

Master Naturalist Policies and Bylaws



Master Naturalists

University of Illinois Extension's Master Naturalist Program is designed for adults of any age that want to learn about and positively impact their local environment. The goal of the program is to engage participants with the natural world and encourage them to seek lifelong learning opportunities to further their development as a naturalist.

Master Naturalist Program participants have the opportunity to:

- Learn about Illinois' natural history, ecosystems, plant and animal communities, and environmental issues
- Enhance your love of nature through hands-on training and community-based service,
- Practice lifelong learning and sharing
- Interact and build relationships with new acquaintances with similar interests
- Give something back to nature and your local community
- Learn from and work side-by-side with experts

To become a Certified Master Naturalist, you must complete 60 hours of field and classroom learning which is offered each spring. During and after training, you may begin working on the 60 hours of volunteer service required to complete your Master Naturalist internship. You have 24 months to complete your internship and become a certified Master Naturalist. To remain certified, an additional 30 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education should be performed and reported annually.

What is a Master Naturalist?

Master Naturalists are adults 18 and older who love the natural environment. They are members of the local community who are interested in habitats, ecosystems, natural resources and the environment.

Levels of Master Naturalists

Master Naturalist Trainee - a program participant from the time he/she is accepted into the program through completion of classroom training.

Master Naturalist Intern - a program participant from the time he/she graduates from 40 hours of Master Naturalist training through the completion of 40 hours of volunteer service. This internship is normally completed within 12 months of the end of classroom training. However, interns may take 2 years to complete their internship upon agreement of the local Extension unit Master Naturalist Advisory Committee. Anyone who fails to complete the volunteer service requirement does not become a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist.

Certified (Active) Master Naturalist - a Master Naturalist Intern who has completed his/her initial 40-hour volunteer service requirement, or a returning University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist. To maintain Certified University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist status requires a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of advanced training annually and is valid for one year. Active Master Naturalists are encouraged to pair with Master Naturalist Trainees and Interns to help guide newcomers through a successful volunteer experience.

Master Naturalist Alumnus - a former University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist who successfully completed the 40-hour classroom training and the 40-hour internship, but who no longer maintains his/her annual active volunteer service and/or advanced training requirements. Return to active status after more than two years as a Master Naturalist Alumnus will require additional training.

Inactive Status / Leave of Absence - a former University of Illinois Extension Certified Master Naturalist or Intern who is temporarily unable to fulfill Active Master Naturalist requirements for health, family, or other personal reasons.

Participants may remain on leave of absence for one or two years at a time upon the approval of his or her local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee. Return to active status after more than two years as an inactive Master Naturalist may require additional training.

Use of the Master Naturalist Title

The title "University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist" is to be used only and exclusively in the University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist program in which the trained and certified Master Naturalists conduct educational programming and answer natural resource questions in assistance to University of Illinois Extension. Master Naturalists are expected to identify themselves as such only when doing unpaid public service work in this University of Illinois Extension-sponsored program. The titles are valid only when the volunteer is participating in the University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist program. When an individual ceases to actively participate, his or her designation as a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist becomes void. Instead, he or she becomes a Master Naturalist Alumnus.

Certification as a Master Naturalist is restrictive in that it is valid only when the individual is participating in a University Extension sponsored or endorsed program for the coming year. Those not continuing in the program will not be re-certified and should be aware that if they represent themselves as Master Naturalists, they are violating their original commitment.

Conflicts of Interest - A Master Naturalist should not display credentials or give the appearance of being a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist at a place of business unless that place is conducting an authorized University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist activity. It is improper to imply that University of Illinois Extension endorses any product or place of business. Master Naturalists must not use their title in any form of commercial advertisement. The Master Naturalist program is a public service program established to provide unbiased information, and the title "Master Naturalist" is to be used only when conducting unpaid volunteer work in the program.

When Master Naturalists make public presentations on natural resource subjects, it is permissible for them to accept unsolicited gifts or be reimbursed for

legitimate expenses incurred in conducting the class. However, it is inappropriate to seek pay for personal gain for speaking engagements conducted as a Master Naturalist. Such speaker's fees or honoraria are permissible when the fee is turned over to the local Extension Unit Office.

