

2024

Volunteer Naturalist Manual



Natural History Program

Boulder County Parks & Open Space

1/5/2024

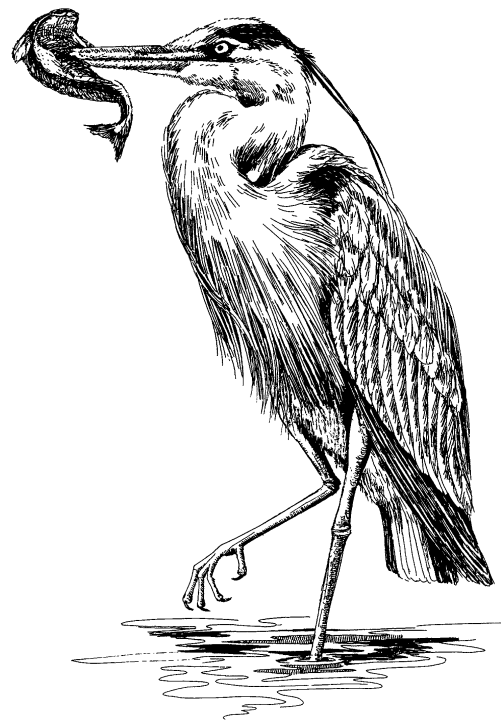
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Boulder County
Parks and Open Space Department

Volunteer Naturalist Manual

Policies & Procedures



Welcome!

We want to extend a warm welcome to you on becoming a Volunteer Naturalist with Boulder County Parks and Open Space. Because of volunteers like you, we are better able to protect and manage the unique natural and cultural heritage of Boulder County and provide excellent education and outreach services to the Boulder County community.

The Resource Management staff is here to support you in your volunteer efforts. We deeply appreciate your ideas, hard work, and expertise. We hope your experiences here will be stimulating, educational, meaningful, and fun!

Sincerely,

The Resource Management Division Staff



A Volunteer Naturalist's Role

Volunteer Naturalist Job Description

Volunteer Naturalists share the natural history of Boulder County with people of all ages, especially relating to Boulder County Parks and Open Space lands.

Volunteer Responsibilities

- Develop and present outdoor and indoor interpretive programs.
- Lead nature hikes and other natural history-related field experiences.
- Present programs for the public, schools, groups, and organizations.

Training and Commitment

- Complete 10-week training course (meets one day per week) and attend one program by the end of training.
- Prepare and present a minimum of six interpretive programs in the first calendar year following your training.

Qualifications and Requirements

- Must be at least 18 years old.
- Strong background and/or interest in the natural history of Boulder County.
- Some knowledge of natural science is preferred.
- Willingness to learn and desire to share knowledge with others.
- Enthusiasm and good communication skills.
- Dependable, self-motivated, and an independent worker.
- Abide by all open space rules and regulations and set an example for other park visitors.
- Must have personal transportation.
- Pass criminal background check.

Benefits

- Develop your knowledge of Boulder County's natural history and share your passions with people of all ages in a variety of environments.
- Opportunity to meet, work with, and learn from people with similar interests.
- Continuing educational opportunities through participation in advanced training, workshops and field trips offered throughout the year.
- Become an integral part of supporting the mission and goals of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department.

A Volunteer Naturalist's Relationship with the Department

Volunteers have been an integral part of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department (BCPOS) since its establishment in 1975. It is important for volunteers to be familiar with the Department's mission and goals, the properties in its system, and established rules and regulations.

The Board of County Commissioners recognizes volunteers as an important and

valued segment of the County workforce. **Please refer to the *Boulder County Volunteer Policy* document to further understand the relationship between volunteers, staff and clients** and the designation the skills you will develop and practice during your volunteer experience hold within the county.

Dress, Personal Appearance, and Representing the County

Volunteer Naturalists are asked to maintain a neat appearance when working with the public. You may be the only contact visitors have with our department. The public relations role of your position is important -- remember to always be pleasant and courteous.

