

Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteers Contribute to Natural Resource Education, Citizen Science, and Stewardship with Virginia Cooperative Extension

Program Overview



The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a volunteer training and service program providing education, outreach, and service to benefit natural resources and natural areas in Virginia. Volunteer training includes 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 stewardship. The program currently 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 Environment and the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation. In addition, the **30 program chapters** across the state work with more than **300 local partners**, including schools, nature centers, nonprofits, and local governments.



In 2010, these volunteers contributed more than 44,400 hours of volunteer service to education, citizen science, and stewardship projects to benefit Virginia's natural resources. They also contributed more than 15,700 hours towards the administrative work of running the local chapters. In total, the **more than 60,000 hours of volunteer service just in 2010** is worth **more than \$1.2 million dollars**.*



2010 Sample Projects with Virginia Cooperative Extension

Projects Directly with VCE: In 2010, VMN Chapters reported 441 hours contributed directly to VCE, mainly through leading or assisting with programs for 4H clubs and camps. Several chapters have organized their own 4H Junior Naturalist clubs, and the VMN Steering Committee is currently investigating the feasibility of a more unified statewide Junior Master Naturalist program. Master Naturalists also have assisted VCE at a number of workshops and special events, such as county fairs.



Other Projects Related to the VCE Mission: More notable, however, is the overall amount of time that VMN volunteers spend on education projects, most of which can easily be seen to relate to VCE's mission and new strategic plan, even when they are not specifically associated with an Extension office. Nearly one third of all VMN volunteer time in 2010 was spent on education projects, totaling 18,000 hours (valued at \$376,740.*) These projects include programs for youth, such as classroom activities, Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences, and schoolyard habitat projects. They also include programs for adults, such as a Plant Natives campaign on the Eastern Shore, habitat programs for homeowners, and talks for a variety of community groups.

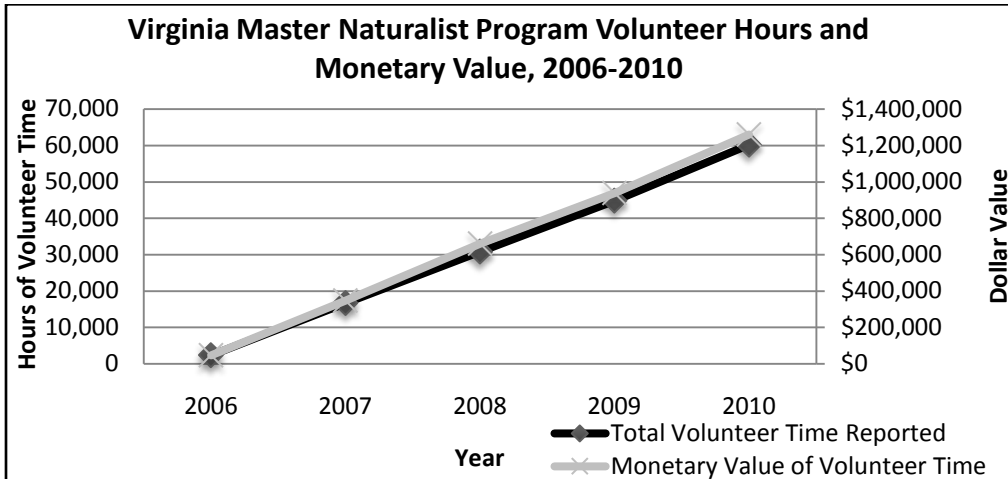
Chapter Advisors: There are 7 VCE Extension Agents who serve as VMN chapter advisors. Chapter advisors assist with volunteer training and management and provide an important link between the local chapters and the state agency sponsors.

NoVA OUTSIDE is an organization developed by an Arlington Regional Master Naturalist member with the mission of connecting children with nature. NoVA OUTSIDE applied for and recently received a social justice grant from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington to increase the time students spend outside connecting with nature in afterschool programs. The grant focuses on schools with more than 60% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. We are currently working with 10 schools in Northern Virginia (four in Arlington and three each in Alexandria and Fairfax). The program provides weekly activity plans for the afterschool staff as well as seasonal training on several of the activities. Six master naturalist members currently serve as school liaisons in helping to implement the program and further train the staff.

