



United States Department of Agriculture



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# United States Forest Service Volunteer Campground Host Manual

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# Introduction

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Thank you for your interest in serving the public, along with your national forests and grasslands, as a U.S. Forest Service volunteer campground host! We hope that your hosting experience is not only positive, fulfilling, and enjoyable, but also that your time as a volunteer lives among your favorite memories.

This manual covers basic information that will help you succeed in your role as a campground host. It includes an introduction to the Forest Service, an outline of your responsibilities, the support and materials that will be provided by the Forest Service, customer service guidelines, rules and regulations, general safety knowledge, and incident management. Please note that some districts may have additional guidelines, which will be communicated with you separate from this manual.

Whether you are new to the program and are learning this information for the first time or are a seasoned campground host who is using this manual to refresh your knowledge base, we hope that you find the contents not just informative, but also useful.

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# 1. Introduction to the Forest Service

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## What is the U.S. Forest Service?

The U.S. Forest Service is a Federal agency that manages approximately 193 million acres of public lands, including 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands in 43 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Agency also provides technical and financial assistance to other countries, states, tribes, communities, and non-industrial private landowners through its International Forestry and State and Private Forestry program areas and hosts the world's largest forestry research organization, with five research stations, a Forest Products Laboratory, the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, and a network of 81 experimental forests and ranges.

The agency's motto—"Caring for the land and serving people"—captures the spirit of its mission, which 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 natural resources on these lands represent some of our nation's greatest assets. National forests and grasslands support wood, energy, and mineral production. Forests provide habitat for millions of animals and produce forage for cattle and sheep. Millions of Americans drink water that originates on Forest Service lands. More than 160 million visitors enjoy outdoor recreation on Forest Service lands every year.

## Forest Service Organization

The Forest Service is made up of four deputy areas: National Forest System, Research and Development, State and Private Forestry, and Business Operations. Certain national programs, including Legislative Affairs, International Programs, Law Enforcement and Investigations, Work Environment and Performance, Office of Communications, and Civil Rights, are housed in the Chief's Office in Washington D.C.

Campground hosting falls entirely within the Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Services staff area of the National Forest System. The National Forest System is organized into nine regions, each headquartered in a Regional Office (RO) and led by a Regional Forester. Each National Forest, Grassland, and Prairie has a Supervisor's Office (SO) and most have multiple Ranger Districts (RD). District offices are responsible for public interactions, trail construction and maintenance, vegetation and wildlife management, and campground operation. This is the level of the Forest Service that you will engage with most as a campground host.

## Volunteers and the Forest Service

The Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972 recognized the public's interest in donating their time and skills for community service and authorized the agency to accept voluntary services. Campground hosting is one of many ways that people can volunteer with the Forest Service. Like all volunteers, hosts receive no salary or wages from the agency and instead donate their time and talents to further its mission. Volunteers may work on a part- or full-time basis, can participate in a one-time project, or serve over several months, seasons, or year-round. Anyone 18 years or older may apply to become a volunteer.

# Forest Service Policies

## **Nondiscrimination Policy**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information such as Braille, large print, audiotape, etc. should contact USDA's TARGET Center. To file a complaint of discrimination, contact the TARGET Center. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## **Fair and Equitable Treatment Standard**

The Forest Service is committed to affording every employee, volunteer, and customer fair and equitable treatment without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

## **Civil Rights Guiding Principles**

The civil rights guiding principles of the Forest Service are to:

- Do business in a fair, equitable, and neutral manner.
- Maintain the trust and confidence of our employees and customers.
- Value, understand, and manage diversity as a high priority.
- Advocate open-minded and anti-discriminatory attitudes and behavior of all agency employees and volunteers.
- Assist our leaders in meeting their commitment to equal employment opportunity and to facilitate effective delivery of agency civil rights programs and activities.

For more information on the history, mission, and values of the U.S. Forest Service, visit [forestservicestewardship.org](http://forestservicestewardship.org)

## 2. The Role of a Campground Host

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When a person volunteers for the campground host program, they become a vital part of a team consisting of the Forest Service and the volunteer, who together serve the public. Campground hosts have a very important role: they not only support the campground's operation, but also serve as a valuable point of contact for campers and other visitors, acting as a representative of the Forest Service. Hosts enhance the overall visitor experience because there is less confusion, better orientation, improved communication and faster emergency response.

This chapter covers some of the basic requirements and responsibilities that are central to the role of a volunteer campground host.

