Expanding Volunteer Capacity

American Hiking Society



Morgan Ellis, Manager, Programs & Events

Morgan joined the American Hiking team in March as the National Trails Day Coordinator after spending a decade in the summer camp and outdoor education industry. In June, Morgan transitioned into the Manager of Programs and Events role, where she manages day to day operations of all AHS programs including Volunteer Vacations, Alternative Breaks, and the National Trails Day® event.



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience.

Program: Trail Stewardship

AHS offers opportunities to build & maintain trails in your local community and beyond including:

- **National Trails Day®** (first Sat in June) brings together thousands of outdoor enthusiasts in communities across all 50 states.
- **Volunteer Vacations & Alternative Break** participants give back to the land, gain meaningful outdoor experiences, and help ensure trails remain safe and accessible for generations to come





Taking place on the first Saturday in June, National Trails Day® is a day of public events aimed at trail volunteers, recreation opportunities, and encouraging local communities to connect in the outdoors. Thousands of hikers, bikers, rowers, horseback riders, trail clubs, federal and local agencies, land trusts come together in partnership to support, maintain, and clean up public lands and trails with a collective goal of expanding access to enjoy the great outdoors.

National Trails Day® Recap

	2026	'25-26 Comparison
Events	**1,401**	+458 (49%+)
Volunteers	**9,495**	+3,438 (57%+)
Volunteer Value	**$1.6M**	+$453,926 (39%+)
Participants	**82,003**	+15,315 (23%+)
Miles of Trails	**1,691**	+933 (123%+)





US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS 2026 IMPACT

VOLUNTEER LABOR VALUE

$21,991



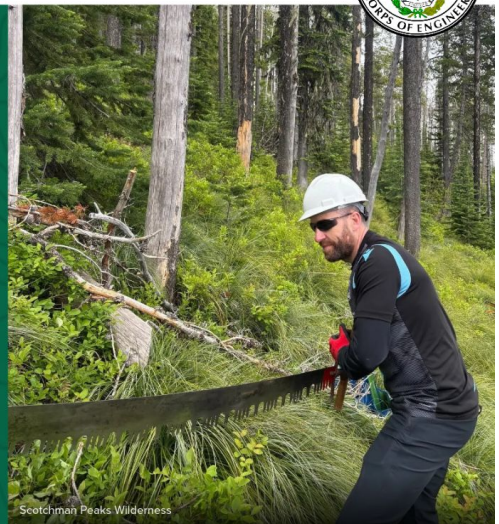
VOLUNTEER HOURS

608



REGISTERED EVENTS

12



Volunteer Vacations



What are Volunteer Vacations?

- 4-7 day service project (**supporting your trail needs**) that involve building and maintaining hiking trails on public lands
- Crews range from **6-20** volunteers, always led by either an **AHS Crew Leader and/or a host staff from your site**
- Accomodations can range from primitive backcountry camping, to car camping (most common), or lodges, cabins and bunkhouses with modern / indoor amenities
- Volunteer Vacations foster public land stewardship and provide volunteers the opportunity to give back to the trails they love, meet new people, and have a great time doing it while helping to complete trail maintenance projects



What is the impact of Volunteer Vacations?

- Since the start of the program, AHS Volunteers have contributed over 650,000 hours of service that helped to build and maintain almost 5,000 miles of trails and topped $11.5 million in volunteer labor value.
- Volunteer Vacations can help support your backlogged trail maintenance needs for projects that don’t otherwise have staff or funding available



Who does what?

American Hiking provides you the following project assistance:

- Volunteer recruitment for your project and national promotion through our website, newsletter, email lists, industry events, sponsors and partners
- Logistical support and communication throughout the planning and trip process
- Volunteer food stipend & meal planning oversight for trips that do not provide food
- Assistance from a volunteer crew leader (if requested) who will aid with menu planning, food shopping, crew communications, social leadership and lodging logistics

Volunteers provide:

- Volunteer labor and eager, enthusiastic attitudes
- Camping gear (backpack, sleeping bag, tent, personal items)
- Travel to and from a predetermined pick-up point, generally the closest major airport

Hosts provide:

- Project plan and backup plan for a volunteer trail project - what are your trail needs?
- Technical expertise and full supervision for the volunteers
- Lodging for volunteers (cabin, lodge, house, improved or primitive campsite)
- Tools & safety equipment including first-aid supplies
- Group cooking supplies including stove, pots, pans, utensils, and fuel
- Transportation to the worksite if hiking is not an option
- Airport Pickup and Drop-off for volunteers (not required but highly recommended)



What are the costs associated with hosting a project?

