



Guidelines for Tracking Volunteer Hours

July 2014

This document covers three important topics related to tracking Ice Age Trail volunteer hours: (i) why we do it, (ii) what we get out of it and (iii) the mechanics of the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) hours tracking system.

Why do we have to track volunteer hours?

The National Park Service (NPS) is required to report to Congress annually the number of volunteers who serve in our national parks and the number of volunteer hours they contribute. In 1983, an amendment to the National Trails System Act extended this "Volunteers in Parks" (VIP) program to include the volunteers who work on our National Scenic and National Historic Trails. Reporting our volunteer hours to the NPS is a condition of, as well as a justification for, the financial and other assistance we receive from the NPS for the Trail. The IATA is charged with administering the volunteer hours tracking program for the Ice Age Trail.

Why should we track volunteer hours?

The work that we put into tracking hours boosts our efforts to support the Ice Age Trail while yielding significant benefits for volunteers:

Benefits to our efforts to support the Ice Age Trail:

- A high hours count builds our case with legislators that we are a good value. The NPS receives relatively generous funding from Congress for the Ice Age Trail, including operational funding, land acquisition funding and support for volunteers, because of the high value of the volunteer hours we report.
- Quantifying our volunteer contribution aids our fundraising efforts. The same "good value" theme that applies to legislators also applies to foundations and other donors—they want to know that the money they contribute grows in value because it goes toward supporting the efforts of hundreds of dedicated volunteers.
- Tracked hours can serve as an important analytic tool. Some chapter leaders use their quarterly hours reports to assess Ice Age Trail maintenance needs and allocate volunteer resources efficiently.

Benefits to volunteers:

- Recognition of our volunteers as VIPs by the NPS provides a legal basis for volunteers to seek compensation for their medical expenses in case of injuries suffered while working on behalf of the Ice Age Trail.
- Through their status as VIPs, the NPS also provides volunteers with protection from personal liability in connection with their work. In essence, the NPS assumes liability if, for example, a hiker is injured while using the Ice Age Trail and tries to sue the volunteer responsible for maintaining the Trail segment where the injury occurred.

NOTE: The above two benefits apply only if volunteers are signed up as volunteers either individually or through membership in an IATA chapter and they record and report their hours and, in the case of injury, report injuries to NPS as soon after the incident as possible.

- The NPS Volunteers-In-Parks (VIP) program recognizes volunteers with a suite of valuable awards. Every volunteer in our database has a "career hours count" (started January 1st, 2007); as volunteers over time pass various hours thresholds (100, 250, 500, 750 hours...) they earn various awards such as certificates, pins, hats, shirts and jackets. Additionally, each time a volunteer passes a 250-hour increment, they receive a federal Interagency Volunteer Pass covering entrance fees at all federally administered recreation sites (national parks, national forests, etc.) for one year.

How should hours of individual volunteers be captured?

It is useful to approach this question with two types of volunteers in mind:

Tracking hours of the "consistent" volunteer

- A consistent volunteer is someone who attends Ice Age Trail events (such as chapter meetings, chapter workdays, outreach events, board meetings) regularly and/or does Ice Age Trail volunteer work on their own.
- This person should be given an individual hours log so that he or she can record his or her hours over the course of the quarter.
- At the end of the quarter, the volunteer should submit his or her log to the chapter hours rep or, in the case of board members, IATA staff.

Tracking hours of the "casual" volunteer

- A casual volunteer is someone who is attending an Ice Age Trail volunteer event for the first time or attends events infrequently.
- Casual volunteers are not expected to maintain individual hours logs.
- To capture hours of casual volunteers, the event coordinator should always be sure to provide an event sign-in sheet.

Should a consistent volunteer maintaining an individual log also sign in if a sheet is available at an event?

- With one exception, the volunteer is free to choose. If the volunteer elects to sign in, he or she should consider those hours captured and should NOT add those hours to his or her individual log. This eliminates accidental double-counting.
- The exception is Mobile Skills Crew projects. All volunteers should sign in at the start of each day at a MSC project. For fundraising purposes, it is important to quantify hours dedicated specifically to MSC projects.