### Requirements of a Campground Host

In addition to possessing good outdoor ethics, communication skills, an ability to deal with the public in a friendly manner, and an enthusiasm for the joys of camping, hosts must meet the following requirements:

- Commitment to work for the entire recreation season (generally spring through early fall), unless otherwise arranged with the district
- Comfortable serving outdoors in a wide range of conditions
- Commitment to be present during peak times (typically Thursday evening through Sunday, along with holidays)
- Comfortable performing light maintenance, such as servicing toilets and picking up litter
- Ability to lift up to 25 pounds, or as determined by the district
- Willingness to submit to a background check

### Responsibilities of Campground Hosting

Campground hosts enhance the overall visitor experience in countless ways. Here are some of the main responsibilities of this position:

- Welcome visitors to the campground
- Provide a Forest Service presence within the recreation area
- Share information with visitors about rules, regulations, the campground, and nearby recreation opportunities
- Communicate with Forest Service staff
- Monitor campground use
- Improve fee compliance
- Perform light maintenance
- Assist with emergency response for incidents

### Daily Roves

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, your daily routine includes walking or driving through the entire campground to complete "roves," generally once each in the morning, afternoon, and early evening. Here are a few activities you may conduct during this time:

- Communicate rules, answer questions, and otherwise assist visitors
- Post new reservations and remove site receipts after campers leave
- Note occupied sites that do not have current fee stubs posted
- Report the number of campground site vacancies to the district office
- Tidy up and restock the fee station with fee envelopes and other materials
- Dispose of any litter that you encounter around the campground
- Remind loud campers about quiet hours
- Ensure restrooms are clean and stocked
- Manage gate closures where applicable
- Mowing and/or weed-eating, with prior approval from your host supervisor

Be sure to report any maintenance-related issues to your host supervisor as they occur.

## **Check Ins**

Daily communication with Forest Service staff is an important way for hosts to share and receive information, and to ensure their own safety. Hosts should check in before 9:00am daily with their supervisor or district front desk by radio or telephone. If it is a weekend and the district office is closed, your host supervisor will provide the name and number of the person that you will contact.

In addition, you can contact your host supervisor at any time with questions, needs, or feedback about the program.

## **Bulletin Boards**

Hosts can help facilitate communication with visitors via the information bulletin board located at the campground entrance. While Forest Service personnel will maintain the information bulletin board and other signage on site, the host can assist by clearing spare pins, old staples, and unauthorized signs. You may also add information to the board—say, for instance, by posting a list of nearby businesses for campers.

## 3. What The Forest Service Provides

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Just as you have responsibilities as a campground host, so, too, does the Forest Service have a responsibility to you! This chapter focuses on the information, tools, and materials the Forest Service provides so that volunteers can meet the campground host program goals, complete their duties, and be successful in their roles.

### Orientation

A district recreation staff member will welcome you to the campground as soon as possible after your arrival. They will provide you with training and explanation of host duties and expectations, an orientation to the area, a campsite, equipment, supplies, important phone numbers, and any other materials you will need to perform your duties. Your host supervisor will also contact you with local safety program information and protocols.

The Forest Service may also require you to take first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, defensive driving, or other training. Your host supervisor or other district staff will inform you if this is the case.

### Host Campsite

One of the most enjoyable perks of the hosting experience is that you will be provided with a designated campsite located near the campground entrance free of charge. The availability of water, electric, and sewer hookups at the host site, internet connectivity, and laundry services varies by campground.

### Vehicle

Some campgrounds may have a golf cart, other utility vehicle, or a Forest Service vehicle available for your official use on-site. Please keep the following guidelines in mind when using any of these vehicles:

- Forest Service vehicles are for official use only. For example, do not run personal errands or make personal purchases while on duty, in an agency vehicle, or in uniform.
- Do not give rides to nonemployees. If you must pick up a camper (for example, a lost child or an injured person), first contact the district law enforcement officer with the person's name, a description of the incident, and the reason for picking the person up, if it occurs outside the facility.
- Remember that you are representing the Forest Service, so be sure to project a friendly attitude.
- Follow any posted speed limits.
- Alcohol is not permitted in agency vehicles under any circumstances.

### Communication Devices

The Forest Service will provide you with some form of communication—typically, a two-way radio and/or phone—for official and emergency use. A landline may be available for your personal use, but you must initiate the phone service in your name. Also keep in mind that if a landline is not available, your personal cell phone is often the best form of emergency communication, as long as you have reception.



