

# What Members Should Know About Volunteer Activities

## **What is a Volunteer Activity?**

Why do we have Volunteer Activities? 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.”*

Through the Master Naturalist Training Course and ongoing Advanced Training one becomes a well-informed volunteer instead of just a volunteer. Since we are part of the statewide Texas Master Naturalist Program we must meet the standards used by chapters across the state for determining what will be considered Master Naturalist Volunteer Activities.

It is expected that over time the volunteers within the chapter will find several frequently recurring activities that become Key Projects (Signature Projects?), while others occur annually.

**Role of the Volunteer Activity Committee (VT):** Review and approved proposed Volunteer Activity opportunities. It is also the committee’s job to notify chapter members of approved Volunteer opportunities. You will find the opportunities that have been reviewed on the Chapter Calendar and the Volunteer Activity Master List and we will add to the list as new opportunities are proposed and approved. The vast majority of Volunteer Activities of our Sponsors and Partners will qualify, but there is no “blanket” approval in effect for any organization at this time. VT hours will not be entered into the database without approval which means you should not put VT 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 Volunteer opportunities. When you come across an opportunity that interests you or that you think others may be interested in, be sure to submit the information to the VT Committee for approval.

## **Nominating VT Opportunities-**

The VT Proposal Form is available at this link–VT Proposal Form Let's go over that form now.

Note that VT stands for "Volunteer Time". 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 VT Committee reviews and approves the activity it will be added to Master List. **If it is a recurring activity and is on the Master List there is no need to submit a form.**

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)

## **What counts as a Volunteer Activity?-**

The Volunteer Activity Committee's job is to review Volunteer opportunities and determine if they meet the state guidelines for approval. These guidelines include the following:

- Volunteer work must be of a type that furthers the TMN mission statement: "To provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within our communities." This mission includes educating the public on natural resources, but it also includes managing, maintaining, and improving the environment for the benefit of wildlife and the public.
- Volunteer work must be performed as a Texas Master Naturalist rather than as a member of another organization.
- Volunteers who belong to two organizations that both require volunteer service as part of membership (e.g., TMN and Master Gardeners) may not count the same work hours twice, getting credit from both organizations.
- Volunteer work that results in a profit to another organization cannot be approved:
  - Volunteers may not count volunteer work for a for-profit organization.
  - Volunteers may not count work for a nonprofit organization that results in the organization earning money for its own programs.
- Volunteer work in approved Chapter fund-raising efforts can be counted.

- Paid work of any kind cannot be counted for Volunteer credit.
- All volunteer work must be approved before any credit can be given for it. A Microsoft Word proposal form is available to download and complete for this purpose.
- All volunteer work is to be reported in a timely manner to the Membership Committee. An online reporting form is available for this purpose.
- Volunteer hours credit is earned for time spent preparing a volunteer presentation as well as for making the actual presentation. Travel time of up to one hour to and from any volunteer project activity earns volunteer credit (does not apply to attending advanced training activities).
- All chapter board members, committee chairmen, and committee members will receive hour-for-hour credit for volunteer hours spent fulfilling those duties (including travel time up to one hour).

### **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 Volunteer hours. An Excel workbook, downloadable from the website (add link here [to be added later](#) ) 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 each month. If using the Excel workbook is too challenging, discuss alternatives with the Membership Committee Chair.

**In conclusion-**

Keep in mind that the Volunteer Committee will not be searching out Volunteer opportunities. It is up to chapter members to begin the process by submitting the proposal form.