

Texas Master Naturalist Program

TEEA 2014 Winner: Civic/Community



Since 1997, the Texas Master Naturalist program has grown to include 44 chapters and more than 8,000 volunteers serving Texas communities throughout 70 percent of the state's counties. The mission of the program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities.

These skilled volunteers work with communities and organizations across the state to implement youth outreach programs; help operate parks, nature centers, and natural areas; and lead local natural resource conservation efforts. In addition, private landowners depend on the expertise of these volunteers to help them gain a broader scientific understanding of the ecology and management of their natural resources. The program works with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, along with 320 local partners across the state.

What makes the work of master naturalists so important is that they are not only individuals who love nature and offer their time, but also trained naturalists with specialized knowledge of different ecosystems, species, habitats, and environmental demands that is priceless when determining how to best manage natural resources. The training and service requirements to become a certified Texas master naturalist are extensive 40 hours of training, including field and classroom instruction customized to focus on the local native ecosystem. Certification also includes eight hours of approved advanced training in special areas of personal interest. In return, members volunteer for 40 hours of community service a year in education, demonstration, and habitat enhancement. Though that seems like a lot for a volunteer program, so many TMN volunteers do even more. Last year, the TMN Chapter of Hays County had four naturalists who contributed more than 2,000 hours each—equivalent to a full-time job!

Whether it's designing nature trails, conserving habitat, setting up birding stations, or planting wildflowers, TMN volunteers are creating a better environment for their fellow Texans. To date, Master Naturalists have developed or maintained more than 1,770 miles of trail, enhanced more than 195,000 acres, and dedicated more than 2 million hours valued at more than \$40.6 million. The Texas Master Naturalist Program serves as an incredible example of the impact that knowledgeable volunteers can have to improve and safeguard the Lone Star State's natural landscapes.