

Parks on the air

An activity for amateur radio operators

Important Links for POTA

- ▶ <https://parksontheair.com/>
- ▶ <https://pota.app/#/>
- ▶ <https://pota.app/#/resources>

Parks On The Air

- ▶ What is it?
- ▶ Who are the players?
- ▶ Where can I participate?
- ▶ When should I play?
- ▶ Why would I want to participate?
- ▶ How do I participate?

What is POTA

- ▶ POTA is not a contest
- ▶ Extremely Competitive radio activity
- ▶ Non discriminate activity that encourages operators to get on the air from Federal or State ran parks and recreation sites.
- ▶ Low cost activity
- ▶ Awards program
- ▶ Community
- ▶ Advanced tools for spotting and hunting amateurs.
- ▶ Well organized

Activators

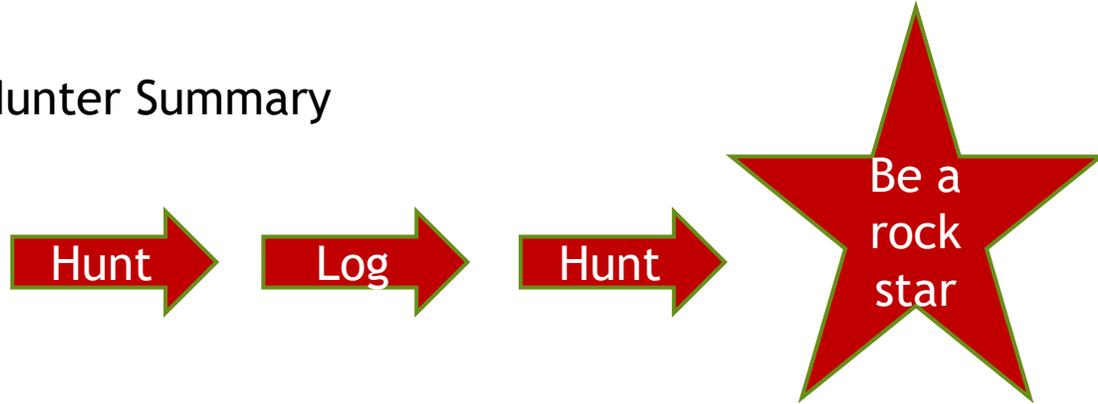
People who go to designated parts and locations to operate amateur radio with the intent to work 10 amateurs in two way communications.



Activator Summary



Hunter Summary



Hunters

- ▶ Hunters are stations trying to contact the Activators.
- ▶ An activator can also be a hunter.
- ▶ Hunters can use any mode, any band and any amount of power.
- ▶ Hunters can earn awards.
- ▶ Hunters can be from anywhere including DX stations or domestic US stations.

Regional Log Coordinators

0 – Jim Shorney – NU0C K0@parksontheair.com

1 – Jay Hubert – KA1JAY - K1@parksontheair.com

2 – James Gallo - KB2FMH - K2@parksontheair.com

3 – Bruce Manning – NJ3K - K3@parksontheair.com

4 – Steve Czaikowski - W3SPC - K4@parksontheair.com

4 – Steve Anderjack - KO4AFL - K4@parksontheair.com

4 – John Martin - KN4SWS - K4@parksontheair.com

4 – Hillary Ramsey - AB1CD - K4@parksontheair.com

5 – Scott Hernandez – KD5PCK - K5@parksontheair.com

6 – Todd Shelton – N6XDX - K6@parksontheair.com

7 – Michael Barnes - WA7SKG - K7@parksontheair.com

8 – (LEAD) Mike Lewis – KA8H - K8@parksontheair.com

9 – Sean Pyne – W4BKR - K9@parksontheair.com

Program Administrators

- ▶ POTA Administrator and President/Owner - Jason Johnston - W3AAX
- ▶ POTA Director/Adviser - Rick Parent - W0ZAP
- ▶ Server and Security Administrator - Thomas Martin - W8TAM
- ▶ Storefront Admin and Public Relations - Julie Martin - WT8J

Other POTA people

Many thanks to the other volunteers who maintain the system and those who help moderate the slack channel and facebook group.

