

# Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteers Contribute to Natural Resource Education, Citizen Science, and Stewardship with the Virginia Museum of Natural History

## 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 the Virginia Museum of Natural History

Projects with VMNH: Although we only have one Virginia Master Naturalist chapter physically near the museum, volunteers with that chapter made significant contributions to the VMNH in 2010. The Southwestern Piedmont Chapter reported 490 hours (valued at \$10,256\*) of volunteer time at the museum, including interpretive programs, research assistance to museum scientists, and assistance with museum collections. In addition, one Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer (also a retired school teacher) was recently hired to coordinate VMNH outreach programs in the eastern region of the state. We hope that this connection will encourage the involvement of other VMN volunteers in VMNH outreach programs in that area.



Other VMNH-related Projects: The Southwestern Piedmont Chapter is also very active with education, citizen science, and stewardship projects in J. Frank Wilson Park, a city park adjacent to the museum that can be used as an outdoor classroom for museum programs. Statewide, all of our Virginia Master Naturalist chapters are involved in interpreting Virginia's natural heritage in a meaningful way for Virginia's citizens. They further this mission through interpreting natural history information and artifacts at educational events, conducting interpretive walks at local parks, and visiting local schools to help teach youth to become tomorrow's natural resource stewards.

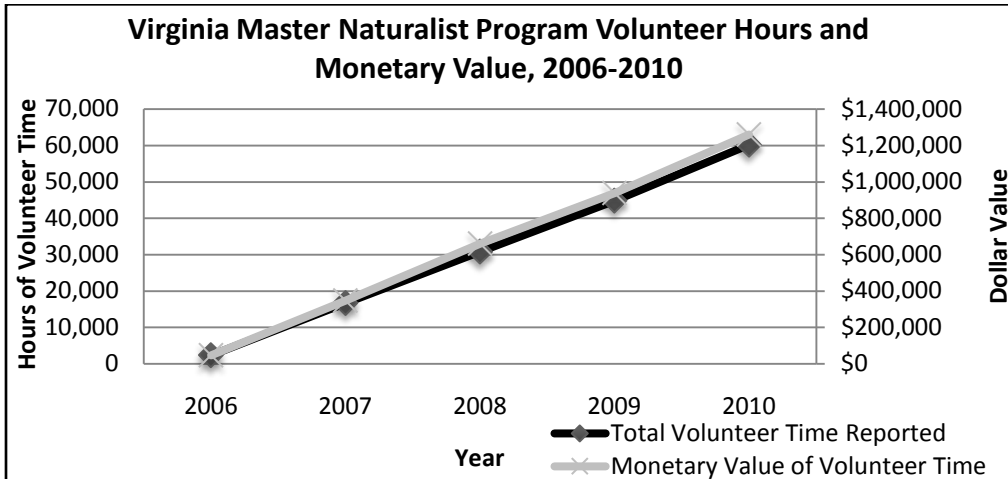
Chapter Advisors: There is 1 VMNH staff member who serves as a chapter advisor to a VMN chapter. Chapter advisors assist with volunteer training and management and provide an important link between the local chapters and the state agency sponsors.

*Throughout the year, chapter members assisted with events held at J. Frank Wilson Park, such as Screen on the Green, Outdoor Fun Festival, and Open Park Day. These events helped to promote more community awareness about what Wilson Park had to offer and promoted outdoor activities. Also, aesthetic improvements were made to the park. A trail was created and maintained. Several trail extensions have been added throughout the year as well. Numerous park clean ups were held with great success. Combined, these efforts continue to further community members' development of an appreciation for natural resources, which in turn furthers stewardship and conservation endeavors.*

