



Volunteer Trail Crew Guidebook

Overnight and Extended Projects

Spring 2019



Photo by Mireilla Van der Linde

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Dear Volunteer,

Welcome! Thank you for making the decision to support and care for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT). Your contribution to the PCT will help make the trail a better experience.

We know that your time and energy is extremely valuable. Our goal is to provide you with the opportunity to be able to use your strengths and pursue your passions to not only better the PCT, but also enrich your own life. We want your volunteer experience to be positive, fulfilling, and memorable.

This guidebook is intended to provide information regarding what to expect while volunteering on a PCTA volunteer trail crew, as well as how to plan and prepare for your trip. Keep in mind, we can only provide you with the basics. Learning what life is actually like on a trail crew will only come from experiencing it yourself!

We look forward to seeing you out on the trail. Thank you for supporting the PCT and the mission of the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

Happy trails to you!

Pacific Crest Trail Association
Volunteer Programs



**Pacific Crest Trail
Association**

The PCTA Mission

The mission of the Pacific Crest Trail Association is to protect, preserve and promote the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail as a world-class experience for hikers and equestrians, and for all the values provided by wild and scenic lands.

PCTA has a vision for the future of the Pacific Crest Trail and a vision for the future of our organization. Our vision includes:

- The entire PCT corridor is permanently protected, well maintained and effectively managed. The trail is world renowned for offering a rare opportunity to travel through exceptionally scenic, remote, primitive landscapes.
- The PCTA, widely recognized as the trail's champion and steward, achieves its work through the strength of its partnerships, staff, volunteers, and the rest of the PCT community.

To learn more about the PCTA, please see *The Pacific Crest Trail Association: Past and Present* at the end of this guide or go to www.pcta.org.

The Trail Crew's Role and Structure

Trail crews are a vital component in the building, maintenance, and protection of the PCT. Currently, there are twelve PCTA community-based volunteer groups that have adopted and physically maintain a portion of the PCT. In addition, there are multiple corps crews who travel extensively on the trail to maintain high priority sites. Each year these crews, along with PCTA staff, take out new and seasoned volunteers to conduct trail work. Projects can include maintaining and constructing structures, maintaining and improving tread, as well as brushing and clearing vegetation.

Getting to know your fellow trail crew members can be fun and is an inevitable part of being on a trail crew. The crew size will typically consist of 3-12 individuals. Since the crew lives and works together throughout the duration of the project it is important that all crew members pitch in to help one another. Responsibilities are shared both on the trail and at the camp. Many times, teamwork is the only way to complete a task at hand.



Photo by Kate Clabby

Each crew has one or two crew leaders who will act as a source of information, education, assistance, and advice for you. They oversee and have the final word on any matter concerning crew life, safety, and work. While the crew leader is there to ensure the quality of work and oversee a safe working environment, they are also there to act as instructors.

We want you to learn valuable trail skills that you can use to do the job right. We encourage you to ask questions, watch and work with experienced crew members, and learn all that you can. The learning element can easily be lost in the press of doing a job. Don't let that happen. Try to experience a variety of work projects during your involvement with the crew. Find your own pace and work together with your fellow crew members.

Your First Day

You will begin by meeting the crew at a



Photo by Jodi Bailey

designated location and time, typically a trailhead or campground. Please review the directions to the meeting location well enough in advance so that if you have questions, you have adequate time to get answers and clarification. It is important to meet the crew at the appointed time; please give yourself plenty of travel time and **plan to arrive 15-30 minutes early**. If you are running late, please contact your crew leader to let them know. After meeting, the crew will set up camp, backpack to base camp, or begin work.

The Trail Crew's Daily Schedule

The schedule will vary depending on the project and crew. Once you meet your crew, the leaders will provide you with additional details on what you can expect each day. Workdays will be 6-10 hours long and you can expect each full workday to contain:

- A shared camp breakfast
- Morning and afternoon stretching, done individually or as a group
- Training and safety sessions with the crew leaders prior to the beginning of a new project
- Lunch, snacks, and breaks
- Dinner and evening relaxation, conversation, and personal time

Meals are provided on many projects, but most crews do not have a camp chef and none of the crews have maid service. This means that all crew members are expected to participate in cooking and cleanup. Leave No Trace Principles (LNT) are also practiced. Please see the *Leave the No Trace Principles* section at the end of this guide to learn more.

