



Virginia  
Master  
Naturalist

**Virginia Master Naturalist Program  
Volunteer Handbook and Policy Guidelines**

What Is the Virginia Master Naturalist Program? .....	3
Program Structure .....	3
Who Is a Virginia Master Naturalist? .....	4
How May The Title Be Used? .....	4
Certification Requirements .....	5
Training Requirements.....	5
Course Exams .....	7
Absenteeism.....	7
Advanced Training Requirements .....	7
Volunteer Service.....	8
Master Naturalist Volunteer Projects and Private Organizations and Landowners.....	9
Out-of State Volunteer Service .....	9
Volunteer Contribution Areas.....	10
Maintaining VMN Status .....	11
Reporting VMN Activities.....	11
VMNs and Relocation.....	11
Membership in Multiple Chapters .....	12
Recognizing VMN Volunteers .....	12
Contributions.....	12
Age Limits .....	12
Discipline and Removal of VMNs.....	13
Risk Management for VMN Activities.....	15
EO/AA and Program Compliance .....	15
Appendix I. Certification Matrix for Volunteers .....	19
Appendix II. Risk Management: Planning for the Best & the Worst .....	21
Appendix III. Incident Report Form .....	22
Appendix IV. Emergency Cards .....	23

# Virginia Master Naturalist Program Volunteer Handbook and Policy Guidelines

## What Is the Virginia Master Naturalist Program?

The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

At the state level, the Virginia Master Naturalist program is sponsored jointly by *Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)* the *Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF)*, the *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)*, the *Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF)* and the *Virginia Museum of Natural History (VMNH)*. Partnerships at the local level are encouraged and might include other public agencies, as well as private organizations whose interests are within the boundaries of the program.

The goals of the program are as follows:

1. Natural Resource Service. To provide, promote and fulfill volunteer service while recognizing and utilizing sound natural resource research, management, enhancement and conservation practices in accordance with the Partners' and Program's mission.
2. Enhancement of Public Understanding through Education and Outreach. To enhance existing natural resources education and outreach activities by providing natural resources and interpretive training at the local level, thereby developing a supply of dedicated and informed volunteers.
3. Volunteer Network. To develop a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer network that can be self-sufficient.

## Program Structure

The Virginia Master Naturalist Program exists as a collection of local programs that adhere to a set of objectives, procedures, and minimum requirements set at the state level. Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers are trained and certified at the local level through their respective chapters. Each local chapter has at least one advisor from one of the program's sponsoring state agencies to ensure that chapters maintain a working relationship with the statewide program and adhere to its principles and guidelines.

The State Steering Committee is comprised of appointed representatives of the State Program Sponsors and appointed Certified Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers. Together with the State Program Coordinator, the State Steering Committee sets the minimum standards and curriculum requirements of the statewide program. Together with the State Program Coordinator, the Committee also reviews and approves new chapter development and both State and Chapter educational curriculum materials.

It is important for Virginia Master Naturalist chapters to capitalize on local resources and expertise through partnerships. Local partners may include schools, nature centers, non-profits, local offices of state natural resources agencies, and any other organizations that might be stakeholders in a natural resource volunteer program. These partners may assist with chapter development through participation in the Local Coordinating Committee, provide resources such as a meeting place or course instructors, and provide volunteer service project opportunities.

When chapters are in their early stages (i.e., through the chapter's first class training) the chapter is run by the Local Coordinating Committee. As a chapter matures, trained Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers should assume a larger role in the administration of the program. Once the chapter has attained a trained cadre of volunteers, these volunteers are expected to maintain and coordinate the efforts of the chapter through the establishment of a Chapter Board of Directors. Upon establishment of a chapter's first elected Board of Directors, the work of the Local Coordinating Committee is completed.

## Who Is a Virginia Master Naturalist?

A Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN) is an individual who, after receiving specialized training, provides education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within his or her community for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### Virginia Master Naturalist in Training

Volunteer participant of an official class from the first day of class continuing until the member has completed Chapter basic training requirements.

### Virginia Master Naturalist Member

Volunteer participant of an official class who has successfully completed Chapter training requirements and passed the final examination, but has yet to complete his or her service requirements for certification for the current calendar year.

### Certified Virginia Master Naturalist

Volunteer participant of an official class or previous Certified Virginia Master Naturalist who has successfully completed all certification or re-certification requirements for the current calendar year, including advanced training and volunteer service.

## How May The Title Be Used?

After completion of the requirements to become a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer, the official title shall be Virginia Master Naturalist (VMN). Use of this title is a privilege, and this title is to be used only by individuals trained as a VMN while volunteering under the auspices of the program. This relationship should be clearly stated in nametags, signs, etc. The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a public service program operated by the State Program Sponsors to provide accurate, unbiased natural resources information. The Virginia Master Naturalist title **may not** be identified with any particular political viewpoint and **may not** be used by groups or individuals as they participate in political advocacy. The title is to be used **only** when doing unpaid volunteer work associated and approved by the program. Any implied commercial endorsement resulting from use of the VMN title is improper. Therefore, the title may not be used for commercial publicity or private business. Participating in a commercial activity, association with commercial products, or giving implied VMN endorsements to any product or place of business is a violation of VMN policies. VMNs may only identify themselves as such while volunteering in conjunction with official/approved VMN programs or activities, NOT for business or personal gain.

VMN training and experience may be given as qualifications when seeking employment; however, once employed, credentials may not be displayed by the VMN or the employer.

***Violation of the policy concerning the use of the title of Virginia Master Naturalist is grounds for removing the certification or membership of an offending member or grounds for revoking the charter of an offending chapter. Such violations will be reviewed by the State Steering Committee, which will make a final determination of the disciplinary actions to be imposed.***

Administrators of the Virginia Master Naturalist program, Executive and Steering Committee members, Chapter advisors, and other members of state sponsoring agencies or local partner organizations who are in a supporting role, but are not trained, in training, or certified, may show or wear the Virginia Master Naturalist text and logo in supporting, promoting and/or advertising the program. However, they may not promote themselves as a Master Naturalist, Virginia Master Naturalist or Certified Master Naturalist unless they have completed their training and all certification requirements.

