How do I?

An occasional series

This week: POTA Parks On The Air
Part 1 Getting Started

Parks On The Air, or POTA as it is more commonly called, began in 2017. By now, it has become one of the more popular operating activities.

Please see Parks on the Air | POTA | Parks program for amateur radio.

They also have:

A Facebook group	https://pota.app/facebook
A Slack Channel	https://pota.app/slack
Twitter:	https://mobile.twitter.com/potaspots
Mastodon	https://mastodon.radio/@parksontheair

In 2017 the American Radio Relay League ARRL ran a year-long event called National Parks On The Air. This event was designed to encourage portable operation in particular and by being visible in public places, help publicize amateur radio. As that event ended, some advocates created POTA. POTA is not only the national parks, but state parks, and wildlife refuges as well.

POTA has expanded to many countries, athough the majority of the locations are in the US.

POTA operations consist of two parts: ACTIVATORS and HUNTERS.

The Hunters can be located anywhere, but typically they operate from a home station. Hunters work the Activators and can gain credit for doing so. Hunters do not need to upload logs. The Activators do the logging.

Hunters have very few rules. From the POTA site:

- Follow the law.
- Follow the DX Code of Conduct.
- Follow the Golden Rule.

Activators actually go out in the field and operate from parks. This could be as simple as a new Technician licensee operating from a 2 meter or 10 meter mobile FM transceiver and a mobile antenna mounted on the vehicle, to a multi operator, multi station, multi HF band station. I believe the overwhelming majority of POTA operations involve 1 or 2 people, not necessarily operating simultaneously.

Activators have more rules: From the POTA site:

- Follow the law
- Follow the DX Code of Conduct
- Follow the Golden Rule
- Leave no trace
- Follow any instructions from park rangers you encounter
- Be courteous of the public space you are using
- You must have an account registered at https://pota.app
- You and all your equipment must be within the boundaries of the park(s)
- You must submit an ADIF log after your activation is complete.
- Follow the Rules detailed here: https://docs.pota.app

Sounds easy, right?

How do I know what parks qualify? From the POTA site:

Once familiar with the rules, head to the map https://pota.app/#/map. Allow location services to quickly zoom to your location, or use the drop-downs to choose an entity and location. The yellow dots are approximate locations of parks in your area. Check official sources (park websites etc.) and ensure you are within the park's boundary.

Spotting

You want people to find you. No fun not making QSOs! So in advance you can schedule an activation on the POTA Website. Once calling CQ POTA, spot yourself on the POTA website.

Or as the POTA site says:
Once you've chosen a location in the park, set up your gear, find a quiet frequency, and start calling CQ. While doing your initial CQ calls, you'll want to head to https://pota.app/ and click the button to add a spot. Once you've spotted yourself, the hunters will probably come fast and furious, so be prepared to start logging your QSOs!

Logging

For an ACTIVATOR, the entire exercise is pointless if you do not log it. While you can manually log QSOs in the field, the ONLY way you get credit for the activation, and the only way the HUNTERS get any credit, is if you upload an ADIF log file to the POTA site.

There are dozens of logging software programs that will generate an ADIF file. If you contest, you may be familiar with the N1MM+ and N3FJP software. Ham Radio Deluxe is a popular program as well. You can manually transcribe your log into the software, export the ADIF file and upload to POTA for credit. Or just take a laptop into the field. Many POTA activations

are “pop ups”. Someone has 30 to 60 minutes spare time and uses it to activate a park. A fully charged laptop is more than enough for logging those QSOs.

How popular is POTA? As I write this on a February Sunday morning, there are 48 active sites. Some in warm places like Arizona; many in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey. Spain and Great Britain seem well represented as well. Some activators are on phone, some CW and some digital modes, primarily FT8.

Please see Rules - Parks on the Air Documentation https://docs.pota.app/

Parks on the Air does not require a specific exchange in a QSO.

What is a valid park for activation?

Qualification of Parks, Trails, and Rivers for Addition to Parks on the Air

From the POTA website:

1st All new parks must be owned and operated by a State/Provincial or Federal/National agency. We do not include parks that have part/shared ownership, sponsorship, or are operated by private organizations, or local governments.

2nd To be considered for inclusion, the park muyst meet the above requirements and offer an informational website detailing current boundary maps.

3rd POTA does not create sub-parks within existing parks if both parks are owned and operated by the same State/Provincial or Federal/National agendy.

