

Introduction

Welcome to the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center! This packet will include important information about our facility and expectations you should have working with our organization. Please read through this packet in its entirety to make sure that you and our organization will be a good fit!

Who Are We?

The Blue Ridge Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit, full-service wildlife hospital and educational organization, and utilizes volunteers and interns alongside our trained staff to achieve the goals of rehabilitating and releasing native Virginia wildlife back to the wild. We do not receive funding from the state or federal government. We're currently the only wildlife-exclusive hospital in the Northern Virginia area and do not charge for our services, meaning the primary method we fund our work is through private donations and fundraisers!

As a Wildlife Hospital, we have full-time veterinary staff to intake new patients and provide medical care, and rehabilitation staff and volunteers to provide daily care to the animals we treat. We offer educational programs to the public with biofacts and non-releasable animal ambassadors that represent their species to audiences of all ages and backgrounds. We also partner with other organizations to take part in research projects to further studies regarding wildlife health, diseases, and other pertinent information.

As a volunteer or intern, YOU make all of this possible! Your dedication and selfless giving of your time and effort allows us to multiply our resources to care for over 3,500 animals a year. For every hour given to feed a baby squirrel, prepare diets for the next day, or clean a cage so that a new animal can be moved outside, you are giving a wild animal another chance to return to the wild.

So what is working at a Wildlife Center like?

Working at a wildlife facility is 75-90% janitorial. This means that the majority of work done here is spent cleaning – whether it's cleaning cages for new patients, cleaning dishes for diet preparation, cleaning laundry that we use between animals, or cleaning the facility to prepare for the next day. Cleaning is incredibly important in keeping our current patients healthy and less stressed, preventing potential disease spread, and overall increases their chances of being released. Just as with anything we care for and maintain, the more we take care of the Center and its rooms and enclosures, the longer these things will last and allow us to care for the animals needing our help. Volunteers will also be expected to pick up and handle animal feces, deceased animals, food animals that may need chopping (mice, rats, quail, fish, etc.), and other tasks that may make some uncomfortable. Volunteers are trained based on their attention to detail, ability to follow instruction, show of commitment, and willingness to learn. No previous experience is necessary to work with us. The animals we see are highly seasonal – our baby season, which consists primarily of baby mammals and songbirds, starts in early March and extends through August into early September, while a higher percentage of our intakes are adult patients from September through February. There is no guarantee that you will be trained on all of our animals or species – training is determined by our staff on a case-by-case basis.

Volunteer Expectations and Requirements:

Volunteers should be enthusiastic, hard-working, and able to work in all weather types. Hospital Animal Care volunteers need to be able to climb stairs, as we have two floors in our hospital, and be able to lift at least 20 lbs.

Volunteers should bring a refillable water bottle and lunch/snacks with them, including their own utensils if necessary. We have a refrigerator, freezer, microwave, coffee pot, and water coolers for volunteer use, as well as small lockers to store any items you bring with you.

Volunteer Shifts

We require our volunteers to commit to at least one 4-5 hour shift one day per week, every week, for a minimum of 6 months. Individuals who are unable to commit to this time frame are not eligible to participate in BRWC's Hospital Animal Care volunteer program at this time.

Our shifts are as follows:

AM Shift (March – September) 8am – 1pm (October – February) 9am – 1pm

PM Shift (March – September) 1pm – 6pm (October – February) 1pm – 5pm.

All Day 8/9am - 5/6pm

As a volunteer, we understand you are giving us your free time, and most of you have social lives, work, families, etc. If you know you have shifts you will not be able to make ahead of time, please note on the calendar in the kitchen the days you will not be in, or e-mail staff when you know so we can plan accordingly.

We also understand that sometimes, life happens! If you can't make it to your shift due to illness, family emergency, car problems, etc. - please e-mail staff ASAP, or call and leave a voicemail as soon as you're able.

A no-call no-show will result in follow-up by staff to make sure your chosen shift time still works for you. **A second no-call no-show will result in termination of your volunteer status**, with exceptions for illness/emergencies.