The Forest Service uses the Bendix King radio; your host supervisor will tell you which channel to use. Be sure to keep your radio charged, turned on, and with you at all times in the campground and treat it with care.

**Here are a few guidelines for radio use:**

- Communicate using only plain English; avoid using any code words
- Keep all communications brief in length and professional in tone
- Pause for a moment before speaking into the radio and release the mic button once you are finished
- Boost your signal by placing the “Lo/Hi” button in “Hi” mode; extend the battery by placing it in “Lo” mode

## **Uniforms**

While some Forest Service employees—and the iconic Smokey Bear—wear full uniforms while on duty, volunteer campground hosts may have a more casual dress code. While it varies by site, the Forest Service may provide you with a volunteer uniform or identification material to wear, which might include a hat, vest, T-shirt, and/or nametag. Be sure to return these items to the Forest Service at the end of the season.

## **Other Materials**

Your host supervisor will supply an assortment of other materials that include, but aren’t limited to:

- Cleaning and maintenance supplies
- A first aid kit, wasp spray, gloves, and other safety supplies
- Keys to the restrooms, gates, or other locked features
- Handout materials for distribution to campers
- Forest and district maps
- Recordkeeping forms
- A list of district contacts and phone numbers
- A brochure on proper terminology and behavior when communicating with people with disabilities

## **Reimbursements**

The Forest Service may provide reimbursement for certain expenses related to your volunteer service (for example, mileage); check with your host supervisor for details.

The agency provides reimbursements only for those days you are serving, and distributes reimbursements about every 6 to 12 weeks. If this schedule poses a problem for you, please discuss it with your local district contact.

## **Time Off**

If you need to take time off, contact your host supervisor at least 48 hours before the requested date. Less notice may be acceptable in the case of an emergency.

## 4. Code of Conduct

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Your service as a volunteer campground host is a critical component of preserving the public lands legacy and to the success of the National Forest System, especially because you will often provide the crucial “first impression” of the Forest Service in welcoming and providing service to our visitors. Your behavior as a host influences how visitors feel about their experience and, ultimately, about the agency and public lands you now represent.

This chapter covers the conduct requirements of a volunteer campground host.

### Our Core Values

The Forest Service has a set of shared core values that define our agency. These values are the framework for all of our interactions, with the public and with each other. As employees of the Forest Service, we believe in:

- **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.

### Communication With Visitors

As a campground host, you are a representative of the Forest Service. The way you communicate with visitors leaves a strong impression. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Communicate with respect; aim to be courteous, tactful, patient, and helpful
- Remain professional at all times; strive to represent the Forest Service in the best possible light
- Focus on education rather than enforcement
- Refrain from discussing your personal views on Forest Service policies
- Be neutral with your opinions; avoid speaking about politics, religion, and any other topics that may be polarizing
- Be responsive to all visitor questions, comments, or requests

### Personal Appearance

Your host supervisor will share with you the specific dress code for your area. In general:

- Practice good personal hygiene
- Wear clothing that is neat, clean, and functional
- If a uniform or other identifying items are provided by the Forest Service, wear these while on duty

## Campsite Upkeep

Here are some guidelines that will help you set a great example for campers as they settle into their own sites:

- Keep your site neat, orderly, and clean
- Any cigarette butts should be disposed of in an appropriate container
- Store all personal items like bicycles and personal tools at your site
- Keep pets under direct control at all times, on a leash no longer than 6 feet in length, unless otherwise approved by your host supervisor
- Leave your pink flamingos (and other lawn ornaments) at home
- Check your volunteer agreement for any other specifics about your site (for example, to learn what types of sun shades are acceptable)
- Talk to your local point of contact if you have any questions about what is or is not allowed at your site

## Personal Visits

It can be exciting for family and friends to visit you at the campground—and it can be a wonderful way to introduce them to the forest! While daytime visitors are welcome, please check with your Forest Service contact regarding local expectations and guidance for overnight visitors. Some units may require campground hosts' visitors to reserve a separate campsite, while others may not. Campground hosts are team members. As such, your privacy is respected. Be attuned to the policy of your local unit before hosting overnight visitors.

