



Monterey County
Joint Parks Commission/
Parks Committee
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- a. Receive a report on Parks Volunteer Program
- b. Provide direction to staff.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Parks Committee and Parks Commission:

- a. Receive a report on Parks Volunteer Program
- b. Provide direction to staff.

SUMMARY:

The Parks Committee has expressed an interest in understanding the Parks Volunteer Program. This report presents how the Program was intended to work and some current practices. Upon accepting Parks, RMA began reviewing policies and practices. There is an existing policy ("*Live-on Volunteer Handbook*", dated December 2008, **Attachment A**). The Handbook appears to be internal only and not formally adopted by the Board of Supervisors (no resolution).

Volunteers provide much-needed supplement to County staff, but we need standard guideline that are followed and enforced. Improving the program, and management of the program, can provide positive results for the parks. Staff offers the following recommendations for consideration:

- A. Update all policies, procedures and forms, including:
 - 1. Requiring Live Scans for Live-On volunteers because of proximity to children in the parks.
 - 2. Requiring Live-On volunteers to move their rigs every 3 months to ensure proper operating condition and prevent homesteading.
 - 3. Add additional special skills needed to the application to attract additional volunteers.
- B. Strictly adhere to all policies so that volunteers are treated equitably. Ensure that all paperwork is received, all training is provided, etc.
- C. Assign/Hire, a staff person to manage the volunteer program. This will provide a more stable, organized volunteer program and result in an increase in volunteers wanting to work with Monterey County. The staff person can do the following to improve the program:
 - 1. Coordinate with all parks and be the one point of contact for the program (for both staff and volunteers.) This will relieve field staff of the duty and they can focus on their park duties.
 - 2. Efficiently track volunteers for establishing a core group of returning volunteers.

3. Monitor length of stay for live-on volunteers.
 4. Coordinate with parks staff for priority projects where volunteers can assist.
 5. Maintain contact with volunteers about upcoming opportunities and return visits.
 6. Assign volunteers for the benefit of the County (location and timeframe.)
 7. Solicit new volunteers through all appropriate channels.
- D. Apply the 6-month stay limit to all Live-On volunteers across the board, both in state and out-of-state. Extended periods increase potential for creating a sense of entitlement. More frequent rotation could result in fewer complaints.
- E. Establish a list of programs and projects that could utilize General volunteers and solicit those volunteers through stakeholder groups and the general public. Parks will improve with new projects and programs and the local communities will become more engaged, resulting in more support for the parks.

Staff seeks direction for an effective volunteer program to supplement Park operations.

Parks Department created a volunteer program intended to provide a supplement to the work force in County Parks. Historically, the Parks Department has utilized two types of volunteers:

- Live-On volunteers. The live-on volunteer program has been an asset to the Parks Department making it easier to serve customers and maintain parks. This position requires a minimum of 20 hours per week of scheduled duties in exchange for a free campsite and utilities for a motor home or trailer. Once assigned, volunteers are expected to adhere to a set schedule, follow the same rules as employees and adhere to all County policies. Volunteers are a complement to the paid staff, are expected to act as such. Live-On volunteers are provided a uniform, identification card and a nametag. Stays at provided locations are intended to be temporary and transient in nature and not to be considered a permanent residence.

The policy limits a volunteer to six (6) consecutive months at any single park unit. The 6-month term limit is comprised of two 3-month terms. At the end of the first three (3) months and upon mutual written agreement of the parties, the stay may be extended for a second 3-month term. At the end of the 6-month stay, the volunteer must vacate the park unit for a minimum of three months before returning.

- General/Project volunteers. This position is a volunteer who comes to a park to perform volunteer services, but does not live in the park. General/Project volunteers may also work on specific one-time or annual projects such as trail work. The general/project volunteers are an asset when we have projects that need their expertise, energy or passion. These volunteers are also a great way to connect with the surrounding communities. Such projects are to be managed by regular parks staff.

Both types of volunteers' duties may include general cleanup, entry station operation, campground host, office work and other assignments. All agreements with volunteers must have ending dates.

In March 2004, a Volunteer Handbook was prepared to set forth some standard guidelines by which staff could follow with some consistency. A copy of the handbook is provided to each volunteer. Volunteers are expected to adhere to all County policies including Vehicle Use, Drug-Free Workplace, Discrimination & Sexual Harassment, Workplace Violence, Smoke Free, etc. Each volunteer initials the checklist to verify they have read and understand each policy.

Applications are submitted and signed by the volunteer, and requires an acceptance signature by Parks Manager. All volunteer applicants are screened, have an interview, complete and sign a Letter of Understanding and complete orientation. Reference checks are conducted on candidates and a DMV report is required for Live-On volunteers. Driver's license, vehicle registration and vehicle insurance information is provided by the volunteer and kept in their file. A DMV report is to be provided by the volunteer as part of the application.

RMA has revised and reinstituted the requirement for volunteers to sign an agreement. An effective program requires activities performed by volunteers need to be set forth, and managed, by county staff. RMA has had some good success working with groups that have performed work at County parks in this manner. In a couple cases, RMA has negotiated work performed in exchange for fees as part of a rental agreement. As an example, we recently had approximately 150 high school and college cross-country students participate in a cleanup day of the cross-country course at Toro Park. Again, these volunteers are an asset that the Parks Department cannot otherwise afford.

The program has suffered from lack of management and maintenance. Over the years and management transitions, there seems to have been changes made to what is accepted under the program either officially (by the Director) or unofficially (by individual staff). Management/Staffing changes and inconsistency has resulted in less volunteers and less structure for the volunteers. As a result of the lack of structure and adherence to the rules, there have been a number of instances in which there have been infractions by volunteers or volunteers have felt empowered to ignore the rules. For example, volunteers have refused to leave at the appropriate time, volunteer sites have become unsightly, and there has been an increase in complaints from customers regarding long-time volunteers. In one case, a volunteer, with knowledge and assistance from a staff person, installed a jacuzzi that was connect to power paid for by the County. RMA intends to develop minimum standards, including a maximum timeframe for live-on volunteers that are strictly enforced. Such standards will be part of a formal program to be presented for consideration and adoption by the Board of Supervisors.

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Attachments:

- A. Volunteer Handbook (dated December 2008)
- B. Application