

Texas Master Naturalist Gideon Lincecum Chapter

Volunteer and Advanced Training Hours Guidelines

Requirements

The *minimum* training requirements include 40 hours of combined classroom and field experiences. These educational sessions should be designed to expose volunteers to a wide variety of natural resources disciplines, providing them with a high-quality learning experience. The sessions should be designed not only to teach the volunteers, but also to provide them with access to the resources that they need in order to teach this information to others in an interesting, useful and meaningful way.

To become a Certified Texas Master Naturalist, a trainee must complete the following:

- The state committee approved curriculum with a *minimum* of 40 hours of combined field and classroom instruction.
- Obtain a *minimum* of 8 contact hours of approved advanced training.
- Complete a *minimum* of 40 hours of approved volunteer service.

Volunteers have a maximum of 15 months in their first year to complete the above requirements to receive their first Certification as a Master Naturalist.

To retain the Texas Master Naturalist™ title during each subsequent year, volunteers must complete a minimum of 8 hours of advanced training per year and provide a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer service per year coordinated through their local chapter. In general, the first year begins once the volunteer has completed the initial training. Local chapters may require more training, volunteer service and/or advanced training.

A chapter may allow participants to begin earning volunteer service hours once they begin the Texas Master Naturalist training. Once the volunteer has completed all the requirements they shall receive a state certificate (MKT- 3338) and color dragonfly pin as a Certified Texas Master Naturalist. At this time, volunteers are also eligible to receive Texas Master Naturalist business cards (MKT-3341) and name tags.

Class attendance

In anticipating the need to set standards for maintaining class attendance, the State Advisory Committee has set the following policy: Each chapter may set a local standard for the maximum number of classes that may be missed during a given training cycle. Chapters are encouraged to keep this standard to a minimum. However, regardless of the number of classes that can be missed, a participant must make up the class(es) by attending the appropriate class(es) within 12 months. Appropriate means the chapter can allow an advanced training class to count as make-up or the chapter may require that it be the same subject class presented during the next training cycle. If an advanced training class is used as make-up, then for that individual, it does not also count as advanced training. In this case the class must account for only one type of training --initial training OR advanced training. A participant may also attend the same subject class of a neighboring chapter within the same ecoregion given adequate prior notification and space availability of the neighboring chapter. If a participant must miss more classes than the local standard allows then the respective chapter may consider an exception to their rule in special

circumstances, such as medical problems, family illness, accidents, etc. However this should be the exception not the rule. Until these classes are made up, a volunteer cannot become a Certified Texas Master Naturalist, but may earn volunteer service hours or advanced training hours towards certification. Upon completion of an approved Texas Master Naturalist program training, it is recommended that the volunteer receive a Texas Master Naturalist (“in training”) nametag. Upon completion of all the requirements within the first year, a Texas Master Naturalist volunteer becomes Certified and is awarded a state certificate.

The Gideon Lincecum Chapter has adopted the state recommended guidelines above with one modification. We allow up to two classes to be made up by viewing video recordings of lectures when those recordings are available.

Hours of classroom time are counted as hours scheduled by the class coordinator. Typically our class sessions are three hours long (6 – 9 pm or 9 am – noon). If a lecturer finishes a bit early, it still counts as three hours. The class coordinator should be able to tell you how many hours you can report for each class if there is any question. All students should report the same time for each class. The time it takes for you to drive to the class or extra time spent after the class in discussion with others or helping clean up the classroom does not count as classroom hours.

The class coordinator or the chapter Membership Committee coordinator or his/her delegate will keep class attendance records. It is your responsibility to make sure your attendance is recorded at each class. It is also highly recommended that you keep your own personal record of your training attendance so that you can help resolve any discrepancy if it occurs at the end of the training period.

Advanced Training Requirements

The purpose of advanced training is to provide Texas Master Naturalists an opportunity to focus their interests on one, or a few, specific topics that interest them. Also, advanced training on an annual basis promotes continued learning and development. Advanced training is a benefit in itself, providing the experienced Master Naturalist with tools to work in more advanced volunteer efforts. Although the State Texas Master Naturalist program may occasionally provide statewide or regional advanced training opportunities, it is generally the responsibility of the chapter to insure that there are sufficient advanced training opportunities offered so that members can attain their 8-hour minimum requirement. In addition, the local chapter should be a clearinghouse for notifying members of approved advanced training opportunities that exist outside the chapter boundaries.

