

Permits for Events, Hunting, Camping, and Other Uses of Conserved Lands



Requiring permits for certain activities on conservation lands (such as events, hunting, and camping) helps land managers ensure that the activities do not negatively impact the land or others' enjoyment of it. The permit-application process can also serve to inform users of the rules for using the land.

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Introduction

Managers of parks, nature preserves, and other lands available for public use often require users to obtain permits to use the land for certain activities. Events, camping, and hunting are the activities for which managers—whether they be local governments, land trusts, or other entities—most commonly require permits. Some permit applications are in PDF form and must be submitted via mail or email, while others consist of online submission forms.

The permit process allows the manager to:

- Ensure that the proposed use will not negatively impact the land or conflict with conservation goals;
- Ensure that the use will not diminish the experiences of other users;
- Inform users of applicable rules (and collect their signatures agreeing to follow and be held responsible for the rules); and
- Obtain any required documentation before the activity occurs (e.g., signed releases or the event organizer's certificate of insurance).

This guide explores the basics of permits and permit applications for events, camping, and hunting, and includes examples for each.

Before Issuing Permits

Before issuing permits, land managers need to formulate and adopt rules outlining which activities and circumstances will require permits and which locations on the property are open or closed to these activities. The rules should also specify how the permit application and approval process will work, including what information and documentation will be required for issuance of permits.

Events

Land trusts that allow events at their preserves (e.g., weddings or charity runs) almost always require the event organizer to submit some kind of application in order to receive permission to hold the event. Government agencies that manage public lands such as local, state, and national parks follow similar procedures.

In many cases, land trusts and governments require the applicant to pay an activity fee to use the space for their event. (Note: Charging an activity fee may have liability implications under Pennsylvania's [Recreational Use of Land and Water Act](#). See the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association's [overview of the Act](#) for more information.)

Rules about whether or not an event requires a permit typically revolve around two questions:

1. Is the event outside the scope of normal activities on the property? For example, a 15-person group hike on a preserve would likely not require a permit, but a wedding would.
2. How many people will attend? Some managers set an attendance threshold (e.g., 25 people) above which a permit is required; this might apply to all

activities or just those outside the scope of normal activities on the property.

Permitting Process

In many cases, the applicant must submit a security deposit or portion of the activity fee along with the permit application. (Some managers also charge application fees on top of the activity fee.) In rarer cases, the applicant does not pay any of the activity fee until the application has been approved.

Given the complex nature of group events and the potential legal issues surrounding them (e.g., liability insurance, alcohol, noise, etc.), the permit process can take longer (and involve more back and forth between the applicant and the manager) than the process for hunting or camping permits.

Typical Features of Event Applications and Permits

Applications and permits typically include most or all of the following information:

- Event organizer name and contact information
- Location, date, and time of event (and setup/teardown)
- Expected number of attendees
- Planned activities
- Information about potential alcohol consumption
- Equipment, structures, or vehicles that will be used (including existing facilities on property)
- Fees
- Liability insurance information
- List of terms and conditions; signature of event organizer agreeing to them

Examples

See these examples of applications and permits for events on land trust preserves and government-managed land:

Land Trust Preserves

- [Harpwell Heritage Land Trust event permit application](#)
- [North County Land Trust event permit application](#)
- [Allegheny Valley Land Trust event permit application](#)

- [Goldthwait Reservation Trust event permit application](#)

Local Parks

- [Philadelphia Parks and Recreation event permit applications](#)
- [Montgomery County Parks and Recreation event permit application](#)
- [Phoenix Parks and Recreation event permit application](#)

State and Federal Lands

- [Point State Park event permit application](#)
- [Crystal Cove State Park event application and permit](#)
- [New York state parks event application and permit](#)
- [National Park Service event permit application](#)

See the [Event Permits library topic](#) at Conservation-Tools.org for these examples and more.

Hunting

Many land trusts require hunters to obtain permits from the land trust in order to hunt on land trust preserves; land trusts typically want to control hunting on their lands because of safety and land-stewardship concerns.

Permitting Process

Most land trusts use one of the following three types of permit processes. The first option is recommended because it gives the land trust discretion to approve or deny permit applications.