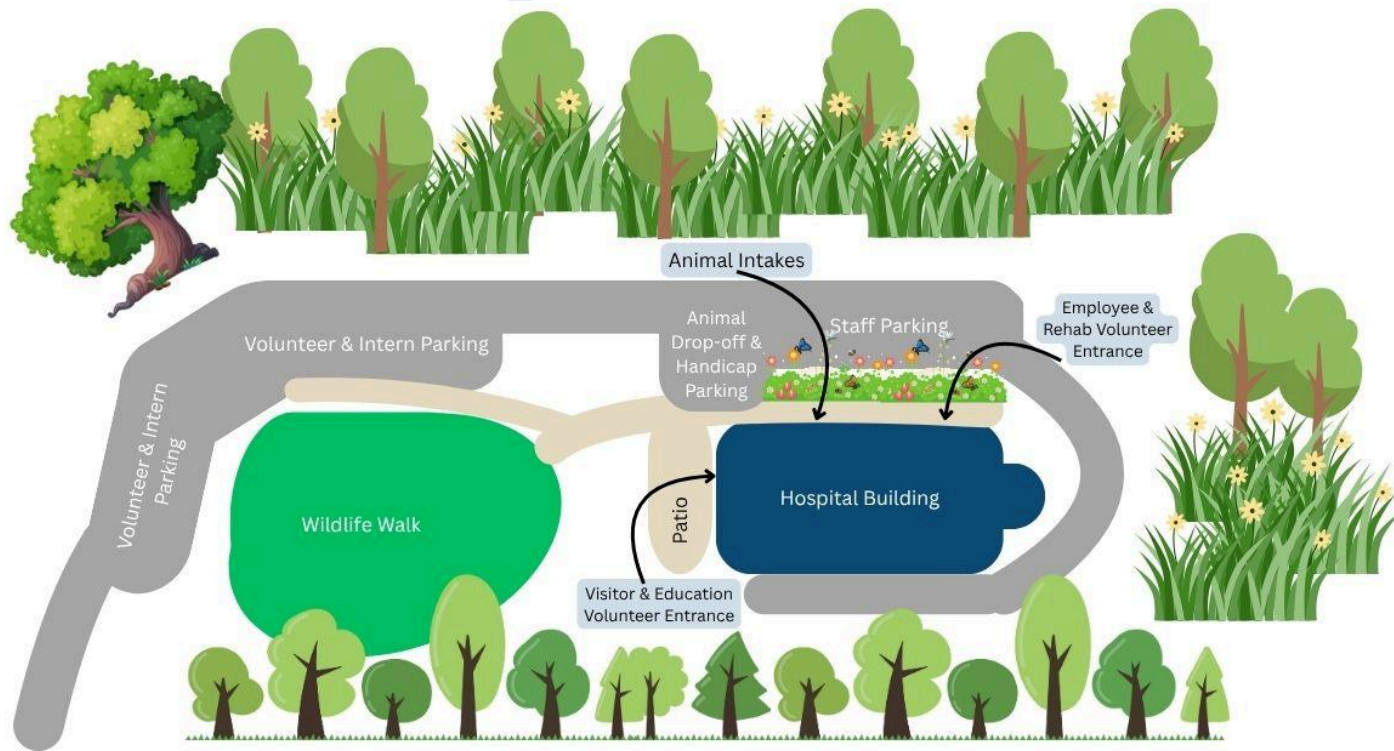
Dress & Parking Requirements

Volunteers & interns are required to wear closed-toed shoes at all times. T-shirts and shorts are allowed, but no short-shorts or crop tops. We recommend volunteers wear clothes that are comfortable and functional, but are items that will not be missed if stained with bleach or torn, etc. Please wear clothes that are suitable for both inside and outside work according to the weather.

Earbuds are only allowed to be utilized in non-animal areas (kitchen, laundry, etc.) and only one earbud at a time.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our facility requires the wearing of NONCLOTH masks, preferably N95s or KN95s, to help protect each other and our patients from the transmission of COVID-19. This is not only a hospital policy, but a state permit policy specifically for working with mammals. If you are unwilling to wear a mask during your volunteer shift, with the exception of being outside of the hospital or while eating or drinking, then you are not eligible for a hospital care position at this time.

Volunteers should park by the Wildlife Walk (the fenced in area) in the parking area. Parking spots directly in front of the building are for animal drop-offs, education event parking, handicap parking, and staff only, unless otherwise noted.



