

Trails Forever Volunteer Program Information

Thank you for your interest in the Trails Forever volunteer program at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Trails Forever volunteer program is an opportunity for you to work closely with park staff and gain experience doing a wide range of trail rehabilitation work. The following information should provide answers to most of the frequently asked questions about the Trails Forever program. Please read over all of the information thoroughly before applying as a Trails Forever volunteer.

What is Trails Forever?

Trails Forever is a partnership program between Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Friends of the Smokies. The volunteer component of Trails Forever gives individuals the opportunity to work along side professional trail workers and make lasting and important improvements to trails throughout the park.

What kinds of work do Trails Forever volunteers do?

Trails Forever volunteers perform a wide range of trail maintenance and trail rehabilitation work. The particular jobs you are assigned to will vary depending on your experience level and may include installing drainage structures (i.e. waterbars, check dams), rehabilitating trail surfaces, constructing turnpikes (raise trail segments), removing brush and vegetation, and building foot logs and bridges. While these jobs may vary in complexity, all Trails Forever volunteers must be able to hike and safely perform strenuous and often difficult manual labor. Volunteers should be able to hike at least 4 miles and be comfortable lifting heavy objects and using hand tools (shovels, fire rakes, Pulaski/axes, sledgehammers, ect).

How do you become a Trails Forever Volunteer?

To be a Trails Forever volunteer, you must apply online at: www.smokiestrailsforever.org/volunteerapplication. This application will help Trails Forever staff determine which projects are best suited to your skills level, physical ability and interests.

Do I need experience to volunteer for Trails Forever?

The Trails Forever program provides opportunities for both skilled and non-skilled volunteers. If you are unsure about your skill level, the volunteer application provides an assessment section that will help you describe the types of applicable skills and work experience you possess.

Do I have to hike to be a Trails Forever volunteer?

Yes. Most of the Trails Forever projects will require at least some hiking. You must be able to hike at least 4 miles in order to participate as a Trails Forever volunteer, since many projects are at least 2 miles from a road or parking area (and 2 miles back).

Can Children be Trails Forever Volunteers?

There will be opportunities for young people to take part in some Trails Forever projects. It is important to remember that most of the project locations will be accessible only by foot and may require hiking 4 miles or more. This means that Trails Forever is not suitable for young children. Trail work also involves the use of hand tools, many of which have sharp edges not suitable for children.

How long are Trails Forever Volunteers required to work?

Trails Forever volunteers are required to commit to at least one full work day with the Trails Forever crew. This may be anywhere from an 8 hour to a 10 hour work day depending on the project.

Where do you meet for Trails Forever projects?

Volunteers will meet the Trails Forever crew at the trail head or parking area. Specific meeting places will be stated in the *Current Projects* section of the Trails Forever website. Volunteers are expected to be on time and prepared to begin work. The Great Smoky Mountains experiences high amounts of visitation. Most of the roads are curvy and travel is often slow, so please allow yourself extra time to reach your destination. Remember, Mapquest travel times do not account for curves, tourists or mountain weather. Be sure and pack your materials and plan your trip the night before. There is no cell phone service in many parts of the park, so there is no way to notify Park personnel if you arrive late. Tardiness will result in a wasted trip.

How do I get to the meeting place?

Volunteers are responsible for their own transportation to and from the designated meeting places.

What do I need to bring

Volunteers are required to provide their own backpack, food, water and clothing. All tools and necessary equipment will be provided. You must wear closed-toes shoes, preferably boots. You may not wear sandals or other open-toed shoes. Volunteers are also responsible for cold-weather and rain gear. Weather in Great Smoky Mountains National Park is often unpredictable and volunteers must be prepared for a range of potential weather conditions. Please see the check-list under the "Program Information" link on the Trails Forever volunteer web page.