

**TRAIL PATROL HANDBOOK
GCTC-YUBA RIVER VOLUNTEER**

**TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST
YUBA RIVER RANGER DISTRICT**



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Welcome to the Yuba River Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Ranger Program!

When it comes to getting back to nature, having fun and promoting safe use of shared-use bi-directional trails for equestrians and other non-motorized users, horseback riders and hikers are ideal. By welcoming and educating trail users, you help equestrians and other trail users maintain and protect trail opportunities.

Your involvement as a Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Ranger requires a high degree of commitment to the sport of equine and hiking recreational travel and wise use of your public lands. You are now a valuable partner of the Tahoe National Forest.

What is a Volunteer Trail Ranger?

Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Rangers are specially trained volunteers who are responsible for greeting fellow enthusiasts, educating riders, and providing useful information about responsible trail use on public lands. Volunteers represent the USDA Forest Service but they carry no law enforcement authority above that of a regular citizen. Their influence lies in their knowledge, friendliness and willingness to help others. They are a vital part of the Yuba River Volunteer Trail Patrol program and have a high degree of commitment to responsible use of horses, mules and hikers on public lands.

An educated individual is a responsible rider. Through education, the objective of the GCTC-Yuba River Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Ranger Program is to increase awareness of the rules and regulations, increase agency visibility, and increase visitor safety and enjoyment on public lands in the Tahoe NF. A Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Ranger communicates with fellow visitors, provides trail directions, and reminds visitors of responsible practices on multiple-use trails. Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Rangers also promote good trail manners as well as help visitors in need. They encourage the principles of:

- ***Tread Lightly Tips for Responsible Horseback Riding***
https://www.treadlightly.org/recreation_tips/horseback-riding/
- ***SHARING TRAILS GCTC Equestrian Etiquette and Safety Guidelines***
<https://www.goldcountrytrailsCouncil.org/equestrian-resources.html>
- ***Leave No Trace*** <https://lnt.org/learn/7-principles>
- ***IMBA Rules Of The Trail*** <https://www.imba.com/ride/imba-rules-of-the-trail>

Why Now?

Tahoe NF trails have been used for many years for casual and competitive equestrian activities. The Gold Country Trails Council (GCTC) was formed in 1981 by a group of Nevada County citizens to fill the need for non-motorized trails in Nevada County and surrounding foothills. GCTC is an organization committed to develop, maintain, and advocate for safe integrated trails for equestrians and other non-motorized users. The citizen volunteers in the Gold Country Trails Council have constructed over 30 miles of trails within the Tahoe National Forest. Most of the public trails are located in the Highway 20 scenic corridor east of Nevada City.

There are many potential impacts to wildlife, vegetation and other resources that can occur because of inappropriate trail use. All users need to work together to minimize the impacts. TNF does not have enough Yuba River District staff to adequately cover all the areas on a given weekend. As a result, the education level on resource and forest conservation, treading lightly, nature appreciation, and **trail sharing** has gone down. In order to turn this around and protect use opportunities, the Yuba River Ranger District has developed the Volunteer Trail Ranger Program in collaboration with Gold Country Trails Council (GCTC), Bicyclists of Nevada County (BONC) and for OHV with Nevada County Woods Riders (NCWR).

Why Volunteer?

When resource impacts increase due to misuse, access to public lands is at risk. When social conflicts from failure to share the trails increase, access to public lands is at risk. **One of the most powerful ways to increase the understanding of conservation and shared use messages is through peers.** Equestrians will listen to other equestrians. Hikers will listen to other hikers. Safety and land conservation messages conveyed by fellow users can have more powerful impacts than those same messages conveyed by federal personnel or law enforcement officers. Most visitors to public lands understand the importance of sharing and conservation but may not be aware of the potential negative impacts of some activities.

Riding and hiking the same trails as other users creates an added level of credibility. Other users will see you as “one of them” and be more apt to listen to what you have to say. When conflicts arise, its usually a result of misunderstanding protocols devised to reduce risk of injury to users of the trails and to keep horses, people and dogs, safe. As a result, you will be able to explain to them what activities are prohibited as well as why (i.e. dangerous or destructive). By increasing the number of individuals contacting visitors, together we can reach more trail users and have a huge positive impact!

Who Benefits?

