

# VOLUNTEER

— HANDBOOK —



— HANDBOOK —

# Handbook Version

This is the 2023 version of the Volunteer Handbook,  
<https://fpdcc.com/volunteer/volunteer-training-leadership/#documents>

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# Welcome!



As a Forest Preserves of Cook County Volunteer, you have joined a dedicated team of more than 500 employees and more than 1,000 volunteers in our efforts to protect and preserve nearly 70,000 acres of open space, a place where Cook County residents can create their own adventure.

It is a fundamental responsibility of each member of our Forest Preserves team to serve as an ambassador to help our visitors discover and learn about their forest preserves, both as a destination and as a taxpayer-supported unit of government. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, skills and time to help us share one of our nation's greatest treasures.

*Arnold Randall, General Superintendent*

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Welcome and thank you for choosing to volunteer with us. It is our pleasure to welcome you to an amazing community of volunteers. Your generous gifts of time, energy, special skills and passion are deeply appreciated.

## **OUR MISSION**

The Forest Preserves Volunteer Program mission is to offer pathways for people to care for and connect to the Forest Preserves.

## **OUR PURPOSE**

The Volunteer Resources team exists to build and sustain pathways for engaging a volunteer community that supports the mission of the Forest Preserves.

## **OUR VALUES**

We celebrate our volunteers' many contributions as well as the countless health and economic benefits the Forest Preserves provide.

We believe that when volunteers are connected to meaningful roles that align with the Forest Preserves mission, they become valued ambassadors for the Forest Preserves.

Our volunteer community should reflect the vast and wonderful diversity of Cook County.

We will continue to seek out volunteers with varied skills and experience, providing numerous opportunities to cultivate growth and enrichment.

We will be effective and efficient in our use of resources, and make the best decisions for our land and all living things.

Thank you again for your volunteer service.

- The Volunteer Resources Team

# The Forest Preserves of Cook County

More than 100 years ago, as our young metropolis was quickly expanding, civic leaders in Chicago had the wisdom and foresight to create the first forest preserve in the nation. Their mission remains ours today:

*“To acquire, restore and manage lands for the purpose of protecting and preserving public open space with its natural wonders, significant prairies, forests, wetlands, rivers, streams, and other landscapes with all of its associated wildlife, in a natural state for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public now and in the future.”*

The Forest Preserves of Cook County, with nearly 70,000 acres, is the oldest and largest forest preserve district in the United States. It receives an estimated 62 million visits each year, providing an escape into a world teeming with wildlife and rich with outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities.

Although Cook County is one of the most densely populated areas in the country, it is the most ecologically diverse county in Illinois. The protected open spaces of the Forest Preserves of Cook County are a big reason both those facts can be true.

Our prairies, woodlands, wetlands and savannas are home to native plants and wildlife, including more than a hundred threatened or endangered species. And more than 20 sites within the Forest Preserves have been designated as an Illinois Nature Preserve—the highest level of protection for natural lands in the state.

The Forest Preserves also keeps our communities healthy. Diverse, restored native ecosystems help filter air and water, making our county a better place to live. And each year, the Forest Preserves has the capacity to absorb more than 1.5 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere—as much greenhouse gas as driving more than 330,000 cars for a year—and help prevent extreme flooding after heavy rainfall.

People of all ages and interests can relax, get active, or just have fun in the Forest Preserves of Cook County. From cross-country skiing to horseback riding to mountain biking, the Forest Preserves has more than 300 miles of paved and unpaved trails for year-round enjoyment.

## **Stay connected to the Forest Preserves**

The Forest Preserves website ([fpdcc.com](http://fpdcc.com)), Facebook ([facebook.com/fpdcc](https://facebook.com/fpdcc)) and Twitter ([twitter.com/fpdcc](https://twitter.com/fpdcc)) are great resources to find information about the Forest Preserves and volunteering.

## Our Volunteer Community

You are part of a community of volunteers who come from all corners of Cook County and from different faiths, cultures and ethnicities. The common thread that connects us is a love of nature and a commitment to ensuring that the Forest Preserves are here for future generations to enjoy. Volunteers make a positive impact by engaging with visitors at nature center events, patrolling our trail systems, stewarding the land through restoration and litter cleanup, monitoring plant and animal populations and so much more. Volunteers are integral to the existence of the Forest Preserves.

We value volunteers as vital partners. You will have proper orientation, training and supervision to meet the responsibilities of your position, have a clear understanding of your role and how it fits into the overall mission of the Forest Preserves, receive recognition for work done, and be treated with respect.



