

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, although 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/) <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 must 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 agency.

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.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the POTA website. It includes a search bar for "Callsigns & Parks", a "SPOTS" button, an "ACTIVATIONS" button, a "SIGN UP" button, and a "SIGN IN" button. Below the navigation bar, there is a section for "Active Spots" with a refresh indicator. A filter bar is visible with dropdown menus for "Band", "Mode", "Program", "QRT", "Hunted", and "Sort".

Click on SIGN UP

The screenshot shows the "Sign Up" page. The navigation bar is similar to the home page but with "SIGN UP" highlighted. The main content area has a numbered list of steps: 1. Create a Cognito account, 2. Complete Sign Up, 3. Wait for approval, and 4. Get on the air! A green button labeled "GO TO COGNITO SIGN IN" is positioned below the first step. The text under the first step explains that POTA uses AWS Cognito for authentication and provides instructions on how to create an account using various methods.


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

Sign in with your email and password

Email

Password

or

[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:

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar with a green background. On the left, there is a hamburger menu icon and the text "Sign Up". In the center, there is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search for Callsigns & Parks". On the right, there are icons for "SPOTS", "ACTIVATIONS", and a user profile icon. Below the navigation bar, there is a vertical progress indicator with four steps: 1. Create a Cognito account (checked), 2. Complete Sign Up (checked), 3. Wait for approval (active), and 4. Get on the air! (not started). Under step 3, there is a text block: "What happens next? The POTA team will verify your information and either approve your account or email you at the address above with questions. This usually happens quickly, but can sometimes take a few days. The [spots page](#) will show your account approval status and let you know when your account is approved and active!".

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:

The screenshot shows the "Complete Sign Up" step. It features a green header with a right-pointing arrow and the text "Complete Sign Up". Below the header, there is a paragraph: "You are almost finished! Fill out the following fields and click Submit. For personal accounts use your current personal callsign, and for club accounts, use the clubs primary callsign. Suffixes, old callsigns or special event callsigns, can be connected to your account later. Your full name should be the name you want to appear on your award certificates. Use your real name as anything else may not be approved by the admin team. You can change your display name once your account has been created." Below this text are two input fields: "Current Callsign" and "Full Name", with "Example: NOCALL" shown next to the first field. There are three checkboxes, all of which are checked: "I have reviewed the Getting Started guide and am familiar with the POTA documentation website (<https://docs.pota.app>)", "I have reviewed and agree to the Parks on the Air Rules (<https://docs.pota.app/docs/rules.html>)", and "I have reviewed and agree to the Parks on the Air Code of Conduct (https://docs.pota.app/docs/code_of_conduct.html)". At the bottom of the form is a green "SUBMIT" button.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar, identical to the previous screenshot. Below it, the progress indicator shows all four steps completed: 1. Create a Cognito account (checked), 2. Complete Sign Up (checked), 3. Wait for approval (checked), and 4. Get on the air! (checked). Below the progress indicator, there is a text block: "Your account is active! Get out there and POTA!". Below that is a note: "Note: You may need to log out and log back in if you have not already done so."

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!