



2015 Fourth Quarter Report
Nebraska Master Naturalist Program, October 1 -December 31, 2015

Current Metrics:

Two Core (basic) trainings were held this quarter, adding **26 new Master-Naturalists-in-Training** to the program. During 2015, 6 Core (basic) trainings were held overall, adding 60 new members. Of the 304 Nebraskans who have entered the program **since 2010, 287 Master Naturalists are now active conservation volunteers.**

Total Volunteer Hours & Activity: 4th Quarter, 2015: October 1 - December 31			
TOTAL Volunteer Hours	Total <u>Value</u> of Volunteer Time*	Contacts	Acres Impacted
1524	\$35,164*	10,240	827
Total Volunteer Hours & Activity for: <u>January 1 - December 31, 2015</u>			
5267	\$121,503*	29,251	3585
Total Program Life Volunteer Hours & Activity: <i>2010 through December 31, 2015</i>			
31,770 hours	\$732,934*	417,912 Nebraskans	18,384 acres

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

Overview:

Since completing production of the *Naturalist Calendar Project* last quarter, Bruce Mellberg, Coordinator, and the Calendar Team invested much time distributing the Calendar around the state to increase the awareness of, and appreciation for, and conservation of, biodiversity in Nebraska, and to introduce the Master Naturalist program to new contacts. The calendar has also been given in gratitude for the successful efforts of its participating members, partners, instructors, supporters and associates.

Trainings Assistant, Matt Jones and Bruce capped a year of collaborating with new and former partners & instructors to implement the 2015 pilot Core & Core + training curriculum, by scheduling and promoting six sessions around the state. These were the most training opportunities thus far offered in a year. Website and tracking system features for volunteer reporting underwent minor revisions, and ongoing upkeep to support the program, its training and administrative needs.

Dennis Ferraro, steps down at year's end as Executive Board Chair, but continues as Principal Investigator and supervisor of the NET grant for the program & Coordinator. He's been key to guiding and sustaining the program, and has valiantly defended its contribution and value in promoting and conserving Nebraska's biodiversity, at a critical time. The program enlists and trains dedicated volunteers as educators, citizen scientists, habitat improvers, and mentors of skill for this purpose. The Master Naturalist mission will always benefit from testimonials vouching for the worth of its curriculum, as partner collaborations help change attitudes and behavior toward sustaining Nebraska's natural resources.



Events Schedule:

• **Upcoming 2016 Master Naturalist Training Schedule:**

- April 7 - 9 Core Basic (Ponca State Park, South Sioux City – Park entry required)
- May 19 - 21 Core Basic (NE 4H Camp, NE National Forest, Halsey, NE)
- June 5 - 11 Core Basic (TNC Niobrara Valley Preserve, Norden NE)
- July 7 - 9 Core Basic (Panhandle Research & Extension Center, Scottsbluff, NE)
- Sept.30 – Oct. 1 Core Basic, pt. 1 (AkSarBen Aquarium at Schramm Park SRA, Louisville, NE)
- Oct. 7 – 8 Core Basic, pt. 2 (AkSarBen Aquarium at Schramm Park SRA, Louisville, NE)

Highlighted Projects:

Naturalist Calendar Project & Distribution: Distributing 3000 copies of the 2016 *Naturalist Calendar* to the conservation community & interested public continued in earnest this quarter, since registrants at the NGPC’s late September *Natural Legacy Conference* in Kearney each received or were sent a free copy. It serves as an outreach vehicle to increase the awareness and stewardship of Nebraska’s diverse natural legacy by presenting nature’s beauty and presence around us, through the year.

Master Naturalists Paula Hoppe and Rebecca Osborn-Reagan (from the first MN Class of 2010) had researched Nebraska’s unfolding phenology, with support from outgoing Board member, Kristal Stoner of Nebraska Game and Parks. Kristal’s Wildlife Diversity Program split half of the production costs with the NMNP. She more than supported calendar distribution with her program’s staff. She also drafted sidebars and provided some of her agency’s photographs.