## What We Expect from You

Forest Preserves volunteers agree to actively perform their duties to the best of their abilities and to abide by the policies and procedures of the Forest Preserves. When you join our volunteer team, you agree to the following:

### **VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT AND WAIVER**

- **Volunteer Role** - I am donating my time for this volunteer role and I understand that in this role, I am not an employee of the Forest Preserves of Cook County (“Forest Preserves”) and I will not receive compensation for this donated time. I also understand that volunteering does not necessarily lead to employment.
- **Volunteer Duties** - I will follow all the rules and regulations of the Forest Preserves and will follow all directions and instructions given to me by Forest Preserves staff and/or certified volunteer leaders.
- **Limitation of Extent of Duties** - I am not authorized to enforce the rules and regulations of the Forest Preserves but will notify Forest Preserves staff when violations of rules and regulations are observed.
- **Conduct** - I will conduct myself in a professional manner and present a positive image of the Forest Preserves. This includes being respectful and helpful to other Forest Preserves visitors, other volunteers and Forest Preserves staff.
- **Media Contact** - In my role as a volunteer, I understand that I do not represent the Forest Preserves in an official capacity and will not write or speak to the media on the behalf of the Forest Preserves.
- **Volunteer at Will** - I understand that my participation in this volunteer program is subject to the above statements and to all rules and regulations of the Forest Preserves. Failure to follow directions and instructions or violation of any of the rules, regulations or policies can result in discipline or immediate dismissal from the program.
- **Reporting Hours** - I recognize that reporting my volunteer hours is important to the success of the volunteer program and will do my best to report them on a regular basis.  
*(see Appendix p.13)*

### **ATTENDANCE**

To make sure that events and activities are adequately staffed by volunteers, we depend on you to complete your scheduled shifts. We do understand that from time to time certain situations may arise that prevent you from doing so. Please alert your contact/leader of any scheduled absences—such as vacation—as far in advance as possible so that an appropriate substitute may be found. In the event of an unscheduled absence—illness or emergency—please alert your contact/leader as soon as possible.

### **DRESS CODE**

As a Forest Preserves volunteer, you are an ambassador for the organization. Please use your judgement to dress appropriately for the activities you will be performing. If you’re ever unsure about what to wear, just ask your contact/leader.

## **USE OF FOREST PRESERVES PROPERTY**

All Forest Preserves property must be used for authorized purposes only. This includes, but is not limited to, facilities, keys, computers, telephones, chainsaws, brush cutters, and back pack sprayers.

## **NON-DISCRIMINATION**

The Forest Preserves is committed to ensuring that all members of the public who are served by Forest Preserves volunteers are treated equally.

Volunteers shall not unlawfully discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, age, religion, disability, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, veteran's status, military discharge status, source of income, housing status, or gender identity.

## **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Sexual harassment is prohibited in the provision or use of Forest Preserves services, facilities and programs. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: (1) submission to such conduct is either a term or condition of the provision of Forest Preserves services, facilities or programs; (2) submission to or rejection of the conduct is used as a basis for making decisions affecting the provision of Forest Preserves services, facilities or programs; or (3) the conduct has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment for the provision of Forest Preserves services, facilities or programs.

If you feel you have been discriminated against or sexually harassed as a Forest Preserves volunteer, you should report the incident immediately to your contact/leader<sup>1</sup> or Volunteer Resources or Lisa Huge, Director of Compliance<sup>2</sup>.

## **GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTION OF MINORS**

Minors are defined as anyone under 18

- Avoid being alone with a minor where you cannot be observed by Forest Preserves staff or other adults. You should not be alone with a group of minors under any circumstance
- Avoid transporting minors in your vehicle.
- Avoid physical contact with minors.
- Informed written consent from parents/guardians and verbal agreement, where appropriate and possible, from the minor should always be sought before a photo is taken for any purpose.
- If you believe someone has perpetrated abuse or neglect, immediately and confidentially report such violation to your local law enforcement agency.

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<sup>1</sup> Your contact/leader could be a Forest Preserve staff person or a volunteer leader such as a Site Steward

<sup>2</sup> Contact Lisa Huge, Director of Compliance at 69 W. Washington, Ste. 2010, Chicago IL 60602 or by calling 312-603-0037.

## **SMOKING RESTRICTIONS POLICY**

Smoking is prohibited in all buildings and vehicles owned, controlled, and/or operated by the Forest Preserves. Smoking is not permitted within at least 15 feet of any entrance to a Forest Preserves public facility and/or place of employment.

## **ALCOHOL AND DRUGS**

Volunteers are prohibited from using, possessing, or being under the influence of any alcoholic beverage/drug, or illegal substance while volunteering.

# **We'll Support You**

## **Background Checks**

We value the safety of our volunteers, staff and the public we serve. Because of this, certain volunteer roles require a criminal background check. When a role requires a background check, it will be noted in the opportunity. We do not do background checks for individuals under the age of 18. Results are securely stored, and access is available only to Forest Preserves staff who have a need to know.

## **Mandated Reporter Training**

In compliance with the state Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, volunteer leaders (Stewards, Workday Leaders, and Seed Collection Leaders) who work with children are now required to complete Mandated Reporter Training by the State of Illinois. If youth attend workdays you are leading, including those accompanied by parents or chaperones, you are required to complete the training. Mandated Reporter Training provides training on how to recognize and report child abuse and neglect.

## **Orientation**

An orientation is an overview of the Forest Preserves Volunteer Program and Volunteer Resources team. Orientation sessions are a great way to formally welcome you as a new volunteer and to get you acquainted with the responsibilities and expectations of your volunteer role.

