
Volunteers in the
National Forests



Meeting the Visitor

NUMBER

3

United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Hi, I am F. Dale Robertson, Chief of the Forest Service.

Meeting the Visitor—is a part of every job with the Forest Service. As a volunteer, you'll find your work frequently brings you into contact with visitors—through personal contacts, phone calls, or letters.

Communication is a skill we can all improve. The tips you'll find in this booklet will help you do just that.

The Forest Service operates under a philosophy called the Good Host. That means we try to treat each visitor to our offices and facilities as an invited guest. We try to make each one feel welcome. In the pages that follow you'll get an introduction to this Good Host approach.

Regardless of your volunteer position—whether in an office or in the field—you will come into contact with people. Learning to be more sensitive and more effective with visitors will make your experience with us more rewarding. Take a few minutes to fix the principles in this booklet firmly in your mind. I hope you find it helpful.



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CONTENTS

Meeting the Visitor	3
The Host Program	5
Do's and Don'ts	7
Host Sense	9
Visitor Sense.....	10
The Basic Principles.....	10
Visitor Is Important	12
Service Is What We Give.....	13
Be Receptive.....	14
Be Helpful.....	14
Be Accurate.....	16
Be Informed.....	16
References.....	18
Field Notes.....	19

Meeting the Visitor

The *Forest Service*, by definition is devoted to *serv- ing the American people*. More people than ever before depend on their National Forests for recreation and other uses. A large and informed public has become very interested in how the National Forests are being managed. To serve our visitors we need to be more sensitive and responsive to their needs and wants. This could in turn increase their cooperation and support for good land management and associated activities.

“ . . . When you notice that you are not communicating well pay attention to *feelings* first, then to *facts*. . . .”

There is no trick to being more responsive. It simply calls for good manners, a genuine interest in those being served, and an informed and helpful attitude.

Our public service attitude is communicated both directly and indirectly. It shows itself in ways that may not be as obvious as telephone communication or personal contact. For example answer these questions:

- How available are Forest Service personnel to the public?
- Can someone be reached in our offices and information obtained *most of the time*?

4 ■ Meeting the Visitor

- Is someone on duty able to provide visitor information?
- Are our offices open at times *convenient* to the public?
- Are the forest users subject to *red tape procedures* in order to obtain fire wood permits or other assistance?
- In the forest or campground, do people feel safe and relatively protected by the presence of staff personnel?
- Is there a way for visitors to indicate their desires or responses to existing services?

All of these impressions convey to the public the Forest Service role in managing their National Forests.

You the volunteer play a *key role* in making visitors to the National Forest feel welcome.



In recent years the Chief of the Forest Service initiated a program that brought our personnel into the full realization of the term "Service" in the Forest Service. He initiated the HOST program aimed at developing public service skills in our employees. A positive public service attitude is a part of all of our jobs and must be made apparent to the public. An important measure of success of the Forest Service through the years has been how effectively and completely it serves the American public. The National Forest *volunteer* is a vital part of this program of giving better public service.



Gifford Pinchot, first Chief of the Forest Service
"A public official is there to serve the public and
not to run them."

6 ■ The Host Program

The *HOST* program focuses on eight basic areas of service:

1. person to person contacts
2. telephone management
3. letter writing
4. publications
5. mass media
6. office operations
7. posting signs
8. office location and design

The impression people receive through these eight areas of service forms the image they have of the Forest Service.

There will be many ways for you to use the following information in the days to come as you meet



and work with the public, other volunteers, and Forest Service employees. You are a part of the Forest Service family, please do your best in giving a *good* HOST image.

Do's and Don'ts

Here are some do's and don'ts in situations you may face during the weeks and months you serve as a volunteer. You will *be* the Forest Service to the public you meet—so be prepared. We are confident you will do a good job and represent the Forest Service *very well!*

Handling an Embarrassing Situation

When you have to handle an embarrassing mishap or situation,

Do—

1. Be understanding
2. Be sympathetic and kind
3. Take positive action to ease and resolve the problem
4. Draw attention away from the mishap or problem
5. Be calm

“... No amount of techniques will substitute for real respect for the other person's integrity and feelings. . . .”

Explaining a Forest Service Rule or Regulation

Should you be faced with a situation where you see a Forest Service rule or regulation being violated.

Do—

1. Be friendly and polite
2. Explain carefully the rule or regulation
3. Offer something else instead
4. Keep the situation on a positive note
5. Answer all questions put to you
6. Contact a Forest Service Officer

Should you be faced with a situation where you must enforce a Forest Service rule or regulation.