Vaccinations

We recommend being up to date on your tetanus vaccination and have great use for volunteers and interns who have received their pre-exposure rabies vaccines. Please note that anyone who has not had a pre-exposure rabies vaccine or does not have proof of a rabies titer in the last 2 years will not be allowed to handle any **Rabies Vector Species (RVS)** which are: raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, bats, foxes, porcupines, and beavers, as well as any carnivores (Bobcats, weasels, etc.) Volunteers without a pre-exposure vaccine or proof of rabies titer will still be allowed to learn how to care for all potential bird species, reptiles, amphibians, and our small mammals (squirrels, opossums, and eastern cottontails). **All bites from mammals, RVS or not, should be reported immediately to staff.**

We also highly recommend getting your seasonal flu and COVID-19 shot. Avian Influenza is a zoonotic disease that we are seeing more of, and your seasonal flu shot can potentially provide protection against Avian Influenza or prevent mutation between human and avian influenza strains. COVID-19 has also been found to be zoonotic, being able to be transmitted both from animals to people but also vice versa. To help protect YOUR health and the health of our staff and patients, we recommend getting your seasonal booster against COVID-19 to help protect against new variants. At this time, these vaccinations are NOT a requirement, but we DO require wearing masks when in our hospital or in enclosures housing patients.

If you cannot meet the physical requirements necessary for a Hospital Animal Care volunteer position, please consider Transport, Welcome Desk, or Event volunteer positions. These volunteer positions are still extremely important for the functioning of the facility, and your

donated time still allows us to care for animals, educate more people, fundraise, and coordinate events! Please see our Volunteer tab on our website for details on what is expected of these other positions.

Our Patients and their Rehab Journey

Keeping Wildlife Wild

Wildlife are exactly that - wild! Because of this, handling of our wild patients is vastly different than handling domestic animals. These animals do not see us as caregivers or friends, but rather predators or, at best, vessels through which they may receive food. Stress can kill, and so we make sure to only handle/interact with our patients when absolutely necessary - during exams, while medicating, feeding, or cleaning enclosures. This means we do not allow any cuddling, "peeking in" at patients, excessive and loud talking to patients or in patient rooms, or any other behavior that would otherwise be a detriment to the welfare of our patients. For some patients, this may also mean obscuring our faces during care, which may require the wearing of a suit, mask, hat, or other method to prevent imprinting or habituation by said animal onto people.

Euthanasia

Because our wild patients must be able to function at their best once they are released, many patients that come into our care have injuries or debilitations that would not allow them to survive in the wild. While a small percentage of wild animals can be happy and successful as ambassadors in captivity, the majority of these animals cannot. Many injuries can lead to chronic pain, discomfort, behavioral issues, and the majority of wild animals are exactly that – wild. Their instinct to avoid humans causes stress, which can lead to illness or further injury. Quality of life and welfare is more important than forcing an animal to live for human benefit. We are also not a sanctuary - our purpose is to release wildlife back to the wild, not keep every single one that can't be released. Euthanasia is a humane method to end an animal's life, and is done by our veterinary staff to the highest welfare standards for our patients. While none of our staff got into this work to euthanize animals, it is sometimes the kindest thing we can offer to suffering patients.

In some cases, euthanasia is required for healthy animals - this could be due to rabies exposures to people or domestic pets, animals crossing state lines, or nonnative/invasive species being brought to our facility. In these cases, we are required per our permits to humanely euthanize these animals.

You are never required to be in the room while this is occurring, but we encourage you to ask questions and understand how our staff came to the decision for our euthanasia patients.

Invasive/Non-native Species

As a Wildlife Center with limited funds and resources, we only rehabilitate native animals that can be released back into the wild. Because of this, as well as state laws prohibiting doing so, **we do not care for European Starlings, House Sparrows, or Rock Doves (Pigeons), or any other species the State of Virginia considers invasive/non-native.** While we don't encourage finders to bring us nonnative or invasive species just because of their nonnative status, if they come into our care, we are only able to humanely euthanize them. However, in

cases where these animals are injured, orphaned, or ill, we will advise they come in so that we may at least prevent further suffering to them through euthanasia.