For a full list you can view the Parks on the air website.

Where can I Operate?

▶ Activators

- ▶ Activators must be in a designated park. Many State and Federal parks are in the system including nature preserves that are just parking lots and trails.
- ▶ Parks must be "Open" to you. If you have overnight permission and the park closes you are still allowed to operate because it was open to you. If you show up after hours and should not be in the park, it would be an invalid activation.

▶ Hunters

- ▶ Hunters are not restricted to where they can operate.
- ▶ Activators can be hunters too.
- ▶ Non POTA parks can be used to hunt.
- ▶ Your in-laws during the holidays can be used

Be safe and follow the laws (Local, State and Federal including FCC laws)

Where can I operate part 2

- ▶ Interstate travel can add some challenges
 - ▶ Higher fees for out of state plates
 - ▶ Different laws about operating in the park including rules on Antennas and what can be attached to the trees or even placing stakes into the ground for a guy wire.
 - ▶ Different wild life and insects exist across our planet, do research and be prepared.

K-5685 Lieber State Recreation Area

In 1952, Cagles Mill Lake was built as Indiana's first flood control reservoir, protecting the Eel and White river watersheds. Mill Creek feeds the 1,400-acre lake and is home to beautiful Cataract Falls. These falls resulted from two pre-glacial bedrock ridges buried beneath ancient lake sediments of the Illinoian glacial period.

K-2267 Shades State Park

Shades State Park is that peaceful place you've sought. Located about 17 miles southwest of Crawfordsville (off S.R. 47), it is a favorite for hikers and canoeists.

The beautiful sandstone cliffs overlooking Sugar Creek and numerous shady ravines provide the backdrop for your journey through this nature lover's paradise.

Also on the property is Pine Hills Nature Preserve, which affords spectacular topography for those willing to take a fairly long hike.