Everyone! Volunteer Trail Rangers earn respect by participating in a program that improves their sport. They also enjoy the experience of participating in an activity they enjoy while meeting fellow trail enthusiasts. Other trail users gain knowledge and awareness demonstrated by Volunteer Equestrian and Hiker Trail Rangers. The Tahoe National Forest benefits from the extension of educational programs and compliance with both Federal and State laws. Finally, the public lands benefit from encouraging responsible use rather than inappropriate use.

Volunteer Trail Ranger Goals

- ▶ Promote safe, responsible equestrian and pedestrian use and responsible land stewardship.
- ▶ Increase knowledge of rules and regulations.
- ▶ Help preserve and enhance recreational opportunities on public lands for future generations.
- ▶ Gather data regarding trail user trends, management successes and problems on the Tahoe National Forest.
- ▶ Have fun!

Volunteer Trail Rangers will accomplish these by:

- ▶ Volunteering time and energy.
- ▶ Increasing Forest Service visibility.
- ▶ Promoting proper trail etiquette through positive peer pressure.
- ▶ Increasing visitor knowledge of rules and principles of trail sharing and conservation.
- ▶ Providing accurate information, education, and trail directions.
- ▶ Emphasizing safety regulations.
- ▶ Promoting responsible trail etiquette.
- ▶ Participating in public education forums such as schools, fairs, 4-H and other local or regional events.
- ▶ Acting as additional eyes and ears to inform agency personnel about trail conditions, visitor use patterns and potential resource impacts.

Trail Patrol Coordinator

The Trail Patrol Coordinator is the person designated by the GCTC Board to aid and assist the Trail Ranger program by:

- ▶ Conducting annual training and certification programs
- ▶ Coordinating first aid, CPR, AED and GPS training
- ▶ Assisting members to record their patrols and file appropriate incident reports
- ▶ Maintaining accurate member information and activity logs.

Who is Right for the Job?

Volunteer Trail Rangers perform a very important public service, not only for the Forest Service, but also for all trail enthusiasts visiting TNF. By increasing public education and understanding, volunteers can help protect and improve natural resources. However, this job is not for everyone. Each of the following is important in becoming a successful Volunteer Trail Ranger:

Professional: Trail Rangers will be representing the Forest Service and the image of equestrians and hikers. It is essential that volunteers always look and act professionally. Courtesy is paramount. Equestrian patrollers must have a qualified equine available for your patrols. Take responsibility for your equine's education. Desensitize it to bicycles and situations it may encounter on the trail.

Safety Conscious: Volunteers are good examples of safe and responsible riding and hiking, know the rules. They are also very conscious of their personal safety. The objective is to get home safely every night. Safety is paramount and nothing that happens on any given day is worth jeopardizing safety.

Good Communicator: Volunteer Trail Rangers must understand that communication skills are vital since public education is the main mission of the Volunteer Trail Ranger Program. Volunteers must demonstrate the ability to communicate with public land visitors in a courteous, informed and positive manner. Remember, we have two ears and only one mouth - effective communicators use them in appropriate ratios.

Believe in Education: Volunteers understand and believe that education is the 2nd effective step in the Three E's (Engineering, Education and Enforcement) and a great way to promote change. Volunteer Trail Rangers must also be willing to learn.

Respectful: Volunteer Trail Rangers respect the environment and **all** types of public land recreational users.

People Oriented: Volunteers must be comfortable making safe public contacts.

Even-tempered: Volunteer Trail Rangers must be able to communicate in a non-confrontational manner to be effective. Positive attitudes = positive programs. Trail users are our guests, our neighbors and our friends, not our enemies.

Ask yourself this: *Do I want to make my opinions known? Or Do I want to make a difference?*

IF you want to make a difference, THEN being a Volunteer Trail Ranger might be for you!

You are representing the Forest Service. Employees and volunteers must be courteous, helpful and professional. Remember, we work *for* the public!

How the Trail Ranger Program Works

To participate in the Trail Ranger program, both you and your horse must be qualified and certified. GCTC will conduct an annual initial and recurrent training and certification courses expressly designed to give you and your equine the skills necessary to safely perform the duties of a Trail Ranger. At the end of the training session, both you and your horse will be certified to represent the Tahoe National Forest.