A Volunteer Naturalist name badge, hat, and T-shirt is provided to you upon completion of training. **You must wear your Volunteer Naturalist name badge when presenting programs.** Please refrain from controversial discussions (political, religious, etc.) with visitors. Our visitors come from a wide variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Our main goal is to encourage an increase of knowledge and care for our natural resources in Boulder County in all our constituents. If you have any questions or concerns about this, or need tips on how to handle situations, talk to the Natural History Program staff.

Volunteer Dismissal

A Volunteer Naturalist may be asked to leave the Department at any time if:

- They misrepresent the Department, its goals, or policies.
- They portray a negative attitude to the public or offends the public through inappropriate language or behavior.
- They are negligent with any County-owned equipment and/or resources. Negligence in an emergency may also be grounds for dismissal.
- They commit an unlawful act on Parks and Open Space property.
- They consistently fail to fulfill the volunteer commitment with no explanation or communication with the Natural History Program Coordinator.

Volunteer Mileage and Out-of-Pocket Expenses

Boulder County has determined that our volunteers are effectively “common law employees” for mileage classification purposes. Volunteers are eligible for mileage reimbursement at the **IRS Standard Rate** for the year.

Volunteer Naturalist seeking to be reimbursed for their mileage must submit the following:

- Volunteer Reimbursement Form
- Support Documentation (activity information, google maps activity)

Not all mileage is reimbursable. Mileage to and from the VN Center or any other Boulder County office from your home is NOT reimbursable. The following mileage is reimbursable:

- From the VN Center to a Parks & Open Space Site (non-office), Library, Community Center, or other location where a program is taking place and back to the VN Center.
- From your home to a Parks & Open Space Site (non-office), Library, Community Center, or other location where a program is taking place and back to your home.

Volunteers are responsible for keeping records of eligible mileage and submitting reimbursement requests with supporting documentation 15 days from the date of the event.

Out-of-pocket expenses can be reimbursed if the expense was approved by the Natural History Program Coordinator. DO NOT make any purchase without prior approval as these expenses may not qualify for reimbursement.

To receive a reimbursement, complete the *Volunteer Reimbursement Form* and submit it to the Natural History Program Coordinator within 15 days of the date of the expense.

DISCOVER – Boulder County Parks & Open Space Volunteer Management Platform

In 2017, BCPOS launched a custom-built software system for natural resource project, event, and volunteer management. This system provides Volunteer Naturalists (VNs) a single platform to sign up for natural history volunteer opportunities and trainings, communicate with other VNs who you are signed up with, and report volunteer hours. This system also allows the public to register for programs and volunteer work projects.

While you are in training, you will be enrolled in DISCOVER as an active Volunteer Naturalist which will allow you to submit feedback and hours spent outside of the training preparing for your final presentation. All subsequent volunteer hours will be submitted directly into DISCOVER by VNs. DISCOVER Database training will be provided to all incoming VNs during the 10-week training.

Volunteer Naturalists are responsible for recording and submitting their volunteer time. All time spent during the initial 10-week VN training, additional advanced trainings, preparing and presenting programs, conducting research, and attending meetings, etc. should be included in your volunteer hours. Any questions about volunteer hours should be directed to the Natural History Program Coordinator.

When you sign up to help lead a program, you will receive a link to a feedback form from DISCOVER the day after the program. You will be asked to enter the attendance numbers from your program as well as your volunteer hours. You should change the number of volunteer hours if necessary, to include the preparation and

research time for your program as well as hours spent at the actual program. You will also be asked to respond to several questions to evaluate the program you helped lead. All Volunteer Naturalists who help with a program are encouraged to fill out this information. It is a great way for you to provide direct feedback to the Natural History Program staff.