K-4163 Cagles Mill Lake State Recreation Area

Both Lieber SRA and Cataract
Falls are part of Cagles Mill
Lake

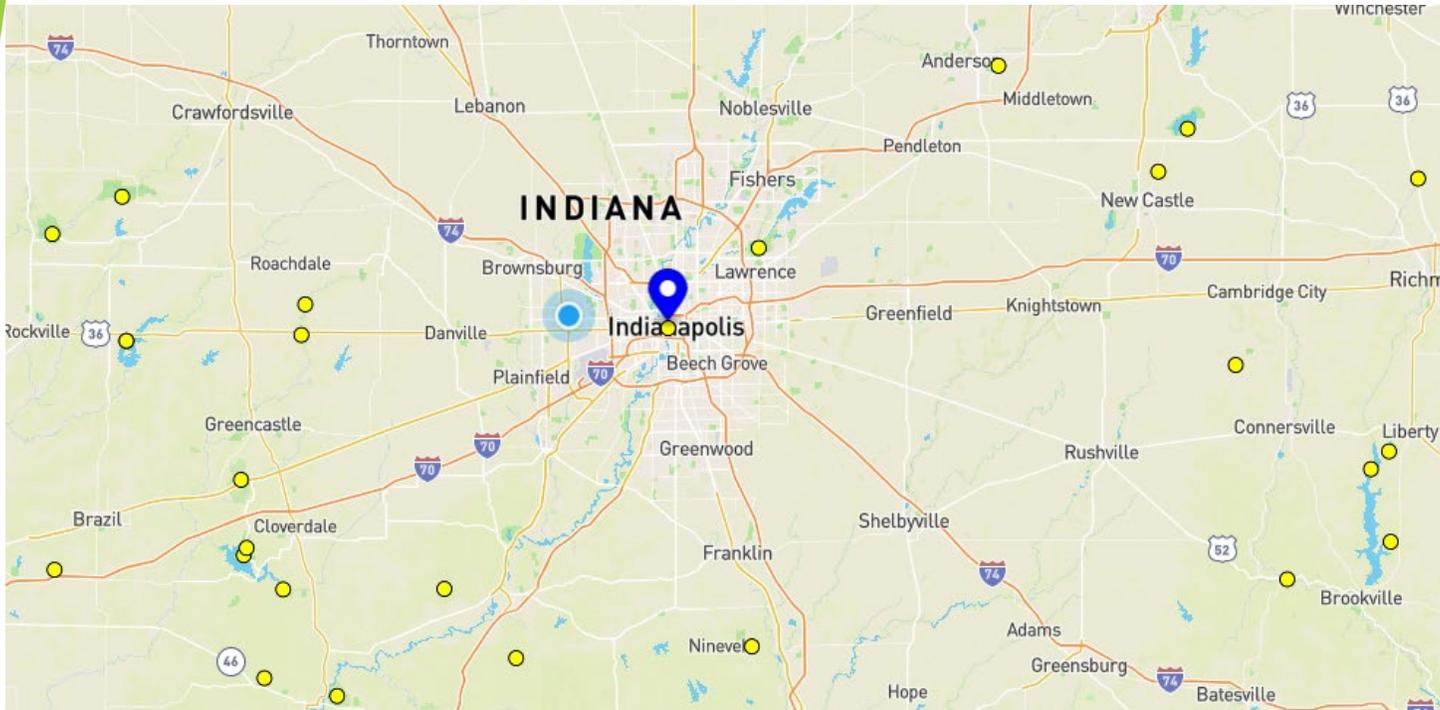
K-2272 Turkey Run State Park

You'll marvel at the natural geologic wonders of this beautiful park as you hike along its famous trails. Nestled along State Road 47 southwest of Crawfordsville, the park offers the chance to explore deep, sandstone ravines, walk along stands of aged forests, and enjoy the scenic views along Sugar Creek.

Make sure to visit the Colonel Richard Lieber Cabin, which commemorates the contributions of the father of Indiana's state park system.



Many other parks are in database



Check the online map at the [POTA.APP](https://www.pota.app) website to see what parks are close to you or will be close on your next trip.

Why Participate
in POTA

TO HAVE
FUN

Why participate

Hunter

- Test your radio skills
- Test your station
- Gain pretty paper for your walls
- Reach other goals such as WAS or DXCC
- Better than watching the snow fall

Activators

- Mostly because you like the abuse of nature
- Test your equipment
- Practice portable operating skills
- Collect awards for your walls
- See places you would not normally adventure out too and enjoy the trails and other features of each park.
- Because you already go camping and this activity can give you an activity to do while not doing the normal camping activities.

How for Hunters?

Any mode

Any Band

Any time

Anywhere

Use the POTA spotting page to help you hunt for activators who have been spotted

Use the POTA spotting page for a list of registered Activations

Watch the slack channels and Facebook group for information about future POTA trips by activators

How for activators

- ▶ **Read the FAQ and watch the videos on the POTA website.** When you ask questions in the groups, the first response is always - Go read the FAQ. Just get it out of the way. It is about not wasting volunteers time.
- ▶ Find a park
 - ▶ Use the POTA.app website to find a map of parks near you.
 - ▶ Check out the parks website to see what the hours of operation are.
 - ▶ Check for local rules about operating radios from within the park. (As far as I can tell no Indiana parks have any regulations about using amateur radio in the parks)
- ▶ Fee's to the park
 - ▶ Most state parks have a fee to enter. I get the annual pass. Seniors, Veterans and disabled folks do get discounts.