Graphic designer and fellow Master Naturalist, Nancy Hawekotte donated nearly 90% of her professional fees, thus largely volunteering to design and ensure quality production for the outstanding result.

Editing was shared with team members, as was the distribution list of representatives from state and federal agencies, as well as non-profit supporters, conservation partners, faculty instructors, program stakeholders, potential recruits, family members, grapevine inquiries and private collaborators with the program and its friends. At least one state legislator also received a Naturalist calendar.

As Chief (text) Editor, the Coordinator also handled bidding, billing and arranging planning & progress meetings for the project. He contracted *UNL Printing Services* for production, then loaded & hauled the resulting 41 boxes to enlist distribution partners. Copies were sent to all Master Naturalists under a separate UNL contract by 12/23/15, though some received theirs in person. This effectively engaged significant numbers of the conservation community with the project.

Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle Reintroduction Project: Several Endangered Salt Creek Tiger Beetle larvae were introduced at 11 transects at 5 monitoring sites in Lincoln’s saline wetlands on October 6, with 13 new and former project MN’s assisting. A fall training for SCTB monitoring was held by project team leaders Bob Harms and Mike Fritz on 10/31, which Matt & Bruce coordinated. Soon after, Bruce assigned 5 monitoring teams, who checked out monitoring equipment by 12/8. Winter monitoring could occur on a few mild days, with spring reintroductions to pick up in March.



Executive Board Election and Meetings: The November 13 meeting was held at the Air & Space Museum in Ashland. By November 30, with voting by partners, members and stakeholders, an election had approved the by-laws unanimously and elected the Executive Board as listed below:

2016 Master Naturalist Executive Board

Dennis Ferraro –Past Chair

Mike Schrad – Chair

Andrea Faas – Vice Chair

Deb Woracek– Treasurer

Leslie Kwasnieski - Secretary

Jeanine Lackey - General Board Program Partner

Daniel Deffenbaugh - General Board Master Naturalist

James Hoke - General Board Master Naturalist*

Upcoming NMNP Executive Board meetings:

- Feb. 26 9 am – 1 pm (UNL Hardin Hall)
- May 20 (tbd)
- Aug. 7 (tbd)
- Nov. 18 (tbd)

(Brice Krohn, of the Crane Trust was subsequently chosen for the vacant *Partner Board Member* in a second election by 1/4/16.) *Brice and James Hoke are the new members. Outgoing members are Joanne Langebee and Kristal Stoner, who will continue as Special Assistant to the Board. Non-voting members are program staff, Matt Jones and Bruce Mellberg.

Master Naturalist Trainings (Matt Jones, Trainings Assistant):

We planned and presented two Master Naturalist Core trainings, bringing 26 new members into the program. The Lincoln sessions in October were held during two weekends; at Pioneers Park Nature Center and Audubon’s Spring Creek Prairie. In November, Core training took place at Fontenelle Forest in Bellevue. Two new instructors were recruited Kevin Paulson led an Outdoor Skills session in October and Prof. Dave Wedin of UNL, facilitated our Flora of Nebraska session in November. Both instructors contributed to the success of these sessions.

In October, we teamed up with Audubon’s Rowe sanctuary for the “Rowe Nature Retreat,” a workshop introducing the Platte River Ecosystem and exploring the native species inhabiting that land. Over a dozen Master Naturalists attended and bonded with the facility, the land and each other during the daylong event.

Much work in developing the 2016 training schedule has led to 5 core training dates at sites far and wide, with two in new locations: the Halsey Youth 4H Camp in the Nebraska National Forest, and Ponca State Park.

Program Partner development:

Bruce followed leads on two new partnerships this quarter--first with the UNL State Museum Education Department, by meeting with representatives, Kathy French, Education Director and Sarah Feit, Volunteer Coordinator on 10/2 to explore possible volunteer opportunities and workshops with their staff. The *Naturalist* calendar served as an introduction to the program and discussions led to scheduling a Master Naturalist owl pellet investigation on a January 2016 Saturday.