## **Training**

Training should prepare you for the responsibilities and expectations of your volunteer role. Your contact/leader will provide the training necessary to help you complete volunteer tasks safely and effectively. Training can range from a short on-the-job session to a series of classes and mentoring, depending on the needs of your role.

We encourage volunteers to pursue training opportunities that will foster their personal development and allow them to take on new volunteer roles with additional responsibilities. Some training opportunities are combined into pre-defined development paths. For example: Ecological stewardship volunteers can complete a series of trainings on the Path to Stewardship.



## **ID Cards**

ID cards are automatically issued by Volunteer Resources to volunteers in certified positions (Ex. Site Steward, Workday Leader, Chainsawyer, Herbicide Applicator/Operator, and Brush Pile Burn Boss). ID cards for other general volunteers can be requested through your Volunteer Resources. ID cards are issued on an annual basis. You should carry your ID card at all times when volunteering.

## **Parking Permits**

Certain volunteers will receive a parking permit as part of their role. These permits do not authorize illegal parking or parking when the Forest Preserves are closed (without prior approval). Unauthorized parking can result in a citation and fine.

## **Lines of Communication**

We believe in open and honest communication. If you have a question, problem or suggestion, you will receive fair and objective consideration without fear of reprisal. It is always best to start with your immediate contact/leader. If at any time you are not satisfied with the response you receive from your contact/leader, feel free to contact someone on the Volunteer Resources team. Solutions may include additional training or reassignment to a different role.

## **Recognition**

- All volunteers: When you have recorded 15 hours, you will receive a volunteer t-shirt.
- Trail Watch volunteers: You will receive a t-shirt each year (per request) and you can receive additional apparel and gear through our 100 hours recognition program.
- Adopt-A-Site volunteers: You get a sign at your adopted site after recording three visits.
- In addition, for every 100 volunteer hours that you log, you may choose a 100-hour recognition item.

## **Resignation**

You may resign from your volunteer position at any time. We ask that you notify your contact/leader at least two weeks prior to your departure and that you complete the exit interview process. Upon resignation, you will return your ID card and all other materials such as keys and tools.

## **Insurance**

In the case of personal illness or injury, volunteers rely on their own personal insurance resources. The Forest Preserves of Cook County does not carry incident or injury (Workers' Compensation) insurance for volunteers and cannot assume responsibility for any accidents or injuries.

## **Volunteers Under 18**

- Some volunteer opportunities are for adults only. If that is the case, the online description will state that volunteers must be 18 years or older to participate.
- For volunteer opportunities that allow youth, the accompanying parent/guardian is required to sign the [Volunteer Waiver/Agreement](#) or [Workday Sign-In Sheet](#) and be present for the entire time.
- Youth attending an Ecological Stewardship Workday as part of a school group will use the [School Year Youth Stewardship Field Trip Agreement Waiver](#).

# Medical Emergency/Injury Procedures

The Forest Preserves strives to provide safe volunteer opportunities and support volunteers in the event of an emergency or injury. Please think about your emergency plan in advance. Know your location, cross-streets and nearest medical treatment facility. Have a cell phone handy and know the location of the nearest first-aid kit.

First Aid/CPR training is available throughout the year. We encourage you to [sign up on the volunteer website](#).

You should follow your contact/leader's instructions to ensure that all work is performed in a safe manner. If you observe any unsafe or unhealthy conditions, please report them to your contact/leader as soon as possible.

## **Steps to Follow in the Event of a Medical Emergency:**

1. Recognize the emergency
2. Make sure that it is safe to enter the area. If not, get to a safe spot and call 9-1-1
3. Ask an injured person if you can help (obtain consent), then check the person
4. Call 9-1-1 when appropriate
5. Help the person, only provide care that you have been trained to give
6. Have the person seek medical attention when appropriate<sup>2</sup>
7. Notify Volunteer Resources staff

## **Reporting a Minor Injury**

If you sustain a minor injury while volunteering (one that does not require a 911 call or hospital visit), notify your contact/leader as soon as possible. Your contact/leader will ask you to complete a form (see *Appendix: Incident Reporting Guidelines and Form*) to document the injury. By completing the form, you give us valuable information to help improve volunteer safety.

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<sup>2</sup> From the National Safety Council

## **Problem Solving, Corrective Action and Dismissal**

Like every visitor to the Forest Preserves, as a volunteer, you agree to follow all the rules and regulations of the Forest Preserves. You are not authorized to enforce the rules and regulations of the Forest Preserves, but will notify Forest Preserves staff when violations of rules and regulations are observed. You will also follow all directions and instructions given by staff and/or certified volunteer leaders. All volunteer duties performed must take place with the permission of the Forest Preserves.

Failure to follow directions and instructions, performing duties outside of the scope of the volunteer role, or a violation of any Forest Preserves rules, regulations or policies can result in corrective action or immediate dismissal from the program.

