



# OREGON STATE PARKS HOST PROGRAM

Updated 1/2011

## **PARK HOST PROGRAM HISTORY**

Formally organized in 1980, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department's (OPRD) volunteer Park Host Program began in a few coastal parks with volunteers greeting the public and answering questions. Initially patterned after the U.S. Forest Service volunteer program, it quickly grew and took on its own special shape and focus. Each year, Oregon park hosts contribute their time to valuable programs and services, which take place in over 90 state park sites. In calendar year 2010, approximately 1153 active hosts donated nearly 403,000 hours of service to Oregon's state park system.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

Although we do accept host applications throughout the year, scheduling for the following year's host assignments officially begins each September after the busy summer season and formal volunteer recognition has occurred. Generally speaking, field staff will begin making contacts for the following year's host assignments in October. Although staff do place hosts year-round as positions come open, the heaviest placement period is during slower months in November and December, and continues throughout the winter season.

Please be sure to consult the volunteer pages of the OPRD website to find the Host Directory which gives details about each park location, amenities, camp site specifics, duties and names of specific staff park contacts. When you apply, remember to select those parks that are the best fit for your geographic preference, skills, interests and abilities.

Both returning and new hosts must fill out and return an application each year. Please supply all the information requested on the application. You may obtain a host packet of information by contacting the Oregon State Parks Information Center at 800-551-6949 during regular business hours, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m, Monday - Friday. If you'd like to speak directly to the statewide host coordinator, please call 503-986-0752.

You may also leave a voice mail message on the OPRD Volunteer Hotline at any time by dialing 877-225-9803. Please note that this toll-free line is a message phone only and will not be answered by a live person. When you call, please speak clearly and slowly spelling any difficult names and addresses. Be sure to leave a phone number where you can be reached. Someone from our Salem headquarters office will return your phone call as soon as possible.

Once we receive your completed host application in Salem, your contact information, skills and interests and camping equipment info are entered into the Hub, a statewide volunteer database. Your application will then be scanned directly into the Hub, so park staff with the correct level of clearance will have access to it when they are ready to interview. Park staff may conduct a search in the Hub whenever they like. They can search by applicant name or Hub ID #, skills and interests, park preferences and your time of availability. Once they narrow down their search to potential hosts, they can find out how to best contact you.

If you are new to the Oregon state parks system, please be aware that a willingness to work during the "shoulder" seasons (March - May and/or September - October) may help you obtain your first placement and assignment. Being flexible in your locations and duty choices will help as well.

A park staff person oversees the volunteer host program at each park management unit. If your skills, interests and times of availability are a good match with park needs, the park host coordinator will contact you either by phone, e-mail or traditional mail. This person will explain the specific duties and responsibilities of the host positions he or she is attempting to fill and may ask you specific questions regarding your skills, abilities, interests and experience. Consider this a formal interview and understand that staff is trying to assess if you will be a good fit for the position(s) they have in mind. Feel free to ask all the questions you want to get a better sense of what you may be getting into! It goes without saying that this arrangement needs to work just as well for you too!

After this initial conversation, you can expect that the references you have provided will be checked. If an agreement on terms, duties and location is reached, you will be penciled into the host schedule at that park. You may consider this a tentative host assignment. Information will then be sent to you regarding your duties and the physical performance level that is anticipated. You will have time to further discuss any concerns with the host coordinator. It's up to you to communicate what type of physical limitations you may have. Every attempt will be made to make reasonable accommodation to modify the duties as described whenever possible.

Your final placement is contingent upon the results of a criminal history check. A form will be sent to you to request details about your background and driving record. We need your approval in order to conduct this check and it is the only time we will request your birth date, social security number and driver's license number. We follow strict guidelines required by the Oregon Identity Theft Protection Act and are extremely careful to safeguard this information in locked cabinets within our Human Resources division. Once the check has been approved, most parks will send a final confirmation letter to you outlining more details about your arrival. When you arrive on site for your assignment, further orientation and training will occur.

Once you are offered a position, please be sure to ask enough questions to thoroughly understand the scope and details of your new hosting duties. If your assignment duties and responsibilities are not adequately explained prior to your arrival or if they change significantly once you arrive at the park, you have the right to negotiate new terms and/or refuse the assignment without penalty. If this occurs, be sure to contact the park manager or statewide host coordinator.

If for some reason you are unable to make it to your confirmed host assignment(s), please be sure to contact the host coordinator at each park or you may call the statewide host coordinator who will then communicate your cancellation to all the parks where you are assigned.

