



**Virginia  
Master  
Naturalist**

**Virginia Master Naturalist Program  
Annual Report for FY 2005/2006**

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## **Summary**

### **Overview of Program**

The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a statewide volunteer training program that will positively impact natural resource education and conservation across Virginia. The program's mission is 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.

At the state level, the Virginia Master Naturalist program is sponsored jointly by *Virginia Cooperative Extension*, the *Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries*, the *Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation*, the *Virginia Department of Forestry*, and the *Virginia Museum of Natural History*. The Program Coordinator position is based in and supported by the Virginia Tech Department of Forestry within the College of Natural Resources.

The program consists of a network of Virginia Master Naturalist chapters across the state. Each chapter is responsible for recruiting and training volunteers and for working with partners to create and coordinate volunteer service opportunities. The training consists of a minimum of 40 hours classroom and field time covering a core set of curriculum objectives. The objectives focus on ecology, natural resource management, basic natural history of the animals and plants of Virginia, and skills for teaching and field research. To become a certified Virginia Master Naturalist, each volunteer must also complete 40 hours of service. This service can be in the form of education (such as leading an interpretive program in a state park), citizen science (such as collecting data on wildlife populations), or stewardship (such as restoring a natural area).

This program benefits Virginia's citizenry, its public lands, and its natural resources. The development of a dedicated volunteer corps will expand the capacity of Virginia's natural resource agencies. The cooperative nature of the program provides a mechanism for state, local, non-profit, and other partners to work together towards the common goals of conservation and education. The volunteer service provides a purposeful way for citizens to spend time outdoors and on Virginia's public lands.

### **Summary of FY 2005/2006**

After more than two years of planning, the Virginia Master Naturalist program is finally becoming a reality. In this first official fiscal year of the program, our focus has been to (1) publicize the program within our sponsoring agencies to ensure that agency field staff are familiar with its goals and structure, (2) foster the development of ten pilot chapters in communities across the Commonwealth, and (3) develop the necessary policy, structure, and support materials to run the program effectively. We have succeeded in these goals and have built a strong framework for the program. There is strong public interest in the program, with some of the pilot chapters reporting that they have enough applicants to fill a class before they have even had a chance to advertise. Individuals from several states considering starting Master Naturalist programs have called us for advice, so it appears that Virginia is already considered a good model for other programs.

## **Accomplishments**

### **Program Publicity**

Staff members from the five sponsoring agencies are involved with the program at the local level as instructors, chapter advisors, and as partners in need of volunteers. Making sure

that these staff members are familiar with the program and their potential roles in it was an important goal this year. We held informational meetings in seven locations around the state with a total of approximately 100 staff members attending. We also communicated program details through internal agency newsletters and meetings. Presentations at the Virginia Chapter of the Wildlife Society and the Virginia Cooperative Extension All Staff Training reached additional staff members and likely partners.

We also began publicizing the program to the general public. With the help of Virginia Cooperative Extension and the College of Natural Resources, we now have a logo, a brochure, and a basic press release. Articles about the program have appeared in several newspapers and Web sites and have helped generate local interest for the pilot chapters.

We anticipate that e-mail and Internet will be a primary mode of communication about the program, so developing a Web site was an important priority. We acquired the domain name [www.virginiamasternaturalist.org](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org) and set up Web hosting with Virginia Tech. The Program Coordinator built and is maintaining the site, which is essentially a one-stop shop for all existing information and documents relating to the program. The Web site launched at the end of February 2006 and is currently receiving more than 500 visitors each month.

Through various public presentations and interactions from October 2005 through May 2006, the Program Coordinator has made 347 face-to-face contacts, 1087 e-mail contacts, and 108 phone contacts (following the VCE guidelines for contacts reporting).

## **Chapter Development**

A goal of the Steering Committee was to establish ten chapters in 2006. Because the program has been discussed for two years and because several Steering Committee members are also involved in chapters at the local level, recruitment was not a difficult task. We now have ten chapters that have completed the first phase of the chapter chartering process, which includes choosing a name, choosing a base location for the chapter, establishing a coordinating committee of five or more individuals, and establishing a chapter advisor who is a local representative of one of the sponsoring agencies. The chapter names, locations, and advisors are listed at the end of this document. They are well-distributed across Virginia, so that a chapter is available for at least some citizens of northern Virginia, the Tidewater area, the Piedmont, Southwest Virginia, and the Alleghany Mountains.

The Local Coordinating Committees are a critical part of chapter development. They require very dedicated members who are willing to spend time making decisions about the chapter organization, developing a training plan and syllabus, establishing partnerships with local organizations in need of volunteers, and publicizing the program to their communities. In total, we have a team of 75 Local Coordinating Committee members (most of whom are volunteers) doing the legwork to start this program on the local level.

