

Georgia master naturalist program – 2004 satisfaction survey

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Scope and Objectives

The Georgia Master Naturalist Program (GaMNP) is an adult environmental education program. This program provides in-depth study opportunities for people who want to understand, change and preserve the relationships between habitats and ecosystems. This program introduces adult learners to environmental topics such as Forest Management, Wildlife Management, No-till Agriculture, Water Quality, Barrier Island Ecology, Endangered Species Management, Backyard Wildlife Management, Bird and Mammal Identification, Plant Identification and other issues critical to their local community. Hands on skills include learning how to read a map and compass, use a GPS device, use taxonomic keys to identify mammals and plants, and identify birds by sight and sound. The program stems from a need to educate the public with scientifically based information about Georgia ecosystems and forests. Our mission is to inform participants in this course about the plants, animals and environments of Georgia and the issues facing citizens and natural resources in our state. Participants will hear from experts who manage our natural resources. Instructors include faculty at the University of Georgia and resource managers from Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Resource Division, Georgia Forestry Commission, US Army, Cooperative Extension Service, and others. Upon completion of the course, participants are encouraged to assist with other environmental educational programs in Georgia and beyond by sharing their knowledge with others.

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Program History

The program was initially offered in March 2002 by the county agents in Bryan, Effingham, Long and Chatham counties. Initially enrollment was 25 students with a waiting list of 25-30 additional students. The course was again offered in the same area in March 2003 with a slightly lower enrollment of 15 students. In 2004, the course was offered by county agents in Clarke and Barrow Counties. Twenty-nine students were enrolled. Topics, while sharing some similarity, were tailored to the geographical area and availability of resources.

Satisfaction Survey

A short mail questionnaire was sent to all participants in September 2004 asking for their impressions of the course. Respondents were also asked to report the number of volunteer hours they contributed to their community, their most and least favorite topics covered by the course, and a brief summary of the type of volunteer service they provided.

Results

A total of 69 surveys were mailed to students. In October 2004 a follow-up survey and letter was sent to non-respondents and every student who provided an email address at registration was sent an email message reminding them to complete their survey if they had not done so and to remind others from the course to also complete and return the survey. A total of 30 responses (43.5%) were received.

Of the 30 respondents, 24 (80%) reported that they had volunteered in their community in a way that utilizes the knowledge obtained from the GaMNP. Response rates of 52.0%, 60.0%, and 27.6% were recorded for 2002, 2003, and 2004, respectively. Respondents reported contributing a total of 4,165 hours of volunteer service or 138.8 hours per person. As expected, the number of hours was greatest for the 2002 class, followed by 2003 and 2004 reflecting the longer time since the students had completed the course.

Students were asked to report the three topics covered by the class that they felt were most useful and least useful. Responses are recorded in Table 1. The types of volunteer service in which the students participated are shown in Table 2.

Summary

The GaMNP provides scientifically based natural resource information to adult learners in a relaxed, participatory learning environment. Students are generally satisfied with the course content although specific improvements in speaker selection, topic diversity and additional hands-on activities will enhance future versions of the course. The course is designed to be locally based with county agents playing a lead role in organizing and delivering the course.

There is a national effort among several states with a similar program to coordinate the marketing of the program. However, it is likely that the curriculum will be designed and delivered as well as driven by local needs. It is necessary to develop a more uniform course outline for Georgia. Perhaps a cafeteria menu approach to the topical content that could then be tailored to specific local needs will be developed. For instance, there is little need for beach ecology and center pivot irrigation topics in North Georgia and similarly cold water fish ecology, while interesting, has limited application on the coast. In future programs, local program leaders will be able to choose topics most suitable for their local environment, economy, and community.

In summary, the Georgia Master Naturalist Program has had a slow beginning but has contributed over 4,165 hours of community based volunteer effort from a core of informed and dedicated individuals. Using an economic multiplier of \$12.00 per hour for trained leadership at the local level, this program has added over \$50,000 in value to the local economy and reached hundreds of people as the volunteers assist local communities in improving their outreach efforts.

