

Shawnee National Forest Volunteer Program

Frequently Asked Questions

1) How do I become a volunteer?

The Shawnee National Forest offers a variety of ways in which you can get involved. Some common and current ways in which people and groups have become involved include participating in workdays or work weekends, coming out for an alternative spring break experience, and adopting a trail or trailhead. Check out the current listing of volunteer opportunities on the Shawnee National Forest website.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please call 618-687-1731.

2) Why do I need to sign and return a volunteer agreement?

This document identifies the group or individual who will participate in a volunteer workday; what the project will be; what personal protective equipment will be provided; and any compensation that might be given. Signatures from the individual or group liaison and the District Ranger make this a living document. By signing this agreement, volunteers are agreeing to follow Forest Service standards for the project and to follow implemented safety procedures. Once signed by all parties (parent/guardian if volunteer is under 18) the volunteers are, for safety purposes, treated like a federal employee. The standards that govern federal worker's safety apply to all volunteer activities.

3) Why do I need to wear a hard hat and/or other protective equipment?

As a Forest Service volunteer, you will be required to wear a hard helmet and other personal protection equipment (i.e., goggles for working with rock) whenever volunteering on Forest Service. Utilizing the personal protection equipment provided by the Forest Service greatly reduces any injury that may occur when traveling to or working at a project site. No, it is not the most attractive clothing accessory but personal protection equipment, like hard helmets, will save you a lot of pain and suffering if used when required.

Failure to follow established safety practices could result in Workman's Compensation denying your claim if you are injured participating in a volunteer workday.

Please show up on your volunteer day in attire suitable for the project and the environment. We ask volunteers to wear long pants, boots, and long-sleeved shirts (if allergic to poison ivy) and bring work gloves if you have them.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. The Shawnee National Forest has a strong and viable volunteer program noted for its dedication to the upkeep and rehabilitation of trails on the Forest **AND** the special attention given to everyone's safety.

Please adhere to these rules and everyone will have a safe and fun time on the trail!

4) Why will the Forest Service not allow volunteers to operate equipment such as chainsaws?

The Forest Service, as well as the Shawnee National Forest, recognizes that volunteers are experienced in many different aspects of working out-of-doors; those skills make the volunteers invaluable as an asset to accomplishing work on the ground. The Forest Service is not trying to diminish a volunteer's abilities by not allowing them to operate certain equipment, however, we must ensure that each volunteer has been qualified under Forest Service standards before operating equipment on volunteer projects.

5) What environmental hazards might I encounter while I am volunteering on the Shawnee National Forest and southern Illinois region?

The southern Illinois region and Shawnee National Forest is well-known for its diversity in wildlife and plant life. The beauty and awe of the region is appreciated and enjoyed by local residents, as well as visitors to the area.

However, along with this beauty and diversity are natural hazards. These hazards include wide-spread poison ivy, poisonous snakes, ticks that may carry Lyme disease, and chiggers.

When performing volunteer work on the Shawnee National Forest, it is advised that you take the following precautions to reduce the chances of suffering from the above mentioned environmental hazards:

Poison Ivy: People have different reactions to poison ivy; some have no reaction at all! The most important thing to know about poison ivy is what it looks like and that wearing long pants, long sleeves, and boots or shoes will reduce your risk of getting this irritating and itchy ailment. If you do touch poison ivy, wear gloves and avoid touching your skin.

If you are exposed, the oil from the plant (called urushiol) will need to be removed to the best of your ability. Store-bought remedies can be applied to help reduce the risk of a bad outbreak by removing the majority of the urushiol, and other remedies may or

may not help reduce the itching and rash and ooze that may occur on some people once the oils have penetrated the skin.

It is also important to know that a person can be exposed to the oils of poison ivy any time of the year. Poison ivy vines that lose their leaves should be avoided at all costs as should the bushy variety that will not completely die away and disappear as the season turns cold.

Find more information on poison ivy at: <http://poisonivy.aesir.com/view>

Poisonous Snakes: The southern Illinois region has a few well-known poisonous snakes that may be encountered when hiking and working in the Shawnee National Forest: copperheads, water moccasins, and massasauga rattlesnakes, and eastern timber rattlesnake. There are a total of 39 species of snakes in Illinois. All snakes can bite when threatened and scared, but the four mentioned above will cause problems for humans bit by those snakes; encountering a snake is usually by chance, unless you know where and what to look for.

When working around swampy, rocky, or even densely vegetated areas, please be aware of your surroundings and if you do encounter a snake, back slowly away and make a wide path around the snake. If you are bit by a snake, stay calm and go to the nearest hospital for treatment.

While many people are afraid of snakes and would prefer to do them harm, snakes play an important role in the ecology of any habitat by helping to control the rodent and insect populations and also provide food for birds of prey and other mammals. Snakes are only active during the warm months in southern Illinois as they are cold-blooded and rely on external warm temperatures.

Ticks: Ticks are prevalent throughout the Shawnee National Forest. Wear long pants and long sleeved shirts, hats, and spray bug spray around your ankles to keep them from crawling up your pant legs. Do the “tick check” after you complete your volunteer mission at the trailhead and then again at home. Ticks like to attach themselves in dark, warm places. Check your entire body!

If you do find a tick, slowly pull on the tick until it releases. You will need to make sure the head comes out with the tick. Attempting to pull out a tick with tweezers or burning it with an extinguished match may cause the tick to release saliva into your skin, which may or may not contain Lyme Disease or other tick-borne illnesses.

Click on the following link to the Illinois Health Department for more information and treatment. <http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pccommonticks.htm>

Chiggers: Chiggers are another common occurrence during the warm months in the southern Illinois region. Chiggers are very tiny mites that will attach themselves to human skin and feed on the skin and blood of a human. While they are not harmful in the United States, they can produce a red dot that will oftentimes swell and itch! People with a more extreme allergy to chiggers may even develop a fever.

The itching typically begins 4-8 hours after the bite. Again, wearing long pants and spraying around the ankles with an insect repellent made for chiggers (and other biting insects) is recommended. As with ticks the chiggers may still find ways to latch onto human skin. Taking precautions will lessen the amount of chiggers and eventual itching caused by them.

Click on the following link from the University of Florida for more information:
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/IG085>