



Will's Hope Summary of Programs for Veterans & Other Qualifying Individuals

As of: 7 Jan 2025

Subject: 2025 Will's Hope (WH) Programs for Veterans

For brevity purposes, **the term veteran is all encompassing and includes** military veterans, active-duty personnel, first responders, public safety, healthcare personnel & other individuals affected by PTSD, TBI & or other related conditions or as approved by Will's Hope (WH).

If you are a veteran, love the outdoors and are looking for a challenge and being stretched in a good way Will's Hope is a program that may interest you. Will's Hope (WH) offers opportunities for bonding with fellow veterans and learning about nature and Native Americans. As a natural byproduct of the experience veterans that have attended Will's Hope have described the significant self-healing opportunities that the program presents. **Veterans must make the commitments below in order to participate in this program.** The Program takes place in the **Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE)**.

Summary

Veterans have many strengths & capabilities that can be overlooked by society. This can lead some veterans to under appreciate their value to society. Will's Hope (WH) is an opportunity to help them frame their life experiences & see their situation in a positive manner while helping energize them for the future. The experience may offer a self-healing component if the participant chooses to fully immerse themselves in the activities.

Vision

Serve military veterans & others (e.g., active-duty personnel, first responders, public safety, healthcare, personnel, etc.) with conditions such as mild PTSD, mild depression & TBI; & other similar conditions. Provide a world class outdoor educational program that captures their interest & allows them to recharge while immersed in a stimulating program that highlights positivity. Will's Hope provides an opportunity for each participant to strengthen themselves, show them their value to their family, community & humanity; and promote self-healing.

Commitments Required of military veterans & others participating in Will's Hope

To realize benefits from this program each veteran must commit to the following as a minimum:

1. **Ensuring you can commit to the time required upfront** for the pre-application, application, interviews, bonding activities, mandatory hike, mandatory orientation & other requirements that must be accomplished prior to the program which occurs in the May/June/July/August timeframe,
2. **Ensuring you can commit to the time required to attend** the 9+day program
3. Attending mandatory events and **submitting documents by the due dates**,
4. **Submitting hard copy of application and related materials** (We do not want electronic copies of application documents)
5. **Using Will's Hope prescribed forms** – especially for the **physical/list of medications** required for each veteran,
6. **Willingness and enthusiasm to connect to or strengthen your connection** to nature and the natural world,
7. During the program do video presentations such as a presentation about GYE wildlife, geology, or Native Americans,
8. Proactively **manage any pre-existing personal issues or activities** so that they **do not become a distraction** during the program and or interfere in any way with the program,
9. **Performing a self-assessment of yourself** and ensuring that you are physically, mentally, emotionally and otherwise prepared and stable to participate in the WH program,
10. **Minimize** your use of social media, smart phones and other electronics **during the program** so you can participate in scheduled activities as well as visit with peers during free time. This is a recurring issue with veteran programs and achieving personal goals as well as meeting program objectives are diminished when veterans spend more than minimal time with electronics. **Daily, time with cell phones should not exceed one**

hour per day if the participant intends to take advantage of the opportunity. Similarly, use of other electronics should be minimized. Participants that avoid excessive use of electronics posture themselves to achieve the most benefits from the program.

11. At the GYE, participate in **Reflections** (video recording of what the experience meant to you & how it helped you),
12. **Compliance with the “WH Voluntary Ground Rules for Participation by Military Veterans, Active Duty, First Responders, Public Safety, Healthcare Personnel & Other Participants, Staff & Self Assessments for 2025 Programs”.**

Mission

Provide veterans and other qualified persons a supportive atmosphere & opportunities to see their situation in a more positive way while using the outdoors, nature, & Native Americans as mechanisms for self-enabling & self-discovery of interests & strengths. Other mission objectives include but are not limited to:

- Finding a connection to or strengthening their connection to nature, the natural world and Native Americans,
- Achieving a deeper understanding of the need for conservation of limited natural resources for future generations,
- Appreciating individual uniqueness as a strength that is to be shared,
- Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and the importance of individual uniqueness to humanity,
- Reinforcing the importance of each individual in the modern world,
- Showing participants ways to see the good in the world & the good in themselves,
- Using positivity as a tool to improve relationships and help each individual throughout their journey,
- Improving or fostering the development of passions,
- Enhancing communication skills, resiliency of spirit and group dynamics,
- Strengthening individual participants is also strengthening the participant’s family, close friends and others,
- Promoting & expanding individual growth, inner peace & self-healing,
- Assisting participants so that at the end of the program they are in a better position to face storms,
- Providing multiple diverse opportunities for each veteran to experience, learn and value,
- Providing the setting for bonding and friendship to thrive,
- Promoting improvement of self-confidence, energy & self-esteem,
- Providing outstanding experiences for participants to return on their own and share their knowledge with their families and friends.

Concept of Operation

Use the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) as the venue for a diverse outdoor educational immersion program. Programs run approximately 9 - 12 days. Each participant actively participates in a variety of outdoor individual & group activities. On average group size is 5-6 participants. Dedicated instructors & volunteers are subject matter experts & oversee activities, logistics & operations.

