



2015 First Quarter Report

Nebraska Master Naturalist Program, January 1 - March 31, 2015

Current Metrics:

By March 31, 2015, **9 new Master-Naturalists-in-Training** had completed the new Core 24 training course at *TNC Derr House & Rowe Sanctuary* in early February, starting toward full Certification as they anticipate Core plus workshops of their choosing, in order to total the requisite 60 hours of instruction. To date, over **230 Certified volunteer Nebraska Master Naturalists** have donated significant time and effort in promoting and supporting the biodiversity of the state’s natural legacy.

Since the beginning of 2015, **Certified Nebraska Master Naturalist volunteers have contributed 536.5 hours valued at more than \$12,098.08*** in conservation service.

Individually and as a community, Master Naturalists have reached out to **3,642 Nebraskans** and committed **260 hours to their continuing education** toward greater conservation literacy. They have collectively **impacted 327 acres of land** through resource management and citizen science projects during this time.

Total Volunteer Hours: January 1 - March 31, 2015					
Volunteer Hours	Travel Hours	Total Volunteer Hours	Total Value of Volunteer Time*	Contacts	Acres Impacted
425.45	111.28	536.5	\$12,098.08	3,642	327

*[Estimated value of volunteer time for 2013 (& currently) is **\$22.55 per hour**, from 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 24,767 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 (**\$558,496***). In total, these conservation volunteers have thus far **connected with 387,068 Nebraskans**.

Overview:

We reflect on change and ponder our prospects ahead.

In December, Treasurer **Deb Woracek** was re-elected for the Nebraska Master Naturalist Executive Board, as was Board Member **Daniel Deffenbaugh**. **Andrea Faas**, current Director of the Pioneers Park Nature Center, was also elected as a new Board Member (and was a former NMNP Steering Committee member). A full quorum attended the February 13 Board Meeting at Mahoney St. Park, with Dan Deffenbaugh “skyping” in.

Contracted and program staff updated and promoted the program’s online presence, along with media outreach, personal presentations and networking with the conservation community to re-establish & advance the potential of the program. New partnerships developed where organizations found common ground with the Master Naturalist mission, while the new coordinator continued to seek out & engage former and existing partners.



Planning and coordinating of the new Master Naturalist training format and schedule were also underway to enlist greater members across the state in 2015. **The By-laws Committee** kept meeting to revise and refine the program operation. Discussions continue, with changes to follow.

Master Naturalist Community:

Certified Master Naturalists now number 230+ strong, as many visualize potential projects for engaging with our partners. This results partly from last fall's "Meet-Ups" with central and eastern MN's, as regular MN meetings continue independently in Omaha, Lincoln and Central NE, with local leadership.

Our first training this year was held at *TNC Derr House & Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary* in early February, with the revised Core (24 hours) format. Nine new Naturalists-in-Training completed the class and most have already begun to volunteer with conservation partners. Other training sessions follow in the spring, summer & fall. Trainings Assistant, Matt Jones interviewed most potential trainees and lined up instructors, while we both helped tailor the curriculum to offer workable outlines for instructors to consider and match.

We continue to recruit and engage new members to our community while experimenting with creative and persistent outreach and promotion. We continue to seek *mentors* to coach new members transitioning into volunteering. Such experienced volunteers serve as helpful examples by reaching out to offer experience and advice. We thus seek to support local and statewide networking among all members of the Master Naturalist community. I also aim to help uncover or create ever more training and volunteer opportunities for members to consider, around the state. We welcome input along these lines as well. A volunteer newsletter emerged in January to capture contributions from members around the state.

Meanwhile Master Naturalists continued to volunteer this quarter in many creative and noteworthy ways to aid partnering conservation organizations and agencies. They advanced biodiversity stewardship & awareness through educational outreach statewide (246 hours), making nearly **3,642 contacts** with diverse audiences. Some led geology hikes or outdoor nature activities; staffed tables or booths at the Crane Festival, Science Fair, Groundwater awareness or Backyard Birding activities; wrote conservation articles; researched and drafted botany signs. Others staffed natural resource education booths; led Sandhill Crane behavior or astronomy workshops or classes; created educational nature videos; or presented nature programs at Hospice sites. Still others led *Leave No Trace* workshops, or mentored youngsters in recreational fishing, kayaking or other outdoor skills (18 hours), for example.

Many NMN members collected data on native species at risk, as trained citizen scientists (103 hours). The ongoing Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle reintroduction project held multi-agency oversight meetings to review successes and strategize best use of resources, volunteer support and monitoring methods for the future. This collaborative project is one of many enhancing Nebraska's biodiversity conservation. Other citizen scientist MN volunteers monitored pollution stations; bluebird nest boxes; helped with Christmas (and other) bird counts & transects; located prairie chicken leks; collected native prairie seeds; and analyzed and identified bird & frog calls, to name but a few.



