



WELCOME TO
VOLUNTEERISM AND SERVICE
WITH THE USDA FOREST SERVICE



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This guide is intended to highlight how the American public can engage in valuable volunteerism and service activities with the USDA Forest Service to accomplish our mission of caring for the land and serving the people.

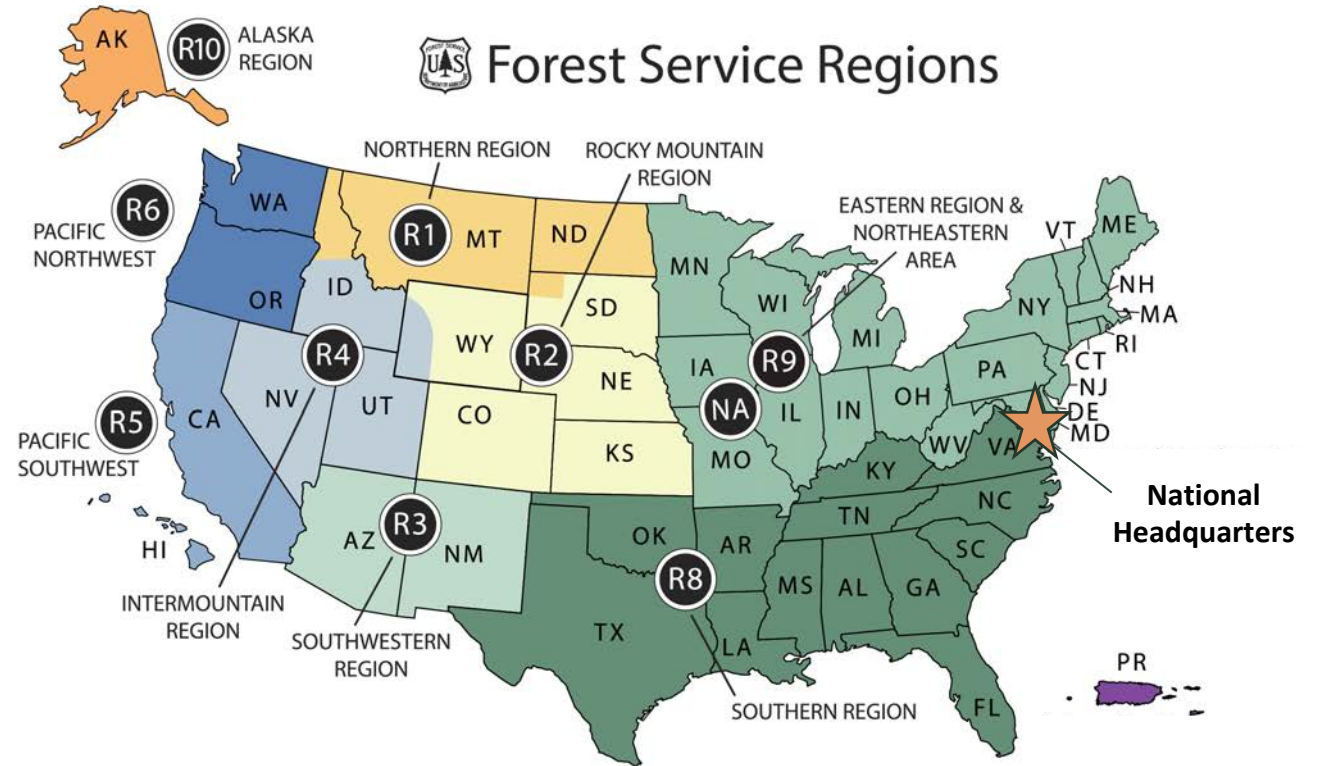
Volunteers assist the USDA Forest Service to remain strong, safe, healthy, relevant, and accessible.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service offers volunteer opportunities for people of all ages with varying levels of skill, ability, or interests. Since 1972, over 3 million volunteers and service participants have provided more than 130 million hours of service to support the USDA Forest Service mission.

Volunteerism and service are critical agency assets that enable the Forest Service to successfully achieve its mission.