Don't—

1. Scold or “chew out” the customer
2. Be harsh, sharp
3. Be abrupt, hurried, impatient
4. Be self-righteous

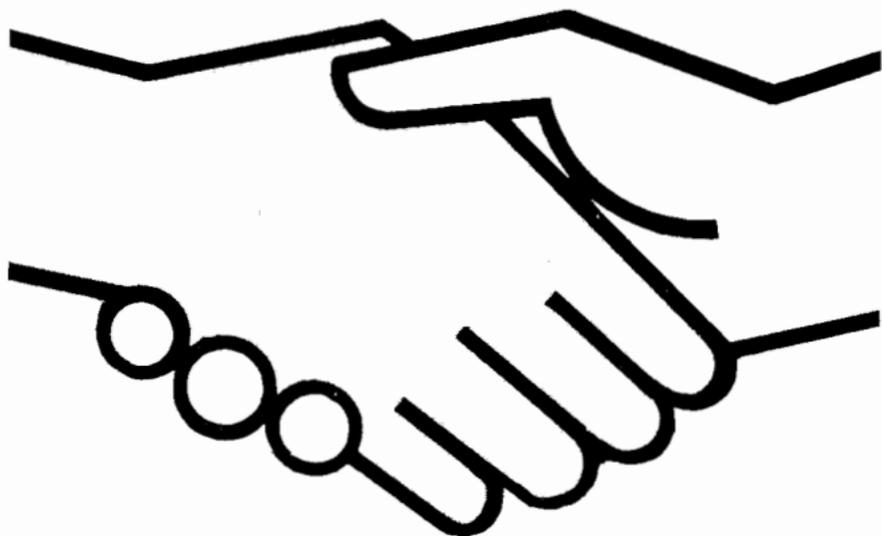
The Impossible Situation

When faced with a situation where a number of people are making requests of you,

1. Keep cool
2. Be polite
3. Give information in turn as rapidly as possible
4. Finish with the customer you are in the process of serving before a lengthy involvement with the next in line
5. Let people know you are aware that they are waiting for service

Helping the Forest Visitor

1. Take each opportunity to help a National Forest visitor
2. Remember you are the symbol of the Forest Service and its services
3. Take pride in doing a good job of serving the public



Host Sense

There's no trick to being a good HOST—it simply calls for treating someone like you would like to be treated! The HOST Program goes a step further with training packages designed to remind us of some of the skills we can use to improve our service in each of the eight service areas.

If you wish to attend one of these programs or one presented on the District, contact your District Ranger. Materials and training aids are available in the Forest Supervisor's office.

Visitor Sense

Several years ago the Recreation Staff in the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service put together a publication on visitor sense. While this booklet was focused on the recreation visitor, it is relevant to all visitors to the National Forests.

I am sure that you as a volunteer can greatly appreciate the *six* key points that the author makes in the booklet. The original text was written by Nord Whited and the graphics were by John Jenoit of the Regional Office in the Pacific Southwest Region. The *six basic principles of good visitor contact* are as follows:

1. **The visitor is important**
2. **Service is what we give**
3. **Be receptive**
4. **Be helpful**
5. **Be accurate**
6. **Be informed**

For most people, a trip to National Forest is special event.

For one thing, visitors are usually on vacation . . . They're in the Forest because they want to be . . . They're seeing interesting things and feeling close to nature.



The mood is really good, and all's right with the World!

Then, BLAM! Somebody in a Forest Service uniform blows it all to bits!

12 ■ Visitor Sense

That's what happens when we brush off a visitor because we're too busy with our own problems,
OR go roaring past a frantically waving camper . . .
OR give information that's completely wrong . . .
OR shout or sigh impatiently because our work is being interrupted . . .

But . . . it doesn't need to happen, and won't, when the SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES of good visitor contacts are followed.

By the way, these apply no matter where you work. Whether it's at a Ranger Station, Guard Station, or Supervisor's Office; on patrol, front country or back; in a vehicle or out; in campgrounds, other recreation areas or around an interpretive services operation. So, check yourself out. Do your attitudes fit in with these fundamentals of good visitor sense? Do you feel that . . .

1. *The Visitor Is Important.*

In fact, recreation visitors are the most important people you'll meet in the Forest.

Here's a little supporting information for that statement:

- *Each citizen is a part-owner of all the National Forests.*
- *All visitors have an equal right to be there.*
- *The very existence of the National Forests depends on how they feel about them.*



2. *Service Is What We Give*

The word is even part of the title of our organization.

And

Information is one of the things the Forest Service is supposed to provide forest visitors.

Not just as a special favor, but as part of our work.

It's not an option.

It's a must!

NOW . . . with those two ideas in mind, the next four points have to do with how we do the job.