Other grounds for dismissal may include, but are not limited to:

- Theft of property or misuse of Forest Preserves equipment or materials
- Abuse or mistreatment of Forest Preserves staff, visitors or volunteers
- Failure to meet minimum standards as detailed in the volunteer role description and/or volunteer waiver
- Failure to satisfactorily perform assigned duties
- Failure to conduct yourself in a professional manner and present a positive image of the Forest Preserves
- Failure to comply with youth protection guidelines
- Failure to comply with non-discrimination policy

If there are concerns with your work as a volunteer, Forest Preserves staff will work with you to correct them. A serious violation of the volunteer rules and regulations may be grounds for dismissal. Additionally, dismissal may be considered if volunteer expectations are consistently disregarded.

If you feel that you are not being fairly treated by your contact/leader, please contact the Volunteer Resources team for assistance with conflict resolution.



# Appendix

# Using the Online Volunteer System (OVS)

Access the Online Volunteer System (OVS) by visiting [fpdcc.com/volunteer](http://fpdcc.com/volunteer) and clicking “Login/Register.” Through this online system you can:

- Keep your personal information updated.
- Record your hours of service.
- Explore and sign up for volunteer opportunities.
- Register for training opportunities, classes, tours and walks.
- Receive invitations for volunteer recognition events.
- Provide feedback to us about your volunteer experience.

**Please, Please, Please Report Your Hours**  
(Without your hours, there would be no volunteer program)

Volunteer hours do not capture the whole picture of the volunteer program, but hours are the one quantifiable piece of data that we need to insure continued support and funding for the program. Volunteer hours can be used to support grant funding, staff and equipment allocation, and budget requests.

## Online Volunteer System (OVS) Terminology

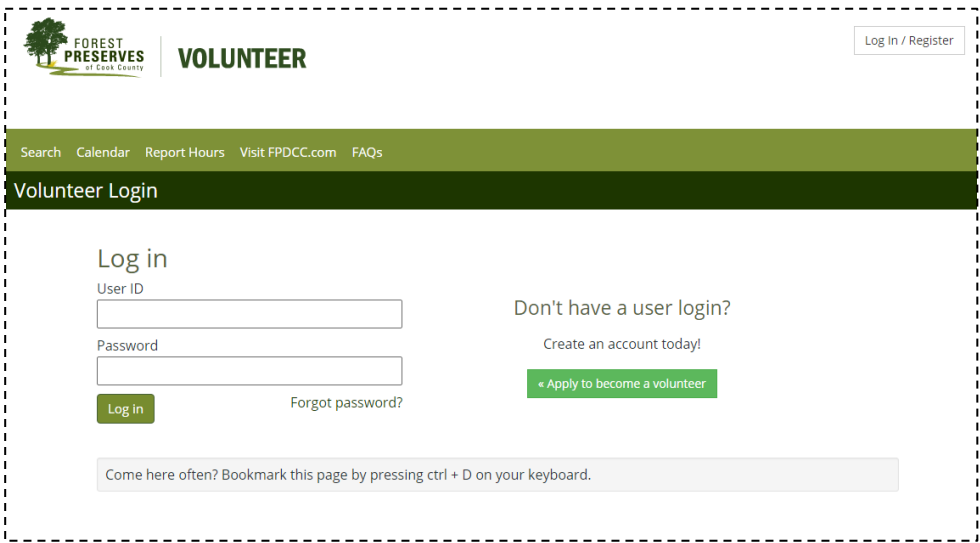
- **Opportunity** - Anything that a volunteer can sign up for; it could be a single-day ecological stewardship workday, a long-term position, a certified role (like Chainsaw Operator) or a training class. Opportunities are created and edited by the Volunteer Resources team.
- **Schedule Slot** - A time and date that an Opportunity occurs. Opportunities like an ecological stewardship workday or a training class would have one or more Schedule Slots. A Schedule Slot has a certain number of spaces and when they are full, the Schedule Slot will no longer display on the OVS. Schedule Slots are created by the Volunteer Resources team.
- **Referral** - An Opportunity you have expressed an interest in, but requires approval before you are placed into it. A Referral is a temporary state; you will either be approved or not approved.
- **Placement** - An Opportunity you were approved for. Most ecological stewardship workdays are automatic approval—anyone who signs up is automatically placed into the Opportunity.
- **Survey** - A digital form that you fill out to record your hours and other information from your volunteer service.

# Instructions for Entering Hours on the Online Volunteer System (OVS)

**1 To Login**  
 Direct link or go to [fpdcc.com/volunteer](http://fpdcc.com/volunteer) and click on **Report Hours**

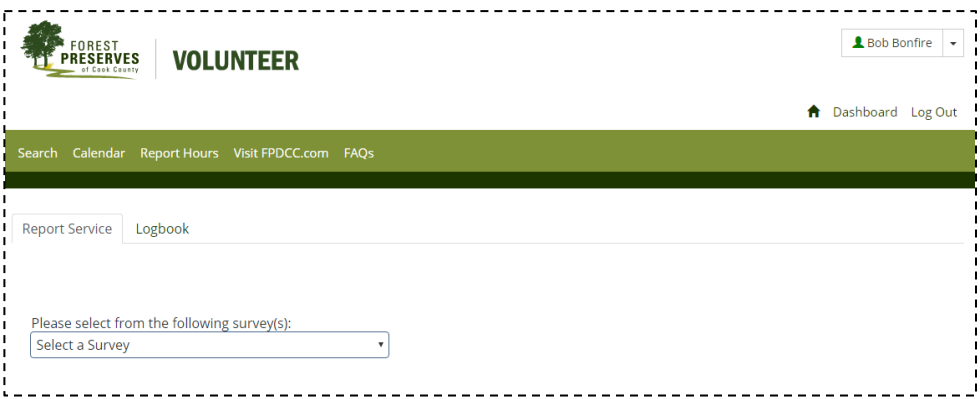
Enter your username and password and click on **Log in**