Natural History Program Protocols & Procedures

Discover Boulder County Programs (Public Programs)

Discover Boulder County (DBC) programs are offered to the public year-round. The program calendar is developed and publicized on a quarterly basis. Public programs can be found on the BCPOS website www.bouldercountyopenspace.org, in the Department's quarterly publication, *Images*, on social media and in the Department's newsletters and listserv emails. They are occasionally picked up by newspapers and other local publications.

These programs are developed by Natural History Program staff and Volunteer Naturalists. Naturalists are encouraged to develop public programs and submit them for scheduling. Below is the procedure for developing and scheduling a Discover Boulder County program:

- Contact the Natural History Program Coordinator to propose a program.
- Provide the following information: program title and brief description; the date, time, and place of the program; and the name(s) of the Naturalist(s) presenting the program.
- The Natural History Program Coordinator will work with you to confirm and finalized details before scheduling the program.
- The program will be scheduled for the appropriate time of year. Program proposals for the incoming quarter are due 6 weeks before the start of the quarter. Once a program is scheduled, the departments PIOs work to advertise the program to the public.
- Public program registration is facilitated through the DISCOVER platform.
- **Program Proposal Due Dates:**
 - **January 15:** Spring Quarter (March – May)
 - **April 15:** Summer Quarter (June – August)
 - **July 15:** Fall Quarter (September – November)
 - **October 15:** Winter Quarter (December – February)

Requested Programs

Requested programs are interpretive programs developed by Natural History

Program staff and Volunteer Naturalist specifically for a requesting group. Different groups request interpretive programs from the department. These requesting groups typically include: schools, senior citizen & community serving organizations, civic organizations, scout troops, and many others.

The only requirements for requesting a program are:

- A group size of at least 8 people.
- Requests must be submitted at least 1 month in advance.

Requested programs are typically uploaded to DISCOVER one month before the program date. Below is the basic procedure for scheduling a requested program:

- The Natural History Program staff receives an inquiry and collects basic information from the requesting group contact on the program topic, location of program, number, and age of participants, and focus of their interests.
- Volunteer Naturalists spots are assigned to the program, depending upon the type of program and age-level of participants (typically, 15 participants to 1 VN ratio; 10:1 with school age children).
- Requested programs are made available to Volunteer Naturalists on the DISCOVER platform, and published in the monthly volunteer newsletter, *Interpreters' Prints*. VNs may contact Natural History Program Specialist to find out more information about available programs.
- Once a Volunteer Naturalist registers for a requested program on DISCOVER, a confirmation email is sent by Natural History Program staff to the participating Naturalists and the requesting group or group contact.
- A **Contact Naturalist** is assigned to the program.

Signing Up to Lead a Program and Volunteer Naturalists Positions

As a Volunteer Naturalist, you decide which type and what program you would like to lead. You sign up to lead a program through the DISCOVER platform. When you sign up to lead a program on DISCOVER, you will have two options. You can sign up as a Contact VN or as a Team VN.

Contact VN's responsibilities include:

- Contacting the requesting group contact to confirm date, time, and location of program, and to find out what specific goals or topics they want covered.
- Contacting the other Volunteer Naturalists involved with the program and meeting with them to discuss the objectives and theme of the program they will present.
- Making sure a first aid kit is taken on all outdoor programs.
- Notifying the group contact and other Naturalists of any program changes or cancellations as soon as possible.
- Completing the Feedback form sent to you from DISCOVER the day after your program. Your input and suggestions are important to the Natural History

Program staff!

- Asking one of the Team Naturalists to be the Contact Naturalist if you become ill or cannot do the program. Please let a Natural History Program staff member know who the new Contact Naturalist is.

Team VN's responsibilities include:

- Meeting with other Team and Contact Naturalists to prepare and present the program that has been requested.
- Completing the Feedback form sent to you from DISCOVER the day after your program. Your input and suggestions are important to the Natural History Program staff!
- Finding a replacement for yourself if you become ill or cannot do the program for any reason and notifying the Contact Naturalist of this information.

