

Whiteoak Sink Volunteer Recruitment

Who: Eager volunteers able to hike 3+ miles

What: Rove manway: remind visitors to stay on path, provide resource interpretation

When: April 1st – May 10th, half day shifts

Where: Whiteoak Sink in Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park would like to recruit a number of volunteers to provide resource damage interpretation to visitors on topics including: soil compaction, plant trampling, and social trail creation. Volunteers are needed to rove Whiteoak Sink during peak days, mainly weekends.



Background:

Whiteoak Sink is a unique, sensitive area which hosts many populations of rare plants. The area also contains important bat hibernacula. Whiteoak Sink is an area accessible by manway off of Schoolhouse Gap Trail. The manway to Whiteoak Sink is not found on official park trail maps, yet it receives a high amount of foot traffic because of the well-known spring wildflower displays. Visitor impacts to the area include social trail creation, soil compaction, and plant trampling.

The following bulleted paragraphs provide background information about Whiteoak Sink and its special resources.

Plant species present in Whiteoak Sink considered rare in the park:

- Three are from Whiteoak Sink only (guyandotte beauty, shootingstar, and wall-rue).
- Five are from three or fewer locales (Virginia bluebell, fairywand, dwarf larkspur, horse gentian, and green violet).
- Two are vulnerable to poaching (pink lady's slipper and yellow lady's slipper).

Anecdotal changes in Whiteoak Sink over the years:

- Increase in extent of social trail network.
- Increase in non-native plant species in disturbed areas.
- Large yellow lady's slipper population poached and trampled; only two plants remain where there were once more than a dozen.
- Soil compaction observed around showy plants due to heavy use.

Volunteer qualifications:

- Eagerness to learn several spring wildflowers
- Able to safely hike 3 miles (to Whiteoak Sink floor and back) partly on an unmaintained manway that is relatively steep in some places
- Able to sign up for at least 4 shifts April 1st through May 10th (There is leeway with this requirement, but the more time you can contribute, the better!)
- Have knowledge of hiking preparedness (i.e. bring food and water, wear sturdy footwear, and be prepared for possible rain showers)
- Have a willingness to engage the public about Whiteoak Sink, its wildflowers, and hiking etiquette (i.e. stay on the main footpaths and obey fencing and restricted area signs)
- Able to attend a scheduled training session prior to volunteering
- Are 18 years or older, unless accompanied by a parent/guardian

We will provide:

- Brief training sessions
- Laminated photos of the common wildflowers found in Whiteoak Sink
- Bulleted talking points
- Radios
- T-shirts

If you are interested, please contact the Whiteoak Sink Volunteer Coordinators at grsm_whiteoak@nps.gov.