Master Naturalist Identification – Master Naturalist Trainees/Interns and Active Master Naturalists should use official University of Illinois Extension name badges to identify themselves as representatives of University of Illinois Extension while conducting programs as Master Naturalists unless anonymity for safety of the volunteer is important.

Annual Volunteer Agreement – All University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Interns and Active Master Naturalists must sign an Annual Volunteer Agreement as part of their commitment to the program. A signed copy of the University of Illinois Extension Annual Volunteer Agreement will be on file in the respective University of Illinois Extension Unit Office.

Training

Application Procedures

Recruitment of trainees will be based on pre-planning and an established need for local Master Naturalist volunteer activities. The local University of Illinois Extension - Master Naturalist Advisory Committee will develop and implement a plan to achieve full representation of the community. University of Illinois Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and program compliance policies must be followed.

Core Course Classroom/Fieldwork Training

Course topics – University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Core Course training consists of a minimum of 32 hours of classroom instruction and 8 hours of fieldwork based on the Illinois Master Naturalist Manual. Exact topics presented may vary due to local needs. However, all programs will include sessions on the following topics:

- Introduction to the Illinois Master Naturalist Program

- Ecological Concepts
- Geology and Soils of Illinois
- Weather & Climate
- Ecological Regions of Illinois
- Ecosystem Concepts and Management
- Botany
- Zoology
- Archaeology
- Forest Ecology & Management
- Aquatic Systems Ecology & Management
- Wetland Ecology & Management
- Prairie Ecology & Management
- Urban Systems
- Art of Interpretation & Teaching

Topics not covered in the Illinois Master Naturalist Manual may also be part of core course training, provided approval of the topic and instructor is obtained.

Attendance – Master Naturalist Trainees are expected to attend all training sessions. In the event a training session must be missed, it is the responsibility of the trainee to make arrangements for making up the missed session.

Course fees

Master Naturalist course fees are set by local units offering the training. The fee should include the cost of the Illinois Master Naturalist Manual, which is required for each participant in the program. The course fee should also account for additional training costs such as meeting room rental fees, and photocopying costs.

Continuing Education

Certified University of Illinois Master Naturalists are only those who have completed their classroom training and internship. Certification is limited to one year from the time of granting, but is renewable by remaining active as a Master Naturalist volunteer. To be considered an active Master Naturalist, you must remain current in annual educational update and volunteer service requirements set by the local Master Naturalist program, or, in the absence of local requirements, follow the state minimum requirements of 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of approved advanced training. Approved advanced trainings are such things as local Master Naturalist update sessions and University of Illinois Extension sponsored seminars and short courses. Credit natural resource or environmental science classes must be pre-approved by the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee.

Volunteering in the Master Naturalist Program

Volunteer Opportunities and Requirements

Types of Volunteer Work Eligible - Volunteers are required to discuss with their local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee all planned activities prior to conducting the program. This information is essential for liability coverage. Generally, volunteer work is done in your local community, but need not be limited to local programming efforts. While the Extension unit office coordinates all Master Naturalist programming, most volunteer work will be done outside the extension office. Many projects may involve interaction with parks and recreation departments, nursing homes, schools, county or city agencies, and other civic organizations.

Educational Efforts - Educational efforts are those activities or programs in which the Master Naturalist educates the public. This includes presentations at demonstration sites; presentations at fairs, booths; and educational presentations to identified audiences, such as environmental clubs, school groups, homeowner associations, and church groups. This also includes training of other volunteers, such as other Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Boy Scouts, civic groups, or other identified groups of volunteers, to assist them in delivering a program. Work to construct or develop a site used for educational programming, such as a native habitat restoration, qualifies as educational efforts.

Educational efforts include the time spent planning, implementing, and reporting on educational efforts. As a good rule-of-thumb in determining which activities are appropriate educational programming, ask the questions, "Is the program educational in nature?" and "Does this activity contribute to the goals and mission of the local Extension unit?"

Administrative Efforts - Administrative volunteer efforts that count towards volunteer time include working on a Master Naturalist newsletter; communication efforts, such as telephone trees; and any other activities that maintain the Master Naturalist Program.

Non-educational Programming - Design, installation, upkeep, and maintenance of public or demonstration community service projects without the inclusion of educational activities (such as active demonstrations, hands-on workshops, etc.) must be approved and documented by an Extension Educator, Unit Leader, or local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee as contributing to the goals and mission of the local Extension program.