A chapter may, and is encouraged to provide shirts, nametags, and other wearable items for their volunteers with the expectation that the chapter include at least the Virginia Master Naturalist logo (provided upon request by the statewide office). Nametags for Certified Virginia Master Naturalists are available through a central vendor, and each chapter is responsible for ordering these nametags for their certified members. Contact the statewide office for the ordering information.

## **Certification Requirements**

To become a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist, a trainee must complete and/or achieve the following:

- The State Advisory Committee approved curriculum with a *minimum* of 40 hours of combined field and classroom instruction (25% in the field).
- Pass the post-training assessment (designed by each chapter) with a minimum score of 70 percent.
- A *minimum* of 8 contact hours of chapter-approved advanced training.
- A *minimum* of 40 hours of chapter-approved volunteer service.

Volunteers have a maximum of 12 months from the last day of their basic training to complete the above requirements and receive their first Certification as a Master Naturalist. Chapters may increase the training or service hours required for certification, but they must indicate such changes in their by-laws and may not decrease the requirements below the state minimum standards. Volunteers who do not complete the certification requirements may still be considered Virginia Master Naturalist members. If they subsequently complete 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced training within one calendar year, they may achieve certification.

## **Training Requirements**

The *minimum* basic training requirements include 40 hours of combined classroom and field experiences, with 25% of that time spent in the field. Because of its geographical diversity, the natural resources of Virginia vary widely. Therefore, each local chapter will customize their

training program to focus on their local ecosystems. Over the course of the 40 hour training, each volunteer should achieve the following objectives:

***A Virginia Master Naturalist should know...***

- All aspects of their role as a Virginia Master Naturalist, the mission and objectives of the program, and the guidelines for participation
- What a naturalist is and does and the significance of naturalists and natural history
- The biogeography of Virginia, including the physiographic regions and the geological and ecological aspects that make them distinct
- Basic concepts of ecology
- Basic concepts of geology
- Basic resource management principles
- Some native flora and fauna in the region
- The general process of science
- The roles of Virginia state agencies in the management and conservation of natural resources

***A Virginia Master Naturalist should be able to...***

- Use a key to identify organisms
- Use a field guide
- Share knowledge with others (verbally and/or in writing)
- Make and record observations in nature
- Recognize when he or she does not know the answer to a question, but be able to seek out answers from people, books, or other reliable resources

***With these objectives in mind, every Virginia Master Naturalist's training should include the following topics:***

- Introduction to the Virginia Master Naturalist program
- Risk management guidelines and policies
- American Naturalists
- Basic Ecology
- Biogeography of Virginia
- Geology
- Nature of Naming
- Education and Interpretation Skills
- Citizen Science and Research Skills
- Ecology and Management of the systems occurring in the region (forests, streams/rivers/lakes, wetlands, and/or coastal and estuarine ecosystems)
- Overview of the 5 vertebrate classes, invertebrates, trees and other plants (including biology, ecology, identification, conservation and management of each)

## **Course Exams**

Each chapter will do a 3 part assessment of its trainees as part of the basic 40 hours of training and first 40 hours of volunteer service. This assessment includes an open-book, written assessment and a practical component that may include skills such as using a dichotomous key or giving a presentation. The written assessment may be one assessment at the end of the course, or a series of shorter quizzes or writing assignments. To receive the VMN certification, participants must pass each of these parts of the assessment (70% or higher). The third part of the assessment is a review of the initial 40 hours of volunteer service. Chapters may ask volunteers to write a self-reflection of their volunteer service activities.

## **Absenteeism**

*Anticipating the need to set standards for maintaining class attendance, the State Steering Committee has set the following policy:* Each chapter may set a local standard for the maximum number of classes that may be missed during a given training cycle without forfeiting the right to earn certification. Chapters are encouraged to set this standard at no more than one or two missed classes. However, regardless of the number of missed classes that a chapter allows, a trainee must make up any missed classes by attending the appropriate classes within 12 months of the completion of the training. Appropriate means the chapter can allow an advanced training class to count as make-up or the chapter may require that it be the same subject class presented during the next training cycle. If an advanced training class is used as make-up, then for that individual, it does not also count as advanced training. In this case the class must account for only one type of training --initial training OR advanced training. A participant may also attend the same subject class of a neighboring chapter within the same physiographic region, given adequate prior notification and space availability of the neighboring chapter. If a participant must miss more classes than the local standard allows then the respective chapter may consider an exception to their rule in special circumstances, such as medical problems, family illness, accidents, etc. However this should be the exception not the rule. Until these classes are made up, a volunteer cannot become a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist, but may continue to earn volunteer service hours or advanced training hours towards certification. Upon completion of all training coursework, it is recommended that the volunteer be recognized by the State Program as a *Virginia Master Naturalist Member*. Upon completion of all the requirements within the 12 months following the end of training, a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer is awarded a state certificate and is recognized by the State Program as a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist.

## **Advanced Training Requirements**

The purpose of Advanced Training is to provide Virginia Master Naturalists an opportunity to focus their volunteer efforts on one, or a few, specific topics that interest them. Advanced Training on an annual basis promotes continued learning and development, providing the experienced Master Naturalist with tools to work more effectively on new or advanced volunteer efforts. While the statewide Virginia Master Naturalist Program may occasionally provide statewide or regional advanced training opportunities, it is generally the responsibility of each chapter to ensure the availability of sufficient Advanced Training opportunities to enable

their members to attain their 8-hour minimum requirement. In addition, the local chapter should be a clearinghouse for notifying members of approved Advanced Training opportunities that exist outside their chapter boundaries.

Advanced Training courses may be made available by Statewide Program Sponsors, local chapter partners, local universities or nature centers, or directly by the local chapter. Master Naturalists must receive approval from their chapter *prior* to attending any Advanced Training course. Chapters may choose to pre-approve advanced training offerings from some of their sponsors and partners. Educational television shows are not a form of Advanced Training and therefore should not be approved as such. Advanced Training hours are counted one hour for each hour of training, exclusive of any travel time to and from the course.

