



# Virginia Master Naturalists

## Historic Rivers Chapter

## Basic Training 2026-2027 Frequently Asked Questions

Historic Rivers Chapter | Virginia Master Naturalists

### Why should I become a Virginia Master Naturalist?

If you love nature, want to learn more about the natural world around you, and want to volunteer for citizen-science, stewardship, and education & outreach activities benefiting nature in your area, the Master Naturalist program is for you. Successful completion of the Basic Training course is required to become a Master Naturalist Volunteer.

### What is involved in training?

The Historic Rivers Chapter Master Naturalist Basic Training course consists of 14 classes and 7 field days over a seven-month period (September – March). Participants are expected to attend all classes and field trips. However, if unavoidable circumstances intervene, you can miss up to two classes and one field day and still successfully complete Basic Training.

### Volunteering

Becoming a Virginia Master Naturalist enables you to participate in a myriad of volunteer activities. To be a Certified Master Naturalist, you must complete at least 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education each year after graduation. If you do not anticipate having time to volunteer at least this many hours per year, this program is not for you.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

## What will I get out of training?

The course provides an overview of science and environmental topics presented by university professors and other expert instructors. Classroom and field trip experiences are designed to enhance your knowledge and comfort level with volunteering in our local community. You will learn with experienced volunteers on active chapter projects.

## What are the training dates?

The following dates are tentative and may change based on weather, instructor availability or other factors.

**Classroom Dates:** ALMOST ALL CLASSES ARE ON TUESDAYS, 6 – 8:30 pm

August 25, 2026 (Tuesday)—Intro to Historic Rivers VMN & Meet and Greet

September 8

September 23 (Wednesday)

October 6

October 20

November 5 (Thursday)

November 17

December 8

January 5, 2027

January 19

February 2

February 16

February 23 – hold for possible makeup

**TRAINING CONCLUDES MARCH 10 (WEDNESDAY) GRADUATION**

**Field Day Dates – ALL SATURDAYS, ~ 9 am – 2:30 pm**

September 12

September 26

October 3 (Chapter Annual Picnic)

October 17

November 7

November 21

December 5

January 16, 2027

February 13

February 21 – hold for possible makeup

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

## When and where are classes?

Most classes meet at Coleman Nursery, 3000 Ironbound Road, Williamsburg. Classes occur approximately every other Tuesday evening from 6-8:30 pm, starting in early September and continuing until March. Field days take place in the Williamsburg area, Newport News, and Gloucester County. They are scheduled on Saturdays.

## May I take the course just to increase my own knowledge of nature, and not volunteer afterwards?

Our mission is to train volunteers who support our local, state, and/or national partners and their activities. As much as we applaud anyone who wants to learn more about nature, we don't have sufficient resources to offer the course only for self-enrichment.

## I would just like to join the chapter to volunteer. Can I do that without training?

No, Basic Training is required to be a member of the chapter and to volunteer. However, you can start volunteering during Basic Training after you complete the risk management unit, which is at the beginning of the course.

## How much time does Basic Training involve?

The Basic Training program requires the following 7-month commitment:

- 14 classes = ~ 40 class hours
- 7 field day experiences = ~ 28 hours
- 5 hours for external requirements
- Additional time for pre-class preparation, and post class research and topic exploration

In addition to class and field day attendance, there is reading for pre-class preparation, after class written questions, attendance at several various nature-related educational activities, and participation in a class-wide volunteer activity. An *open-book* final exam concludes the Basic Training program.

## Who can attend classes and field days?

For the safety of all, only those individuals enrolled in the HRC Basic Training program, the Basic Training coordinating team, and instructors, are allowed to attend Basic Training classes and field days.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

## What happens if I can't attend all the classes?

Trainees are expected to attend all classes and field days. Please check the schedule carefully to make sure you do not have conflicts.

Weather cancellations are sometimes necessary, and instructors' availability may change at the last minute. Trainees are asked to treat scheduled makeup days as mandatory. One makeup class date and one makeup field day are built into the schedule. Participants may miss up to two classes and one field trip only and still graduate.

## Are instructors and course coordinators paid positions?

No. All instructors and Chapter board and committee members volunteer their time.

## What is your COVID policy?

The Virginia Master Naturalist program and the Historic Rivers Chapter abide by the Virginia Department of Health guidelines currently in effect at the start of training.

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/covid-19-faq/>

## As a trainee, do I need computer skills?

YES. Trainees need access to a computer, laptop, or tablet with access to the internet. You should be able to use email, search the internet, receive Microsoft Word and/or PDF documents, and send documents by email. Access to a printer may be helpful.

Course materials are primarily disseminated using cloud-based Microsoft OneDrive and email.

Some classes may be conducted by ZOOM and pre-recorded video. Trainees should be familiar with Zoom participation and online learning, *or be prepared to familiarize themselves with Zoom and other online platforms.*

Our leadership team can provide technical support if necessary.