- There is NO cost due to American Hiking
- The only costs would be associated with staffing / supervision of your project, providing housing (if not provided at your location), and purchasing / providing the group cooking gear



AHS Volunteers

- AHS volunteers come from all walks of life and from across the country.
- Age ranges from 10 to 80 - host determines minimum age.
- AHS only allows those under 18 with a parental or legal guardian, and if allowed by host staff.
- While many volunteers come with significant trail maintenance experience, there is no experience needed to join a Volunteer Vacation! Consider this range of experience when designing your project.
- All tool use, instruction and full supervision needs to be provided for the duration of the project work



Next Steps for Hosts



Create a project plan and submit an online application

- Rolling application window open through late fall for a project during the following year
- On your application, you let us know:
  - **Project Dates** - Consider weeks when the weather would be ideal to host a volunteer crew and when accommodations would be available.
    - If your location is known for seasonal attractions (i.e. fall foliage, wildlife migrations or spring blossoms, etc.), consider hosting in that time-frame to attract more volunteers.
    - If dates are flexible, let us know in the application
  - **How many volunteers you can host**, the minimum volunteers to run the project, and the minimum age you can supervise
  - **The scope of the project plan:** the bulk of your volunteer projects should be focused on building or maintaining multi-use or hiking trails on public land.
    - Have a few projects on backup!
  - **Accommodations:** cabin/bunkhouse, campsite facilities, backcountry access, proximity to bathrooms, water access, wifi / cell coverage, etc.
  - See **FULL HOST WEBINAR** on our website for detailed project application tips

Application Timeline

Applications will be reviewed and accepted on a rolling basis until early November

☐ November - December

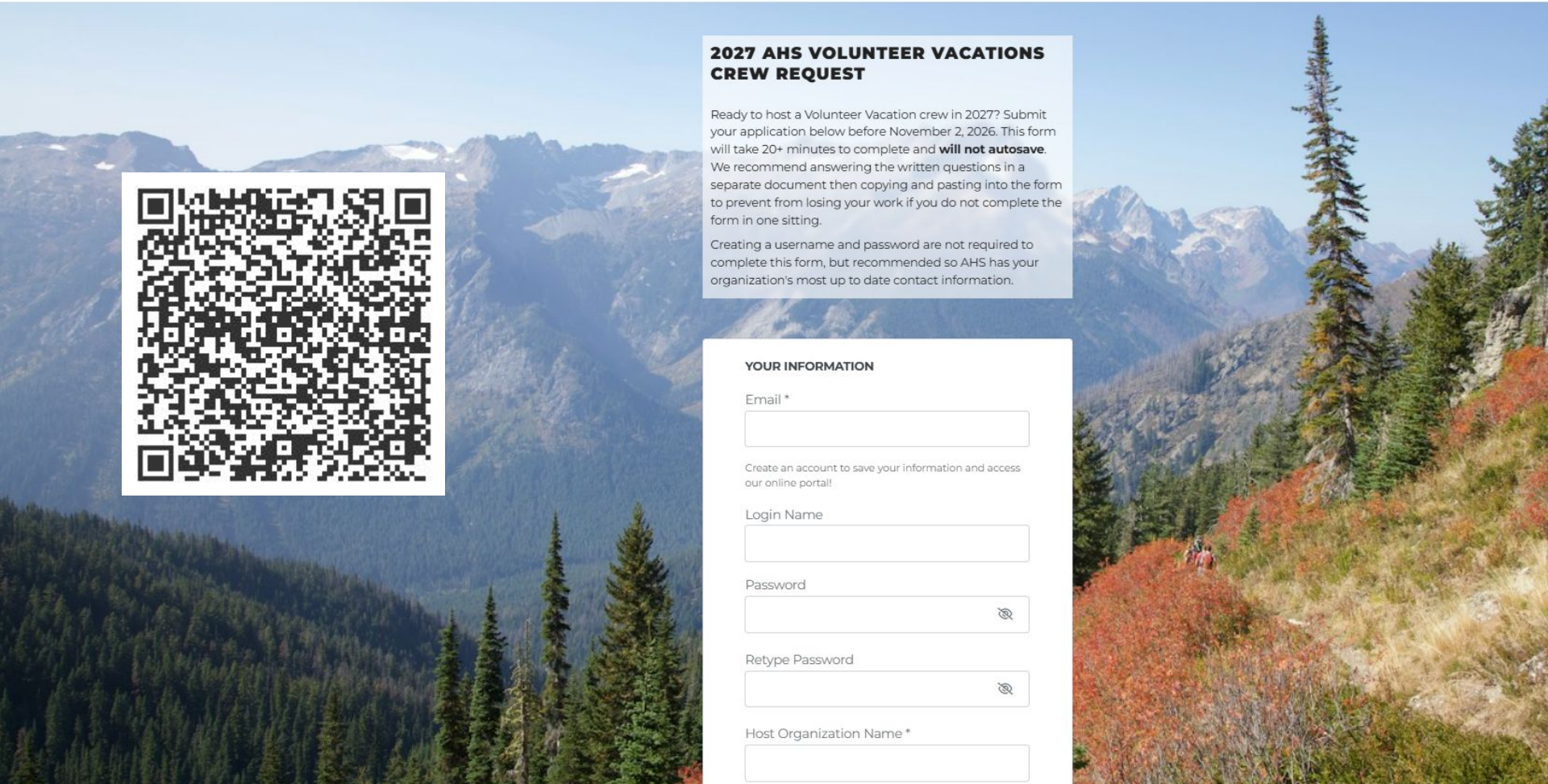
- AHS staff will contact selected hosts to discuss plans & confirm project details
- AHS will post Volunteer Vacation schedule on webpage, hosts will confirm details and sign host agreement

