

PRESS RELEASE

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Local nonprofit supports federal employees during government shutdown

The Charlottesville-based Shenandoah National Park Trust is collecting packaged snack foods for National Park Service employees who are working without pay during the partial government shutdown. Local citizens are invited to contribute items.

As the official nonprofit philanthropic partner to Shenandoah National Park, the Shenandoah National Park Trust has been working overtime to support the park and its employees in what is now the longest government shutdown in United States history.

“To keep national parks open but understaffed is a serious challenge,” says Susan Sherman, executive director of the Trust. “The government shutdown is putting a strain on the park’s wildlife and landscapes, as well as the park staff who are either shut out of their jobs or who are forced to work without pay.” A 2017 report by the employment website CareerBuilder found that nearly 80 percent of federal employees live paycheck to paycheck. Sherman says that it is not unusual for both members of a married couple to work for the National Park Service. Now that federal employees have missed their first paycheck, there is no money coming into those households.

Earlier this month, the Trust assumed costs of keeping porta-johns open and clean at two of the park’s most popular trailheads, Old Rag Mountain and Whiteoak Canyon.

“People are hiking in the park during the government shutdown,” says Sherman. “If the bathrooms are bolted shut because they are overflowing, that becomes an issue for the neighbors who live near those trails.” The nonprofit is therefore raising emergency funds to keep these bathrooms operational.

Charlottesville residents interested in supporting Shenandoah National Park employees during the government shutdown can drop off packaged snacks at the Trust’s offices at 404 8th Street, NE, 2nd floor, next Monday through Wednesday, January 21 through 23 during business hours. Trust staff will deliver the gift basket to the national park headquarters later in the week. Contributions to keep the porta-johns open can be made at www.snptrust.org.