Despite being nonnative, **it is illegal in Virginia for anyone to raise, rehabilitate, and release or keep nonnative/invasive species**, so we cannot advise members of the public to do this, or give these animals back to finders after they're admitted into our care. Only those with exhibitor's permits AND specific permission from the state may keep invasive species for educational purposes, not including coyotes or nutria.

Many people who attempt to raise these animals themselves over fear of having them euthanized don't have previous professional training or knowledge of how to care for these animals, which often leads to metabolic bone disease, aspiration and pneumonia, stunted growth, skin infections, and often, death. It would be inhumane for us to actively advise these animals be left in these situations knowing the likely outcome, and also illegal for us to do so.

Note about Outdoor Cats: As a wildlife center that sees on average 15% of our 3,500+ intakes brought in due to confirmed cat attacks, and as an organization that follows current scientific understanding of the impacts of outdoor and feral cats, we do not condone outdoor cats or TNR (Trap-neuter-release) efforts as they currently stand, due to the inhumane conditions that outdoor and feral cats face when left outside unsupervised and uncontained and the impact they have on native wildlife. Please be aware that during your time at our organization, you will hear staff discussing this topic often, which can be difficult for some people to accept. We understand this is a highly controversial topic, but we request that you keep an open mind, otherwise this may not be the best fit.

Releases

If an animal makes a full recovery, we try to get them back to the area from which they came if possible, especially adults who have territories, nests, family, and/or mates, or reptiles & amphibians who legally must be released within a quarter mile of their exact found location. If they cannot be returned due to the finder not allowing it, or they're babies and not reptiles, they can be released in the county in which they were rehabilitated (Clarke), or at a different location with permission from the landowner near to where they were found (same county). If you would like to take part in releasing, please let our staff know – you will need to also be listed as a Transport Volunteer to allow you to do this.

Please note that, other than turtles, we do NOT allow handling of animals being released by volunteers/interns other than opening their transport container for them to leave of their own accord. Violation of this policy may impact your continued standing as a volunteer/intern with our organization.

Zoonotic Diseases

Wildlife can be infected with and spread a variety of zoonotic diseases (those that can be spread from animals to humans) through various means (fecal-oral, airborne transmission, direct contact, etc.), so proper PPE (personal protective equipment, such as latex/nitrile gloves, masks, gowns, etc.) and hygiene are required when handling animals or in animal care areas. Required PPE may differ between species. There is no human food prep or eating in animal care areas, including the kitchen. Please wash your hands often - after using the bathroom, after directly handling animals, or after handling animal laundry/dishes/furniture. The following list of diseases are simply the most common ones our wildlife can spread – there are many more not listed here for time and space's sake:

- Rabies
- Baylisascaris procyonis (“Raccoon Roundworm”)
- Salmonella
- Cryptosporidiosis
- Coccidia

Many diseases can also be transferred from wildlife to domestic animals, like parvovirus and distemper – we recommend wearing proper PPE or changing clothes when returning home, and keeping pets up to date on vaccinations to protect pets from any potential transfer of diseases. Wildlife are inherently dangerous to work with, so we ask that you do not try to handle any animal without being trained first or put yourself into any situation in which you feel unprepared or unsafe. Many animals can bite or talon through PPE like leather welding gloves, and others still have strong wings that can injure you if not handled properly. If you ever feel uncomfortable with handling an animal or enclosure that you’ve been assigned, please speak up to staff to let them know and we can either assist you with their care, advise you on better tips and techniques, or reassess and potentially make that animal/enclosure staff-only if appropriate.

Permits

We rehabilitate and house wildlife thanks to permits issued to us by the state and federal government. Our permits also allow us to keep feathers, bones, and bodies of deceased wildlife for the purpose of education or imping, all of which cannot leave our possession. Taking home native bird feathers is illegal without a permit according to the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Doing so can jeopardize our permits and abilities to help wildlife in need, so taking any native animal products from BRWC is strictly prohibited.

As a sub-permittee under our facility permits as a Category 3A (wildlife teaching hospital), you are only allowed to handle wildlife here at the Center, and only animals that we have authorized for you to handle in a written letter that will be kept in your volunteer file on site. Breaking wildlife laws outside of the Center will result in direct termination of your volunteer status, but could also have negative consequences on the Center’s permit status. Please be mindful of the laws surrounding wildlife – ask a staff member if you have any questions.