The Chapter Board of Directors and/or the Chapter Advanced Training Committee should use the following criteria when reviewing Advanced Training opportunities for possible approval:

Does the Advanced Training opportunity:

- 1. Promote continued learning and development of naturalist skills?**
- 2. Provide Master Naturalists with knowledge and skills to work in volunteer efforts?**
- 3. Provide Master Naturalists an opportunity to focus their interests in one or a few specific topics?**
- 4. Build on the core curriculum initially provided by the local chapter?**
- 5. Provide information on natural resources and resource management applicable to Virginia?**
6. Direct trained volunteers toward specific programs in need of their services?
7. Take advantage of local partnerships?

Advanced Training opportunities must meet criteria 1-5. It is suggested that the remaining criteria also be a part of the opportunity.

## **Volunteer Service**

Volunteer service hours are those direct contact hours spent on Virginia Master Naturalist projects approved by the local chapter. Time spent on Chapter leadership positions, such as serving as a Board or Committee member, should also be eligible for service hours credit. Local chapters, at their discretion, may limit the number of such volunteer hours credited to the individual's annual volunteer requirement.

Service may involve a series of short, unrelated volunteer experiences, a long-term commitment to a single project or resource or anything in between. A Master Naturalist may earn his or her hours working independently or as part of a team, perhaps on a class project. Master Naturalist volunteer hours can come in the form of outreach, such as educational or interpretive services, assistance to statewide sponsor or local partner programs and/or research, or simply manual labor that benefits the local natural resources. For a Master Naturalist volunteer, the opportunity to do meaningful and interesting work is the reward. Virginia Master Naturalist trainees will vary in their abilities. Some will want volunteer opportunities to be presented to them, while others will see a need and want to design their own project. Virginia Master Naturalist trainees should be encouraged to design volunteer projects that are interesting to them and capitalize on their individual talents. There are few constraints, excepting that volunteer service must be dedicated to the beneficial management of the natural resources and

natural areas within their communities and that the service must be for public benefit, not personal gain.

Much of the time, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers are volunteering with state agencies and other organizations. As a result, they wear multiple “hats”. For example, a Virginia Master Naturalist doing Wildlife Mapping is both a DGIF volunteer and a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer. Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers should follow any volunteer guidelines of the organization for which they are volunteering. These may include a separate application, additional training, and additional reporting of volunteer hours. It is fine if both the organization and the Virginia Master Naturalist program or chapter recognize and count those volunteer hours. The one exception is state-run volunteer programs (such as Master Gardeners, Master Watershed Stewards, and Master Tree Stewards) in which there is a required level of service. Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers who are also volunteers in one of these programs should choose which “hat” to wear for any given volunteer hours.

Virginia Master Naturalists frequently hold leadership roles in other natural resource organizations. Volunteer work for these organizations may count towards certification if it is on an approved project that benefits natural resources. Administrative time that is not project-oriented (e.g. board meetings, member recruitment, fundraising) is generally not appropriate for certification hours when it is with an outside organization.

## **Master Naturalist Volunteer Projects and Private Organizations and Landowners**

Not all projects must be done on public lands or with public organizations. Projects with private not-for-profit organizations that have natural resource or environmental education missions are acceptable. Examples include 4H Centers, land conservancies, and nature centers. With these projects, volunteers must still adhere to the "no advocacy" guideline for the program.

Projects on other private lands (such as individual landowners' properties) may be approved, but must have a clear public benefit that outweighs any financial gain to the landowner. The project should directly benefit natural resources in the broader locality. Chapters should evaluate proposed projects to ensure they are not simply performing free landscape work on private lands. Whenever possible, Master Naturalists should explore ways to tie their stewardship projects to education. If Master Naturalist chapters are offering programs for individuals or private organizations such as private schools, they must ensure that these programs also are available to other individuals and private organizations in the community in order to avoid discrimination.

## **Out-of State Volunteer Service**

Individuals who live in states neighboring Virginia are still welcome to participate in the Virginia Master Naturalist program. Their volunteer service, however, must be done in Virginia in order to count towards the program. There may be opportunities for regional projects that cross state borders, and those may be evaluated by chapters on a case-by-case basis.

## Volunteer Contribution Areas

VMN volunteers should record contributions in the following areas:

- **Educational Programming**  
This area indicates activities or programs in which the VMN educates the public. This includes interpretive programs at parks; presentations at fairs, booths, etc.; and educational presentations to identified audiences, such as garden clubs, school groups, homeowner associations, etc. This also includes training of other non VMN volunteers or identified groups of volunteers to assist VMNs in delivering a program. Educational efforts include the time spent planning, implementing, and evaluating the program.
- **Citizen Science Activities**  
This area indicates service involving data collection, monitoring, biological inventories, and other research-oriented activities. Examples include bird censuses, Wildlife Mapping, and the Virginia Frog and Toad Calling Survey. The activities may be a part of statewide projects or projects specific to a local partner.
- **Stewardship Activities**  
This area indicates hands-on activities intended to improve habitat and other natural resources, or, in some cases, to improve the ability of the public to access these resources. These activities may include exotic plant removal, habitat restoration, and trail building. As with other service projects, these activities must be for public benefit, not personal gain, and be approved by the chapter.
- **Chapter and Volunteer Management Time (Administrative)**  
This time includes efforts spent on chapter organization, volunteer development, training and other management roles. This may include: leading general membership meetings, planning and supervising VMN training classes, working on a chapter newsletter, communication efforts, attending state meetings, and any other activities that maintain and support the effectiveness of the chapter and the statewide program. Chapter and Volunteer Management Time does not include management activities associated with planning, implementing or reporting on specific education, citizen science, or stewardship projects reported under those categories. Local chapters, at their discretion, may limit the number of such volunteer hours credited to the individual's annual volunteer requirement and should indicate these limitations in their by-laws.
- **Training Time**  
Training time is time spent in personal education to increase skills and knowledge; for example, advanced training, education conferences, or other settings that qualify as recertification training.
- **Travel Time**  
Starting January 1, 2012, VMN volunteers may count time spent on travel to conduct volunteer service towards the certification requirements and milestone achievements. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to choose service opportunities close to their communities, rather than choosing projects that have very high travel time compared to the actual service time. Volunteers must log travel time as a separate project in the online reporting system so that it is possible for chapters to report the percentage of volunteer time that was spent on travel each year. In addition, Master Naturalists may want to track their mileage on all projects for tax purposes, and the online reporting system provides a field for tracking this information. Only the travel time to and from volunteer service

counts towards certification; travel time to and from training (whether the basic training course or advanced training events) does not qualify.

