



Friends of the  
Desert Mountains

# Volunteer Handbook

# Table of Contents

<b>Section I. Mission, Vision and Goals Statement of the Friends of the Desert Mountains</b> .....	3
<b>Section II. What Do the Friends of the Desert Mountains Do?</b> .....	4
<b>Section III. How Do the Friends of the Desert Mountains Do It?</b> .....	4
Conserving Land.....	4
Supporting the National Monument .....	4
<b>Section IV. Volunteer and Requirements</b> .....	5
Qualifications for Volunteers.....	5
Requirements For Becoming a Friends Volunteer .....	5
<b>Section V. Volunteer Program Policies</b> .....	5
Policies .....	5/6
<b>Section VI. Volunteer Bill of Rights and Responsibilities</b> .....	6
Bill of Rights .....	6
Bill of Responsibilities .....	7
<b>Section VII. Procedure for Reporting Injury or Illness</b> .....	7
<b>Section VIII. Volunteer Ethics and Standards of Behavior</b> .....	8
Harassment.....	8
Drugs and Alcohol .....	8
Disciplinary Action or Dismissal from Volunteer Programs.....	9
Problem Solving .....	9
Privacy.....	9
Learning Your Role .....	10
Attendance.....	10
Logging Monthly Volunteer Hours.....	10
Absences .....	10
Safety .....	10
In Case of Fire.....	11
Smoking.....	11
Dress Code .....	11
Personal Conduct.....	11
Use of Equipment .....	11
<b>Section IX. List of Volunteer Programs</b> .....	11
<b>Section X. RSVP/Volunteer Connect Programs of Riverside County</b> .....	13
<b>Appendix A. Monthly Volunteer Hours Log</b> .....	14
<b>Appendix B. Volunteer Education</b> .....	15
<b>Appendix C. Events Calendar</b> .....	16

## **Section I. Mission, Vision and Goals Statement of the Friends of the Desert Mountains**

### **Vision**

*The Friends vision for the Coachella Valley is a thriving and productive community integrated with a healthy and sustainable natural environment*

### **Mission statement**

*The mission of the Friends of the Desert Mountains is to preserve land, to support education, conservation and research in the Coachella Valley, and to act as the support organization for the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.*

### **Goals:**

**To achieve our mission and realize our vision, we will...**

- **Acquire:** Where the opportunity permits, we will acquire land that will help to ensure the protection and preservation of key areas within the Coachella Valley and surrounding mountains, consistent with enhancing the quality of life and the productivity of our community.
- **Preserve:** We will devote our financial and human resources to protect, preserve, and enhance the land entrusted to our care.
- **Conserve:** Conservation is the foundation upon which we were founded. We commit to conserve the land we acquire in perpetuity and to protect its biological, cultural, scenic, and/or recreational values for present and future generations
- **Support:** We will work closely with our partners, the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service, to ensure that all visitors to the area are exposed to the myriad of biological, aesthetic and cultural qualities that make this landscape so precious. We will also encourage and support an active volunteer program and work collaboratively with local agencies to build a greater support structure for conservation throughout the valley.
- **Educate:** Education is at the heart of the Friends mission. We believe that education is the key to ensuring that today's success will be supported by tomorrow's leaders. We will sponsor and support educational programs in schools and with the broader community, including hikes, nature talks, workshops and classroom programs in order to share the wonder of the desert.
- **Research:** As an active partner with the science community, we will fund, organize and support programs that enlighten and broaden the public's understanding of the land that we all call home. We will ensure that our lands remain open to scientists and other researchers, so that they may broaden our understanding and love of these natural classrooms.

## **Section II. What Do the Friends of the Desert Mountains Do?**

The Friends of the Desert Mountains (Friends) act to protect one of our most precious and threatened natural resources: the spectacular desert lands and mountains of the Coachella Valley.