If you would like to become a Home Rehabilitator, we’d love to discuss this with you! Staff can discuss with you how to become sponsored and the expectations and requirements of becoming a home rehabilitator. We’re always looking to help expand the network of home rehabilitators and would be happy to help you pursue that process.

Rehabilitator Code Of Ethics

1. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to achieve high standards of animal care through knowledge and an understanding of the field. Individuals must make an effort to be informed of current rehabilitation information, methods, and regulations through participation in continuing education.

2. A wildlife rehabilitator should be responsible, conscientious, and dedicated, and should work continuously toward improving the quality of care given to wild animals undergoing rehabilitation.

3. A wildlife rehabilitator must abide by local, state, provincial and federal laws concerning wildlife, wildlife rehabilitation, and associated activities.
4. A wildlife rehabilitator should establish safe work habits and conditions, abiding by current health and safety practices at all times.
5. A wildlife rehabilitator should acknowledge limitations and enlist the assistance of a veterinarian and other trained professionals when appropriate.
6. A wildlife rehabilitator should respect other rehabilitators and persons in related fields, sharing skills and knowledge in the spirit of cooperation for the welfare of animals.
7. A wildlife rehabilitator should place optimum animal care above personal gain.
8. A wildlife rehabilitator should strive to provide professional and humane care in all phases of wildlife rehabilitation, protecting the welfare, respecting the wildness, and maintaining the dignity of each animal in life and in death. Releasable animals should be maintained in a wild condition and released as soon as appropriate. Nonreleasable animals have a right to euthanasia.
9. A wildlife rehabilitator should encourage community support and involvement through volunteer training and public education. The common goal should be to promote a responsible concern for living beings and the welfare of the environment.
10. A wildlife rehabilitator should work from a foundation of sound ecological principles, incorporating appropriate conservation ethics and an attitude of stewardship.
11. A wildlife rehabilitator should conduct all business, activities, and communications in a professional manner, with honesty, integrity, compassion, and commitment, realizing that an individual's conduct reflects on the entire field of wildlife rehabilitation.

Policies

The following policies should be read through completely - any issues with any policies should be brought to staff attention immediately. Acknowledgment and agreement to said policies will be confirmed in a follow-up online form.

Public Media Release Policy

By signing this policy, you are permitting the BRWC to take photos/videos while on BRWC property to be used in social media or other public or private media, to include but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, The BRWC Ridgeline, YouTube, TikTok, and any other media form BRWC should choose to use. If you do not sign this policy, BRWC staff will not be permitted to take photos/videos of you for BRWC use.

_____ Date: _____

Volunteer Safety and Indemnification

Volunteers should be aware that wildlife can be unpredictable and can cause harm to people in a variety of ways, whether through biting, taloning, scratching, hitting with wings, or other means. Wildlife can also carry a variety of diseases as mentioned previously in this handbook, many of which can be zoonotic and affect people.

Only those with proof of pre-exposure rabies vaccination or titer within the last 2 years may handle rabies vector species, to include: foxes, raccoons, skunks, groundhogs, bats, mink, weasels, otters, beaver, porcupine, and any other animals in the Order Carnivora.

We do not allow handling of patients without specific training and clearance by staff on each species and age of wildlife. **It is your responsibility to evaluate your level of comfort and current training when working at BRWC and voice these concerns to staff should you be uncomfortable or not trained on your assigned shift** so that we may either train you, give further training advice, or reassign you.

In consideration of being permitted to volunteer at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, and in consideration of the training and experience provided to the volunteer, I hereby agree to indemnify and hold forever harmless the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, their agents, trustees, and employees, from any and all liability resulting in injury or death to myself or my minor child, named below, sustained while working at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center or participating in volunteer program activities sponsored by the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

I further understand that such activities involve the risk of injury, disease, or death, and agree to assume said risks being fully aware of the dangers posed by such activities.

I have read the foregoing and understand the contents of this agreement.

_____ **Date:** _____

Photography/Videography

In order to maintain a responsible and ethical presence on social media, **we do not allow pictures/videos to be taken behind the scenes within the hospital and shared on personal social media pages without exclusive Staff permission.** You may take pictures/videos of patients if concerned with injury or illness to show to staff. All photos/videos taken at BRWC are the property of BRWC and may be used on BRWC social media pages. Posts from BRWC pages may be shared on your personal pages with appropriate credit. Taking & sharing photos/videos at public releases & education events are permitted.