Doing it right is just as important as knowing that the job has to be done.

14 ■ Visitor Sense

3. *Be Receptive.*

If you see that a visitor wants to talk to you, be encouraging. That means stopping, too, if you are passing a vehicle.

Be friendly. A smile helps to say that you are.

Offer to help if your visitor seems hesitant to ask.

Above all, don't be a grouch if your other work is interrupted. Just remember Point No. 1 (The Visitor is Important!)

Give the visitor your full attention. Your interest shows in your attitude.

Most National Forest visitors are easy to be nice too. They want their contact with us to be a good experience, and we're supposed to see that it is.

4. *Be Helpful.*

Take time to make sure the visitor understands what you're saying.

You may have to walk outside, or down the road, and point.

OR write out directions . . .

OR repeat the whole thing.

Saying, "I don't know" is acceptable but don't leave it at that! Help the visitor find out where to get an answer.

“That’s not my department” just doesn’t make it as an answer. It simply should not be in your vocabulary.

Show visitors that you’re really concerned with helping them. Think how *you’d* like to be treated in the same situation.



5. *Be Accurate.*

The Forest *can* be a dangerous place for a visitor. Make sure any information you give is correct. “I don’t know, but I’ll find out,” is better than misleading people.

Carry a Forest recreation map, and use it to help visitors.

Check any points you’re doubtful about with your supervisor or the staff.

The Forest map (back and front) is loaded with recreation information. Learn to read all the symbols.

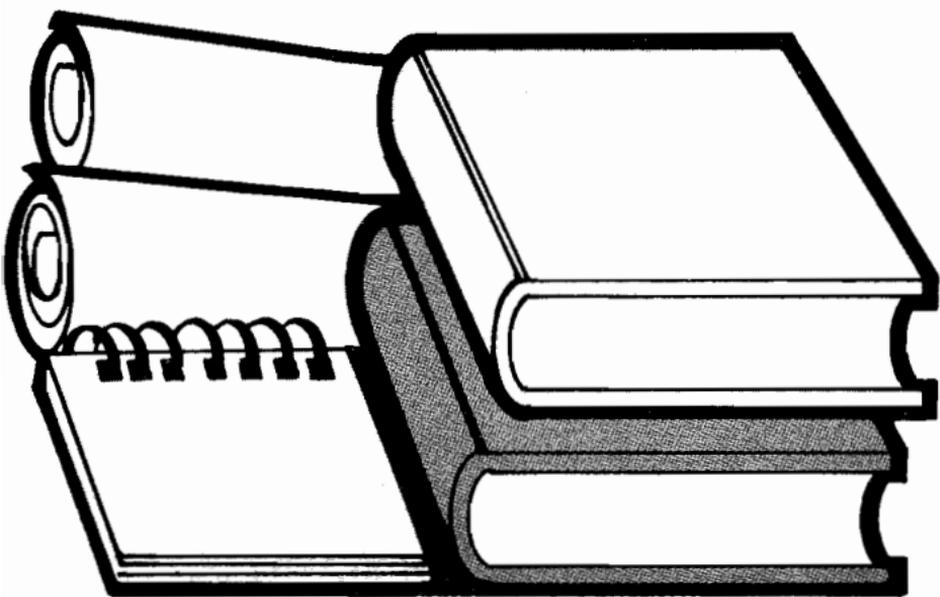
When helping a visitor, hold the map so that “North” is in the direction of actual North. Visitors will find it easier to understand.

6. *Be Informed.*

For a start, satisfy your own curiosity about your Forest area. Lots of times you’ll find that your interests are the same as any visitor’s.

Read all the information on the Forest Recreation map and any brochures the District or Forest gives to our visitors.

Many visitors will ask basic questions about the area’s trees, wildlife, history, or terrain. You don’t have to be an expert, but they’ll appreciate anything you can offer.



You might want to make up a reference book with answers to the most frequent questions. Some offices already have such references and will be glad to let you look them over.

Know what basic management activities the Forest Service is carrying out in your area.

If your District or Forest offers visitor activities, such as campfire programs, or self-guiding trails, etc, let people know about them.

Well, that's about it.

It's a big job, and extremely important.

YOU may be the *only* person from the Forest Service some visitors will ever *meet*. The impression YOU make will last a lifetime. You'll never be *wrong* if *visitors remember* their *contact* with you as a *worthwhile* and *pleasant experience*.

References

Supervisor Office: _____

District Office: _____

Emergency Services: _____

State Police: _____

Sheriff Office: _____

Fire State Forester: _____

Forest Service: _____

Weather Information: _____

Field Notes

