

# HELLS CANYON VOLUNTEER PROGRAM INFORMATION PACKET

(managed by the US Forest Service, Wallowa-Whitman National Forest)



**The HCNRA volunteer program began in 1981.** In 2001 the volunteer coordinator from the Clarkston HCNRA office received national recognition and an award for her efforts of managing such an outstanding program and sometimes recruiting nearly 100 volunteers each year! This program was held up as a model to several other Forests not only due to the remote access to the sites but because volunteers man them year round. The FS volunteer program was created by the National Forest Act of 1972 to provide an opportunity for people to offer their time and skills to help the Forest Service administer its programs. We consider our volunteers the backbone to the river corridor. Their help in managing and maintaining these beautiful sites in the Hells Canyon has been commendable and outstanding. The information provided here describes the residences and expectations we hope for if you sign up to the volunteer program.





**Volunteer responsibilities:** At both sites the number one priority is to show a presence and be available to the visiting public. Projects are great but being on site to answer questions or assist boaters with their permits should take precedence. Each site is unique in the type of visitor use you will be greeting. For example, Cache Creek is a permit check in station so the majority of your time during summer months will be spent meeting the boats at the dock. At Kirkwood, the Snake River Trail #102 runs through it and there is camping near by so your visitors will be on site and often checking out the museum. We don't expect volunteers to know all Hells Canyon history but a general knowledge of the canyon and the Forest Service policies will be necessary. If you sign up, the Clarkston Washington HCNRA office will go over the information with you and have several dialogs with you previous to your tour. There is also a wealth of reading materials at both sites so your education will happen as you spend more time in the canyon. In addition, if you have a question, call us by satellite phone and we will try to answer as best we can. If you sign on for any of the winter months be prepared for long periods of low traffic. If you don't like an isolated setting, the winter time may not be the best fit. When you speak with the Clarkston HCNRA office, let us know what kind of person you are and we will try to get you matched with the right volunteer tour.

**The buildings and grounds should be clean and well maintained.** The restrooms should be both a morning and evening maintenance round as often heavy traffic can quickly change the state of them. The public should feel welcome and leave these sites assured that the cultural resources there are in cared for and in capable hands. The facilities should be open from about 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m but there are times (depending on the season) that the hours need to be flexible.

**There are two residences in Hells Canyon:** Cache Creek Administrative Site, located in Oregon about 30 miles south of the Lewiston Idaho and Clarkston Washington valley. This river portal check in station is about a half of mile beyond the Washington/Oregon border. Kirkwood Historic Ranch located on the Idaho side of the river, is about 6 miles south of the Snake River Pittsburg Landing boat launch. For reference, the closest town is White bird Idaho off of US HWY 95.



(Cache Creek Visitor Center and Ranch house)

**Cache Creek is the northern entrance to the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA).** It could be compared to the front gate of Yellowstone Nat'l. Park – except that access is by boat. One of the primary purposes of Cache Creek is to provide a permit station for managing powerboat access year round. Commercial tour boats and private boaters stop on a daily basis. Annual on-site visitation to Cache Creek has exceeded 15,000 during peak visitation years. Approximately one-third of the main residence has been remodeled into a visitor center. The grounds are used by visitors throughout the day for picnicking, hiking, etc. There is a busy visitor workload in the summer – with more care taking and maintenance responsibilities in the fall, winter and spring.

**The Cache Creek Ranch house has (almost) all the amenities of most homes and completely furnished.** There is indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water and both solar and propane light fixtures throughout. It does not have air-conditioning but it does have a cozy wood stove and the Forest Service provides the wood. The kitchen is unique in that it has two kitchen sinks with views in either direction and both are breath taking. The refrigerator, stove with oven and water heater are powered by propane. There is also a BBQ housed in the adjacent shop or sometimes located in the barn above. A generator for powering the washing machine or charging laptops or cell phones is also on site. However, there is no cell service available. Water is purified through a solar powered filtration system. The site has a furnished shop, large barn and tack shed that houses a riding lawn mower, tractor, large tools and other equipment.