Please keep in mind the following when given permission to take pictures in any circumstances:

- Taking pictures should not cause excessive stress or handling of that animal, nor compromise the safety of the animal or person.
- Pictures should not include excessive fecal matter, dirty enclosures, lack of proper PPE, cuddling, or other inappropriate behavior for wildlife.

If found in violation of any part of our photo policy, you will be given a warning & asked to remove any media in violation. If it happens a second time, your volunteer status will be terminated.

Please sign that you understand and agree to the photo policy above.

_____ Date: _____

Nondisclosure

As a volunteer at the Center you may hear or see things that are considered confidential or private information. We ask that you never share the names, phone numbers, addresses, emails or any other personal information of any staff, volunteers, interns, or member of the public associated with the Center, to include finder information. Any information not made accessible to the public by the Center should be kept at the Center.

You may also have friends or family reach out to you for wildlife advice. As all wildlife situations are different we ask that you refer them to the Center's wildlife hotline until you have been through hotline training.

If a member of the press (to include online blogs) reaches out to you for comment about anything related to the Center outside of your personal information and experience we ask that you refer them to a BRWC Staff Member.

Please sign that you understand and agree to the nondisclosure policy above.

_____ Date: _____

Attendance

We ask that you show up on time for all assigned shifts. If you are going to be late or are unable to come to your shift **please call or e-mail** the Center ASAP. If you have vacation or something planned that will prevent you from coming to your assigned shift please let us know as soon as the plans are made and mark it on the calendar. If you no-show/no-call twice in a row your volunteer status will be terminated.

Please sign that you understand and agree to the attendance policy above.

_____ Date: _____

Covid-19

1. Volunteers & interns must wear masks (no cloth masks - recommended KN95 or N95) during their volunteer shift inside the hospital or outside working directly with patients, except when eating or drinking.
2. Social distancing is encouraged as much as possible, including while eating indoors.
3. Hand washing & disinfecting inside the hospital is required between patients & before handling any human food.

Please let us know if any of the following apply at any time:

1. You or someone you share a home with has been displaying Covid-19 symptoms OR
2. You know you have been directly exposed to or share a home with someone who has tested positive or you yourself have tested positive for Covid-19.

If any of these apply to you, please let a staff member know before arriving for your volunteer shift, as we will want to postpone your volunteer activities according to CDC guidelines as to when is safest for you to return.

I have read through and understand the policies regarding COVID-19 for the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center:

_____ Date: _____

Training & Dismissal

Training at BRWC does not always follow a linear path - everyone starts in the same place, but depending on the season and our needs, you may be trained differently to others. To progress through your training, you must show your abilities to pay attention to detail, follow instruction, general situational awareness, and overall competency to be assessed at the discretion of staff. Your progression through your training is entirely reliant on our staff's assessment and is in no way guaranteed. You may be held back or prohibited from further training if you are unable to meet these standards.

Our staff also has the right to terminate your volunteer status at-will should you violate any of our policies, or create a dangerous/hostile environment for our patients or personnel, or if staff determines volunteering is no longer a net benefit for both parties. If you have questions or concerns about training progress or areas of improvement, staff members will be happy to discuss these with you.

Please sign that you understand and agree to the training policy above.

_____ Date: _____

Medical & Emergency Information

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address:

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Age: _____ Birth date: _____

Pre-exposure Rabies Vaccine: YES / NO If yes: Date of vaccination _____

Date of last titer / booster _____

Please answer the following questions: Are you in good health: (Circle One) YES NO

Do you have any allergies? (Circle One) YES NO If yes, please list them:

Are you on any medications? (Circle One) YES NO If yes, please list:

Please list any medical problems or limitations that you may have that might effect your activities at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center.

In Case of Emergency, Notify:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

Relationship: _____

Name & Phone of Physician: _____

Signature of Acknowledgment

I have fully read and to the best of my ability understand the content of this document. I have signed all policies to which I agree and left blank to which I disagree. I understand that these policies may change at any given time by BRWC staff.

Date: _____