

Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteers Contribute to Natural Resource Education, Citizen Science, and Stewardship with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

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 Department of Conservation and Recreation

Chapters listed 2000 hours of volunteer activities at DCR State Parks and Natural Area Preserves on their 2010 annual reports, but this figure is vastly underestimated. The reported volunteer time can be valued at \$41,860*; the actual time is likely double that figure. Our new online Volunteer Management System will help us more accurately quantify the volunteer activities in 2011 and future years.



State Parks: Virginia Master Naturalist chapters reported volunteer activities in 18 Virginia State Parks. Their activities included education (interpretive programs, special events), citizen science (bird and butterfly counts), and stewardship (trail maintenance, habitat restoration, waterway clean-ups.) The parks in which VMN volunteers are most active are Douthat, False Cape, Pocahontas, and York River, with more than 200 hours contributed to each park in 2010.

Natural Area Preserves: Virginia Master Naturalists were active at 11 DCR Natural Area Preserves. Most often, their activities included Volunteer Stewardship Committees through which they monitor visitation, serve as visitor contacts, maintain species lists, and assist with field trips, scientific monitoring, trail clearing, invasive species control and other management actions. Other projects included designing and installing interpretive signs, restoring wildlife habitat, and developing "virtual tours" for visitors. VMN volunteers are particularly active at preserves on the Eastern Shore, on the Northern Neck, and in Southwest Virginia.

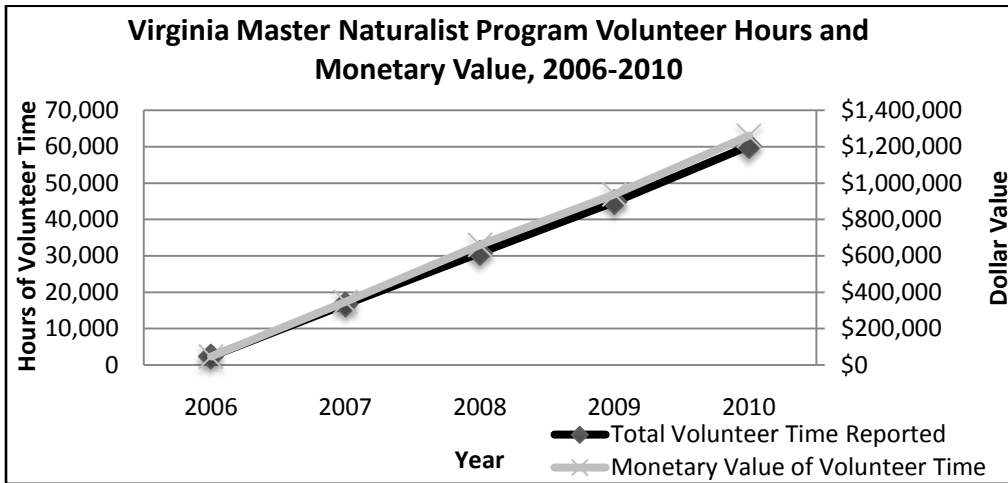
Chapter Advisors: There are 12 DCR staff members who serve as chapter advisors to VMN chapters. These individuals assist with volunteer training and management and provide an important link between the local chapters and the state agency sponsors.

Volunteers with the Alleghany Highlands Master Naturalist chapter completed 435 hours at the Nature's Outpost at Douthat State Park. Nature's Outpost is an opportunity for park visitors of all ages to learn about the flora and fauna of the park. Located at the Beach Complex at the lake, it receives many visitors. Because of cutbacks to park staffing, on many occasions this resource would not be open were it not for Master Naturalist volunteers.