## **Maintaining VMN Status**

Regardless of when in a given calendar year a Master Naturalist volunteer first meets the requirements for Certification, they will remain certified until the end of the following calendar year. An exception is made for volunteer participants who graduate from a basic training course in November or December and who complete their volunteer requirements before the end of that calendar year. These individuals will retain their certification through the following two calendar years, so as not to be penalized for prompt completion of their service hours. To retain Certification in subsequent years, a Master Naturalist must complete a minimum of 8 hours of approved advanced training and provide a minimum of 40 hours of approved volunteer service annually. Local chapters may require more training, volunteer service and/or advanced training. A chapter may allow participants to begin earning volunteer service hours once they begin their Virginia Master Naturalist training.

A trained volunteer is always considered a Virginia Master Naturalist Member. Master Naturalist volunteers in any given year are either "certified" or working towards certification. If circumstances prevent a member from attaining the required volunteer service for certification in a given year, they will be considered "certified" as soon as they subsequently fulfill their chapter's certification requirements (e.g. 40 hours of service and 8 hours of advanced training within one calendar year). Chapters may choose to have an "inactive" status for volunteers who are not actively participating in the program.

See **Appendix I** for a table of certification deadlines and timetables.

## **Reporting VMN Activities**

Recording and reporting volunteer efforts is an important part of being a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer. A surprising number of volunteers are very active, but never report any hours. Accurate reports of volunteer efforts help the state sponsoring agencies and local partners evaluate their investment in the program. Reporting volunteer hours is also an important component of risk management, providing documentation of what activities were done when and by whom. VMN volunteers should complete time sheets and report their hours to the online Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Management System (VMN-VMS) or to their chapter record keeper at least monthly. Chapters must submit an annual report to the State Program Coordinator using the standard report template provided.

## **VMNs and Relocation**

When a member moves to a different part of the state or wishes to become active in an alternate chapter, a transfer can be affected under the following conditions: The transferee brings a letter from the old chapter certifying that the transferee is a member in good standing, which includes paid dues. In addition, the letter should provide information on the transferee's status including completed coursework, certification, the number of volunteer service hours and advanced training hours that have been accrued during the current year.)

It will be up to the new chapter's Board of Directors to determine if the transferee needs to complete additional training that is specific to the new area, chapter and/or physiographic region during the new chapter's next class training period.

The transferee must agree to adhere to all the rules and policies of the new chapter--even if they are more stringent than those of the old chapter.

The new chapter should accept all volunteer service and advanced training hours certified in the transfer letter from the old chapter.

## **Membership in Multiple Chapters**

Being a Virginia Master Naturalist is a significant commitment, and actively participating in training, volunteer projects, chapter activities, and chapter administration takes a lot of time. For that reason, Virginia Master Naturalists are strongly encouraged to choose just one chapter for their membership. It is recognized, however, that some volunteers have the time and energy to fully commit to two chapters and have worthwhile reasons for membership in two chapters (such as two residences, or a long history of participation with a nearby chapter). Volunteers may be members of two chapters if they have the approval of the board of directors and chapter advisors of both chapters. Volunteers in this situation need to fully commit to both chapters, and they are expected to keep separate records with each chapter for certification requirements.

## **Recognizing VMN Volunteers**

Upon completion of the certification, individuals receive the official Virginia Master Naturalist title and certificate. These recognitions are renewed annually after recertification requirements have been met.

The Master Naturalist program also recognizes milestone achievements of volunteers. These milestones are cumulative and honor those volunteers who have given 250, 500, 1000, and 5000 hours of service. A volunteer may reach these milestones within one year or over the course of several years.

A Chapter may also establish local awards as seen fit. An example of such an award might include "the most hours served" or "Chapter Master Naturalist of the Year".

## **Contributions**

VMNs may not charge fees for talks, slide presentations, demonstrations, etc. They may accept donations for these activities on behalf of the chapter. These gifts should be given to the chapter for the furtherance of the VMN mission.

## **Age Limits**

As it is in its beginning stages, the program is targeted towards adult volunteers, though many of those adults may work with youth as part of their volunteer service. However, there are likely to be some highly motivated youth and parent-child teams who would fit into this program perfectly. Youth who are 14-17 years old may participate, provided that they (1) apply and enroll in the program using the application and enrollment procedures established by the chapter,

and (2) be accompanied at trainings, field trips, and volunteer service events by a parent or other adult who is directly responsible for them.

A likely part of future program growth will be a youth-focused version of the program which would not carry the same restrictions. Opportunities to pilot such a version, such as by having a chapter based in a high school, will be considered by the Steering Committee on a case-by-case basis.

## **Discipline and Removal of VMNs**

### **Policy and Procedures for the Disciplining and/or Removal of Members:**

**1. General Policy.** As a policy, in all efforts, the Virginia Master Naturalist Program remains fair, objective, accurate and comprehensive. When it becomes obvious that an individual or group of individuals participating in any capacity of the program is misrepresenting the program and its written objectives, then that individual or group of individuals may be asked to step down from positions of leadership and/or participation in the program. Such a case could result in the revoking of Virginia Master Naturalist participation, Certification and/or Chapter Charter.

**2. Background.** It is important to review the founding principles of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program before addressing inappropriate behavior. The mission statement and the Virginia Master Naturalist Chapter Management Guidelines contain the primary tenets of the program.