☐ December

- AHS announces schedule to volunteers, begins advertising Volunteer Vacations

☐ 8-10 Weeks Prior to Project

- AHS confirms trip, sends crew roster, confirm travel details, connects host with Crew Leaders



2027 AHS VOLUNTEER VACATIONS CREW REQUEST

Ready to host a Volunteer Vacation crew in 2027? Submit your application below before November 2, 2026. This form will take 20+ minutes to complete and **will not autosave**. We recommend answering the written questions in a separate document then copying and pasting into the form to prevent from losing your work if you do not complete the form in one sitting.

Creating a username and password are not required to complete this form, but recommended so AHS has your organization's most up to date contact information.

YOUR INFORMATION

Email *

Create an account to save your information and access our online portal!

Login Name

Password

Retype Password

Host Organization Name *

Volunteer Project Examples

Volunteers can do a variety of tasks based on your trail maintenance needs!

- Build new trails, trail reroutes, general trail maintenance
- Water management: building, removing & maintaining checks, water bars and other drainage systems
- Brushing, logging, removing invasive species, grubbing & vegetation control
- Spreading mulch, gravel, or other trail substrates
- Treadwork: improve outslope, drainages, tread repair
- Installing or replacing boardwalks, crib walls, bridges, and other structures
- Facilities improvements such as installing signs, improving campsites and trailhead / camping facilities, general clearing and clean up of public spaces

A day in the life of a Volunteer Vacation Crew

- Each Volunteer Vacation itinerary will vary based on location, weather, project rating, and crew participants.
- Typically, volunteers enjoy a hearty breakfast at camp and be on the trail between 8AM and 9AM.
- Crews will generally work 6-8 hours each working day.
- Everyone will pack their lunches to eat on the trail. Plenty of other breaks should be included.
- Most projects will wrap up the work day in the late afternoon, to hike back to camp and enjoy a few hours of daylight for free recreation.
- The crew will reconvene at a chosen time for dinner.
- After dinner has been cleaned up, evenings offer plenty of free time to relax, sit around the campfire, and get to know your fellow crew members.
- Most trips give a full day off during the work week to explore the area, take a recreational hike, or take a tour of local attractions.



Resources

- Host Information Webpage
- Link to longer host informational webinar
- Host Guide
- Required Group Gear

Sign-up for our Host Newsletter List



Questions?