Should a volunteer be concerned with which type of capturing method he or she chooses?

- No. Each volunteer's record in the master database is minimal—it includes the volunteer's name and career hours total, broken down by date and type of work (administrative, maintenance, training, etc.). Whether the volunteer's hours were captured at a chapter event (any chapter), board meeting, MSC project, any other Ice Age Trail event or on an individual hours log, reporting procedures ensure that the hours from all venues will ultimately be added to the individual volunteer's career hours total.

Once the hours of individual volunteers are captured, how should they be collected and added to the database?

At the chapter level

- At the end of each quarter, a representative from each chapter should collect all event sign-in sheets and individual hours logs from chapter volunteers.
- From those sheets, the chapter hours rep should create a chapter quarterly hours report. This report should summarize hours for all volunteers who contributed to chapter work, and also include a subset of info on number of Boy/Girl Scouts volunteering and their hours.
- The chapter hours rep should submit the chapter's quarterly hours report to the IATA staff person (currently Eric Sherman) who coordinates volunteer hours tracking.

At the board level

- At the end of each quarter, each board member should submit his or her individual hours log to the IATA staff person (currently Eric Sherman) who coordinates volunteer hours tracking.

What are the deadlines for quarterly reports?

January 21st for the Oct/Nov/Dec quarter

April 21st for the Jan/Feb/Mar quarter

July 21st for the Apr/May/June quarter

October 7th for the Jul/Aug/Sep quarter

- The deadline is earlier in the month for the last quarter because the IATA 's final report for the "volunteer year" is due to NPS in mid-October.

Clarifications and things to keep in mind:

There are many ways to volunteer!

- Volunteering is not strictly limited to trail building and maintenance. Participating in just about any activity that benefits the Ice Age Trail (including meetings, outreach events, administrative work, etc.) should be counted as volunteer time.
- Hiking the Ice Age Trail purely for recreation, either alone or as part of a group event, should not be counted as volunteer hours. Even that activity, however, can wind up including some volunteer time if, for example, you wind up reporting trail damage after your hike.
- Another good example of hiking that counts as volunteer time: organizing and leading a group hike.

Include travel time!

- The NPS requires that travel time to and from an Ice Age Trail event be counted as volunteer time, as you couldn't do your volunteer work without the travel time.
- Event sign-in sheets should always include a column for travel time.

Don't worry too much about the paperwork

- Feel free to modify the forms provided for event sign-in sheets, individual logs and chapter quarterly reports. The format is not as important as the data included on the various sheets.
- If you are an event coordinator who forgets to bring along an "official" sign-in sheet to the event, provide whatever you can to allow volunteers to sign in and record their hours.

A value is assigned to a volunteer hour

- The federal government recognizes a value for a volunteer hour. The latest figure is \$22.14 per hour.
- For the most recent NPS "volunteer year" (10/1/13-9/30/14), 2,379 volunteers provided 78,354 hours of superb volunteer service to the Trail. Considering the Fiscal Year 2014 private sector rate of \$22.55 per hour, Ice Age Trail volunteers donated a staggering \$1,766,882.70 worth of sweat equity!

Please share this information!

- Board members should remind each other at the start of each board meeting to record hours for the meeting on individual logs or a sign-in sheet.
- If you go to an event attended by casual volunteers and don't see a sign-in sheet, urge the event coordinator to provide one.
- Consider using this document as a guide for a brief training at your next chapter meeting. Repeat this training once per year.
- The IATA staff person (currently Eric Sherman) who coordinates volunteer hours tracking is available for presentations and trainings.
- In 2009, the NPS hired Dan Watson as a full-time VIP Coordinator for the Ice Age and North Country National Scenic Trails. Dan will help to coordinate reporting, training, the volunteer recognition program and a variety of other duties supporting the volunteers.

Thank you!