**Mission.** To develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **Key Elements of the Chapter Management Guidelines**

- Maintain the program as an unbiased public service.
- Recognize one's responsibilities as a Virginia Master Naturalist.
- Recognize the autonomy of the various partners when coordinating or implementing projects and other chapter events.
- Keep accurate records.
- Present a positive public image that speaks well of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program.
- Actively participate as a team member with other individuals of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program.

Local Chapters should be instrumental in making members aware of these key elements of the State Program as well as their own bylaws, policies and procedures. Chapters shall be vigilant and responsible for ensuring members and affiliates are following policy.

**3. Applicability.** All Volunteers, Coordinating Committee Members, Planning Committee Members, Local Chapter Board Members, Chapter Committee Chairpersons, Advisors and State Steering Committee Members are subject to the same level of conduct.

**4. Procedures for disciplining and/or dismissal.** The subsequent procedures are to be followed on the occasion of disciplining and/or dismissing an applicable member of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program.

**a. Informal Initial Step.** When any member of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program and/or the public thinks an infraction of the tenets, policies, written rules or guidelines of the State or Chapter has occurred, that person should confront the offending party and state what violation they think has occurred and why. This simple act will resolve or preclude most problems an organization will encounter. Not all members are fully aware of the regulations of the program and may be just acting out of ignorance and not malice. It is important for individuals and officers/boards/ committees to know that their actions are being noted with regard to the tenets of the program. If the informal approach is unsuccessful in resolving the problem, the following formal procedure should be followed:

**b. Formal Process**

In order to demonstrate grounds for this action, the case must be presented in writing. If the case involves a volunteer, committee member, or committee, then the written case must be submitted to the Chapter Board of Directors. If the infraction involves a Chapter Officer, member of the Board of Directors, or a member of the Chapter Planning Committee, the written case must be submitted to the Chapter Advisor(s). If the case involves a Chapter Advisor, or a member of the State Steering Committee, the written case must be submitted to the State Program Coordinator.

A case may be brought to the attention of the local Chapter by:

- general public, non-affiliates of the Virginia Master Naturalist program
- partnering organizations of the Chapter or State Program
- member(s) of the chapter
- member(s) of the chapter Board of Directors
- Chapter Advisor(s)
- member(s) of the State Steering Committee

**c.** The offending individual(s) shall be notified of the allegations within 7 days after the written case has been submitted. The individual(s) shall have 30 days to respond in writing to the case details before suggestions toward disciplinary action are made.

**d.** The Chapter Advisor(s) and/or the Chapter Board of Directors shall review the documented case and make recommendations toward disciplinary action and submit this information in writing to the State Program Coordinator. The submitted documentation must include a statement(s) from the offending person(s) and the original written case submitted to the committee(s). The State Program Coordinator may contact all involved parties regarding the case prior to taking the case to the State Steering Committee. The Program Coordinator will notify (in writing) the petitioners with the acceptance or non-acceptance of the outlined grounds and recommendations on the further process of disciplinary action.

**e.** The person(s) affected by the documented allegations and disciplinary action shall also be notified by the Program Coordinator of the case and the final disciplinary action.

**f. Appeal Process.** The individual(s) have 30 days to respond or appeal to the Chapter Board of Directors, Chapter Advisor, or State Program Coordinator. No response indicates an acceptance

of the case recommendation and disciplinary action unless otherwise stated within the disciplinary course of action. In the case of an appeal, the Chapter Board of Directors or Chapter Advisor shall make a recommendation and resubmit the case to the State Program Coordinator for final resolution. Circumstances that may warrant reconsideration requests may include substantive error or omission of information that was submitted to the Program Coordinator.

## **Risk Management for VMN Activities**

Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers must abide by all policies and procedures of the Virginia Master Naturalist Program and its sponsoring agencies.

All service projects must be approved by the chapter. Before participating in a service project, volunteers should receive an orientation to the project. A volunteer should understand the project's purpose, the project's protocols, hazards and risks associated with the project, and safety procedures. The project proposal form should contain all of this information and essentially serve as a job description for that project. Volunteers must be aware of their responsibilities as they relate to liability when planning programs. See "Planning for the Best and the Worst" in Appendix II.

Enrolled Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers have liability insurance from Virginia's Division of Risk Management. This insurance program covers employees and volunteers while participating in chapter-approved projects and activities only. As noted on the required Volunteer Information and Enrollment Form, if a volunteer is injured while performing volunteer duties, medical claims are his or her responsibility (personal insurance or cash payment). Upon request, the chapter advisor will file the claim with Virginia's Division of Risk Management. If accepted, the volunteer or the insurance carrier may be partially or fully reimbursed. Filing a claim with Risk Management does not guarantee acceptance or reimbursement.

In the event of a fatality or an emergency that involves serious injuries or life-threatening incidents, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers should follow the procedures on the Emergency Card (Appendix IV), including completing an Incident Report Form (Appendix II). Volunteers should carry the emergency card at all times. The emergency card will vary slightly among chapters, so as to reflect the procedures of the sponsoring agency for that chapter.

All Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers must receive training in risk management that includes guidelines for youth interactions as well as other risk management policies. A Powerpoint template, script, and handouts are posted on the Virginia Master Naturalist Chapter Coordinators' Web page. Chapters must include risk management training as part of the basic training course.

## **EO/AA and Program Compliance**

VMN chapters and volunteers will comply with statewide program policy in recruitment, screening, and training of VMN volunteers and in implementing educational programming. This policy mirrors that of Virginia Cooperative Extension and applies to paid and non-paid staff (such as VMN volunteers). The following sections are from the Virginia Cooperative Extension Management Guidelines and should be used as the guidelines for VMN chapters and volunteers.