OVERVIEW OF USDA FOREST SERVICE

- Established in 1905, the mission of the USDA Forest Service is “to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”
- The National Forest System (NFS) Program Area is divided into 9 regions, 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands, covering 193 million acres of land in 44 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.
- Over 20% of the U.S. water supply originates on Forest Service land. National Forests are the single most important source of water in the U.S., providing over 6 million Americans with drinking water.
- The State and Private Forestry (SPF) Program Area is the federal leader in providing technical and financial assistance to state forestry organizations and private landowners, and oversees firefighting and prevention activities.
- The Research and Development (R&D) Program Area is internationally recognized for cultivating natural resource knowledge management and learning.



“Caring for the Land and Serving People”

VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

There are a wide variety of volunteering and service opportunities that can meet your talents and interests or help you to learn new skills.

CAMPGROUNDS



- Serve as a Campground Host to maintain sites and facilities, and manage campground safety
- Coordinate stewardship and cleanup events
- Monitor developed recreation and wilderness sites

VISITOR CENTERS



- Greet and share information with visitors
- Respond to inquiries and provide interpretive talks
- Perform administrative and information technology tasks
- Manage interpretive displays and provide safety requirements

TRAIL WORK



- Maintain and clear trails, remove hazardous trees
- Perform routine checks and updates as a local steward
- Monitor and provide trail condition reports, photos, GPS locations, and descriptions
- Support recreational trail maintenance for biking, hiking, ski and other trails

CONSERVATION



- Conduct inventory of wildlife and plants
- Serve as a fire lookout to spot wildfires
- Build and repair fences, nest boxes, picnic tables, and other structures
- Rehabilitate special natural areas, glades and wetlands

EDUCATION



- Facilitate tours and experiences for visitors
- Deliver environmental education and interpretive programs
- Represent the Forest Service at public events and schools
- Develop informational resources

SPECIAL PROJECTS



- Use Geographic Information System (GIS) to map geological landmarks and other projects
- Survey and track wildlife
- Provide large-scale data collection for science literacy and shared knowledge through [Citizen Science](#)
- Observe and explore changes to ecosystems through Bioblitz events

ONE-DAY AND SPECIAL EVENTS



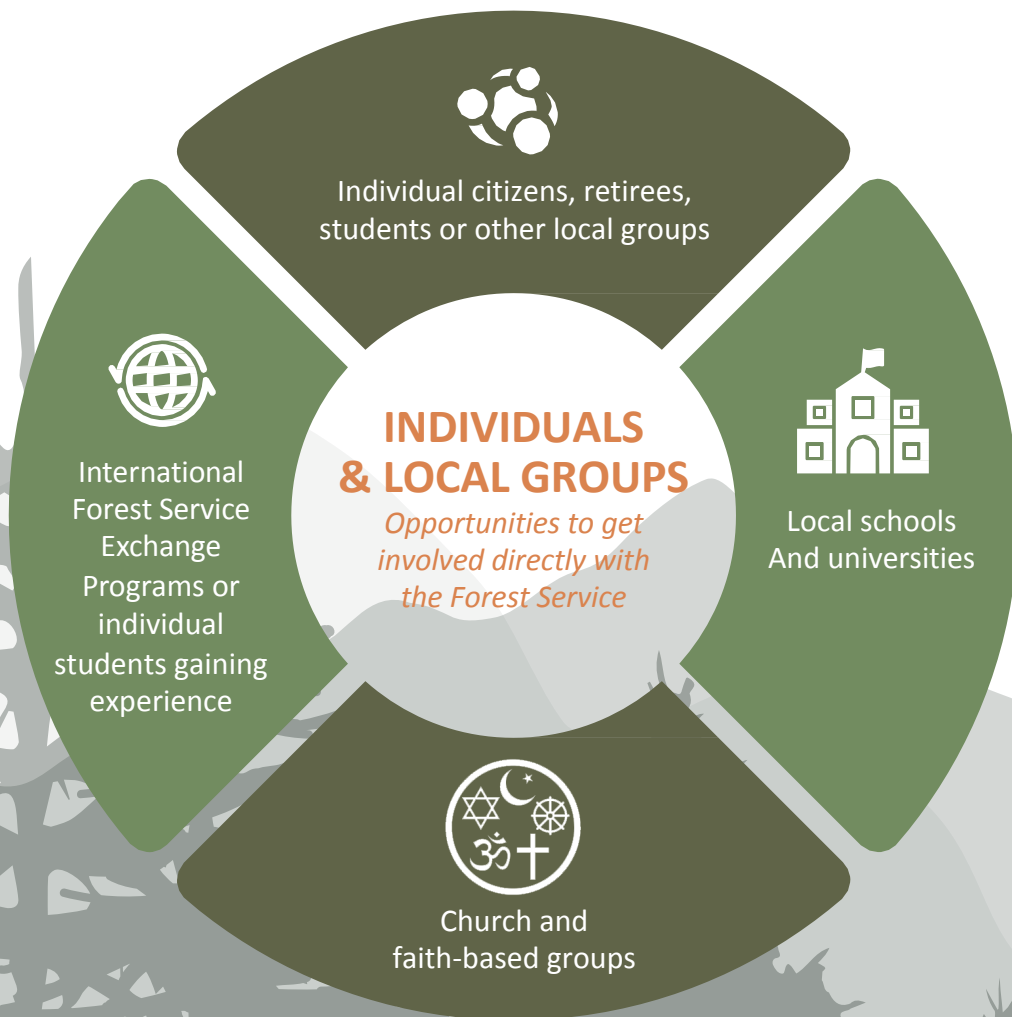
- Serve as booth or table host at school events or community festivals
- Participate in days of service projects, such as National Public Lands Day, Get Outdoors, or National Trails Day
- Host a friends meetup to clean up a site

