Volunteer Guidelines

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Welcome from the Staff and Board of Directors

Oakland Nature Preserve (ONP) is a 128-acre preserve just west of Orlando, Florida, in the town of Oakland, situated on the south shore of Lake Apopka.

Our mission is to promote an understanding of the fragile balance between mankind and the environment by EDUCATING present and future generations about the natural ecosystems and cultural history of the Lake Apopka Basin, and by RESTORING and CONSERVING the lands within the Preserve.

Oakland Nature Preserve was built by volunteers, and we rely on their ongoing support to continue our mission. Consider yourself the backbone of ONP, as we cannot continue our work without volunteers.

We are excited to have you as a part of our team. We have ambitious restoration goals here and cannot accomplish them without dedicated volunteers. Every hour you invest here helps the Preserve provide more opportunities for our community to explore, learn about, and develop an appreciation for the environment.

This manual is your guide to the Preserve and will help you become acquainted with our basic guidelines. It will also answer common questions, serve as a reference, and explain procedures we have at the Preserve.

Please review the following information package so you can get some context for how your contribution today is part of something much larger.

We are ever grateful for your time, energy and support.

Sincerely,

The Staff and Board of Directors
About Oakland Nature Preserve

- Oakland Nature Preserve consists of wetland and upland habitats. The upland habitats have seen the most degradation, and are our current focus for restoration.

- Most of the surrounding upland area was transformed to a citrus farm, but the citrus crop failed after heavy freezes in the 1980’s, then the land then converted to a slash pine farm for paper pulp.

- Now we’re trying to restore the Preserve upland property back to the way it was before Christopher Columbus and the explorers arrived to the Americas, back to its original habitat: Sandhill habitat.

- Habitat Restoration is a long, hard process involving: Removing invasive plants, preparing the soil, growing native plants, maintaining restored areas, and monitoring wildlife.

Volunteers help us here at Oakland Nature Preserve with ALL these things! (You may not do ALL of these things on your first day though!)
Sandhill Habitats

- Sandhill habitat is characterized by scattered longleaf pines and a diverse understory of grasses and wildflowers.

- Sandhill habitat is unique because it requires fire to survive. Because humans suppress fires and because of development, the sandhill that once covered most of the S. Eastern US has almost completely disappeared.

- Sandhill needs to burn every 2-4 years, so sometimes we set prescribed burns at the Preserve.

- Sandhill has the second most diverse understory in the world, second only to the rainforest.

- Here is an example of restored sandhill habitat from behind our building!
Gopher Tortoises

- One of the most common inhabitants of a sandhill habitat is the Gopher Tortoise. We are very happy to see them on the Preserve!

Gopher Tortoise burrows are often easy to spot because of the characteristic mound of loose sand at the burrow entrance (called the “apron”).

- Gopher Tortoises are medium sized land tortoises with a hard shell, stumpy back legs and flattened shovel-like front legs it uses to dig burrows in sandy soil.
- These burrows provide a refuge for more than 350 different species of animals during fire!
- Gopher Tortoises are called “Keystone species” because they are the backbone of the community in which it lives. If gopher tortoises live in a habitat, it is considered very healthy!
- As we restore, we find we have more and more gopher tortoises at ONP. They are also breeding here at Oakland Nature Preserve, as we see babies often too!
- Gopher tortoise burrows are often easy to spot because of the characteristic mound of loose sand at the burrow entrance (called the “apron”).
- This apron is a very important as it is their safe sunbathing area
- Female gopher tortoises often use it as a nesting site

Gopher Tortoises are protected in Florida under state law. It is unlawful to damage, destroy, harass or kill gopher tortoises, their burrows or their eggs

- We do Gopher Tortoise counts (surveys) every year at ONP: 79 burrows as of July 2018
- We search for and examine the burrows, as they give us an indication of the presence/absence of a resident gopher tortoise.
- On our last survey, we marked all the Gopher Tortoise burrows with a pink flag
• This helped us remember which burrows had been surveyed, but also, more importantly, to alert our staff and volunteers that there is a nearby resident gopher tortoise. **EXTRA CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN WHILE IN THE AREA OF PINK FLAGS, PLEASE GIVE THEM A 10 FOOT RADIUS. NEVER WALK DIRECTLY ON THE BURROW OR APRON.**

Please alert a staff member if you find an unmarked (unflagged) burrow.