## Prohibited Activities

Just like visitors and Forest Service employees, volunteer campground hosts are expected to follow all forest rules. Make note of the following actions, which are prohibited while you are on duty and may constitute grounds for termination of the volunteer agreement:

- Possession or use of firearms, except when authorized by a Regional Forester, Forest Supervisor, or Station or Institute Director
- Consumption of intoxicating beverages
- Possession or use of illegal drugs
- Use of government-owned vehicles, property, tools, equipment, or telephones, except as authorized in the volunteer agreement
- Fighting, use of derogatory language, intimidating behavior, discrimination, sexual harassment, violent or threatening behavior
- Violation of any state Fish and Game regulation or violation of any Federal, state, or local law
- Selling or distributing products or literature in a Forest Service facility
- Establishing additional rules or placing unauthorized signs

## 5. Customer Service

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The Forest Service wants visitors to have experiences that create pleasant, lasting memories of their time spent on the national forests. Campground hosts can help contribute to these positive experiences by providing exceptional customer service to all visitors. This means projecting a positive attitude, treating everyone with kindness and respect, and responding appropriately to complaints and difficult situations.

This chapter covers the basics of good customer service for a volunteer campground host.

### Greeting Visitors

The smiling face of a campground host is often the first one a visitor sees upon arriving at a campground or settling into their site. While you will want to document specific information (date, name, contact information, campsite number, vehicle details, group size) about each camper after they arrive, you can also do a number of things to help visitors feel welcome:

- Introduce yourself and describe your role at the campground
- Orient visitors to the campground facilities and regulations
- Answer any questions the visitors might have
- Share information about area history, wildlife, terrain, flora, fauna, and recreation opportunities
- Offer available maps, brochures, or other printed material about the campground and surrounding area

#### Here are some ways you can greet visitors:

- “Have you been here before? I would be happy to show you a map and offer suggestions on things to do.”
- “Are you planning a hike today? I’d be happy to suggest some trails.”
- “Are you aware this is a national forest? If you’re interested in knowing more, I can answer questions or direct you to our nearest visitor center.”
- “Some of my favorite places on the forest are....”

### Six Principles of Good Visitor Contact

Great customer service starts with a positive attitude, good listening skills, and a genuine interest in evaluating and responding to visitors’ needs. Here are six basic principles of good visitor contact:

- **Be Welcoming:** Each visitor is a part-owner of all National Forests; all visitors have an equal right to be there.
- **Be Ready:** “Service” isn’t just part of our agency’s name; it’s what we provide. Try to anticipate visitors’ needs and offer relevant information.
- **Be Receptive:** Make time for all visitors who want to talk. Give them your full attention, and address any questions or requests.
- **Be Helpful:** Repeat information, show visitors the way, or write down directions if needed. Seek answers for their questions.
- **Be Accurate:** Carry a forest recreation map of the local area and know how to read it so that you can use it to help visitors.
- **Be Informed:** Learn about the history, natural setting, and recreational opportunities around the campground, and share this with visitors.

## Handling Difficult Situations

Dealing with visitor complaints and dissatisfaction is an essential part of customer service as a campground host. Even if you can't directly "fix" or address their concerns, you can help visitors feel heard and respected. Here are three ways to work with visitors who are upset:

**React With Empathy:** A dissatisfied or even angry visitor usually just wants to be heard and understood. Acknowledge the visitor's feelings, listen to them without interruption, use statements that reflect back what you hear them say, and offer solutions when possible.

### Some useful phrases include:

- "It seems like you're pretty upset about this, and I don't blame you."
- "Let's see what we can do."
- "It has to be frustrating to have to..."
- "Most people would be angry if their..."

**Use Positive Nonverbal Communication:** Our body language can be just as powerful as our words. Offer adequate space between yourself and the visitor, smile (if appropriate), lean toward the visitor as they speak, and project a relaxed attitude with your arms and legs uncrossed. Offer solutions when possible.

**De-Escalate the Situation:** Stay responsive to the visitor's needs while avoiding confrontation by remaining calm, speaking in an even tone, disagreeing without becoming argumentative, and using neutral language to discuss their concerns. If necessary, ask another person, such as a district staff member, to handle the situation.

Instead of using pronouns (I, me, my), begin your remarks with impersonal, clarifying phrases such as:

- "It would appear from the evidence..."
- "Correct me if I'm wrong, but are you saying that..."

## 6. Rules and Regulations

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The purpose of rules and regulations is to protect not only our forest resources, but also our visitors. Generally, people want to know what the rules are and what behavior is acceptable, but they don't always understand why the Forest Service requires a rule or why compliance is important. This is where you come in—as a host, your responsibility is not to enforce rules and regulations, but to share information about them with visitors.