PATHWAYS TO VOLUNTEERING AND SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

The Forest Service provides opportunities for individuals, groups and partners to perform volunteerism and service activities on a local Forest Service unit or office. The following chart provides more information about the different types.

| | <h2>VOLUNTEERING</h2> <p>Volunteers do not receive salary or wages, but may be reimbursed for approved, out-of-pocket expenses.</p> | <h2>SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES</h2> <p>Service participants receive remuneration, or wages, stipends, and other benefits.</p> |
|---|---|--|
| <h3>INDIVIDUALS & LOCAL GROUPS</h3> <p><i>Opportunities to get involved directly with the Forest Service</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer opportunities under direct supervision of Forest Service staff require a Volunteer Agreement Form, or OF301a, to authorize engagement. Individuals or groups who freely donate time, talent, and resources as a volunteer must sign a volunteer agreement form, or OF301a. • The Volunteer Agreement form must specify service expectations, requirements, safety, and any reimbursements that the Forest Service may approve. • Individuals who volunteer as part of a local group or organization may also be engaged through a volunteer agreement form. Many Friends groups, faith-based groups, schools and universities, and businesses volunteer through group volunteer opportunities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service opportunities, under the oversight of Forest Service staff, engage participants in work-based, educational, and professional development opportunities through formal programs that offer remuneration as part of the experience. • Generally, projects are short-term and seasonal in nature. Many Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) crew members, young adults ages 15 to 18, are directly hired by the Forest Service to engage in paid summer employment. | |
| <h3>PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS</h3> <p><i>Opportunities to get involved through Forest Service Partners</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner organizations can recruit and manage volunteers on behalf of the Forest Service. Partner led volunteer projects must be authorized under a cooperating agreement. • Partner-led volunteer opportunities include individuals or groups who volunteer as part of a larger organization, corporation, State or local government. • Partner-led volunteer opportunities can include individuals or groups who volunteer as part of a larger organization, corporation, State or local government. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner organizations sponsor service opportunities to engage individuals or teams in workforce development activities that offer stipends, living allowances, and other benefits as part of service. Projects may be short- or long-term. • The 21CSC is a partnership initiative that provides paid opportunities for young adults and veterans to acquire work skills through hands-on service and job training experiences. | |

PATHWAYS TO VOLUNTEERING OR SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)



7 HOW TO GET INVOLVED

1 FIND

INDIVIDUALS & LOCAL GROUPS

- Check opportunities on [Volunteer.gov](https://www.volunteer.gov), your local unit or community webpages and calendars and meetup boards for a project near you.
- Attend a volunteer informational meeting.
- Join local groups who sponsor projects.
- Search special announcements for YCC or Resource Assistant Program opportunities on the Forest Service website.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Learn about partner organizations that sponsor opportunities.
- Consider programs hosted by agencies like the Veterans Administration (VA) and opportunities through our 21st Century Conservation Corp (21CSC).