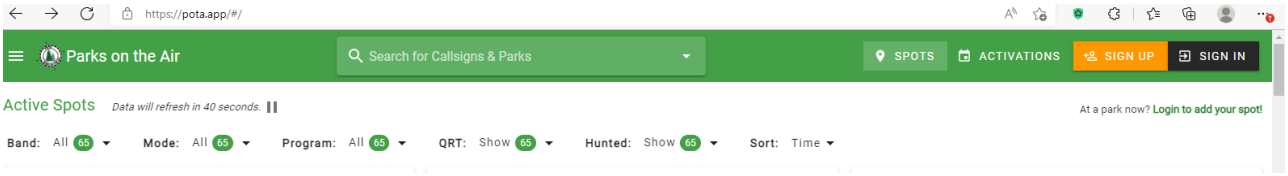
Please be aware that we are temporarily holding the entry of most new parks in the US, with an exception for newly commissioned parks.

Your best option is to make sure it is already listed in the https://pota app/#/map and has a POTA number.

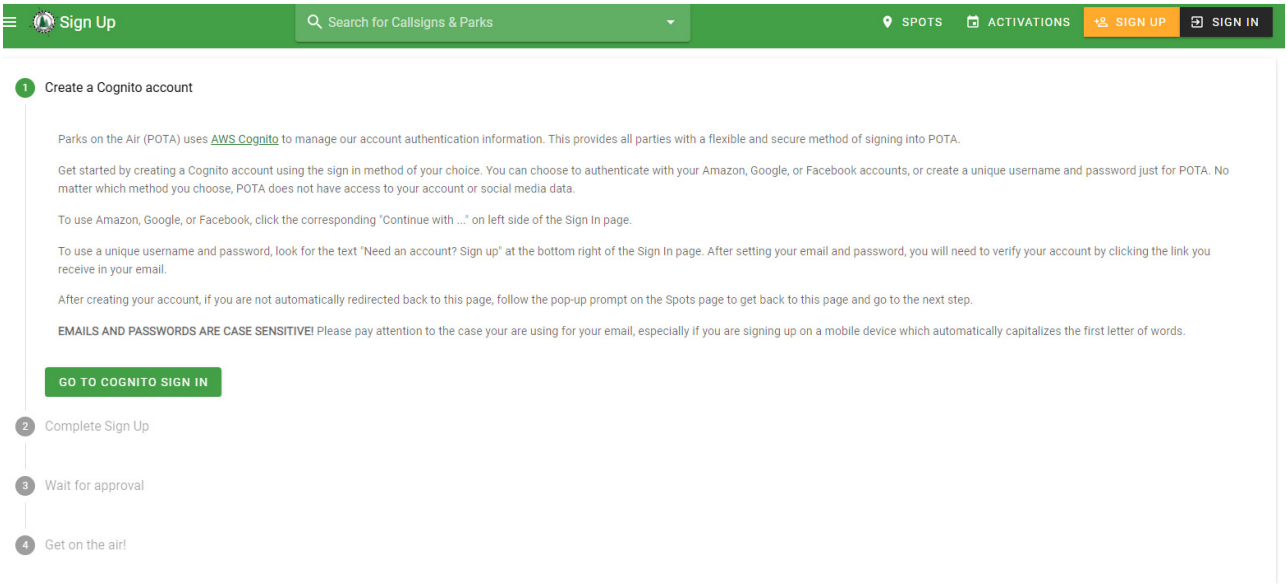
Ready to be an ACTIVATOR? Let’s go!

Ya read the rules. Let’s get an account.

Go to the Active Spots page.



Click on SIGN UP



This sounds scary, but it is OK. Go to the COGNITO Sign in

Sign In with your social account

Continue with Login with Amazon

Continue with Google

Continue with Facebook

We won't post to any of your accounts without asking first

or

Sign in with your email and password

Email

name@host.com

Password

Password

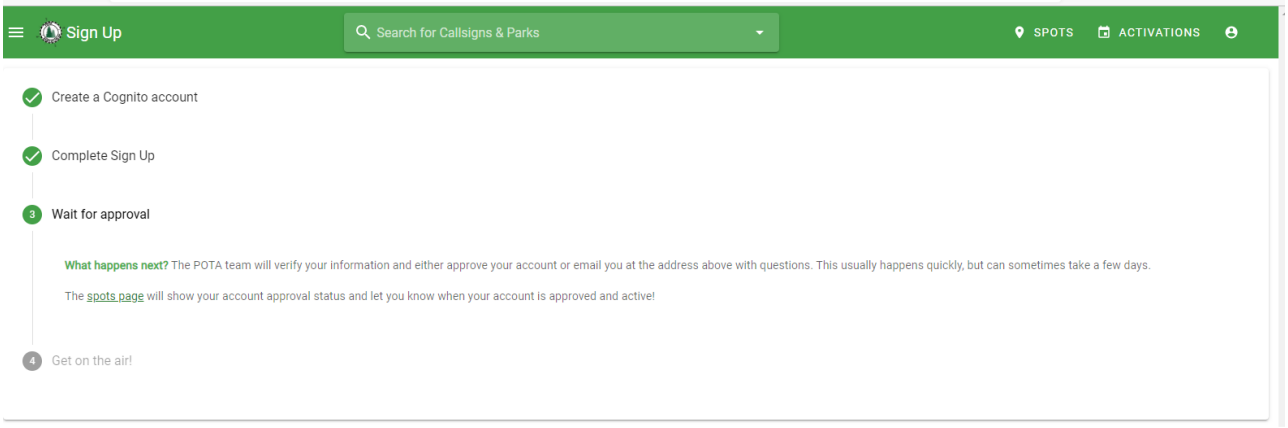
Forgot your password?

