



Dear Virginia Master Naturalist supporters,

As I take this moment to reflect upon 2007, the second year of the Virginia Master Naturalist program, I am so impressed with everything you all have accomplished. In 2006, we planted the seeds of the program in our first 10 chapters. Since then, these seeds have sprouted, taken root, and are growing vigorously! In 2007, we added 11 new chapters, with 4 more to come in 2008. We have more than 350 active volunteers, and the fruits of their labors are already apparent. These volunteers contributed 7400 hours of service toward natural resource education, citizen science, and stewardship projects in 2007. Through their efforts, more than 15,000 people were educated about Virginia's natural resources. Knowledge about the state of our natural resources was increased through citizen science projects such as water quality monitoring, bird population counts, and Wildlife Mapping. Habitat was improved through tree planting, invasive species control, rain gardens, and other stewardship projects.

As with any plant, our sapling program requires nourishment. Many groups and individuals contributed last year, giving time, financial contributions, and in-kind support to help ensure the continuing success of our program. Thank you to the 100+ chapter coordinators who contributed thousands of hours towards building and leading chapters. The contributions of our sponsoring agencies, 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, are critical components of the program. Along with supporting the program financially, they support us through staff time as chapter advisors, course instructors, service project leaders, Steering and Executive Committee members, consultants, publicists, and in many other ways. The Virginia Tech Department of Forestry and College of Natural Resources also provide financial support as well as a home for the program coordinator position. On the local level, more than 130 partners support the program, providing meeting space, instruction, service project opportunities, and other program support for our chapters.

This annual report includes stories and highlights from our chapters, images showing our volunteers in action, summary statistics for 2007, and reminders for upcoming events. Please read on! Thank you again for your support and interest in the Virginia Master Naturalist program.

Sincerely,

Michelle Prysby

Virginia Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

Virginia Tech Department of Forestry/
Virginia Cooperative Extension

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The Fairfax Chapter plants a tree in honor of the birth of their chapter.
Photo by Marilyn Shroeder, Fairfax Chapter

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The Virginia Master Naturalist Program: An Overview

The Virginia Master Naturalist Program is a statewide volunteer training program positively impacting natural resource education and conservation across Virginia. The program's mission is to be a corps of well-informed volunteers providing 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 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 Virginia Tech Forestry Department and College of Natural Resources provide additional support. Local partnerships are a cornerstone of the program and include other public agencies, as well as private organizations involved in conservation and education.

The program consists of a network of 25 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



Rivanna Chapter volunteers learn about stream ecology by sampling macro-invertebrates on a field trip.
Photo by Rose Brown.

ecology, natural resource management, basic natural history of the animals and plants of Virginia, and skills for teaching and field research. Volunteers also complete 8 hours of advanced training that provides more specialized skills and knowledge. 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 expands 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.



Fairystone State Park in Patrick County is one of many state parks partnering with Virginia Master Naturalist chapters.



2007 Program Statistics

These data, provided by the chapters, show how our volunteers are making a difference. These figures represent a minimum; volunteer hours tend to be underreported.

Number of Basic Training Courses Held	21	
Number of Volunteers Trained in 2007	491	
Total Number of Trained Volunteers	574	
Number of Active Volunteers	364 (63%)	Active volunteers are individuals who reported any volunteer service during the year.
Number of Certified VMNs	93 (16%)	This number has reached 160 as of June 2008.
Number of Education Projects	166	E.g. Interpretive programs, classroom presentations, and development of interpretive materials.
Volunteer Hours: Education	3530	
Number of People Directly Reached Through Education Programs	15,265	
Number of presentations given by VMN volunteers	215	
Number of Citizen Science Projects	93	E.g. Water quality monitoring, Wildlife Mapping, and other monitoring and inventory studies.
Volunteer Hours: Citizen Science	2333	
Number of Stewardship Projects	212	E.g. Trail building and maintenance, invasive plant removal, and habitat restoration.
Volunteer Hours: Stewardship	1587	
Total Project Hours:	7449	
Monetary Value of Volunteer Project Hours:	\$149,576	Based on the Independent Sector's 2006 report for VA.
Volunteer Hours: Administration	9253	These hours reflect the tremendous amount of work completed by local leaders to start our 11 new chapters. Established chapters report spending less time on administration and more on projects.
Total Volunteer Hours for 2007	16,702	
Monetary Value of total volunteer hours	\$335,376	Based on the Independent Sector's 2006 report for VA.
Total Volunteer Hours 2006-2007	19,044	
Monetary Value of total volunteer hours 2006-2007	\$382,404	Based on the Independent Sector's 2006 report for VA.

