

Want to become a Master Naturalist?

by Jane Alvizo

Bois d'Arc Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists



Do you like spending time in a natural setting, learning about different plant and animal species – and maybe even finding something new? Do you enjoy getting your hands dirty and your feet muddy? Do you care deeply about our environment and want to find out more about how to improve and protect it? If you do, and you would like to work with others who are on the same quest, you can apply to become a Certified Texas Master Naturalist.

In Fannin County the local chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists is the Bois d'Arc (BOH dark) Chapter, and its fourth training class is scheduled to begin August 23, 2016, and continue through December 13, meeting for three hours (6-9 p.m.) each Tuesday, at the Derrell Hall Education Center (Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office), 2505 N. Center St., Bonham, TX 75418. You can go online at txmn.org/boisdarc for an application or drop by the Ag Extension office at this address to pick one up. Return your completed application, participate successfully in an interview, begin your training, and you can be on your way to becoming one of a corps of dedicated, well-informed citizen volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service in implementing youth education programs; who help the park service operate its parks, nature centers, and natural areas; and who provide leadership in natural resource conservation efforts.

What will you learn in the training sessions? You will be the first class in our county to receive the latest information in the revised curriculum and from the updated manual. Among the topics that you will study as you are on your way to becoming a citizen scientist are land stewardship, geology, archaeology, the phyla and classes in the kingdom of living things, ecology and the management of ecosystems, and the laws/regulations and ethics that apply to conservation. At tmn.org you can find a full description of the statewide content and goals of the curriculum.

What will be expected of you as a Master Naturalist? Well-informed Texas Master Naturalists are citizen volunteers who help the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Recreation Service in their efforts beneficial to the management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Since its founding in 1998, the organization's members have contributed more than 1,003,409 hours of service on 90,000 acres of wildlife and native plant habitats and have reached more than 1.2 million Texas residents of all ages. These volunteer efforts are worth more than \$20 million.

What will you need to do to become certified? Complete the organized training program that involves a minimum of 40 hours of classroom and field experience instruction. Obtain a minimum of 8 hours of advanced instruction. Complete a minimum of 40 hours of chapter-approved volunteer service.

What then do you do to maintain certification? Each year thereafter, complete at least 8 hours of advanced training and provide at least 40 hours of volunteer service in projects approved by your chapter. And of course, there is always some paperwork. Each month you will report on paper or online

your hours of service and advanced training so that your chapter and you yourself get credit for your volunteer service and for the number of individuals who were impacted by your volunteering. It's meaningful, important, and rewarding; and your chapter will provide more than enough opportunities for you to make a difference while maintaining your certification.

Want to give us a test run? The Bois d'Arc Chapter meets the third Tuesday of each month, usually at the location previously mentioned. Our next two meetings are at 6 p.m. on July 19 and August 16, 2016. Most of us come early, no later than 5:30 p.m. (and some of us come later), to enjoy the good food provided by our hospitality committee and the lively conversations shared with our fellow conservationists.

Still want more information? In addition to visiting the state and local chapter websites, you may contact Cody Maxwell, Fannin County's Texas Agrilife Extension Agent; Connie Aplin, Bois d'Arc Chapter President; or Linda Brinlee, 2016 Bois d'Arc Master Naturalist Training Chair, at the Texas Agrilife Extension Service number: (903) 583-7453.