In May, we held a two day Chapter Coordinators Training Workshop. The aim of this workshop was to equip chapter coordinators with the background knowledge and understanding of the program needed to recruit participants, plan volunteer trainings, and organize chapter activities so as to prepare them to move on to the next phase of the chapter chartering process. The event was held at Douthat State Park (also the site of one of the first ten chapters) and the workshop sessions were led by Steering Committee members and the Program Coordinator. Overall, the workshop was very successful. The evaluations indicated that the participants felt prepared to move on to the next phase of the chapter chartering process. One participant reported: *"I have attended many types of training programs over the years, (Master Gardener, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, etc.) and I found this training to be the best organized and comprehensive of any I have attended."* We now have a good model for this workshop that we can use again for future coordinators' trainings.

## **Program Policy, Structure, and Support**

There have been some membership changes for our Steering and Executive Committees. We now have a 15 person Steering Committee that includes representation from the Virginia Museum of Natural History. The 11 person Executive Committee includes two representatives from each sponsoring agency, plus one volunteer (from the Steering Committee). Many of the Steering Committee members are also involved on the local level as chapter coordinating committee members and chapter advisors. Their dual perspective from the local and the state level is very helpful. A complete list of committee members can be found at the end of this document.

We started the year with draft versions of curriculum objectives and policy documents. Through this year, we have finalized these versions and incorporated input from the executive committee and key individuals with the sponsoring agencies. All program documents are posted on the Web site.

We have started the process for developing an on-line record keeping system. The Agriculture, Human and Natural Resources Information Technology department at Virginia Tech is doing the software development and database hosting. The system will be used for both Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists. Thus far, we have established a working group and held meetings and e-mail discussions to develop the list of functional requirements for the system. An outside consultant serving as a volunteer in the working group has built a demonstration version of the system and we are in the process of testing it and making additional recommendations.

Though having a handbook or written curriculum for the program is a future goal, we chose not to focus our efforts on that goal during this start-up year. Instead, we gathered existing resources from the sponsoring agencies that match the curriculum objectives. These resources were compiled into notebooks and distributed to the ten chapters with recommendations to use the resources in their volunteer trainings as handouts or background reading.

## **Budget**

Fifteen percent of the total 3-year program budget was spent in FY 2005-2006. Outside of employee salary, benefits, and indirect costs, the most significant expenditures were in for travel and training, including the costs associated with the coordinators training at Douthat State Park.

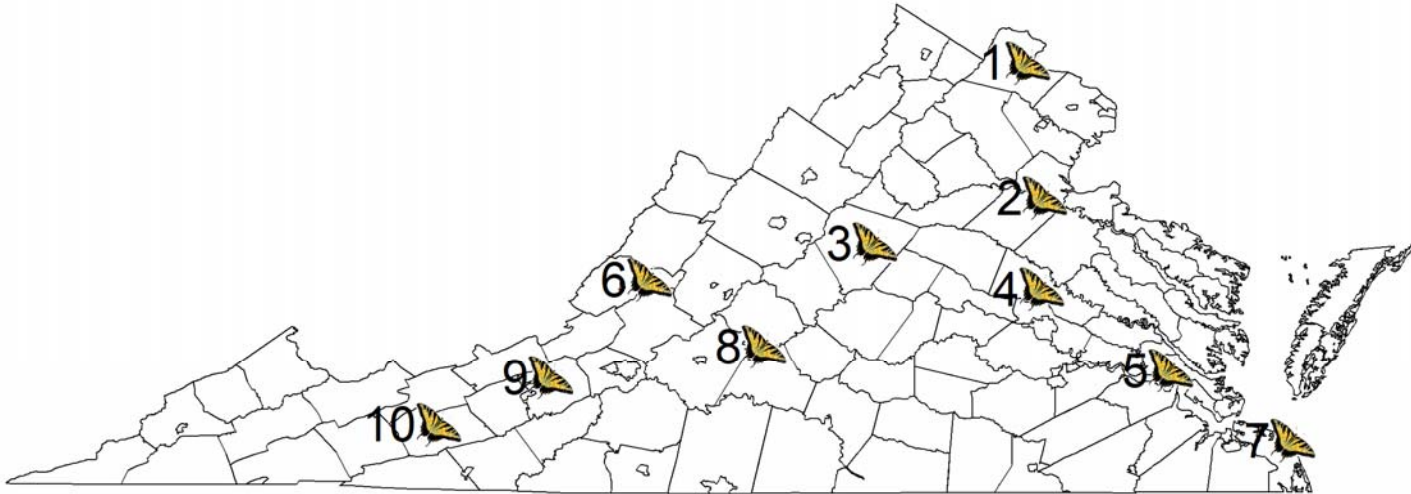
<b>Budget Summary</b>		<b>Expenditure Details</b>	
Total Budget for FY 2005-2006 through FY 2007-2008	\$300,000	<b>Description</b>	<b>Expenditures</b>
FY 2005-2006 Expenditures	\$44,587	Employee salary + fringe benefits	\$30,771
Remaining Funds	\$255,413	Miscellaneous Contractual Services	\$1,042
Percent Remaining	85%	Travel, Convention, Education	\$9,792
		Supplies and Materials	\$747
		<b>Total Direct</b>	<b>\$42,352</b>
		Indirect/Overhead	\$2,235
		<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$44,587</b>

