INTRODUCTION

Volunteering has made an immeasurable contribution to communities, organizations, and individuals for many years. Volunteers can and do make a vital contribution to the achievement of the goals of Laojunshan National Park.

By definition, a Volunteer is anyone who performs work for the Park under a signed volunteer agreement for which he/she receives no salary.

This Strategic Plan presents policies, guidelines, and best practices that will guide decision-making for establishment and implementation of a successful Volunteer program. It includes a statement of Mission, Guiding Principles, short and long-term goals, and suggested best practices. And it defines responsibilities for each level of the park organization, including the individual volunteer.

The Plan defines a Volunteer Program for the future, one that will be implemented over time as the park staff is expanded and especially as the variety of visitor service programs are established and implemented.

MISSION OF THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The primary purpose of the Volunteer program is to provide a way for the Park to recruit and utilize voluntary assistance and services from a wide variety of individuals and groups. The main objective of the program is to utilize this voluntary help in such a way that is mutually beneficial to the Park, to each individual volunteer, and to residents of villages and communities in and around the Park.

Volunteers are accepted without regard to race, ethnic group, religion, age, sex, or disability.

The volunteer’s role is to assist park staff and enhance Park services. Volunteers give the Park the ability to spend available funds more efficiently, to increase best stewardship of park resources, and to improve services to the public.

The volunteer program seeks to:

- Provide opportunities for volunteers to actively participate in and make a meaningful contribution to the operations of Laojunshan National Park.
- Provide volunteers with a positive and pleasant service experience.
- Build public awareness of the goals and values of the Park.
• Develop greater connections between the Park and local people living in and around the Park.
• Increase effectiveness of paid staff and integration of park programs with all who serve as partners in the achievement of park goals.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

• Engage a wide variety of individuals and groups in preserving their cultural and natural heritage.
• Provide volunteers with opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment.
• Collaborate with partners and local people living in and around the Park.
• Promote excellence and diversity in all aspects of park operations.

SHORT-TERM GOALS FOR THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

• Complete and approve the Strategic Volunteer Program Plan for the Park
• Identify and establish the organizational structure of the Volunteer Program
• Select a Volunteer Coordinator for the Park
• Identify, describe, and prioritize tasks that volunteers can and should be able to do to contribute to achievement of park goals.
• Identify and implement a diverse set of recruitment strategies that best connect capable volunteers with appropriate park tasks.
• Establish information about Park Volunteer Program on Park website.
• Develop and implement appropriate training for park volunteers.

LONG-TERM GOALS FOR THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

• Volunteer recruitment and placement is actively and systematically managed and targeted to the prioritized needs of the Park.
• All park staff receive training in the best ways to supervise and manage park volunteers.
• Initial volunteer programs are evaluated and changes made to improve overall volunteer program.
• Volunteers are fully trained to perform the work of the position for which they have been appointed and to understand and protect resources while performing their duties.
• Volunteers are drawn from a wide diversity of sources, including varied ethnic groups, villages in and around the Park, and regional urban areas.
• Safety is incorporated into all aspects of the Volunteer program and individual work assignments.
• Measurable goals and objectives are developed, along with methods to measure accomplishment of goals.
• A process is developed and implemented to monitor and evaluate the overall Volunteer Program; feedback is shared among all levels of the park organization and appropriate changes are made.
• Some form of uniform is established that will make Volunteers easily identified and distinguishable from paid staff, partners, visitors, local people, etc. Such uniform items are made available to park volunteers as appropriate.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK LEADERSHIP

Park leadership must clearly communicate their support of the Volunteer Program. Leadership needs to set forth a broad vision for volunteerism that reaches throughout the organization and inspires each volunteer to contribute to the best of their ability.

Park leadership will be responsible for designation of the Volunteer Coordinator and will ensure that time apart from his/her normal duties is provided to perform the prescribed duties of this important role.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

The Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for administering the Park’s volunteer program. This individual serves as the principal liaison between volunteers and park staff. Except as otherwise set forth in organization charts and job descriptions, the Volunteer Coordinator does not directly supervise park volunteers. Specific duties of the Volunteer Coordinator include but are not limited to:

• Develop, evaluate, and help other staff implement a diverse and effective volunteer recruitment strategy.
• Build a network of contacts in local villages, neighboring communities, regional interest groups, universities, and the full spectrum of volunteer organizations.
• Lead a systematic assessment of needs and capacity for volunteer services through ongoing communication with park staff and partners.
• Lead and coordinate administrative activities that support the volunteer program, such as:
  • Respond to telephone, e-mail, and other forms of inquiry about volunteer work.
  • Update park website to provide up-to-date information about volunteer needs and opportunities.
  • Assure accurate, consistent, and complete record-keeping, maintenance of volunteer agreements, requests for reimbursement, etc.
  • Order and maintain a supply of approved uniform items - patches, hats/caps, shirts, vests, etc.
- Develop and lead implementation of program that provides for feedback between volunteers, staff supervisors, and other park staff and partners.
- Keeps volunteers and staff informed throughout the year through special mailings, electronic-mailings, phone calls, etc.
  - Lead and coordinate efforts to provide sufficient training for both volunteers and staff supervisors.
  - Leads development of a program that systematically, consistently, and fairly recognizes the contributions of park volunteers.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF FIELD SUPERVISORS AND PARK STAFF**

- Determine which, if any, tasks for activities within his/her work responsibilities are appropriate for performance by volunteers.
- Write specific (brief) role and function statements, or job descriptions, that outline the work and expectations of a volunteer.
- Identify specific skills and experience necessary to do these tasks, including physical or environmental demands of the work.
- Provide immediate supervision of volunteer.
- Provides on-the-job training and evaluation.
- Works with Volunteer Coordinator and other staff to assure appropriate training for volunteers under his/her supervision.
- Fully implements approved policies for recognition by initiating awards for volunteers under his/her supervision.
- Trains volunteers in safe work practices.

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK VOLUNTEERS**

Park volunteers are expected to conduct themselves, always, in a manner that best represents Laojun Mountain National Park and its mission. Actions and appearance should, at all times, be professional and respectful of others.

Each volunteer, in addition to carrying out individual work responsibilities, will:

- Abide by park rules, regulations, and standards
- Be prompt and reliable in reporting for duty.
- Work a determined number of hours according to a mutually agreed upon schedule.
- Complete Volunteer time sheets, or report hours worked, as arranged with supervisor.
- Attend orientation and training programs as provided.
- Treat the public and fellow works honestly and politely at all times.
- Perform duties in a safe manner.
- Wear the uniform as prescribed.
- Communicate questions/concerns to park staff in a timely manner.
DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS IN LAOJUNSHAN NATIONAL PARK

Campground hosts

Campground hosts normally live in or near their assigned campground and provide a wide variety of services to visiting campers. Mainly, they provide information about campground and park rules and regulations, collect park and camping fees as authorized, and assure appropriate behavior in the campground. They also answer general informational questions regarding the park’s features and facilities, safety and resource protection issues, and ongoing park programs. Campground hosts may perform routine maintenance and cleanup requirements.

Visitor Center Volunteers

Volunteers may staff each of the park visitor centers for the purpose of answering a wide variety of questions about park features, what to do in the Park, rules and regulations that guide visitor actions, availability of commercial (lodging, food, guided tours, etc. Such volunteers are expected to be very knowledgeable about the Park and also experienced in greeting and talking with visitors. English speaking skills might, from time to time, be very helpful. All staff at visitor centers may be expected to do minor cleanup and maintenance at the visitor center as needed.

Trail guides and field information and interpretation

Local people (or individuals with in-depth knowledge of the Park) may be utilized as volunteers to guide visitors into the undeveloped portions of the Park. Such volunteers must, first, have a deep understanding of routes of travel, park features, past and present cultural values and customs, potential safety hazards, and park policies and regulations. In some cases, volunteer trail guides must be in excellent physical condition and capable of talking with visitors. English speaking skills may, at times, be essential.

- Wildlife Protection and Monitoring
- Community and village support
- Research and monitoring – ie botany, wildlife, geology
- Water and Land Conservation
- Resources Management Projects
- Educational and interpretive programs for Children
- Photography and preparation of informational and interpretive materials

BEST PRACTICES TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
**Recognition and awards**

Volunteers make valuable contributions to Laojunshan National Park, and establishing appropriate ways to recognize and award their service is an important part of the Volunteer program. Supervisors of volunteers are encouraged to hold recognition events throughout the year to honor their volunteers. Also, the Park Volunteer Coordinator may distribute awards to site supervisors or directly to volunteers by mail. The value of such awards should be nominal, consistent, and mostly based upon the number of hours contributed. Non-monetary awards should be items of an honorary nature that can be worn, displayed, or used in the work environment. Such items could be a cup, desk pen set, desk clocks, jacket or Tee-shirt, day-pack, small lunch cooler, etc. Small “junior-ranger” badges displaying park logo may be especially appropriate for children. Awards based on cumulative hours of work are suggested as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours worked</th>
<th>Award suggested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 100</td>
<td>Certificate of Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Specially designed Volunteer pin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>Laojunshan National Park logo patch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>Laojunshan National Park pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>Coffee Cup imprinted with Park logo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Park Coordinator may also choose to plan an annual event where all volunteers are invited to enjoy lunch or dinner and celebrate their contributions. Such an event might be the appropriate time to hand out awards for hours contributed.