2 CONTACT

- Contact your Forest Service volunteer coordinator or other staff directly.
- Visit a Forest Service field office, email staff, or submit interest and questions on [Volunteer.gov](https://www.volunteer.gov).

- Contact local partner organizations to learn about programs and projects.
- Become knowledgeable about specific application processes and eligibility requirements.

3 ENGAGE

- Submit an OF301 Volunteer Application to identify your strengths, time availability, certifications and interests.
- Negotiate and sign a volunteer agreement.
- Identify and understand the potential safety issues prior to beginning the work. Follow all project and safety requirements.
- Regularly check in with your Forest Service unit and be sure to report your accomplishments and hours to your local Forest Service contact. Opportunities are available for individuals and local groups to be recognized for exemplary work.

- Follow the application process and eligibility requirements and submit materials by the deadline.
- Identify and Understand the potential safety issues prior to beginning the work. Follow all project and safety requirements
- Regularly check with your host organization and be sure to report your accomplishments and hours. Opportunities are available for partners and participants to be recognized for exemplary work.

For further questions, contact the USFS volunteer coordinator on your unit or in your region.



Qualifications

Anyone can volunteer, but minors need parental consent. The Forest Service staff negotiating and approving volunteer agreements will determine if there are certain qualifications for each volunteer assignment.



Training

You will receive the proper training to ensure you have the knowledge and skills necessary to complete tasks adequately and safely.



Timekeeping and Accomplishments

It is important for you to record the number of hours you serve and work accomplished. Your agency or partner contact will tell you how and where to report your timekeeping.



Uniforms

You may need to wear a uniform or special attire if you have frequent contact with the public so they can identify you as an agency representative. The Forest Service or partner will provide a uniform or a uniform allowance.



Expenses and Reimbursements

You may be eligible for reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses related to transportation, food, and certain miscellaneous expenses. Some service participants receive remuneration for their efforts.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED | RELEVANT TERMS



Volunteer.gov

A national, centralized portal where land management agencies, including the USDA Forest Service, post volunteer opportunities searchable by city, state, agency, and interest.



Partner-led Volunteer

Individuals or groups, who freely donate time, talent, and resources, to perform duties to support Agency projects, except firefighting, law enforcement and union representation; engaged as part of a larger organization, corporation, State or local government, or other entity. The host organization collaborates with the Forest Service through a cooperating or partnership agreement.



Service Participant

Forest Service participants are individuals, teams or crews, who receive remuneration for service to perform duties to support Agency projects, except firefighting, law enforcement and union representation perform; designed to promote increased awareness about natural and cultural resources.



Direct Volunteer

Individuals or groups, who freely donate time, talent, and resources, to perform duties to support Agency projects, except firefighting, law enforcement and union representation; engaged directly through a Volunteer Service Agreement (OF-301a).



Job Hazard Analysis (JHA)

A procedure that focuses on project tasks as a way to identify hazards before they occur by examining the relationships between the worker, the task, the tools, and the work environment.



Region

The USDA Forest Service is divided into nine (9) regions; regional office staff coordinate activities between national forests and grasslands, monitor activities on those lands, provide guidance for forest plans, and allocate budget to the forests.



USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

USDA and its Agencies, offices, employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.



Campground Host

Volunteers that live for extended periods of time on public campgrounds and are responsible for providing friendly service and recreational information to the public, collecting data, and maintaining facilities, among other possible duties.



Volunteer Service Agreement

Outlines the project goals, agreement period, and responsibilities of your volunteer position, and must be signed prior to your volunteer service.



