



**2015 Second Quarter Report**  
**Nebraska Master Naturalist Program, April 1 - June 30, 2015**

**Current Metrics:**

By this quarter’s end, our ranks grew to 264 members, as 24 recent **Master-Naturalists-in-Training** completed their Core 24 training course at three sites: *Wildcat Hills Nature Center; Cedar Point Biological Station, and The Nature Conservancy’s Niobrara Valley Preserve*. They must now choose and complete the balance of Core plus workshops in order to reach the required 60 hours of instruction to certify. **Certified Nebraska Master Naturalists** and **Master-Naturalists-in-Training** have so far donated significant time and effort in promoting and supporting the biodiversity of the state’s natural legacy. They are networked through our ListServ grapevine, the monthly newsletter and website events calendar to learn of opportunities to volunteer or learn, as with our Facebook page.

From April 1 to June 30 of 2015, **Certified Nebraska Master Naturalist volunteers and Master-Naturalists –in-Training have contributed 1,149 hours valued at more than \$26,527\*** in conservation service.

During this second quarter, individually and as a community, Master Naturalists have reached out to **5,749 Nebraskans** and committed **339 hours to their continuing education** toward greater conservation literacy. They have collectively **impacted 1,470 acres of land** through resource management and citizen science projects during this time.

Total Volunteer Hours & Activity, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter, 2015: April 1 - June 30					
Volunteer Hours	Travel Hours	TOTAL Volunteer Hours	Total <u>Value</u> of Volunteer Time*	Contacts	Acres Impacted
895.6	253.5	<b>1,149</b>	\$26,527*	5,749	1,470
Total Program Life Volunteer Hours & Activity: 2010 through June 30, 2015					
21,484	5,189	<b>26,673</b>	\$615,346*	393,398	16,235

\*[Estimated value of volunteer time for 2013 (& currently) is **\$23.07 per hour**, from [https://www.independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](https://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time) ]

Overall, since tracking began in the fall 2010, the Nebraska Master Naturalist Community has contributed a **grand total of 26,673 hours of service** through natural resource programs statewide. This amounts to an estimated value of well over half a million dollars of conservation work and public education (**\$615,346\***). In total, these conservation volunteers have thus **connected with 393,398 Nebraskans**.

**Overview:**

It has been a very busy season. We enter the second year of our three-year NET grant, for which Coordinator Bruce Mellberg drafted a budget and prepared a Public Information Plan. Trainings Assistant, Matt Jones and Bruce embraced an ambitious quest to introduce ever more Nebraskans who share a passion for nature to the *Nebraska Master Naturalist Program* by undertaking the most widespread training schedule around the state so



far. Working together, they arranged & partly presented Core-24 (Basic) training sessions in new and repeat locations around the state to measurable success. There were challenges with implementing the revised, two part curriculum for the first time. It was essential to provide enough knowledge base to underpin further specialization by Master-Naturalist-Trainees who need to reach certification through Core + workshops or equivalent, qualifying training. Providing adequate variety for Core + opportunities around the state may prove to be challenging. Getting qualified instructors willing and available to volunteer their time to travel & present through our curriculum can involve significant investigation. We find this especially true for the subjects of fauna and flora of Nebraska. When instructors must cancel, (as it happened twice this spring on short notice), it gets difficult to adjust or fill the training time with educational content. Unforeseen program requirements also challenged the available time for the Coordinator, namely the Public Information Plan needed to accompany the annual budget, once approval of the second year of the current NET grant was announced.

Much travel was needed to host trainings at western venues, while staffing coverage wasn't always ideal, nor was the weather during sessions and for several planned projects. We did benefit from time, thought and travel invested in media promotion of our western training. We were grateful for MN trainee scholarships offered by Alie Mayes, representing our Program Partner at the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, and for the great accommodations at UNL's Cedar Point Biological (field) Station, thanks to our deepening relationship with fellow Master Naturalist, Jon Garbisch, who is the Associate Director of Operations at the facility.