2007 Basic Training Courses

Nearly 500 people completed a Virginia Master Naturalist basic training course last year with one of our 21 chapters. Regardless of the chapter or location, these courses share common core objectives, such as teaching participants to understand basic concepts in ecology, geology, and natural resource management, providing them with the tools to identify common flora and fauna in the region, and giving them applicable interpretation and science skills. Chapters can also tailor the course to fit their local ecosystems and natural resource issues. For example, the Holston Rivers Chapter in southwest VA highlights fish and freshwater mussels in their course because of the high diversity of these organisms in their watershed. There's a lot to cover in just 40 hours, so the course is designed to cover the basics and what the natural history appetites of the participants in order to help them become life-long learners.

Most chapters choose to accomplish the objectives through a 3-4 month series of evening classes accompanied by several Saturday field trips. Some chapters stretch the course out over a longer time period (9-12 months) to take advantage of the natural history each season has to offer. The Central Blue Ridge Chapter, based in Nelson County, took a different approach. They condensed the course into 6 intense field-oriented class sessions, starting with a weekend-long residential experience at Nature Camp in Vesuvius, VA.

Sample Basic Training Course Schedule: **Holston Rivers Chapter in Abingdon**

- Class 1:** Introduction to the VMN program, Naturalists and Naturalist Skills
- Class 2:** Ecology
- Class 3:** Botany
- Class 4:** Weather, Biogeography, Geology, and Soils
- Field Trip**—Interpretation and Teaching Skills at the Virginia Museum of Natural History
- Class 6:** Dendrology, Forest Ecology and Management
- Field Trip**—Forest Ecology and Management
- Class 7:** Entomology, Herpetology
- Class 8:** Ichthyology and Freshwater Mussels
- Field Trip**—Ichthyology and Freshwater Mussels
- Class 9:** Ornithology, Mammalogy
- Class 10:** Aquatic Ecology and Management
- Field Trip**—Stream Health, Save Our Streams training
- Class 11:** Naturalist and field journal presentations by the class
- Class 12:** Graduation, final exam, wrap-up



Northern Neck trainees practice bird identification on a class field trip. Photo by Fawn Palmer

Sample Basic Training Course Schedule: **Central Blue Ridge Chapter in Nelson County**

- Class 1:** Introduction to the VMN program, Naturalists and Naturalist Skills, Basic Ecology
- Class 2/Field Trip:** Three day experience at Nature Camp, including classroom and field sessions on biogeography, herpetology, astronomy, taxonomy, entomology, botany, ornithology, mammalogy, and wildlife management.
- Class 3/Field Trip:** Forestry and geology
- Class 4/Field Trip:** Wildlife management and habitat restoration
- Class 5/Field Trip:** Geology and soils, interpretation and teaching skills, citizen science skills
- Class 6/Field Trip:** Wrap up and graduation

2007 Volunteer Projects

Virginia Master Naturalists completed more than 7400 hours of natural resource volunteer service in 2007. Each chapter works with partner organizations in the community to identify existing needs for natural resource volunteers and projects. VMN volunteers may choose to work with an existing project or to develop their own. Projects fall into one of three categories: Education/Outreach, Citizen Science, or Stewardship. Chapters identify opportunities within each of these categories so that VMN volunteers with varied backgrounds will find projects that suit their interests and talents.

In their annual reports, chapters were asked to describe 1 to 5 projects that they felt were most noteworthy. Listed below are some of the projects that were chosen in which VMN volunteers worked directly with one of our five sponsoring agencies, followed by additional examples of projects initiated by chapter volunteers or local partners. You can find VMN volunteers hard at work in Virginia's state parks and natural area preserves, leading programs at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, at home entering data for the VDGIF WildlifeMapping program, in the woods collecting seeds for VDOF projects, and working with the youth in VCE's 4H clubs. They are also volunteering with dozens of local partners, including nature centers, local parks, schools, and federal lands such as national parks. Most impressively, many of them have initiated their own projects, from organizing nature camps for youth to starting new citizen science projects.

