



Photo by Amy Rager

Capstone Projects

Capstone projects provide Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteers with an opportunity to demonstrate the skills learned in class. Working singly or in groups, they conduct their first volunteer project with feedback and advice from their instructors, and share their work during their last class. This project is designed to facilitate the move from learning to action. Participants dedicate considerable time and effort to these projects, with impressive results. Capstone projects in 2009 included:

- Development of a program to support experiences in nature for disabled kids: www.naturallykids.org.
- Prairie Plant Display at Quarry Hill Nature Center in Rochester.
- Creation of Green Backpacks to teach elementary students how to reduce their carbon footprint.
- Creation of a nature club on line for home school families: www.naturestudy.org.
- Development of a field day at Edenbrook Conservation Area on What to Expect in Autumn.
- Sign designed for Lake Superior Zoo about endangered species in Minnesota.
- A touch screen exhibit to identify the birds of Fort Snelling State Park by season.
- Identification, location, and education about narrow leaf bittercress, an invasive species.



Photo by Marcia Kelly-Naturally Kids

Annual Conference

The second annual conference was held at Audubon of the North Woods near Sandstone, MN with one hundred three Minnesota Master Naturalists attending. Keynote speakers included polar explorer, Ann Bancroft and J. Drake Hamilton of Fresh Energy. Breakout sessions covered a variety of topics from research on the Master Naturalist Program, to getting involved with the SLICE lake survey program. Evaluations indicated that participants loved the conference and included excellent suggestions for 2010.



In Their Words....

“Teaching [the course] for the first time this year has been one of the richest experiences of my lifetime. It is difficult to convey. Intense, positive, challenging, worthwhile, truly AWESome - in that speechless-with-amazement way.”

“Of the seven field trips I attended during the three Master Naturalist Volunteer classes I’ve attended, Saturday’s field trip was the best by far! It’s fitting and wonderful that the last field trip I attended was the most memorable!”

“I felt like a sponge just soaking up all the knowledge of our teachers. Never did I feel uneasy asking questions nor needing clarification. In my opinion it was a perfect experience in every way.”

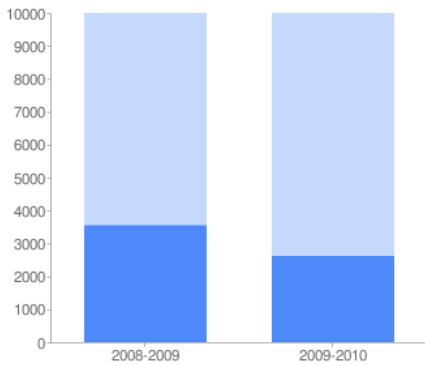
“I co-own lakeshore property -- my learnings will allow me to better convince other owners that native plants and animal protection are worthwhile.”

“The capstone projects -- both completing our project and learning about other projects -- provided a good summary of the course, the opportunity to specialize in a subject or nature center, and to meet and interact with others.”

Establishment of Foundation Account

In early 2008 a University of Minnesota Foundation account was established for the Minnesota Master Naturalist Program. This allows individuals, corporations, trusts, and estates to give tax deductible donation to the program. Donations are used to fund scholarships for participants, to support the annual conference, and to fund on-going programming. An annual silent auction at the conference also supports the Master Naturalist fund. To date we have received over \$6,000. Our annual goal of \$10, 000 would provide the funds to maintain the account balance and allow us to provide the most

Minnesota Master Naturalist Fundraising Progress



scholarships possible. Giving is easy: Go to www.MinnesotaMasterNaturalist.org and click on “Make a Contribution”.

Our thanks to those who have donated so far!



Photo submitted by Deb Lewis



Submitted Photo



Submitted Photo



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2009 Year End Program Summary

The Minnesota Master Naturalist Program is completing its fifth year! With 490 active Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteers, the program continues to be in high demand and to turn out excellent and committed volunteers. Over 130 instructors have been trained, representing forty different local entities ranging from city, county, state, and federal government; to local nature centers. Minnesota is benefiting from the work of Master Naturalist Volunteers statewide.

Master Naturalist Participants

Just who are Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteers and what do they think of the program? What do they learn during their 40-hour class? A Conservation Biology PhD student and an external evaluation team are using answers to these questions to help us to modify and improve the program. Here are a few of the things we've learned.



Motivation for Participation: When volunteers were asked why they participated in the Minnesota Master Naturalist program, the highest rated reasons cited were:

- to learn more about native plants and animals
- to learn more about Minnesota's natural ecosystems
- to engage in a personally enriching experience
- to improve skills to help others develop a stewardship ethic
- to be close to nature
- to improve skills promoting environmental conservation.

Participant Demographics: Approximately 68% of Minnesota Master Naturalist participants are from greater Minnesota, 18% are from the Twin Cities suburbs, and 14% from Minneapolis and St. Paul.



Photo by Amy Rager

Participants especially liked the outside activities and field trips. About 94% of the participants stated that the course "met" or "exceeded" their expectations.

Instructor Ratings: Master Naturalist classes are taught by professional naturalists, whose program delivery earns high marks from participants. The most frequent rating for instructor qualities was "excellent", with the highest ratings for instructor enthusiasm, approachability and knowledge

level.

Knowledge Gain: Pre- and post-class tests allow us to assess what Master Naturalist participants learn during their classes. Participants showed a statistically significant increase in knowledge based on a pre- and post course twenty question multiple-choice test. The Big Woods, Big Rivers course increased from a pre-course score of 10 (50% correct) to the average post-course of 16 (80%). The Prairie and Pothole course showed an average pre-course score of 12 (60% correct); this increased to 16 (80% correct) for the post test. The North Woods, Great Lakes course average pre-course score was 12 (60% correct); this increased on the post-course score to 15 (75% correct).



Photo by Tim Boyle

Preparation to Volunteer: Most class participants (over 90%) feel that the skills and ideas they learned in the class prepared them to volunteer in nature-related activities.



Photo by Tim Boyle

Volunteer Service

Minnesota Master Naturalist Volunteers are required to provide forty hours of volunteer service and eight hours of advanced training to maintain their active status in the program. For every year they are an active volunteer, they earn a reward pin showcasing a native Minnesota plant or animal. Volunteer service includes the following four categories:

- Stewardship – natural resource management projects
- Program Support – activities that support nature-based programming
- Citizen Science – engagement in natural science research programs
- Education/Interpretation – development and delivery of natural science or conservation information.

Volunteer Service Hours

The value of volunteer service according to Independent Sector.org was \$20.25 in 2008 (no data were available for 2009 at press time).

