**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 Virginia Master Naturalist activities, do not count towards required service hours, and do not carry the liability shield.*

**Project Name** *(For approval and recording purposes)*: Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail Education & Outreach

**Submitted By:** Michelle Prysby, VMN Program Director **Phone or Email Contact:** mprysby@vt.edu

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

The purpose of this project is to raise public awareness and increase use of the Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail (VBWT). These efforts will help the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) ensure that the VBWT remains a high quality, reliable, relevant, and highly visible Trail program. Increased awareness of the VBWT encourages ecotourism in Virginia, which benefits local economies and encourages conservation of wildlife habitats. Volunteer efforts will help connect community members to places where they can observe and enjoy wildlife, locally and throughout the Commonwealth.

More specifically, this project will entail:

1. giving presentations about and promoting the VBWT sites and loops in the local area,
2. sharing VBWT information and promotional materials at events and/or any relevant opportunities for reaching interested members of the public,
3. nominating new VBWT sites that provide high-quality wildlife viewing opportunities and alerting DWR’s Watchable Wildlife staff about sites that your chapter feels should be removed from the Trail.

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

Education/outreach

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

* At least one participant per chapter is needed to serve as the VBWT Education & Outreach Project Liaison for the chapter. This person serves as the main point of contact for chapter members and as the point of contact for DWR, should the agency need to contact the chapter about something relating to VBWT loop(s) in their area. The liaison should:
	+ help identify and set up opportunities for volunteers to share information about the VBWT with the public
	+ obtain an annual supply of promotional materials (rack cards, brochures, maps/fliers) through DWR-established channels to be used as needed for outreach activities throughout the year.
	+ work with property owners/managers to nominate new VBWT sites by completing and submitting the DWR’s online site nomination form
	+ alert staff to any sites that the chapters feel warrant removal from the Trail
	+ Disseminate the appropriate DWR-approved media template/s to volunteers and ensure that they are using these when presenting on the project
* Note that if your chapter is also participating in the VBWT Site Visits Project, chapters can choose whether or not they would like one person to function in both liaison positions, or if they would like to have different liaisons for each project.
* Additional chapter members may participate in any or all of the following aspects of the activity:
	+ give presentations (using the DWR-provided template/s), interpretive programs/walks, or other educational programs about VBWT loops or sites to the public or identified community groups,
	+ share information about VBWT loops or sites at public outreach events, such as tabling at Earth Day festivals, county fairs, etc. (using DWR or site provided literature when appropriate),
	+ work with the Liaison to nominate new VBWT sites or recommend removal of others.
	+ **Note:** VMN volunteers may also conduct education and outreach *at* VBWT sites that are more generally focused on wildlife or other topics, but these activities typically would be coordinated as part of other chapter education and outreach activities. This project is meant for education and outreach *about* the VBWT and VBWT sites.

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

Volunteers are needed throughout the Commonwealth. At this time, this activity is only available to VMN chapters that have previously adopted VBWT loops, and those chapters, should they choose to do this activity, should focus on their adopted loops. Education and outreach may be done in a variety of locations and settings. Additional chapter participation will be welcome following an evaluation of loops which were not previously adopted via the now completed VBWT Adopt-a-Trail project.

**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 an ongoing activity with no fixed end date.

1. The Liaison should expect to spend several hours annually organizing the other chapter volunteers.
2. The number of education and outreach events will be determined by the interest of the volunteers and the opportunities in the local community. We suggest that chapters doing this activity commit to a minimum of two VBWT education and outreach events per year. This could be two presentations, tabling about the VBWT at two festivals, or some combination.
3. Participating volunteers will spend variable amounts of time per education and outreach event, just depending on the nature of the presentation or event.

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

**Name:** Jessica Ruthenberg

**Organization:** Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

**Phone numbers:** 804.229.2556

**Email:** jessica.ruthenberg@dwr.virginia.gov

**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?**

1. Knowledge and awareness of the VBWT sites on the chapter’s adopted loop(s).
2. Ability to communicate with a diversity of people in a diversity of settings using best practices for teaching, education, and interpretation.
3. Familiarity with the eBird and iNaturalist websites is desirable, but not required.
4. Liaison: Strong organizations skills to assist with delegation education and outreach opportunities.

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

DWR will provide training on when and how to use the media templates in conjunction with outreach events.

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

Online information about all of the VBWT loops and sites is available at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/vbwt/>.

DWR can provide rack cards about the VBWT , maps of individual VBWT loops that can be used as fliers, and, for a limited number of loops, brochures. If volunteers want to create additional promotional materials, these materials are welcome but should be reviewed by the DWR Watchable Wildlife Biologists to ensure consistent branding and messaging prior to being disseminated to the public.

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

1. If tabling, the chapter will need standard tabling display materials.
2. If presenting, the volunteer will need to make sure any necessary A/V equipment is available.

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

Volunteers should review the Safety and Risk Management for Virginia Master Naturalist volunteers document, particularly the sections relating to duty of care, contact with the public, and information/protocols/scientific integrity.

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

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

Liaisons may be asked to complete an annual survey or submit information to DWR about their chapters participation in the project to gauge community impact and project success.

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

The adopting VMN chapter and appropriate hyperlinks to the chapter will be posted on the loop landing page for the adopted loop/s.

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

This project offers volunteers an opportunity to become more connected not only with DWR but also with the VBWT sites in the area. It also offers volunteers the opportunity to practice education and outreach skills.

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