Prairie Astronomy Club member, Beth Jenckes (also a Master Naturalist), and Bruce met with the Hyde Observatory Board in Lincoln on 10/27 to enlist Master Naturalists for their public astronomy viewings. Bruce outlined the potential for NMN support and asked if astronomy workshops were possible, to recruit and prepare volunteers. Board members debated this, leading to a follow-up meeting with Emeritus UNL Prof. Ed Schmidt in early December. Three Master Naturalists already volunteer there.

Matt Jones contacted Sarah Bailey of the Bader Memorial Park to discuss their need for Master Naturalist volunteers (at least two already volunteer there) and for possibly hosting Core+ training there, on the north bank of the Platte River. A follow-up orientation hike on 12/6 was attended by area MN's with Matt and Bruce to explore the site's possibilities.

Omaha MN's explored a Heron Haven (private Omaha preserve) partnership in early December, with the Omaha MN group scheduling their next meeting there in early January, 2016.

Master Naturalist Community:

To promote networking among eastern Nebraska Master Naturalists, Bruce invited them to share their e-addresses, which activated interest and progressive leadership among the "Omaha Group" for exploring Master Naturalist Chapter or Group status, under program By-Laws. On their own, they also created a separate Omaha Listserv which they will manage to dialog on local MN activities; and for which they would also invite all in the greater MN Community to "opt-in," via the 'official' Master Naturalist ListServ.

Malia Robinson, representing the Master Naturalist program volunteered with the Homestead National Monument in Beatrice and received a complimentary letter from the Superintendent (attached).

By collaborating with staff at The Nature Conservancy's Platte Prairies, Master Naturalists Karen Hamburger, Deb Miller, and Deb Mowry received a Watchable Wildlife grant in 2015 to produce a field guide for wildlife and habitat in central Nebraska. *The Explorer's Guide to Central Nebraska Prairies* thus aims to help visitors observe the subtle charm of Nebraska's native prairie. It challenges the reader to look closer at nature, inquire, and interpret what one encounters. This guide seeks to enhance understanding and appreciation of Nebraska's grasslands, while inspiring more learning.

Master Naturalist groups met in Lincoln on 11/21 at Sue Kirkpatrick's home; and in Omaha on 10/27 at Glacier Creek Preserve; on 11/14 at Camp Brewster, Fontenelle Forest; and had planned to meet at Heron Haven on 1/9. A core group of central Nebraska MM's met at Bader Memorial Prairie, near Chapman (Grand Island) on 12/6.

The Annual Meeting and Training Event: Since an annual awards gathering for the Master Naturalist community wasn't held since 2013, an Omaha member planning committee of MN's and Board members took the lead on organizing and inviting all on 12/7 to save the date for the 1/23/16 event.

Outreach and Media:

The Nebraska Master Naturalist training schedule and program were promoted through a newspaper notice, with in-person outreach presentations and Naturalist calendar gifts to many in the conservation community, and to others not familiar with our program aims (with an introductory letter drafted by the Coordinator for this); along with informal in-person contacts, and through program e-newsletters and the online events calendar listings at the MN website. Specifically:



- Scottsbluff Star-Herald reporter, Steve Frederick wrote an unsolicited article on the Master Naturalist program, prompted by the local interest of April, 2015 MN trainee, Zach Hagen:
http://www.starherald.com/opinion/frederick-here-s-a-way-to-learn-about-nature-do/article_b1ccb5ee-9588-11e5-8f7e-4bb78a97acb0.html .
- Naturalist Calendars were presented informally as an outstanding introduction to the program to attendees at several public and invitational events and venues this quarter, including conferences, talks, meetings, conservation clubs, face-time visits, office visits and various contacts made by fellow Master Naturalists also willing to approach new prospective recruits, partners or supporters for the program. It's been a very effective introduction to start the conservation conversation.
- Bruce and Matt also posted continuing educational and volunteer opportunities, along with program-related links and public activity notices on the Nebraska Master Naturalist Facebook site:
<https://www.facebook.com/masternaturalist>; and on the (MN website) Online Master Naturalist Events Calendar, with help from short-timer UNL undergrad assistant, Cat Berrick.
- Bruce and Matt also responded to several MN e-mail inquiries about the program, training, volunteering, website and tracking input, to gain confidence with more effective reporting.