It is not the Contact VN's responsibility to develop the interpretive program. All the Naturalists who are assisting with the program should be actively sharing in the preparation of the program.

Making the Right Impression

For both public and requested programs, it is essential that Volunteer Naturalists introduce themselves and let the audience know that the program is being offered by the **Boulder County Parks & Open Space Department**. Remember, you are there representing the BCPOS Department. Volunteer Naturalist's should always have their name badge visible. When offering a public program, please make sure you have the following materials available for distribution:

- Copies of the current *Images* magazine.
- Copies of appropriate park brochures.
- Feedback Forms.
- Any materials that the program/department is requesting support with marketing (VN Recruitment, Management Plan Feedback Requests, Public Comment Requests, etc.)

These materials are available for pick up at the Volunteer Naturalist Resource Center at Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat.

First Aid and Emergency Procedures

It is strongly recommended that all Volunteer Naturalists be certified in First Aid and CPR. Training is offered for free through our department at least twice a year, or you may obtain training and certification elsewhere.

At least one first aid kit must be present at every VN-led outdoor program.

Programs or hikes with multiple groups of participants should have first aid kits for each group. First aid kits are located in the Volunteer Naturalist Resource Center at Walden Ponds. Any first aid kit materials used and/or procedures administered need to be reported to the Natural History Program Coordinator immediately, and a **First Aid & Incident Report** completed.

In the event of a medical emergency, Volunteer Naturalists must be prepared to take charge of the situation. You should remain with the victim, prevent further injury, use common sense, and administer first aid within the scope of your training. When possible, send three people from the group to contact appropriate emergency services. Be sure the messengers have accurate information on the location of the injured person and the nature of the injuries (e.g., the victim is located about half-way around the Canyon Loop Trail at Betasso Preserve with an apparent leg fracture; he is breathing and has a pulse). One of the messengers should wait for the emergency vehicle, and the others should return to you to report that help is on the way.

Report the incident to the Natural History Program Coordinator or Education and Outreach Supervisor as soon as possible.

Carlos Lerma Natural History Program Coordinator	(303) 678-6214 office	(303) 720-0430 cell
Angela Borland Natural History Program Specialist	(303) 678-6215 office	(303) 678-6215 cell
Eva Lark Education & Outreach Supervisor	(720) 564-2607 office	(843) 340-8673 cell

Resources Available to Volunteer Naturalists

Volunteer Naturalist Resource Center

The Volunteer Naturalist Resource (VN) Center is located at Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat Area **(3893 N 75th St, Boulder, CO 80301)**.

The VN Center is staffed by the Natural History Program staff, during which times the access gate on the road leading to the center and the building are usually open. To access the Volunteer Naturalist Resource Center for research or program preparation when the building and gate are locked, locate the **lock boxes on the gate and outside the door of the building** that contain the key to the padlock on the gate and the front door, respectively. The combination to the lock boxes is the same and updated on a quarterly basis.

To ensure security at the VN Center, please remember to follow the closing

procedures found in the building. The combination to the lock boxes at Walden Ponds is given out to Volunteer Naturalists when they register to lead a program that quarter. **Volunteer Naturalists may access the VN Center seven days a week, from sunrise to sunset (the same hours that Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat is open to the public).**

There are a variety of resource materials and equipment available for use by all Naturalists. All resource materials are available to Naturalists and staff only for approved BCPOS programs/uses. **Volunteer Naturalists may not use resource materials for personal use.** Naturalists should contact Natural History Program staff to reserve interpretive resource materials in advance for programs to ensure availability or complete the ***Equipment Check-out Form*** online to reserve materials.

