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'Volunteer vacation' brings hikers to General Butler

Diggin' What They Do

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Twenty volunteers, most from as far away as Wisconsin, Virginia, Minnesota and Pennsylvania, spent the past week helping to clear and maintain hiking trails at General Butler State Resort Park in Carrollton.

The "volunteer vacation" is one of many offered through the American Hiking Society, said team leader Tina Temple of Owensboro, Ky.

Parks and other facilities with hiking trails submit applications to the society, listing the work that needs done, how many volunteers are needed and when, Temple said.

Recreation supervisor Tanya Supplee said this was the first year she's applied to the program on behalf of the park. She said her plea centered around the devastation the park endured when the state had to remove ash trees because of the infestation of the emerald ash borer, an insect that feeds on the trees and, ultimately, destroys them.

Park volunteer Bobby Jackson has taken on most of the job of repairing the trails himself over the past two years, Supplee said, but there was just too much work to do.

Jackson, she said, has volunteered to work the trails for the past 25 years, even going so far as to rent equipment on his own dime.

But this week, he had help as the volunteers cleared away fallen trees and limbs, cut back overgrowth, and built and installed new footbridges. On Thursday, volunteers were installing "water bars," landscaping logs which are secured across the trails at an angle to deflect rainwater and prevent erosion.

"These people are from all over, and they are the best water-bar installers anywhere," volunteer Andy Niekamp of Dayton, Ohio, said proudly.

Along with Jackson, Sarah Beach and Jacob Becraft were local volunteers helping with the project.

Most volunteers do one to two volunteer trips each year, Temple said. As team leader, she generally does two or three. Last year, she went on four.

Volunteers are sent wherever they are needed within all 50 states and the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, she said. Volunteers must pay for their own transportation, but their hosts provide accommodations and meals during their stay.



Volunteers with the American Hiking Society took a working vacation this week helping to clear and maintain hiking trails at General Butler State Resort Park in Carrollton. Here a group installs a "water bar," landscaping logs secured at intervals along a trail to deflect rainwater and prevent erosion. (Staff photo by Phyllis McLaughlin/pmclaughlin@madisoncourier.com)

After wrapping up work Thursday night, today will be the group's day off. Temple said some of the volunteers from Wisconsin are taking a side trip to Mammoth Cave before heading home. She said she will be bringing members of her team to Madison for shopping and sight-seeing.

For more information or to plan a volunteer vacation, visit the society's website at www.americanhiking.org.

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