Advanced training courses may be made available directly through TCE, TPWD, or any number of short-courses provided by universities or nature centers. One way for a chapter’s trainees to meet their advanced training requirements is by actually sponsoring the advanced training sessions. The chapter’s Local Coordinating Committee, Advanced Training Committee or equivalent must pre-approve all advanced training opportunities before the volunteer attends. Educational television shows are not a form of advanced training and therefore should not be approved as such. Advanced training hours are also counted one hour for each hour of advanced training, however travel time is not included for advanced training hours. Pre-approval must be obtained for an advanced training session that is outside the chapter boundaries.

Chapter Coordinators and/or the Chapter Advanced Training Committee should use the following criteria or ask the following questions of the opportunity when reviewing and approving Advanced Training Opportunities:

Does the Advanced Training opportunity:

- 1. Promote continued learning and development of naturalist skills?**
- 2. Provide Master Naturalists with knowledge and skills to work in volunteer efforts?**
3. Direct trained volunteers toward specific programs in need of their services?
4. Provide practical information and training for application in volunteer efforts?
5. Take advantage of local partnerships?
- 6. Provide Master Naturalists an opportunity to focus their interests in one or a few specific topics?**
- 7. Build on the core curriculum initially provided by the local chapter?**
- 8. Provide natural resource management issues and information applicable to Texas?**

Advanced Training opportunities must meet the following criteria: 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8. It is suggested that the remaining criteria also be a part of the opportunity.

Volunteer Service Requirements and Guidelines

In order to attain certification, a Texas Master Naturalist trainee must complete a minimum of 40 volunteer service hours on pre-approved projects within one year of the initial training series. In order to retain the title of Certified Texas Master Naturalist, a volunteer must complete another 40 service hours on pre-approved projects in every subsequent year. Volunteer service hours are those direct contact hours spent on Texas Master Naturalist projects approved by the local chapter. (Thus, volunteer hours credited for the TMN program may not be credited from or to another Master Volunteer or other volunteer program). Sometimes travel and prep time for specific projects may be counted as service time as determined by the local chapter. Service activities relating to the development and management of a local chapter, such as serving as a board member, should receive volunteer service credit hours.

Volunteer service project opportunities can be presented by various different identities ranging from the state program sponsors, the chapter, local chapter partners, an individual volunteer, other agencies such as city, county, state and federal agencies and even nature centers and schools. Several chapters have even successfully instituted a “class project” where the current training class of the chapter finds/develops and mutually agrees to volunteer for the project as a group and receive their required volunteer service hours at the same time.

Volunteer projects may be a series of short experiences such as serving on a speaker’s bureau – or they may involve the long-term efforts of an entire volunteer team from just one or even several chapters. Either way, for a master volunteer, the opportunity to do meaningful and interesting work is the reward. Texas Master Naturalist volunteers will vary in their abilities and interests. Some will want volunteer opportunities to be presented to them by the local chapter and state program sponsors and partners, while others will see a need and want to design their own project. There are few constraints, except that volunteer service must meet the program mission by being dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

All volunteer service projects must be pre-approved, ideally, through a local committee process, as this can often be an arduous job that should not be left to just one person. The pre-approval of volunteer service projects and opportunities is important to:

- Provide a list of service projects for volunteers of the chapter
- Ensure the goals of the organization and the partners are met
- Avoid assumptions and possible misunderstandings

Chapter leaders will be confronted with numerous service projects and opportunities to approve. Below are some points to consider as a chapter Volunteer Service Committee pre-approving individual service projects.

- A. Is the proposed service project representative of the goals, practices and teachings of the Texas Master Naturalist Program?
- B. How does the project address a pressing naturalist, natural resource management, chapter and/or partner need for meaningful service or resources?
- C. What is the scope of the project in terms of when it would need to be conducted, where, estimated time needed to complete or maintain per month, how many volunteers would be needed, etc.?
- D. Is the project within the Chapter’s service area and ecological training?
- E. How does the project allow the chapter to focus and/or create visibility, identity and/or recruitment for the chapter?
- F. How can the project’s impact on the community and our natural resources be measured?

