



ACT
Government



Volunteer Use of Power Tools

Trial Program Summary Report 2025

Introduction

In 2025, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) implemented a trial of power tool use for approved volunteers within the ParkCare volunteering program. All policies and procedures were developed in consultation with the Urban Parks and Places (UPP) volunteering program within City Presentation.

This summary report has been prepared by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to inform its future activities in this area and enable the sharing of learnings with City Presentation in relation to its Urban Parks and Places program. It identifies 9 recommendations based on the learnings of the trial program.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that volunteer use of power tools is adopted into business-as-usual practice for ACT Environmental Volunteering

The implementation of the trial program has demonstrated the value of volunteer use of power tools. It has recognised the capabilities of volunteers and provided avenues for volunteers to continue to undertake large-scale weed management activities in a more efficient and effective manner.

Whilst the current model is appropriate at the current scale, it is suggested that the below recommendations are considered for broad-scale implementation, with appropriate additional resourcing.

Recommendation 2: 'Volunteer Use of Power Tools' policy wording should be approved and incorporated into relevant volunteering programs

The policy wording supporting volunteer use of power tools has been developed by City Presentation staff in collaboration with PCS. It is recommended this wording is approved and adopted into current volunteer policies across ParkCare and UPP volunteering.

Recommendation 3: Power Tool Training should be outsourced to an external provider

Training is a time-intensive and costly process when run internally.

If run internally, training would be limited to certain weekdays which is likely to put barriers in place for volunteer attendance and limitations would be placed on how frequently sessions could be run. The UPP program staff are currently not resourced to deliver training in-house.

It is recommended that training be outsourced to an external provider to ensure adequate staffing capacity.

Recommendation 4: Volunteer use of power tools should be steadily scaled to ensure in-house capacity

The delivery of power tool use has been worked in amongst PCS staff's other business as usual activities including works planning, delivery of materials (mulch, tree guards/stakes/gravel), other tool maintenance and on ground support at volunteer activities. Without increased resourcing, staff will need to monitor increasing demands and manage expectations to ensure sustainable delivery.

At current, the level of power tool use engagement remains manageable for ParkCare staff, with an anticipated slow and steady growth in volunteer engagement. The current resourcing cannot accommodate additional volunteers beyond the ParkCare program.

It is not recommended within ParkCare that tools are procured for the coming 6-12 months. This is due to there currently not being the level of demand to necessitate an increase, but also to ensure delivery of the program remains manageable for on-ground staff. ParkCare currently receives positive feedback on their ability to effectively support volunteers. Ensuring workloads remain manageable for staff maintains both staff wellbeing as well as improved engagement for the volunteer community.

It is recommended that longer-term, volunteer involvement in power tool use and procurement of additional tools, is steadily scaled to allow staff to monitor capacities and ensure that high-quality volunteer support can be maintained across all business deliverables of the ParkCare program.

Recommendation 5: Budget resourcing must be considered

With any expansion of the program, the cost of PPE and training, maintenance for increased loans, staffing capacity and the potential to increase the number of tools available must be considered from a budgetary perspective. Base funding will be required for the delivery of this program.

Recommendation 6: Longer-term, a new booking system should be investigated

An improved booking system should be investigated longer term. It is recommended that after 12 months, the ACT Government explore improved systems, that provide a booking calendar for volunteers for streamline administrative processes. It is likely that this platform would come at an expense to government, with an annual fee, and requirement for a Security Check. The current process for booking only remains viable at the current level of tool delivery and number of volunteers involved.

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This Recommendation should be considered in conjunction with Recommendation 9 of this report.

Recommendation 7: City Presentation and Urban Parks and Places Volunteering should only implement the program once more resourcing becomes available

It is recommended that the Urban Parks and Places Volunteering Program (UPP) look to implement the program once staffing and resourcing is made available. There is significant resourcing cost in the delivery of power tool use, and this must be balanced against current staffing and budgetary capacities.

The UPP program will also need to consider how approvals can be tied in with restrictions of the Urban Forest Act in woody weed removal and other legislative requirements. These are different requirements to volunteers operating on PCS managed land.