How to - Prepare

Prepare your equipment

- Post your activation on the POTA.APP website so that people are aware that you will be operating. When using modes like FT8 or CW this will allow the spotting system to automatically spot you. If I am going to a known DEAD zone - I spot myself in the spotting page when I get the border of the dead zone so I can be picked up by the auto spotting for CW.
- Bring antennas, radios, coax, more coax, tuners, mics, keys and batteries.
- Bring something to log with
 - Computer logging
 - Ipad/Android tablet logging
 - iPhone Logging
 - Paper logging (remember pencils)

Other stuff

- Bring water, snacks, food and toilet paper.
- Insect repellent and raincoats never hurt anyone. I also pack an umbrella, more for the sun than the rain.
- Optional - I bring a folding chair and a 3-foot table in case I cannot find an open picnic table. Some "Nature Preserves" on the list do not offer a picnic table at all.
- Know your county and grid square. It is not required but you can plan on someone asking

Logging recommendations

- ▶ Paper logging is very popular. It requires no battery and no chance of the PC or device losing your data. I do not paper log. Many do.
- ▶ N3JFP has been suggested for PC logging by many people.
- ▶ N1MM+ offers a POTA UDC.
- ▶ HamRS is an iPad app that I used. It has a huge list of bugs people are complaining about. Might wait a bit to make sure those are worked out before investing.
- ▶ HamLog is an iPad app that was discontinued. It worked well but no longer is supported nor can you purchase it. If you have it, it works.
- ▶ RumLog for iPad has the capability to work with POTA and is what I am currently using.
- ▶ Any logging program that allows you add two custom fields. This is to track your park and the park of the person you are working if they provide it.

Park to Park logging

- ▶ Two fields should be added to your logging application.
 - ▶ <MY_SIG_INFO> is used to track the park you are at.
 - ▶ <SIG_INFO> is used to specify the park of the station you are working
- ▶ If a person you are working is at more than 1 park, ie a 2-fer park you need to log that person twice and change the SIG_INFO field for each entry to match a park they provide.

Logging - Final note about paper

If you log on paper, you eventually will have to move that paper log to a program that can produce a ADIF file.

What Radio should I take to activate?

- ▶ This is completely up to you. Too many parameters to tell you what the perfect radio is for you.
- ▶ If you plan to run QRP you do not need to worry about finding power outlets at a park. Some parks have power, most do not.
- ▶ If you plan to operate in your automobile you can rely on the power in the vehicle if you have a mobile installed.
- ▶ If you plan to hike and operate deep into a park, then you might consider a lighter QRP solution.

The best Antenna for POTA

- ▶ **The one that works**
- ▶ Depends on the park rules
 - ▶ Connecting to trees can be prohibited.
 - ▶ Staking the ground is prohibited in many states.
 - ▶ Never nail or screw anything into a public tree without prior approval.
- ▶ A wire in the tree has always been successful for me in Indiana and Missouri
 - ▶ Use para cord and a random stick or rock to toss it up (Bring 100 ft of paracord - at least)
 - ▶ Never nail into a tree or purposely break a tree on public lands
 - ▶ Do not damage wildlife. If in a nature preserve - you may need to think twice about the use of trees.
- ▶ Screwdriver antennas are quick to deploy, and I have had many successful activations this way
- ▶ Eagle one Antenna or Alpha S9 vertical antenna work well connected to the camper or truck using a hitch mount.
- ▶ 102" CB Whip has given me many successful activations. In the winter it was already connected to the truck, so it was a no brainer to pull up and activate without getting into the weather.
- ▶ **Any Antenna that works!**

Anything special about the communication?

