

# What Members Should Know About Advanced Training

## **What is Advanced Training?**

Why do we have Advanced Training? First, the TMN program is all about service. The mission of TMN is *“to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas.”*

Think of Advanced Training as a means to this end. You get AT in order to be the well-informed volunteer, better equipped for Volunteer Service. According to the Introduction to the Texas Master Naturalist Program, Advanced Training should cover—more in depth—a subject area of the initial training that is of specific interest to you. AT should not only give you in-depth information, but it should also enable you or train you to put to use the information received when conducting your TMN service.

**Role of the AT Committee:** Review and approved proposed Advanced Training opportunities. It is also the committee’s job to notify chapter members of approved AT opportunities. You will find the opportunities we’ve reviewed on the Chapter Calendar and the AT Master List and we will add to the list as new opportunities are proposed and approved. There are no “blanket” approvals in effect for any activity. AT hours will not be entered into the database without approval which means you should not put AT hours on your time sheet unless they have been approved.

**Role of the Master Naturalist:** It is the job of all chapter members to seek out AT opportunities. When you come across an AT opportunity that interests you or that you think others may be interested in, be sure to submit the information to the AT Committee for approval.

## **Nominating AT Opportunities-**

The AT Proposal Form is available on this page of the website. Let’s go over that form now.

Note that AT stands for “Advanced Training”. Please be thorough when filling out the form. If the activity is approved, the information you provided will be

forwarded to the rest of the chapter members and we'd like to have adequate information.

The AT Committee reviews and approves the activity. After the event has passed, we may check with the submitter to see if the lecture timing was correct. Sometimes speakers get all worked up and go beyond their scheduled time. We want every minute to count for you! We would then update information on the master list for approved AT for the maximum time that should be allowed for the activity. Keep in mind that if you decide to stay after a lecture to chit chat with the speaker, that time does NOT count for AT hours!!

You may submit the form in hard copy format or by e-mail to AT Committee Chair at [gmnatvt@gmail.com](mailto:gmnatvt@gmail.com).

### **Approval Process-**

The Advanced Training Committee's job is to review AT opportunities and determine if they meet the state guidelines for approval. **Please note: Reading books or watching TV shows are NOT accepted as advanced training.**

*Guidelines used to determine if an AT opportunity qualifies—*

In order for a program to qualify as advanced training, the Chapter Operating Manual states that the Advanced Training Committee must ensure that all of the following conditions are met:

- 1. Promotes continued learning and development of naturalist skills and**
- 2. Provides Master Naturalists with knowledge and skills to work in volunteer efforts, and**
- 3. Provides Master Naturalists an opportunity to focus their interests in one or a few specific topics, and**
- 4. Builds on the core curriculum initially provided by the Chapter, and**
- 5. Provides natural resource management issues and information applicable to Texas.**

What are "naturalist skills"? Observation, Study, Analysis of the interconnectedness of all living things to each other and to their environment.

We have had questions about repetitive activities (like bird walks with the same guide every month). This is the AT Committee philosophy. If the same program is given by the same speaker or, if a scripted program, it is given by a number of speakers, you should expect to get credit only once per year. If a non-scripted program is given by multiple speakers, we are inclined to give credit for each program since you will probably gain a different perspective and tidbits of knowledge from each speaker.

We are not a policing committee, but we will ask questions to help in describing how the AT meets the conditions. We would hope that each Master Naturalist in this chapter will embrace the intended purpose of AT and not be caught up in a numbers race.

### **Reporting Your Hours-**

The Texas Master Naturalist Program sponsors, Texas Agrilife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, receive funding from the state legislature and are accountable to the state legislature. They must establish measurable goals related to their missions, and are reviewed based on measurable outcomes. Time spent by Chapter members in Advanced Training and performing Volunteer Service activities is transmitted to the Texas Master Naturalist Program, which must make an annual report to the state. State auditors representing the comptroller's office review the report and assess whether or not goals are being met and then relate that to future funding

On a local level, the Guadalupe County extension programs are accountable to the county commissioners' courts. Agents may use Chapter activity reports to relate the program's success. Local leaders appreciate programs that involve local citizens.

The Membership Committee provides a format for recording and submitting Advanced Training hours. An Excel workbook, downloadable from the website (on this page) to your computer, enables members to record all of their hours in one place, with worksheets for each month, and a totals page that calculates automatically. Members should submit their workbook to the Membership Committee Chair at the end of each month. If using the Excel workbook is too challenging, discuss alternatives with the Membership Committee Chair.

**In conclusion-**

Keep in mind that the Advanced Training Committee will not be sending out every AT opportunity that we may see. It is up to chapter members to begin the process by submitting the proposal form.

Remember, acquiring knowledge through advanced training is great, but as Texas Master Naturalists we are expected to USE that knowledge in service.

*Thanks to the Coastal Prairie Chapter for the majority of this document.*