Nutrition and Meals

A well-fed crew is a happy crew! Food is one of the single most important facets of a trail crew. As trail workers burn calories and expend energy at a rapid rate, the need and desire for food increases. Often, food is one of the most popular topics of trail conversation. Crew leaders aim to provide meals that are delicious, nutritious, and filling.

Crew leaders do their best to accommodate an individual's dietary needs, however, we may be unable to meet highly specialized requests.

PCTA collects dietary needs on volunteer applications, then shares that information with crew leaders before meal-planning. If you're concerned your dietary needs haven't been recorded, please contact PCTA or your crew leader at least two weeks prior to the project start date.

Keeping Clean

Sanitation is a vital component to crew life. Since hands are the main transmitting devices, please



Photo by Kate Clabby

wash them often. Here are a few guidelines that all crew members need to follow:

- Wash your hands before handling any food
- Wash your hands after using the privy
- Wash your hands just for the heck of it
- Wash all cooking gear and personal eating utensils after meals
- If using water from outdoor sources, make sure to treat, boil, or purify it
- To get food out of a bag, such as trail mix or chips, use scoops or pour directly from the bag

What You Will Need to Bring

At the end of this guide, you will find a *What to Bring* checklist. When packing for your trip, please keep in mind:

- Temperatures may vary from the 20s at night to 90s during the day. The weather can change quickly, and it often does. Crews work in all conditions, rain or shine, cold or hot. Please come prepared for all elements.
- You will need to bring enough containers with you to hold a gallon of water as you're working throughout the day.
- Trail work is dirty work. Since you will be working in the dirt and may be working in mud or dense vegetation, please bring appropriate gear. This means you may want to reconsider bringing your most expensive outdoor apparel.
- Insects are always a possibility. This can include mosquitoes, no-see-ums, and ticks in some areas. Clothing that covers your arms and legs can prevent bites. You may also want to consider bringing bug spray. Inspect your body at the end of the day and when you get home for bites.
- Ample sunshine can make for a great day on the trail; however, at higher elevations the risk of sunburn increases. You should bring a hat, sunscreen, and lip balm.
- Please do not bring firearms. These are prohibited by the agency agreements that enable our work.

Backcountry Projects

Some crews will work in backcountry settings that can be 3-10 miles from a trailhead. Backcountry projects can be physically and mentally demanding. To volunteer on a backcountry trail crew, prior backpacking



experience is required. Volunteers provide their own personal backpacking gear (tent, backpack, sleeping bag) and need to be comfortable living and working in the backcountry. On longer duration backcountry trips, pack stock support is typically provided to assist with tools, food, and group gear. Volunteers will backpack in their own personal gear. Volunteers need to keep in mind that backcountry projects offer fewer luxuries. Since kitchen gear is kept to a minimum due to necessity, meat may not be served at meals on backcountry projects.

Safety, Safety, Safety

Safety is very important to us and is something we will address here and again on the trail. During trail work, we utilize a variety of tools. If used improperly, they can be dangerous and there is the risk of an accident. In addition, the daily use of trail tools can be stressful on your body. We do our best to avoid injuries. The best way to do this includes **being mindful, listening to your crew leader and being aware of your fellow crew members**. Work smarter, not harder! Don't try to compete with yourself or anyone else. If you're tired and need a water break, take it!

Be particularly attentive at the end of the day, as most injuries occur when folks are tired.

Any participant (volunteer, corps member, staff, or agency partner) on a project should feel responsible and empowered to stop trail work operations if they spot a safety concern or problem. Crew leaders should be informed immediately regarding safety issues, or inappropriate comments or behavior. In addition, all participants on a project should work within their personal physical limits and should not feel compelled to push themselves beyond their limits. **Nothing is as important as an individual's personal safety**. All participants need to be honest with each other regarding the state of their personal well-being.

Safety, Safety, Safety (continued)

Each crew leader is trained with an emergency protocol developed by the PCTA and our partners.

Prior to beginning trail work, the crew leaders will provide the crew with a safety session. You will

be instructed of the emergency protocol, location of the first aid kit, and any other safety precautions that need to be taken at the project site. You will also be provided with work gloves and a hard hat.