Projects With State Agency Sponsors

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation: Chapters described projects at Virginia State Parks, including interpretive programs, special events, and stewardship projects at Douthat, Mason Neck, Bear Creek Lake, York River, and other parks. At Douthat State Park, Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers contributed 90 hours of service in 2007 leading interpretive programs. The Alleghany Highlands chapter wrote that staffing by the Master Naturalists enabled Douthat State Park to keep the "Nature's Outpost" open through Labor Day.

Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers have also been involved in projects at the DCR Natural Area Preserves. For example, Northern Neck Chapter volunteers are planning projects to re-blaze trails at Hickory Hollow and to compile native plant lists for Hickory Hollow, Dameron Marsh, and Hughlett Point.

In addition, Virginia Master Naturalists have collaborated with Soil and Water Conservation Districts to conduct educational programming, stream clean-ups, and water quality monitoring.

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries: Most chapters have been involved in Wildlife Mapping to some degree. Several chapters have adopted specific sites on which they conduct regularly scheduled Wildlife Mapping surveys. Many chapters are involved with other wildlife surveys as well (e.g. the Virginia Frog and Toad Calling Survey.)

Some Virginia Master Naturalists have received training in the DGIF Habitat Education program and are doing related local projects, such as working with schools to develop



Tidewater Chapter members build a bridge on their adopted trail at First Landing State Park.

Photo by Dorie Stolley

2007 Volunteer Projects, Continued

wildlife gardens or giving presentations on backyard habitats. The Historic Rivers Chapter is working on a habitat improvement project for quail. There also are VMN volunteers involved in the VDGIF Complementary Workforce Program and as VDGIF-certified wildlife rehabilitators.

Virginia Cooperative Extension: Virginia Master Naturalist Chapters are partnering with 4H to conduct many youth programs. For example, Blue Ridge Foothills and Lakes Chapter volunteers gave 75 hours of service helping to share the Water Wizard Van with 4th graders in Bedford County. The Water Wizard Van is a traveling, education vehicle that contains interactive activities to teach youth about water resource topics. Several chapters assist with Junior Naturalist 4H clubs. Historic Rivers Master Naturalists are assisting VCE extension specialist Jeff Kirwan with a project to map out the trees on the James City County school campuses. In all, education projects account for nearly 50% of the time contributed by VMN volunteers, and many of these are contributing to Virginia Cooperative Extension's mission of educating people using science-based information.

Virginia Museum of Natural History: Although we have only one chapter in close proximity to the museum, the volunteers with the Southwestern Piedmont chapter have contributed hundreds of hours of time to the museum, including leading education programs and assisting with research and collections activities. We are discussing ways to involve VMN volunteers in expanding the museum's programs to other parts of the state.

Virginia Department of Forestry: Many chapters described seed collection and tree planting projects with VDOF. Fairfax Master Naturalists collected over 1000 pounds of seed for state nurseries, local tree planting organizations, and schools to grow into seedlings for reforestation. Alleghany Highlands Chapter volunteers spent 30 hours gathering and sorting acorns for state nurseries. New River Valley Chapter volunteers spent more than 50 hours planting hardwood seedlings in a riparian buffer zone in Blacksburg Heritage Farm Park and also provided on-going care for the trees. Riverine Chapter volunteers planted 1712 trees and shrubs to restore a riparian area in Chesterfield County. Two chapters described rain garden projects that involve VDOF as a partner.

Beagle Ridge Chapter members are working with VDOF and other partners on a large-scale restoration project at Wythe Community College that includes invasive species control, interpretive trail development, and a possible pine thinning and pruning demonstration.

Riverine Chapter members coordinated with VDOF and other partners to staff an information booth at the State Fair. Volunteers were there to answer questions, provide information to fair visitors, and lead interactive programs for youth.



Rivanna Master Naturalists as well as other chapters assisted with 4H tree planting projects in partnership with VCE, VDOF, and local parks and natural areas.
Photo by LoriAnne Barnett

Additional Noteworthy Projects with Other Program Partners

The Historic Rivers Chapter planned and led a 2-day Junior Master Naturalist camp for youth in New Quarter Park in York County. They taught concepts and skills in geology, fossils, nature journaling, insects, decomposition, using binoculars, birds, and predators. The youth participants took nature walks, did nature-themed crafts, looked for fossils, and engaged in many other hands-on nature activities.