**Outside communication is by radio to the Clarkston HCNRA** office twice a day. North East Dispatch out of La Grande, OR monitors the radio if you cannot reach the Clarkston office and have an emergency. A satellite phone is available for those who need to make an occasional and brief call to check in with family members or to converse with the Clarkston office about something that cannot be done briefly, over the radio. Radio checks should be conducted about 8:30 and 4PM Monday through Friday. Emergency contact info is posted at the sites should contact need to be made when the FS office is not open.

**Transportation for volunteers is by jetboat provided by the Forest Service.** If you are volunteering at Cache Creek, the Clarkston FS office is where you will be meeting the boat and there is a compound located there to store your vehicle. If you are volunteering at Pittsburg, you will meet the boat at Pittsburg landing (near Whitebird Idaho) and park your vehicle at the launch.

**If you have friends or family that want to come visit** during your tour, they will need to submit a USFS volunteer agreement with the Clarkston office. In addition, they will responsible for arranging transportation to and from the site. In the past, some outfitters were willing to waive the boat fee for guest of volunteers. This in no longer the case. Guests should be prepared to pay the full price of the tour or possibly a reduced price. Remember, even if the guest does not experience the entire boat ride, they are still taking up a seat. A list of outfitters can be accesses on the Wallowa-Whitman website at [www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman.com](http://www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman.com). The Clarkston office can also provide this list via mail or email.

**During winter months the only consistent travel into the river corridor is through Beamers Hells Canyon tours.** This outfitter holds the US Mail contract and has for many years. They deliver mail on Wednesdays. The Address for the sites are as follows: **Cache Creek Ranch~ Snake River Route ~ Lewiston, ID 83501 Kirkwood Ranch ~ Snake River Route~ Lewiston, ID 83501.** The mail boat does not provide grocery items so please do not ask the boat captains to fill grocery lists. Their contract requires that all packages delivered should be metered.

### **Cache Creek dock and boat permit check-in station**

**This 6,556-acre ranch was purchased by the U. S. Forest Service in August of 1991.**





**Cache Creek serves as a Forest Service permit check in station for the northern river portal into** for power boaters entering the Wild and Scenic Snake river corridor, as well as a point of interest for both private and commercial float and powerboat passengers. Annually, this site is visited by over 3000 powerboats and many of the LCV commercial outfitters stop with their passengers during the summer months. It's known for the 'best river view in the canyon'. The picnic area provides not only great shade in the summer but a breath taking picture of the Snake River. The grounds offer a variety of fruit tree's including apples, cherries and figs and even a grape arbor. Folks visiting here have learned to share this spot with deer, turkey and various wildlife. There have even been a few visits from moose and bear and there was a winter that a beaver wanted to make their home underneath the boat dock.

**The climate is moderate and four seasonal and extremely hot in the summer.** Although the sites do have power by both solar and generators, there is no air conditioning in the residences. If you enjoy high temperatures the summer months at Cache Creek would be a perfect fit. The spring, fall or winter months are the most requested tours so they may not be available.

**There is an abundance of wildlife** – everything from deer, big horn sheep, beavers, and otters and even the occasional bear or moose. It is also well known as a bird lover's paradise. In the summer months, filling the hummingbird feeder will become a daily ritual and turkeys are a consistent part of the landscape.





## KIRKWOOD HISTORIC RANCH

**The Kirkwood Historic Ranch is located within the Wild and Scenic Snake River corridor** of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. This site signifies more than any other on the river, the unique cultural heritage preservation and interpretation. Visitors will be introduced to the historical ranching lifestyle in the canyon and thereby gain an appreciation of man's presence and influence since the turn of the century. The volunteer program at Kirkwood provides the backbone of support for this interpretive effort. There are year round opportunities!