These awards are one small way to show Park appreciation to volunteers for their significant contributions toward the preservation and protection of the park. However, the best gift that park leaders and staff can provide is assuring continuing and enriching opportunities for volunteers to be constructively involved with Laojun Mountain National Park programs.

**Uniforms**

Volunteers should be easily identifiable as individuals who are contributing to park programs. Such recognition is normally based upon clear display the park logo with the word volunteer clearly attached to it. This uniform may be sewn onto a hat or onto the sleeve of a shirt or jacket. The Volunteer Coordinator would purchase a supply of hats and clothing, secure selected identifying logos and provide these inexpensive uniforms to volunteers for wear during their period of service as volunteers.

**Recruitment**

Recruitment practices will be based upon basic mission and goals of the Park. Volunteers will be sought who can fill prescribed positions that serve to advance preservation of natural and cultural resources, enhance visitor services, and better integrate the local villages and nearby
towns with the Park. Specifically, recruitment will target a diverse group of individuals qualified to perform the functions identified in this Plan, i.e., campground hosts, visitor center assistance, research, training, community development, tourism enhancement, etc. The outcome of the recruitment program will be a comprehensive database of groups and individuals who have expressed a willingness to volunteer their time and who possess necessary skills and experience. The Park’s Volunteer Coordinator will develop and maintain that database, and will coordinate recruitment efforts. However, all park staff, especially on-site supervisors, must be diligent in seeking out volunteers from local and regional sources to meet the needs of their respective responsibilities. Some ideas to consider:

- Identify best practices based upon local and regional customs and experience.
- Develop bulletins for wide distribution on the park websites and among partners and local communities that describe volunteer opportunities and benefits.
- Reach out, especially, to schools and academic institutions and seek to incorporate volunteer service into curriculum design.
- Develop long-term relationships with advanced learning centers that promote the values of utilizing Laojun Mountain National Park as a site for research and thesis preparation.
- Develop long-term relationships with local and regional service groups.

**Program Evaluation**

Periodic assessment of the Park’s volunteer program is essential, especially during the early years of program implementation. Such assessments might be set forth in a matrix or chart that provides for comparison of strengths and weaknesses and also provides for identification and comparison of threats to success (i.e., capacity to manage program, budget constraints, lack of interest, inability to attract needed skills, etc.) and opportunities (i.e., expanded recruitment, upcoming special events, more specialized training, etc).

Additional recommendations for program evaluation include:

- Conduct a survey/evaluation of volunteers about their experiences at the time they leave the program; analyze feedback and make changes as appropriate.
- Solicit feedback from other staff, partners, local people, and tourism companies on a regular basis and make changes as appropriate.
- Track employee engagement in the volunteer program so that time commitments and problems can be identified. Make improvements based on findings.
- Shop the marketplace of ideas – internet, books, linkage with existing regional volunteer networks, etc. Look for success stories in other fields and activities where volunteers are used.

**Miscellaneous administrative policies and procedures**

Over time, volunteer supervisors can be expected to deal with a variety of questions for which policies must eventually be established, including:
• Can or must volunteers use their own supplies and equipment, ie vehicles, cameras, tools, etc? It is advised that the Park and each supervisor provide all equipment necessary and appropriate to carry out their assigned tasks to volunteers. If a volunteer is required to use their own equipment to perform assigned duties and that property is lost or damaged or destroyed the volunteer may be reimbursed for their loss. If a volunteer prefers to use their own equipment rather than available park equipment they do so at their own risk and will not be compensated should their property be lost, damaged, or destroyed.

• What benefits and protection/risk management applies to volunteers at Laojunshan National park? Volunteers should be treated as park employees consistent with all applicable laws and regulations that guide compensation for work related injuries, damage or loss of personal property, immunity from liability, etc.

• What kinds of reimbursement can be paid to volunteers? By definition, volunteers cannot be paid a salary for their work; however, subject to availability of funds and established park practices, volunteers may be paid for out-of-pocket expenses that are the result of their volunteer service, including transportation to training or worksites, meals, uniform items not provided by park, required equipment not provided by park, etc.

• Can housing be provided for park volunteers? Accommodations may be provided for volunteers during their period of work in the Park. Park policy may limit assignment or funding for such accommodations to certain specially needed tasks that cannot be provided by local people. Likewise, volunteers provided accommodations may be required to work a specified number of hours – ie more than 32 hours/week – to be eligible for free accommodations.