Table 1. The three most useful and least useful topics covered by the Georgia Master Naturalist Program, 2002-2004, as reported by students who have completed the course.

3 MOST USEFUL TOPICS		
FIRST CHOICE	SECOND CHOICE	THIRD CHOICE
BIRD ID & HABITATS		BARRIER ISLANDS & MARSH HABITAT
BURNING TO PRESERVE PINE FORESTS	ARBORETUM	EXTENSION SERVICE ACTIVITIES
DENDROLOGY	BIRD ID	FOREST & MEADOW MANAGEMENT
FORESTRY	BIRDING	FORESTRY
FORESTRY & ENDANGERED SPECIES	BOTANICAL GARDEN	GEOLOGY OF GEORGIA
HABITAT DIVERSITY	ECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES	GEOLOGY, WILDLIFE & PLANT
HYDROLOGY	ENDANGERED SPECIES	HEALTHY PONDS/LAKES
JEKYLL ISLAND	ENDANGERED SPECIES	JEFF JACKSON
MEETING OTHER PEOPLE	LONGLEAF PINE ECOLOGY	LANDFILLS
NATIVE PLANT ID	MARITIME FOREST & SALTWATER ECOLOGY	PLANT ID
PLANT AND TREE ID	PLANT AND TREE ID	SEWAGE TREATMENT
PLANT ID	PLANT IDENTIFICATION	SLATWATER MARSH
PLANT ID	RECYCLING	SOIL FORMATION AT SAPALO
RECYCLING CENTER/LANDFILL	RESOURCES MATERIALS	TREE FARM MGMT
SOILS & HYDROLOGY	SAVANNAH	TREE ID
SOILS & HYDROLOGY	SEA TURTLES	WATER ISSUES
TOUR FT. STEWARD	SEWERAGE	WATER STUDY
TREE ID	STREAM ECOLOGY	WIDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT
		WILDLIFE HABITAT&DAMAGE
TREE ID WITH BILL LOTT	TRACKING AND MAMMALOGY	CONTROL
URBAN FORESTRY	TREE ID	WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT
URBAN TREE MGMT	TRIP TO SALT MARSH	ID TREES, PLANTS, WILDFLOWERS
WATER	VISIT N. GA	FRESH & WASTE WATER TREATMENT
WATER QUALITY-HYDROLOGY	WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT	
WATER TESTING	WETLAND & COASTAL ISSUES	
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT	WILDFLOWERS AND MEDICINAL PLANTS	
WATER POLLUTION	INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY	
GPS TRAINING & ORIENTEERING	HORTICULTURE AT GA BOT GARDENS	

Table 1. Continued.

3 LEAST USEFUL TOPICS

FIRST CHOICE

DAHLONEGA AND TALLULLAH GORGE
DAHLONEGA GOLD MUSEUM
FARMING
FARMING
GEOLOGY AT TALLULLAH GORGE
GEOLOGY AT TALLULLAH GORGE
GPS
LESS EMPHASIS ON W.L.M.
PACING
PESTICIDES AND CROP INFORMATION
PINE FOREST MANAGEMENT
PLANT COMMUNITIES, WILDFLOWERS
TAXES
TOO MUCH FOCUS ON TREE FARMING
TOO MUCH FORESTRY
TOO MUCH ON PINE TREES
WASTE TREATMENT
WATER TREATMENT PLANT

SECOND CHOICE

BASIC GEOLOGY
EXOTIC PHEASANTS
FARMING, PESTICIDES
FISH
FISHERIES
FISHERIES
GPS
GPS
NAVIGATION & COMPASS
TREE ID
XERASCAPING

THIRD CHOICE

AGRICULTURE
ANIMAL TRACKS, SKINS & SKULLS
BASIC GEOLOGY
COMPASS
DAHLONEGA
GFC FORESTRY GUY
SHEEP FARM

Table 2. Types of volunteer service activities reported by students who have completed the Georgia Master Naturalist Program, 2002-2004.