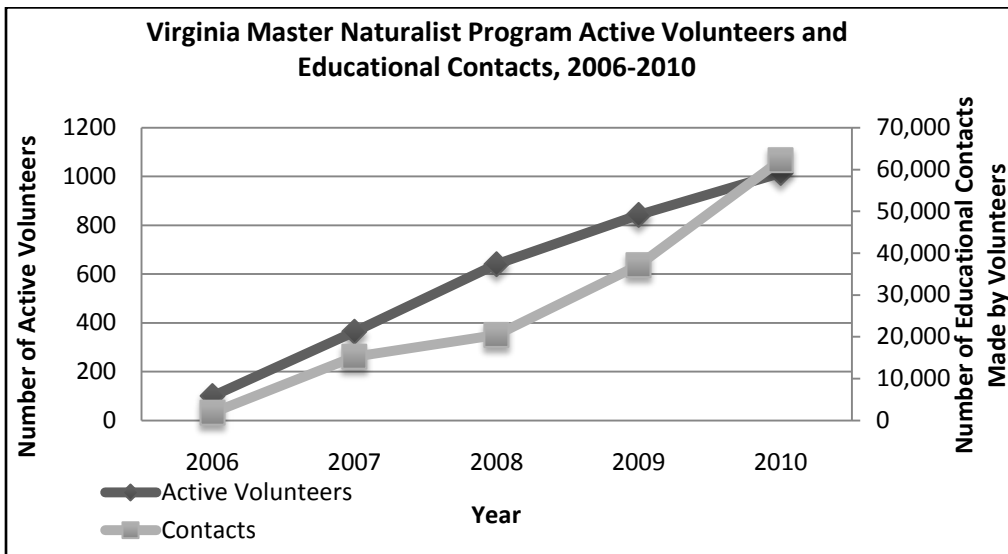
From the Arlington Regional Master Naturalist Chapter 2010 Annual Report

*The Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), Economic Information Services Division, uses the Current Employment Statistics annualized average hourly earnings for all production and non-supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls in Virginia. (<http://www.vaservice.org/go/volunteer/statistics/>)

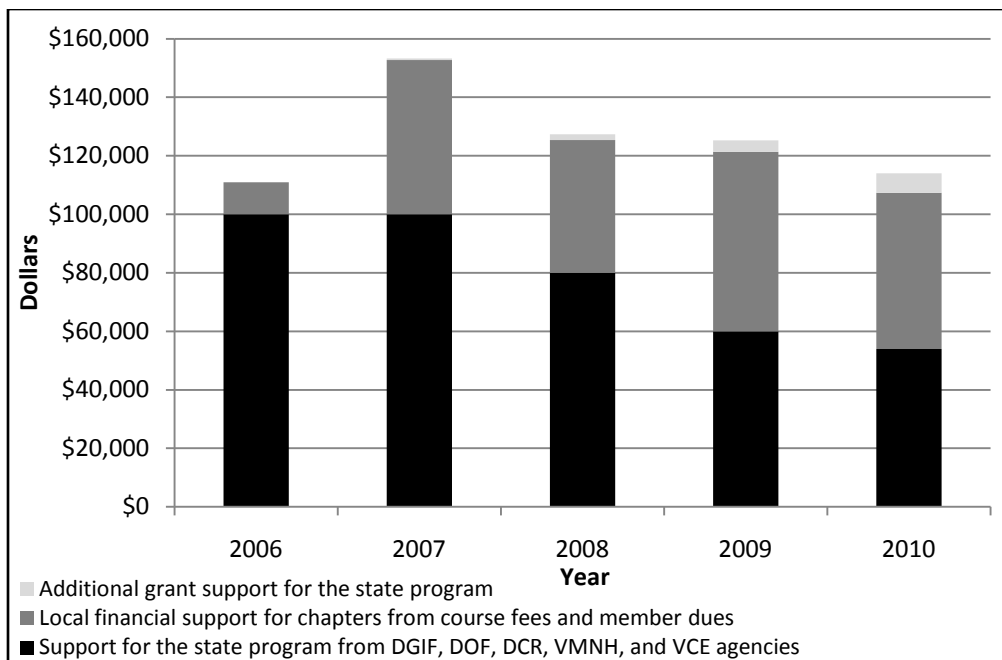
Virginia Master Naturalist Program Statistics At-A-Glance



Over the lifetime of the program, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers have contributed a total of 154,932 hours of service, valued at more than \$3.2 million.



While the number of active volunteers has grown, so has the number of other Virginians reached through the program. Through their educational programs in parks, schools, and beyond, the volunteers have made more than 136,000 educational contacts.



At the statewide level, the Virginia Master Naturalist program has been funded mainly by a partnership of 5 state agencies. This critical funding supports statewide events and initiatives and a program coordinator. Some additional grants have funded special projects. At the local level, the program is self-sufficient through course fees and member dues.