Virginia Master Naturalist Program
Certification and Enrollment Changes

March 2021
Virginia Master Naturalist State Program Office

Background
We recognize that, because of COVID-19, many VMN volunteers have not been able to do the kind or amount of volunteer work that they may have planned for 2021. While there are many possible activities and projects that can be done from home, there are other activities (like educational programs and tabling at festivals) that have been greatly limited. In addition, we recognize that our volunteers may have unexpected responsibilities related to families or jobs this year.

We want Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer activities to be truly voluntary, and we want to avoid creating pressure on any of you to meet volunteer commitments that you may have made before the pandemic. We gathered input from our sponsoring agencies, some chapter leaders, leaders of other VCE volunteer programs, and other states’ Master Naturalist program leaders. As a result, we are instituting the following guidelines and changes to our processes for this year. For now, these changes only apply to the timeframes described below.

VMN Enrollment and Certification

1. Staying enrolled as a VMN volunteer in 2022: Now that we are using Better Impact, we will be starting a re-enrollment process on the system at the end of 2021. We will provide more information on that process later this year once we have the details planned. It will involve a simple process on Better Impact that will not be a significant administrative burden for either the volunteer or the chapter leaders. As part of that process, we will likely ask that every volunteer complete and report at least one volunteer hour during 2021 in order to stay active volunteers in 2022. Again, we will provide more information in late 2021. For now, we encourage all volunteers to go ahead and plan to do some volunteering in their VMN roles this year and to practice logging on and using Better Impact. We do understand that sometimes there are extenuating circumstances regarding the ability to volunteer and log hours, so chapter leaders may address those issues on a case-by-case basis.

2. Maintaining Certified VMN status for 2022: Currently enrolled VMN volunteers who have (a) previously attained the Certified Virginia Master Naturalist status in any year, or (b) been part of the program since 2018 or earlier but never Certified can earn Certified VMN status for 2022 by completing 20 hours of volunteer service and 4 hours of continuing education in 2021. This is a 50% reduction from the normal 40+8.

3. Earning First-time Certification: Currently enrolled VMN volunteers who took basic training courses in 2019, 2020, or 2021 and who have not yet completed the requirements for Certified Virginia Master Naturalist status will still have to complete 40 hours of service and 8 hours of continuing education to earn their first-time Certified Virginia Master Naturalist status, but they may have an extended time frame to complete those requirements. Each chapter can work with its recent trainees to determine what that time frame should be, but we are suggesting an extra 6 to 12 months to complete the requirements. This means that a person whose basic training ended in May 2021 would have until December 2022 or even May 2023 to
complete the 40+8 (compared to the normal deadline of May 2022.) Each chapter will work out a plan based on their schedule and situation, so if you fall into this category, please contact your local chapter leaders. To simplify record keeping and reporting, we still encourage as many trainees as possible to complete the Certification requirements within the normal time frame, which is one year after the end of their training course.

**VMN Recertification Pins**

We will have an annual recertification pin for 2022. Volunteers will be awarded this pin based on their service in 2021.

- Volunteers who were previously Certified in any year may recertify and earn the pin by completing and reporting 20 hours of approved service and 4 hours of CE in 2021.

- Volunteers who fall into #3 above (more recent training course graduates who are working on their first Certifications) will only earn the recertification pin if they complete an additional 20 hours of service and 4 hours of CE in 2021 after achieving their first 40 hours of service and 8 hours of CE for their first Certification. Note that this is a 50% reduction in the extra hours; normally an additional 40+8 would be required to earn the pin in this situation.

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