From the San Geronio Pass to the Salton Sea, the Coachella Valley is home to more than 30 plants and animal species that are rare, threatened or endangered. Each year millions of tourists and conventioners visit and new residents move to the Coachella Valley. As new development changes the face of the valley, it is important that we act now to protect the wildlife, recreational opportunities, clean air and water that our unique and beautiful landscape provides.

The Friends has another significant role as supporters of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument. These public lands provide for our quality of life – clean air and drinking water, wide-open spaces, wildlife and recreation. It is important that we work to protect and preserve the National Monument now and for generations to come.

## **Section III. How Do the Friends of the Desert Mountains Do It?**

### **Conserving Land**

In the late 1980's with increasing pressure from new development and shrinking public resources, it became clear that an independent organization was needed in the Coachella Valley to help acquire and conserve open space for all residents to enjoy. In 1987 a group of community volunteers formed a coalition that later became known as the Friends of the Desert Mountains and incorporated as a 501c3 non-profit organization.

Our approach to land protection is simple, fair and effective, tapping the power of both private and public sectors. Working in conjunction with biologists, conservationists and state and local government agencies, we select land for its scenic, biological, recreational or cultural significance and offer to purchase it at fair market value. We also accept donations of land. Through these key land acquisitions, we give permanent protection to the beauty, character and diversity of the Coachella Valley.

### **Supporting the National Monument**

The Friends worked diligently in 1999-2000 on behalf of the legislation establishing the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and since that time has served as the Monument's nonprofit support group working closely with BLM and USFS.

Friends provide visitor services, educational and interpretive programs, cultural preservation, administration of the gift shop in the National Monument Visitor Center and opportunities for volunteers to help with improvements and programs. The Friends also work with Congressional

representatives to obtain additional funding for management and acquisition of inholdings in the National Monument.

## **Section IV. Volunteer Qualifications and Requirements**

### **Qualifications for Volunteers:**

- Genuine interest in and a desire to help the Friends fulfill its mission
- Sensitivity to the needs of others and the ability to set clear, appropriate boundaries
- Willingness to follow the Friends policies and procedures
- Passion, reliability, and commitment
- Willingness and ability to be flexible and adaptable
- Ability to work supervised or unsupervised as a team or individually
- Ability to work with youth, staff, volunteers and general public
- Must be 18 years old to lead a hike or operate a cash register
- May need to hike in a desert environment on uneven terrain
- May need to learn and use a variety of hand tools and equipment
- May need to lift heavy objects

### **Requirements for Becoming a Friends Volunteer:**

- Schedule and attend an orientation session with the Volunteer Coordinator
- Complete a volunteer application
- Agree to background testing procedures and certification if applicable

### **Training for Volunteers:**

A variety of skills may be required for different programs. Training will generally be provided during the course of volunteer duties, or during continuing education sessions. The following skills would be helpful:

- Basic knowledge about the Friends, the National Monument, BLM, and USFS
- Use of GPS equipment, compass, map, and camera
- Hiking safety, first aid, and CPR
- Knowledge of local history and conservation efforts in the Coachella Valley
- Knowledge of local wildlife and their habitat, flora, fauna and geology

## **Section V. Volunteer Program Policies**

### **Policies:**

- In selecting and assigning volunteers, the Friends does not discriminate on the basis of race, age, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, disability, or any other classification that may be protected under federal, state, or local law.