Volunteer & Service Participant Rights

The Forest Service appreciates the work of volunteers and service participants and acknowledges that individuals should receive appropriate assignments, safe conditions, meaningful tasks, orientation and training, supervision and support, recognition of service, respect, and the development of individual potential. The Forest Service reserves the right to terminate a participant at any time.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE POPULATIONS

The USDA Forest Service provides opportunities for all Americans to contribute with special emphasis on youth, seniors, tribal and other native groups and emerging professionals

Opportunities for Veterans



Veterans Fire Corps (VFC)

- The VFC is a collaborative initiative that builds upon the knowledge, leadership experience, and training of men and women who served in the armed forces, retraining them and refocusing their mission to protecting public lands from the threat of wildfire.
- The Forest Service partners with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), Conservation Legacy (CL), and Student Conservation Association (SCA) to operate the Veterans Fire Corps.
- As part of their service, Veterans receive a living allowance, lodging, food, workers compensation insurance, and can also enroll in the AmeriCorps college education awards program.

Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults



21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC)

- The 21CSC is a partnership initiative that provides paid opportunities for young adults and veterans to acquire work skills through hands-on service and job training experiences. 21CSC is designed to develop a generation of skilled workers who are educated and active citizens to serve as stewards of natural and cultural resources.
- The USDA Forest Service Resource Assistants Program (RAP) is a rigorous and immersive paid internship for U.S. citizens or permanent residents who are at least 17 years old, interested in natural and cultural resources careers. Resource assistants are recruited by partner organizations into unique experiences to launch careers and to gain stewardship values under the supervision of Forest Service staff.

Opportunities for Tribal and Native Groups

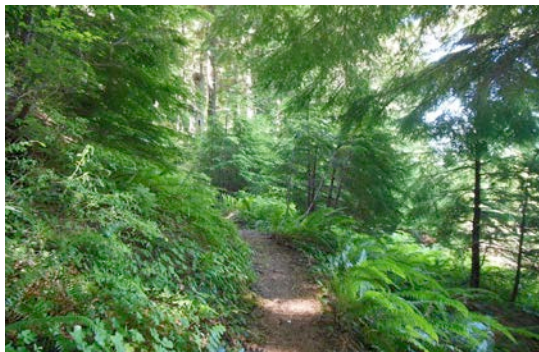


- Tribal engagement through Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Nicolet National Forest provides opportunities for tribal youth to support recreation and wilderness initiatives. The program's objective is to introduce young people to explore natural resources management through habitat restoration in their own community, with a commitment to tribal sovereignty. Youth receive a minimum wage stipend for summer employment.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE POPULATIONS (CONTINUED)

The USDA Forest Service provides opportunities for all Americans to contribute with special emphasis on youth, seniors, tribal and other native groups and emerging professionals

Opportunities for Seniors



Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services ([ACES](#))

The Forest Service ACES Program provides opportunities for non-federal experienced workers, age 55 and older, to assist with technical aspects of conservation-related programs executed on or directly impacting National Forest System land. ACES enrollees are recruited by partner organizations and can work to support a variety of Forest Service programs.

Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities



Finger Lakes National Forest YCC

- Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests YCC: The forest hosts residential crews of teenagers from the Lexington School for the Deaf to work on restoration projects and learn about wilderness practices in Vermont and New York. Residential YCC programs make it possible for underserved youth from urban and rural communities who are not within commuting distance of a forest to experience and make connections to the great outdoors, with the opportunity to earn a minimum wage for hours worked.

Opportunities for Rural Communities



Appalachian Trail Conservation Leadership Corps

- Groundworks USA and the Appalachian Trail Conservation Leadership Corps field crews jointly work on segments of the Appalachian Trail in Virginia and North Carolina. This project is part of renewed Forest Service efforts to address backlogged maintenance work on historical trails across the country.

MEET SOME OF OUR PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS



Volunteer Group Participation

Friends of Sandia Mountains (FOSM)

- 📍 Sandia Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands. Albuquerque, NM
- 📅 Started: 1996

Friends of Sandia Mountains (FOSM) is a volunteer organization affiliated with the Sandia Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest and National Grasslands. Established in 1996, the organization has grown to a membership of 144 volunteers and in its tenure has become an invaluable partner to the Forest Service and to larger community of Albuquerque. With a focus on conservation and education activities within the Sandia and Mountainair Ranger Districts of the Cibola National Forest, they have been instrumental in helping the Cibola meet its targets and improve services/safety to the community. As a group, they contribute to almost every discipline on the Forest (Trails/Wilderness, Facilities, Safety, Wildlife, Recreation, Forestry, and Heritage programs). FOSM also leads partner groups like the Youth Conservation Corps to provide assistance in projects around the district.



