

Idaho Master Naturalist Program Overview



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History and Development of the Program

The first Master Naturalist Program in the United States started in 1995 with the city of Fort Collins, CO Master Naturalist Program. In response to urban sprawl, the citizens of Fort Collins approved a city sales tax to preserve natural areas. Part of the money from the tax was used to create a volunteer task force to help educate citizens and visitors about the wild plants, animals, and processes that are conserved with the open space initiative.

The first state-wide master naturalist program began soon after in Texas. Texas now has the largest program in the country and is often used as a model for other state's programs, including Idaho's. As the name implies, Master Naturalist programs were modeled after the popular Master Gardener Programs that began in 1973 at Washington State University's Extension program. The combination of rigorous training and service for certification has proved successful not only for Master Gardener programs, but for Master Naturalist programs as well. Currently, there are 26 state-wide Master Naturalist programs and 4 in development.

Along with Texas, Florida and Michigan have prominent Master Naturalist programs (program names vary) and have evaluated their programs. All three states have shown an approximate 15% increase in knowledge scores about ecology and other program content (Haggerty 2004, Van Den Berg, 2006, Main, 2004). Demographics from these three programs are similar, catering more to women than men, people over 50 with higher than average incomes and education levels. Since many state Master Naturalist programs are hosted by the state fish and wildlife agency, these participants represent a new group of supporters for these agencies; different than the traditional sportsman.

Many states have developed Master Naturalist programs as a response to decreasing state budgets for education and nongame wildlife programs within agencies. In addition, a shift to include citizens in natural resource decision making, science, and conservation efforts is occurring in state wildlife agencies (Wallace, 2005). State wildlife agencies are generally interested in broadening their base of support and attempt to do so by reaching out to new constituents, finding ways to serve the non-hunting/fishing public in a time when hunting and fishing popularity is decreasing. Increasing urbanization is a concern for many states developing these programs. Some agencies feel the need to keep urban people connected with nature and the natural resources that sustain them.

The concept of an Idaho Master Naturalist Program (IMNP) has been of interest to several individuals and agencies in Idaho for the past five years for many of the reasons above. Idaho Department of Fish and Game, along with the Sawtooth Science Institute, began learning more about Master Naturalist programs in 2004, by sending representatives to the National Master Naturalist Conference. With an overwhelming amount of information about these programs, and a lack of dedicated funds and personnel to create and implement the program in Idaho, efforts moved slowly, but interest did not wane.

In the fall of 2006, IDFG assigned Idaho Master Naturalist Program development to an employee with a goal of having a pilot chapter formed by the late fall of 2007. IDFG had four main motivations when committing to the development and implementation of the IMNP. First, the IMNP, if modeled after the Texas Master Naturalist Program, met many of the agency's goals and objectives laid out in its strategic plan. Second, the department desired to standardize parts of its state-wide volunteer program and saw the opportunity to incorporate a new volunteer program. Third, the program would offer an opportunity for IDFG employees implementing the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS) to gain needed support and help with this largely unfunded plan. Fourth, it was viewed as a way to reach out to the public in new ways, involving them in science, information, decision making, and on the ground work toward conservation.

Program Details

MISSION OF THE IDAHO MASTER NAUTURALIST PROGRAM

The mission of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to actively work toward stewardship of Idaho's natural environment.

GOALS OF THE IDAHO MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM

1. Increase public knowledge of natural resources, ecology, conservation, and natural resource management.
2. Enhance existing efforts toward conservation in Idaho.
3. Create and foster partnerships between natural resource agencies, organizations, and citizens.

VISION

In the future, Idaho Department of Fish and Game would like to see the Idaho Master Naturalist Program have many chapters throughout the state of Idaho. These chapters would form a loose network of Idahoans participating in conservation on various levels in their communities.

LEARNER OUTCOMES

We want participants of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program to finish their 40 hours of service and 40 hours with:

1. an increased knowledge of Idaho's natural environment and ecological principles.
2. an understanding of a variety of views about nature and natural resource management.
3. motivation to continue learning and volunteering toward conservation of Idaho's natural world.
4. the feeling that they can help make a difference in their community through conservation volunteerism.

PARTNER OUTCOMES

For partnering agencies, this program has the potential to bring many benefits. The benefit that might first come to mind is that of a volunteer workforce to help agencies and organizations do important work to carry out their missions. This is a benefit that can save organizations money and help support paid staff. The Texas Master Naturalist Program, now almost 10 years old, consists of 27 chapters state-wide. Below is a short list of accomplishments the Texas Master Naturalist Program saw in 2003-2004.

