

CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK



Bluestem Chapter
Texas Master Naturalist Program
(adopted May 18, 2015)

CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK

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OPERATING HANDBOOK

Bluestem Chapter

Texas Master Naturalist Program

A: DUES

1. **Establishment of Dues:** The Board of Directors may set the annual dues, if any, payable to the Chapter. The Board of Directors under special circumstances may waive individual membership fees, on a case-by-case basis, by a majority vote of the Board of Directors.
2. **Dues Schedule:** Dues shall be payable in advance of the last day of January in each calendar year. If dues are not paid by March 31 in each calendar year, then all privileges afforded a certified member are rescinded until dues are paid.
3. **Dues Amount:** The Board of Directors has set the dues at \$20 per year.

B: BOARD MEMBERS

Elected Officers

1. President/State Representative (votes in event of a tie)
2. Vice President/Programs (Advanced Training) Chair
3. Secretary
4. Treasurer

Other Board Members

5. Past President
6. Chair – Education
7. Chair – Membership
8. Chair – Publicity
9. Chair – Social Media/Web Site
10. Chair – Historical Records (Historian)
11. Chapter Advisor
12. Class Representative of most recent class (elected by class members at last class session each year; eligible to vote after initial certification)

C: DUTIES OF OFFICERS

1. President
 - a. Preside at all meetings of the Chapter.
 - b. Serve as Chair of the Board of Directors.
 - c. Appoint, subject to the Board's approval, committees and committee chairs.
 - d. Serve as ex-officio member of all committees.

- e. Sign all Board-approved documents that may be legally binding on the Chapter.
 - f. Sign checks in the absence of the Treasurer.
 - g. Provide agenda for Board meetings and general meetings.
 - h. Become Past President upon completion of term as President.
 - i. Work with the Membership Chair to fulfill and submit the Chapter's annual report to the state office annually.
 - j. Vote when there is a tie.
 - k. Coordinate the review and updating of the Chapter Bylaws and Chapter Operating Handbook.
 - l. Prepare summary of the Chapter's activities at the end of each calendar year as a part of historical record.
2. Vice President/Programs (Advanced Training) Chair
- a. Assist the President and act for the President in his/her absence.
 - b. Chair the Program Committee.
 - c. Retain right of first refusal to serve as President following term as VP
3. Secretary
- a. Conduct all necessary Chapter correspondence.
 - b. Record, distribute (within two weeks after the meeting), and preserve the minutes of all meetings of the Board of Directors, general membership meetings, and special meetings.
 - c. Keep a record of attendance at each meeting and whether a quorum is present.
 - d. Maintain a hard copy file of all minutes and correspondence.
 - e. Bring to each meeting the minute book, a copy of the bylaws, rules and policies, a list of all committees, and a copy of the parliamentary authority adopted by the Chapter.
 - f. Distribute notice of membership meetings and field trips.
4. Treasurer
- a. Maintain budget and accounting records.
 - b. Receive all dues and monies for the association and maintain them in a separate Chapter bank account.
 - c. Keep an account of all income, expenses, disbursements, and other financial matters.
 - d. Pay all bills upon receipt of a written statement or receipt. Treasurer or President shall sign all checks, drafts, or other instruments for payment of money or notes of the Chapter.
 - e. Make a bi-monthly report to the membership at the general chapter meeting.
 - f. Develop an annual budget for approval by the Board of Directors.
 - g. Present the financial records for audit on or before the January Board meeting.
 - h. Submit all annual financial records and audits as required.
 - i. Prepare tax forms as needed.

D: DUTIES OF OTHER BOARD MEMBERS.

1. Past President
 - a. Assist the President.
 - b. Chair the Nominating Committee.
 - c. Provide continuity from prior Board of Directors
 - d. Assume the responsibility as the State Representative for the Chapter if that position is not otherwise filled.
 - e. In the absence of a Past President, the President will reassign necessary responsibilities.