- Volunteers are not eligible for any salary or employee benefits.
- The services of a volunteer may be refused or terminated by the Friends at will and shall be terminated when deemed to be in the best interests of the Friends to do so.
- Volunteers must adhere to the Friends policies, including but not limited to confidentiality, sexual harassment and prohibition of drug or alcohol use while on the job – refer to page 8.
- Volunteers are prohibited from representing the Friends, the Bureau of Land Management or the US Forest Service before the media (newspaper, television, radio, or magazine reporters) or the public (internet blogs, social websites, public forums) unless specifically requested to do so by Friends staff. Any media requests should be directed to the Friends Executive Director (ED).
- The solicitation of others or the distribution of any non-Friends materials is prohibited by volunteers on the National Monument premises.
- Volunteers are placed in specific jobs according to placement standards and other criteria and to fulfill the needs of the Friends.
- Volunteers must complete and sign a volunteer application form. However, completion of the forms does not guarantee acceptance as a volunteer.
- Volunteers must be interviewed and selected by the person appointed by the Friends.
- Volunteers must attend a volunteer orientation and any required training sessions.
- Volunteers must follow Friends established protocol of hierarchy in relation to communication with Friends board members and executive staff.
- Volunteers must use all safety equipment required for particular duties.
- Volunteer workers must report their hours through the “volunteer portal” at [www.desertmountains.org/portal/](http://www.desertmountains.org/portal/). As a guide, the monthly volunteer hours log is attached as Appendix 1.
- All volunteer related injuries must be reported to the ED or volunteer chair/leader immediately so that proper procedures can be followed. The procedure for reporting related injuries is referenced in “Procedure for Reporting Injury or Illness” – refer to page 7.

## **VI. Volunteer Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**

### **Bill of Rights:**

As a Friends volunteer, you have...

- The Right to be treated as a contributing team member and not just free help.
- The Right to a suitable assignment by taking into account, your personal preferences, temperament, experience, education, and employment background.
- The Right to know as much about the Friends as possible with regards to our policies, programs and staff.
- The Right to continuing education on the job as a follow-up to initial training; access to information about new developments and training for greater responsibility.

- The Right to sound guidance and direction by someone who is experienced, patient, well informed and who has the time to invest in your training.
- The Right to promotion through advancement to assignments of more responsibility, through transfer from one activity to another or through special assignments.
- The Right to be heard and to have a part in planning your project, freedom to make suggestions and to be respected for your opinion.
- The Right to recognition in the form of promotion, awards, day-to-day expressions of appreciation and by being treated as a significant contributor.

**Bill of Responsibilities:**

As Friends volunteer, you have...

- The Responsibility to uphold the mission and vision statements of Friends of the Desert Mountains.
- The Responsibility to follow policies and procedures.
- The Responsibility to be considerate, respect confidences and work as a member of the team with all staff members and volunteers.
- To use responsible judgment in making a decision.
- The Responsibility to keep Friends staff member or the volunteer chair informed of problems or changes in the workplace.
- The Responsibility to maintain a caring and respectful attitude to all visitors.
- The Responsibility to fulfill the obligations of the position for which you are volunteering. If you are unable to keep your project commitment, inform the volunteer chair/leader or Conservation Coordinator (CC) as soon as possible.
- The Responsibility to attend required trainings.
- The Responsibility to log your volunteer hours on a monthly basis. (refer to Appendix 1)
- The Responsibility to immediately report any accident or injury to the ED. Refer to the “Friends and Leaders Contact Information” page in the handbook.

**Section VII: Procedure for Reporting Injury or Illness**

Volunteers are required to report all injuries and illnesses that occur in the workplace or during a volunteer project. All injuries or illnesses that result in time missed from volunteering must be reported immediately to the ED. If it is not reported immediately your claim could be denied.

Below is the procedure for reporting injuries or illnesses. Volunteers are expected to follow these steps:

1. Volunteers must report all injuries or illnesses, no matter how minor, to the ED or volunteer chair/leader immediately. Notification can be made in person, by phone or voicemail. Good judgment should be used in selecting the method of notification. Refer to Friends and Leaders list for contact information.

2. Once the ED or volunteer chair/leader is notified, necessary medical treatment may be suggested at this time.
3. In an emergency use your best judgment in seeking medical treatment. **Please note: your personal insurance is primary.**

## **Section VIII. Volunteer Ethics and Standards of Behavior**

### **Harassment:**

Friends is committed to providing a work environment free of unlawful harassment. The Friends policy prohibits harassment due to race, religion, color, sex, national origin, disability, genetics, medical condition, age (40 years and older), sexual orientation, retaliation or any other classification protected by federal, state, or local law. **All Such Harassment is Unlawful.** Friends harassment policies apply to all volunteers.