Resource Assistant, Conservation Education through The Greening Youth Foundation

Farjana Islam

- 📍 Washington, D.C.
- 📅 Started: 2017

Farjana contributes to mission critical work of the Forest Service by coordinating the Health and Nature Navigators program, a pilot initiative conducted in conjunction with Park Rx America, which seeks to connect patients, providers, and the greater health care community to nature and their national forests by leveraging the park prescription movement. Her duties involve the promotion of health benefits in nature and explaining the connections between forest health and human health. She also engages the community in citizen science activities and Project Learning Tree/iTree activities with Woodsy Owl to inspire environmental stewards to lend a hand, and care for the land.



Lead Volunteer Interpretive and Conservation Education Ranger

Joe Murray

- 📍 Deschutes National Forest. Bend, Oregon
- 📅 Started: 2002

You will regularly find Volunteer Ranger Joe up at Mt. Bachelor in the Deschutes National Forest during the summer and winter months educating the public about the geologic landscape of the Cascade Mountain Range and high-desert wildlife and ecology, as well as providing glimpses of Central Oregon's rich cultural history. In the past 6 years alone, Ranger Joe served 1,015 volunteer hours and had 2,453 people in his formal program talks and represented the Forest to 1,768 people. He also mentors new volunteers, champions efforts to expand program capacity and serves as a volunteer ambassador helping to promote to local communities and businesses. Joe's unwavering commitment to serving Deschutes National Forest knows no bounds and we are truly grateful for his service and for being a friend to the Forest.



HR Intern for Region 5 Staffing

Laconya Mitchell-Carr

- 📍 Vallejo, CA
- 📅 Started: 2018

"I am an Air Force Veteran and recent college graduate who desires future federal employment as an HR Specialist. The U.S. USDA Forest Service has provided me with a unique learning opportunity by exposing me to the role of an HR Specialists in the federal civil service workforce. I am grateful for the training and job knowledge that my mentors have provided, and look forward to assisting all of the Region 5 customers with excellent HR support services."

“Conservation is a state of harmony between [people] and land.” ~ Aldo Leopold

For more than 100 years, the Forest Service has brought people and communities together to answer the call of conservation. From retirees to youth groups to conservation organizations and partners, the Forest Service is deeply grateful for the shared stewardship of volunteers and service participants to conserve the public lands legacy for future generations. We would not be able to accomplish our mission without the invaluable and extensive volunteerism and service contributions. As members of the Forest Service community... employees, volunteers and service participants alike are mindful of how our core values are starting points for spurring dialogue, finding common ground and building enduring relationships.

Forest Service Core Values

Service: to each other, to the American people, to the planet

Interdependence: of all things - people and nature communities and colleagues; the past, present and future

Conservation: protection when necessary; preservation when appropriate; restoration, when needed; and wise management for multiple use and enjoyment, always

Diversity: people and cultures, perspectives and ideas, experiences and ecosystems

Safety: in every way—physical, psychological and social

- The Forest Service believes in service - to each other and the planet; the connections of people and nature; that conservation means we protect, preserve and restore public lands for the people and their enjoyment; that diversity is key—people and cultures, experiences and ecosystems; and safety is at the heart of everything we do.
- Thousands of partnerships, projects and programs with citizens, organizations, Friends Groups, and many others help the Forest Service every day to steward public lands.
- Whatever your interest, location, level of experience, or age, you are welcome to join a legacy of service on our public lands. This is your opportunity to give back to your community, to experience nature and learn more about our resources, and to meet new people. The Forest Service needs your help to care for the land and serve people.

www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/volunteers

www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/opportunities-for-young-people

www.volunteer.gov

CONTACT

For more information regarding volunteerism and service, please visit fs.fed.us/working-with-us/volunteers or contact your local [Forest Service unit](#). Check out [Discover The Forest](#) for more information on Forest Service units in your area.



~TRANSFORMING YOUTH~

TYO

~OUTDOORS~

This guide has been created by TYO: Transforming Youth Outdoors in partnership with the USDA Forest Service.