- ▶ The Activator's log is what matters. Hunters do not submit logs and have no say to the accuracy of the activators log.
- ▶ The only requirements to be a valid contact are:
 - ▶ Must be done in a designated park.
 - ▶ Person, Radio and antenna must all be in the park.
 - ▶ Must log BAND/DATE/TIME/MODE/PARK#/CALL SIGN
 - ▶ Signal Report and State are often given even though they are not required. (I log these for person use)
- ▶ Call CQ
 - ▶ No rules about this exist.
 - ▶ FT8 they recommend "CQ POTA {CALL} {GRID}" (remember to update your grid in WSJTX
 - ▶ SSB I use "CQ PARKS ON THE AIR FROM KILO-{PARK#} THIS IS AC9HP CALLING CQ AND STANDING BY" -- But again - zero requirement to even mention you are logging for POTA
 - ▶ CW - I use "CQ POTA DE AC9HP" or often after being spotted I just use "CQ DE AC9HP" or simply "QRZ?" When finishing up a QSO. No set protocol or rule exists here either.
- ▶ You can operate other contests and events in the park and not even mention you are in the park. All the contacts still count and the people you work are considered hunters
 - ▶ SKCC/QSO Parties/PODX Contests etc

Wow - this was fun, but I am exhausted

- ▶ It is recommended to call QRT a few times before turning off the radio. This allows people waiting for a better signal to try to work you. On side band you might just call "Last Call for Park K-`{NUMBER}` from `{CALL}`"
- ▶ After you turn off the radio, if you have internet, it is a good idea to **post QRT on the spotting page**. You do this by spotting yourself with QRT in the comments. This moves you to the bottom of the postings and then you disappear off the page.
- ▶ Plan for tear down time.
 - ▶ Taking down the antenna can take just as long as putting it up.
- ▶ **LEAVE NO TRACE**
 - ▶ Cleanup your trash
 - ▶ Do not leave wire in a tree
 - ▶ Do not leave a fire in the pit
 - ▶ Practice adulting
 - ▶ The quickest way for an activity to get banned from your local parks is to have someone not do the right things.

Sending the logs into the regional coordinator

- ▶ Follow the rules for the naming of the log. Today as write this the rule is to follow this format:
 - ▶ "{Callsign}@{PARK#} {DATE}{STATE}"
 - ▶ State is optional for when a park or designator is across state lines. I have never used this.
 - ▶ Example: AC9HP@K-5685 20211212.ADI
- ▶ Multiple days at the same park go in the same log. No need to separate the logs by day.
- ▶ Parks that count as 2 parks need to be sent in twice with the correct park numbers in each log. I use NOTEPAD find/replace feature but your favorite editor such as NANO or VI would work just fine.
- ▶ Be patient. It can take days or weeks to get a response from the coordinator. Sean (9 Calls) is quick and does a great job. However even he is a volunteer and sometimes this is not his life's priority.

Stats and awards

- ▶ Today nothing is automated.
- ▶ The coordinator will submit your log to the database.
- ▶ After your log was sent to the POTA database it takes a day or so for the system to update your stats.
- ▶ Awards can take longer
- ▶ P2P contacts will show up after both parties have submitted logs

Other logging

- ▶ I always send my logs to (No requirement - but out of courtesy and self-interest):
 - ▶ QRZ
 - ▶ LOTW
 - ▶ EQSL
- ▶ LOTW (Optional but country hunters like you to do this)
 - ▶ Make sure you add a station location that signifies the grid square and county you operated from.
 - ▶ TQSL has directions on how to accomplish this.
 - ▶ Some parks have multiple grid squares/Counties even if not listed in the POTA database. (Example SHADES)

The final courtesy

- QSL Cards

- ▶ No requirement to send QSL cards
- ▶ QRZ has a place to indicate if you want to exchange QSL cards in the mail
- ▶ It can get costly
- ▶ I often only send a card to people on new bands or if some special event is happening. (Like Support your parks annual events)



Navigating the POTA.APP website

- ▶ Where is the FAQ
- ▶ How to sign up
- ▶ How to sign in
- ▶ How to post activation
- ▶ How to self spot
- ▶ How to spot others
- ▶ How to check awards



Any Questions?

Be sure to check out the POTA.APP website and the parksontheair.com website for more information.