Prohibited harassment includes, but is not limited to...

- Verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory jokes or comments, slurs or unwanted sexual advances, invitations, or comments
- Visual conduct such as derogatory or sexually-oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings or gestures
- Physical conduct such as assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movement or interfering with work due to sex, race, or any other protected classification
- Threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of continued volunteering
- Retaliation for having reported or threatened to report harassment

Should anyone harass a volunteer, the volunteer should report the incident immediately to the ED. Any report of harassment by a volunteer of the Friends will be dealt with immediately. There are no such “off the record” reports of harassment. A complete investigation will be conducted and if Friends determines that unlawful harassment has occurred, effective remedial action will be taken in accordance with the circumstances involved. Any volunteer determined to be responsible for unlawful harassment will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Friends will not retaliate against any volunteer for filing a complaint and will not knowingly permit retaliation by management, employees or volunteers.

### **Drugs and Alcohol**

The Friends is committed to providing a safe, drug and alcohol free environment for all. The use, possession, manufacture, sale or distribution of drugs, drug paraphernalia, alcohol or other mood/behavior altering substances on Friends premises is prohibited.

In addition, volunteers are not to report to work or remain on duty if any of their sensory, cognitive or motor functions or capabilities are altered, diminished, or otherwise affected by



the use of drugs or alcohol. Volunteers in violation of this policy are subject to immediate termination.

### **Disciplinary Action or Dismissal from Volunteer Programs**

The Friends has adopted a progressive policy to identify and address conduct that results from unacceptable behavior, poor performance or violation of the Friends policies, practices or procedures.

**Verbal Warning:** A verbal warning will be given when a problem is identified that justifies a verbal warning or volunteer engages in unacceptable behavior. Verbal warnings are documented and placed in the volunteer's personnel file and will remain in effect for three (3) months.

**Written Warning:** A written warning is more serious than a verbal warning. A written warning will be given when a volunteer engages in conduct that justifies a written warning or engages in unacceptable behavior during the time period that a verbal warning is in effect. Written warnings are maintained in a volunteers personnel file and will remain in effect for three (3) months.

**Dismissal from Program:** A volunteer will be dismissed from a program when he or she engages in conduct that justifies dismissal or does not correct the matter that resulted in less severe discipline.

### **Problem-Solving**

Friends hope that the working climate is pleasant and problem free. Nevertheless, sometimes problems develop between volunteers or between volunteers and staff. Our policy is first to have the volunteer try to work out any differences directly with the other party. If that is not successful, however, there are steps which may be taken:

1. Discuss the problem with the CC. Problems can often be resolved at this point.
2. If the CC does not resolve the problem, contact the Executive Director.
3. If the Executive Director does not resolve the problem, contact Friends Board of Directors.

### **Privacy**

Friends generally have an open door policy. However, if a door is closed this generally indicates a need for privacy. Please respect the privacy of others by knocking before entering a room and wait for permission to enter. Also keep in mind that voices should be kept low as to not disturb others.

### **Learning Your Role**

Listen carefully to directions, accept them willingly and ask for clarification if you do not understand. Never perform any services other than those specifically assigned to you or which you feel is immoral or illegal. When in doubt, ask the CC or Executive Director. Please feel free to suggest additional tasks you are willing to do or request additional work if you have the availability.

Relay any personal concerns or opinions about staff, management, rules, etc., to the CC and **not to other volunteers, staff members or the general public.**

### **Attendance**

Once you have scheduled yourself for a project, please understand that we rely on you to arrive at the scheduled time and remain for the duration of the assigned shift.

