable to their respective program (e.g. training on Audience-Centered Experiences interpretation) or will deepen volunteers’ knowledge of park resources (e.g. training on geology or canal engineering).

The CHOH volunteer handbook serves as a reference guide for volunteers and NPS staff. The park will update the handbook in accordance with the recommendations laid out in the Volunteer Program Assessment Report and share it with all current volunteers via email and at the annual volunteer program meetings.

Safety & Oversight

Volunteers should only perform work for which they are qualified, adequately trained, comfortable doing, willing to do, and that is part of their written job description.

Certain volunteer activities are considered hazardous, and therefore require a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA). These hazardous activities include operating a chainsaw, working with mules, and operating canal boats. All volunteer programs will be assessed using the Green-Amber-Red (GAR) model, and a complete JHA library will be developed. GARs and JHAs will be completed by NPS supervisors of volunteers and the Volunteer Program Manager in consultation with the park Safety Officer.

The park will continue to offer Operational Leadership training opportunities to volunteers at least annually. Additionally, the park will evaluate each program to determine whether Operational Leadership should be required (e.g., all boat program volunteers could be required to take Operational Leadership training). The park will develop other safety training for volunteers, based on the specific volunteer activity, and may include Go-No-Go, or a condensed volunteer program specific operational leadership type training.

Volunteers assist the park in providing safety information to park visitors, and, when certified, can provide first aid. The park will ensure that volunteers are acting within their training and certification and will develop a reporting procedure for use in cases when they provide a visitor with first aid. A “First Aid Report Form” is being developed by the Chief Ranger’s office. Once it is complete, the Visitor and Resource Protection (VRP) office will work with NPS supervisors of volunteers to ensure that volunteers are trained in completing and submitting the form anytime they administer first aid.

Volunteers are directed to contact Dispatch or 911 in cases of emergency. However, coordinating with local public safety agencies, outside of an emergency, is the responsibility of the U.S. Park Police (USPP) and the CHOH VRP division. Additionally, while park volunteers provide safety information to visitors, Search and Rescue (SAR) is not within the scope of the park’s volunteer programs. SAR responsibilities fall under the responsibility of the USPP and VRP division. In order to function as an EMT or First Responder, volunteers must be credentialed through the Chief Ranger’s office.

Other recommendations in this section of the Volunteer Program Assessment Report are addressed in “Appendix A” of the park’s action plan.

Relevant Policies

Since compliance with current law and policy is a top priority for the park, we have listed those specific recommendations below along with the responsible staff and a completion deadline. The recommendations based on best management practices will be worked on over the next year and have been laid out in the written text.

The following chart lists the law and policy recommendations found in the Volunteer Program Assessment Report:

Law and Policy Recommendation	Responsible Staff	Completion Deadline
Review volunteer program policies and park’s alignment with them and establish local policies where warranted. (DO-7, RM-7)	Volunteer Program Manager	12/31/2019
Collect the same type of data for each program. (DO-7 § 12, RM-7 § 12)	NPS Supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	12/31/2019
Share chain of command annually with volunteers. (DO-7, § 14; RM-7, § 3)	Superintendent's Secretary sends to NPS supervisors of volunteers, NPS supervisors of	10/1/2019, and then annually thereafter

	volunteers send to volunteers	
Ensure Volunteer Coordinator at Great Falls is working under appropriate position description. (HR Policy 19-07)	Chief of IEV and Palisades District Interpretive Supervisor	12/14/2019 (Date to transition to new PDs)
Ensure responsible and appropriate supervisory span of control over volunteer programs. (DO-7, § 3.6)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Initial completion by 4/1/2020
Ensure updated Volunteer Service Agreements are on file for each volunteer. (DO-7, § 4; RM-7, § 4)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Volunteers will be transitioned to new version of Volunteer Service Agreement (OMB 0596-0080 v1) with completion by 9/1/2020; then renew annually
Update and/or develop position descriptions for each volunteer program. (DO-7, § 4; RM-7, § 4)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Initial completion by 12/1/2019; then ongoing
Implement system for annual volunteer performance reviews appropriate for each volunteer program. (RM-7, § 15)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Initial completion by 9/1/2020; then annually
Update or develop program guidelines and training materials for NPS staff who manage volunteer programs and approved volunteers who assist with training. (DO-7, § 15; RM-7, § 12 and 15)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Initial completion by 4/1/2020; then annually
Require volunteer training (“CHOH 101”) such as: park information, history, safety, volunteer policies, and other information appropriate to each program. (DO-7, § 8; RM-7, § 6)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	Initial completion by 9/1/2020; then annually
JHA's for hazardous volunteer activities: chainsaw and <i>Mercer</i> boat operations and mule care. (RM-7, § 8)	NPS supervisors of volunteers and Volunteer Program Manager	The park will issue a safety stand down immediately for hazardous activities, and volunteers will not be allowed to perform these activities until a JHA is issued.
Report volunteer medical action plan to visitor accidents properly (any volunteer who provides first aid to a visitor). (DO-50B; RM-50B)	Chief Ranger and NPS supervisors of volunteers	Completion by 9/1/2020

Appendix A

In order to focus resources and staff capacity on individual volunteer programs that have the highest level of alignment with the park's strategic plan and provide the highest level of visitor service, the park will make the following adjustments to the volunteer program:

Western Maryland District

The Western Maryland District includes volunteer programs in Brunswick, Williamsport, Hancock, and Cumberland.

