



University of Illinois Extension

Master Naturalist Policies

I. Introduction

The University of Illinois Master Naturalist Program is an educational volunteer training program offered by University of Illinois Extension. The program is designed to give participants an opportunity to experience nature, develop knowledge of and respect for the environment, and practice natural resource stewardship.

Our Mission

The mission of the University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist program is to provide science-based educational opportunities that connect people with nature and help them become engaged environmental stewards.

Our Vision

To give individuals the opportunity to experience nature, develop knowledge of and respect for the environment, and practice natural resource stewardship.

Our Goals

- Offer *Master Naturalist educational programs and materials* that provide classroom and field based training on the environmental and cultural resources of Illinois.
- Cultivate *volunteers to serve* as educators and community ambassadors for environmental initiatives; as stewards in the management of natural resources in Illinois; and as stakeholders who will perpetuate the Master Naturalist Program.
- Facilitate *cooperation and collaboration* among partnering groups and agencies.

To become a Master Naturalist, you must fill out and submit an application to the local Extension Unit offering the program. After the local coordinator reviews the application, you may be invited for a short interview. Not all applicants are accepted into the program.

II. 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 with a minimum of 40 hours of Master Naturalist training through the completion of 60 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 Master Naturalist Advisory Committee.

Master Naturalist Graduate - a Master Naturalist Intern who fails to complete the volunteer service requirement for certification.

Certified (Active) Master Naturalist - a Master Naturalist Intern who has completed his/her initial 60-hour volunteer service requirement, or a returning previously certified University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist. To maintain Certified University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist status requires a minimum of 30 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education 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 / Leave of Absence - a former Certified Master Naturalist who no longer maintains his/her annual active volunteer service and/or continuing education requirements. Return to active status after more than two years as a Master Naturalist Alumnus will require additional training as approved by the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee/Coordinator.

Use of the Master Naturalist Title - The title "Master Naturalist" is to be used only and exclusively in the Master Naturalist program in which the trained and certified Master Naturalists conduct educational programming and provide natural resource assistance to University of Illinois Extension and its local partners. Master Naturalists are expected to identify themselves as such only when doing unpaid public service in the program. The title is valid only when the volunteer is participating in the Illinois Master Naturalist program. When an individual ceases to actively participate, his or her designation as a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist becomes void, and he/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 Master Naturalist endorsed project or activity 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. They should refer to themselves as Master Naturalist Alumni.

Conflicts of Interest - A Master Naturalist should not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Master Naturalist at a place of business unless that place is sponsoring a Master Naturalist activity. It is improper to imply anything that 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 volunteer program established to provide service and 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. Speaker's fees or honoraria are permissible when the fee is turned to the University of Illinois Extension office for the furtherance of the Master Naturalist mission.

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

Certificates - 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 60-hour internship, the Master Naturalist Intern becomes a certified 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.

III. Training

Application Procedures - Recruitment of trainees will be based on pre-planning and an established need for local Master Naturalist volunteer activities. The local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee will develop and implement a plan to strive for full representation of the Extension Unit. University of Illinois Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and program compliance policies must be followed. Applicants complete an online or paper application for consideration into the program.

Screening of Applicants – Screening techniques, such as in-depth applications, in-person interviews, and other sources will be used as needed to determine if candidates are appropriate for the program. All Master Naturalist trainees who have been accepted into the program are required to complete full background checks as part of the volunteer selection process. This includes completion of the Volunteer Application; an interview; a DCFS CANTS check; Illinois State Police Conviction Name Check Request for Volunteers and a name check against the National Sex Offender Website (<http://nsopw.gov/en>). The University will treat this information as confidential.

Currently active Master Naturalist may be invited to assist with interviewing new potential trainees. Training should be provided to these volunteers in proper interview skills as well as appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask in the interviews. Volunteers may not be involved in the screening procedure for other trainees or volunteers.

Applicants should receive explanation of volunteer opportunities, particularly those that the individual will commit to for the internship. If these opportunities are not suitable to the candidate (i.e., conflicts with schedule, no interest in offered program areas, etc.), then the candidate should be advised to reapply to the program again in the future.

Protection of Minors Training – All Master Naturalist volunteers must complete online training developed by University of Illinois Extension on “Protection of Minors” as a requirement of becoming and continuing to be a volunteer. As part of that training, there is an online form to complete acknowledging they are aware of University of Illinois policies regarding protection of minors and understand their responsibility for mandated reporting incidences of abuse and/or neglect of minors to the University of Illinois Police Department (217-333-1216) AND to a U of I Extension employee within

the unit in which they are volunteering (e.g., County Director). Calls to the UI Police Department for mandated reporting should be made together with the County Director or other Extension employee, such as an Extension Educator.

Core Course Classroom/Fieldwork Training

Course topics – University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist Core Course training consists of a minimum of 40 hours of classroom and field instruction based on the Illinois Master Naturalist Manual. Topics presented may vary due to local needs. A few chapters are still in development. To fulfill the 40 hour minimum training requirement each Master Naturalist training will cover all foundation chapters, at least two ecosystem chapters, at least two “ology” chapters and selected supplemental chapters that meet local needs. Additional topics not covered in the Master Naturalist manual may also be a part of the course training provided the local Master Naturalist advisory committee approves the topic and that a suitable instructor is available.