### **Logging Monthly Volunteer Hours**

Please log your volunteer hours on the Friends “Volunteer Only Portal” or on the manual Monthly Volunteer Hours Log (attached as Appendix 1). We highly suggest you log these hours regularly and as soon as possible. If you do not have access to a computer, turn your hours in to the lead volunteer on a monthly basis.

Accurate recording of volunteer hours is very important for several reasons. Friends staff is often required to report volunteer hours in order to comply with grant funding or to apply for new grants. Proper recording allows us to verify the volunteer hours completed for school requirements, work related projects or other references. Friends also track your hours for the purpose of recognition and awards.

### **Absences**

If you are unable to meet your obligation of the position for which you volunteered, please notify the CC or volunteer chair/leader as soon as possible.

### **Safety**

In compliance with federal regulations of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), Friends maintains safety and health standards and cooperates during workplace inspections. Further, it is Friends intention to provide a work environment that promotes employee and volunteer health, safety and efficiency. “Safety first!” is our number one concern above getting the job finished. We therefore ask that each volunteer practice safe working habits, such as turning off machines and equipment when not in use, keeping file drawers closed, keeping work areas orderly and not overloading electrical circuits. Volunteers must also use all provided safety equipment as required for particular duties and trail safe practices. Remember

you must report any accident or injury immediately to the ED. Procedure for reporting volunteer related injury or illness is listed on page 7.

### **In Case of Fire**

If a fire alarm sounds, exit the building through one of the many exits to the outside. If there is heavy smoke, crouch as low as possible while exiting. Do NOT delay to gather personal belongings or work equipment. When outside, gather at the far end of the parking lot or the other side of the street so as to not obstruct fire department. Do not re-enter the building until an “all clear” has been announced by fire department.

### **Smoking**

Smoking is not allowed inside Friends building or the Visitor Center.

### **Dress Code**

Discretion should be exercised in your personal appearance. Clothing should be neat, clean and appropriate for the tasks at hand. We request that no ripped or torn clothing or inappropriate language or photographs on clothing be worn to any Friends functions. Anyone inappropriately dressed may be asked to leave. Volunteers are requested to wear their volunteer shirt AND nametags when representing the Monument and Friends.

### **Personal Conduct**

Your professional conduct while on the job should be representative of the image that Friends strives to present to the business community, other volunteers and staff and the public at large.

### **Use of Equipment**

You may not use the Friends supplies, equipment or telephone for personal use.

## **Section IX. List of Volunteer Programs**

Below is a list of the volunteer opportunities with Friends. You will be provided with a detailed project description for each of the programs you request.

- Guided Interpretative Hikes & Volunteer Training Hikes
- Education, Training & Outreach
- Visitor Services
- Stewardship & Ed Hastey Trail
- Trail Ambassador
- Weed Warriors
- Citizen Science

- Events\*
- Youth Education
- Canyon Cougars Fundraising Hike (women only)
- Mentoring

**Guided Interpretative Hikes & Volunteer Training Hikes:** Hike Leaders lead visitors on hikes while providing natural and cultural interpretation, while Hike Sweeps bring up the rear and ensure that all hikers remain with the group. Scheduled in-season hikes are led out of the Visitor Center on Thursday, November through March. Additional hikes may be scheduled throughout the year, but must be pre-approved by the Executive Director. **ALL** volunteers have the opportunity to attend Training Hikes to develop and strengthen interpretive skills and expand upon their knowledge of the local environment.

**Education, Training & Outreach:** Friends sponsor various public programs and lectures throughout the year and may offer community outreach opportunities for qualified volunteers. In addition, volunteers are eligible to attend Friends sponsored Volunteer Trainings and Lectures led by local experts in a variety of subjects.

**Visitor Services:** The Visitor Services program provides volunteer support to the National Monument Visitor Center staff. Program volunteers help to run the gift shop cash register, maintain inventory control, greet and assist visitors, providing information on hiking trails, places of interest, and general information about Coachella Valley to visitors. *A background check is required.*

**Stewardship/Ed Haste Trail & VC Maintenance:** Trail Stewards work on trail construction and deconstruction. Work may include cleanup, graffiti removal, trail repair, and more, all under the supervision of Trail Stewardship Leaders. The Ed Haste trail is located behind the Visitor Center. Volunteers will do trail stewardship and VC grounds maintenance. Work may include light pruning, litter pick-up, raking and other general gardening skills.