Books & Other Literary Resources

There is a research library located in the VN Center at Walden Ponds. All non-reference books, including children's books, may be checked out and taken home for use during a program or study. Be sure to complete the check-out process before taking any books out of the VN Center. **Books need to be returned and re-shelved on a timely basis so that all volunteers have access to the resources they need.**

Interpretive Resources and Biofacts

To check-out interpretive resources (pelts, pond dipping supplies, bug boxes, wildlife taxidermy mounts, etc.), complete the Equipment Check-Out/In Process. **All resources must be returned within 48 hours of their use** unless other arrangements have been made with the Natural History Program Coordinator. Should any damage or loss occur, report it to the Natural History Program Coordinator so that necessary repairs or replacement can be made.

Program Outlines and Research Notes

Naturalists are encouraged to contribute to the Natural History Program by submitting their interpretive program outlines, research notes and other appropriate materials to the Natural History Program Coordinator. These materials should include specific thematic and topical information that will be useful for other Naturalists looking to repeat the program or build on it.

Volunteer Naturalist Virtual Library

To assist you in preparing for programs, you have access to a webpage designed just for Volunteer Naturalists. This page includes links to DISCOVER, the Boulder County Parks and Open Space webpage and other helpful links. It also includes a variety of background materials and program outlines or activity templates that you can use or adapt for your program. **You can find the webpage at www.bouldercountyopenspace.org/naturalhistory.**

Your Experience as a Volunteer Naturalist

Improving Your Program Presentation Style

Observations & Interpretive Coaching

Interpretive Coaching is a way to continually support Volunteer Naturalists in their growth as educators and interpreters. Interpretive Coaching is standard for all volunteers and helps all of us develop consistently high-quality programs. This is not meant to be an evaluation process, but a means to strengthen skills and confidence in all Volunteer Naturalists. Coaching sessions include observation of volunteers leading a program and both coach and Volunteer Naturalist completing reflection forms that focus on encouraging and positive feedback, with helpful comments and suggestions. The contents of those forms are then shared in a follow-up meeting that allows staff to support volunteers in uncovering new assets and skills they possess.

Staff Support with Programs

Any questions that might arise regarding program design, planning and implementation may be directed to the Natural History Program staff. It usually takes one or two years of presenting to feel comfortable with your program presentation style or program design skills. Call Natural History Program staff members at any time to discuss program planning, resources, ideas, etc., or to set up an appointment to meet to ensure a successful and rewarding volunteer experience.

Feedback

Program Evaluation Forms are provided to public and requested program participants as well as Volunteer Naturalists through DISCOVER. Comments supplied by registered participants will be shared with the respective Volunteer Naturalists.

Volunteer Naturalist Program Annual Evaluation

Each December, all ongoing Volunteer Naturalists will receive a link to the Volunteer Naturalist Program Evaluation. The evaluation provides each volunteer the opportunity to provide feedback about their volunteer experiences over the past year, any problems or frustrations encountered, personal goals or objectives the volunteer would like to pursue over the next year, and suggestions and recommendations for improving the program. The evaluation process helps the Natural History Program staff facilitate volunteers' expectations, and aids in future program planning and development. Volunteer Naturalists may request to meet with the Natural History Program Coordinator to discuss the year's experiences in addition to completing the online evaluation.

Pets, Family & Friends

Your children and pets are **not allowed** to accompany you when presenting an interpretive program. We have this policy so that full attention can be given to the participants during the program. Participants are **not allowed** to bring pets to BCPOS interpretive programs for the same reason. Family members not requiring your

attention or supervision can register through DISCOVER to attend any Discover Boulder County program you are presenting just like any other member of the public.

Program Policies

Illness Policy

If you find yourself ill and unable to present the program you volunteered for, contact the Natural History Program Coordinator and the other naturalists presenting the program with you to see if a replacement can be found. If a replacement cannot be found, and the other naturalists cannot lead the program without you, the program may have to be canceled.