- ▶ You will sign a special volunteer agreement for the Trail Ranger Program. In that agreement, you will agree to follow the operational guidelines in this handbook.
- ▶ Volunteers shall wear the volunteer vest while on patrol. Vest and recognition items will be provided to the volunteer at no cost.
- ▶ Trail Rangers are encouraged to use GPS while on Trail Patrol and contribute rides gathered through GPS to the GCTC GPX trail library.
- ▶ Each Trail Ranger is eligible to participate in a GCTC sponsored basic first aid course, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) courses, at no cost.
- ▶ GCTC will also provide a clinic on horse emergency care on the trail at least every two years.
- ▶ Members are encouraged to volunteer patrol as many times as they like in any given month, but only one volunteer patrol per month is required. The member may ride or hike the patrol shift. Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays are preferred. Ride patrols should last two hours or longer. Hike patrols should last an hour or longer. The member will be excused from a patrol ride if the weather prohibits safe riding or the GCTC Trail Patrol Coordinator grants an excuse for other reasons. Two retroactive make-up shifts per year will be permitted. The make-up for the December patrol shift must be made in January. For the safety of the members, it is recommended that all patrolling should be done in pairs whenever possible. Members may patrol alone should it be necessary or may patrol while riding or hiking with non-patrol members. If patrolling with non-patrol members make sure the other individual understands you are on patrol, and will be stopping to communicate with other trail users. Patrollers are responsible for the conduct of family and friends accompanying you on your patrol.
- ▶ In case of an emergency, remain calm and call 9-1-1 immediately. Follow the emergency dispatcher's instructions. It is extremely important that you report to the dispatcher the location of the emergency. If you are unable to get cell service at the emergency scene location, clearly
- ▶ mark & note the location of the scene. Use your GPS waypoint function. Someone should immediately ride or hike to available cell service to call 9-1-1 to report the emergency and receive instructions from the 9-1-1 dispatcher. If feasible, someone should stay at the scene and wait for emergency responders.
- ▶ GCTC carries liability insurance for members while providing club-sponsored volunteer service in TNF. Inform your GCTC Trail Patrol Coordinator of any non-emergency incidents injuries or damage incurred while you were trail patrolling.
- ▶ Log your trail patrol rides by accessing the Trail Patrol calendar on the Trail Patrol groups.io site. <https://groups.io/g/GCTCtrailpatrol> At a minimum, list your name, trail, and hours on patrol, including travel time to and from your residence.
- ▶ The Trail Patrol Coordinator is available for assistance and help with any issue.

Thank You for Your Commitment

The Volunteer Trail Ranger Commitment

Tahoe National Forest Trail Volunteers are committed to the education of visitors to your public lands. Therefore, Volunteer Trail Rangers must share that commitment.

As a Volunteer Trail Ranger, I commit to the following:

- ▶ I will wear all appropriate safety/protective gear.
- ▶ I will wear an identifying vest during volunteer activity.
- ▶ I will attend all training required by Tahoe NF and/or GCTC.
- ▶ I will adhere to all applicable regulations and safety rules.
- ▶ I will not attempt to invoke any law enforcement authority. I will call for assistance should the need arise.
- ▶ I will avoid situations that are potentially dangerous or confrontational.
- ▶ I will follow the Forest Service ethics and conduct guidelines, safety practices and policies as outlined in this document.
- ▶ I will always remember that my primary function is education.
- ▶ I will make sure brush, limbs, signs, and posts are replaced or reported in areas with recent illegal use or construction.
- ▶ I will report, immediately, personal injuries or accidents occurring in the line of duty.

The Volunteer Trail Ranger Pledge

Volunteer Trail Rangers must maintain an unquestionable reputation and serve as outstanding examples to their fellow riders. The effectiveness of the Volunteer Trail Ranger Program depends on it.

As a Volunteer Trail Ranger, I pledge to:

- ▶ Welcome trail users to Tahoe National Forest.
- ▶ Use the *Good Host* approach by being courteous, respectful and responsive to the public and professional in my manner.
- ▶ Provide accurate information. I will admit when I don't know the answer to a question and refer visitors to the appropriate agency for additional information.
- ▶ Promote the principles of *GCTC Safety and Trail Etiquette Guide*, *Tread Lightly Tips for Responsible Horseback Riding*, and *Leave no Trace*.
- ▶ Travel designated routes, making my presence known to other visitors.
- ▶ Consider safety to be the primary concern while volunteering.
- ▶ Patrol without impairment by drugs or alcohol.
- ▶ Observe applicable rules and regulations.

