

AMC-DV Accepted Peer Practices
Large Group Hikes

Approved by DV Executive Committee 12-17-13
Initial draft discussed at DV Leaders Meeting 11-9-13
Amended April 25, 2018

The AMC DV Chapter policy regarding "Large Group Hikes" has been amended to further reflect our stewardship and LNT principles as outlined by AMC Vision 2020, and AMC's documented hiking practices. While much of the policy approved on 12-17-13 is retained, the amendments will provide specific limits for participants where group size is not set by a particular venue.

As stated in AMC's Vision 2020, "AMC has always been about connecting people to the outdoors and actively engaging them in a way that encourages the stewardship and understanding of our natural resources." We in the DV Chapter recognize that for the long-term sustainability and protection of the outdoors, it is important that we get more people outdoors and involved with our parks and trails. We recognize that there is a social/camaraderie aspect to large groups that is important to many. We also recognize that leading large (20+ people) groups on hikes creates some challenges in terms of safety, resource protection, and being considerate of other visitors. We therefore expect that leaders of large hike groups will adhere to the following guidelines when planning trips.

1. It is essential to adhere to the limits on group size set by a particular venue (for example: 10 person limit in state game lands, 25 person limit on the Appalachian Trail). We will begin to compile a list of these limits for frequent hike locations and post them on the Chapter Website. If there is no group size limit set by the venue, and the venue is not included on the approved list of exceptions on the Chapter Website, the number of participants shall be no greater than 25, including leaders.
2. Exceptions to participant limits – A list of venues where LNT is less of a concern (i.e., durable surfaces, wider trails), allowing for group sizes of greater than 25, will eventually be posted on the DV Chapter Website. Permanent or temporary exceptions will be approved by a quorum of the Large Group Hike Committee. Leaders that wish to have venues included as exceptions, should provide ample time for the committee to opine before planning hikes with larger group size limits.
3. If the hike group is expected to be a large one, leaders are encouraged to include this information in their hike description. For example, "This is expected to be a large group of more than 20 people." Leaders should also indicate if this is posted to other organizations, such as Meetup, another Chapter, another Club,

etc. This will allow potential participants to choose for themselves whether they want to attend a hike with a larger group.

4. If the hike is posted on Meetup, the Leader needs to set participant limits to reflect these guidelines, and adjust as necessary to incorporate registrations not received through Meetup. The Meetup "guideline" is set at 30 participants to account for "no-shows" but leaders should exercise reasonable judgement so actual group size is no more than 25 participants.
5. Standard safety protocols are particularly important to follow to ensure the safety of a large group. These would include a point/front of the hike, a sweep, and an assistant leader or two in the middle of the group as needed. Instructions for waiting at trail junctions, turns, etc., should be clearly stated at the beginning of the hike, and an appropriate pace established that will ensure the group does not become spread out. Leaders should also ensure the safety of the group by properly screening participants to make sure that their abilities are suited to the difficulty of the hike.
6. The group should be split if it is over the group size limit set by the venue. The group might also be split up to ensure safety when necessary. When splitting a group, the leader might consider altering the route slightly for one group. If the groups are following the same route, 15-20 minutes between start times, with the faster group in the front, should allow for sufficient separation between the two groups.
7. Leaders should have an appropriate ratio of assistant leaders to group size. A ratio of 10:1 is suggested, particularly for more challenging terrain. Leaders should provide assistant leaders with copies of maps for the area if necessary, and make sure the route to be followed is clearly defined.
8. Leaders should encourage car-pooling to the trailhead when possible to avoid taking too much space in small parking areas.
9. Environmental impact should be minimized by staying on the trail and not allowing participants to venture into sensitive areas that need to be protected. Where the trail is narrow, participants should be instructed to stay in a single line so as not to broaden the trail.
10. As a Leave No Trace organization, we in AMC need to observe the LNT principle that states "Be considerate of other visitors." Leaders should be cognizant of others on the trail, and instruct the group not to be overly loud to ensure a positive experience for all.

11. The trailhead talk before the hike represents an important opportunity for leaders to acquaint large groups with the need for safety, resource protection, and consideration for others that are the goals of their hikes and of the AMC in general. For Meetup groups, it is also important to acquaint the participants with the nature of the AMC and how they can become involved in the organization.
12. Leaders should understand that the above guidelines are not intended to supersede good judgment on the part of the leaders, or hiking and leadership chairs.