Actual Volunteer Service Examples:

Bad/Unacceptable	Better	Best
Being “on call” as a wildlife rescuer for a non-partner organization	Actually performing a wildlife rescue event for a partnering organization of the local chapter	
Planting exotic plants at a local school	Planting native plants or a Wildscape at a local school	Leading 5 th graders and staff in implementing a native plant garden/Wildscape at a local school
Monarch monitoring in Colorado	Monarch monitoring in Texas	Monarch monitoring within your local chapter’s area
Cleaning the elephant cage at a zoo	Caring for the Prairie Chicken area at a local zoo that is in partnership with the local chapter	Leading interpretive programs about Prairie Chickens at a local zoo that is in partnership with the local chapter

Bad/Unacceptable	Better	Best
Maintenance at a private native plant nursery	Maintenance of a demonstration garden at a park/nature center or being part of a native plant propagation team for the city's botanical garden	Holding a workshop on how to install and maintain a wildscape or other similar type of native habitat.
Conducting wildlife management activities on your own land	Conducting wildlife management practices/activities on public land	Teaching/assisting landowners to develop their own wildlife management plans that the landowner would carry out
A teacher receiving service credit for natural resource education activities he/she conducts in their classroom	A teacher receiving service credit for natural resource education activities he/she conducts as an unpaid after school Environmental Club leader	A teacher /volunteer who organizes and conducts a natural resource education workshop for other Master Naturalists or the general public.
Stream clean-up by a volunteer who works for a local watershed protection program	Stream clean-up by volunteers who do not work for a local watershed protection program	Master Naturalist Volunteers conducting stream or watershed restoration practices. Or Master Naturalist volunteers coordinating a stream clean-up for the local community to participate in.
Receiving service credit for time spent serving as a Board or Committee member for another natural resource/environmental organization NOT in partnership with your local Texas Master Naturalist Chapter.	Receiving up to a set limit of service credit (e.g. 10 hours per year as set by your local chapter) for serving as a Board or Committee member for another natural resource/environmental organization that is ALSO a partner with your local chapter, providing the chapter with resources such as meeting space at little or no cost.	Receiving service credit for time spent serving as a Board or Committee member for a natural resource/environmental organization in partnership with your local chapter and because the organization invited you to serve and represent your local Master Naturalist Chapter in this capacity.
	Conducting endangered species surveys; developing nature trails or habitat brush piles at a local park/nature center which is in a partnership with your local chapter.	Maintaining a nature classroom/training area for that same partner who also allows the chapter to keep an office and/or hold chapter meetings in this same space.

A trained volunteer, no matter how little or how much volunteer service they are providing the chapter within a given year is always considered a Master Naturalist volunteer. Master Naturalist volunteers in any given year are either "Certified" or working towards certification for that given year.

The Gideon Lincecum Chapter has adopted the above state recommended guidelines for volunteer service. In addition, we have posted a list of current projects on our Web site at <http://grovesite.com/page.asp?o=tmn&s=glc&p=188967> where they can be downloaded as Adobe Acrobat PDF files. The document is called "Volunteer Project Codes." Other documents that are also at this same Web site page are:

Volunteer Hours Reporting Form

Volunteer Project Approval Form

Advanced Training Reporting Form

Advanced Training Approval Form

On a separate page, there is a sheet of Frequently Asked Question regarding reporting procedures. This link is: <http://grovesite.com/page.asp?o=tmn&s=glc&p=438318>

Here are some specific examples of good and unacceptable service work that are not illustrated above.

- Working on your property for your benefit, such as maintaining your wildlife appraisal for property taxes valuation, is not service work.
- Doing Citizen Science projects (such as NestWatch, Weather reporting through Cocorahs, invasive species tracking and reporting) where the results are for the benefit of the public in general is a valid service project.
- Trapping brown-headed cowbirds and reporting the data to the state is a valid service project. Shooting an occasional cowbird, feral pig, or coyote is not.
- Making a bluebird nestbox for donation to the chapter or program attendees is a valid service project. Making bluebird boxes and putting them on your own place or selling them for your own profit is not.
- Guiding groups on nature walks is valid volunteer service. Doing it on your land or anyone else's land for a fee is not.

There will be other questionable projects that may arise. Please check with the chapter Volunteer Service Committee chair for approval on your project.