This recommendation has been included at the request of City Presentation and the Urban Parks and Places volunteering program, who have been involved in the development of this report.

Recommendation 8: Incorporating other tools should not be considered for at least another 12 months

It is not recommended to expand the suite of tools available to volunteers for at least 12 months. Chainsaws and Augers should not be considered in this expansion due to their high levels of risk, and for chainsaws, an inability to put in place the same risk mitigations that are required for ACT Government employees.

Other tools that may be considered based on volunteer feedback could include new head attachment types for brush cutters and a pole/extension for the hedge trimmer. Incorporation of additional tools will require updates to the training requirements of currently certified volunteers.

Recommendation 9: Personal Tools or Long-Term Loans may be reviewed after 12 months

It is recommended that both PCS and City Presentation consider the viability of volunteers being able to use their own tools, or the ability for Government to procure and provide long-term loan tools to volunteer groups.

The key risks associated with this that must be considered:

- WHS considerations on maintenance and suitability of tools for use, particularly for the brush cutter utilising a metal blade head. How to undertake maintenance of this attachment is currently not included in the training
- Lower oversight over each time tools are used, including WHS considerations and works approvals
- Lower oversight over ability to approve individual works based on staff capacity to conduct weed debris removal from site
- Biosecurity concerns and cross contamination
- Storage considerations, given there are already some community members concerned about how they store tools and equipment for their groups, this would add pressure
- Cost considerations around procurement of additional tools for long-term loans, additional PPE (individual harnesses) and signage, as well as ongoing servicing and maintenance costs of a larger fleet of tools

Opportunities of this approach include:

- Streamlined processes for volunteers
- Reduced staff time in managing loans
- Reduces need for improved IT booking system with potential cost efficiencies associated (although not all groups may want to manage their own tools).

It is recommended that for at least the next 12 months, the same processes remain in place requiring volunteers to collect and drop-off equipment to a centralised location. As tool loan becomes more common practice across both ParkCare and potentially Urban Parks volunteer programs, this can be reassessed.

Background

Current volunteer policies across ParkCare and Urban Parks and Places (UPP) volunteering do not support volunteer use of any powered tools. There has been increasing demand from the volunteer community for this to be reviewed, with a vision to improve efficiencies and reduce the risk of injury from manual weed removal activities.

In line with the ACT Government response to the recommendations from the Inquiry into Environmental Volunteerism in 2022, ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) undertook the responsibility of developing a power tool trial program. The trial sought to understand if volunteer use of power tools could be implemented more broadly for ACT Environmental Volunteers and what was the most appropriate way to deliver the program.

The trial included 5 battery-operated power tools (brush cutters, pruning/reciprocating saws, hedge trimmers, self-propelled mowers and drills) and was supported by the Executive Branch Managers (EBM) of both City Presentation and PCS.

The scope of this project identified that PCS would be responsible for developing a trial program for the ParkCare volunteering program and provide recommendations that would in principle be appropriate for both the UPP and ParkCare volunteering program areas to ensure a consistent policy approach for ACT Environmental Volunteers. Delivery and implementation of power tool use would remain the responsibility of the individual program areas (i.e. not solely PCS).

The Trial Program commenced in February 2025 and formally ran for 6 months.

Trial Program Development

Significant work went into the development of the trial program. This included:

- Formal training for volunteer coordination staff
- The development of Risk Assessments and Standard Operating Procedures
- Workplace Health and Safety and Volunteer Policy meetings with representatives from both PCS and City Presentation
- Development of a Power Tool Induction training package
- Development of booking forms, approval processes, risk templates, equipment scheduling, qualification recording, feedback mechanisms and other key administrative resources
- Procurement of tools, personal protective equipment (PPE), signage and other associated equipment

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Importantly, the approach taken in preparation and delivery of the trial is informed by the duty of care that the ACT Government has in approving and facilitating works by volunteers on government land. Volunteers are covered under the ACT Insurance Agency policy, similarly to ACT Government Staff. To ensure the safety of volunteers, the ACT Government is required to ensure that activities have been appropriately risk assessed, and the proper training, tool maintenance/suitability, handling and use of power tools.

