

Master Naturalist Volunteers Contribute to Natural Resource Education and Conservation



Program Overview



The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a volunteer training and service program providing education, outreach, and service to better manage natural resources and natural areas in Virginia. Volunteer training includes a minimum of 40 hours of classroom and field time in natural history and natural resource management. To become a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist, each volunteer must complete 40 hours of service in education, citizen science, or land stewardship. The program is sponsored jointly by Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Virginia Museum of Natural History, with additional support from the Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources and Forestry Department. In addition, the 25 program chapters across the state work with more than 150 local partners, including schools, nature centers, nonprofits, and local governments.



Currently, the program has 636 active volunteers. Since the program's inception in 2006, these volunteers have contributed 49,877 hours of service, with a value of \$1,001,535 to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

2008 Sample Local Accomplishments

Education

In 2008, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers completed more than 7116 hours of service on projects to educate the public about natural resources. Their programs reached nearly 21,000 children and adults. As one example, the Central Rappahannock Chapter is partnering with Mott's Run Nature Center, operated by Fredericksburg Parks and Recreation. The center is located at Mott's Run Reservoir and Recreation Area, an 860 acre natural area managed for both recreation and protection of a drinking water source. Master Naturalist volunteers staff the nature center to provide natural history information to the public. They answer questions about nature, lead visitors through interactive displays, and maintain a nature journal to track the flora and fauna in the area. The volunteers educated more than 900 visitors in 2008 and have allowed the center to serve more people by providing much needed weekend staffing.



Stewardship

In 2008, Virginia Master Naturalist completed more than 5200 hours of service on stewardship projects, such as habitat restoration. Their efforts positively impacted more than 2500 acres of land and more than 200 miles of trails in Virginia.

Invasive species were a particular area of focus for the program in 2008. 74 Master Naturalist volunteers were trained in 4 regional workshops equipping them to address invasive species issues in their communities. The impacts of these workshops are already apparent: workshop participants have educated others about invasives, worked to eradicate invasives on their own properties, and engaged in work days to remove invasive plants in public parks and natural areas. One Master Naturalist team in Bedford County launched an invasive species removal campaign for their Homeowner's Association. They led an educational program for other homeowners, conducted a survey for the invasive *Ailanthus* tree, and worked with the property owners to remove 50 *Ailanthus* trees in the neighborhood. Over the next several years, they plan to continue the work, educating more homeowners and eventually controlling *Ailanthus* throughout the 100 acre subdivision.