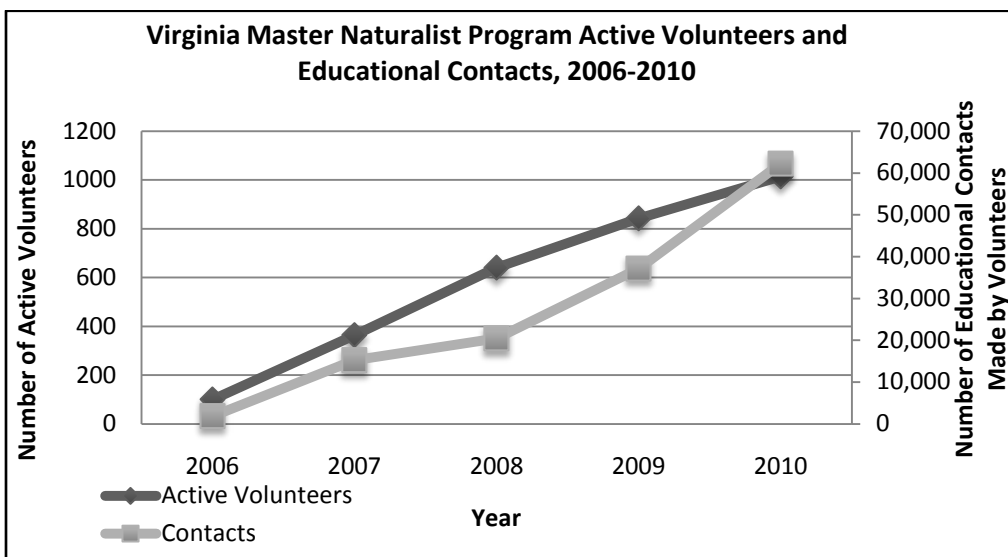
From the Alleghany Highlands Master Naturalist Chapter 2010 Annual Report

*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/>)

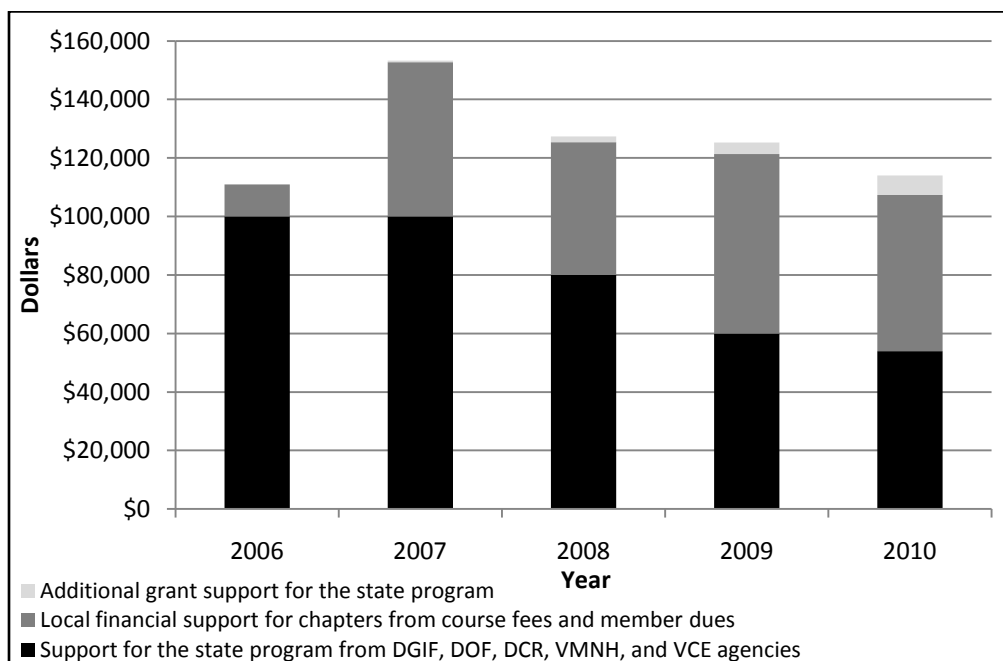
Virginia Master Naturalist Program Statistics At-A-Glance



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.