

OREGON COAST AQUARIUM VOLUNTEER DIVE PROGRAM

Becoming a Volunteer Diver

Joining the Volunteer Dive Team –Qualified divers may join our volunteer dive team by attending an aquarium diver recruit training course conducted at the Aquarium, plus attending an orientation course. Though not required, all volunteer divers are also encouraged to attend a 30 hour training program conducted by the aquarium (see optional training below) to achieve the maximum experience.

Required Training:

1. Diver Recruit Training – The Habitat Diver Certification Course

An Oregon Coast Aquarium “Habitat Diver” course has been developed specifically to meet the needs of the dive program here at the Aquarium, and is required of all prospective volunteer divers. This is a specialty certification course through PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors). The curriculum includes watermanship/scuba skills evaluation, underwater naturalist, plus habitat diving and tending techniques. The course includes classroom sessions, pool sessions, and Aquarium habitat dives and requires about 3-4 days to complete. It is typically scheduled in concert with the Orientation Course (see below). Upon completion of the Habitat Diver Training course we will sit down with recruits and discuss volunteering opportunities and scheduling, invite suitably qualified divers to attend an Orientation Course to join the program, or offer options for remedial training to those that still might need more experience or skill development. The cost for the course is \$175. Prerequisites are listed below.

2. Orientation Course– The orientation course will typically be scheduled along with the Habitat Diver Certification course and is a one day program. This course includes an induction session on the history, structure and mission of the Aquarium; volunteer program benefits, policies and procedures; a tour of the Aquarium behind the scenes; incident and emergency management procedures; role of the surface tender and shift captain; a session on animal husbandry techniques and water quality; scientific diving; shark diving policies/techniques; a shark behavior observation session; and a tour of diving exhibits in the main building galleries, aviary and mammals. Upon successful completion of the Orientation Course divers will become members of the volunteer diver program and assigned to a shift schedule that suits the diver’s and the aquarium’s needs. There is no cost for this course.

Optional Training: The Aquarium also offers a 30-hour course of training which is optional for volunteer divers and required for all other volunteers. Beginning in March, every Tuesday evening for ten weeks, trainees attend a 6-9 p.m. class held in the Aquarium’s theatre. The fall training begins in September and are conducted on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Staff and experienced volunteers give talks about the animals, habitat, and marine biology of the Oregon coast as well as the animals exhibited in the Aquarium. There are also components dedicated to the development of interpretive skills. Divers who wish to attend this optional training are asked to contact the Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Leslie Lythgoe, 541-867-3474 ext 5316, leslie.lythgoe@aquarium.org.

Prerequisites –Volunteer recruits must hold Advanced Open Water certification (or equivalent), have a minimum of 25 logged dives, cold water diving experience, and be cleared medically fit to dive by a physician. As a minimum, divers are expected to possess an Advanced Open Water Diver level of diving knowledge and have good to excellent diving and watermanship skills. Divers must possess current First Aid, CPR and Oxygen Provider certification, or obtain it within 2 months of commencement. Divers must also have and maintain Divers Alert Network membership (this provides emergency evacuation insurance coverage) but are strongly encouraged to hold D.A.N. medical insurance at minimally the standard level of coverage (which provides medical coverage for the treatment of diving accidents). Currently the standard plan insurance (which includes D.A.N. membership) is \$54 per year. You can get more information on membership, insurance, benefits and training opportunities at www.diversalertnetwork.com

Equipment Needs- Volunteer divers provide the following equipment: mask, fins, thermal protection, buoyancy compensator, and regulator. Thermal protection includes drysuit (with appropriate undergarments) or wetsuit, plus gloves, hood, and boots as needed. The aquarium provides steel cylinders for the divers and an assortment of soft weights that can be loaded into an integrated system on a BC (which you provide) or divers can use one of the aquarium provided weight harnesses or weight belts.

Scheduling – Volunteer diver positions require a commitment of at least one 6–7 hr shift every three weeks. Each team has a shift captain (lead diver) assigned by the Dive Safety Officer. The day of the week you volunteer is determined by your availability and the Aquarium’s needs. We are committed to providing a quality volunteer diving experience and believe we can do this best within the structure of teams. Committing to a fixed schedule and becoming a part of that team will be of most benefit to all involved.

Commitment – We are asking you to commit a minimum of one full year to the Aquarium. We realize that this is a major commitment, and we want you to consider it carefully. Do you have that much time? Is it important to you? We are happy to answer your questions before you make that final decision. Most of our divers stay well beyond the requested one year, but that is the minimum commitment we ask of you.

Contacts– For more information on the volunteer dive program you can contact our Dive Safety Officer, Vallorie Hodges, 541-867-3474 ext 5302, val.hodges@aquarium.org or Bob Carskadon, Dive Program Assistant, 541 867-3474 ext 5302, bob.carskadon@aquarium.org

If you would like more information on the Aquarium’s interpretive volunteer program or the optional 12 week training, contact our Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Leslie Lythgoe, 541-867-3474 ext 5316, leslie.lythgoe@aquarium.org.