1. 2,751 volunteers trained
2. 192,606 hours of volunteer service
3. an economic benefit of volunteer hours=\$3.38 million dollars
4. 530,845 adults and youth were contacted by volunteers (programs and outreach)
5. 75,000 acres of habitat impacted by volunteers

Volunteers already play a big role in many agency's and organization's daily operations. The Idaho Master Naturalist Program simply adds training and support to existing volunteer programs, and bring volunteers and structure to those organizations without current volunteer programs.

Another benefit to partnering agencies is the relationship built between partners. In an age of shrinking budgets and increased workload, most agencies don't have the luxury to do everything themselves. Partnerships are good business and are looked positively upon by the public, politicians, funding sources, and managers. There is no room for competitiveness in conservation. We all must work together for the benefit of the natural world of Idaho.

A third benefit to partner agencies of the IMNP is meeting the goals and objectives of the agency and carrying out the mission of the organization. Undoubtedly, partnering agencies have a conservation aspect to their mission. Education and outreach is most likely another component of their mission. The IMNP works toward these goals!

Increased public support for partnering agencies and management actions has been measured in participants of Michigan's Conservation Stewards Program. The sponsoring agency, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has shown an increase in support for various natural resource management techniques such as prescribed fire and hunting (Van Den Berg, 2006) from program participants. We hope the Idaho Master Naturalist Program brings the same benefits to its partners.

Curriculum

There are three curriculum guides and one file box provided for you. These consist of:

1. Idaho Master Naturalist Statewide Core Curriculum
2. Citizen Science Track Curriculum
3. Education Track Curriculum
4. Idaho Master Naturalist File Box

The core curriculum consists of 20 chapters of material. It may not be possible for all 20 chapters to be covered in each chapter training session. It is up to chapter planning teams what chapters to cover and how many, though at least 15 chapters are required to be covered. The chapters have been written for the Master Naturalist to read before a field trip or class session that might expand on the concepts in each chapter. Chapter leaders may choose their own activities to teach concepts or explore ideas. To promote regional variation in the program, specific lesson plans have not been provided. However, chapter planning committees are encouraged to share lesson plans and training ideas and will be able to do so, on the Idaho Master Naturalist website.

Each participant must have a complete copy of the curriculum, either printed or on CD. The curriculum will be provided to you at cost by IDFG.

Currently, there are two tracks to the Idaho Master Naturalist Program. **The Citizen Science Track** focuses on training and service that will help participants gain knowledge and skills to work on data collection, research, and other scientific pursuits. Participants who choose this track will be working with a biologist, researcher, or scientist to help with projects that aid managers in natural resource decision making. For example, a participant might help a park manager conduct a visitor survey, do campsite inventories, inventory noxious weeds, monitor a peregrine falcon nest, or take water samples.

The **Education Track** will help prepare participants to help organizations and agencies give programs to children and adults. Staffing booths at fairs, creating interpretive brochures and displays, assisting at educational events, and working at nature centers and visitor centers would also be tasks for participants of this track.

There has been discussion of developing more tracks. Some ideas for additional tracks are the Conservation Steward Track, where participants learn about habitat improvement and might participate in tree planting, stream bank restoration, weed pulling, litter pick up, or seed collecting. An Outdoors Skills Track has also been discussed. This track would help participants teach others to fish, backpack, bird watch, camp, and hike responsibly. These activities that help people enjoy Idaho's natural areas, may also help increase their support for the conservation of these areas. We encourage you to think of how the Idaho Master Naturalist Program can expand in the future. All ideas and suggestions are welcome.

In addition to the core curriculum, a participant choosing either of these tracks must also complete the curriculum associated with each track. So, all participants will work through the core curriculum, and their track curriculum of choice.

As you prepare your master naturalist chapter, you might decide to provide these two tracks together, guiding all participants through the core curriculum as a group and splitting them up for specific track curriculum training. Or, you could provide only one track at a time. These three curriculums are meant to be challenging, yet general. The Idaho Master Naturalist Program needs to maintain vigor, but must be made enjoyable and interesting and accommodate a variety of participants. It is not the intent for Idaho Master Naturalists to be able to memorize all the concepts and facts in the curriculum. With the time allotted for training, this would be impossible. It is more important to consider the training a time to expose the participants to many topics and ideas, so they can find their interests. It is even more important to provide them with the means to find more information and learn more about the things that interest them.