Master Naturalist volunteers facilitated care & transport of injured raptor & other wildlife, or enhanced, restored or created wildlife habitat through Program Partner projects, such as cleaning up stream beds & other natural environments; mitigating or suppressing invasives (cedars, thistles & weeds); with natural resource management projects which **impacted some 327 acres** of private and public land this quarter (162 hours). Additionally, Master Naturalists volunteered with bison calf sorting, branding, and vaccination at partnering sites; planting native prairie plants; recycling; conducting prescribed prairie burns; or contributing leadership roles at county extension offices, among many others.

Master Naturalist Trainings: Matt and I finalized development of the new **Core 24** (or Tier 1) format which was launched on Feb 4-6 at the *Nature Conservancy's Derr House* and *Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary*. Half of the 9 training applicants hailed from central Nebraska, as did a number of the instructors, which should help grow the local conservation community. This format features 24 hours of introductory instruction in the basics of Nebraska's natural resources. The overview thus prepares "naturalists-in-training" to choose and pursue more in-depth (Core +, or Tier 2) instruction toward full certification in the program, *and to also begin volunteering earlier*. The total number of training hours required to certify remains at 60 hours.

To recap, Master Naturalists must still report an additional 20 hours of conservation volunteering and eight hours of continuing education each year, to keep their certification. The four *specialization categories* are still:

- Interpretation and Education
- Resource Management
- Citizen Science
- Outdoor Skills

Together, Matt and I readied the new training format by updating resource documents and planning registration & fees. Matt continued to recruit instructors; plan venue availability & logistics; and reorganize the MN training documents. He handled most training arrangements & interviews, with help from the coordinator, who ensured that the online registration and course payment functioned well, by consulting Jacki Loomis for helpful support from her SNR-UNL "Maps & More Store," which is linked through our website. We gratefully acknowledge her essential collaboration, and also rely heavily upon Matt's working knowledge & logistical support of the Master Naturalist program with his own investment of time and ability! We sincerely appreciate his commitment to advancing the program mission through his tireless efforts.

The Coordinator dedicated measurable effort and time toward helping to develop and organize Core + training workshops, namely Mike Schrad's proposed small mammal workshop or tag-alongs, with input from MN Kit Ehlers; and with coordinating Dennis Ferraro's scheduled Frog Watch workshops, Parts 1 & 2 (field session-April 9).



Upcoming 2015 Master Naturalist Training Schedule:

April	15 - 18	Wildcat Hills Nature Center (Gering/Scottsbluff)
May	6 - 9	Cedar Point Biological Station (Ogallala, Lake McConaughy)
July	17 - 19	“ “ “ - Core +
June	7 - 10	The Nature Conservancy’s Niobrara Valley Preserve (Valentine area)
June	11 - 13	“ “ “ - Core +
October	2-3, 9-10	Lincoln area, TBA
November	6-7, 13-14	Fontenelle Forest (Omaha area)

Websites: The Master Naturalist program now benefits from a renewed website and a system that actually works for reporting volunteer effort and time! Thanks to UNL IT consultant, Mark Mesarch for unblocking the technical gnarls which hampered our digital presence, to advance our capabilities with the new UNL web template.

Part Time Temporary Assistant Stephen Vantassel also contributed significant expertise to help edit and improve our online content. Trainings Assistant Matt Jones’ familiarity with the program and its digital underpinnings also helped us re-define and decide our online training application pathways and program direction.

With minor adjustments, the new (UNL template) NMNP website functions perfectly adequate after the December launch at the same address, [Nebraska Master Naturalist](http://NebraskaMasterNaturalist.com), to favorable reviews. Updates and improvements continue, and Bruce has formally as well as individually ‘walked’ a few doubtful Master Naturalists through the revised, online pathways for submitting their volunteer & education hours. Meanwhile, Stephen Vantassel & Matt Jones rounded up & posted previous year’s Executive Board Meeting minutes and Board member bios & photos on Home website, for community reference.

We are currently weighing the potential benefits and the realistic costs of reviving and/or rebuilding the [Nebraska Nature Network](http://NebraskaNatureNetwork.com) website as a digital networking platform for contributing partners *Nebraska Outdoor University*, NMNP and the *Nebraska Alliance of Conservation and Environment Education* (NACEE) to serve the public and Master Naturalist community (created under a previous NET grant). We reached out to these NNN partners for feedback on future use. That decision looms.