This chapter covers some of the common rules and regulations that you will encounter as a campground host, along with how to handle rule violations.

### Fee Payment

In the second chapter, you learned that one of the responsibilities of a campground host is to “improve fee compliance.” While you should not accept any direct fee payments, you can:

- Inform visitors of the payment procedures
- Offer visitors a collection envelope
- Direct visitors to the fee collection area
- Place envelopes on cars not displaying a fee stub or seasonal pass where a parking fee is charged, noting the date, time, license number, and vehicle description

### Common Restrictions

Earlier, we covered some of the specific activities that are prohibited while campground hosts are on duty. Below is a list of activities that are restricted for all users on the forest:

- Collecting or disturbing forest resources without proper permits
- Vandalism
- Dogs off-leash in developed recreation sites
- Mountain bikes on designated hiking or horse trails not open to their use
- Motorized vehicles (except battery powered wheelchairs) on trails unless designated for that use
- Discharging a firearm in or within 150 yards of developed recreation sites, campsites, buildings or residences, across or on national forest or grassland roads or adjacent bodies of water, or into or within any cave
- Excessive or underage drug and/or alcohol use
- Indecent exposure
- Metal detecting
- Use of fireworks in a developed recreation site, or when prohibited in local areas due to wilderness or fire risk

### Handling Violations

Luckily, most visitors enjoy using our national forests without committing any serious violations or disturbances. Please do not ignore obvious rule violations, however, because even small ones can become serious problems! Prevention is key: work to communicate rules and regulations to visitors upon arrival, during your roves, or when approached, and offer a reminder if you witness violations.

At the same time, remember to never put yourself in harm's way and to avoid aggressive confrontations; back away and disengage with the visitor if a situation escalates. You must know how to handle difficult situations, but your responsibility is education, not enforcement.

If you encounter a violation and the campsite occupant is not present, leave a written notice stating the problem. If the problem persists after the occupant returns, notify your host supervisor or recreation personnel on duty, the local district office, or a district or cooperative law enforcement officer.

## **Requesting Assistance**

If a visitor continues with a violation or if the behavior escalates even after you inform them of the rules, back off and assess the level of assistance required. If it is not an emergency, contact your host supervisor; if you are unable to reach them and if the situation warrants it, contact dispatch and request assistance.

If the situation constitutes an emergency, dial 911 and notify the district ranger as soon as possible. Contact dispatch immediately if you witness any of the following:

- Domestic fighting
- Theft
- Assault
- Rowdy behavior
- Suspicion of drugs

Be sure to document license plate numbers and descriptions of the incident if it's possible to do so without endangering yourself; your safety is most important. Do not attempt to intervene and "solve" the issue yourself.

## 7. Job Safety

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The hope is that all volunteer campground hosts will have pleasant and injury-free experiences during their time on the forest. If you sustain an injury, however, your health and welfare is the priority; notify your host supervisor or dispatch, and seek medical assistance immediately.

### Job Hazard Analysis

It's important for campground hosts to be informed about the potential safety and health hazards involved with specific aspects of their role. The way we do this is with a job hazard analysis (JHA), which identifies both hazards and ways to avoid or mitigate them. This might include:

- Specific procedures
- The use of personal protective equipment
- Clothing requirements
- Skill qualifications
- Required training
- Safety practices
- Emergency evacuation procedures

Your host supervisor will provide you with a JHA for specific tasks that you might perform while on duty.

### Protective Gear

Some tasks require various forms of personal protective equipment (PPE); if so, it will be mentioned specifically in the JHA. Some common PPE requirements include:

- Leather boots
- Hard hat
- Long-sleeved shirt
- Safety glasses or goggles
- Gloves

### Driving Safety

Whether driving your own vehicle or one that belongs to the Forest Service, practice "safety first" by acting as a defensive driver and obeying all posted speed limits and rules of the road. If operating a Forest Service vehicle or golf cart, also keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Always carry a hand-held radio while driving
- Inform your host supervisor if damage occurs, or if a vehicle or cart requires service
- Always check behind the vehicle and proceed with caution when backing up
- Refrain from using the horn to get a camper's attention unless necessary
- Keep the vehicle clean inside and out



If a visitor requests a “jump start” for their vehicle battery, you may do so as long as you have the proper training and approval from your district ranger; inquire whether this is acceptable as soon as you begin your service for the season.