### **Equal Opportunity (EO)**

Definition: All personnel activities are conducted in a manner that assures equal opportunity for all, based solely on individual merit and fitness of applicants and employees,

related to specific jobs and without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

Policy: Extension classified employees are covered by and subject to the provisions of the State Personnel Act and all other rules and regulations applicable to Virginia Tech. VCE operates in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Classified Employee Handbook. The Commonwealth of Virginia has established rules of personal conduct and standards of acceptable work performance for its employees. Violations of the established rules or unacceptable work performance may result in the imposition of disciplinary action. Such action is designed, and is to be used, as a corrective measure and shall not be based on an employee's race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, political affiliation, disability, gender, veteran status, or age. Guidelines on Standards of Conduct and Performance are outlined in Virginia's Employee Standards of Conduct and Performance Handbook. All Virginia classified employees have access to the state grievance procedure. Rules on grievability are outlined in the Commonwealth of Virginia Employee Handbook. Extension Faculty members are governed by the employment procedures of the university of their affiliation. Reference should be made to the Faculty Handbook of the respective university for information on grievance procedures and other important topics.

**The following EEO Statement, "Virginia Master Naturalist programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer." should be included on all documents which are distributed publicly.**

### **Affirmative Action (AA)**

Definition: A set of specific and result-oriented procedures designed to correct differential treatment of individuals or groups of people. Progressive steps taken to achieve compliance with Civil Rights, Equal Employment Opportunity rules, laws, and regulations.

Policy: VCE is an affirmative action organization and actively recruits minorities and women in employment and programs. **It is the responsibility of each employee to participate in the VCE affirmative action plan by assisting in recruitment and by helping to create an open, multicultural environment.** Supervisory employees will follow affirmative action guidelines in selecting and supervising staff and will be evaluated on results achieved.

### **Sexual Harassment**

Definition: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Policy: Sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination involving unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which interferes with the education or work of others. Sexual harassment violates university policy as well as state and federal laws and can result in disciplinary action for employee offenders as severe as dismissal. In addition to university sanction, persons who engage in sexual harassment may be subject to civil or criminal action.

## **Program Compliance**

Definition: Virginia Cooperative Extension programs are planned and conducted in response to issues affecting the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the people of the Commonwealth. Programs are conducted in accordance with the respective resources and staff competencies of the two institutions. Virginia Cooperative Extension is committed to the intent of Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other related acts.

Policy: All VCE personnel have the responsibility for promoting balanced programs, regardless of the program area to which they are assigned. Balanced membership is defined as the condition existing when the number of members of the non-majority race or gender reaches 75 percent of the number of the non-majority members that the group would have if its racial or gender composition were exactly proportional to that of the community. This is to be used as a guide to assist Extension personnel in measuring progress toward achieving a fully integrated Extension program. **VCE will not terminate sponsorship to any group which has demonstrated and documented evidence that it made and continues to make all reasonable efforts to integrate and balance its membership.**

Documentation is defined as written records which reflect adequately the reasonable efforts made by VCE personnel and sponsored groups to balance membership. Handwritten notes indicating dates, names, places, and other pertinent facts constitute documentation. Such documentation should be retained for a period of three years from the original date. The reasonable efforts made by volunteers will be similarly documented. Documentation will be retained at the unit level for review by state and USDA Extension staff members for three years.

Reasonable efforts consist of a combination of actions designed to communicate to all persons that memberships are open, that non-members are welcomed and encouraged to become members, and that VCE (and the Virginia Master Naturalist Program) subscribes to a balanced membership philosophy. Examples of reasonable efforts are listed in section 5.2.2 of the Virginia Cooperative Extension Management Guidelines Handbook.

## **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Definition: A federal anti-discrimination statute designed to remove barriers which prevent qualified individuals with disabilities from enjoying the same employment opportunities that are available to persons without disabilities.

Policy: Extension offices (and Virginia Master Naturalist chapters) must make their programs available to the disabled. These guidelines should be followed: 1) If Extension offices are not accessible to the disabled, every effort will be made to provide services in an alternative location. 2) Consider the accessibility of meeting rooms that are used to conduct classes and meetings. Choose only accessible rooms if at all possible. 3) It is not mandatory to remodel public buildings if the services can be provided elsewhere; however, if remodeling is to be done, the remodeled areas must be accessible to the disabled. 4) All new construction must be accessible to the disabled. 5) No interested parties may be denied services because of disability unless it is impractical to accommodate their needs or if accommodating them would create an unacceptable health or safety risk. Every reasonable effort must be made to design and deliver Extension programs that encourage participation of individuals with special needs.

**The following ADA Statement must be used in all methods of promotion of VCE events and programs, including written, verbal and electronic means for workshops, events, seminars, classes and organizational meetings: "If you are a person with a disability**

**and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ (name, office) at (phone number/TDD\*) during business hours of \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. and \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. to discuss accommodations five days prior to the event. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120."**

**The following ADA Statement must be used in all methods of promotion for accessing VCE services, including written, verbal, and electronic means, and on any materials placed conspicuously in public places: "If you are a person with a disability and desire assistance or accommodation, please notify \_\_\_\_\_ (name, office) at (phone number/TDD\*) during business hours of \_\_\_\_\_ a.m. and \_\_\_\_\_ p.m. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120."**

**For job listings, advertisements, or other recruiting materials the following ADA Statement must be included: "Individuals with disabilities desiring accommodations in the application process should notify \_\_\_\_\_ (name, office) at (phone number/TDD\*) by the application deadline. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120."**

## Appendix I. Certification Matrix for Volunteers

**I've just completed my basic training. How long do I have to finish my requirements for certification?**

If your training class ended on this date:	you have until this date to complete any make-up classes, 8 hours of advanced training, and 40 hours of volunteer service for certification:
January 2011	January 2012
February 2011	February 2012
March 2011	March 2012
April 2011	April 2012
May 2011	May 2012
June 2011	June 2012
July 2011	July 2012
August 2011	August 2012
September 2011	September 2012
October 2011	October 2012
November 2011	November 2012
December 2011	December 2012
January 2012	January 2013
February 2012	February 2013
March 2012	March 2013
April 2012	April 2013
May 2012	May 2013
June 2012	June 2013
July 2012	July 2013
August 2012	August 2013
September 2012	September 2013
October 2012	October 2013
November 2012	November 2013
December 2012	December 2013

**I've just completed all of the requirements to become a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist. How long does my certification last?**

In general, the expiration date of the certification depends upon when the requirements for certification were met, not upon the year of the basic training course.