Foundation Chapters (required)

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Illinois Master Naturalist Program

Chapter 2: Understanding the Natural World

Chapter 14: Soils of Illinois

Chapter 15: Environmental Ethics and Philosophy

Chapter 19: Natural Divisions: The Biogeography of Illinois

Ecosystem Chapters (minimum of 2)

Chapter 3: Understanding Prairie in the Prairie State

Chapter 4: Forests of Illinois

Chapter 5: Wetlands

Chapter 6: Agricultural Lands and Wildlife

Chapter 7: Urban Areas and Wildlife

“Ologies” Chapters (minimum of 2)

Chapter 8: Ornithology

Chapter 9: Mammalogy

Chapter 10: Herpetology

Chapter 11: Botany

Chapter 12: Entomology

Chapter 13: Geology

Supplemental Chapters (as appropriate)

Chapter 16: Archaeology – People and the Early Illinois Landscape

Chapter 17: Weather and Climate

Chapter 18: Flowing Water – Illinois’ Streams and Rivers

Chapter 20: Art of Interpretation and Teaching

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 – The current course fee per trainee is \$250. If Units can raise sufficient donations and contributions to offset the registration costs, participants can be charged a lower registration fee. From the \$250 registration fee, \$125 remains with the local unit and \$125 is paid to the state MN program. The state portion shall be used to pay for the MN manual for each trainee and for further curriculum revisions and new chapters that will be needed in the future.

IV. Maintaining Certification

Certified Master Naturalists are those who have completed their classroom training and internship and have returned a signed volunteer agreement form for the current program year. 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, one's volunteer service and continuing education requirements must remain current each year.

Screening for Active Volunteers- Yearly, all active Master Naturalists must sign a copy of the volunteer agreement and have their name checked against the National Sex Offender Website. A volunteer background (DCFS CANTS) check, completion or update of the Volunteer Application and the Illinois State Police Conviction information checks must be renewed no less than every five years of volunteer service. A volunteer charged with a criminal offense but not yet convicted may be suspended as determined by consultation between the Unit/county staff, Regional Director, and state program leadership. The volunteer will be notified (with a receipt requested) that he or she is on suspension as a Master Naturalist volunteer pending resolution of the matter. Upon resolution of the matter, the individual may request his/her volunteer appointment be restored to "active" status. The County Director, in consultation with administration and the Master Naturalist program leadership, will determine whether the volunteer's appointment should be restored based on the facts and circumstances.

Annual Volunteer Agreement – All 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 Annual Volunteer Agreement will be on file in the respective University of Illinois Extension Unit Office.

Retention of Volunteer records- Applications, verification of clearance from DCFS, Illinois State Police and Sex Offender databases will be retained for five years past the time in which the volunteer leaves the program. Exception: For active volunteers or cases where a volunteer has filed a grievance or was terminated the files should be retained indefinitely. The University will treat this information as confidential.

Volunteer data files such as hours logged, projects participated in and demographic information such as address, phone number should be retained for ten years after the volunteer becomes inactive. Incident or accident report files including accident report forms, acknowledgement of risk forms or

other documentation related to an incident or potential incident/accident should be maintained for four years after the volunteer becomes inactive.

V. Volunteering in the Master Naturalist Program

Types of Volunteer Work Eligible - Volunteer service with sponsoring and partnering groups or agencies that furthers the mission of the Illinois Master Naturalist program is considered eligible. Additional volunteer service is eligible as pre-approved by the local Master Naturalist Advisory Committee. Generally, volunteer work is done in the local community or in regional natural areas, but need not be limited to local efforts. Projects may involve natural resource stewardship at regional parks and preserves, citizen scientist efforts such as Bee Spotters, environmental educational and outreach, administrative service and leadership in perpetuating the Master Naturalist Program and in support of other Extension programs such as 4-H. Travel time to volunteer service activities can be included in volunteer service hours.

Natural Resource Stewardship – Natural Resource stewardship includes but is not limited to hands-on management, planting, wildlife and vegetation monitoring, and trail work as it relates to the management of the region’s natural resources. Some activities may require additional training and certification. Opportunities for stewardship of regional parks, natural areas, and preserves can be performed by coordinating with partnering groups and agencies. In addition to attending existing and scheduled volunteer workdays, Master Naturalists may contact partner groups about opportunities for independent service projects. Master Naturalists are particularly encouraged to coordinate with partnering groups and agencies regarding opportunities to assume an ongoing stewardship role at locations and preserves in need of continuing site stewardship.

Citizen Scientist Efforts – Citizen scientist programs cover a wide range of interests, but are generally focused onto one group of organisms such as birds or environmental conditions such as precipitation measurement or water quality monitoring. Most of the citizen scientist efforts include observation, logging data and sharing of information which is used formally and informally by teachers and researchers. The longest running citizen scientist effort is Audubon’s Christmas bird count which started in 1900. Bees, butterflies, lady beetles, frogs and fireflies - there are citizen scientist programs that provide the structure for MNs to contribute knowledge to the scientific community.