TREAD Lightly Pledge

Travel and recreate with minimum impact

Respect the environment and the rights of others

Educate myself and others, and prepare before I go

Allow for future use of the outdoors; leave it better than I found it

Discover the rewards of responsible recreation

Leave No Trace

Plan ahead and prepare

Travel and camp on durable surfaces

Dispose of waste properly

Leave what you find

Minimize campfire impacts

Respect wildlife

Be considerate of other visitors

Required Equestrian Ranger Training & Certification

Volunteer Equestrian Trail Rangers will be required to complete a training/certification process and qualify before one can begin patrolling on horseback:

Trail Ranger qualifications

- ✓ Proficient in conducting successful encounters with other TNF trail users
- ✓ Proficient in using GPS
- ✓ Ability to mount and dismount while on the trail
- ✓ File regular trail patrol reports on the groups.io site: <https://groups.io/g/GCTCtrailpatrol>
- ✓ File Incident Reports on the GCTC website > In the News> Incident Report _
<https://www.goldcountrytrailsCouncil.org/incident-report.html>

Equine qualifications

- ✓ Remains calm and under rider's control while walking past: bicycles, strollers, hikers with backpacks, dogs, ATV or motorcycle.
- ✓ Remains calm and under rider's control while being passed by the above.
- ✓ Calmly walk by another equine and leave another equine.
- ✓ Can be securely tied on the trail.
- ✓ From a halt, back up 3 – 4 steps, walk, trot in a straight line, walk, halt.
- ✓ Do a 180 degree turn to simulate turning around on a narrow trail.
- ✓ Walk a serpentine.
- ✓ Move laterally to simulate moving to the side of or off the trail.

Required Safety Gear

- ▶ Helmet while riding
- ▶ Heeled boots or stirrup cages while riding
- ▶ Gear to tie equine on trail, such as a halter & lead rope
- ▶ Minimum First aid kit (vet wrap, gauze, bandages)
- ▶ Cell phone or radio
- ▶ GPS
- ▶ Flashlight (can use a headlamp or phone)
- ▶ Method to record location of any maintenance or safety concerns, such as a small notepad & writing implement or a note app on your cell phone
- ▶ Flagging Tape
- ▶ Extra water
- ▶ Leash or lightweight rope

Trail Ranger Uniform/Recognition Items

- ▶ Official Volunteer Trail Ranger Vest.
- ▶ To help promote our professional image, all equipment is to be kept clean, neat, and serviceable.

A Typical Volunteer Trail Ranger Patrol

On trail or in the forest

- ▶ **Spend time at the trailhead.** This is the best place to make contacts because of the higher concentration of trail users. Generally, the best time to be at the trailhead is Friday, Saturday, Sunday or holidays, between 9 - 11 am or 1- 3 pm. Introduce yourself to users, give out information and, if available, maps as needed and answer questions related to trail conditions, trail closures, etc. Talk about riding and hiking safely, that TNF Yuba River District has two-way trails, and sharing trails with all users.
- ▶ Ride or hike the trails (work in pairs if possible). Stop and talk to riders or hikers encountered on the trails. Be available to offer directions and answer questions.
- ▶ You are our eyes and ears, so take note of maintenance needs as you ride the trails- signs broken or missing, broken fencing, trees down, grooming or reconstruction needs, wetland impacts, etc. Record location on your phone's mapping app or other device.
- ▶ If you see a problem, take a photo (if possible), write up a description of the problem and take down a license plate number if possible. If you see a violation in progress, if it is safe, politely educate the people on the error of their ways, but do not try to be a law enforcement officer or confrontational.

Making Contacts

Educate Rather than Enforce: The visitors that you will meet will vary widely in experience, awareness, philosophy and expectations. Some may not be familiar with designated routes (roads and trails) and travel management plans. Others may choose to disregard these issues. Your task is to assist visitors in making safe, tread lightly decisions while visiting public lands in Tahoe NF.

The most effective way to communicate these messages is with an educational tone rather than with enforcement. Explain the “why” behind regulations. Give examples of your own experiences. Look material over with them, explaining where they can find the information in the map or brochure. If you don't understand the reason for a regulation, find out! Often the reason relates back to trail user safety or resource impacts in some way. If you do not know, or are unsure of an answer it is better to admit it than to give false or inaccurate information.

Here are some important principles in making successful contacts:

Introduce Yourself: Who are you, why are you here, and what can you do for them?

“Hello, my name is xyz and I'm a volunteer Trail Ranger. This is my partner abc. We're out here today to answer questions, pass out information and education materials, and to help everyone understand the rules for riding and hiking here. Do you have any questions? Is there anything thing that we can help you with?”