Eligibility

- Veteran or person from other qualifying groups that have a disability – the disability may or may not be diagnosed,
- Wants to attend, learn, participate in all activities and are willing to help themselves,
- Are **positive** & stable,
- Are respectful & considerate of others (e.g., instructors, guides, program leaders and others),
- Are able to focus on program activities, without external distractions, & use their phone when it does not conflict with group activities. **Use of cell phones should be less than 1 hour per day.**
- Are able to follow instructions,
- **Use appropriate language & appropriate behavior** at all times,
- Are courteous, truthful & honest,
- Can work together as a small team or group,
- Are willing to share their observations and thoughts with the group,

- Listens more than talking,
- Track record of good behavior,
- Share responsibility for common housekeeping tasks and meals,
- Are able to hike up to 3 miles (or more) with a 600-foot elevation gain, *
- Complete a pre-application, application, physical and other documents; and disclose any information pertinent to the participants participation in the program**,
- Attend bonding, hikes, orientation and other pre-program activities***,
- Self-certify that Will's Hope Programs will help them with their disability,
- Will's Hope acceptance of the application and associated materials/documents,
- Complete all requirements and other pre-requisites,
- Making prescribed commitments, &
- Voluntary compliance with all ground rules.

* This requirement may be waived based on an individual's specific situation

Will's Hope is a non-smoking program (including chewing tobacco, smoking marijuana and vaping). Non-prescribed harmful drugs & Over the Counter harmful drugs are not allowed. Prescribed medications must be in a container with a prescription attached. Weapons, ammunition, knives & other similar items are not allowed. No alcohol in any form. Will's Hope is not a therapeutic, medical or a program for someone in crisis. Will's Hope is a voluntary program and is not connected with any government program. If you smoke, we ask that you go on a smoking cessation program so by the time of the program (May-July) you do not smoke on the program. If you are unable to comply with our smoking requirements this needs to be discussed with the Program Leaders prior to acceptance as there are a number of areas where smoking is absolutely forbidden.

To see current veteran program offerings: Please see the website (www.willshopeopportunities.org) and click on the "Veterans +" button at the top of the page for specific dates. If we currently do not have a program for you please contact us as soon as possible so you are on our radar. In some cases, it may take up to a year or more to assimilate similar individuals in order to develop a program. For each program we are able to accommodate 5-6 participants. During the program each participant does a presentation on a topic relevant to the GYE as well as talking about their experience at the end of the program (Reflections). You can find testimonials and past program photos at the "Veterans +" button at the top of each web page.

Major Activities

Participants can anticipate being busy throughout the entire period. All activities take place in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Major activities may include the following and other activities:

- Wildlife observation and viewing led by a professional wildlife guide using binoculars and spotting scopes,
- An introduction to regional geology, the "Yellowstone Hot Spot" and volcanic activity,
- Thermal features – geysers, hot springs, fumaroles, & mud pots,
- Native American culture and philosophies that are applicable to today's world & relevant for veterans,
- Visits to important Native American cultural sites,
- Fly fishing led by a professional guide,
- US Forest Service demonstration and possibly a field exercise (dependent on number of 1st time attendees),
- Horse ride in the Beartooth/Absaroka Wilderness (dependent on time being available for this)
- Wildlife track identification in the field and casting tracks (this will depend on weather, time of year, river flows and time available),
- Hiking through scenic, steeply wooded terrain nearly untouched by humans,
- Practical exercise(s) – dependent on time available,
- Understanding Old Faithful,
- Insight into the fragile balance of nature by learning about keystone species,
- Insight into the challenges facing the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem,
- Field seminars on various topics,

- Bonding,
- Participant presentations, and
- Reflections

Cost: The cost for each participant is \$400 for 1st time attendees and \$800 for returning veterans. The actual cost of the program is approximately \$5,000 per person and the portion above \$400/\$800 is covered by Will's Hope. The veteran is responsible for at least \$200 of the fee even if they have a sponsoring organization that is helping to cover the fee. For example, if a sponsoring organization covers \$200 or more of the fee for a 1st time attendee the 1st time veteran is still responsible for \$200. Similarly, for returning veterans they must contribute \$200 if a sponsoring organization covers the \$600 for a total of \$800. If the veteran has no sponsoring organization, they are liable for the entire fee. Limited funds may be available to help qualifying veterans with no sponsoring organization.

Pre-Applications and Applications: If you are interested in attending the 2025 programs, please let us know so that we can discuss your potential participation and the program prior to giving you a pre-application to complete. **We will release applications only after the individual has completed the pre-application and the pre-application is acceptable to Will's Hope. The application process involves multiple interviews. If you are interested it is important to get on our radar as soon as possible** because there are deadlines and we will be working on a first come first serve basis. We may also request a **letter of recommendation** from a doctor, counselor, pastor, VA, DAV, service agency or other organizations/professionals that are acceptable to Will's Hope.

Standards: Please visit the Will's Hope website www.willshopeopportunities.org and click on the "Veterans +" button at the top of the page. This takes you to the "Veterans Program" page. On the "Veterans' Program" page look at "**Voluntary Ground Rules for Participation for Military Veterans, Active Duty, First Responders, Public Safety, Healthcare & Other Participants**" pdf document at the bottom of the page. Please review this document as this outlines the behavior and environment pertinent to Will's Hope programs.

If you are a military veteran, active duty, first responder, public safety, healthcare worker and are interested in Will's Hope, **please contact Mark Squire at 719-210-5625 to see if there are openings and or to get on our radar so we know you are interested. Do not wait for a deadline to get on our radar – please do it as soon as you know you might be interested.**

** The application packet will contain detailed information about the program such as clothing to bring, schedule, and other details.

*** The orientation will discuss all details related to the program such as food, what to bring, travel arrangements, emergency procedures, etc. and have pictures of major activities & so forth.

More Info: Contact Mark Squire at 719-210-5625 or willshopeinfo@gmail.com