



Monmouth County Park System Volunteer Services | 2020

This past year not only presented unique challenges, it also provided an opportunity for change. Social distancing requirements, coupled with health concerns, prevented many volunteers from partaking in activities. Park events, which often require the assistance of 100+ volunteers, were cancelled. Large, corporate, school, and non-profit group volunteer projects were not feasible. Volunteer participation was halted for approximately 3.5 months and all training was postponed. However, during this difficult time, we embraced our chance to re-evaluate procedures, practices, training modules, and our short and long term goals. With “all hands on deck”, 2020 quickly became a year for “thinking outside the box”, requiring flexibility, creativity, and collaboration.

By late May, position-specific social distancing guidelines were established for volunteers and distributed accordingly. And in June, **Garden Teams** resumed their weekly projects, and the **Trail Maintenance Team** returned to the trails. According to state guidelines, indoor positions were limited to those considered necessary. Volunteer **Program Assistants** in most divisions, including **SPUR**, returned late summer/early fall; all the while new policies and procedures were communicated and monitored closely. As we were forced to adapt to overcome new challenges, we also celebrated the resulting accomplishments.

In early 2020, we began our conversion to the new online **Volunteer Console** which required the weekly contribution of 7 **Administrative Assistants** and over 300 volunteer service hours. Park volunteers were introduced to this new system over the summer; training continued on an ongoing basis. This new Console proved to be a valuable tool during the pandemic, enabling us to move away from paper records, volunteer registration tables, shared stations, etc. Volunteers registered for projects and training, recorded their service hours, and printed reports, all from the comfort of their home computer or cell phone. On the Console homepage, we communicated important announcements, including the Covid-19 Policy established by the County.

Volunteer Training moved out of the office and into the field, on the trails and in the gardens. Training small crews with tools-in-hand provided an opportunity for one-on-one instruction and guidance. Volunteer handbooks and training modules were updated to communicate best practices, providing stronger visual aids, and more practical examples. Volunteers gained more confidence and new crew leaders emerged. Industry webinars were attended for staff development. Complementary material was researched, developed, and shared to help volunteers succeed. Over 250 collective hours dedicated to training helped prepare park volunteers for various positions.

The new **Trail Stewardship Program** was launched in 2020, beginning with the **Trail Marking Project** in February. After weeks of research online and in the field, including meetings with Park Managers and staff on-site, trail marking standards were established and volunteer training began in June. Volunteers assisted with trail inspections, sign assessments, tree marker installations, and volunteer focus groups were formed to evaluate effectiveness. By November, two facilities (Shark River Park and Tatum Park) were fully assessed; trees were marked, and the project is currently under evaluation. Since then, three additional facilities have been assessed and installation for Huber Woods Park, Clayton Park, and Hartshorne Woods Park are currently underway.

In 2020, **Trail Maintenance** crews became laser-focused, tackling more challenging projects, after receiving a combination of enhanced on-site training and watching select technical videos. In fall, 18 new volunteers joined the team, and new crew leaders were recruited, trained, and deployed to scout the trails and lead projects. Local teams of

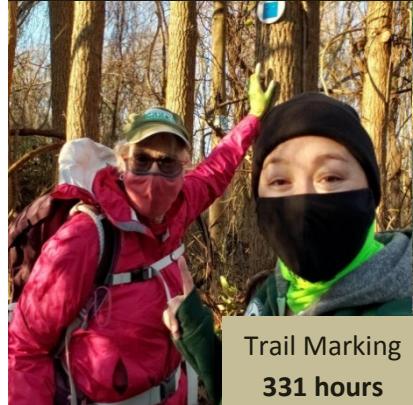
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up to 6 met on a regular basis, developing skills, camaraderie, and a sense of accomplishment. Volunteer Park Assistants were coordinated to assist after storms, clearing branches from the trails and reporting downed trees.

Looking back on this past year, it has become more evident than ever, that our strength lies in our community. Despite the pandemic, much has been achieved this year with help from our dedicated, enthusiastic, and passionate volunteers! The years ahead will most certainly provide additional challenges and we will continue to be thankful to face them with the support of our Park System volunteers!

2020 Volunteer Highlights

462 Volunteers **9270** Hours of Service



Trail Marking
331 hours



Gardening
1898 hours



Administrative
468 hours



Programs & Camps
2347 hours



Park Clean Ups
234 hours



Trail Maintenance 1414 hours



Equestrian
2270 hours

Independent Sector, a leadership forum for charities and nonprofits in the US, estimates the average value of volunteer service in New Jersey at **@29.49/hour**. Based on this figure, the **2020 in-kind-service provided by Park System volunteers would be \$273,372**.

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!!!