2. Chair – Education
 - a. Appoint Education Committee members.
 - b. Work with Chapter Treasurer to develop a training program budget and recommend tuition to the Board.
 - c. Coordinate the training of Master Naturalist interns according to State guidelines:
 - 1) Plan, implement, and evaluate the Chapter training curriculum and develop training calendar.
 - 2) Select all presenters and make arrangements for their class/presentation including materials, handouts, and audio-visual equipment.
 - 3) Arrange for location and room seating for all classes.
 - 4) Arrange for speaker gifts, travel and lodging needs, and speaker expense reimbursements, if any.
 - 5) Arrange for posting of training program on Chapter and State Web sites and newspaper and/or flyer announcements.
 - 6) Prepare intern binders, including any additional inserts.
 - 7) Coordinate with committee members to ensure success of training program. Manage the on-going class through graduation.
 - 8) Interact with AgriLife office sharing training information.
 - 9) Work with other Chapters regarding class make-ups.
 - 10) Prepare thank-you notes to speakers following presentations.
 - 11) Prepare final class evaluation.

3. Chair – Programs (Advanced Training)
 - a. Plan and schedule Advanced Training, with at least two programs per year open to the public, in coordination with AgriLife and/or Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge.
 - b. Plan and schedule Advanced Training as part of general membership meetings at least two times per year.
 - c. Arrange for location and room seating for all programs.
 - d. Arrange for speaker gifts, honorariums, travel and lodging needs, and speaker expense reimbursements, if any.

- e. Prepare sign-in sheets per program, tally number of attendees, and submit to Membership Chair for reporting to State and AgriLife.
 - f. With President, plan and coordinate field trips as appropriate.
 - g. Use the State Master Naturalist™ Program Chapter Management Guidelines section on Advanced Training Requirements (see section I).
 - g. Notify membership of field trip requirements, i.e. water, safety, maps, travel logistics, etc.
 - h. Ensure speakers or field trip leaders are recognized appropriately.
4. Chair – Membership
- a. Maintain a roster of the Chapter’s member names including in-training members plus addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses.
 - b. Maintain a record of volunteer service and advanced training hours and class training attendance.
 - c. Submit reports monthly to AgriLife and quarterly to State. Prepare and submit annual report to State.
 - d. Notify the Board of members meeting certification and threshold hour achievements.
 - e. Order and maintain the member certification and recognition awards, e.g. shirts, name tags, certificates, business cards, pins, etc.
 - f. Ensure that members have a current approved background check on file along with any other liability or insurance forms as required.
 - g. Maintain a record of special interests and specific expertise of members.
5. Chair – Publicity
- a. Schedule television and radio spots, prepare and submit announcements to local newspapers, and prepare and distribute flyers and/or other publicity for new class recruitment, programs, and other events.
 - b. Prepare and publish a Chapter newsletter.
6. Chair – Social Media/Web Site
- a. Manage Bluestem Shutterfly, Facebook, and other appropriate social media sites.
 - b. Manage Chapter Web site page (see Web site training manual).
7. Chair – Historical Records (Historian)
- a. Maintain the historical records of the Chapter. Historical records include but are not limited to: training classes, projects, recognitions, events, elections, photographs, and meetings.
 - b. Work with Social Media/Web Site Chair for digital documentation of historical record.
8. Advisor
- a. Advise, recommend, and inform the Chapter on appropriate business.
 - b. Review the Chapter’s financial status and participate as a member of the annual audit committee.

- c. Assist the State Program Office and State Committee in implementing and enforcing program regulations and policies.
- d. Facilitate opportunities for Master Naturalist volunteers to exercise initiative and judgment within proper measure of autonomy when coordinating chapter events and activities.
- e. Participate in event planning and attend events when possible or when identified as necessary through the planning process.

E: AD HOC COMMITTEES – Ad Hoc committees are formed for a particular and specific short-term purpose.