If you complete all the requirements for certification between these dates:	your certification is valid through this date:	Keep in mind:
January 2010 through December 2010	31 December 2011	*Exception: If your basic training course ended in November or December 2010 and you achieved certification before the end of 2010, your certification is valid through December <b>2012</b> .
January 2011 through December 2011	31 December 2012	*Exception: if your basic training course ended in November or December 2011 and you achieved certification before the end of 2011, your certification is valid through December <b>2013</b> .
January 2012 through December 2012	31 December 2013	*Exception: if your basic training course ended in November or December 2012 and you achieved certification before the end of 2012, your certification is valid through December <b>2014</b> .

## **I've just completed all of the requirements to become a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist. How do the rest of the volunteer hours I contribute this year count?**

Once you achieve the initial certification, all certification hours are based on the calendar year and cannot be banked. Extra volunteer hours worked in any calendar year are "gravy"; i.e. they count towards your lifetime achievement but cannot be banked for future certification years. The same principle applies to Advanced Training. This system greatly simplifies record keeping for everyone. We do recognize milestones of lifetime service achievement, so please do not be discouraged from contributing extra volunteer hours.

### **Examples:**

1. If your course ended in December 2009, and you achieved certification in May 2010, you are certified through 2011. Any additional hours you work in 2010 are "gravy" and any hours you work in 2011 count towards certification in 2012.
2. If your course ended in December 2010, and you also achieved certification in December 2010, you are certified through 2012. Any additional hours you work in 2010 or 2011 are "gravy" and any hours you work in 2012 count towards certification in 2013.
3. If your course ended in May 2010, and you achieved certification in April 2011, you are certified through 2012. Any additional hours you work in 2011 are "gravy", and any hours you work in 2012 count towards 2013 certification.
4. If your course ended in May 2010, and you achieved certification in May 2010, you are certified through 2011. Any additional hours you work in 2010 are "gravy", and any hours you work in 2011 count towards 2012 certification.

## **Appendix II. Risk Management: Planning for the Best & the Worst**

Nothing can replace the good management practices of planning, documentation and extension of that information to your representatives through good training. In order to adequately prepare for any activity you must prepare for the best and the worst to occur. While there is no inclusive list of items from which to plan your activity, there are some general points from which to start. The following are some items which may assist you in your planning process. More information can be found at <http://intra.ext.vt.edu/policies/riskmgt.html>.

### **Items to be Considered When Evaluating Risk**

#### ***Be aware of the necessity to know:***

- Types of activities
- Plan of supervision
- Location, number, and competence of supervisors, and of participants
- Crowd control
- Safety procedures
- First aid procedures and practices
- Plant and equipment maintenance
- **If at any time you fear for your safety, remove yourself from the situation immediately.**

#### ***Be alert to dangerous conditions:***

- Physical facilities and areas
- Participants: rowdiness, horseplay, general observations, discipline, if children; physical abilities (vision, clumsiness), experience, and ability to handle tools, if adults

#### ***Put overall administration into specific written procedures:***

- Medical treatment authorization forms, if children
- Schedules
- Registration forms
- Do's and Don'ts for participants
- Emergency procedures (before and after accident)
- Safety rules
- Job descriptions (Includes Volunteers)
- Participant Insurance requirements

#### ***Ensure specific supervision criteria:***

- Communicate, so that participants understand the responsibilities of their position.
- Be sure all representatives understand and adhere to safety practices and procedures.
- Be alert to changing conditions which can bring about hazardous conditions.
- Ensure existing sponsoring agency policy regarding activity is followed.

#### ***Be clear on instruction given to those involved in activity regarding***

- Skills needed for various jobs
- Instruction for safety, courtesies of the game, etc.
- Protective devices.
- Rules and regulations.
- Warnings

#### ***Complete all necessary forms***

- Medical form
- General Waivers
- Equine Waivers, if necessary
- Accident insurance, if necessary

## Appendix III. Incident Report Form

Date of Injury:		Time:	AM	PM
Name of Volunteer:				
Street:				
City, State, Zip:				
Phone number:	( )	-	Ext:	
	Age:	Sex:	The volunteer is requesting reimbursement. Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> (Volunteer must file with own health care provider first.)	
Chapter Advisor:		Phone Number:	( )	- Ext:
Street:				
City, State, Zip:				
<b>Part A: To be completed, signed, and dated by the volunteer.</b> <i>If the injured person cannot fill out the description, a witness can write the narrative of what he or she saw only, and should also sign and date the form.</i>				
<b>1. Detailed description of incident (attach additional pages if necessary, sign and date them):</b>				
<b>2. Description of injury (attach additional pages if necessary, sign and date them):</b>				
<b>3. Signature:</b>			<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Part B. To be completed, signed, and dated by a witness to the incident.</b>				
<b>1. Witnesses (name/address/phone number):</b>				
<b>1. Detailed description of incident as witnessed (attach additional pages if necessary, sign and date them):</b>				
Accident reported by:				
Report submitted by:			Date:	

This form should be given to the chapter advisor, who should file it with the Virginia Division of Risk Management if a claim is requested. A copy should be maintained in the chapter records and a copy should be sent to the Virginia Master Naturalist program coordinator, 460 Stagecoach Road, Charlottesville, VA 22902.

# Appendix IV. Emergency Cards

## A. Emergency Procedures Card for Master Naturalist Chapters with a Virginia Cooperative Extension Advisor

Ask your local Cooperative Extension office for copies in a wallet-sized card format.

**EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

*Ensure all steps are followed in accidents resulting in serious injury and/or fatality and incidents that involve law enforcement and/or may result in litigation.*

- Priority attention: care for injured; stabilize the situation.
- Call 911 or police, ambulance and clergy as appropriate.
- A responsible Cooperative Extension representative stays at the scene.
- Make NO statements to anyone other than the police, a supervisor/unit coordinator, Virginia Tech Legal Counsel, Risk Mgmt., or University Relations.
- Appropriate person must immediately contact the parent, guardian or next of kin to the injured and inform them of the situation.
- Contact your supervisor, unit coordinator and Risk Management **ASAP**.
- Contact Virginia Tech Legal Counsel.
- Immediately complete the Accident/Incident report and take notes; **FACTS ONLY**.  
A copy of the report form can be found in the Risk Mgmt. Guide.
- Refer all media to University Relations. **DO NOT MAKE ANY COMMENT!**
- Call Virginia Tech Police for assistance if you cannot reach emergency contacts.