We rediscover our interdependence with those reliable Program Partners closer to our offices, as we look toward the fall schedule and anticipate more training opportunities, while exploring the potential for expanding our community and embracing innovative projects and potentials. It is now clear that considerable focus must be devoted, however, to accommodating the reporting requirements of our generous supporters with the NET, UNL Office of Sponsored Programs, and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, as with the Executive Board.

A full quorum attended the May 22 Board Meeting at Hardin Hall, with Dan Deffenbaugh "skyping" in. There was discussion of the informal groups and how they function. Guidelines for shaping the volunteer-generated newsletter policies were requested of paid staff. No NACEE Conference will occur this year, but a Master Naturalist Reunion is scheduled for the end of July & early August. A more comprehensive NMN program reporting plan for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, was revealed by Kristal Stoner. The By-Law updates were shared by Mike Schrad. Jeanine Lackey led a discussion on fundraising and sustainability.

### **Master Naturalist Community & Highlighted Projects:**

Certified Master Naturalists *and* Master-Naturalists-in-Training together now number 264, and a number of individual and collaborative projects continue to develop around the MN domain and with our partners.



Many dedicated Master Naturalists keep volunteering with partnering conservation organizations and agencies, and have voluntarily enriched their understanding with **Continuing Education** opportunities totaling **355 hours (9155 hours over life of program)**. They promoted biodiversity stewardship & awareness through Educational Outreach statewide (**542 hours**), and made **4,115 contacts** with fellow Nebraskans & **impacted 13 acres**. Outdoor skills (**59.5 hours**), for example, **contacting 584** people.

Some MN's collected data, monitored behavior and assisted researchers as trained citizen scientists (**306 hours**), making **487 contacts and impacting 149 acres**.

Other Master Naturalist volunteers helped with natural resource management projects which **impacted some 1,308 acres** of private and public land this season (**241 hours**), together with **contacting 563** Nebraskans. Omaha MN's took initiative to create outreach displays for a booth on **Earth Day**, April 18. Bruce supplied them with rack cards & fasteners for an MN banner, plus naturalist images to laminate. It was the *same day* as four other MN outreach events in Lincoln, Indian Caves SP, Halsey and the La Vista Cabela's Store (Ladies' Day Out). That weekend was also our heavily promoted MN Training at Wildcat Hills NC, so paid staff were challenged to send out opportunity alerts on ListServ, displays & handouts to each, in time (plus the 1<sup>st</sup> Tri-City Ed Fair at Hastings museum just before). Then, an untimely deluge swamped out eastern Nebraska on April 18<sup>th</sup>, and no one made it to Indian Caves, or to the Elmwood Park booth which Bruce had reserved, invoiced & paid, for the event. (The new outreach displays will therefore grace upcoming events around Omaha). Luckily, the **Lincoln Earth Day** event was moved indoors, so their booth had 108 visitors (including 3 MN's from other booths). It was staffed by 4 MN's who signed up 13 attendees for the Naturalist Network ListServ.

On April 9, USFW Team Leader for the **Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle Recovery and Reintroduction** project gathered stakeholders at the Children's Zoo in Lincoln to review Logistics and Needs; supplies and HOBO units; staff changes and larvae rearing progress and needs. Matt announced the Spring SCTB Monitoring Team training for Sat, April 25, which was again led by Bob Harms and Mike Fritz, T & E Coordinator with NGPC, at Shoemaker Marsh (N. Lincoln saline wetlands). Eight MN's and 4 team leaders attended on a drizzly morn. Soon after, endangered SCTB larvae were painstakingly reintroduced at 3 Little Salt Creek field sites. Then, a torrential downpour of nearly 8 inches of rain completely wiped out that investment, over May 5-6. It had been some of the winter's brood of larvae, diligently fed in zoo labs. Accessing the field sites was impossible for weeks, due to sludge & much more rain, testing the beetles' resiliency. Research team leaders checked the status by June's end, to renew reintroductions. I sent out updates to MN monitoring teams & helped recruit additional lab feeder MN's needed at the UNL Entomology lab and both zoos, as plans revived.

