

# THE NATURALIST



Naturalist Dan Deffenbaugh, overlooking Norden Chute Niobrara Valley Preserve

## Welcome to the first issue of the Naturalist!

*Matt Jones, State Program Coordinator*

"The Naturalist" is an exciting development into the future communications of the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program. This newsletter will be published quarterly and will offer information about the current activities, projects and needs of the Program and Master Naturalist Foundation. We hope to also feature photos and experiences from fellow members to share with you all. In this first issue we will dive into the history and background of both the Master Program and Foundation, as well an update about the development of the Jr. Naturalist Program and the nature journaling of fellow Naturalist Deb Mowry.

## 2020 Volunteering Snapshot

Nebraska Master Naturalists volunteered a total of **8,080** hours in 2020, Connected with **51,210** people and impacted **14,231** acres through natural resource management projects. The total volunteering effort provided the state in **\$219,776** in salary savings by using volunteers.



Illustration, Deb Mowry

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## Covid-19 Impact on Volunteering

### *Annual Volunteering Obligation For 2020 Waived*

This last year we have all be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Nebraska Master Naturalist program realizes that it was difficult for many reasons to complete the annual volunteer and continuing education obligation as many events and opportunities we cancelled or postponed. The Program staff and Executive Board has decided to waive the annual member requirements for 2020 in order to meet the needs of our members in this challenging time. We hope for a safe and healthy return in 2021, and encourage you and your fellow Master Naturalists to participate in future volunteer and education opportunities that will be increasingly available as public health allows. To help the Program provide you with engaging opportunities we need to hear from you. Take a few minutes to complete this survey, that will better inform us on ways to keep you active and connected:

<https://forms.gle/ahTXFSoiawPXGKyy9>



Image, Deb Miller

## Developing the Jr. Master Naturalist Program

The Jr. Nebraska Master Naturalist Program is one step closer in its development. The project has received funding from the the Hubbard Foundation and The Nebraska Master Naturalist Foundation. Also is currently waiting official approval for funding via The Nebraska Environmental Trust in April. The goal of the Jr. Program is to take the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program and expand it to a larger youth audience. We are currently accepting applications for a part-time coordinator position. To view the full job description or apply you can do so at our website [www.nemasternaturalist.org](http://www.nemasternaturalist.org).





# The Nebraska Master Naturalist Foundation

## *A Brief History*

The Nebraska Master Naturalist Foundation (NMNF) was incorporated in April 2015 as a 501(c)3 Nonprofit and a Steering Committee formed to support the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program (NMNP). During 2017, officers were elected, by-laws were established and we learned to work together as a team. In 2018, the NMNF agreed to provide funds through a grant with the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and NMNF for the foundation to provide one half of the State Director's salary and benefits. We were able to raise these funds through the generosity of our members' and donations received in 2019-2020.

In 2019, the NMNF began looking for possible grantors/grants to support our commitment. This continued into early 2020. Due to the coronavirus/COVID-19, these early requests were not funded as most grants were going to support non-profit organizations targeting virus related problems in local communities.

With assistance from the NMNP board, we were able to secure a large grant from The Claire M. Hubbard Foundation in the fall of 2020. With this grant, along with donations from Master Naturalist Members, we made the first payments for 2020-2021 to UNL, and are now close to having sufficient funds to make the June 30, 2021 payment.

The NMNF has agreed to support one half of the State Program Director's salary and benefits package in the NET Grant that has been recently submitted for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. We should hear about approval of this grant in the spring of 2021. Without the financial support of our volunteers and donations, we could not go forward, so we thank you again for all your contributions of time, treasures and talents!

# *The Importance of a Cottonwood Twig*

*Deb Mowry  
February 2021*

My boots crunch the snow on my timbered yard as I hike among the trees. I usually stop and say hello to each of them. But today, I am focused on a solitary tall cottonwood tree in the distance. I shuffle my way through the snow and greet my old friend with a soft gloved touch to its deep gray furrowed bark. I look up, and up and further to the distant fanning branches. My tree can grow to 170 feet tall and the crown can have a width of 60 to 100 feet.

Up high, I see branches with leaf buds patiently waiting for spring. A recent winter storm has torn many small twigs with these precious buds from the tree and they now litter the snowy ground. I like picking up a knobby, gnarly twig and searching for large bud scale scars, reminders of where the leaves grew seasons before. They look like two or three raised rings circling the twig like a bumpy knuckle. I eagerly find the scar and then break it with a quick, forceful snap.