Key Principles of the Trial Program

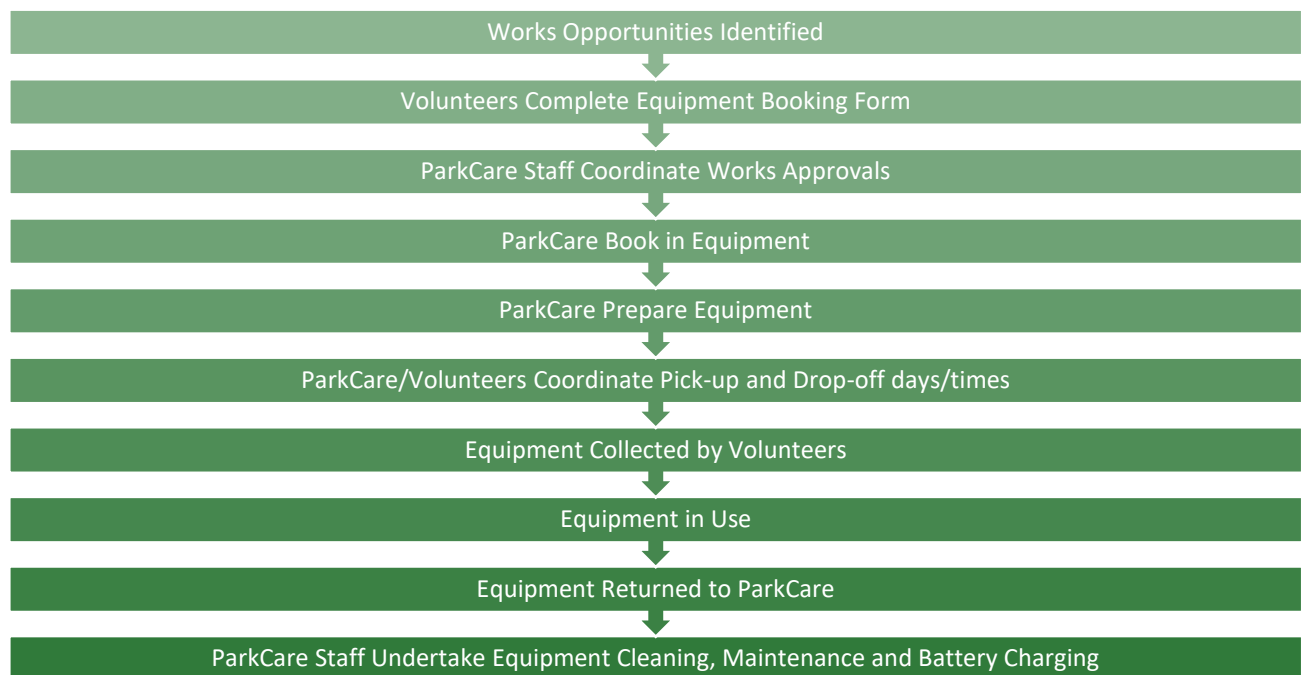
Through working with City Presentation and the EBMs of both City Presentation and PCS, key agreements were made as part of the in-principle support to undertake the trial program. These included:

- Volunteers would only be able to use equipment loaned and maintained by the ACT Government
- Power tool use would be limited to five specific tools, with specific attachment types (this includes brush cutters with two attachment options, pruning/reciprocating saws, hedge trimmers [no extension poles], self-propelled mowers and drills [no auger or other style attachments])
- Only battery-powered tools are to be used
- Volunteers must undertake the induction before they are able to use power tools

Tool Loan Process

Managing power tool loan requests can be a time intensive process for ACT Government staff, and appropriate procedures were put in place to coordinate loans.

It was identified that it took staff roughly two hours to coordinate a power tool loan request, following the below process:



Trial Program Findings

Trial Program Engagement

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49 volunteers participated in the trial program



57 loan requests were processed during the trial



Weekends were the most popular for tool use



Pruning Saws and Brush Cutters were the most in-demand resources

During this time, PCS received requests to loan equipment to groups that worked across both PCS/UPP land, for UPP activities, or for non-PCS land in general. PCS had to reject these given they were strictly only resourced to supply equipment for PCS managed land activities.