1. **Audit Committee:** Responsible for conducting the annual audit of the financial records of the Chapter. Members will include the vice-president, secretary, and advisor (at least one).
2. **Nomination Committee:** Responsible for selecting the annual ballot of the four officer positions. Will also serve when an officer vacancy occurs that requires filling. The committee will present a slate of candidates at the annual meeting. Committee consists of Past President (Chair) and a minimum of two additional certified members in good standing.
3. **Other Ad Hoc Committees:** May be formed by the Board as needed to address specific tasks or purposes.

F: ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

Active members are those members who submit the required service reports and pay the Chapter dues for the current year. These actions indicate they wish to remain active members of the Chapter. The Chapter may require additional reports as a condition of membership as well. Lack of contact with the Chapter through attendance at one or more meetings or Chapter activities during the preceding year or lack of written notice to the Chapter that they wish to remain an active member will indicate that they do not wish to remain active members. Membership in the Chapter is open to qualifying individuals regardless of race, age (must be 18 years of age or older unless joining with an adult sponsor as approved by the Executive Committee), gender, religion, disability, or national origin. Members under the age of 18 may not hold an officer position but are eligible for all other privileges of membership.

G: MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION

1. Initial membership (within 15 months of the start of the annual training class)
 - a. Minimum of forty (40) hours basic training class (combination of classroom and field experience)
 - b. Eight (8) hours of approved advanced training
 - c. Forty (40) hours of approved volunteer service
 - d. Class fees paid
 - e. Pass background screening

2. Re-certification per year
 - a. Eight (8) hours of approved advanced training, documented with electronically-submitted timesheets
 - b. Forty (40) hours of approved service, documented with electronically-submitted timesheets
 - c. Attendance at a minimum of two (2) general meetings
 - d. In good standing (dues paid for certifying year)
 - e. Required documentation, if any, completed, signed, and returned (conflict-of-interest, background check, insurance, liability waiver, etc.)
 - f. Pass background screening every three years to meet Youth Protection Program standards
3. All members must agree to and abide by the current Texas Master Naturalist Code of Ethics and Texas Master Naturalist Standards of Conduct.
4. In accordance with the Chapter Bylaws, Article IV.B.4, persons with dues in good standing but who are unable to complete the required service and/or advanced training hours by December 31 for recertification will be classified as members, not certified members.

Texas Master Naturalist Code of Ethics

Each member pledges to:

1. Subscribe to the highest standards of integrity and conduct.
2. Promote and support the statewide and local Master Naturalist program
3. Respect the state sponsors of Texas Parks & Wildlife and Texas AgriLife Extension and their roles and expectations.
4. Disseminate information to promote understanding of, and appreciation for, the values of our natural resources.
5. Strive to increase knowledge and skills to advance as a Master Naturalist volunteer
6. Promote competence as a Master Naturalist volunteer by supporting high standards of education, service and performance.
7. Encourage the use of sound biological information in education and outreach and in management decisions.
8. Support fair and uniform standards of service and treatment of those engaged in the Master Naturalist program.
9. Know and follow established program guidelines and policies
10. Abide by chapter bylaws
11. Avoid use of the Master Naturalist title, logos and trademarks for personal endeavors and/or profit.
12. Act as trustworthy and ethical stewards of the environment
13. Never inappropriately disturb or harass wildlife, never inappropriately remove anything from its natural state or area.

