



## Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Volunteer Position Description

**Title:** Midewin Interpreter

**Purpose:** Interpreters deliver educational programs for groups to promote awareness, knowledge and appreciation for the environment and natural and cultural resources. This is a key role in sharing Midewin's history, mission, challenges and accomplishments. Interpreters help directly with part two and four of our mission which are to provide opportunities for scientific; environmental; and land use education and research and also to provide recreational opportunities.

**Duties and Responsibilities:** An interpreter may play the role of the following: tour guide, mascot handler, exhibitor for Midewin booth at fairs, youth program educator, educational programs, Welcome Center host, and/or trail host at events. Programs take place on-site & off-site for the general public, school groups, partner sponsored day camps, clubs, etc. Please review the separate position descriptions if you are specifically interested in Welcome Center host or Youth Educator. This position description will mostly cover tour guides and other public program interpreters. Some interpreters are responsible for speaking in front of individuals or groups up to 50 or more. It is important to read and retain lots of information about a variety of topics in order to be a good resource for visitors. Tour guides are responsible for scheduling tours in advance or coordinating with staff when there are special requests from private groups. Tour guides will check their tour route or program area; confirm availability of technology or interpretive props needed; request any additional staff or volunteer assistance; check out tour radios; and check out vehicle and gate keys.

**Department and Location:** Under the direction of the Environmental Education Specialist, interpreters may have several jobs within Midewin's Public Services department. The primary check-in location for public tours is the Welcome Center. Other programs may start from the River Road Trailhead or the Iron Bridge Trailhead, but these may vary. For offsite programs, interpreters will be responsible for picking up materials, driving to the program area, setting up, breaking down, and returning the materials.

**Qualifications:** Interpreters may be required to drive a Forest Service vehicle; in this event a valid driver's license is necessary and drivers must pass an online defensive driving course and road test. Experience with leading programs and public speaking are preferred. Individuals must be friendly and enjoy working with all ages and backgrounds. Individuals are required to have excellent communication skills including being a clear and enthusiastic speaker. Part of interpretation is the ability to analyze information and construe meaning using general knowledge, specific knowledge or intuition. Interpreters should be able to express information to a variety of demographics and be aware of cultural differences. Midewin interpreters must have the best interest of the U.S. Forest Service and Midewin in mind. An interpreter must act tactfully and professionally when dealing with occasional difficult situations, misunderstandings and/or tension from the public.

**Time Commitment:** Midewin interpreters are needed year round, in varying capacities. Scheduled tours on the public event calendar take place on Saturdays from April-October. Many special requests for private groups take place during the weekday business hours. Tours may be 3-5 hours each including preparation time. Tour guides and program leaders, in training, must first learn the general tour that covers Midewin's history and mission. In time, interpreters can choose additional tours of interest and shadow seasoned interpreters each time that tour is scheduled. Midewin does ask that once the interpreter declares their commitment to a scheduled tour they adhere to that commitment. Unless there is an emergency, we need plenty of notice for a program cancellation or to make other arrangements.

**Training:** Interpreters are required to complete the in-house orientation and shadow seasoned interpreters until they are comfortable and approved to take a lead role. First Aid and CPR is encouraged, but not required. Local training opportunities are available such as National Association of Interpretation certification and Environmental Education Association of Illinois workshops. Additional responsibilities could become applicable or available to this position in the future that might require additional training and/or certification. These additional responsibilities will be determined by the program managers and offered to selected volunteers.

**Working Conditions/Physical Effort:** *Interpreters are covered by the Volunteer Agreement (Form 301a) while performing duties described by this position description during the season(s) listed or scheduled shifts.* Interpreters must read, sign and consent to the U.S. Forest Service Job Hazard Analysis, which includes safety requirements and recommended best practices. Interpreters may work in variable conditions including:

- Exposure to outdoor weather conditions & allergens
- Standing for up to 2 hours or more at a time
- Walking on uneven ground for short distances
- Light to moderate lifting

**Benefits:** Interpreters will learn the history and the future plans of the Midewin and be a part of the mission along the way. Interpreters play a critical role in sharing Midewin's history and mission and delivering environmental messages. Interpreters gain the satisfaction of helping people learn first hand what they can do to become a steward of the environment. Interpreters have the opportunity to inspire tomorrow's decision makers and positively affect their environmental awareness. Midewin's volunteer staff receives ongoing recognition from their supervisor and other staff. Volunteers that contribute three or more individual volunteer visits in the fiscal year will receive an invitation to an annual volunteer recognition banquet in November. Midewin's volunteer staff receives the bimonthly Prairie Telegraph. Volunteers may be featured in the telegraph, newspaper articles and/or U.S. Forest Service success stories. Awards can be received for outstanding, innovative and/or long term, core volunteers.