Non-educational programming may also include travel time and other non-work time necessary to do the job of volunteering.

Training Time

Time spent in training or other settings that qualify as advanced education training should not be counted as volunteer time. Instances where the Master Naturalist is the recipient of information or training rather than the presenter of information count as advanced training or re-certification time.

Reporting Volunteer Activities - Record the date (month/day/year) when volunteer activities took place. Specifically list what the volunteer did during the period of time being reported. It is helpful to keep a file of volunteer job descriptions, contracts, letters, reports, newspaper clippings and pictures of events, exhibits and displays, etc. to be used in writing annual reports and impact statements. Record the number of people that a Master Naturalist has impacted by the particular efforts being reported, including group demographic information.

Individual Master Naturalist report summaries for the previous year (name of Master Naturalist, hours of service, and hours of continuing education for the year) must be reported by the end of January each year. A listing of Master Naturalists who have signed an Annual Volunteer Agreement for the coming year will also be submitted by the end of January. This information is needed to re-certify the Master Naturalist for the following year.

Performance Evaluation

Master Naturalist volunteers are entitled to a periodic performance review from their immediate supervisor. The review process should include oral and written feedback on job performance, and include opportunity for the volunteer to assess his/her supervisor and the satisfaction level of the volunteer jobs he/she has been assigned. Volunteers dissatisfied with current job assignments may request reassignment to different volunteer jobs that meet local Extension programming needs and that adhere to Extension program priorities.

Due Process for Volunteer Grievance Procedures – Each volunteer has the right to bring complaints to the attention of the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee, Master Naturalist coordinator, Extension Educator and/or the Unit Leader with the assurance that they will receive a review and be accorded fair and equitable treatment.

Purpose of Grievance Procedure

Extension volunteers may use the grievance procedure to address complaints, which relate to the terms and conditions of volunteer service.

This grievance procedure covers oral and written reprimands, reassignment, termination of volunteer service, and similar volunteer personnel matters. The grievance procedure is an informal in-house means of addressing volunteer complaints. Grievances will not be processed which are or become the subject of any other administrative or judicial proceeding. Each Unit Leader or other Extension academic staff member responsible for volunteer staff has an obligation to make every effort to resolve volunteer relations problems as they arise.

Unit Level Grievances

When a volunteer has a grievance about volunteer personnel actions taken at the unit level, the procedures below are recommended.

1. **Informal Step: Oral Discussion with Unit Extension Professional.** A volunteer may make a complaint informally to the Unit Leader or academic staff member. The Unit Leader or designee should initiate discussion, considerations, and resolution within ten (10) working days from the date of the complaint. The Unit Leader or designee should give a response to the volunteer within ten (10) working days of the date of the discussion. Informal resolution is encouraged, and a written grievance should be filed only after informal resolution has proven unsuccessful.
2. **Formal Step One: Written Grievance to University of Illinois Extension Regional Director.** If the volunteer is not satisfied with the informal step, the volunteer may present a formal written grievance to the Regional Director within ten (10) working days of the date of the oral discussion and response. The written grievance should be clear, concise, and specifically detail what action is requested to resolve the grievance. The Regional Director or his/her designee will arrange for a meeting with the volunteer. The Regional Director or his/her designee will investigate the causes of the grievance and, if necessary, will conduct a hearing regarding the issues of the grievance. A minimum action is that the Regional Director or his/her designee must discuss the issues with the parties involved in the complaint. The Regional Director or his/her designee will provide a written response to the grievant within twenty (20) working days of the receipt of the written grievance. A copy of the written grievance and the written response shall be furnished to Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach and Dean of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES).
3. **Formal Step Two: Final Decision by Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach.** If the volunteer is not satisfied with the Formal Step One decision, a written request for a review may be made to the Associate Dean of Extension and Outreach. The volunteer shall request the review within ten (10) working days of the step two written response receipt. The Associate Dean or his/her designee will make a complete and thorough

review of the written record, request any additional information, or conduct any further investigation he/she feels necessary. He/she will furnish a written decision to the volunteer within twenty (20) working days from the date of receipt of the grievance. A copy of the written grievance and written response shall be furnished to the Dean of the College of ACES. The decision of the Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach shall be final in all grievances.