Texas Master Naturalist Standards of Conduct

Master Naturalist program volunteers shall at all times:

1. Uphold the Commitment made to the program and the required volunteer and advanced training hours required by the program.
2. Uphold the dignity and integrity of the Master Naturalist program. They shall endeavor to avoid even the suspicion of dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or unprofessional demeanor.
3. Conduct themselves appropriately to context and setting at all times.
4. Be considerate and respect other's points of view.
5. Keep accurate records of volunteer service, training and research, and regularly notify your local chapter of these records.
6. Avoid performing service when such service is judged to be contrary to the Code of Ethics or detrimental to the well-being of the program and its sponsors.
7. Provide maximum possible effort in the best interest of each client and/or volunteer project regardless of the degree of remuneration.
8. Be mindful of their responsibility to society and the program.
9. Studiously avoid discrimination in any form, or the abuse of program authority, certification, or membership for personal satisfaction. Avoid advocacy, lobbying or promoting political issues.
10. Cooperate fully with professionals and other Master Naturalist volunteers in the best interest of our natural resources.
11. Refrain from advertising in a self-laudatory manner, beyond statements intended to inform prospective clients or members of qualifications, or in a manner detrimental to the Master Naturalist program and its volunteers.
12. Avoid all use of alcohol and controlled substances while on duty as a Master Naturalist volunteer. Reporting for service while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance will result in termination from volunteer service.
13. Accept responsibility for decisions made and actions taken based on these decisions.

H: GUIDELINES FOR ADVANCED TRAINING AND SERVICE HOURS

1. Responsibility – it is the responsibility of each member to see that their Advanced Training and volunteer service work is approved and to report those hours to the Chapter in a timely manner.
 - a. All training and service hours are to be recorded by each member on their individual training and service record form and submitted electronically to the Membership Chair by the 5th of each month.
 - b. Participation forms are kept that track the attendance at each event/project. Each member is required to sign the form for every event attended; these forms do not constitute individual reporting and are for general tracking and auditing purposes only.
2. Advanced Training Hours – Every member must obtain a minimum of eight (8) Advanced Training hours each calendar year by December 31st to qualify for recertification.

- a. The Bluestem Chapter provides a variety of Advance Training opportunities. These may be offered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, other Master Naturalist Chapters, Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge, Master Gardener Chapters, and other similar organizations and may be offered on-line with appropriate documentation. The approved hours must include presentations with a leader, documentation of attendees, and must pertain to information relevant to the master Naturalist program or the volunteer programs for service projects of the Bluestem Chapter.
 - b. A list of currently known training opportunities will be posted on the Chapter Web site.
 - c. Some Chapter meetings have an Advanced Training component. They are generally one hour, and if different, the amount of credited time will be announced at the meeting.
 - d. Advanced Training may be submitted without prior Board approval if it meets one or more of the following requirements:
 - 1) Promotes continued learning and development of naturalist skills.
 - 2) Provides Master Naturalists with knowledge and skills to work in volunteer efforts.
 - 3) Directs members toward specific programs in need of their services.
 - 4) Provides practical information and training for application in volunteer efforts.
 - 5) Provides members an opportunity to focus their interests in one or a few specific topics.
 - 6) Takes advantage of local partnerships.
 - 7) Builds on the core curriculum initially provided by the local Chapter.
 - 8) Provides natural resource management issues and information applicable to Texas.
 - e. Travel time to and from training is not included as training time.
 - f. The Board reserves the right to revoke training submitted that does not meet these requirements. Questions about what constitutes approved training should be directed to the Board.
3. Service hours – After being certified as a member of the Bluestem Chapter, a member must complete a minimum of forty (40) volunteer service hours each calendar year by December 31st to qualify for recertification.
- a. Volunteer hours credited for the Texas Master Naturalist program may not be credited from or to another volunteer program.
 - b. A list of approved service opportunities will be posted on the Chapter Web site.
 - c. Service hour credit is given for attending Chapter meetings. It is up to the individual members to keep track of the amount of time you spent at the non-training portion of the meeting and to report that time.
 - d. Questions concerning what constitutes appropriate service may be submitted to the Board for clarification.
 - e. Travel to and from a **direct service** project is included as service time.
 - f. In the event of both service and training, if service time exceeds amount of training time, then travel counts.