Resource Requirements

Training:

- Training involves 2 hours of in-class theory followed by 4 hours to supply PPE, travel the short distance to the practical site, provide on-ground examples of use and then undertake individual practical assessments of each volunteer.

- Currently, it takes 3-4 staff members one full business day to train a maximum of 12 volunteers. This includes preparation of equipment, delivery of training and the wash-down of vehicles and equipment post-training.
- Due to shift-based rostering, this limits training to a Wednesday when all ParkCare staff are on shift.
- The cost is estimated at \$1,260 of staff time (based on 3 staff) and additionally requires the allocation of depot meeting room facilities, several government vehicles, and the full suite of power tools inventory of ParkCare.

Tools and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

- ParkCare currently stocks, at an approximate value of \$15,000:
 - 4 brush cutters and harnesses
 - 8 pruning/reciprocating saws
 - 2 hedge trimmers
 - 1 self-propelled mower
 - 2 drills
 - Associated batteries, spare batteries and chargers
 - Stock of consumables including replacement blades, drill bits, trimmer maintenance items
- Volunteers are supplied with their own PPE, including helmet, face shield, hearing protection, eye protection and gloves, at a cost of roughly \$55 per volunteer.
- Significant storage space is required to manage power tool loans, including for the storage of equipment, consumables, signage, and a battery charging station to ensure there is adequate supply of charged batteries ready for each loan.
- Maintenance costs of tools and equipment must also be considered. This includes the ongoing replacement of consumable parts, and official servicing of brush cutters, hedge trimmers and self-propelled mowers by the manufacturer.

Staff Time:

- It is estimated that it takes one staff member an average of 2 hours to process a loan from start (booking) to finish (maintenance).
 - This includes responding to booking requests, coordinating approvals and collection/drop-off logistics, managing battery charging systems, preparing tools for loan, wash down of tools post-loan for biosecurity, maintenance of tools post-loan and the logistics of ongoing maintenance and consumable replacements.
- It is important to note this figure does not include any staff time involved in the removal of weed debris from site when needed.

Feedback & Learnings

Volunteers were required to provide regular feedback as part of their involvement in the trial program, and the ParkCare team also recorded learnings throughout the course of the trial.

What worked well:

- The implementation of the trial program and access to power tools was positively received by the volunteer community
- The induction training was commended as being professional, at an appropriate level and providing confidence in power tool use

Feedback responded to:

- Immediate issues in the delay of processing loans, and lengthy approval timelines caused issues in the first portion of the trial. The ParkCare team adapted administrative processes and streamlined approvals to improve efficiencies
- Short battery life, particularly for brush cutters, saw issues for multi-day loans. ParkCare updated documentation and sought and actioned approvals to issue battery charging devices with loans
- ParkCare staff also provided feedback to the volunteer community, ensuring that volunteers were adhering to the appropriate procedures, including providing enough information when requesting equipment and getting approvals, and only collecting/dropping off equipment at pre-allocated times.

Feedback not actioned:

- ParkCare received requests for long-term loans, or for volunteers to self-supply their own equipment, associated feedback also included:
 - Tools being made available at all PCS depot sites, not only the site the ParkCare staff are based at
 - One volunteer requested shorter term loans
 - Other volunteers identified the ease of the drop-off and collection process
- One volunteer expressed frustration in not being able to use chainsaws as part of the trial process
- One volunteer group provided a suggestion to have an improved booking system where volunteers can actively see equipment availability to help coordinate their works

These items of feedback are reflected in the recommendations section of the report.

No Workplace, Health and Safety (WHS) incidents were reported throughout the course of the trial program. No information through informal channels of under-reporting were heard either, which was identified as a risk in implementing the trial program.

Summary

The Volunteer Use of Power Tools trial program delivered positive results for ParkCare volunteers. The activity recognised the works of volunteers and their capabilities in the field and provided more effective and efficient weed removal mechanisms that reduced risk of over-use injury.

With the appropriate resourcing, the broader delivery of power tool use for ACT Environmental Volunteers will be of significant benefit to the ACT community.