At the May 22 Executive Board meeting in Lincoln at the UNL School of Natural Resources, Board member and NGPC partner representative, Kristal Stoner, presented a project which she had going with volunteer Master Naturalists, Rebecca Reagan Osborn and Paula Hoppe (whose idea it was), for researching and publishing a **2016 Master Naturalist Calendar**, populated with photos the team requested from MN's and seasonal or daily events from nature, to either sell or distribute without cost. A run of 3000 copies will debut at



the NGPC's Natural Legacy conference in late Sept., and will also be distributed statewide *for free*, and to all Master Naturalists this first year. It will be used as a recruiting tool (both for the NMNP as well as for our partners). Calendar progress meetings with the team and graphic designer & MN, Nancy Hawekotte, have been held often, since then.

Of the three Master Naturalist groups, the Omaha group has met more often, recently hosting field workdays, a botany lecture and a photography workshop at UNO's Glacier Creek Preserve, in Bennington (NW Omaha). Their local community benefits from the individual enthusiasm of its motivated members, who rotate leadership teams and host sites for meetings, every three months. Half of our 8-member Executive Board resides in the Omaha metro area and support the MN community to varying degrees.

The grass-roots, volunteer-generated newsletter continues to serve as an outlet which features photography and writing contributions from members around the state. It was undertaken by member Julia Ross and several MN contributors, and will likely continue to arrive quarterly, via the Master Naturalist ListServ, per guidelines drafted by Matt Jones, as directed by the Executive Board.

### **Master Naturalist Trainings:**

The considerable March outreach investment of promoting our *Wildcat Hills Nature Center* Core-basic training for April 15-18 (on mostly rainy days) yielded 6 new Master-Naturalist-Trainees from the Nebraska Panhandle, though 14 had originally signed up & were interviewed. This left a very engaged batch of trainees who keep actively volunteering and seeking training hours toward their certification. Both Matt and Bruce were on hand for the entire duration of our very first training in the Scottsbluff/Gering area. We benefited greatly from "host" Amanda Filipi, Education Coordinator at the center, who also taught the interpretive and the archery session (after an injury kept the Outdoor Skills instructor out of action). Alie Mayes Education Coordinator of our partnering *Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory*, presented the session on birds and her NET grant-funded program generously allotted full scholarships for three participants, who wouldn't have attended, otherwise. Matt coordinated these. We are indeed grateful to her organization's enabling support. Prof. Steven Rolfsmeier, of Chadron State College, also led an engaging Nebraska botany session with field hike. Together, Matt and I planned & jointly presented the Resource management Land Ethics session.

Matt drafted and sent out a survey for Core+ trainings that MN's would like to see in the summer/fall. He also coordinated all Core 24 training sessions (including the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle spring monitoring training, for which he attended interagency team meetings with Bruce); arranged training venues and promoted all trainings over the ListServ, newsletter and Events webpage; ordered printed copies of recruiting rack cards, the training manuals and curriculum for each attendee; shopped for supplies and snacks; facilitated background checks and liability waivers; tracked registrant payments; prepared binders, name tags, certificates and corresponded with trainee updates. Matt also sent thank yous to instructors, uploaded their PowerPoints to Google Drive on MN website and updated training documents. He and Bruce planned upcoming training needs together.



### Trainings (continued):

From May 6-9, UNL's Cedar Point Biological Station hosted a class of 10 participants, half of whom were from Lincoln or Omaha was another first-time training venue for us. We were grateful for the hospitality of Prof. Jon Garbisch, Associate Director of CPBS, who is also a Certified MN, and who led a geology session here, as at Wildcat Hills in April. Matt handled introductions and a Land Ethic session, over the first day, then Bruce supervised the remainder of the training, when Matt had arranged to be absent for time off with his family. Weather was again rainy, but instructors stayed flexible with migrating to field instruction when possible. Cabin and training facilities there were excellent, including meals prepared by culinary staff at the unbeatable cost of \$30/day. Attendees continued to seek out in-depth training & volunteer opportunities afterward.