Time devoted to the core curriculum and each track is a choice the coordinating committee must make. The state guidelines require you to spend at least 25 hours on the core curriculum, but you can spend more time covering these topics. State guidelines also require you to spend at least 15 hours on each track. Therefore, you could organize your chapter with 25 hours of core and 15 hours of track training to reach 40 hours of training. Participants would then be able to choose what they wanted to do for their 8 hours of advanced training. Another scenario might be to use 33 hours for core curriculum and use 15 hours for track training. That would complete both the 40 hours of training and the 8 advanced training hours.

The Idaho Master Naturalist file box is meant to help participants organize information they receive throughout their training and service. It is also meant to utilize the many informative brochures and leaflets that address topics covered in the IMNP curriculum. In Missouri, a file box is used for the Missouri Master Naturalist Program *as the curriculum*. Here in Idaho, we hope it is used as a supplement to the curriculum and a way to encourage participants to use existing publications to help them learn and participate in conservation activities. File boxes should be given to the participant with accompanying file folders. We encourage you to allow the participants to organize their file boxes and literature in their own way. Consider giving them 10-12 empty file folders with tabs and let them work on organizing information in a way that makes sense to them. However, you may choose to present the file boxes more formally, with a consistent filing system. Choose whichever model you feel fits with your chapter best.

A file box may seem out of date in an electronic age. However, many agencies still publish brochures and printed matter. In addition, many people do not have internet access at home. You may find it helpful to poll your participants to see if they have computers and access to the internet regularly and be sensitive to their ability to access that resource. Electronic sources of information, such as CDs, websites and videos should be used, but should be accompanied hard copies or computer access for those who do not have it.

You have been given a sample file box to use. Please consider this just a beginning. Feel free to add your own resources and remove materials you find unnecessary. The Idaho Master

Naturalist Website will host a file box contents list for you to look at and post handouts you have distributed.

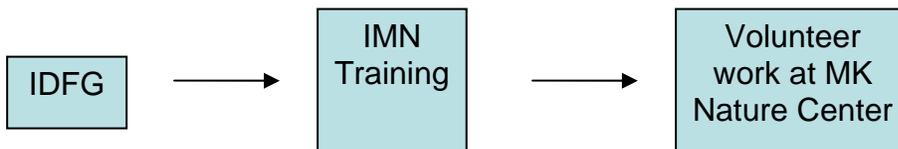
Chapter Organization

IMNP developers fully recognize individual styles of teaching and program implementation. By no means, is this manual, or any part of the program design meant to restrict you from starting a chapter using your own creativity. Chapters can be formed in several ways.

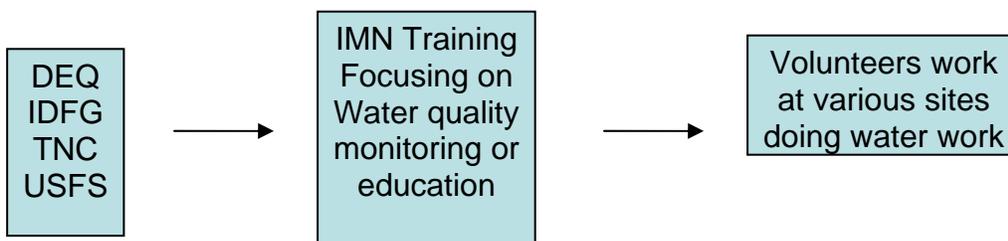
1. **A chapter may be formed around an agency.** In this scenario, one agency or organization may start a chapter by themselves, with few or no partners. Participants will sign up for the program knowing their volunteer time is expected to be for the agency putting on the training. An example of this might be The Nature Conservancy starting a chapter to help them with all aspects of their work on their properties.



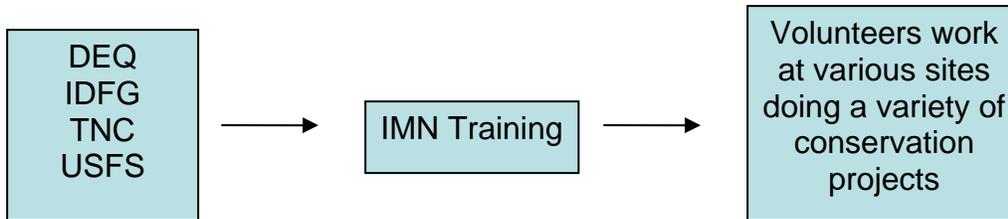
2. **A chapter may be formed around a location.** There might be a specific location that a Master Naturalist group is trained to work on. For example, Idaho Rivers United might start a Master Naturalist Chapter for work on projects on the Boise River. Participants may engage in a variety of activities and for various agencies that work on the Boise River. Participants would know, entering the program, their volunteer time was expected to be focused on the River.