I: YOUTH PROTECTION POLICIES

The purpose of the Youth Protection Standards Program (YPS volunteer screening) is to provide a safe and secure environment for youth and adults involved in Extension programs, implement best practices related to management of volunteer service risk, and protect the image and integrity of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and its associated groups. In order to serve as a volunteer, all potential volunteers who have direct, face-to-face contact with youth must be screened every three (3) years through the Youth Protection Standards Program. The criminal background check conducted is a national search of 48 jurisdictions, in addition to state and national sex offender lists.

1. 5-point strategy to prevent child abuse:
 - a. Educate Master Naturalists to aid in the detection and prevention of child abuse.
 - b. Conduct background checks to prevent offenders from entering Master Naturalist organizations.
 - c. Establish policies that create barriers to child abuse within the program.
 - d. Require improper behavior be reported in order to identify offenders quickly.
 - e. Remove and report alleged offenders swiftly.

2. Seven rules for working with youth to create barriers to abuse (make volunteers aware of these when youth are present):
 - a. Never be alone with a youth. Always have another adult volunteer present. Have youths use the buddy system. They should never go off alone. (Announce this at workdays.)
 - b. Always have instructional sessions in view of other adults and youth members.
 - c. Always respect their privacy. Youth and unrelated adults should never be in the restroom or changing room at the same time.
 - d. Always have safety measures in place for workdays or projects with high risk:
 - 1) Two or more adults at all times.
 - 2) No youth is allowed a workday without parent/guardian or an adult willing to assume responsibility for the youth.
 - e. Always wear appropriate attire.
 - f. Always use constructive discipline. Corporal punishment is never allowed.
 - g. Know the three Rs of Youth Protection: Recognize, Resist and Report
 - 1) Recognize situations that might place a youth at risk.
 - 2) Resist – the child needs to know that if he resists, most child molesters will leave him alone.
 - 3) Report – If the child reports attempted or actual molestations he will protect himself as well as other children from further abuse, and he will not be blamed for what occurred. If a child reports to you, you file a report to Texas A& M AgriLife Extension Chapter Advisor at

3. The Child’s Bill of Rights – Specific resistance methods are emphasized in the Child’s Bill of Rights. When a child is confronted with a situation that he thinks is dangerous, he has the right to:
 - a. Trust his own instincts or feelings
 - b. Expect privacy

- c. Withhold information that could place him in danger
 - d. Refuse gifts
 - e. Say no to unwanted touching or affection
 - f. Say no to inappropriate demands and requests from adults
 - g. Be rude or unhelpful if the situation warrants
 - h. Run, scream, and/or make a scene
 - i. Physically fight off unwanted advances
 - j. Ask for help
4. Disclosure
- a. Don't panic or over react to the information being disclosed.
 - b. Don't criticize the child.
 - c. Do respect his privacy; take the child to a private place away from other children, yet still in view.
 - d. Reassure child you are concerned.
 - e. Do not promise to keep his secret; tell him it is necessary to report it to AgriLife Extension Chapter Advisor.
 - f. Ask if he has talked to his parents about the abuse if the parent is not the alleged abuser.
 - g. Encourage child to tell appropriate authorities. Tell him he is not to blame. No one should ask him to keep a special secret. It is okay to talk about it with appropriate adults.
 - h. Keep it strictly confidential.
 - i. Report it to AgriLife Extension Chapter Advisor; no state requires proof, only good faith.

J: ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT OF THE CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK (COH)

1. **Adoption:** Initial adoption and ratification of the COH is by a majority vote of those present at a general meeting following written distribution of the proposed COH to the general membership ten days before the meeting with notice that the ratification vote will be held at the general meeting. Written distribution may be via conventional mail, email, or other equivalent means.
2. **Amendment:** Changes and amendments may be made by the Board of Directors at a regular Board meeting with a two-thirds vote of the Board members in attendance. The general membership must be notified in written form of the proposed changes or amendments ten days before the meeting and be given an opportunity at the Board meeting to voice any concerns about the changes or amendments. Written form may be via conventional mail, email, or other equivalent means.