Virginia Cooperative Extension

Publication 490-101



VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

First Contact: Risk Mgmt. Office: 540-231-7439 Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Office: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_

University Relations: 540-231-5396 VT Legal Counsel: 540-231-6293

State Police: Cell Phone #77 State Police Local: \_\_\_\_\_

VT Police: 540-231-6411 Local Police: \_\_\_\_\_

**THESE PROCEDURES SHOULD ONLY BE FOLLOWED IN THE EVENT OF A FATALITY OR AN EMERGENCY WHICH INVOLVES SERIOUS INJURIES OR LIFE THREATENING INCIDENTS.**

Information on how to handle incidents of a lesser nature, or on what forms to complete may be found in the Risk Management Information Guide for Virginia Cooperative Extension.  
The general switchboard number for Virginia Tech is: 540-231-6000.

VT/028/1203/25M/241492/490101

## B. Emergency Procedures Card for Master Naturalist Chapters with a Virginia Department of Forestry Advisor

Follow these steps in accidents resulting in life-threatening injury and/or fatality and incidents that involve law enforcement and/or may result in litigation.

1. Priority attention: Care for injured; stabilize the situation.
2. Call 911 or police, ambulance, and clergy as appropriate.
3. A responsible Master Naturalist representative stays at the scene.
4. Contact chapter adviser, regional VDOF supervisors, and VDOF media liaison immediately.
5. Chapter adviser, VDOF supervisor, or other appropriate Master Naturalist representative immediately contacts the next of kin to inform them of the situation.
6. Make NO statements to anyone other than the police, chapter adviser, VDOF supervisors, and VDOF media liaison.
7. Immediately complete the Master Naturalist Incident Report and take notes on the situation (facts only).
8. Refer all media to VDOF media liaison.

### EMERGENCY CONTACTS AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Emergency (rescue, police, fire): 911

Chapter Adviser:

Office:        Home:        Cell:

Asst. Regional Forester:

Office:        Home:        Cell:

Regional forester:

Office:        Home:        Cell:

VDOF media liaison: John Campbell

Office: 434-220-9070 Home: 804-935-0809 Cell: 434-989-0655

**Wallet Card Version:** Please cut out and carry at all times when you are training or volunteering as a Virginia Master Naturalist.

<p><b>Emergency Procedures Card</b> <b>for Master Naturalist Chapters with a Virginia Department of Forestry Advisor</b> <b>Follow these steps in accidents resulting in life-threatening injury and/or fatality and incidents that involve law enforcement and/or may result in litigation.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Priority attention: Care for injured; stabilize the situation.</li><li>2. Call 911 or police, ambulance, and clergy as appropriate.</li><li>3. A responsible Master Naturalist representative stays at the scene.</li><li>4. Contact chapter adviser, regional VDOF supervisors, and VDOF media liaison immediately.</li><li>5. Chapter adviser, VDOF supervisor, or other appropriate Master Naturalist representative immediately contacts the next of kin to inform them of the situation.</li><li>6. Make NO statements to anyone other than the police, chapter adviser, VDOF supervisors, and VDOF media liaison.</li><li>7. Immediately complete the Master Naturalist Incident Report and take notes on the situation (facts only).</li><li>8. Refer all media to VDOF media liaison.</li></ol>
<p><b>EMERGENCY CONTACTS AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS</b> Emergency (rescue, police, fire): 911 Chapter Adviser Office _____ Home _____ Cell _____ Assistant Regional Forester Office _____ Home _____ Cell _____ Regional Forester Office _____ Home _____ Cell _____ VDOF media liaison: John Campbell Office: 434-220-9070 Home: 804-935-0809</p>

## **C. Emergency Procedures Card for Master Naturalist Chapters with a Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Advisor**

*Ensure all steps are followed in accidents resulting in serious injury and/or fatality and incidents that involve law enforcement and/or may result in litigation.*

1. Priority attention; care for injured; stabilize the situation.
2. Call 911 or police, ambulance and clergy as appropriate.
3. A responsible Virginia Master Naturalist representative stays at the scene.
4. Contact your chapter advisor and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries dispatch ASAP.
5. Make NO statements to anyone other than the police, your advisor, or VDGIF dispatch.
6. Appropriate person must immediately contact the parent, guardian or next of kin to the injured, and inform them of the situation.
7. Immediately complete the Accident/Incident report and take notes; FACTS ONLY. A copy of the report form can be found in the Virginia Master Naturalist Program Volunteer Policy Handbook.
8. Refer all media to a VDGIF representative. DO NOT MAKE ANY COMMENTS!
9. Call the Virginia Tech Risk Management Office if you are unable to reach other emergency contacts.

### **EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION**

VDGIF Dispatch: 804-367-1258 OR 804-367-2679. Dispatch is the best way to make contact with your Chapter Advisor and his/her Regional Manager. Your Advisor is \_\_\_\_\_, and the Regional Manager is \_\_\_\_\_.

State Police \_\_\_\_\_ Local Police \_\_\_\_\_

Virginia Tech Risk Management Office: 540-231-5396

These procedures should only be followed in the event of a fatality or an emergency which involves serious injuries or life threatening incidents.

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### **Emergency Procedures Card for Master Naturalist Chapters with a VA Department of Conservation and Recreation Advisor**

*Use the Virginia Cooperative Extension version and contact your chapter advisor to find out what phone numbers he/she would like included.*

### **Emergency Procedures Card for Master Naturalist Chapters with a VA Museum of Natural History Advisor**

*Use the Virginia Cooperative Extension version and contact your chapter advisor to find out what phone numbers he/she would like included.*