Click on **Forgot Password** if you don't remember your User ID or Password



**2 Choose the survey for the Opportunity that you would like to report your hours.**

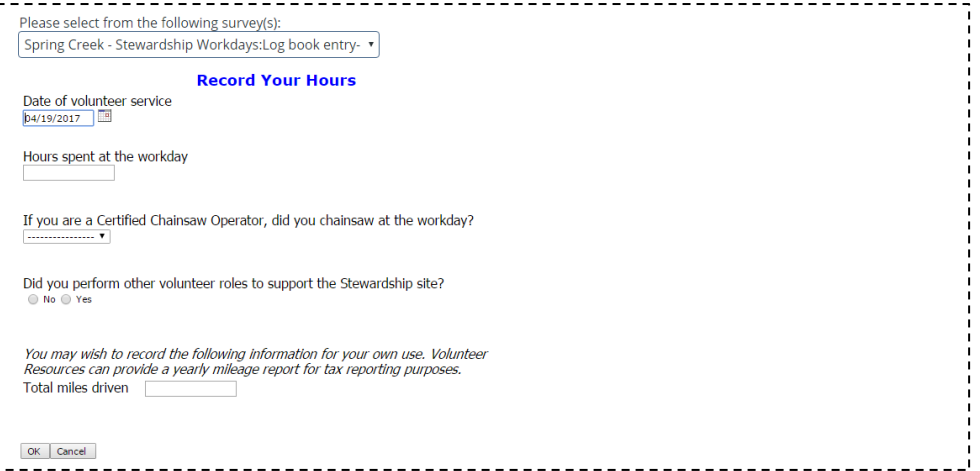
Don't see the survey that you are looking for? Then you are either not placed in the **Opportunity** or the **Opportunity** has expired. If it is an **Opportunity** that is on the OVS, you can sign yourself up for it; if it is not on the OVS, email Volunteer Resources



**3 Fill out the survey and click OK**

If you want to fill out the same survey again, click on **Make another entry**

Each survey you fill out creates a **log book** entry which can be viewed and then edited or deleted



# Staying Safe in the Forest Preserves

## TAKE 5 FOR SAFETY

Follow the Take 5 Risk Assessment when entering a new site, beginning a new activity, or if conditions change.

1. **Stop** to make observations and consider potential risks
2. **Look** to identify weather, plant, animal, and work area hazards
3. **Assess** the level of risk those hazards present
4. **Manage** hazards by using control measures to reduce risk
5. **Monitor** activities and conditions continually

First Aid/CPR training is available throughout the year: [Click Here to View Class Dates and Sign Up](#)

## WEATHER HAZARDS

**Heat** - Working outside in warm weather can put you at risk for a heat-related illness. There are several heat-related illnesses, including heatstroke (the most severe), heat exhaustion and heat cramps. The best way to avoid a heat-related illness is to limit exposure outdoors and take basic precautions on hot days. Follow these tips from the National Safety Council advises you to:

- Drink more liquid than you think you need.
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing and a hat.
- Replace salt lost from sweating by drinking fruit juice or sports drinks
- Avoid spending time outdoors during the hottest part of the day, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Wear sunscreen: Sunburn affects the body's ability to cool itself.
- Pace yourself when you exert your body.

**Cold** - If you are outdoors in cold weather, you need to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia. Both conditions are caused by excessive exposure to low temperatures, wind or moisture. Before venturing outside in winter, the National Safety Council advises you to:

- Check the temperature and limit your time outdoors if it's very cold, wet or windy.
- Bundle up in several layers of loose clothing.
- Wear mittens or warm gloves, cover your ears with a warm hat, and wear socks that will keep your feet warm and dry.

**Tornado/Severe Weather** - Thunderstorms can occur at any time of the year. Severe thunderstorms occur most frequently in the spring and fall. These dangerous storms frequently have lightning, damaging winds, large hail, and heavy rain.

Be Prepared
<b>What to wear:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dress in layers (long &amp; short sleeves)</li><li>• Clothes that can get dirty</li><li>• Sturdy, closed-toe shoes (boots preferred) that can get dirty</li><li>• Long pants and long socks</li><li>• Sun protection (hat or bandana, sunglasses)</li></ul>
<b>What to bring:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Water bottle</li><li>• Snack</li><li>• Sunscreen</li><li>• Insect repellent</li></ul>
<i>If you are unfamiliar with being outdoors, do not hesitate to ask Forest Preserves staff or an experienced volunteer. They are happy to provide helpful tips and advice!</i>

- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch or a Tornado Watch:** Atmospheric conditions are favorable for the formation of one or more severe thunderstorms or tornadoes. Review your emergency plan and be ready to act quickly if a warning is issued.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning or a Tornado Warning:** A severe thunderstorm or a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar and there is imminent danger, take shelter immediately.