Banshee Reeks Chapter members developed two interpretive brochures for Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve to increase visitor awareness and improve their experiences while walking the preserve's trails. One brochure includes a flowering plant list and the seasons in which they bloom. The second brochure focuses on edible plants commonly found on the preserve.

Old Rag and Daughter of the Stars Chapter members are adopting outcrops! Each of the 51 most significant rock outcrops in Shenandoah National Park is being assigned to one or more volunteers.

Volunteers visit the outcrops regularly to document the flora and any impacts to the habitat from humans or invasive species. They also interact with visitors to explain the unique features of the outcrops. Master Naturalists are writing a volunteer handbook for the project and will coordinate training opportunities.

Beagle Ridge chapter members participated in an existing Christmas Bird Count circle at Mt. Rogers to learn how to create a local "circle count" for the chapter. The chapter members have since determined a location for a local Wythe/Grayson circle, and they are in the process of conducting practice sample counts (a requirement for participating in this event.) This Beagle Ridge count will become one of only 3 CBC circles in Southwest VA.

Tidewater Chapter members participated in the Sea Turtle Nest Sitting project, coordinated by biologists at the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. After some advanced training on nest sitting protocols and sea turtle natural history, volunteers committed to 7 hour shifts (8pm to 3am!) watching the relocated Loggerhead sea turtle nest at a remote site in BBNWR and also assisted with eventual excavation of the relocated nest.

Eastern Shore Chapter members are helping to create a new park for the town of Onancock, bordering Onancock Creek, a scenic creek that empties into the Chesapeake Bay. The project includes planning a nature trail route, clearing brush and trash from the site, developing interpretive signage denoting native plants and associated wildlife value, creating observation areas, and repairing a canoe/kayak dock. The project will provide Eastern Shore residents with an easily accessible public area for light hiking, bird watching, nature study and relaxation. Portions of the trail and observation areas will be handicapped accessible. It will be especially beneficial as an outdoor experience and nature education site for children.



Central Virginia Chapter members hike the Appalachian Trail to check cameras deployed for a predator survey in partnership with the Appalachian Trail Club. This is a pilot project for the Appalachian Trail MEGA-Transsect, which will likely involve many Virginia Master Naturalists.
Photo by Central Virginia Chapter.

Spotlight on a Volunteer: Our 100th Certified Virginia Master Naturalist, Cherie Aukland



Cherie Aukland gets ready to collect geographic data at a WildlifeMapping site.

Photo from Historic Rivers Chapter

The VMN program recently reached an exciting milestone with our 100th volunteer to complete the requirements for becoming a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist. It seemed like a great opportunity to profile one of our wonderful volunteers. Cherie Aukland, with the Historic Rivers Chapter, completed 40 hours of basic training, 8 hours of advanced training, and 40 hours of volunteer service to be awarded her certificate in March 2008.

In her "day job" (actually at night), Cherie teaches computer and information technology courses at Thomas Nelson Community College. She has many personal ties to the natural world, though, from growing up with parents who spent time outdoors and from being an avid backpacker. Most of Cherie's backpacking is in Washington state, however, and she realized that she knew more about the natural world out there than in her home state of Virginia. When she read about the VMN program in the local paper, she saw it as a great opportunity to learn more about nature here at home and to actively participate in natural resource conservation work.

"I actually signed up late," says Cherie. "I called and begged to get in!"

Cherie soon proved to be a real asset for the chapter by volunteering as the Service Projects Coordinator. She organized new forms and a system for proposing and tracking projects for the chapter. After getting the new system in place, she decided to get back to the outdoors and do the rest of her volunteer hours as the WildlifeMapping Coordinator for the chapter. WildlifeMapping is a citizen science program sponsored by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries that involves volunteers in documenting wildlife species diversity and abundance around the state. The program has become a real focus for the Historic Rivers Chapter. As a group, they have adopted several sites in local and state parks which chapter volunteers visit regularly to document wildlife presence. Cherie coordinates all of the sites and keeps the projects going. She's even drawing on some of her computer skills and will be using GPS and GIS technologies to do some mapping of the natural areas in the community. She says, "It's been a great thing in my life to be doing this, and I'm going to continue to have a great time doing it." Congratulations, Cherie, and all of our other Certified Virginia Master Naturalists!