Inclement Weather Cancellation and Safety Policy

Programs should be canceled when weather conditions, including snow, high winds, heavy rains, or lightning, could be dangerous to participants or volunteers, or could make travel to program sites dangerous. Volunteers unsure of whether to cancel a program should consult with Natural History Program staff, or other BCPOS Education & Outreach staff. The Natural History Program Coordinator must be notified immediately of program cancellations.

Due to the unpredictable and fluid nature of the weather along the Front Range, **the decision to cancel an outdoor public program or hike is generally made 12-24 hours before the start of the program.** If a program ever needs to be cancelled less than 12 hours before the start time, Natural History Program staff will confirm that information is received by all registered participants by calling and/or emailing people directly. A notice can be placed at the meeting place during the advertised time to inform any participants that show up.

If in doubt about whether it is safe to hike or conduct the program because of adverse weather or trail conditions when you arrive at the meeting place, **please cancel the hike**, and inform the participants of the potential danger and the reason for your decision and refer them to the Natural History Program Coordinator if they have any questions. **If you believe weather or driving conditions are too dangerous to drive to a trailhead or meeting place to conduct or cancel a program, please do not attempt to do so. Consider the program canceled and call the Natural History Program Coordinator.**

Emergencies Policy

Call **911 for emergencies**, and **303-441-4444** (Boulder County Sheriff's Dispatch)

for **non-emergencies**. Refer to the *'Responding to an Emergency'* Document for details and protocol.

Programming Policy for Plants

" (a) It shall be unlawful for any unauthorized person to remove, move, destroy, mutilate, collect, or deface any natural or man-made object within any Boulder County Parks & Open Space area, including, but not limited to: trees, down timber or branches, shrubbery, plants, flowers, rocks, fences, signs, kiosks, restrooms, tables, benches, cultural resources, and trash containers." **(Resolution No. 2020-99, Section 1a).**

This includes but is not limited to plants used for edible or medicinal purposes or for educational programs. Within the following guidelines, 'plants' refers to any trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, and woody or herbaceous plants.

Collecting any part of any plant is strictly forbidden without the written permission of the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department through a Special Use Permit. Permission will be reviewed and considered for research purposes and the removal of noxious weeds. Permits may be obtained by applying in advance to the Director of Boulder County Parks and Open Space **(Resolution No. 2020-99, Section 20).**

Programs promoting or focusing on the edible or medicinal use of any plant are not permitted on Boulder County Parks and Open Space properties, nor will such programming be sponsored by the Department. References to the historical uses of plants by early Native American cultures and pioneers is permitted within the context of program themes offered through the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department.

Park Regulations

To see a complete list of Rules and Regulations refer to the 'Resolution No. 2020-99' document.

- Parks are open from sunrise to sunset.
- Pets, where allowed, must always be on a leash and under physical control of a person.
- Feeding, disturbing, trapping, hunting, or killing wildlife is not permitted.
- A valid Colorado fishing license is required whenever fishing in ponds, lakes, creeks, and rivers.
- Mountain bicycling is permitted on designated trails only.
- State law prohibits the possession or consumption of any beverage having alcohol content greater than 3.2% in any public place.
- It is unlawful to carry or possess (outside an enclosed vehicle) any glass bottle or container within a park or open space area.

- Discharging or carrying firearms, crossbows, fireworks, or projectile weapons of any kind is not permitted.
- Camping is prohibited in all parks and open space areas; the only exception is the designated camping area at the Boulder County Fairgrounds in Longmont.
- Building ground fires or collecting firewood is not allowed.
- It is unlawful to swim, wade, ice skate, ice fish, or boat on any body of water except where posted to allow such activities.
- Collecting, removing, destroying, or defacing any natural or manmade objects within parks and open space areas is not permitted. It is unlawful to construct trails and facilities or install rock bolts.
- No unauthorized motorized vehicles permitted.
- Group Use permits are required for any groups larger than 25 people.
- No commercial use is permitted without special written permission.
- No posting of advertisements in parks or vehicles is permitted.