“We need your help to keep these trails open and that's only going to happen if everyone is responsible. Wherever you go, you need to read the signs, read the maps, and know the rules for riding and hiking there. Help us, help you. Being uneducated and ignoring the rules will only lead to more restrictions and closures, is that what you want?” (No) “We're riders and hikers too and we don't want that either. I want a place for my kids (grandkids) to ride and hike and I'm sure you do too. Please be responsible, Tread Lightly, and have a great day.”

Avoid Conflict: Volunteers should never allow a contact to become confrontational. Conflict creates a defensive situation and individuals rarely learn when they are defensive. You as a Volunteer Trail Ranger will gain nothing from a confrontation, but the riders and the public have a lot to lose. If you embarrass or anger a visitor you may only risk your own safety. Do not approach people who are obviously intoxicated.

Things to Know

Safety Tips

- ▶ Carry a map a GPS or phone app so you know where you are on the trail.. The person who gets lost is always the one without a map.
- ▶ If you are not familiar with the trails, go with someone who knows the trails.
- ▶ Do not over-estimate your ability or stamina.
- ▶ Do not over-estimate your equine's ability or stamina.
- ▶ Desensitize your equine to bicycles, OHV's, motorcycles, dogs, strollers, backpackers and hiking poles.
- ▶ Check weather conditions and avoid potentially dangerous situations. If conditions become severe (high winds, storms) get off the trail.
- ▶ Dress for changing weather conditions – layered clothing is best.
- ▶ Carry a flashlight or headlamp. Many cell phones have a flashlight function.
- ▶ Carry plenty of water.
- ▶ Carry a GPS or use a cell phone app if you can. They can be helpful in emergency situations.
- ▶ Cell phone coverage is marginal at many locations in the Tahoe NF.
- ▶ Accidents or incidents tend to happen in the late afternoon.

Volunteer GCTC Trail Patrol Routes Tahoe National Forest, Yuba River District

GCTC volunteer trail patrollers may serve anywhere within the Yuba River District, as long as you follow TNF regulations and restrictions. Some suggested areas/routes are listed below. Feel free to combine routes, overlap, or do partial routes. At the end of your day, you will report your route and observations to your GCTC coordinator. ***When patrolling, always carry a map of the area. If the trails are new to you, you should go with someone who knows the trails you are patrolling. You need to know where you are at all times and be prepared to answer visitors' questions and provide directions.*** Expectation is that patrol rides will be at least two hours, patrol hikes at least one hour.

#	Trailhead / Staging	Area / Routes
1	GCTC Equestrian Trail Head,. Alternates: Rock Creek X Conservation Camp Rd, Hwy 20 X Pine Flat Way (park well off the pavement on the north side of highway), Rock Creek Nature Trail Trailhead	Lone Grave Area: Dascombe, Harmony, Pfeiffer, Rock Creek Connector (Hoot & Zigzag), Rock Creek Nature Trail (if hiking), Pioneer segment Harmony Ridge Market to White Cloud
2	Skillman Horse Camp, Upper Burlington	Hallelujah, Dogwood, Pioneer segments near Skillman
3	Equestrian Overlook Trail Head	Pioneer segment White Cloud to Skillman, Hallelujah Trail
4	Hwy 20 X Zeibrigt	Pioneer Trail Segments Bear Valley to Skillman, Bear Valley to Penstock <i>Lang Crossing technical for stock – paved road is alternate</i>
5	White Cloud	Hallelujah Trail, Pioneer Trail Segment
6	Bowman Lake Rd	Spaulding Lake Trail, Blue Lake, Upper Pioneer Trail
7	Little Lasier Meadows Horse Camp	Connector Trail, Blue Trail, Pass Trail, PCT Segment
8	Loney Meadow <i>Short Segment Gravel/Dirt Rd</i>	Loney Meadow, Bullpen, Lindsey Lake, Bowman Mountain, Carr-Feeley Round Lake
9	Carr-Feeley <i>Gravel/Dirt Rd</i>	Carr-Feeley Round Lake Loop, Sand Ridge Glacier Lake Loop
10	Grouse Ridge Lookout <i>Rough Gravel/Dirt Rd</i>	<i>Horse Trailers not recommended</i>
11	Eagle Lakes Rd	Southern Access Grouse Ridge Trails System