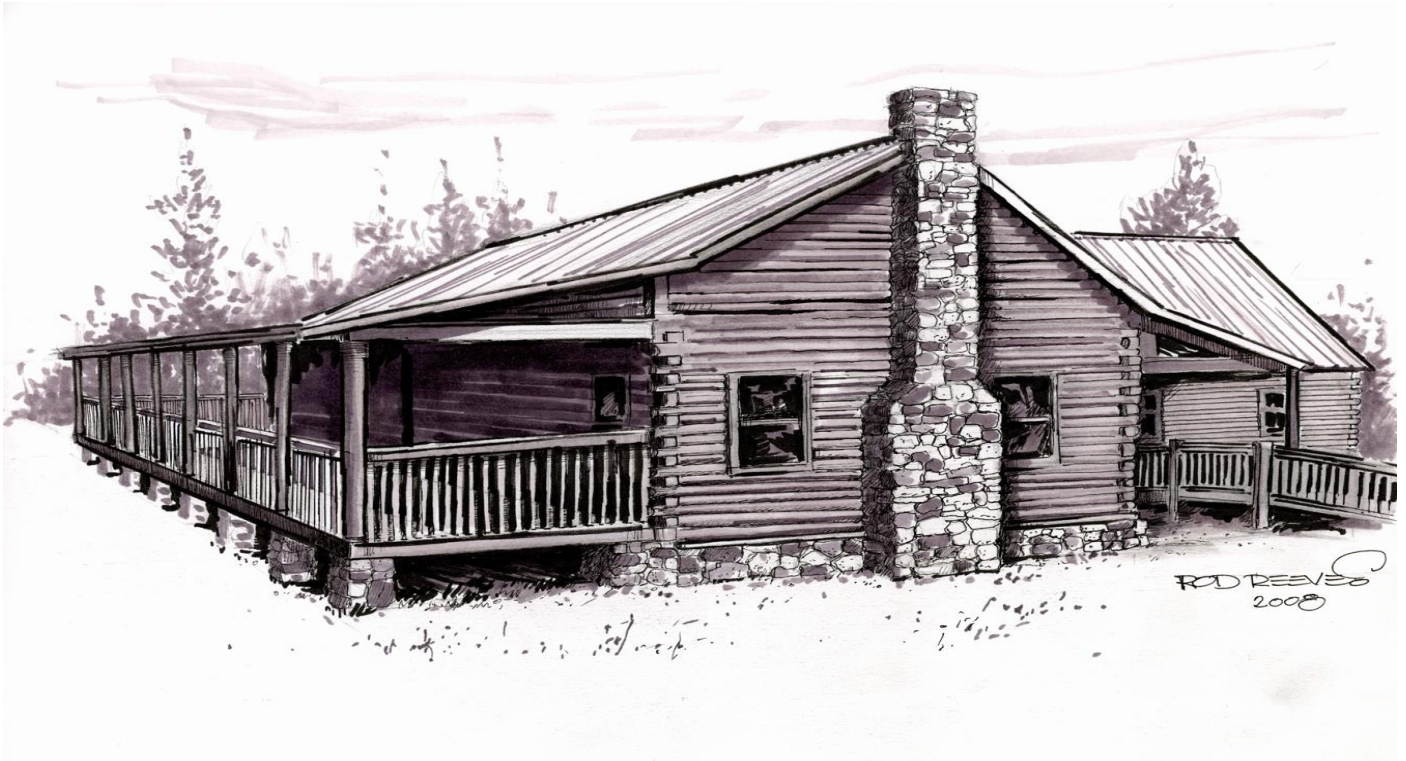




# OAKLAND NATURE P R E S E R V E



## Volunteer Guidelines

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## Welcome from the Staff and Board of Directors

Oakland Nature Preserve (ONP) is a 152-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.

Our organization encourages the teamwork of employees and volunteers so that we can effectively educate visitors and restore and conserve the lands within the Preserve. Volunteers contribute their unique talents, skills, and abilities to complete physical and non-physical tasks, enable the paid staff to concentrate on the work for which they were trained, and educate the public about our organization and its cause. 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 uplands have seen the most degradation and are our current focus for restoration.
- Most of the surrounding upland area was transformed into a citrus farm. The citrus crop failed after heavy freezes in the 1980's and the land was 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 the explorers arrived to the Americas, back to its original 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 has the second most diverse understory in the world, second only to the rainforest.
- Sandhill habitat is unique because it requires fire to survive and needs to burn every 2-4 years. Because humans suppress fires and because of development, the sandhill that once covered most of the S. Eastern US has almost completely disappeared. We sometimes set prescribed burns at the Preserve to simulate the natural burn cycle.
- Above 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 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 and 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: 180 active burrows in 2023. On our last survey, we marked all the Gopher Tortoise burrows with a blue 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 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

### Attire:

We require that all restoration and maintenance volunteers wear suitable attire for outdoor work (long pants and closed toe shoes). Sun protection, bug repellent and a re-useable water bottle are highly recommended (we have water refilling stations onsite so you can stay hydrated). Please leave all other items, including electronics, in your car or in the office. Museum Docents and events volunteers may wear suitable attire for indoor/outdoor work.