Website, Digital Resources, ListServ, Staffing:

The Coordinator again reminded Master Naturalist volunteers in mid-December, to submit their activity hours (volunteering and continuing education) on the website tracking system by the end of the month (& year) for better metrics reporting & accuracy. An "Administrative" category was added on the tracking system to better report volunteer hours supporting NMNP (or other partner) training; administration; or office efforts.

With the pending departure of our on-call, temporary undergrad assistant, Cat Berrick, Bruce selected Doug Wells, recruited from 5 SNR applicants for Cat's position, beginning next semester. Doug went through the June 2015 Core class at Niobrara Valley Preserve. For help in updating and inputting content on the NMNP website, Bruce set up Dreamweaver training with SNR IT consultant, Mark Mesarch on Dec. 9, coordinated with another program to share costs. Mark was separately contracted to create a better database search tool for gauging volunteer activity for us.

Meanwhile Cat updated & repaired Online Resources, and posted volunteer and learning opportunities for certification-seeking Master Naturalists, via the Online Events website calendar. She drafted & distributed the monthly Master Naturalist Newsletter on Mail Chimp for current opportunities. Doug was able to learn these duties with Cat at her screen. Cat also drafted spreadsheets supporting member communications and calendar distribution. She independently rooted out website content typos and repaired faulty hyperlinks on her own. We thank her for her active initiative & support!

Bruce alerted Matt to SNR INSPIRE training after attending SNR orientation on 12/8, then obtained his copy of Skills Finder assessment for employee development, and arranged for trainers to visit him for personal orientation & overview on this, at his Ext. office in Kearney on 12/11.



What's Ahead?

Matt was finishing planning for the proposed five 2016 Core-24 trainings with Bruce's help on some venues at year's end. Matt represents the program identity in so many ways, while advancing its visibility and engagement throughout the state.

With three new partners collaborating with us, we look to developing even greater choice in learning and volunteer opportunities for our members, while renewing long-held partnerships. We watch with interest the growing leadership and collaborations among the Omaha Master Naturalists in engaging awareness and positive change in the urban preserves & backyard habitats of their community. We will strive to create more varied conservation service and learning opportunities for fellow Master Naturalists from across the state. We greet the new Executive Board Chair, Mike Schrad, along with newly elected partner member Brice Krohn and Master Naturalist representative, Jim Hoke, as each of them offer new energy and insight to our dynamic mission. Our thanks go to Kristal Stoner and PI Dennis Ferraro for their ongoing support and involvement with the program, as with continuing Board members. We welcome the enthusiasm and active resourcefulness of Doug Wells, our on-call, undergrad program assistant, with his background and somewhat parallel position with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The extra support he offers will help advance the program aims. Paula and Rebecca of the Naturalist Calendar project team are already researching the unfolding events for the 2017 edition, by the way.

Wherever Master Naturalists emerge to take initiative and cultivate interest among their peers, we are grateful for the generosity of their expertise and time. It could well become contagious, as we consider those fellow conservation partners who helped us through our own setbacks and discoveries of skill and potential.

We encourage our fellow members to record their hours, before each quarter's end, to get a realistic count, and to seek out others who share their interests, to find common ground as they expand their awareness and further their understanding of why native resources matter to them, while discovering new ways to conserve and sustain habitats and biodiversity through their remarkable investments of effort, time, reflection, fun, and community.

This report was drafted and submitted by Bruce Mellberg, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Coordinator. It was made possible with essential input by Matt Jones, Nebraska Master Naturalist Program Trainings Assistant, and guidance from UNL Professor Dennis Ferraro, Principal Investigator for the supporting grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Bruce Mellberg, Coordinator
Nebraska Master Naturalist Program
January 25, 2016
(Rev. 2/22/16)