Sign in

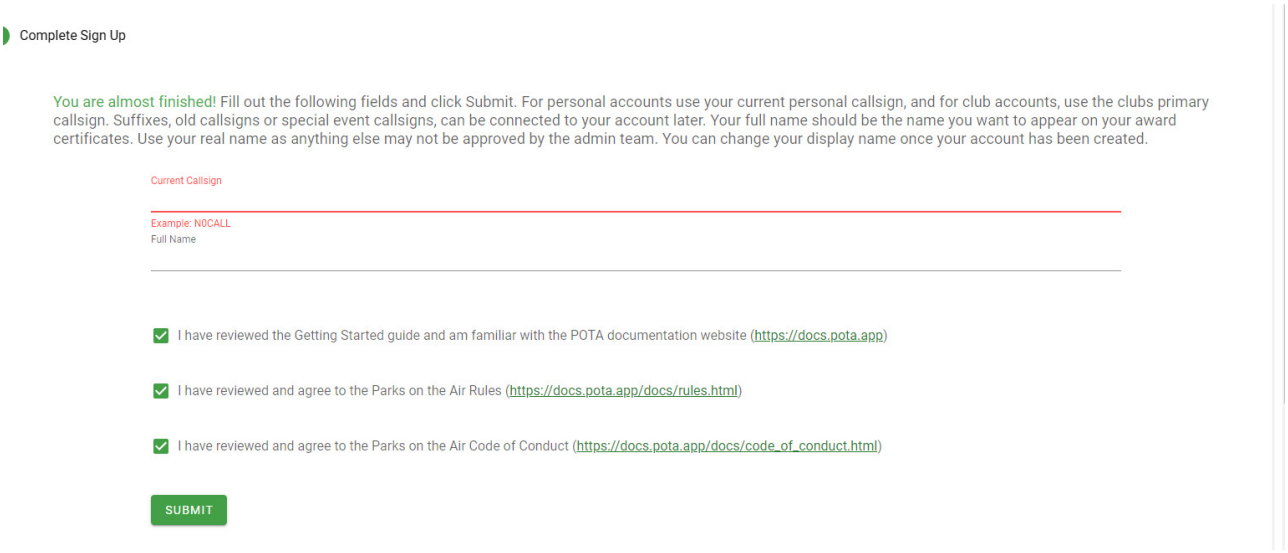
Need an account? Sign up

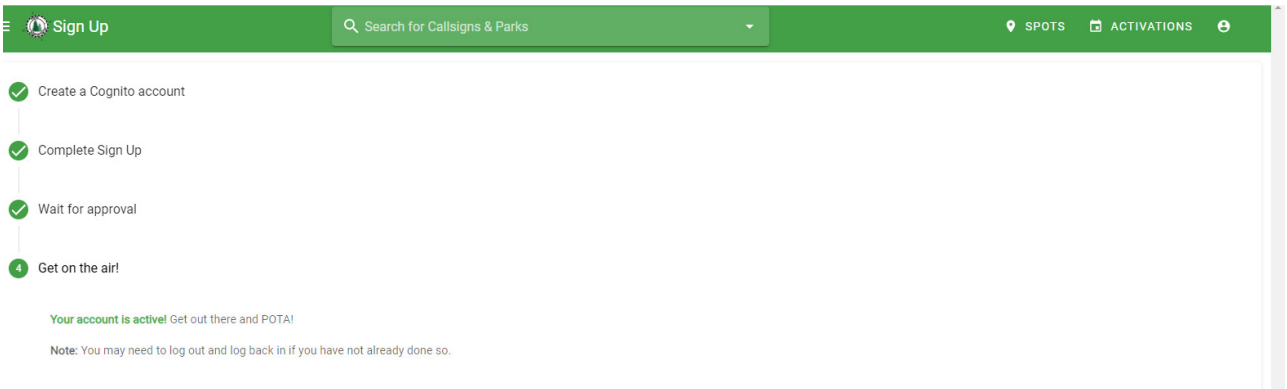
I am not going to recommend which option you choose from the above listings. The social accounts have advantages; having a stand-alone account has its advantages.

Once you log in:



Not being sure what to do, I went to the Spots page, saw a message I needed to complete the process and when I clicked on it, got this:





Approval took seconds and I saw the above.

In Part 2 and beyond (I am not sure yet how far this ***How Do I…*** series will go, we will find a park and get on the air!

See ‘ya on the air!