From June 7-13, the training room at the *Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve* was again crowded with 10 new Master Naturalist trainees coming mostly from Omaha and Lincoln for the Core-basic. Four more joined from Scottsbluff & Omaha, later in the week when our first Core + workshops were offered. When the Human Dimensions instructor from TNC gave abrupt notice of schedule conflicts, Matt & Bruce both tried in vain to fill the slot. Most MN Trainees stayed for the entire week, as Bruce again oversaw training operations when Matt left for family obligations, returning to close out the training. Bruce again prepared and presented Interpretation with related environmental education activities (as at Cedar Point, in May). It was our final Bison Tour with Tracy Nelson, fellow MN and NVP Operations & Outreach Coordinator, as she soon after retired, from 15 years at the Preserve. (Sandhills neighbor & Bison Manager, Richard Egelhoff had also recently retired.) Bruce had shepherded the multi-step UNL processing for the lease agreement, to train at NVP.

Matt and Bruce kept planning and recruiting instructors for July & August Core + training sessions at Cedar Point, and for the late July MN Reunion and the Lincoln & Omaha Core-24 trainings this fall. During and after, Matt and Bruce evaluated the effectiveness of each training session, to see where improvements could be made. Scheduling instructors to present certain subjects, like fauna or flora has often been difficult, due to their limited availability. Matt handled most applicant interviews, with some help from Bruce, who ensured that the online registration and course payment functioned well and was flexible enough to meet needs.

While Matt was off for two weeks in late June, Bruce was left to explore and pursue prospective instructors for the upcoming Core + workshops scheduled for mid-July at Cedar Point. He secured and set up several leads for Matt to finalize arrangements, upon his return. The Coordinator also continued to devote measurable effort and time toward helping Matt to develop and organize Core + training workshops, along with ongoing discussions for Board Member, Mike Schrad's proposed small mammal sampling workshop(s) at the *Nature Conservancy's Derr House*, near Wood River, and other possible sites.



### **Second Quarter 2015 Master Naturalist Training Schedule:**

July	17 - 19	Cedar Point Biological Station (Ogallala, Lake McConaughy) – Core +
August	7 - 9	Cedar Point Biological Station (Ogallala, Lake McConaughy) – Core +
October	2 - 3	Pioneers Park Nature Center, Lincoln, NE – Core Basic
October	9 - 10	Audubon Spring Creek Prairie Lincoln, NE – Core Basic
November	6-7; 13-14	Fontenelle Forest, Bellevue, NE – Core Basic

**Websites, Digital resources, etc.:** The **Master Naturalist website** has a time-tracking system that *actually works* for Master Naturalists to report their volunteer effort and continuing education hours! --which we keep reminding our Member volunteers to use. It's at the same address as before, [Nebraska Master Naturalist](#), and is found under "Members" tab. For unknown reasons, some Certified Master Naturalists aren't submitting their volunteer hours to vouch for their own accomplishments or to show the program's success for Program Partners and the world at large.

The website continues to function acceptably for introducing and inviting site-visitors to the Program, while offering continuing education resources. Updates and improvements continue as needed, as both Matt and Bruce check for sound content, good function or any troubleshooting needs—though precious little has arisen lately. We consulted Jacki Loomis of SNR-UNL *Maps & More Store* to accommodate more variety and choice for online registrations of MN training through her website, linked with ours under the "Store" tab on the home page.

Many instructors generously share their presentations to upload for reference into the Master Naturalist Curriculum Resources folder. Bruce also posted a list of online references in free, digital formats which he selected from the *University Extension Division; Nebraska Game and Parks Commission*; and other state agency or Program Partner publications, to supplement self-directed MN continuing education efforts.

### **Outreach and Media:**

The Nebraska Master Naturalist training schedule and program were promoted through news releases, newspaper and magazine ads, local media & articles (Radio/TV/newspapers), with in-person outreach presentations & contacts, via the improved NMNP website, updated rack card handouts and through timely volunteer e-newsletters and the website calendar listings (described in detail, last quarter).