Educational Efforts - Educational efforts are those activities or programs in which the Master Naturalist provides environmental education to the public. This includes developing and providing presentations to relevant audiences or at project demonstration sites, providing natural resource training to other volunteers, and developing environmental interpretative materials, programs, and signage. In general, those activities that contribute to the vision and mission of the Master Naturalist Program are considered appropriate.

Administrative and Leadership Efforts - Administrative volunteer efforts that count towards volunteer time include working on a Master Naturalist newsletter, serving on the Master Naturalist Advisory Committee, providing content for Master Naturalist publications and web media, planning

conferences or workshops, and any other activities that help maintain and sustain the Master Naturalist Program.

Other Extension Support – UI Extension includes many program areas such as youth development, local foods/small farms, consumer education, families and community well-being. Periodically MNs may be asked to help with 4-H fairs or expos or other events and activities that promote and strengthen UI Extension in local communities.

Training Time - Time spent receiving training that would qualify and could be considered as continuing education should not be counted as volunteer service time. Instances where the Master Naturalist is the recipient of information or training rather than the presenter of information should be considered as continuing education rather than as part of the service commitment.

Reporting Volunteer Activities – All reporting is done online through the state MN volunteer reporting system. A tutorial is available. Discuss any problems with coordinator. It is helpful to keep a file of volunteer project descriptions, reports, correspondence, newspaper clippings and pictures of projects, sites, events, exhibits and displays, etc. to be used in writing annual reports. Records should attempt to quantify the impact of the volunteer's service on the respective site, project, or audience.

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 December each year**. This information is needed to re-certify the Master Naturalist for the coming year.

Continuing Education - Approved continuing education includes Master Naturalist training sessions, partner sponsored workshops and approved short courses. Credit for natural resource or environmental science classes must be pre-approved by the Master Naturalist Coordinator.

Local Master Naturalist groups may plan periodic informational meetings with educational updates for active Master Naturalists and Interns. These also apply toward continuing education credits. Travel time to and from continuing education activities may not be included in reported hours.

Volunteer Performance and Renewal of Active Status Procedure - Volunteer performance will be a continuous assessment process in order to ensure the mission of the Master Naturalist program are being met in a manner that best serves the needs of the University of Illinois and the Master Naturalist program. The review process may include oral and written feedback on volunteer performance and can be used as encouragement for continued involvement in the program.

Grounds for Dismissal of a Volunteer - A University of Illinois Extension volunteer can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the local Extension staff coordinating the Extension program in conference with the UI Extension unit director and regional director. Possible reasons for dismissal may include a volunteer who 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, failure to comply with University of Illinois volunteer policies and misuse of the Extension program title. At the time of dismissal, the volunteer will be required to turn in his or her name badge and other Extension property to the local Extension staff coordinating the program.

Procedure for Dismissal – The local Extension staff coordinating the volunteer program will notify the volunteer in writing that he/she is being dismissed from the program and the general reasons for dismissal. Units will first consult with the State Master Gardener Coordinator and the Assistant Director, Extension Field Operations, The letter will be written with input from the Extension Program Coordinator, the County Director, the Regional Director and signed by all three, with copies to the State Master Gardener Coordinator and the Assistant Director, Extension Field Operations. The decision of the letter is final and effective immediately. A copy of the letter should be placed in the volunteer’s file and the file should not be purged even after the volunteer is inactive for three years. A copy of the termination letter should be sent to the Director, Extension Field Operations. This individual will maintain a confidential file of all letters and will serve as a consultant to discuss other current or future volunteer roles by this individual.

VII. Program Compliance

The Illinois Master Naturalist Program complies with the equal opportunity policies of its partnering organizations in addition to the University of Illinois Extension policy as follows.

Equal Opportunity Statement - 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, pregnancy, citizenship status, order of protection status, genetic information, 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 and all participants are encouraged to help create an open, multicultural environment.

Americans with Disabilities Act - All reasonable efforts must be made to include persons with disabilities in the Master Naturalist program. Extension personnel will take the needs of such persons into account in determining the services to be provided under the program or activity. When feasible, all efforts to encourage and accommodate those with disabilities in Master Naturalist program activities should be made by providing physical access (for example, ramps) and serving other specialized needs (for example, sign language interpreters).

VII. Setting and Amending Master Naturalist Policies

Recommendations for policy changes are directed through the State Master Naturalist Advisory Committee that has the following purposes:

- Serve as advisory council to University of Illinois Extension administration.
- Encourage equitable distribution of state Master Naturalist resources.
- Recommend minimum standards for University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist core course training.
- Strengthen state Master Naturalist education and training.
- Increase awareness of University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist programs.
- Provide support for and recommend policies and guidelines for University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist programs while recognizing local needs.

Official notification of state Master Naturalist policy changes will be communicated via email or direct mailing of any policy changes.

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