Grounds for Dismissal from Master Naturalist Program

A University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee, Master Naturalist coordinator or Extension Educator and Unit Leader, in the event that the Master Naturalist demonstrates actions that are in conflict with the mission, purpose, and objectives of University of Illinois Extension. Examples of conflict include, but are not limited to, misuse of the Master Naturalist title and failure to comply with University of Illinois Master Naturalist program policies.

Procedure for Dismissal

The following steps will be followed in removing a volunteer.

1. The Unit Leader will notify the volunteer in writing, listing specific concerns and/or policy infractions in question. The notice should also include the immediate and/or possible outcomes including possible removal from the volunteer role.
2. The Unit Leader will provide an opportunity for the volunteer to respond to this notice and provide any additional or contradictory information pertinent to the situation.
3. The Unit Leader, in consultation with the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee, will review the original complaint and other evidence and decide on the action to be taken. The decision will then be conveyed to the volunteer in writing within ten (10) days of the decision. Appeals of the

decision follow the due process for volunteer grievance procedures described above.

The Unit Leader should consult with the Regional Director and other appropriate Extension administrators any time there is a serious incident involving a volunteer.

Recognition and Awards

Upon satisfactory completion of the classroom/fieldwork portion of Master Naturalist training, a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Intern certificate is awarded to the participant. After completion of the 40-hour internship, the Master Naturalist Intern becomes a certified University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist and is awarded a Master Naturalist certificate. Certificates may be presented at an annual graduation or volunteer recognition ceremony. In succeeding years, University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist who remain active by keeping their continuing education and volunteer service requirements current may be awarded a "Years of Service" certificate.

Program Compliance

It is the policy of the University of Illinois not to engage in discrimination or harassment against any person because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, unfavorable discharge from the military, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam era, and to comply with all federal and state nondiscrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action laws, orders and regulations. This nondiscrimination policy applies to admissions, employment, access to and treatment in the University programs and activities.

This policy means that the Master Naturalist program is open to all regardless of status or affiliation. Similarly, all Master Naturalist program offerings must be open to all who wish to participate regardless of status or affiliation. Reasonable accommodations for those with special needs must be made to ensure equal access to programs. Instances of discrimination or harassment are grounds for dismissal and de-certification from the Master Naturalist program.

Affirmative Action

University of Illinois Extension is an affirmative action organization and actively recruits minorities and women in employment and programs. It is the responsibility of each employee to participate in the University of Illinois Affirmative Action plan by assisting in recruitment and by helping to create an open, multicultural environment. Supervisory employees will follow affirmative action guidelines in selecting and supervising staff, and will be evaluated on results achieved.

Americans with Disabilities Act

Extension offices must make their programs available to the disabled. These guidelines should be followed: 1) If Extension offices are not accessible to the disabled, every effort will be made to provide services in an alternative location. 2) Consider the accessibility of meeting rooms that are used to conduct classes and meetings. Choose only accessible rooms if at all possible. 3) It is not mandatory to remodel public buildings if the services can be provided elsewhere; however, if remodeling is to be done, the remodeled areas must be accessible to the disabled. 4) All new construction must be accessible to the disabled. 5) No interested parties may be denied services because of disability unless it is impractical to accommodate their needs, or if accommodating them would create an unacceptable health or safety risk. Every reasonable effort must be made to design and deliver Extension programs that encourage participation of individuals with special needs.

Volunteering

Master Naturalists frequently volunteer at the Rend Lake Recreation Nature Sites, Crab Orchard Wildlife Refuge, Giant City State Park, Shawnee National Forest and more. Generally, volunteer work is done in the community, but need not be limited to local programming efforts. Many projects involve interaction with parks and recreation departments, schools, county or city agencies, and other civic organizations.

Educational Efforts - This includes presentations at demonstrations, fairs, and to identified audiences, such as environmental clubs, school groups, homeowner associations, and church groups. This also includes training of other volunteers,

such as other Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Boy Scouts, civic groups, or other identified groups of volunteers.

Non-Educational Programming - Design, installation, upkeep, and maintenance of public or demonstration community service projects must contribute to the goals and mission of the Extension program.