3. **A chapter may be formed around a cause, or subject matter.** One example is water quality. An Idaho Master Naturalist chapter could be opened to focus on water and water quality monitoring and education. Many agencies might come together to rally around this conservation cause. Many agencies would benefit from the Idaho Master Naturalist Participants. Volunteers would know, entering the program, their volunteer work would be focused around water quality work and could be performed at a variety of locations.



4. **A chapter may be formed for general purposes.** An agency, organization, or a group of agencies could get together to form a chapter with the purpose of contributing to the training of the volunteers and providing volunteer projects. Volunteers would know, entering the program, they could choose where they served their volunteer time.



There may be other scenarios that the IMNP can be implemented to serve. All IMNP chapters do not need to look alike. Regional variations due to a different array of partnering agencies are welcomed and will only add to the strength of the program. As long as the mission and general format remain consistent, we can build a network of chapters around the state working toward conservation.

Chapter Formation

Chapters are formed by a local coordinating committee composed of at least three volunteers and one natural resource representatives. The committee’s responsibilities for starting a chapter are outlined in detail in the Idaho Master Naturalist Chapter Chartering Guidelines.

Evaluation

Program evaluation is meant to help determine if the program is successful in meeting the identified goals and objectives. It is ironic that in these days of tight budgets and small staffs, program evaluation is often cut out or simply never planned for. Program evaluation is essential for accountability and determining how we can make the program better.

The Idaho Master Naturalist Program has been designed with an evaluation component that is not separate from the training or service components. It is required that all training classes perform the evaluation as part of program implementation. Participants are not required to participate in the evaluation process. You may add additional evaluation components to your particular chapter program. The evaluation tools provided are mandatory but can be tailored to fit your program. Your participation in writing custom questions for your region and chapter is essential, if you want specific information gathered regarding unique program components you added.

The evaluation of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program, in general terms, seeks to answer the question, “Is the Idaho Master Naturalist Program successful in meeting its goals, objectives, and participant learning outcomes?” And, “How can the program be changed to be more effective and satisfying to future participants?” The first question will be addressed quantitatively,

through a participant questionnaire modeled after the Michigan Conservation Steward's Program evaluation. The second question will be addressed qualitatively through small group data generation techniques such as focus groups, nominal group technique, or brainstorming.

Both the quantitative and qualitative evaluation components should be conducted by someone other than the program facilitator to reduce bias of evaluation results (Graziano, 2006, p. 318). The Idaho Master Naturalist Working Group will perform the evaluation process for you, or you could have a co-worker or partnering agency administer the evaluation. Data gathered from the evaluation is for you, and you will be given all raw data and data analysis results.

Quantitative evaluation

The questionnaire designed for evaluating the IMNP can be used in several ways. If you have a waiting list for your chapter training, it is recommended that the evaluation is administered using a nonequivalent control group design. Basically, if you have 40 people apply for the program, but only 20 seats in the class, we would ask the 20 on the waiting list to participate in your program evaluation process and in return, they will be guaranteed seats in the next class. The pre-program questionnaire would be administered to all 40 people and the post-program questionnaire to all 40 people. Analysis will be made comparing participants and wait-list individuals. Assuming the two groups are similar in other variables, this method of program evaluation allows for cause/effect relationships to be concluded, if in fact, there are differences between the two group's questionnaire results.

If you do not have a waiting list, then we must resort to using the evaluation tools in a pretest-posttest design. This design is weaker and cannot be used to establish cause-effect relationships (Graziano, 2006, p. 319).

Qualitative evaluation

The qualitative evaluation can be administered throughout the program in various forms. At least 2 qualitative evaluation pieces are required during the program implementation. Below, are some ways qualitative data will be collected during program implementation.

- feedback forms
- comment boxes
- group discussions
- brainstorming after an activity or lesson
- and journal entries.

Sources Cited

Graziano, A. M., & Raulin, M. L. (2006). *Research Methods: a process of inquiry* (6th ed). New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Main, M. B. (2004). Conservation Education Mobilizing Grass-Roots Conservation Education: the Florida Master Naturalist Program. *Conservation Biology*, 18(1), 11-16.

Van Den Berg, H. (2006). *Impact of Michigan Conservation Stewards Program on Participant's Knowledge, Attitudes, and Skills Regarding Ecology and Resource Management*. Paper presented at the National Master Naturalist Conference, Flagstaff, AZ.