



Connecting People with Nature since 1920

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Welcome!

As a volunteer Shelter Caretaker, you are stepping into an important position that enables the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to maintain and protect over 2,000 miles of trails. The Trail Conference was started in 1920 and from day one has been a volunteer-powered organization. Our volunteers have accomplished amazing feats over the decades, including building the first six miles of the Appalachian Trail, and you are now joining our century-old legacy that has provided millions of trail users with a means to explore the outdoors.

Responsibilities for your assigned lean-to include making sure it stays in good, safe condition for all visitors it hosts, and reporting major issues to your immediate supervisor. Each Shelter Caretaker is expected to hike and care for their adopted lean-to at least twice a year (preferably in the spring and fall) and report their efforts back to their volunteer supervisor. You will also find additional opportunities to learn new skills and meet fellow outdoor enthusiasts while out on the trail, or at one of our [upcoming events](#).

Our Trail Conference family is passionate and dedicated and we are so happy you are a part of it. The over one hundred thousand hours donated by volunteers each year make it possible for our park partners to have work completed that otherwise might not get done. Your willingness to contribute your time, energy, enthusiasm, and talents for the benefit of public lands is deeply appreciated.

The primary objective of this welcome packet is to give you an understanding of your role and how it supports our shared mission. Please contact your Local Trail Committee (LTC) Chair or Supervisor, Program Coordinator, or the Volunteer Engagement team ([volunteer@nynjtc.org](mailto:volunteer@nynjtc.org)) if you have any questions.

Thank you for accepting the role of Shelter Caretaker!

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## OUR MISSION

The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a volunteer-powered organization that builds, maintains, and protects public trails. Together with our partners, we strive to ensure that the trails and natural areas we share are sustainable and accessible for all to enjoy for generations to come.

## OUR VALUES

- The joys of nature belong to everyone.
- Environmental conservation is a shared duty.
  - Volunteers are our superheroes.
  - Respect is essential to success.
- The right path is always a responsible one.
- Financial sustainability is fundamental to a healthy organization.



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## TRAIL CONFERENCE VOLUNTEER RESOURCES

Welcome to your new volunteer position! This guide explains all the resources available to you on your [Online Dashboard](#):

### Priority/Frequently Used Resources

- [Online Dashboard](#): Every volunteer has access to an online dashboard via the Trail Conference website. The online dashboard hosts all the listed documents below. If you need help logging on, follow the instructions in this packet or contact [volunteer@nynjtc.org](mailto:volunteer@nynjtc.org).
- [Online Reporting Form](#): All trail volunteers submit their volunteer hours using this form. Hours are separated by region, Supervisor, and Trail Chair. This form is located on the Dashboard under 'Resources for Online Reporting', along with the [Online Reporting Instructions](#).
- [Volunteer Service Agreement Forms](#): If you're volunteering on NPS/ATC, NY DEC or NY OPRHP lands you must fill out the associated park volunteer service agreement (VSA). Check our grid to see if your park or region requires a VSA. If you're still not sure, email [volunteer@nynjtc.org](mailto:volunteer@nynjtc.org).

### General Resources

- [Avenza User Guide](#): Trail Conference maps can be accessed digitally through the Avenza map app. This very useful app can geolocate where you are so that you can mark exact spots where you've spotted something with photos and GPS points. (Note: All NJ State Park maps are downloadable for free).
- [Trail Volunteer Structure \(RTC\) Chart](#): If you're a trail volunteer that means you're part of a Regional Trails Council (RTC). Each RTC is a group of volunteers operating within a specific geographic region to coordinate the management of trails in the area. There are five RTCs: New Jersey, East Hudson, West Hudson, Catskills, and Long Path.
- [Shelter Caretaker Checklist](#): Checklist of actions to do on your hike to/from the shelter, at the shelter, and after your shelter inspection trip.
- [Trail Management Guide](#): A complete guide to all practices, protocols, and policies for trail volunteers.
- [Invasive Species Management Techniques for Trail Maintainers](#)- Management techniques for various types of invasive species (Note: We've highlighted specific species, but these techniques can be used generally). This includes managing herbaceous plants, small woody shrubs, large thorny woody shrubs, vines, and removal methods.
- [Quick Invasives ID Guide](#)- Quick guide with photos of common invasive plants that you encounter on the trail, and best practices for how and when to remove or clip them. This includes plants that are 'aggressive resprouters' which cutting is not recommended.
- [Learn About Invasive Species- Standard Guide](#)- Learn about the 14 most common invasive species. This is also the part 1 training video for Invasive Strike Force Surveyors.
- [Learn About Invasive Species- Intermediate Guide](#)- Learn about 11 less common invasive species. This is the part 2 training video for Invasive Strike Force Surveyors.
- [Tools and Safety Protocols](#)- Recommended tools and safety protocols such as boot brushes, protective eye gear, leather gloves or larger tools like a weed wrench or pick mattock.

### Policies and Guidelines

- [Injury, Incidents and Insurance](#): Injuries and incidents that occur when actively volunteering are covered by insurance, either through the Trail Conference or a partnering land manager. Be familiar with the reporting process and forms before going into



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the field.

- [Code of Conduct](#): By becoming a volunteer you are agreeing to our Code of Conduct. To keep a positive and safe atmosphere we expect all volunteers and staff to follow our code of conduct. If you experience or witness a breach of this code please email [volunteer@nynjtc.org](mailto:volunteer@nynjtc.org).
- [Outdoor Activity Safety Guidelines](#): There is inherent risk when working with tools. Keep yourself and others safe by following these guidelines and any instructions particular to your role.
- *Youth*: If you are under 18, or are a guardian bringing a youth with you, the [Guardian Consent Form](#) must be filed with [volunteer@nynjtc.org](mailto:volunteer@nynjtc.org). If you are an adult volunteer that plans to work with youth other than your own, you must [submit to a background check](#) prior to doing so.

#### **Training and Skills Building**

- [Online Learning Library](#): Our learning library provides pre-recorded trainings and webinars you can watch at any time.
- [Trail Blazing and Maintaining Resources](#): Whether you're an official trail maintainer or just curious about how trails are maintained, this page has all resources you'll need to effectively care for the trails.
- [Trail Design & Construction Resources](#): Are you interested in joining or leading a crew? Or just curious about how trails get built? Check out this resource page.