

# **Middle Peninsula Master Naturalists (MPMN) Basic Training Course (BTC) Frequently Asked Questions**



## **What is a Virginia Master Naturalist and the Middle Peninsula Master Naturalists (MPMN)?**

Virginia Master Naturalists are volunteer educators, citizen scientists, and stewards helping Virginia conserve and manage natural resources and public lands. The VMN program is a program within the Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources and Environment and Virginia Cooperative Extension that is sponsored by six additional statewide agencies: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, Virginia Museum of Natural History, Virginia Institute of Marine Science Center for Coastal Resources Management. The MPMN is the VMN chapter serving Gloucester, Mathews, Middlesex, King and Queen, and King William Counties.

## **Who should take the MPMN Basic Training Course?**

If you live in Virginia's Middle Peninsula, have a love of nature and the outdoors, and want to volunteer with the MPMN chapter, this basic training course is for you. The course provides an overview of the natural sciences taught by local experts, professors, and highly trained members of our chapter. After completing BTC, you will be able to volunteer as a MPMN member. There is an expectation that MPMN members provide at least 40 hours of volunteer service and obtain 8 hours of continuing education each year after graduation. If you do not have time for volunteer work or do not wish to volunteer, then this course is NOT for you.

## **What is the application process?**

To apply for our upcoming basic training course, you will need to fill out an application. After we review your application, we will schedule an interview, complete reference checks, and you will undergo a criminal background check required by the state.

## **Do I need any special background, knowledge, or skills to apply?**

No, you do not need any special skills or knowledge to apply or become a VMN.

## **What format is the basic training course?**

Basic training is a hybrid course with weekly Zoom lectures and in-person field trips. Zoom lectures are held on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 pm to 9:00 pm. Field trips and some lectures will take place in-person on Saturday mornings/afternoons or Sunday afternoons. Field trips may involve driving to areas within the chapter's service area including the counties of Gloucester, Mathews, Middlesex, King William and King and Queen and usually last approximately 4 hours. The course takes approximately 18 weeks, with breaks over the holidays.

## **When does the next basic training class start?**

The next basic training class, BTC6, officially starts September 13, 2026, and will continue into the beginning of February 2027. Graduation will be in February or March 2027.

## **How much time does the basic training course involve?**

At a minimum over the approximately 18 week training period, your commitment will be—

- Approximately 50 hours of Zoom and/or in-person lectures.
- Approximately 40 hours of in-person field experiences.
- Approximately 2 to 3 hours per week to prepare for lectures or field trips, including assigned readings.
- 3 hours of volunteering with a certified Master Naturalist.

### **Do I need any special computer skills?**

Yes, you will need to know how to use email, Zoom, and Google drive. Communication takes place via email and course materials will be distributed via Google Drive. A flash drive of materials will be made available upon request. We will have an optional session on using Zoom and Google Drive before the course begins and help available during the course.

### **What if I need help during the course or have questions?**

You will be assigned a certified Master Naturalist to serve as your mentor throughout the course. This individual will assist you in any way necessary.

### **Is there a cost for completing basic training?**

Yes, there is a \$175 tuition fee, due upon acceptance of your application. This fee covers your course materials, including books and field guides, a magnification loupe, a field notebook, your required background check, and expenses incurred to provide field trips.

### **Do you offer scholarships?**

No, but there is a sliding payment scale if the registration fee poses a barrier to your participation.

### **Do you have a refund policy?**

Yes. If you withdraw before you receive your course materials your tuition will be fully refunded. We will not give any refunds after the first in-person class.

### **What happens if I cannot attend all of the Zoom lectures and Field Trips?**

You may miss two live Zoom lectures and one in-person field trip but will be required to make up the missed Zoom lecture by watching the recorded session and/or attending a Field Trip with the next basic training class.

### **Are instructors and basic training staff paid?**

No, all instructors, including those outside of MPMN, and basic training staff are volunteers. No one is paid for their time.

### **What are my requirements after graduation?**

To become a certified Virginia Master Naturalists after graduation you must volunteer 40 hours and complete 8 hours of continuing education within one year following your course completion. There are numerous opportunities throughout the year to earn volunteer and continuing education hours within our chapter. Each year thereafter you will be required to volunteer 40 hours and complete 8 hours of continuing education to remain a certified Master Naturalist.

### **Can I volunteer with MPMN without taking the basic training course?**

No. The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a state-sponsored organization, and the basic training course is required to become a member of the chapter and to volunteer.

### **Where can I find more information about VMN and the MPMN?**

You can find more information on the [Virginia Master Naturalists](#) website and the [MPMN Facebook page](#) and [MPMN](#) website.