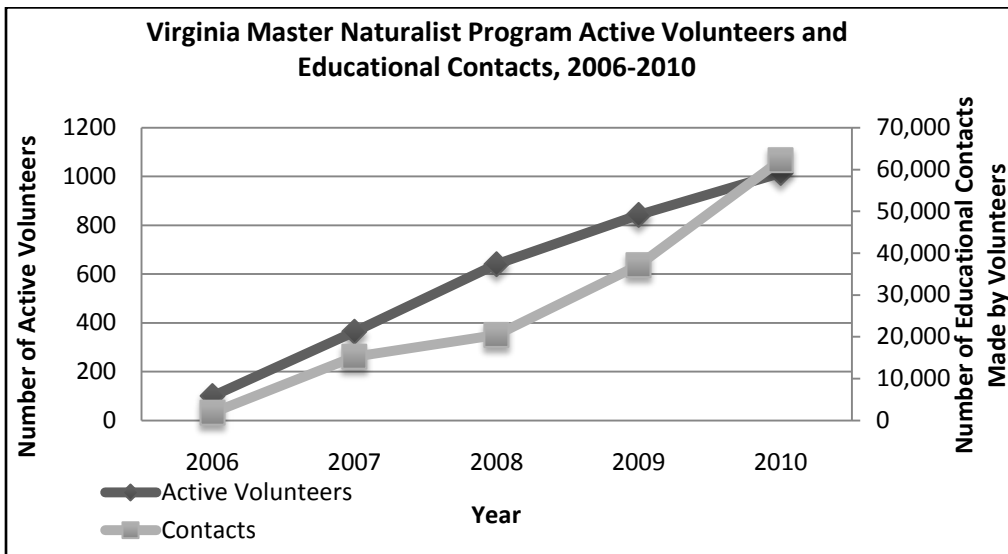
*From the Southwestern Piedmont Master Naturalist Chapter 2010 Annual Report*

\*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/>)

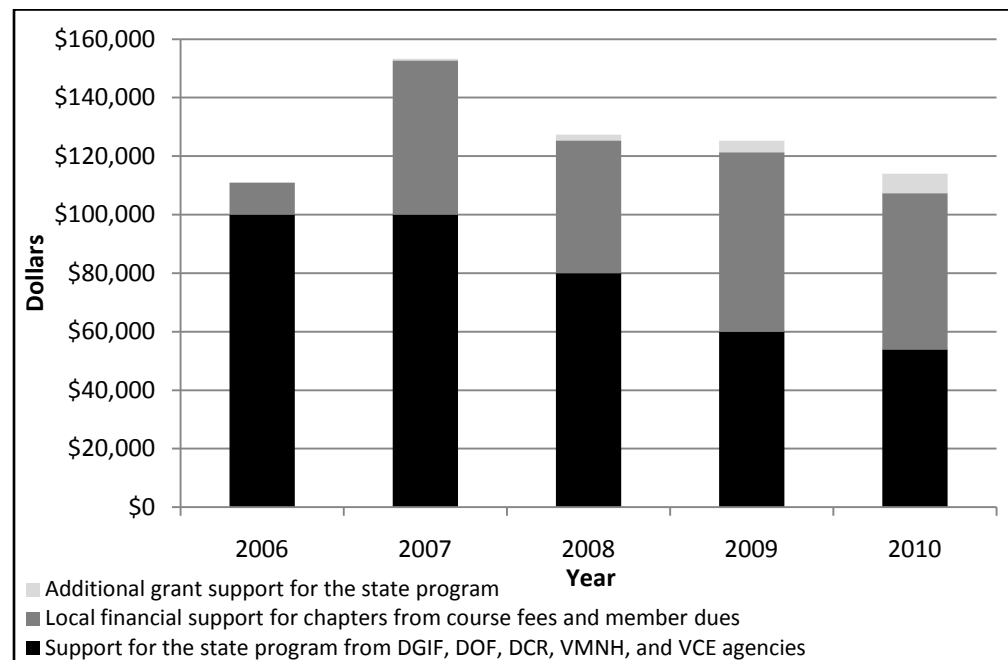
## Virginia Master Naturalist Program Statistics At-A-Glance



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 60,000 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.