*We can record and flag it appropriately to keep it safe.*
Volunteer Guidelines

We require that all volunteers wear suitable attire for outdoor work (long pants and closed toe shoes). Sun protection, bug repellant and a re-useable water bottle are highly recommended (we have water refilling stations onsite so you can stay hydrated).

All volunteers and parents of children volunteers must have an orientation to the preserve by the outreach coordinator and receive these volunteer guidelines before volunteering. This can be setup by contacting outreach@oaklandnaturepreserve.org. Each day you would like to volunteer, please register directly with the Outreach Coordinator or on the website, http://www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org/volunteer/, Returning Volunteers Schedule Visits Here link. We need to know how many volunteers we are expecting so we can plan which projects we do each day. No electronics (including cell phones) are to be used while volunteering.

Training:
You will receive the appropriate training for each volunteer position offered at the Preserve. Usually training will be a briefing before the task at hand begins. You are also highly encouraged to initiate training requests as you feel the need and ask questions or get more clarification if you are not comfortable with any aspect of a project.

Liability:
Volunteers are not covered by Worker’s Compensation. We encourage every volunteer to carry their own health insurance. If an injury occurs, report the injury to a supervisor or staff person immediately. Please remember that first aid kits are located in the office at the Preserve.

After ANY incident or injury, no matter how slight, that involves volunteers, staff, or visitors, a Preserve staff member must be notified. In the case of a medical emergency, call 911 and then contact the closest staff member.
Logging Hours:
Volunteers must sign in and out on the Volunteer Sign in Sheet on the table by the classroom at the beginning and end of your shift so that the Volunteer Coordinator can keep a record of volunteer time.

Please remember that the Preserve is required to keep an accurate record of all volunteer time. This record is valuable in reflecting participation and accomplishments of the volunteer program. It also allows potential funding organizations and the general public to recognize the value of community support given through volunteer participation.

Service Hours:
Oakland Nature Preserve also accepts volunteers participating in community service activities, student intern projects, high school, college, boy scout, corporate volunteer programs and other volunteer referral programs.

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to provide the required paperwork to the Outreach Coordinator and complete an orientation before commencing volunteer activities.

You must be working as a volunteer the whole time you are receiving credit otherwise credit will be denied.

Failure to follow the guidelines for participation and electronics is cause for dismissal.
Volunteer Rights

- To be respected as an individual by the staff and other volunteers
- To be appreciated for your work and dedication
- To receive adequate training so you can perform your job confidently
- To be listened to when you have a question or concern
- To work in a positive work environment

In turn, we ask our Volunteers to abide by our policies:

The following will not be tolerated at Oakland Nature Preserve:
- Use of cellphones or other electronics while volunteering.
- Untrue or false recording of hours/time spent volunteering.
- Conduct that may jeopardize the safety of others.
- Harassment and/or inappropriate or indecent conduct or language.
- Interference with employee or volunteer duties.
- Defacing property (indoors or outdoors).
- Soliciting or loitering.
- Parking in unauthorized areas; driving or parking in field areas.
- Alteration or installation of equipment.
- Use of illegal drugs, intoxicants and weapons.
- Smoking in building or on property.
- Volunteers are not permitted to use Golf Carts.
- Tools are to be used properly and safely.
- Tools must be cleaned after use before they are stowed.
Registration and Waiver

You must register online before you begin volunteering. If you do not have access to a computer, you may pick up a paper application from our office. The registration paperwork includes a liability waiver. www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org/volunteer

Volunteer Perks

We recognize that our volunteers give of their free time and we hope to see you return time and time again.