There, I see what I am looking for: a reddish-colored star located in the center of the stem. I count five points. The star is actually the pith of the plant, which transports vital nutrients to twigs and leaf buds. This star shape is common to trees of the willow family, which include cottonwoods, aspens, willows and poplars. But of all these trees it is the cottonwood that many Native Americans elevate to sacred symbolism.

The Lakota call it the tree of life, due to the star, and use its branches in their Sun Dance ceremony. Dakota Native Americans tell a story of a little star who wanted to hear the sounds and songs of humans and hid in the cottonwood so as not to disturb the people as they worked.

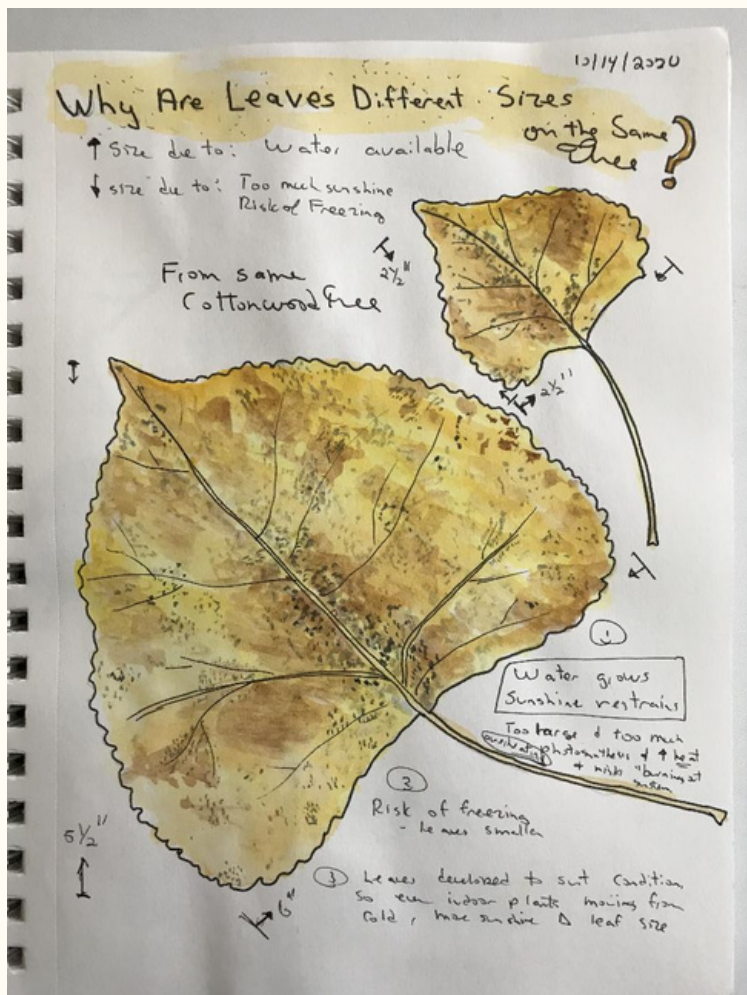
Cheyenne and Arapahoe also noticed the star. In their tradition, if the Spirit-Of-The-Night-Sky needs more stars it calls upon the Wind Spirit, who blows and causes cottonwood twigs to break, releasing their stars to heaven.



Deb Mowry, Cottonwood Illustration

The cottonwood twig is also important to Native Americans in other ways. I think of this as I pick up more broken twigs and touch the terminal buds. If it were spring, I would feel a stickiness when touching them. Cottonwood buds contain a yellow resin, a concoction of over ten different chemicals, one being salicin. It behaves similar to acetylsalicylic acid, better known as aspirin, due to its anti-inflammatory properties. Native Americans learned to use the buds as medicine and this practice continues today as people make lotions and ointments with it.

Of course, not all twigs fall to the ground. Most stay on the tree and leaf buds open to become triangular-shaped leaves. This shape gives the eastern cottonwood its scientific name: *Populus deltoides*. The word reminds me of the deltoid muscle in my shoulder-it is triangle shaped too. In summer I enjoy hearing the wonderfully shaped leaves make a rustling sound as the wind grazes their surface. A flat petiole, or stem, allows the leaves to clatter next to each other, making the unique musical sound. Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux Holy Man, said it well: "Perhaps you have noticed that even in the slightest breeze you can hear the voice of the cottonwood tree; this we understand is its prayer to the Great Spirit, for not only men, but all things and all beings pray to Him continually in different ways."



Looking down at the unopened buds on the twigs in my hand, I reflect on Black Elk's words. These buds may be lost, but high up in the tree are so many more just waiting to flutter in a summer breeze.