TYPES OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE

ANSWER PHONE IN EXT.OFFICE
ASSIST REEF MARINE RESEARCH
ASSIST WITH CLEAN UP DAYS
ASSIST WITH MARSH AND SHORE PROTECTION
ASSIST WITH PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL GROUPS - DIP NET MACRO INVERTEBRATES
ASSISTING HOME-SCHOOL GRANDCHILD
AUDUBON BOARD
BEACH EROSION MEASUREMENTS
BOTANICAL GUARDIAN (GPCA/DNR) FOR PITCHER PLANTS
BOTANICAL GUARDIAN FOR TATTNAL CO
BUILD WILDLIFE HABITAT AT OATLAND ISLAND ED. CENTER
CO-DIRECT SIERRA CLUB
CHORT COMM FOR GA SOUTHERN BOTANICAL GARDEN
COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING, PRUNING, MULCHING
CONSTRUCTED ELEVATED WALKWAYS
DAILY INFORMAL EE TALKS AND DEMONSTRATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
FWS VOLUNTEER
GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA NATIONAL AFFAIRS & LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
GIVE PRESENTATION IN H.S. SCIENCE CLASS
GIVE PRESENTATIONS
LEAD COASTAL FIELD TRIPS
LEAD FIELD TRIPS
LEAD WALKS
LOCAL CCA CHAPTER OFFICER
MAINTENANCE & PLANTING IN HERITAGE GARDEN AT OATLAND ISLAND
NATURALIST ACTIVITIES SUCH AS BIRD & BEACH WALKS
NATURE WALKS TO ID TREES, INSECTS, BIRDS; DISCUSS RAINFALL AND RUNOFF
NO FORMAL SERVICE BUT READILY SHARE MY KNOWLEDGE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS -
ESPECIALLY CHILDREN
NO SERVICE IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM BUT VOLUNTEER AT LOCAL WELCOME CENTER
PHOTOGRAPHY DOCUMENTATION
PLANT RESTORATION
PRESCRIBED BURNING
PRESERVE GREENSPACE
PROMOTE CONSERVATION
PROPAGATE NATIVE PLANTS FOR BOT. GARDEN
PROVIDE ENVIRON EDUC INFO TO TEACHERS
PROVIDE PROGRAMS DESCRIBING INDIGENOUS ANIMALS AND LIFE STYLES
PUBLIC WORKSHOPS, TREE WALKS
READING ENVIRONMENTAL TEXTBOOKS TO PRINT-DISABLED COLLEGE STUDENTS
SERVICE AS SUBSTITUTE SCHOOL TEACHER
SET UP AQUARIUM FOR INDIGENOUS SPECIES (ALLIGATORS, ANOLES, ETC)
STATE PARK VOLUNTEER
TEACH COLLEGE STUDENTS ABOUT "ENVIRONMENTAL AND RECREATIONAL ECOLOGY"
TEACH STREAM ECOLOGY AT AUTREY MILL NATURE CENTER
TRAIL GUIDE AT NATURE CENTER FOR SCHOOL GROUPS
TREE INVENTORY AT FIVE POINTS IN ATHENS

Table 2. Continued.

TREE INVENTORY AT FIVE POINTS IN ATHENS
URBAN TREE SURVEY IN NEIGHBOR IN ATHENS WITH CONNIE HEAD
VEGETATION CONTROL
VOLUNTEER AT OUTLAND ISLAND EDUCATION CENTER
VOLUNTEER AT PHINEY SWAMP NATURE PARK VISITOR CENTER
VOLUNTEER GARDENING IN SAVANNAH & ST. SIMONS ISLAND NATURE PRESERVE
WORK W/ LANDOWNERS & GA POWER TO PROTECT PITCHER PLANTS
WRITING NEWSLETTER
WRITES TO CONGRESSMEN AND SENATORS TO SUPPORT WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
SPRING BIRD SURVEY @ MILL CREEK NC, BUFORD
ADAPT-A-STREAM MONITORING, BUFORD;

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