## **PARK HOST DEFINITIONS & DUTIES**

Each hosting situation varies according to park location, the number of visitors and other hosts at any given time of year, availability of accommodations and other park resources, and if staff are on-site. The best way to fully understand all duties that are expected in any given job is to talk directly to the host coordinator in each management unit. But in general, all hosts will:

- Receive a parking space for their RV, close to their work site. Full hook-ups are provided whenever possible, but check at each location for details. Please note that all living accommodations are expected to be either self-propelled or able to be towed by a vehicle that you drive in. In cases of emergency and/or natural hazard, an immediate evacuation may be necessary, so we cannot allow living accommodations that are not able to be driven or towed away on demand.
- Work a minimum of one month in any one location. Multiple month positions are available and may be arranged with park staff in advance. Longer-term assignments are available primarily during the winter and shoulder seasons and will be pre-arranged according to specific park needs.

- Receive orientation, training, day-use park passes, a volunteer uniform and recognition.
- Receive a position description with specified duties and scheduled times to work.
- Work under signed agreements with applicable volunteer insurance coverage.
- Understand and explain rules that apply to park users. This is in an advisory role only and does not include enforcement of park rules.
- Be expected to personally follow park regulations and abide by the OPRD Volunteer Code of Conduct.

## **GENERAL HOSTING CATEGORIES**

The hosting categories below are not exclusive; in other words, overlapping duties are common. Your patience and flexibility is requested with the inevitable changes as they occur, but you will always be asked in advance before new job tasks are assigned.

### Campground Hosts:

- Work and live in the campground loops near campers.
- Have a sign identifying them as park hosts at their site
- Perform routine visitor services such as:
  1. Greet visitors and make them feel welcome.
  2. Distribute park literature, answer questions, receive comments and be readily accessible to the public.
  3. Represent OPRD, serving as a contact point for campers and travelers.
  4. Pick up litter and clean fire pits.
  5. Check and stock restrooms.
  6. Notify park staff or law enforcement when emergencies arise or activities within the park area warrant this.
  7. Maintain a tidy host site.
  8. May sell firewood and ice.
  9. May assist with registration and cleaning of yurts, cabins and other special facilities.
  10. May include other specific duties as agreed upon with park staff.

### Visitor Services Hosts:

- Will live in park, but may or may not live in the campground loops.
- May work in day-use or campground entrance stations, museums, visitor centers, or hospitality centers.
- Usually have a sign identifying them as park hosts at their site
- Perform regular visitor services tasks such as:
  1. Provide information and distribute park literature.
  2. Collect user fees.
  3. Work on cash registers, selling retail items in park stores and hospitality centers.
  4. May do stocking, ordering and inventory of retail items.
  5. May perform some clerical work such as computer input, filing, answering phones in park offices.

### Interpretive Hosts:

- May work for one month, but it's preferred that they accept a position for several months in a row during the summer.
- Will live in park, but may or may not live in the campground loops.
- May work in park museums, visitor centers or interpretation/education centers.
- May or may not have a sign identifying them as park hosts at their site.
- Provide special visitor services or programs such as:
  1. Lead or assist in park interpretive or educational programs.

2. Lead or assist with Junior Ranger Program for youth.
3. Provide lighthouse or historic tours.
4. May assist with the development of new interpretive or educational programs.
5. May assist with the writing and development of interpretive brochures.
6. May introduce interpretive rangers or guest speakers and provide assistance during before, during or after programs.
7. May conduct/assist with research on park interpretive topics.
8. May assist with the development of other interpretive projects or services as requested.

#### Maintenance Hosts:

- Will live in the park, but may or may not live in the campground loops.
- May or may not have a sign identifying them as park hosts at their site.
- Perform duties such as:
  1. Work on maintenance or service projects.
  2. Mow, weed, do landscaping or gardening.
  3. Operate and maintain a variety of equipment.
  4. Paint, build, or work on construction projects.
  5. May work with park recycling program.
  6. May provide small engine repair.
  7. May route and paint signs.
  8. May move irrigation equipment.
  9. May include other specific duties as agreed upon with park staff.

#### Extended-Stay or Special Project Hosts:

- Usually do, but may not live in the park.
- May or may not have a sign identifying them as park hosts at their site.
- May work at fairly remote locations where there may be no permanent park staff on-site.
- Work fairly independently, either having responsibility for:
  - a) most maintenance tasks and/or operations at a specific campground or day-use site.
  - b) an agreed-upon assignment or specialized tasks which fall outside the typical realm of other hosting duties as described above.
- By design, are not typically first time volunteers, but are hosts who have volunteered over a period of years at OPRD and have moved into jobs with increasingly responsible duties.
- Will not work in any one location longer than a 10-month period under a renewable contract.
- Perform duties such as:
  1. Work on special programs or longer-term projects that have been designated by park staff.
  2. May utilize unique vocational skills, licensures or certification to contribute to special projects as defined by park staff.
  3. May coordinate schedules, train or oversee work of other hosts on occasion.
  4. Greet visitors and make them feel welcome.
  5. Represent OPRD, serving as a contact point for campers and travelers.
  6. Open and close gates.
  7. Pick-up litter.
  8. Mow, weed, do landscaping or irrigation.
  9. May maintain and sometimes clean restrooms.
  10. Notify park staff or law enforcement when emergencies arise or activities within the park area warrant this action.
  11. Maintain a tidy host site.
  12. Provide an on-site security presence for parks which don't always have regular staff working at them.
  13. Provide other general maintenance or project work, with duties as agreed upon.