## **Handling Equipment**

Whether mowing grass, using a weed trimmer to create a defensible space, or driving a golf cart during your roves, you need to use all equipment responsibly. This is especially important in areas where a single spark can launch a wildfire. Here are some ways to handle equipment with care:

- Ensure all equipment is in proper working order before using it; report any service needs to your host supervisor
- Keep equipment free of oil, dust, carbon buildup, and flammable materials
- Use the recommended grade of fuel for vehicles and equipment, and don't “top off” the fuel tank
- Keep vehicles off of dry grass or brush
- Remove rocks from the grass before using a weed trimmer or mower

## **Workers' Compensation**

We of course hope that all volunteers enjoy a pleasant and injury-free experience while serving as campground hosts. In the unlikely event that you suffer a duty-related injury, however, the Forest Service does provide volunteers enrolled on a Natural and Cultural Resources Volunteer Service Agreement (OF-301a) with workers' compensation medical coverage.

If an injury occurs, you or your host supervisor must report the injury to the Forest Service's Albuquerque Service Center, Human Resources Management (ASC-HRM) through the contact center at 877-372-7248 within 48 hours of the incident in order to begin the process of filing a worker's compensation claim with the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Program (OWCP).

In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, 20 CFR§10.300(b), onsite personnel representing the Forest Service have the authority to provide verbal permission for examination and/or treatment of a volunteer for a work-related injury and in lieu of authorization by ASC

## 8. Common Incidents

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Some of the most common incidents you may encounter as a campground host include misplaced items, missing children, and medical issues. This chapter covers general guidance on each of these; further information on handling emergencies can be found later in the manual.

### Lost and Found

Hosts are often the first point of contact for visitors who either lose or find items in the campground. In the case of lost items, take down a description of the item and its last known whereabouts, along with contact information for the person reporting the loss. If your campground has a message board, allow them to post a notice about the item.

Similarly, for found items, write down a description of the item and the circumstances in which it was found, along with contact information for the visitor who found it. If the finder would like to keep the item should it not be claimed, place a temporary tag with their contact information on it, and store it in a location agreed to by your host supervisor.

### Lost or Missing Children

If a visitor reports a lost or missing child, contact your host supervisor immediately. If they ask you to help the visitor, complete the following tasks:

1. Document a detailed and accurate description of the child, including:

- Name
- Sex
- Hair, eye, and skin color
- Height
- Weight
- Age
- Color and style of clothing
- Any other identifying features (glasses, freckles, etc.)
- Where they were last seen and with whom

2. Offer to show searching family and friends the locations of hiking trails.

3. Remind family and friends to frequently return to the campsite or leave someone there in case the child returns and to notify the host and/or authorities if the child is found.

4. If the child is still missing after a 30-60 minute search, contact the local Sheriff's Department. Consider contacting law enforcement sooner if the child is very young, was last seen near a hazardous location (e.g. cliffs, beaches, or lakes), or if darkness is approaching.

5. Report any foul play at once to the Sheriff's Department.

## Medical Issues

If you have medical training and if doing so will not put you in harm's way, you can use the first aid kit provided to you by the Forest Service to assist an injured or ailing visitor. Any attention you give the visitor falls under the "Good Samaritan" law, which basically protects you as long as you perform within the scope of your training. Be sure to know the laws for your location, as they vary by state.

If you have not completed basic first-aid training, contact your host supervisor and schedule a time to receive the training. In the meantime, you can still help in several ways:

1. Request assistance, either from dispatch, a forest employee, or other staff
2. Dial 911 or direct a bystander to do so in case of an emergency
3. Comfort the injured or ill visitor
4. Direct emergency responders to the visitor with the medical issue

## 9. Safety Issues

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All recreational activities on the forest, including those that happen at campgrounds, feature inherent risks because of the natural setting in which they occur. The Forest Service works hard to both reduce risks before each recreation season begins, and to address ones that develop during the middle of the season; the campground host serves as an important partner in this work.

This chapter covers some of the most common safety issues you may encounter as a campground host, with a focus on those related to wildlife encounters, animal-borne diseases, and fires.