To help protect your personal safety, please take the following precautions while you're on a trail crew:

- Wear boots with slip-resistant tread that offer firm and flexible support. Light-weight trail running shoes, sneakers, and sandals are not acceptable
- Wear clothing suited to the location, climate, and job
- Long pants are required. Wear long-sleeved shirts as needed (certain tasks require wearing a long-sleeved shirt)
- Wear sunglasses or safety glasses in brushy country for eye protection
- Wear sunscreen
- Drink water regularly
- Avoid working alone
- Be sure others know where you are
- Watch your step and make sure you have secure footing at all times
- Always be on guard for falling trees, snags, limbs, rolling logs, or rocks



Photo by Terry Hill

Pets

Please do not bring any pets. There are swinging tools and moving objects during volunteer projects. Pets can be a significant distraction, at risk of injury, and a safety hazard for others. In addition, while your pet may be adorable and well-behaved, not everyone is comfortable around pets.

Alcohol and Marijuana

Because safety is our top priority, we are concerned about the potential for any type of intoxicating drug or alcohol to affect a volunteer's capacities.

Alcohol: PCTA does not provide alcohol on projects. If a volunteer decides to bring and consume alcohol, they need to do so in moderation and outside the designated work hours. Volunteers will be dismissed from a project if the crew leader feels a volunteer is abusing alcohol. Some projects are led by corps crews from the American Conservation Experience (ACE) or Student Conservation Association (SCE). While serving with these crews, alcohol is NOT allowed in camp. It is important to know that these corps programs are drug and alcohol-free and we expect volunteers to respect these policies.

Marijuana: Possession or use of marijuana is prohibited at all times on PCTA volunteer projects. Although certain states have legalized the medical and/or recreational use of marijuana, it remains illegal to possess marijuana on all federal lands -- even within states that allow it; the federal government can prosecute people who are otherwise protected under state laws. All PCT projects are under federal jurisdiction because the PCT is a federally designated and managed resource. Where the PCT crosses private or state lands, it does so upon federally-owned easements. Further, the agreements that provide funding and insurance coverage for PCTA volunteer programs are federal agreements. Therefore, PCTA must abide by federal laws on all projects. Volunteers will be dismissed from a project if using marijuana.

In an Emergency

If there is an emergency at home PCTA staff will know how to locate



and contact the crew you are with. **Please ensure that calls are only made for real emergencies.** If there is a real emergency at home, please have your family members or friends contact:

- **PCTA Headquarters**
Office hours: Monday-Friday,
8:00 am-5:00 pm PST
Phone: (916) 285-1846
- **Justin Kooyman,**
Director of Trail Operations
For after-hours or weekend emergencies
Phone: (916) 245-3330

Sharing the Trail with Equestrians

The PCT is a long-distance national scenic trail open to hikers and equestrians. Volunteer equestrian packers are vital to the success of backcountry trail projects. A week-long trail project for a twelve-person crew can require 2-3 tools per person, 200 pounds of food, food storage bins, and a variety of kitchen supplies. It would be extremely challenging, if not impossible, to get these items in to a backcountry base camp without the assistance of equestrian packers. One pack animal can carry approximately 150 pounds of food and gear!

If you are on a trail project with packers or if you encounter equestrians on the trail, here are a few tips:

- Be clearly visible. Do not stand behind trees.
- Move tools, backpacks, and yourself off the trail. If the terrain allows it, stand on the downhill side of the trail.
- Communicate with the riders and let the pack stock know you are there. Say hello!
- If you need to pass stock tied near the trail, move slow, talk to the animal, and give a wide berth while passing.

For Your Protection

A volunteer working on the PCT is officially a volunteer of the USFS, BLM, or NPS, and is entitled to certain protections when safety requirements and current volunteer agreements are in place. In all three of these federal agencies, volunteers are considered to be federal employees for purposes of:

- Compensation for work-related injuries or illnesses under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA), relating primarily to costs for medical care in case of injury or illness; and
- Protection from tort claims, under the Federal Tort Claims Act, which may be filed by anyone who may claim to have sustained personal injury or property damage due to the actions of a volunteer; and
- Claims relating to damage or loss of personal property of the volunteer while performing volunteer service.

Volunteers are not considered to be federal employees for purposes of pay, benefits, retirement, or unemployment compensation. Volunteers working on the PCT in California State Parks are covered by the federal agency that holds the easement through that given park; this will be either the USFS or the BLM.