Outreach and Media:

Working with Matt Jones, Bruce Mellberg promoted the Nebraska Master Naturalist program, training schedule and events 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.

- We consulted Jacki Loomis of SNR-UNL *Maps & More Store* to ensure accuracy and functionality of our online registration format, linked to her website, prior to launch of new NMNP website.
- Routed edited draft of SCTB article on Citizen Science engagement (by MN Tim Olin & Matt Jones) for publication in 1/18 *Sunday Lincoln Journal*: http://journalstar.com/sports/local/outdoors/master-naturalists-help-project-to-reintroduce-salt-creek-tiger-beetles/article_c2405c64-d7da-5611-989e-36629295d754.html
 - (which Kristal Stoner also edited and re-published in NGPC Wildlife newsletter (2015): <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/programs/nongame/pdf/2015newsletter.pdf>)
 - (--and which was re-printed in the Jan. Volunteer MN Newsletter)
- met w/Tom Bouse to explore possibilities for new short (2-3 min.) promotional MN film
- delegated Stephen Vantassel to secure permission for incoming MN photos, to promote NMN program
- Promoted Wildcat Hills NC MN Core 24 Training (4/15-18):
 - Mid-Jan: Drafted, submitted and routed processing for payment of color *Nebraska Life* magazine ad (Mar/April edition), to promote training schedule for 2015.
 - Shared digital ad *pdf* with Western Nebraska training partners & local media for distribution.
 - Mid-Feb: Called & e-mailed Scottsbluff area media outlets and program partner contacts to schedule meetings and appointments for early March visit to area
 - March 5-6: Matt & I traveled to Scottsbluff for 2-day ‘media blitz,’ & to meet with program partner contacts to *promote* April Core 24 training at Wildcat Hills NC
 - ✓ Appearances & interviews with Radio: (<http://kneb.com/uncategorized/nebraska-master-naturalist-program-offers-2015-training-opportunities-3/>), KOTA - TV (link not available),
 - ✓ 2 Newspapers: (http://www.starherald.com/news/local_news/program-offers-master-naturalist-certification/article_43e9b051-d2af-5e9b-abd8-52d4bffd69a3.html ;
 - ✓ http://www.geringcitizen.com/articles.php?ID=6571&Member_ID=&l=&First_Name=&Last_Name=)
 - ✓ Grapevine and Face Time: Director Anne James, *Riverside Discovery Center*; Supt. Ken Mabery, *Scottsbluff National Monument*; also called local representatives for *Platte River Basin Environments*, *UNL Extension Div. BSA, GSA, ESU & NRD*.
 - Continued to plan April MN training with Matt, Amanda Filipi (Wildcat Hills NC Education Dir.) & Alie Mayes (Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory Education Coordinator), who should both instruct *and benefit from* new Master Naturalists-in-Training there
 - Drafted and ordered 2 small Tuesday ads in *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* newspaper
 - Responded to subsequent inquiries from Panhandle NE promotion and advertising

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> .



The Future of the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program:

We aim to further refine our revised training program this year, as we encounter new faces joining our community as Certified Nebraska Master Naturalists, both in class and in the field. We will encourage them to network their talent, creativity and commitment together with our solid membership and with the growing roster of conservation partners. We also welcome and hope to sustain the collaborations which Matt has generated with new instructor contacts and training venues. We also appreciate Stephen's insight and assistance through his final few days with us.

We depend heavily on Dennis's sound vision and practical advice, and on the support and direction of each member of the Executive Board with the program, especially the consistent insights and ready support of Kristal Stoner (NGPC's Wildlife Diversity Program Director), and Leslie Kwasnieski's inclusive leadership and perceptive good will.

These times show great potential for the Master Naturalist Program to continue to advance as a key player in the conservation landscape. We seek ever newer ways to promote the stewardship of Nebraska's biodiversity by enhancing the conservation literacy of those engaged by our trained and dedicated volunteers. In turn, these selfless Master Naturalists continue to explore and forge committed service partnerships with the conservation organizations and agencies allied with us to ensure the natural heritage of our state! The measure of our success may ultimately be most evident in the quality of choices awaiting fellow stewards from beyond our time... We are laying the groundwork for them, as have those before us-- In truth, we owe them our best wisdom.

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.

At this writing we also gratefully acknowledge the significant contributions over recent months by Dr. Stephen Vantassel, Part-Time Temporary Assistant, who leaves us at the end of the month for a statewide *Vertebrate Pest Specialist* position with the Dept. of Agriculture in Montana. We sincerely wish him well in his future endeavors.

Bruce Mellberg, Coordinator

Nebraska Master Naturalist Program

April 24, 2015 (Revised, May 27, 2015)