- The hunter submits permit application and must wait for approval from the land trust. If approved, land trust staff might sign and return the application, or issue some other kind of physical permit for the hunter to carry. Examples:
 - [Kennebunk Land Trust hunting permit application](#)
 - [Leelanau Conservancy hunting permit application](#)
 - [Walloon Lake Trust and Conservancy hunting permit application](#)
 - [Northeast Wilderness Trust hunting permit application](#)

- The hunter submits a permit application to the land trust and is then free to hunt; the hunter does not have to wait for approval or a physical permit from the land trust. Examples:
 - [Door County Land Trust hunting permit application](#)
 - [Little Traverse Conservancy hunting permit application](#)
- The land trust provides a permit (often with a map and list of regulations) that the hunter completes, signs, and carries with them while hunting; the hunter does not submit an application to the land trust. Examples:
 - [Allegheny Land Trust hunting permit](#)
 - [Western Pennsylvania Conservancy hunting permit](#)
 - [Alabama Forever Wild Land Trust hunting permit](#)
 - [Lyme Land Conservation Trust hunting permit](#)

See the [Hunting Permits library topic](#) at Conservation-Tools.org for these examples and more.

Typical Features of Hunting Applications and Permits

Applications and permits typically include most or all of the following information:

- Hunter name, contact information, and vehicle information
- Hunting season (type of game, weapon, and date range)
- Property regulations, both general (e.g., rules prohibiting motorized vehicles) and specific to hunting (e.g., rules requiring hunters to remove carcasses); signature of hunter pledging to follow them
- Map or list of properties open for hunting (sometimes with an indication of which properties the applicant is applying to hunt at); alternatively, the name of a specific preserve for which the permit is valid
- Indication if the hunter is a member of the land trust or if they have hunted at the land trust's preserves before

Land trusts seeking to collect data on hunting or wildlife populations on their preserves could also ask hunters to report any kills.

Camping

Some land trusts and trail groups issue permits allowing people to tent camp on preserves and along trails. State agencies—in Pennsylvania, the [Department of Conservation and Natural Resources](#) (DCNR)—issue permits for certain types of camping in state-managed public lands, such as backpacking in state forests.

Permitting Process

Prospective campers must submit a permit application to the respective managing entity. Upon approval, the entity usually issues a physical permit for the camper to display at their campsite.

Typical Features of Camping Applications and Permits

No matter the format of the permit application (PDF or online form), organizations and government agencies usually issue a printable permit for campers to display. Applications and permits typically include most or all of the following information:

- Camper name, contact information, and vehicle information
- Date and location of proposed camping
- Details about camping plans (e.g., does the camper plan to start a campfire?)
- Camping regulations; signature of camper pledging to follow them

Examples

See these examples of permit applications and permits:

- [Greater Worcester Land Trust camping permit application](#)
- [North County Land Trust camping permit application](#)
- [Armstrong Trail camping permit application](#)
- [Pennsylvania state forest camping permit](#)

See the [Camping Permits library topic](#) at ConservationTools.org for these examples and more.

Other Uses

See the [Other Permits library topic](#) at ConservationTools.org for examples of applications and permits for other uses of public lands, including:

- Commercial filming
- Scientific research and archaeological exploration
- Guiding and outfitting operations
- Non-camping recreation activities

Addressing Liability for Personal Injury or Property Damage

Accidents happen, and when they do, claims for personal injury or property damage sometimes follow. Defending lawsuits is expensive and time-consuming. The defense may be ultimately successful and covered by insurance, but the costs are ultimately passed on to the insured through higher premiums. The risk of being held responsible for injuries or property damage associated with permitting events and activities on one's property may be avoided or minimized through use of risk-reduction tools and strategies.

One of these tools is the permit application and approval process itself, which allows a government or organization to collect necessary information (such as a certificate of insurance) from users before the activity occurs.

Another tool is requiring permittees to sign a release agreement such as the [Model Release Agreement](#) published by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association; this model includes:

- A covenant not to sue (beginning with the words "I WILL NOT SUE");
- A covenant releasing the landowner from any and all liability for injury;
- A covenant indemnifying and holding harmless the landowner for any loss, liability, damage, or cost incurred as a result of the injury;
- Language regarding potential defenses that could negate the indemnity (see the "I AGREE..." section of the model); and

- Language affirming the signer is at least 18 years of age or, if not, that the signer is a parent or guardian of the minor child and is giving up the rights of them, their spouse, and their child to sue.

Recreational Use of Land and Water Act

As noted above, charging an activity fee may have [implications for liability protection](#) under state statutes that limit landowner liability for personal injury and property loss claims.

Additional Resources

The following [ConservationTools.org](#) guides address liability issues:

- [Indemnity Agreements and Liability Insurance: Protection from Claims Brought by Third Parties](#)
- [Guide to Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act](#)
- [Overview of Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act](#)
- [Reducing Liability Associated with Public Access](#)
- [Release of Liability: A Tool for Managing the Risk of a Volunteer or Participant in an Activity Suing the Activity's Organizer or Host](#)

The most recent version of this guide and related resources can be found online at [ConservationTools.org/guides/167](#)

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