WildlifeMapping
in Virginia



To learn more about WildlifeMapping, visit
<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlifemapping/>.

Milestone Achievements in 2007

Although volunteers must contribute 40 hours of service annually to remain Certified Virginia Master Naturalists, some of our volunteers have given many, many more hours. We are working on more formal ways to recognize these contributions, but for now, here is the list of volunteers who achieved our milestones of lifetime service in 2007. These hours include time spent on natural resource projects as well as administrative time donated to developing and supporting the local chapters. Thank you so much for all that you give to our program and to Virginia's natural resources.

It should be noted that we most likely have many more milestone achievers for whom we do not have reported hours. These names were compiled from the 2007 annual reports submitted by chapters. If any volunteers believe they should be added to this 2007 list, please contact your chapter's record keeper.

250+ Lifetime Hours:

Susan Abraham, Banshee Reeks Chapter
Shirley Devan, Historic Rivers Chapter
Emily Gianfortoni, Riverine Chapter
Frank McLaughlin, Banshee Reeks Chapter

500+ Lifetime Hours:

Kari Abbott, Historic Rivers Chapter
Tammie Lowry, Beagle Ridge Chapter
Susan Powell, Historic Rivers Chapter
Charlotte Rea, Central Blue Ridge Chapter

Other 2007 Program Accomplishments



Applications were approved for 4 new chapters that will serve the diverse populations in some of Virginia's urban communities.



We received a grant from the Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources to provide invasive species training to VMN volunteers.



We shared our program model with many other states that are considering developing their own Master Naturalist programs.



We launched the Chapter Coordinators' Listserv to promote collaboration and sharing among chapters.



Our Web site had nearly 15,000 visitors.



Our chapters partnered with 130+ local organizations.



Volunteers and chapter advisors from 11 chapters came together for our 2007 Chapter Coordinators Training. Starting a new chapter takes about a year, and hundreds of volunteer hours!

Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Conference

When: October 17-19, 2008

Where: Wytheville, VA. Our home base will be the Wytheville Meeting Center, with field trips to many nearby natural areas.

Who: All Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers who have enrolled in or completed a basic training course are invited to attend. Chapter advisors are encouraged to come as well! We hope to see at least a few representatives from each of our 25 chapters, and the more the merrier.

What: This conference offers an opportunity to obtain advanced training in many natural resource topics, a venue for chapters to share their accomplishments and ideas with each other, and time to explore a beautiful part of our state. Located in the Southwest Virginia, Wytheville is a terrific spot for a fall getaway during prime leaf changing season. We'll have access to the National Forest, several state parks, a wildlife management area, and other wonderful natural areas. Some training topics to choose from will include public speaking skills, tips for working with youth, developing interpretive materials, Project Underground, wildlife data collection for DGIF, plus many more. Our field trip themes will range from environmental education to fish biology to forest ecology and more!

Tentative schedule:

Friday, October 17

Day: Pre-meeting field trip to Mount Rogers

Evening: Arrive by 5:30 pm. Registrations, supper, welcome and kick-off, program highlights from 2007, chapter "share fair" and networking session

Saturday, October 18

Morning: Concurrent classroom sessions

Afternoon: Field sessions

Evening: Banquet and keynote speaker

Sunday, October 19

Morning: Concurrent sessions in the classroom and nearby

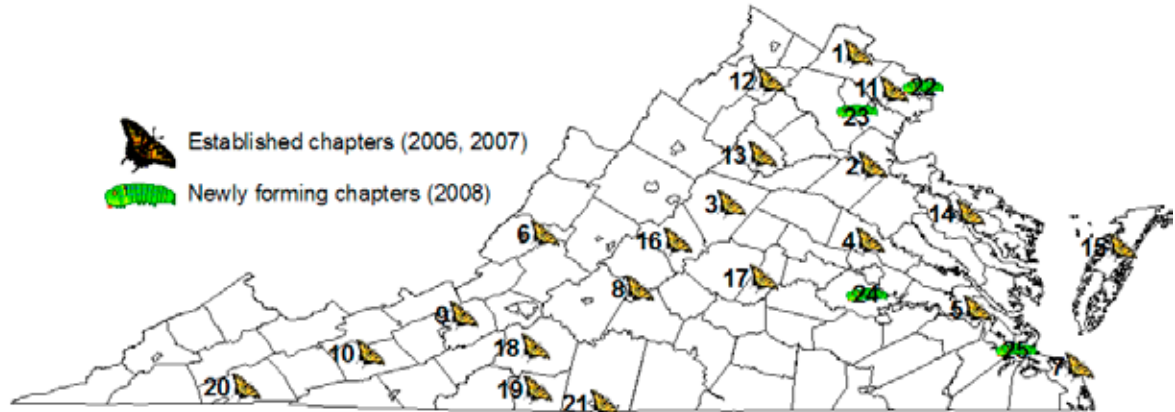
Afternoon: Field sessions

Logistics:

We will have on-line registrations and we'll send out an announcement when that becomes available. Volunteers will be responsible for their own lodging arrangements, but we'll provide a list of affordable hotels in the area that partner with the Wytheville Meeting Center to provide discounts. You might also consider camping or staying at a cabin in a state park such as Hungry Mother State Park. State park cabins fill up quickly, so make those plans soon.



**Join us for a fall mountain getaway
and fantastic learning experience!**



- 1. Banshee Reeks Chapter
Base Location: Loudoun County
- 2. Central Rappahannock Chapter
Base Location: Fredericksburg
- 3. Rivanna Chapter
Base Location: Albemarle County
- 4. Riverine Chapter
Base Location: Hanover County
- 5. Historic Rivers Chapter
Base Location: James City/York Counties
- 6. Alleghany Highlands Chapter
Base Location: Bath/Alleghany Counties
- 7. Tidewater Chapter
Based Location: Virginia Beach
- 8. Central Virginia Chapter
Base Location: Lynchburg
- 9. New River Valley Chapter
Base Location: Blacksburg
- 10. Beagle Ridge Chapter
Base Location: Wythe County
- 11. Fairfax Chapter
Base Location: Fairfax County
- 12. Daughter of the Stars Chapter
Base Location: Front Royal
- 13. Old Rag Chapter
Base Location: Madison/Rappahannock Counties

- 14. Northern Neck Chapter
Base Location: Northern Neck
- 15. Eastern Shore Chapter
Base Location: VA Eastern Shore
- 16. Central Blue Ridge Chapter
Base Location: Nelson County
- 17. Central Piedmont Chapter
Base Location: Cumberland County
- 18. Blue Ridge Foothills and Lakes Chapter
Base Location: Franklin County
- 19. Southwestern Piedmont Chapter
Base Location: Martinsville
- 20. Holston Rivers Chapter
Base Location: Abingdon
- 21. Dan River Chapter
Base Location: Danville
- 22. Arlington Regional Chapter
Base Location: Arlington
- 23. Merrimac Farm Chapter
Base Location: Prince William County
- 24. Pocahontas Chapter
Base Location: Chesterfield County
- 25. Peninsula Chapter
Base Location: Newport News

**For contact information and details about our chapters,
please visit
<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/chapters.html>**

"I want to help educate others about stewardship of our natural resources and environment."

--Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer

Photo: Eastern Mud Turtle, *Kinosternon subrubrum*, at New Kent Forestry Center, Providence Forge, VA. This juvenile turtle was observed during our New Chapter Coordinators Training in May 2008.



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Steering Committee

Michelle Adcock, VCE
Denise Hayes, Volunteer
Beth Hawse, VA DCR
Michael Hayslett, Volunteer
Ron Hughes, VA DGIF
Jeff Kirwan, VCE
Michael Lachance, VCE
Ann Mallek, VMNH
Toni Noreika, VA DOF
Ellen Powell, VA DOF
Ellen Reynolds, VA DCR
Lou Verner, VA DGIF
Carol Zokaites, VA DCR

Executive Committee

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Dean Cumbia, VDOF
Bob Duncan, VDGIF
Timothy Gette, VMNH
Denise Hayes, Volunteer
Jeff Kirwan, VCE
Chris Ludwig, VDCR
Keith Morgan, VDCR
Jim Riddell, VCE
Dave Slack, VDOF
David Whitehurst, VDGIF

Program Coordinator

Michelle Prysby

Virginia Tech Department of Forestry/Virginia Cooperative Extension

Mailing Address: 460 Stagecoach Road, Charlottesville, VA 22902

Phone: 434-872-4580 E-mail: masternaturalist@vt.edu

www.virginiamasternaturalist.org