## **PLANT & ANIMAL HAZARDS**

**Poison Ivy** – If your work area includes poison ivy, familiarize yourself with what it looks like. It is the oil that causes the reaction so gloves can protect your hands, but rubbing your gloves or sleeves on your face or arms or touching your pants or socks can spread the oil. Avoidance is the best prevention. Wash your clothing afterwards to remove the oil. Tecnu is a product available at most drugstores. When combined with cold water, it removes the oil from your skin and is best used as soon as you know you have been exposed to the oil. Dish soap will also help remove the oil. A Poison Ivy Identification sheet is available from Volunteer Resources via the Supply Order System. (Learn more about identifying poison ivy: [fpdcc.com/plant-profile-poison-ivy-scary-nuisance/](http://fpdcc.com/plant-profile-poison-ivy-scary-nuisance/)).

**Mosquitos** – To prevent mosquito bites, use Environmental Protection Agency-registered insect repellent such as DEET or picaridan and wear long-sleeve shirts, long pants, and a mosquito head net. Learn more about Mosquitoes: [fpdcc.com/nature/people-nature/mosquitoes-and-west-nile-virus/](http://fpdcc.com/nature/people-nature/mosquitoes-and-west-nile-virus/).

**Ticks** – Ticks are found in and near wooded areas, tall grass and brush, and may be something people encounter on occasion while visiting the Forest Preserves.

In the Chicago region, infected ticks can transmit diseases including anaplasmosis, babesia, ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease, Powassan virus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia through their bites.

While the chances of contracting a tick-borne disease are relatively small, the Forest Preserves and the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) encourage Cook County residents to take common-sense precautions to prevent tick bites while enjoying the warmer weather outdoors.

Avoiding Tick Bites:

- Walk in the center of trails when possible so vegetation doesn't brush against you.
- Use repellent that contains 20 to 30 percent DEET on exposed skin. Always follow product instructions.
- Use products that contain permethrin to treat clothing and gear, such as boots, pants (especially the cuffs), socks and tents. Alternatively, look for clothing pre-treated with permethrin.
- Tuck long pants into your socks and boots. Wearing light-colored pants makes ticks easier to see.
- In heavily wooded areas or in tall grass and brush, check yourself, children and other family members every two to three hours for ticks (especially ears, hair, neck, legs and between the toes).



- If you let your pets outdoors, check them often for ticks. Ticks can “hitch a ride” on your pets, but fall off in your home before they feed.

#### What to Do After a Tick Bite:

Check yourself or a partner for ticks within 24 hours of spending time in a natural area. If you find a tick on yourself, others or pets, remove it promptly. According to the CCDPH, the best way to remove a tick is to grasp it with fine-point tweezers as close to the skin as possible and gently but firmly pull it straight out. Do not twist or jerk the tick. Wash the bite area and your hands with soap and water and apply an antiseptic to the bite site.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the mouthparts of a tick can remain embedded and lead to infection if not removed properly. If the mouthparts do break off or you have trouble removing the tick, consult your physician.

The CCDPH encourages you to seek medical treatment if you experience a rash that looks like a bull’s-eye or a rash anywhere on your body, or an unexplained illness accompanied by fever following a tick bite. The most common symptoms of tick-related illnesses can include fever, chills, aches and pains, and rash. Early recognition and treatment of the infection decreases the risk of serious complications. Learn more about ticks: [fpdcc.com/nature/people-nature/ticks-and-disease/](https://www.fpdcc.com/nature/people-nature/ticks-and-disease/)

**Chiggers** – Chiggers (tiny mites) are extremely small in size, but their bites pack a powerful punch. Chiggers are generally picked up from low grasses close to the ground. Chigger bites are uncomfortable, itchy, annoying, and can make it difficult to sleep. In most cases, chigger bites don’t cause any harm to your health. Chiggers feed on skin cells, but not on blood. Use the same precautions as for ticks.

**Stinging Insects** – Being outdoors puts you at risk of being stung by flying insects (bees, wasps, and hornets). Follow the recommendations by the Center for Disease Control:

#### Hives and Nests Are Often Found:

- Inside hollow trees, walls and attics (entrance is usually a very small hole)
- In shrubs and hedges
- Under logs and piles of rocks
- Inside holes in the ground

#### Reduce Your Likelihood for Getting Stung:

- Do not use scented deodorant, cologne or perfume (fragrances attract insects)
- Wear light-colored clothing (bright colors and patterns attract insects)
- Wear long-sleeve shirts and pants
- Tie back long hair to keep stinging insects from getting entangled
- Avoid flowering plants when possible
- Remain calm and still if a single stinging insect is flying around (swatting may cause it to sting)
- If attacked by several stinging insects, run to get away (bees release a chemical when they sting, which attracts other bees)

#### If You Know You Are Allergic:

- Carry an epinephrine autoinjector at all times

- Wear medical ID jewelry stating your allergy
- Alert anyone you will be volunteering with that you have an allergy and the location of your epinephrine autoinjector

## **WORK AREA HAZARDS**

**Carrying Tools** – Most tools should be carried at your side with the cutting edge turned down and away from your body in your downslope hand.