- The park will work to identify partners to independently manage the following programs by December 31, 2020:
 - Lockhouse 75 (FY19: Program not active)
 - Hancock Visitor Center (FY19: 21 volunteers, 190 hours)
 - Brunswick Visitor Center (FY19: 1 volunteer, 43 hours)
- The park will assess the volunteer program at Lockhouse 70 by December 31, 2020 and will explore additional opportunities to interpret this lockhouse for the public. (FY19: 1 volunteer, 38 hours)

Palisades District

The Palisades District includes volunteer programs in Great Falls.

- The Interpretive Rovers and Great Falls Tavern Visitor Center programs will be combined to include all visitor service volunteers in Great Falls by November 1, 2019. This new Visitor Service program will be expanded to include both static and roving interpretation.
 - Interpretive Rovers (FY19: 4 volunteers, 129 hours)
 - Tavern Visitor Center (FY19: 24 volunteers, 1817 hours)
- The Great Falls Bike Loaner Program closed on October 1, 2019. The park will explore other options such as nonprofit partners, concessionaires, or commercial entities to deliver a similar experience. The program will not reopen as a volunteer program. (FY19: 49 volunteers, 532 hours)
- The park discontinued the volunteer Flagger Corps as of October 1, 2019. In recent years, the park has moved to contracting out maintenance projects that require flagging. Contractors are required to provide their own flaggers as part of the contract. (FY19: Program not active)
- The park will increase the number of volunteers who serve as Billy Goat Trail Stewards to meet identified needs for increased visitor safety on BGT.
 - Billy Goat Trail Stewards (FY18: 28 volunteers, 1379 hours)

- The park will reduce the number of volunteers in the Palisades Bike Patrol program to align with staff capacity.
 - Palisades Bike Patrol (FY19: 143 volunteers, 5960 hours)

Headquarters Based

The Headquarters Based programs includes programs parkwide that are coordinated by the Volunteer Program Manager and other staff at CHOH HQ.

- The park will transition the Canal Steward Program to be independently managed by the C&O Canal Trust over the next 12 months (FY19: 17 volunteers, 1240 hours)
- The park will move the following campground program under the Visitor & Resource Protection division, which manages the campgrounds: Camp Hosts (FY19: 5 volunteers, 960 hours)

Appendix B

To create the structure necessary for the volunteer program to be successful, the span of control will be reduced to meet NPS staff capacity. NPS supervisors of volunteers will create regular schedules for the volunteer programs and require a certain number of hours for each type of volunteer position. These requirements will ensure the park's resources are focused on peak visitor times and will provide improved visitor services. Appendix B of this action plan details the maximum staffing levels for specific volunteer programs, as well as the individual volunteer time commitment for those programs. These numbers are based on FY19 NPS staffing levels and are subject to change based on future staffing levels.

Western Maryland District

Volunteer Program	FY19 Number of Volunteers per Program	Maximum Volunteer Staffing Level per Program	Individual Volunteer Time Commitment
Williamsport Visitor Services	29	30	60 hr/yr
Williamsport Bike Patrol	26	35	40 hr/yr
Trails & Rails	19	25	24 hr/yr
Cumberland Bike Patrol	12	20	40 hr/yr
Cumberland Visitor Services	11	12	60 hr/yr

Palisades District

Volunteer Program	FY19 Number of Volunteers per Program	Maximum Volunteer Staffing Level per Program	Individual Volunteer Time Commitment
Great Falls Visitor Services	24	30	100 hr/yr
Interpretive Boat Crew	0	15	80 hr/yr
Palisades Bike Patrol	143*	70	40 hr/yr

Billy Goat Trail Stewards	28	45	40 hr/yr
Mule Volunteers	2	6	100 hr/yr
EMS Patrol	2	4	75 hr/yr
PSAR Tech	0**	5	75 hr/yr

*In FY19, 36 Palisades Bike Patrol volunteers had a minimum of 40 hours of service. In FY18, 65 Palisades Bike Patrol volunteers had a minimum of 40 hours of service.

**Program was not active in FY19, this is a new FY20 initiative.

Headquarters Based

Volunteer Program	FY19 Number of Volunteers per Program	Maximum Volunteer Staffing Level per Program	Individual Volunteer Time Commitment
Weed Warriors	3	15	35 hr/yr