### General Hazards

If you notice a potential safety hazard, report it to your host supervisor. Common campground safety hazards may include:

- Downed or exposed wires, or faulty electrical boxes
- Broken sprinkler heads
- Damaged picnic tables or fire pits with exposed rebar, nails, or sharp edges
- Raised nail heads on foot bridges, railings, or docks
- Dead trees

### Bears

Bears reside in many National Forests. As visitors in their homes, we are the ones who are responsible to keep the animals and ourselves safe. It is important for campground hosts to understand best practices in regard to bears, and to help educate visitors on these practices.

A common saying is, “A fed bear is a dead bear.” This means that when a bear becomes habituated to humans and human food, it will lead to the probable destruction of the bear because it becomes a nuisance and an increased danger to campground visitors. Because bears have an incredible sense of smell, they are attracted to any and all odors. It is important, then, to keep a clean campground and encourage visitors to practice proper food storage, following all recommended guidelines in your area.

If bears are present in the area where your campground is located, be proactive by doing the following:

- Educate visitors on safe food storage
- Keep your campsite clean
- Deposit all garbage in wildlife-resistant trash containers
- Store all scented items, including non-food items like toothpaste, sunblock, and deodorant, when not in use

## Black Bear Encounters

If a bear enters the campground seeking food, it may act in a predatory manner. Here are some guidelines for responding to a black bear encounter.

- Maintain a safe distance from the bear.
- Attempt to scare it away with loud shouts, by banging pots and pans together, or by throwing sticks or rocks in its general direction.
- If the bear persists, slowly move toward your vehicle or another secure area; face the bear while doing so, but don't look directly into its eyes.
- Report the incident to your host supervisor and only retrieve your personal belongings with their assistance.
- If you are attacked by a bear, act aggressively—yell, make noises, and wave your arms—and fight back; do not “play dead.”
- If you're carrying bear spray, make sure you know how to use it properly before an encounter occurs.

**Note that guidelines will differ in areas where grizzly bears are present;** your host supervisor will provide grizzly-specific information if you are volunteering in such an area.

## Hantavirus

Rodents carry the hantavirus in many regions of the United States. Infections in humans can lead to acute pulmonary failure and death. The disease is transmitted in several ways:

- By inhaling the aerosolized virus
- Through broken skin, eyes, nose, and mouth
- By ingestion of contaminated food or water
- Via the bite of an infected animal

### **To avoid infection, campground hosts should:**

- Avoid direct contact with both living and dead rodents, their droppings, urine, saliva, nests, or items they may have contaminated
- Use PPE in areas of infestation (i.e. respirator, gloves, eye protection, disposable coveralls)
- Ventilate closed buildings or rooms before spending time inside
- Disinfect all surfaces and objects in a room where infestation has occurred before sweeping or vacuuming

Seek treatment if you experience any contact with possible carriers or signs of possible symptoms, which usually occur within 2 to 3 weeks of exposure and may include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Cough
- Increasing acute respiratory distress

## Rabies

The rabies virus is an acute, often fatal disease most commonly transmitted through the saliva of an infected mammal during a bite; inhalation of aerosols is also possible. Campground hosts should avoid any wild animal (especially raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats) that appears to have lost its fear of humans or is behaving abnormally or aggressively; similar behavior in domestic animals is also a warning sign to exercise caution. PPE should be worn if working in bat-roost sites or in areas where bats congregate.

### If you are bitten by an animal:

- Cleanse the wound with soap, water, and disinfectant
- Seek medical attention
- Record the date and location where the bite occurred

Seek treatment if you experience any contact with a possible carrier or display any symptoms, which may include:

- Pain at the wound site if bitten or scratched
- Fever
- Headache
- Malaise
- Apprehension
- Difficulty swallowing
- Muscle spasms
- Paralysis
- Disorientation, agitation, or hallucinations

## Campfires

For many people, one of the highlights of visiting the national forests is enjoying a peaceful evening in front of a campfire. Visitors can typically have campfires, use charcoal grills, and use pressurized gas camping stoves without any prohibitions as long as two conditions are in place: there are no local fire restrictions and there are no red flag warnings issued by the National Weather Service.

### Forest Service Restrictions

Each national forest issues its own fire restrictions; your host supervisor will tell you what specific restrictions your district imposes.