The Basic Training team and the Chapter communicate primarily by email so you should be prepared to check your email regularly and frequently (at least once per day) and respond promptly if requested.

## How do I apply?

By May 24, you will receive an email with the link to the online application on a site called Better Impact. On June 1, the online application will be “live” for you to apply. The link will be “live” until June 30 or until the class is filled. We encourage you to apply early – we typically have more people interested than we have space for.

To successfully complete the application, we suggest the following preparations:

1. Prepare to devote approximately one hour to completing the online application. It must be completed in one sitting. You will not be able to save your responses to return later.
2. When you open the Better Impact link, you’ll have to enter a username and password. If you’re accepted into Basic Training, you will use these login credentials. Of course, they can be changed later if necessary or if you request.
3. When completing the online application, you’ll need to answer the following questions. You may want to prepare for these questions before you log in:
4. Have you applied to or been in a Virginia Master Volunteer program before? (Virginia Cooperative Extension programs such as Master Gardener Program, Master Financial Education Program, Master Food Volunteer Program, Virginia Master Naturalist Program)
5. If so, which Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Volunteer programs have you applied to or been a part of?
6. Why are you interested in becoming a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer?
7. How did you hear about the Virginia Master Naturalist program?
8. What kind of volunteer work would you like to do as a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer?
9. Please describe any previous volunteer experience you may have.
10. What do you consider your strengths, special talents, or abilities that would make you a good match for this volunteer program?
11. On the online application, you will need to provide the following information for three references.
  - a. Name
  - b. Relationship
  - c. Address
  - d. Primary Phone #
  - e. Secondary Phone #
  - f. Email address

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

## What background, knowledge, and skills do we look for in an applicant?

You don't have to be a science major, natural scientist, ecologist, or biologist to be accepted into the program. Many HRC master naturalists originally applied without significant scientific or environmental knowledge or experience but have become expert through their volunteer experience.

Historic Rivers Chapter seeks people with:

- A desire to volunteer in the community for the benefit of the area's natural resources
- Time available to fulfill Basic Training requirements and to volunteer after graduation
- A basic knowledge of and curiosity about the natural world

It's helpful to have some experience working as a member of a team or working with another volunteer organization. It's also helpful to be enthusiastic about participating in citizen science, education/outreach, and/or stewardship projects, and to be willing to share your knowledge with others.

APPLICANTS WILL BE ACCEPTED IN THE ORDER THAT THEIR COMPLETED APPLICATIONS, PAYMENT, AND REFERENCES ARE RECEIVED.

## How do I pay the tuition?

After you've completed the application, we'll send you instructions on payment. You will be able to pay by check or online. Payment is due by July 15, 2026.

## What does tuition cover?

The standard fee for Basic Training is \$175, which covers all course materials and other class expenses. The master naturalist program emphasizes inclusivity. If your financial situation makes it difficult to pay the full tuition, a Variable Pricing option is offered during the application process. Applicants will be directed to Variable Pricing options during the application process. Any Variable Pricing option chosen will not be considered in evaluating applicants.

## What is the refund policy?

If an applicant withdraws before the first class, tuition will be refunded. Since course materials are handed out at the first class, no refunds are given after that time.

## Do you have a payment plan?

If your financial situation makes it difficult to pay the full amount up front, please contact a course coordinator for possible payment options. Contact Bill Wedon: [billweldonhrc@gmail.com](mailto:billweldonhrc@gmail.com)

## Is Historic Rivers Chapter affiliated with another institution?

The Historic Rivers Chapter (with 29 other Virginia Master Naturalist Chapters) is a statewide program sponsored by these Virginia public agencies and institutions:

- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
- Virginia Museum of Natural History
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
- Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Center for Coastal Resources Management

## For whom is the program not a good fit?

If you're looking for skills for employment as a naturalist, this is not the course for you. Our mission is to train volunteers who will volunteer and support our local, state, and/or national partners and their activities. If you don't intend to volunteer, or don't have time to volunteer, then this course is not for you.

## What are the requirements after graduation?

The Chapter expects you to become certified within a year of graduation. Certification requires 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education each calendar year. There are numerous activities and opportunities through which to earn volunteer hours and continuing education credit within our chapter, and members can develop new activities if desired.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and local governments, and is an equal opportunity employer. For the full non-discrimination statement, please visit [ext.vt.edu/accessibility](http://ext.vt.edu/accessibility).

## Where can I find more information about the chapter's activities?

You can find more information on our chapter website:

<https://www.historicrivers.org>

Check out the State Virginia Master Naturalist website:

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org>

Or check out our Facebook page

(Historic Rivers Chapter):

<https://www.facebook.com/HistoricRiversChapter>

## Still have questions?

Contact Bill Weldon: [billweldonhrc@gmail.com](mailto:billweldonhrc@gmail.com)