**As might be expected of a ranch that is located in the deepest river canyon in North America,** Kirkwood is both remote and isolated. Most visitors arrive by floatboat or powerboat on the Snake River; some arrive by foot or horseback on the Snake River National Recreation Trail. Most of the trail use takes place in the spring and fall when temperatures are moderate. But, even with this isolation, Kirkwood hosts over 15,000 visitors each year. Visitors can also access Kirkwood via the Kirkwood road, which is a primitive road suitable for ATV's. There is a seasonal closure April 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup> on the lower part of the road.



**Volunteers are provided transportation to the ranch by Forest Service boat and usually the 'rotation' (taking previous volunteers out and new ones in), takes place on the first Tuesday of every month.** Almost all Kirkwood rotations occur at Pittsburg boat launch which is accessed via FS road #493 from U.S. Highway 95. This is a 17-mile gravel and dirt road near White Bird Idaho. The land mark we always suggest is to look for 'Hoots' Café on highway 95. The turn off into Pittsburg is just across the highway from the café. From there, the boat ride is about 6 miles to Kirkwood which is about a 20-minute trip by boat or a six-mile hike along the Snake River Trail. No locked parking area is provided, but we have rarely had problems with vandalism. It is handy to have a vehicle at Pittsburg, but it should be either a pickup truck or high clearance auto to handle the road in the winter. From Pittsburg, it is a



20 minute trip by jetboat. For those who may have friends hiking in from the landing, its a six mile hike along the Snake River trail #102 to Kirkwood.



(trail coming into Kirkwood house and museum)

**Volunteers at Kirkwood live in the historic ranch house**, a small two story frame building. The downstairs has a bath, kitchen, and root cellar while the upstairs has a living room, two bedrooms and sleeping porch. The house has indoor plumbing and the sewer system consists of a septic tank and drainfield. The water source is the Kirkwood Spring and is currently on a solar filtration-purification system. Heat is provided by a wood stove. Kitchen appliances consist of a wood cook stove with oven, a three burner propane hot plate, a propane refrigerator and a small freezer. Laundry facilities include a washing machine with generator -- scrub board and tub are also available, if volunteers feel so inclined. The house is completely furnished, including two double beds, one single bed, kitchen table and chairs, living room furniture consisting of chairs, tables and bookcases, dressers, an upright closet for clothes storage, curtains, and rugs. (below) Sleeping porch at Kirkwood.

**No dogs allowed.** Historically, the volunteer program did allow for folks to bring their dogs. However, in 2017 the Wallowa Whitman NF no longer allow dogs to accompany hosts durring their tour unless it is a certified service animal. When discussing the volunteer program with the Clarkston HCNRA office please let us know if you have a service dog.

**Groceries:** Volunteers should plan enough food items to cover the stay of their tour. We realize that on occasions some food items might have been overlooked in the packing process. In those cases let the



Clarkston office know by satellite phone and we will try our best to get the item and arrange a ride for it by boat. Its difficult for the Clarkston staff to fullfill grocery wish lists. In most cases, office coverage is limited and the fullfillment of getting groceries may have to be done outside of office hours and in personal vehicles. In addition, finding a boat ride outside of the commercail powerboat season is limited.

**We look for our volunteers to be folks that neither need or want a lot of supervision.** They must be self-starters, independent, highly motivated and good communicators who sincerely like people. They should have the basic skills necessary to function effectively, efficiently and safely in a primitive setting far from the nearest town. If you are healthy, outgoing and adventurous, the Hells Canyon river corridor is one of the most unique volunteer opportunities in the National Forest System! We hope you will apply!

***Hells Canyon National Recreation Office,  
Clarkston Washington 99403  
509-758-0616***

*(please contact Carmen Hodges [carmen.hodges@usda.gov](mailto:carmen.hodges@usda.gov) )  
Or Robin Sullivan @ [robin.sullivan2@usda.gov](mailto:robin.sullivan2@usda.gov)  
for available Hells Canyon Volunteer opportunities*



*(View from the porch at Cache Creek)*



