**Virginia Master Naturalist Program**

**Project Proposal Form**

*Project proposals should be completed by partner organizations or chapter members and submitted to the chapter’s Board of Directors for review. Projects will be evaluated for relevance to program mission and objectives. Projects and activities implemented without approval are not considered Master Naturalist activities, do not count towards required service hours, and do not carry the liability shield.*

**Project Name**: Virginia Native Seed Pilot Project – Seed Collection

**Submitted By:** Isaac Matlock **Phone or Email Contact**: (703) 508-5196, Imatlock@cliftoninstitute.org

**Project Purpose and Value** *(How will this project contribute to natural resource management, conservation, or education?)*:

The purpose of this project is to enhance pollinator habitat restoration in Virginia by establishing a viable native seed industry. Seeds of native species with out-of-state genetics can currently be purchased from seed companies, but many plant species that are commonly found in native grasslands in Virginia, and that provide important resources to pollinators, are not yet sold by seed companies. Furthermore, very few species that are sold have Virginia genetics. Using plants with local genetics restores fragmented plant populations and provides superior resources for pollinators (Bucharova 2017, 2021). Establishment is also improved by using plants that are adapted to local conditions.

In using Virginia ecotype seeds, we help restore and conserve pollinator habitat with species most suited for our local ecosystems. These seeds will also further enhance the genetic diversity or species currently available on the commercial seed market leading to more resilient ecological restoration work and overall aid in maintaining healthy levels of biodiversity in Virginia.

**Project type** *(Is this project education/outreach, citizen science/monitoring, stewardship, or administrative?)*:

stewardship

**Project Description** *(Describe what the project involves. What will participants actually do?)*:

VMN members will be able to assist in seed collection of our target species, assist in recording wild populations, and overall contribute to gathering data and seed throughout the state. By making this project available statewide, we hope to get seeds from majority of the counties within Virginia further contributing to genetic diversity within the Virginia ecotype seeds.

Anyone interested in volunteering for the project will need to contact the project organizer ([imatlock@cliftoninstitute.org](mailto:imatlock@cliftoninstitute.org)) to confirm their participation in the project. It is advised that volunteers who do not have prior seed collecting experience, review the provided seed collection training material that will be made available through the project organizer or participate in seed collection trips with an experienced collector. Volunteers can seek out new sites for the project or will be able to contact the project organizer for suggested locations for collection locations. Collection can be done independently or in small groups provided there is recorded permission for doing so on any private or public site. Landowner contact information along with the written consent will need to be shared with the project organizer for record keeping purposes prior to collection. More information on how to document locations will be found on the seed collection protocol. Once the seeds have been collected, proper storage per the seed collection protocol will need to executed until a hand-off date is organized or until the seeds are mailed to The Clifton Institute. Any volunteers who do not wish to pay for shipping will be able to contact the project organizer and work out a day in which the seeds can be passed on to the project organizer or associated project partners.

Once the seeds are collected, they will be processed and used for propagation of lives plants intended for small farmers through the assistance of the Randolph Farm agricultural learning center at Virginia State University. Any seeds not collected to the standards of the project protocol will not be accepted as part of the NRCS funded *Virginia Native Seed Pilot Project.*

More information on the project will be available by contacting the project organizer directly at Imatlock@cliftoninstitute.org

**Project Location** *(Where will this project take place?)*:

This project is taking place throughout Virginia. Specifically, where ever the target species are located and where volunteers are permitted to be collect from. (All chapters are welcome to participate)

**Time Frame** *(What, if any, is the time frame for this project? Be as specific as possible –What time does the volunteer need to be there and how late are they expected to stay? If it is seasonal, what are the approximate dates or appropriate weather conditions? Is this an on-going project or does it have a fixed end date? About how many hours can a volunteer expect to put into this project?)*:

This is a pilot project and we are approaching the second season of collection so participants can participate at their choosing from June to November 2023. The time frame is based on the target plant species we are looking to collect from. As long as the seed is ready, participants can continue to help with the project.

**Partner Contact** *(If a partner is involved, who at that organization is the contact for this project?)*:

**Name: Isaac Matlock Organization: The Clifton Institute**

**Phone number: 703 508 5196 Email: Imatlock@cliftoninstitute.org**

**Project Chair** *(Who from the chapter is the contact person and organizer for this project?)*:

**What, if any, prior experience or expertise is required or preferred?**

It is ideal that volunteers have basic to slightly elevated plant identification skills. Being able to properly identify the species for collection will be vital for project success. No prior seed collection experience required.

**What training will be provided and by whom?**

Training is offered by Isaac Matlock (project organizer) from the Clifton Institute through online training material, potentially an in-person workshop, and any additional training or assistance through direct contact with the project organizer as needed by volunteers.

**Resources provided** *(What equipment or other resources will be provided for the volunteer(s)?)*:

Online reference material will be available for any volunteer to access. This material will give individuals information on the proper seed collection protocol for the project, species specific information for identification and when to collect. I will also be available for individuals to contact on an as needed basis.

**Resources needed** *(What will the volunteer(s) or chapter need to provide and how will these resources be acquired?)*:

Volunteers will need to supply their own seed collection tools (pruners, bags, buckets, gloves, plant guide, sharpies, smart phone (for photos and coordinates))

**Safety hazards and protocols** *(What hazards might the volunteers encounter and what safety protocols should be followed?)*

Field work has the risks of stinging insects, sun burn, heat related illness, skin irritants like poison ivy. Volunteers will need to be a equipped to work in all conditions and have the ability to hike and stand in heat for extended periods of time depending on where they collect from. It is recommended to collect with a partner or to notify someone of your location and expected time of arriving home.

**Are minors involved?** *(If yes, then all volunteers must be trained in working with youth and the Above Suspicion policy.)* **YES NO**

**How will the project be evaluated during implementation and after completion?**

Collections that are made following the recommended protocol with be accepted and to deemed viable and others collections missing data or not of Virginia ecotype will not be usable. Protocol will be made available to volunteers.

**How will the Virginia Master Naturalist program be recognized?**

This project has many partners involved; all organizations will be mentioned in recognition at the completion of the project. Further conversation on appropriate recognition can be determined.

**How will volunteers benefit from participation in the project?**

Volunteers will be directly involved in the development of a sustained native seed industry here in Virginia. These seeds will provide small farmers with new cash crops which will be made available for sale to the public. This will aid in the conservation of our native plant species and pollinator habitat. Participating volunteers will have the opportunity to learn wild seed collection methods that they can use in the future for personal use or assisting with later seed projects. These skills are valuable as they educate individuals about our native plants and how more successful incorporate into restoration work on their own property on projects they may be assisting with in the future.

*For Chapter Board of Directors Only: Project approved? YES NO Date of approval:*