

Welcome to the Withlacoochee Forestry Center Volunteer Trail Ranger Program! Participation in this program will allow you to be a steward of this unique area we call Withlacoochee State Forest.

What is a Volunteer Trail Ranger?

Volunteer Trail Rangers are an elite group of specially trained volunteers who are responsible for greeting fellow enthusiasts, educating users, giving minor aid in emergencies, and providing useful information about responsible trail use on public lands. Volunteers represent the Division of Forestry, but they carry no law enforcement authority above that of a regular citizen. Their influence lies in their knowledge, friendliness and willingness to help others. They are a vital part of the WFC Volunteer program and have a high degree of commitment to responsible use of trails on Withlacoochee State Forest.

An educated user is a responsible user. Through education, the objective of the WFC Volunteer Trail Ranger Program is to increase compliance with the rules and regulations, increase agency visibility, and increase visitor safety in our state forest. A Volunteer Trail Ranger communicates with fellow visitors, hands out maps, and reminds visitors of responsible trail use practices. They encourage *Leave no Trace* and *TREAD Lightly!* principles. Volunteer Trail Rangers also promote good trail manners as well as help visitors in need.

Why Volunteer?

When resource impacts increase due to misuse, access to public lands is at risk. One of the most powerful ways to increase the understanding of conservation messages is through peers. Trail users will listen to other users before they'll listen to folks with badges and guns, therefore, safety and land conservation messages conveyed by fellow users can have more powerful impacts than those same messages conveyed by law enforcement personnel. Most visitors to public lands understand the importance of conservation but may not be aware of the potential negative impacts of some activities. ***Most people do things wrong out of ignorance, not willful intent.***

Participating in the same activity as other users creates an added level of credibility. Other users will see you as "one of them" and be more apt to listen to what you have to say. As a result, you will be able to explain to them what activities are prohibited as well as why (i.e. dangerous or destructive). By increasing the number of individuals contacting visitors, together we can reach more users and have a huge positive impact!

Who Benefits?

Volunteer Trail Rangers earn respect by participating in a program that improves their sport. Other users gain knowledge and awareness demonstrated by Volunteer Trail Rangers. The WFC benefits from the extension of their education programs. Finally, the public lands benefit from encouraging responsible use rather than inappropriate use.

Volunteer Trail Ranger Goals

- Provide outstanding customer service to our visitors.
- Increase compliance with rules and regulations.
- Promote safe, responsible trail use and responsible land stewardship.

- Help public lands for future generations.
- Gather data regarding, trail management successes and problems on forest lands in Withlacoochee State Forest.

Volunteer Trail Rangers will accomplish these by:

- Volunteering time and energy.
- Increasing Agency visibility.
- Increasing peer pressure by fellow users.
- Encouraging visitor compliance.
- Providing accurate information, education, and maps.
- Emphasizing safety regulations.
- Promoting responsible trail etiquette.
- Acting as additional eyes and ears to inform agency personnel about trail conditions, visitor use patterns and potential resource impacts.

Who is Right for the Job?

Volunteer Trail Rangers perform a very important public service, not only for the WFC, but also for the various trail user communities. By increasing public education and understanding, volunteers can help protect and improve natural resources. However, this job is not for everyone. Each of the following is an important factor in becoming a Volunteer Trail Ranger:

Professional: Trail Rangers will be representing DOF, and the image of trail using recreationists. It is essential that volunteers look and act professionally at all times. You must be neat, clean, and courteous. Assigned uniforms should be clean and in good repair, and worn properly.

Safety Conscious: Volunteers are good examples of safe and responsible use, but they are also very conscious of their personal safety. The objective is to get home safely to your family every night. NOTHING that happens on public lands during the day is worth jeopardizing that objective.

Good Communicator: Volunteer Trail Rangers must understand that communication skills are vital since public education is the main mission of the Volunteer Trail Ranger Program. Volunteers must demonstrate the ability to communicate with public land visitors in a courteous, informed and positive manner. Remember, we have two ears and only one mouth - effective communicators use them in appropriate ratios.

Believe in Education: Volunteers understand and believe that education is the second effective step in the Four E's (Engineering, Education, Enforcement and Evaluation) and a great way to promote change. Volunteer Trail Rangers must also be willing to learn. Remember, you are educators, not enforcers.

Respectful: Volunteer Trail Rangers respect the environment and all types of public land recreation users.

People Oriented: Volunteers must be comfortable making public contacts.

Even-tempered: Volunteer Trail Rangers must be able to communicate in a non-confrontational manner to be an effective educator. Positive attitudes = positive programs. Users are our guests, not our enemies.

Ask yourself this:

Do I want to make my opinions known?

Or

Do I want to make a difference?

IF you want to make a difference, THEN being a Volunteer Trail Ranger might be for you.

You will be representing the Division of Forestry. Employees and volunteers must be courteous, helpful and professional. Remember, we work for the public!

How the Trail Ranger Program Works

If you feel that you qualify to be a Trail Ranger and if we feel that you qualify, then:

- You will fill out a volunteer packet to Volunteer for DOF. You will agree to pursue the training and follow the operational guidelines in this handbook, and training supplied to you through WFC. If you choose to use your own equipment, DOF will not be responsible for any repair or maintenance. Under the volunteer agreement, DOF will pay medical costs for injuries incurred while performing the duties of a Trail Ranger. Trail Rangers are expected to be examples and use trails responsibly. Report any work related injury immediately to the supervisor in charge. An incident report must be completed describing the events leading up to the injury.
- A training program will be provided to give you the skills needed to safely and successfully perform the duties of a Trail Ranger.
- Trail Ranger uniform and recognition items will be given to all successful applicants.
- Access will be provided to necessary education materials and safety gear.
- You will select another Trail Ranger to patrol with and schedule potentially available patrol days with the site supervisor and/or volunteer coordinator. Patrols could consist of part day (4 hours minimum), whole day, or multi-day (weekend or longer). All patrols must be approved in advance by the supervisor and /or volunteer coordinator or designated representative.
- At the end of each day, you will complete volunteer time sheets and turn them into the volunteer coordinator monthly. All radios and other gear should be returned to the place where they were picked up.
- Regular Trail Ranger meetings will be scheduled so that we can critique the program and make necessary changes or provide additional training.