Here are some things you can look forward to receiving as you accrue hours:

- 25 hours – Water Bottle
- 50 hours – Leather Keychain
- 75 hours – Volunteer T-Shirt
- 150 hours – Individual Oakland Nature Preserve Membership

Age Requirements

High school aged volunteers (14-17 yrs) are welcomed with parental consent (unless parent will be volunteering at the same time (implied consent))

Middle school age volunteers (11-13 yrs) are welcomed with parental consent and one parent/guardian working as a volunteer for each 2 children volunteering

Elementary age volunteers (9-10 yrs) are welcomed with parental consent and one parent/guardian working as volunteer for each child volunteering

Elementary age volunteers aged 8 years and younger are welcomed only with prior approval, parental involvement and availability of outreach coordinator
Youth Volunteer Expectations

Thank you for dedicating a portion of your time to volunteering with Oakland Nature Preserve. Without your support, we would not be able to offer the many experiences our visitors enjoy. The following information highlights some of the most important aspects of our policies pertaining to youth volunteers. This letter serves as a reminder to our past volunteers and as a reference for new volunteers.

**Hours** – Regular shifts are from 8:00am-12:00pm on Mondays and Saturdays. For events, shift times may vary. You are expected to work your entire shift each time you are here.

**Earned Hours** – As the name suggests, volunteer hours are earned based on effort not necessarily time. If you volunteer an 8-hour day, you are only guaranteed to accrue all 8 hours if you are on task and work diligently. Hours can and will be subtracted for inappropriate behavior, not following directions, using a cell phone or text messaging while on duty and without permission and other reasons as determined by staff.

**Cell phones** – *Should be kept in the office or in your car and not on you while volunteering.* Remember to turn your ringer off while you are volunteering so it cannot be heard outside the office. Cell phones are a matter of convenience for many of us but remember, there is a time and a place. That goes for texting as well. If an emergency arises and a parent/guardian needs to contact you immediately, he/she can contact the Volunteer Coordinator who will notify you to call home.

**Behavior** – Keep in mind, as a volunteer you are a representative of Oakland Nature Preserve. You must act responsibly and model good behavior at all times while volunteering with us.

**Dress Code** – Dress comfortable for working outside, any clothing with inappropriate images or text will not be permitted. Closed toe shoes are required. Bring gloves if you have them, if not, we will provide you with our loaner gloves.

**Summer Camp** – Volunteers that are interested in volunteering with Summer Camp must be interviewed beforehand. Contact the Volunteer Coordinator or Managing Director if you are interested.

**Lunches** – You are responsible for providing your lunch while here. Oakland Nature Preserve does not have a refrigerator for volunteer lunches, so please make sure your lunch will survive at room temperature. We do not allow youth volunteers to go out or down to the gas station’s deli for lunch, even if you drive. Please respect these rules for your safety, and fairness of all youth volunteers.

**Enthusiasm** – Please share your excitement with our visitors and other volunteers. Our mission is to promote understanding of the fragile balances between mankind and the environment by educating present and future generations about natural ecosystems and by restoring and conserving the lands within the Preserve. Your enthusiasm is infectious and can have a huge
impact on your experience as well as those around you, and can change the way people interact with our environment. Your hard work is what enables ONP to reach its goals.

**Friends** – They are great to have but DO NOT invite them to spend the day with you at the Nature Preserve. You will make new friends while you are here and your focus should always be on your task at hand.

**Drugs** – Tobacco, alcohol and other illicit drugs are not permitted on the property at any time and are grounds for immediate termination.

**Dismissal** – Volunteering is a privilege and a responsibility. We expect our volunteers to treat this opportunity as a job. Volunteers not acting in accordance with our policies and procedures will be given verbal warnings, written warnings and may be terminated from their volunteer position depending on the severity of the infraction.

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**Youth Volunteer Agreement**

I have read and understand the above policies and expectations and have discussed them with my parents. I understand that volunteering is a privilege and a responsibility and affirm my commitment to Oakland Nature Preserve and its mission.

_________________________  __________________
Volunteer Name (please print)  Date

_________________________  __________________
Volunteer Signature  Date

**For the parent/guardian:**

I have reviewed and discussed the above policies and expectations with the minor in my care. We understand that compliance with these rules is required of all Volunteers at Oakland Nature Preserve. Parents are needed to reinforce these expectations and are responsible for ensuring your teen adheres to these policies. Thank you for partnering with us to ensure your child has a wonderful experience.

_________________________  __________________
Parent/guardian signature  Date