**Ambassador:** Trail Ambassadors adopt a trail(s) to monitor the condition, pick up micro-trash, interact with person(s) hiking the trail, provide information about trails and Friends volunteers (offer our Monument trail map for sale), participate in simple trail surveys and report on the condition of the trail. Reports can be submitted online to the Program Chair or complete paper form and drop by the office.

**Weed Warriors:** The second leading cause of species extinction is invasive species. Here in the Valley, we are plagued with invasive plants that range through almost all of our five Life Zones: Sahara mustard, tamarisk, fountain grass, bull thistle, and unfortunately the list continues on. Volunteers have the opportunity to get absolutely filthy, sweat profusely and laugh heartily with fellow volunteers and State and Federal partners while doing important work to protect our native flora and fauna.

**Citizen Science:** In the spring of 2011, Friends volunteers had the chance to work with a PhD candidate who was doing work at the Phil Boyd Deep Canyon Research Station here in Palm Desert. This experience led to two other projects in which volunteers participated, performing needed natural science investigations in our area. The Citizen Science program gives anyone the opportunity to present a natural science project or study for consideration by the program chair. If the project seems viable, the presenter will then work with the program chairs to develop a plan for volunteer involvement. Volunteers have the opportunity to join with others to gain knowledge and experience while contributing to our local science database.

**Events:** Volunteers who work on our Events crews are an incredible group of people. Our annual Coachella Valley Wildflower Festival, held each March here on the grounds of the National Monument Visitor Center, is the highlight of our community outreach year. Volunteers of all ages help to make this Festival a memorable day of fun and education. Other events come up during the year that require many volunteer hours to assist in setting up tables, chairs, sign-in sheets, brochures and informational material placement, etc. These events could be at the Friends offices, visitor center or out in the community.

**Youth Education:** Friends is currently in the process of developing our Youth Education program in order to provide more kids with the opportunity to get out on the land and learn firsthand about our valley and the importance of education. Some groups we have worked with in the past includes: CV Recreation Dept, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys & Girls Club, school groups, and Building Healthy Communities. Volunteers may be asked to work indoors or outdoors with kids, and may have the opportunity to work with live animals in the course of hands-on science learning (not required). **A background check is required.**

**Canyon Cougars Fundraising:** Women’s hiking group do a hike in January annually to raise funds for the Wildflower Festival or choose to fund a special need for the Visitor Center. The hike usually is 8-16 miles in length and the trail is chosen each season by the participants.

**Mentoring:** As a new volunteer completes an application online, this group reaches out by telephone to “welcome to Friends”. You will be available to answer additional questions, ask questions, schedule an orientation, connect the new volunteer with the program leaders, and encourage them to become involved.

\*Locations are at the National Monument Visitor Center and Other Designated Locations within the Coachella Valley

## **Section X. RSVP/Volunteer Programs of Riverside County**

As a Friends volunteer, you are automatically included with the Riverside County RSVP/Volunteer Connect program that provides opportunities for individuals of all ages to volunteer their time, experience and skills to assist non-profit agencies throughout the Coachella Valley.

RSVP offers individuals opportunities to provide valuable services to their communities. Host agencies range from senior centers, food banks and food pantries to cultural museums. “Citizens on Patrol” and sites that help preserve our environment, wildlife and natural habitat. Volunteers provide office supportive services, facilitate workshops, interact with the public, support short term agency projects, assist at special events, and implement social media capacities and much, much more!

RSVP is sponsored by the Riverside County Office on Aging. RSVP also depends on local support from cities within the Coachella Valley, as well as business and private donations.