## VEHICLE REQUIREMENTS

Due to varying individual park facilities and the 30-day minimum host assignment, it is highly recommended that volunteers who participate in the OPRD Park Host Program have a self-contained recreational vehicle (RV). This includes motor homes, fifth wheels or trailers with kitchen and bathroom facilities. Pickups with campers and camper van conversions will be considered as long as you obtain a host assignment where there are shower and restroom facilities. Tents, cars or pickups without campers are discouraged, however may be considered on a case-by-case basis only with approval of the park manager.

## GENERAL WORK EXPECTATIONS

1. All hosts are expected to be “model campers” and must maintain clean, orderly campsites.
2. Hosts may sell only OPRD approved items in the parks.
3. You must check with the manager before adding any additional structures or storage containers at your site. All plants and/or gardens must be grown in portable containers unless explicitly approved by park management.
4. Do not perform vehicle maintenance at your site. If you have questions, consult with your park manager. You may obtain permission to work on your own vehicle at the shop area.
5. State equipment shall not be used for personal benefit.
6. Only camping and recreational equipment may be in public view. All other equipment must be stored out of viewing sight.
7. It is not appropriate to consume alcohol or use tobacco while on active duty. Please confine use of either to your site area and during off duty times only.
8. Hosts are considered official ‘agents’ of OPRD, therefore:
  - Please dress appropriately.
  - Avoid offensive conduct and the use of offensive language.
  - Avoid displaying signs, decals, bumper stickers, and posters that express political or religious viewpoints. Check with your manager for guidelines.

## ORIENTATION, TRAINING & SAFETY CONCERNS

Prior to your first park orientation, you will have the opportunity to take a series of on-line safety training modules. If you do not have access to an e-mail address to set up your on-line account, you may still take your safety modules through paper and pencil tests at your first park assignment for each year. After successful completion, you may print out a training record to carry with you.

Orientation and safety training is required before you assume active duty at Oregon State Parks. As a host representing OPRD and just like paid staff, you are expected to follow specific safety standards and practices at all times.

***Always take care to perform your duties carefully and safely, and report any unsafe conditions you encounter. Please perform ONLY the duties/activities listed on your Conditions of Voluntary Service Host Agreement. Please do not attempt to perform any activities for which you have not been trained!***

If your duties change during the course of your hosting assignment, please be proactive and ask for proper training relating to your new job requirements or in using new, unfamiliar equipment and ask to have your position description updated. Ongoing training will be provided as the need arises and as you move from park to park.

## **INSURANCE COVERAGES**

### **Workers' Compensation**

In Oregon, park hosts working and living in any park site are considered to be 'subject' workers and therefore are entitled to coverage under Workers' Compensation while on duty. It is extremely important that any incidents, accidents or injuries that occur on the job be reported immediately to park staff. The park manager or the staff person in charge will ask you to fill out report forms in order to file a claim. This insurance is to help pay damage claims and medical expenses.

### **Tort Liability**

All OPRD volunteers are covered by the State of Oregon for civil liability. This protects volunteers from being liable for negligence or injury to others, under these conditions: 1) you are working on a state agency task assigned by an authorized supervisor; 2) you limit your actions to the scope of duties explicitly prescribed within your volunteer assignment, and 3) you perform your duties in good faith and do not act in a reckless manner or with the intent to inflict harm on others.

### **Personal Property Insurance**

It is strongly recommended that you have all personal property covered by your own insurance. OPRD will not and cannot replace any lost, stolen or damaged property.

### **State Vehicle Insurance**

If your host duties require you to drive park vehicles, you will be covered by OPRD's vehicle liability and collision insurance while operating a state owned vehicle only. You will be asked to show proof of a valid driver's license and an acceptable, current (3-5 years) driving record.

### **Private Vehicle Insurance**

You may also be asked to show proof of vehicle insurance if you use your own vehicle while performing OPRD duties.

## **TIMECARDS, YOUR HOST "PROFILE" AND ON-CALL HOURS**

You will be required to turn in a "timecard" at the end of each month, tracking the time you've spent performing host duties at each park. While you may be hosting in a park where you are the only hosts on duty and the hours seem like they're "around the clock", you are indeed entitled to a fair schedule and time off. Discuss the "on-call" hour conversion with your supervisor.