Generally, there are four stages of such restrictions, depending on the risk of wildfires. These typically last for an extended period of time, such as several weeks. Here is a brief description of each:

- **Stage I:** Visitors cannot build, maintain, attend, or use a fire, campfire, or charcoal, coal, or wood stove except in designated campsites that feature a metal fire ring. Visitors can use petroleum-fueled stoves, lanterns or heating devices as long as they meet fire underwriter's specifications for safety. Visitors can smoke only within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site, or an area 3 feet in diameter cleared of flammable material.
- **Stage II:** In addition to the restrictions above, other activities are prohibited (e.g. smoking; using an explosive; possessing or using a motor vehicle off National Forest System roads, except when parking in an area devoid of vegetation within 10

feet of the roadway or parking overnight in Forest Service developed campgrounds; etc.); A full list of restriction actions is available at [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5371474.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5371474.pdf), or at your local Forest Service office.

- **Stage III & IV:** Visitors cannot enter, stay in, or use any restricted portion of the forest.

## **Red Flag Warnings**

The National Weather Service issues a fire weather watch when conditions (e.g. low humidity, strong winds, possibility of dry lightning strikes, dry fuels) that increase fire danger could exist within the next 12-72 hours. A red flag warning, the highest alert, is issued when weather events may result in extreme fire behavior within the next 24 hours. Extreme caution is necessary during these weather events to prevent a simple spark from causing a major wildfire.

When the National Weather Service issues a red flag warning, visitors cannot have open-flame campfires or charcoal fires. Visitors can use a pressurized gas stove. The only places visitors can smoke is within buildings, vehicles, developed recreation sites, or an area 3 feet in diameter cleared of burnable material.

The campground host should communicate current fire regulations to visitors and remind guests to fully extinguish their campfires before leaving their campsite or going to bed in order to reduce the risk of wildfires started by unattended campfires. Check during roves to see that all campfires are extinguished.

# 10. Handling Emergencies

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Fortunately, emergencies don't happen every day. When they do occur, however, it's important that campground hosts know how to react—that means keeping calm and addressing the situation quickly, but rationally. As always, your safety takes precedence; it is important that volunteers do not place themselves in harm's way. This chapter covers some general guidelines for handling emergencies.

## Communication

In an emergency, the campground host serves as a point of contact for campers by providing telephone and two-way radio service for any emergency needs. The host also communicates with law enforcement when needed, and acts as a contact point for any incoming emergency messages.

Keep a radio or phone nearby, along with a notepad, pen or pencil, and contact information for dispatch, law enforcement, and district personnel. Know where specific sites, facilities, pay telephones, areas of good cell phone service, and your district office are located.

## Requesting Assistance

Dial 911 to request help during an emergency. Tell the dispatcher the campground name, address, site number (if applicable), and the general nature of the emergency, so that they can respond appropriately. If you are unable to make the call, send a bystander to do so, making sure they can communicate that information to the dispatcher. In addition, notify your Forest Service point of contact as soon as possible during an emergency. If the district ranger is not available, call dispatch.

## Documentation

It is important to document all injuries and accidents that you witness, or that visitors report to you, and then report these to your host supervisor. Take clear, detailed, accurate notes about the nature of the emergency, including:

- Time and date
- Descriptions of the incident, including injuries or damage
- Visitor's name, address, phone number, campsite number, and license plate number

If directing law enforcement to the area, tell the officer if you noticed drugs, alcohol, weapons, or dogs in the area.

## Responding to Fires

Call 911 immediately in the case of an RV, facility, brush, or forest fire, and give the dispatcher the campground name, address, specific site number, and directions to the site, if applicable. In addition, contact dispatch and/or the district office to inform them of the fire. Follow all directions from Forest Service staff and fire officials when they arrive. Use caution around RV fires; keep campers away from propane tanks that may explode.

Know where to find fire extinguishers, fire caches, and first-aid kits throughout the campground. You may find yourself in



a situation where Forest Service staff or fire officials may request your assistance in bringing these aids to an emergency scene.

## Traffic Incidents

Contact the Sheriff's Office if vehicles are involved in an accident and follow all other documentation and communication procedures outlined earlier in this chapter. In addition, do not remove any vehicles or materials (even broken glass) if there has been an injury; law enforcement officers consider traffic accidents to be crime scenes. As discussed in the Common Incidents chapter, you can, however, assist injured visitors relative to the extent of your training.

## 11. Conclusion

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Thank you for taking the time to read through this manual. If you have any further questions, want to learn more about campground hosting, or request clarification on what is common on your district, please contact your host supervisor or district office.

*“Perhaps the rebuilding of the body and spirit is the greatest service derivable from our forests, for what worth are material things if we lose the character and quality of people that are the soul of America.”*

~Arthur Carhart, Forest Service Landscape Architect, 1919