**Traffic** – Use caution when working on or near any type of trail and along roadsides. If you are volunteering in a group, it may be helpful to post a lookout or traffic monitor for certain areas.

**Widowmakers** – A widowmaker is a limb or branch that is no longer attached to a tree but is still in the canopy either wedged in a crotch, tangled in other limbs, or balanced on another limb. Be extra cautious around trees that look dead or damaged. They pose the greatest risk.

- If you're in a forested area, keep an eye out for dead or broken branches in the canopy above you.
- If you are a chainsawyer, check the canopy above for any widowmakers before felling a tree.
- High winds and snowfall can increase the risks by weakening or dislodging branches. Take care in these conditions.
- When you do notice a potential widowmaker branch, avoid it.

**Slip, Trip and Fall Hazards** – Watch for vines, tree roots, stumps, slick spots, and holes in your work area. Walk slowly and carefully. Pick your feet up when walking across natural terrain.

## **WORKING AROUND A BURN PILE**

- The fire gives off particles and gasses that can be harmful to your lungs, potentially affecting your ability to breathe easily. Avoid the area where the smoke is blowing, spend the least amount of time close to the fire, and respect a safe zone around the fire.
- Embers can travel quite a distance and in all directions when a heavy log is thrown on.
- Large flames, especially if prompted by wind gusts, can happen suddenly. Never approach a brush pile fire from the downwind side where the flames are blowing towards you.
- Heat from the fire can make snowy or wet ground conditions muddy and slippery.
- Synthetic materials in clothing and footwear can catch on fire and/or be damaged from embers easily. If you are wearing clothing or footwear that you value or is not fire safe, keep a distance from the fire.
- People who are sensitive to smoke should not work near the fire.
- Be on the lookout for Slip, Trip and Fall hazards near the fire and remove if possible. These may include fallen twigs, branches, and vines, cut stumps and holes.

# Volunteer Accident/Injury Form

*This section to be completed by the injured volunteer*

Print name

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Phone / email address

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Mailing address

---

City, State, ZIP

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Name of your supervisor

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Date of injury

Time of injury

---

Location where injury occurred

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Describe the accident (*describe, in detail, how and why the injury occurred*)

Describe the body parts injured or the nature of the injury.

Name all witnesses (*full name*)

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## Medical Information

Was first aid given?  Yes  No

Did you seek, or plan to seek, medical treatment?  Yes  No

If yes, name of physician who treated you for your injury

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Volunteer signature

Date

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*Submit this form to your supervisor (Site Steward, Project or Workday Leader, FPCC staff) as soon as possible. If you cannot complete the form at the time of the injury/illness, deliver it to your supervisor or fax (773-792-0539) or mail (6100a N. Central Ave., Chicago, IL 60646) it to Volunteer Resources as soon as possible.*

# Overview of Volunteer Programs/Roles

## **Ecological Stewardship**

Stewardship volunteers take care of our natural areas and connect people to the Forest Preserves. You will learn about native plants and animals, gain hands-on experience in ecological restoration and develop leadership skills.

## **Litter Cleanups**

Make a direct impact on the health and beauty of your favorite forest preserve on your own or with a group.

## **Community Science**

Become a community scientist, learn to identify local species and collect critical information about plants and animals.

## **Nature Center, Recreation and Event Volunteers**

Help with special events or assist in other ways at our six Nature Centers.

## **Nature Ambassadors**

Nature Ambassador Supporters promote the Forest Preserves by forwarding newsletters, posting positive content about the Forest Preserves or sharing our social media posts, and by making community connections. Nature Ambassador Outreach Volunteers represent the Forest Preserves alongside a staff member or knowledgeable volunteer at special events.

## **Trail Watch**

Create a welcoming environment by supporting community safety and helping visitors on the trails.

**Other Opportunities:** There are often other ways to get involved that are not included in the programs listed above.

## **Forest Preserves Contacts**

### **Volunteer Resource Center**

6100 A N. Central Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60646  
Volunteer.FPD@cookcountyil.gov  
773-631-1790  
Fax: 773-792-0539

### **Forest Preserves of Cook County General Headquarters**

536 North Harlem Avenue  
River Forest, IL 60305  
800-870-3666

### **Forest Preserves of Cook County Police**

One Aloha Lane  
Westchester, IL 60523  
708-771-1001

## Forest Preserves Important Rules

The complete list of rules is listed online: [fpdcc.com/rules-regulations/](https://www.fpdcc.com/rules-regulations/)

Volunteers are not expected to enforce any rules or regulations. Never confront visitors that may be violating rules. Instead, call the Forest Preserve Police at 708-771-1001 so they can determine the best course of action. The following is a list of the more common situations you may encounter:

**Forest Preserves of Cook County Hours** – Forest Preserves are open every day from sunrise to sunset. Check with Nature Centers, Campgrounds and other facilities for specific hours. The Forest Preserves can issue special permits for visitors and volunteers who require access before or after these hours.