For Your Protection (continued)

Please be aware that the protections listed above will not be valid if a volunteer injures him/herself while hiking in to or out of a project/base camp site, either by arriving late or leaving early, without a member of the official trail crew. An official trail crew member is designated as a corps crew member or other person(s) designated by the trail crew leader. You will also not be covered if your injury is the result of lack of compliance with safety procedures, if the proper safety equipment was not used, or if you fail to report an injury immediately. The coverage also does not cover injuries you might sustain on days off during a recreational opportunity.

new friendships, and thankful for the opportunity to give back to the trail.



Ensure Your Experience is Positive

Living and working on the trail can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. While each person's experience will be different, we often hear from volunteers at the end of their project that they feel refreshed and energized, satisfied with the work they performed, excited about their

While we try to make sure your needs are met while on a trail crew, please remember you are a vital component in ensuring your own experience is a positive one. Being flexible and open-minded with a willingness to work as part of a team will help to make your experience joyous and memorable. ***We look forward to seeing you on the PCT!***

What to Bring Checklist

! For all backpacking/backcountry trips: Please bring only lightweight, compact items and equipment, even if your group will be assisted by pack stock.

Clothing

Layers work best as outdoor temperatures, weather, and your activity level will vary throughout the day. Follow the layering system for your work and camp clothes.

Long pants are required to conduct trail work. Long sleeve shirts are recommended for sun and insect protection and in some areas are required for trail work.

- Layer 1: Long underwear tops and bottoms, socks. Made of lightweight wool or synthetic material.
- Layer 2: Mid-weight wool or synthetic pants and shirt. Can be more than one layer; bring additional layers if you get cold easily. Cotton is not recommended but can be included here.
- Layer 3: Raincoat, rain pants, or other water/wind resistant gear.
- Sturdy boots with slip-resistant tread that offer firm and flexible support. No sandals or sneakers while working on the trail but you may want to bring these for wearing at camp.
- Warm hat and warm gloves while at camp.
- Work gloves and hard hat if you prefer to use your own, otherwise we will provide them.

Sleeping Items

- Tent
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping mat

Food and Eating Utensils

- Sealable plastic container to pack lunch
- Plate / bowl
- Fork and spoon
- Cup / insulated drinking mug
- Water bottles: bring enough containers to hold 4 quarts (1 gallon) of water
- Water filter, if desired (water and/or filters will be provided on all projects)

Toiletries and Personal Items

- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Hat
- Lip balm
- Insect repellent
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Daypack
- Alarm clock

Other Items to Consider

- Towel
- Swimsuit
- Camp chair (compact)
- Supplemental snacks
- Camera
- Map and Compass
- Pocket knife
- Bandana

Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles

The Leave No Trace Principles are adopted by the Pacific Crest Trail Association. These principles are designed to help us minimize our impact on nature. Please do your part.

conditions that will be encountered. Users need to be prepared for all weather conditions and have adequate gear including clothing, boots, shelter, water, and food.

1. **Plan ahead and prepare.** Outdoor users can increase their level of safety and comfort as well as minimize damage to nature by planning ahead and being prepared for the terrain and weather

2. **Travel and camp on durable surfaces.** A primary, identifiable trail provides a route that concentrates outdoor users and minimizes the impact to the area. Trampling can occur when

users depart from this trail. The resulting barren area can lead to erosion and with consistent use the area will be unable to recover. When traveling users should avoid shortcuts and walk in a single file in the middle of the marked trail even when wet or muddy. Choose the most durable surfaces such as sand, gravel, rock, dry grasses, or snow when traveling and camping. Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from the edge of a stream or lake.

3. **Leave what you find.** Preserve the present and the past. Leave rocks, plants, natural objects, and historic and cultural artifacts as you found them. Take pictures instead! Do not dig tent trenches or hammer nails into trees. Replace rocks and twigs that you may have cleared when setting up your campsite. Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species by keeping your boots and gear clean of hitchhiking seeds.
4. **Minimize campfire impacts.** Natural areas have become increasingly degraded with an overuse of fires and increased demand in firewood. Alternatively, a lightweight stove can be used for cooking and a candle lantern or headlamp can be used for light. If fires are permitted they should be limited to fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. They need to be kept small and made from sticks found on the ground that can be broken by hand. Campfires need to be extinguished completely and the cool ashes scattered.
5. **Respect wildlife.** Wildlife need to be quietly observed from a distance. Users should not follow, approach, or feed them. During sensitive times (mating, nesting, raising young, winter) wildlife should be altogether avoided. Storing

food, scented personal items, and trash in secure locations can help protect the user and the local wildlife.