## **Plans for FY 2006/2007**

Our goals for the next fiscal year include:

- (1) Begin development of the written resource manual for volunteer training, with plans to complete some sections by June 2007 and to complete the entire manual by May 2008. This manual is to serve as a textbook and reference for the volunteers.
- (2) Continue to grow the program by shepherding the first ten chapters through the rest of the chartering process and by fostering the development of new chapters in communities where there is an established need for the volunteer service and an interest in the population. Some of the communities likely to establish chapters in the next fiscal year include Fairfax County, Rockbridge County, King & Queen/King William Counties, Martinsville, Nelson County, and Abingdon.
- (3) Complete the on-line record keeping system and train chapter record-keepers to use it effectively.
- (4) Work with the sponsoring agencies and other partners to offer advance trainings and volunteer opportunities that meet identified needs relating to conservation of natural resources in Virginia.
- (5) Explore new possibilities for partnerships that will assist the program in becoming sustainable, effective, and successful.

## 2006 Virginia Master Naturalist Chapters



### 1. Banshee Reeks Chapter

Based at Banshee Reeks Natural Area, Leesburg

Chapter Advisor: John Rohm (DGIF)

Training schedule: 2 session for September-December 2006; possibly 2 spring sessions for 2007

Coordinating Committee is formed (Ron Circe' et al.)

### 2. Central Rappahannock Chapter

Based in Fredericksburg

Chapter Co-advisors: Regina Prunty (VCE) and Sammy Zambon (DCR-State Parks)

Training schedule: October 2006-spring 2007

Coordinating Committee: Ann Crouch, James Scibek, Karen Snape, Jennifer Gron, Karl Gron, Elaine Hild, Catherine Pritchett, Rebecca Taft

### 3. Rivanna Chapter

Based at Ivy Creek Natural Area, Albemarle County

Chapter Advisor: Peter Warren (VCE)

Training schedule: September 2006-December 2006; spring session for 2007

Coordinating Committee: Dede Smith, Mary Lee Epps, Ruth Douglas, Ann Mallek, Ida Swenson, Susan Pleiss, LoriAnne Barnett, Sam Austin

### 4. Riverine Chapter

Based in Ashland

Chapter Advisor: Colleen Calderwood (VCE) Training schedule: Spring 2007

Coordinating Committee is formed with ten members.

### 5. Historic Rivers Chapter

Based in Williamsburg/James City and York Counties

Chapter Advisor: Charlene Talcott (DCR-State Parks)

Training schedule: Spring 2007

Coordinating Committee: Dennis Gaston, Bill Williams, Kari Abbott, Vicki Clark, David Norris

6. Alleghany Highlands Chapter

Based at Douthat State Park, Bath/Alleghany Counties

Chapter Advisor: Beth Hawse (DCR-State Parks)

Training schedule: January-May 2007

Coordinating Committee: Jennifer Heisey, Christine Hodges, Denise Hayes, Jennifer Unroe

7. Tidewater Chapter

Based in Virginia Beach

Chapter Advisor: Darren Loomis (DCR-Natural Heritage)

Training schedule: Spring 2007

Coordinating Committee: Dorie Stolley, Jeff Thompson, Christina Trapani, Colette Amici

8. Central Virginia Chapter

Based in Lynchburg

Chapter Advisor: Mike Hayslett (VCE/

Holiday Lake 4H Center)

Training schedule: Fall 2006

Coordinating Committee: Rebecca Linton, Lora DeVan, Joanne Langford, Ashley Carwile, David Dawson, Nancy Miaoulis

9. New River Valley Chapter

Based in Blacksburg

Chapter Advisor: John Copeland (DGIF)

Training schedule: September 2006-March 2007

Coordinating Committee: Laura Belleville, Scott Bowen, Llyn Sharp, Barb Walker, Michelle Adcock, Suzie Leslie, Jeff Kirwan

10. Beagle Ridge Chapter

Based at Beagle Ridge Environmental Education Center, Wytheville

Chapter Advisor: An advisor for this chapter is pending.

Training schedule: October 2006-March 2007

Coordinating Committee: Debra Davis, Tammy Lowry, Greg Smith, Virginia Smith, Link Elmore, Gregg Reynolds, Ellen Reynolds

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