**Dogs**– On-leash dogs are allowed at most locations—dogs are prohibited at Nature Centers and Illinois Nature Preserves. Service animals are allowed almost everywhere in the Forest Preserves. More information: [fpdcc.com/dogs/](https://www.fpdcc.com/dogs/)

- If you see a dog off leash, call 708-771-1001, do not try to approach the dog or its owner.
- If you see dogs behaving in a dangerous manner, call 911.

**Horses** – Horses must display tags and each rider must possess a horseback rider's license. More information: [fpdcc.com/equestrian/](https://www.fpdcc.com/equestrian/)

- If you notice a horse without a tag, call 708-771-1001, do not approach the rider.

**Littering** – All littering is prohibited

- If you find litter, please dispose of it in the nearest Forest Preserves trash can or recycling bin.

**Dumping** – Some residents and businesses use Forest Preserves land to illegally dispose of unwanted yard waste, furniture, tires, oil, chemicals and electronics.

- If you see evidence of illegal dumping, call 708-771-1001 and if you are able to take pictures safely, email them to [trail.watch@cookcountyl.gov](mailto:trail.watch@cookcountyl.gov).
- If you witness illegal dumping in progress, call 708-771-1001 and try to get a license plate number if you can do it safely.

**Vehicles** – Drivers must obey Illinois traffic laws and all posted signs within the Forest Preserves. Vehicles are only allowed on grassy or unpaved areas for unloading and loading in accordance with their picnic or event permit. The speed limit in the Forest Preserves is 15 mph.

- If you see cars driving recklessly in Forest Preserves parking lots or driveways, call 911.
- If you see cars parked illegally or observe speeding, call 708-771-1001 and try to get a license plate number if you can do it safely.

**Alcohol Use** – Alcohol is allowed in the majority of Forest Preserves properties. Alcohol, including wine and beer, is prohibited on or within 50 feet of roads or parking lots, on the grounds of our nature centers, and at 22 locations, which are posted with signs indicating no alcohol without a picnic or event permit. Please note that glass containers of any type are not allowed in any Forest Preserves.

- If you notice unusually loud or reckless behavior, call Forest Preserve Police at 708-771-1001
- Do not confront or engage with individuals you think may be violating alcohol policy

**Plants and Wildlife** – Collection of plants and animals is strictly prohibited. This includes harvesting firewood; collecting mushrooms, wildflowers or other wild plants and their seeds; and otherwise removing or damaging any plants or trees. Hunting is not allowed on any Forest Preserves property. Visitors may not kill, injure or otherwise disturb any animals or their nests. Feeding of wildlife is strictly prohibited.

- If you witness someone collecting plants or animals, or notice signs of collection such as someone with shopping bags or plastic bags full of plants, jars with specimens, digging implements or nets, call 708-771-1001.
- If you witness someone feeding wildlife, call 708-771-1001.
- If you find a feeding station, note the location and call 708-771-1001 as soon as it is convenient.

**Swimming** – Swimming in any natural body of water is prohibited. If you witness someone in a body of water who appears to be in distress, call 911.

- If you witness someone swimming, bathing or standup paddle boarding, call 708-771-1001.

**Fishing** – Fishing is allowed only in designated areas. All state laws and regulations apply to Forest Preserves waters, with some additional restrictions. Fishing line should not be left behind to entangle wildlife. Dispose of line properly at designated line-disposal stations or take with you. More information: [fpdcc.com/fishing/](http://fpdcc.com/fishing/)

**Trails** – Bike and horse riding is only allowed on official, designated trails. More information: [fpdcc.com/rules-regulations/](http://fpdcc.com/rules-regulations/)

- If you notice an equestrian or cyclist riding off-trail or on an unofficial or hiking-only trail, call 708-771-1001.

**Archaeology, Salvage and Physical Property** – All historic or archaeological findings located within Forest Preserves boundaries are the property of the State of Illinois and may not be removed.

- If you witness someone collecting or notice signs of collection, such as someone with a metal detector or digging tools, call 708-771-1001.

**Missing Signs, Graffiti or Damage to Property**

- If in progress, call 708-771-1001 and provide a description of the offender(s) or license plate number if you can do it safely.
- Otherwise, note the location and call 708-771-1001 as soon as it is convenient.

**People Living in the Forest Preserves**

- If you notice evidence of people living in the Forest Preserves do not approach. Call 708-771-1001 and describe the location and conditions.

**Injured or Dead Animal**

- If you see a large dead animal such as a dog, deer or coyote, call 708-771-1001.
- If you see a smaller dead animal like a squirrel or raccoon that is not on a trail, no action is needed.

**Storm Damage, Tree Down Across a Trail or Trails That Need Repair**

- If the situation presents an immediate risk to the public, call 708-771-1001. If possible, remain on the trail to warn others that may be approaching.
- If there is no immediate risk, note the location and call 708-771-1001 as soon as it is convenient.