### Orientation:

All volunteers and parents of children volunteers must have an orientation to the preserve and receive these volunteer guidelines before volunteering. For restoration and maintenance workdays, the orientation will occur 15 minutes before the scheduled shift start time. For Museum Docents, orientation and training is scheduled a few times each year.

### Training:

You will receive the appropriate training for each volunteer position offered at the Preserve. 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.

### Scheduling:

Each restoration and maintenance workday or event you would like to volunteer, please register directly with the Volunteer Coordinator or on the Event Calendar on the website, [www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org](http://www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org). Docents and Eco-Interpreters have a separate scheduling procedure that will be emailed after training.

### 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.

#### Breaks:

Please take adequate rest and drink breaks, especially during the hot and humid months. Restrooms and a water fountain are available at our Education center. Please inform your leader/supervisor if you need to leave your worksite for a break.

#### Non-Discrimination Policy:

It is the policy of this agency that there will be no discrimination or harassment in its programs, activities or employment based on race, color, sex, sexual preference, marital or parental status, religion, national origin, age, mental or physical disability, Vietnam era or veteran status. Questions or concerns related to nondiscrimination or equal opportunity should be directed to the Managing Director.

#### 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. 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.

#### Mandated/Court Ordered Hours:

Oakland Nature Preserve accepts individuals who need mandated/court ordered hours, from Orange County Alternative Community Service (ACS), Lake County Probation Services, and youth in a Juvenile Diversion program such as Neighborhood Restorative Justice. Only non-violent offenders are accepted, and all must meet with the Volunteer Coordinator prior to volunteering to verify paperwork and identity.

Mandated/Court Ordered volunteers are not permitted to bring children to the Preserve while completing service hours, no exceptions.

**You must be working the whole time you are receiving credit otherwise credit will be denied. Failure to follow the guidelines 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
- Use of Golf Cart without express permission and written consent
- Improper or unsafe use of tools

### Benefits of volunteering with us

- Share your enthusiasm and appreciation of the environment





- Increase your own knowledge of the natural world
- Spend time outside
- Meet people with similar interests

## Volunteer Positions

We have several ways for volunteers to become involved with the Preserve.

*Restoration and Maintenance* volunteers typically work on Monday and Saturday mornings. Volunteer duties may include but are not limited to: removing invasive plants on many of our trails, assisting in plantings, trimming plants along our boardwalk, leaf-blowing the parking lot, boardwalk, and pavilion, and various other tasks.

*Museum Docents* greet and engage our visitors. You do not have to be a Master Naturalist or scientist to be a great tour guide, museum docent, environmental interpreter or greeter. If you enjoy the outdoors and talking with people, and have an outgoing and friendly demeanor we welcome you to consider joining our program.

*Office Volunteers* assist us with data entry and other various tasks on an as-needed basis. Please contact the Volunteer Coordinator for availability.

We also have two programs designed specifically for teenagers. These programs have limited spaces and are interviewed by the Volunteer Coordinator before placement.

- The *Leader in Training (LIT)* program is for youth who want to gain knowledge in programming events, working with kids and gain leadership skills during our Environmental Summer Camp program.
- The *Youth Docents* main priority is engaging with ONP guests. If you enjoy the outdoors and talking with people, and have an outgoing and friendly demeanor we welcome you to consider joining our program.

## Registration and Waiver

You must register 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. Registration for Restoration and Community Volunteer Days is on our events calendar, [www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org/volunteer](http://www.oaklandnaturepreserve.org/volunteer). Registration for Docent and LIT must be requested from the Volunteer Coordinator, [outreach@oaklandnaturepreserve.org](mailto:outreach@oaklandnaturepreserve.org).

## 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 (items may vary based on our inventory):

- 25 hours – ONP Sticker
- 75 hours – Leather Keychain
- 100 hours – Volunteer T-Shirt “We Dig Our Volunteers”
- 150 hours – Individual Oakland Nature Preserve Membership for 1 year

## Age Requirements

High school aged volunteers (14-17 yrs) are welcomed with written 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 restoration and maintenance 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 unless arrangements are made with the Volunteer Coordinator ahead of time.

**Earned Hours** – As the name suggests, volunteer hours are earned based on effort not necessarily time. If you volunteer a 4-hour day, you are only guaranteed to accrue all 4 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 on silent or in your car and not on you while volunteering.* Cell phones are a matter of convenience for many of us but remember, there is a time and a place. 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 always act responsibly and model good behavior 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, and if not, we will provide you with loaner gloves.

**Leader In Training and Youth Docents** – Volunteers that are interested in volunteering as a Leader In Training or Youth Docent must be interviewed beforehand. Contact the Volunteer Coordinator for more information.

**Lunches** – You are responsible for providing your own refreshments while here if you are working a shift longer than 3 hours. Oakland Nature Preserve does not have a refrigerator for volunteer food, so please make sure your food 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## 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