6. **Be considerate of other visitors.** All users have the right to an enjoyable outdoor experience. Courtesy and respect toward fellow-users help protect the quality of their experience. Yield to other users on the trail, step to the downhill side of the trail when pack stock are passing, and camp away from the trail and other visitors. Let nature's sounds prevail by avoiding loud and obtrusive voices and noises.
7. **Dispose of waste properly.** Be informed about proper waste storage and disposal. A good rule is: pack it in, pack it out. Leftover food needs to be properly sealed and stored away from the tent. If latrines are unavailable, human waste will need to be disposed of in catholes 6-8 inches deep in the soil and at least 200 feet from a water source. Toilet paper and hygiene products need to be packed out. Some people will use leaves, rocks, and pinecones to supplement toilet paper. To wash dishes or yourself, water needs to be carried at least 200 feet from the water source. Strained dishwater should be scattered. You can also practice "negative trace" by picking up trash that others may have left behind.

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The Pacific Crest Trail Association: Past and Present

It may be impossible to pinpoint the first person to propose the PCT, but Clinton C. Clarke, founder of the Pasadena Playhouse and chairman of the Mountain League of Los Angeles, is often credited with the idea since he organized the Pacific Crest Trail System Conference in 1932 to support the concept. Clarke's federation of hiking clubs and youth groups was devoted to developing an interconnected system of existing trails and new construction that would extend all the way from Canada to Mexico on or close to the crest of the western states. This was not a new idea, but unifying the many hiking groups for this cause was. Clarke organized the YMCA-PCT Relays, held during the summers of 1935 through 1938. During these relays, 40 teams of young

hikers (ages 14-18) scouted a route for the trail under the direction of a young YMCA outdoorsman named Warren Rogers. They carried a log book north from Campo on the Mexican border, eventually reaching milepost 78 on the Canadian border.

Rogers became more involved and served as the Conference executive secretary with Clarke, organizing support for a border-to-border trail for the next twenty-five years until Clarke's death in 1957. The result of this effort and



others was the enactment of the National Trails Act in 1968. The Act called for the appointment of a Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Advisory Council to develop the route, design, and management plan for the trail. The Council held its first meeting in 1970.

The Pacific Crest Trail Association was first incorporated as the Pacific Crest Trail Conference in 1977 under the leadership of Rogers and M. Merritt Podley. It was the natural outgrowth of the old Pacific Crest Trail System Conference, and Pacific Crest Trail Club, an individual membership group that Rogers founded for hikers and equestrians. Rogers ran the Conference and Club from his home in Santa Ana until the early 1980s. The Club was merged into the Conference, and the name was changed to Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) in 1992 to reflect the focus and volunteer structure of the group as an individual membership organization, rather than a federation of outdoor clubs. The board of directors developed bylaws for governance of the organization and took charge.

In June 1993, the PCTA joined the U.S. Forest Service and other land management agencies in celebrating the completion of the Trail with a “Golden Spike” ceremony near Soledad Canyon in the Angeles National Forest. That same year, the PCTA signed its first Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Departments of Agriculture’s Forest Service (USFS), the U.S. Department of Interior’s National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This agreement recognized the PCTA as the federal government’s primary partner in the management and operation of the PCT. The Memorandum of Understanding is renewed on a regular basis.

With help in the form of a USFS grant, the PCTA hired its first paid staff in 1993. The Forest Service’s intent was to have the staff design and develop an Association structure that would give leadership to a membership expansion effort, maintain the trail with volunteer work parties, and become self-supporting. Since then the PCTA has continued to grow both in staff and responsibility.

Today, the PCTA has a regular staff of 27, including an executive director and trail and administrative staff. A volunteer board of directors provides leadership and governance for the PCTA. The PCTA conducts annual advocacy trips to Washington DC to support the PCT, issues visitor permits to hikers and equestrians traveling more than 500 miles on the PCT, and publishes magazines and e-newsletters to provide education, stories, and pictures on current PCT events and issues. In addition, the PCTA, along with their government agency partners, lead the coordination, management, and operation of the PCT and feeder trails. Activities include signing, condition surveys, trailhead and trail use

surveys, water development, adopt-a-trail programs, as well as new construction and ongoing maintenance. However, this is not done by staff alone. PCTA volunteers put in almost 100,000 hours each year.

