

Texas Master Naturalist 20th Anniversary Project Oral History Interviews

For our 20th Anniversary Project, we want to collect the story of our program, its successes, the laughs had along the way, and most importantly, the people who have made it the success that it is. For this, we are asking each TMN Chapter to conduct a number of Oral History Interviews with chapter members, current and former. These interviews will help us collect a story of your chapter – what has made your chapter and our program a success; what you have accomplished in your communities; what are you proudest of; how being involved in the TMN program changed your members' lives; and what fun stories have happened along the way. We are also going to ask for memories from state-level TMN Program founders; how their original vision for the program has been shaped over time; and the impacts or changes they have seen in Texas' landscape because of the TMN Program.

BASIC INTERVIEWING TIPS

- Always put a spoken introduction at the beginning of every interview
- Never just stick to the question outline -- listen and respond
- Ask only one question at a time, and ask brief questions.
- Ask open-ended questions. That is, phrase them so more than a "yes" or "no" answer is required.
 - Use words or phrases such as "Why," "How," "Where," "What kind of...?", "Could you tell me more about. . . ?" (SEE SECTION on QUESTION FORMATS below)
- Let the interviewee tell his/her story (Don't insert yourself too much)
- Don't interrupt -- write down questions to ask later
- Structure the interview using turning points in the person or organization's history
- Keep people on track -- give them room to navigate, but pull them back in if necessary
- Establish the interviewee's role throughout their story
- Once you have gotten the basic facts of a story, ask questions that require analysis
- Don't contradict or argue with the chronicler, but follow up on differing answers
- Ask people not to speak in shorthand (meaning acronyms, internal chapter lingo, 'naturalist speak', etc.)
- Don't forget to ask about negative as well as positive aspects of a situation
- Don't be afraid of silence
- Listen quietly, carefully, and actively. Maintain eye contact (unless it is obviously making the other person uncomfortable, which can happen in certain cultural settings).
- Try to limit interviews to one-on-one settings
- Always be respectful
- Be aware of your interviewee's body language, speech patterns, and reactions
- Consider a well-lit area to hold your interview



Master Naturalist

QUESTION FORMATS

The way you ask a question will affect the answer you will get. You want to try to ask open-ended questions and avoid closed questions. Ask questions that require more than a one-word answer.

Closed Questions	Open-Ended Questions
Where did you go to school?	What do you remember about where you went to school?
Did you walk to school?	How did you get to school?
Do you remember school picnics?	Tell me about the school picnics. What did you like or dislike about them?

A good way to help the interviewee recount their past experiences is to ask provocative questions. You can do this by asking questions in terms of Who did What?, Where?, When?, How?, and Why?

You can also ask questions that require people to analyze a situation.

Start questions with:

Tell me about....

Describe...

What do you remember about...

Explain...

Expand...

Avoid leading questions. These are questions which suggest a particular answer, or which influence the interviewee to answer in a certain way.

NO	YES
I understand Mrs. Smith was a wonderful teacher. Is that true?	What can you tell me about your teacher, Mrs. Smith? What did she look like? What was her classroom like? What activities was she involved with

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please use the main question as initial question points and the subpoints to clarify if needed. *Also, please share these questions with your interview subject prior to the interview (at least 1-2 days).

1. What are the five best things about being a Master Naturalist?
2. Please complete the following sentence: I became a Master Naturalist to . . .
 - a. Tell me about a time (as a child or as an adult) that may have affected your decision to become a Master Naturalist
 - b. If you had a job or profession before Master Naturalists, what was it? If you currently hold a job while being a Master Naturalist what is it? Do the skills and knowledge you have from your ‘day job’ transfer to your participation in your MN chapter? If so, how?
3. What has been the most surprising change in yourself since becoming a Master Naturalist?
 - a. What do you do or say that identifies you as a Master Naturalist to others?
4. How would you describe the impact you have had on the natural resources of Texas as a Master Naturalist?
 - a. What changes have you noticed over time to the landscape or to the people you have worked with?
5. What hopes do you have for your chapter, the TMN program or Texas' natural resource future?
 - a. What work would you like to see the next generation of Master Naturalists continue?
 - b. What would you like to tell the next generation of Master Naturalists?

*Some chapters may choose or not have the opportunity to share all of the interview questions with the interview subject ahead of the time for the actual interview - either because of timing or to encourage the interview subject to speak from the heart and not from a scripted answer to each question. Each chapter can choose how they begin the interview process - sharing the questions or not. If they choose not to share the exact questions, we suggest they at least share the following note with their interview subject:

In your TMN Oral History Interview, you will be asked about things such as how the TMN program has affected you; how you think you have affected the landscape or others through your work in the TMN program and the future. So, thinking about your involvement in the TMN program in advance of the interview will help the interview go smoothly. In addition, you will be asked to introduce yourself with the following questions, which you can prepare ahead of time:

How did you get involved with your Master Naturalist Chapter

How did you hear about the program?

What role/roles have you played in your chapter over time?

What are the five best things about being a Master Naturalist?

INTERVIEWER GUIDELINES

1. Read through your script before you get to the recording location. Have your interview subject do the same.
2. Even if you may know each other well, the interview situation with a camera can feel awkward. You will want to put the subject at ease with some casual conversation before the interview.
3. Explain consent form to your interview subject and have them sign it.
4. Start the recording.
5. Begin by saying aloud into the video recording the following (it is recommended that you write down the specific information and read into the mic so that you don't stumble):
 - a. Interviewer Name
 - b. "This is the 20th Anniversary Oral History project."
 - c. Date (Month, Day, Year)
 - d. Time (include a.m. or p.m.)
 - e. Subject Name
 - f. Location (TMN Chapter)
 - g. (WAIT 5 seconds on video before next point)
6. Interview
 - a. Have subject introduce themselves and give TMN Chapter (A second time)
 - b. Question 1 will be part of the introduction of subject
 - i. How did you get involved with your Master Naturalist Chapter?
 1. How did you hear about the program?
 2. What role/roles have you played in your chapter over time?
 3. What are the five best things about being a Master Naturalist?
 - c. Refer to the Semi-Structured Interview Questions sheet for questions 2 through 7.
 - d. Try to remember the questions so that you aren't looking down at the paper constantly
 - e. Silence is ok.
 - f. Asking for stories is difficult. Some suggested ways of asking: "Tell me about x"; "Was there a specific time that x happened"; "You were talking about x. Do you remember a specific occasion for which that was the case?" While there is no time limit suggested, it is typical for these interviews to be up to 30 minutes in length.
7. Before the end of the interview, you may want to review and ask the following:
 - a. "We have covered quite a bit of ground here. Is there anything else you would like to say, or something that came to mind as we were talking that you would like to add?"
8. Close the Interview (Stop recording at least 5 seconds after last spoken word).