An internet-based volunteer "tracking" system has been designed by OPRD's Information Services division and is the way your supervisor and the statewide volunteer coordinators keep records of the hours you've spent hosting at OPRD. New in 2009, parks around the state can "link-up" to share information within this database, so it will be easier to communicate about your schedules, hours, references and duties from park to park. Although your full host profile lists your hours, safety training, date of most recent criminal history check, and so on, we recommend that you keep track of your hours for your own personal records.

## **HOST HOUR BARS, RECOGNITION & REWARDS**

Once you've logged 1,000 hours of service with OPRD, you will be awarded your host recognition pin with the corresponding hour bar you've earned. This small gesture is to honor the valuable time and energy you've contributed to the OPRD Park Host Program. A second bar will then be awarded upon reaching 2,000 hours of service. Follow-up hour bars for every additional 2,000 hours of service will be presented to you in person if at all possible, to recognize your significant dedication and achievement.

## **Just a Note About That!**

We recognize that many of you don't volunteer for the recognition, and that you just desire to "give back" to your state or the parks system. But do keep in mind that recognition is indeed a volunteer's pay. An accurate posting of hours is not only important in terms of recognition, but to support the ongoing feasibility of the OPRD Volunteer Program. We track hours for all types of volunteer work within the statewide volunteer database, including positions other than hosting and work performed during special events. This information provides us with good data in order to prepare annual reports and secure funds, and helps us to track the overall success of the OPRD Volunteer Program through the years. In addition, our insurance premiums are based upon these hours reported over the course of an entire year.

## **HOST GATHERINGS**

The Host Rendezvous, a big special event just for park hosts is held during the spring season every two years. Hosts gather together to discuss current needs and issues, and to participate in informal training sessions and safety training. The focus is on celebration with a good dose of updated information so that you can feel "in the know". This fun event is not required for you to be a host, although it is highly recommended. If you have interest in attending, please contact your closest park host coordinator or the statewide host coordinator.

Occasionally we will sponsor informal campouts at different state parks. These are generally held in the fall and are usually 1-2 day long get-togethers with the primary purpose of building camaraderie, information sharing, and discussion.

## **HOST UNIFORM AND SUPPLIES**

The various state parks purchase caps and visors, vests and nametags for all host volunteers. Occasionally, supplies run short so please be patient if your park is out of them. Every attempt is made to secure you with all appropriate supplies before your arrival. If your hosting assignment requires significant public contact with park visitors, you will also be provided with name signs to indicate where your campsite is so they can easily find you.

## **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR CAMPGROUND HOSTS**

1. If you can, plan to arrive a day before the previous hosts leave. They can be knowledgeable resources for you, and can offer tips on performing your duties and answering frequently asked questions. Be sure to check with the park manager or host coordinator ahead of time if you'd like to do this — especially during the busy summer months.
2. Spend some time getting oriented to the general area where your park is located. Stop by the local Chamber of Commerce for flyers. Read the OPRD Parks & Heritage Guide and the specific park brochure where you are hosting. Be sure to review all the host orientation materials provided for you.
3. During your orientation session with park staff, don't hesitate to ask questions, clarify responsibilities, or bring up concerns. It is fully expected that you may be a bit anxious about your new assignment, especially if you're new to hosting at OPRD sites. Your questions will not come as a surprise and they'll be glad you're showing such interest and enthusiasm in performing your job correctly.
4. **Remember safety is always first!** Be aware of your physical limitations and discuss any specific medical problems, i.e., allergies, surgeries, diabetes, etc, with your park host coordinator or supervisor. Follow all training guidelines and protocols within each park unit, making sure to ask questions if you are unfamiliar with any piece of equipment or unaware of how to proceed.

5. While you will not be placed in the position of being the primary responder in emergency situations, if you're hosting in remote locations, it may be beneficial for you personally to keep up your training and certification in general first aid and CPR.
6. Ask for constructive feedback on your performance. You are entitled to receive a review of your work and be given an opportunity for improvement.
7. **THINK CUSTOMER SERVICE!!!** When dealing with the public, and you don't know the answer to a question, please don't respond with a mere "I don't know". If you don't know, it's okay. It takes time to learn the park system and each park you're hosting at. Tell those inquiring that you'll find the answer as soon as you can and that you'll get back to them. When asked for a recommendation on a restaurant or an activity, it's best to try finding out more about the visitor's particular tastes, so you may suggest what would most appeal to them. Always attempt to give more than one recommendation and never give a blatantly bad review. You may of course speak from your own experience, but be sensitive to the effect of your words on the image and reputation of businesses in the area.

**We hope you will consider joining us by becoming an Oregon State Parks park host. Feel free to contact us if you have questions!**



Oregon State Parks Info Center: 800-551-6949

OPRD Volunteer Hotline: 877-225-9803

OPRD Host Coordinator: 503-986-0752

OPRD Volunteer Website: <http://egov.oregon.gov/OPRD/VOL/>