- Bruce and Matt Jointly planned April MN training with partners, Amanda Filipi (**Wildcat Hills** NC Education Dir.) & Alie Mayes (*Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory* Education Coordinator), who each instructed *and should benefit from* newly prepared Master Naturalists-in-Training there.
- Bruce drafted and placed orders for two successive but small Tuesday ads just before the Wildcat Hills training, in the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* newspaper
- Bruce responded to follow-up inquiries from Panhandle NE promotion and advertising, before and after training there.
- Matt compiled and sent out April and July Newsletters of “Nebraska Master Naturalist News, Volunteer Opportunities, Workshops & Events”
- Bruce and Matt also posted educational and program-related links and public activity notices at several intervals on Nebraska Master Naturalist Facebook site:  
<https://www.facebook.com/masternaturalist> .

### Matt’s Summary:

The 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2015 has been a very busy and successful one for the Nebraska Master Naturalist program. In the last three months we have held three core trainings, two of which were held in facilities that we have not utilized in the past, that being Wildcat Hills Nature center in Gering and Cedar Point Biological Station. In all, we have initially training 25 individuals in the pursuit over the next year, of completing their certification.

A lot of effort went into publicizing our trainings in April, since the Scottsbluff/Gering area was a new training location for us. Bruce and I were able to sit and talk with local newspapers to get the word out. You can find our article for April’s training in the Scottsbluff Star herald here:

[http://www.starherald.com/news/local\\_news/program-offers-master-naturalist-certification/article\\_43e9b051-d2af-5e9b-abd8-52d4bffd69a3.html](http://www.starherald.com/news/local_news/program-offers-master-naturalist-certification/article_43e9b051-d2af-5e9b-abd8-52d4bffd69a3.html) and also an interview on local Am radio station KNEB:

<http://kneb.podbean.com/e/nebraska-master-naturalist-program-offers-2015-training-opportunities/>. Also in sharing the word locally for the Cedar Point Training I was able to get our press release in with the Keith County Newspaper and conducted an interview for the North Platte Telegraph:

[http://www.nptelegraph.com/news/local\\_news/new-class-appeals-to-nature-lovers/article\\_710aa064-d0fd-57af-a355-e1cf926eab10.html](http://www.nptelegraph.com/news/local_news/new-class-appeals-to-nature-lovers/article_710aa064-d0fd-57af-a355-e1cf926eab10.html)



### **What's Ahead:**

More Core + workshops have already been held at UNL's Cedar Point Biological Station in July at this writing, with good attendance, and still more will occur there in August.

The final Core-24 trainings for new trainee-recruits this year will be held during the first two weekends in Lincoln (*Pioneers Park Nature Center*, then *Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie*); and again in November, at *Fontenelle Forest* in Bellevue.

We still seek Master Naturalist mentors who are willing to assist new members transitioning into volunteering, and to serve as helpful examples with experience and advice. I believe this is how we grow the Master Naturalist community.

We continue to work steadily to arrange and host varieties of Core-24 training and Core + workshops in different locations around the state; to distribute news, handouts and outreach for those who wonder who & what we are; to inform new & continuing Master Naturalists trainees of volunteer activities; to seek Program Partner collaborations and qualified instructors willing to share their expertise and enthusiasm; to accommodate member interests and solicit suggestions from both members and partners; to generate positive relationships where we can; and encourage MN's to record their hours, seek out others who share their interests, expand their awareness and further their understanding of why native resources matter to them, as they discover ways to conserve and sustain habitats and biodiversity through their awesome investments of effort, time, reflection, fun, and community. Great bunch of folks!

A survey of partners, instructors and members is in the works to see how well we are doing, at making the conservation difference which we have promised.

**This report was drafted and submitted by Bruce Mellberg, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Coordinator. It would not have been possible without the invaluable input by Matt Jones, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Trainings Assistant and indispensable guidance from UNL Professor Dennis Ferraro, Principal Investigator for the supporting grant funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. New-hire, part-time, temporary assistance Catherine Berrick also assisted**

Bruce Mellberg, Coordinator

Nebraska Master Naturalist Program

July 24, 2015 (Revised, 8/4/2015)

