

2025 Northwest Montana Lookout Association (NMLA) General Volunteer Information

Please take the time to read through these project details. The better prepared you are, the better experience you will have.

Maps:

We recommend that you buy a map to get a good idea of the area you will be traveling/working. Maps are available at most federal or state agency offices. Your project crew leader will have a map you can look at if you don't have one.

Projects:

Since you are a **volunteer** and will be no doubt working alongside federal or state employees, expect to put in a full workday. Most restoration and historic preservation is done using hand tools. If the worksite location is appropriate for the use of electric power, generators and power tools will be provided. Trail maintenance projects involve use of primitive tools such as cross-cut saws, axes, pulaskis, hand saws, shovels and loppers, which you will be trained for and supervised by a project crew-leader. Trail work can involve strenuous lifting, bending, and hiking to and from work site each day. The NMLA crew-leader will assign appropriate tasks to fit your comfort and skill level.

Project Specific:

Each project will have its own set of objectives. Each objective will require specific skills. These skills will be spelled out and attached to the volunteer agreement for each project.

Volunteering:

All volunteers must enter into a Volunteer Agreement with the agency you are working for. This agreement is important as it covers you as if you were an employee of that agency in case of accident or injury.

Project Crew Size:

Most structure projects will be completed by small crews consisting of from 2 to 4 volunteers. The small crew size is necessary due to the on-site working environment. As safety is of utmost importance, working too closely with one another can create an unsafe working environment. Most lookout cabs are no larger than 14' x 14' atop timber towers and cabs on the ground are similar in size so working conditions especially on a tower can become very cramped. Trail projects can accommodate more volunteers.

Materials and Supplies Support: We do our best to arrange for pack support:

If no packer is available for the project, we will notify you at least one week prior to your trip. When a project has a packer, we will arrange for them to haul tools, food and some personal gear. The first priorities for packing are crew food and tools. If

there is space, larger items such as sleeping bags and tents may also be packed. **Please be prepared to carry in ALL of your personal backpacking gear and remember to pack light!** In rare cases a helicopter may be used for support purposes.

Food and Cooking Gear:

NMLA or the agency will provide group gear such as cooking stove, pots & pans, water filter, etc. Coordinate with others in the project crew to maximize efficiency and minimize cleanup. However, each volunteer should bring a personal kitchen kit (with plate/bowl, spoon/fork, hot mug, water bottle, etc).

Personal Gear:

Please see the attached list for other personal gear needs. Note: participants will need to bring long pants (no shorts for trail work), long sleeved shirt (when sawing), work gloves and sturdy pair of hiking boots (tennis shoes ARE NOT recommended) to work in. Please wear hiking boots with ankle support. Volunteers are also responsible for bringing their own personal camping gear including a sleeping bag, tent, and backpack. Dressing in layers is the best approach. One work "outfit" will be sufficient; everyone will stink as much as you do (unless they are not working very hard).

Weather:

Daytime temps may range from 70-95 degrees. Overnight lows could range from low 20's to 40's—remember we're at elevation, so bring a good sleeping bag! Be sure to dress in layers (avoid cotton). Always be ready for rain and don't forget warm hats/gloves for early AM and evenings. It's worth investing in good rain gear and a pair of gaiters to keep the mud on the trail and not in your boots or socks. Remember, you will be working at a high elevation, so be prepared for wind, which can make the weather seem chillier.

Leave No Trace:

We will be practicing Leave No Trace camping principles in the backcountry. The NMLA crew-leader will be training you in these principles and what needs to be followed during the week. We will try and leave as little an impact as we can and to leave the camping area better than we found it.

Bears & Pepper Spray:

The bears are truly wild, and, unlike National Parks, tend to shy away from humans, especially larger groups. Grizzly bears are on the endangered species list and receive the most attention. It is easy to avoid unpleasant confrontations with these wild and beautiful creatures by following a few common sense rules. In areas of dense brush along the trail, announce your presence to bears. If you want an additional level of protection, you might consider cayenne pepper-based spray. Cayenne pepper-based bear spray is widely available at sporting goods stores. Be sure to purchase a belt holster for the pepper spray; it's no good in your backpack. The NMLA crew-leader on your trip will be carrying pepper spray and has been trained to use it. There will be education and training given by the NMLA crew-leader during the trip on safety and rules to be followed while traveling and living in bear country.

Working in the Great Outdoors:

Please keep in mind that we do the best we can to plan for many details and logistics, but sometimes Mother Nature, pack mules, or any number of variables can put a glitch in the best-made plans. There are always unforeseen events that can alter a project, cause us to move our campsite, delay our travel plans or just be a nuisance. And of course, this always happens when you least expect it or most want to relax at camp after a long day. **Working in the Great Outdoors means we must be flexible. Thank you in advance for your understanding and flexibility if any unfortunate changes happen on your project.** The best way to help is to keep a positive and accommodating attitude and ask what your crew leader needs from the crew to find an adequate solution.

Packing list (required):

- RAIN JACKET AND PANTS!!!
- Tent
- Warm sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad
- Full set of long underwear
- 1 set of work clothes; pants, long-sleeved shirt, t-shirt
- Work gloves
- Warm pants for evening
- 1 wool or fleece shirt/sweaters/jackets
- Hiking socks
- Sleeping socks (1 pair; you don't hike in them!)
- Underwear
- Warm mittens or gloves, warm hat
- Hiking boots with ankle support (not tennis shoes)
- Camp shoes
- Kitchen kit: spoon/fork, bowl/plate (Tupperware works for meals and as a lunch box), & hot mug
- Personal biodegradable toiletries (non-fragrant, bears like smelly stuff)
- **Water bottles/Camelback—at least 2 liters (3 recommended).** Please don't overlook this suggestion!
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Sun hat/ sunglasses
- Personal medications (allergies? Epi-pen?)
- Waterproof matches/ lighter
- Medium-Large backpack for carrying all of this stuff!

Optional items-Keep it light!:

- Leatherman or all-purpose tool
- Bug repellent
- Camera (and waterproof bag)
- Book
- Binoculars
- GPS

Food if not provided:

- Keep it simple – 3 meals a day plus any snacks (not included if meals are provided) you might choose to include
- Team up with the other volunteers to create group meals
- Divide meals – each volunteer “cooks” one or two meals.
- If you have specific dietary needs / allergies, everyone needs to know.

If you do not have all of the required gear, contact the crew leader—some equipment can be shared with other participants (water filter, stove, pots and pans, etc.). Also, if you are traveling with friends, try to combine duplicate items such as toothpaste, bug spray, sunscreen, etc. **NMLA or the agency will provide group gear including cooking items, tarp for rain/shade, and oh yeah, toilet paper.** Try to “cross-use” what you are packing. For example, leave the pillow at home and stuff a sweatshirt with clothes for padding.

Emergency Communication:

Each crew leader carries an agency radio or other communication device. The Crew Leaders will ‘check in’ with the appropriate agency each day.

*This information Guide was created by adapting the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation’s volunteer details document to meet the needs of the NMLA. THANK YOU BMWF!