*Deb Mowry, Master Naturalist  
2013*





Image, Deb Miller Niobrara Preserve Training 2015

# Nebraska Master Naturalist Program History

## *The Early Years 2005-2007*

*A timeline of the history of the Master Naturalist Program was organized and written by fellow Naturalist Tim Olin*

### **2005**

The roots of the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program began as a quest to focus on eco-tourism in the state of Nebraska back in 2005. A meeting was held on September 21, 2005 regarding that focus. Those attending that meeting included Tom Tabor-Division of Tourism, Dennis Ferraro -UNL Extension, Mark Hupert-Game & Parks, Keeana Leonard-Rowe Sanctuary, and Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel-UNL Extension & Rural Initiative, Randy Cantrell, UN Rural Initiative & Marcia White, UN Rural Initiative.

An overview was given by Cheryl of “how the group has developed from the original task of a field guide training to a more comprehensive master naturalist program.”

Also discussed was the suggestion that a full time coordinator was probably needed to run a quality program. Matters to look at included: how the program would be organized, training sessions, costs and fees incurred, how volunteer hours would be logged and promotion of the program. Partners for the program could be UNL Ext (Rural Initiative), Game and Parks, Rowe Sanctuary, and other private and public conservation groups. It was decided that Dennis would develop an outline for the 1 & ½ day field guide training that would be held in Garden County.

Prior to that meeting many emails were exchanged between the participants about that upcoming September meeting. They were looking at a possible Master Naturalist Program that Iowa had. Another option was something along the lines of the UNL Extension Master Gardener program.

It was at that meeting that they began to look at different approaches to promoting eco-tourism and field guides that would show the way to create a master naturalist program. Another topic was where to the program should be “housed”. Game and Parks was one logical place as it already had met with national experts and was planning the Nebraska Legacy program.



*2010 First Training Class*

Research on other Master Naturalist programs was done by Mark Hupert and what he found was that at least 10 states had programs. The Iowa program is close to the Master Naturalist program, “but is called Master Conservationist. In every case the program has a connection between Extension and the equivalent of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Dennis Ferraro laid out the hours required for education, service required and costs for the basic program. “The foundation for the Master Naturalist programs seems to be the Master Gardener program.” While the Master Naturalist program seems worthy of pursuit by someone in the state, I’m not sure it’s a perfect fit with the Field Guide Training was one thought. If a Master Naturalist program is developed at some point in the future, perhaps it can serve as a feeder program to a certified field guide.

## **2006**

Dennis and Scott Hyngstrom work on receiving grants. Game and Parks gives a \$25,00.00 in-kind grant to the cause. Dennis conducted and facilitated stakeholder meetings to build a Master Naturalists program.

A survey and letter was sent to over 200 nature and education related agencies and persons.

Results indicated that a NMN program would be greatly supported. Sixteen different groups were picked to develop the statewide program. Those agencies included: Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, Crane Meadows, Wildcat Hills Nature Center, Platte River Whooping Crane Trust, The Nature Conservancy-South Central Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development Council, Central Platte NRD, UNL Wildlife Club, Lincoln Children’s Zoo, Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo, Papio-Missouri River NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, Cather Foundation, Upper Big Blue NRD, Fontenelle Nature Association and Nebraska Game and Parks.



## 2007

Work continued in April of 2007 and evolved into a February 13, 2008 meeting where the program began to take form. What is the vision? It will be recognized both as a state-wide and national sustainable, science-based, conservation, and education volunteer program. Who will coordinate the program? A state-wide coordinator. Who will be the volunteers? Quality vs Quantity was the focus. What is the core training to be? How many hours long will it be? What will be covered? How much training during the year shall be required? Who will train the volunteers? How much will it cost for trainers? Where will the funding come from? The Nebraska Environmental Trust was mentioned as a funding opportunity.

Another interesting aspect brought up at that time was the potential for a Jr. Master Naturalist element, which is now beginning to take shape in 2019 and 2020 from the Papio Missouri River NRD. Ten attendees wrestled with what to do next and how to do it. Of those 10 attendees only one (Dennis Ferraro) is still active in the program. One of the objectives stated at that time was within five years to have trained and certified 500 people state wide.



Niobrara Valley Preserve Training, Image Dan Fogel

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*Please consider supporting the future of the Nebraska Master Naturalist Program by donating today. Your commitment will go a long way to protect conservation and education in Nebraska!*

*Leaving a gift in your will or trust, or another form of planned gift can make positive impact in our fulfilling our mission.*

*Find out more at [www.nemasternaturalist.org](http://www.nemasternaturalist.org).*

*The Nebraska Master Naturalist Foundation a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our federal tax ID number is 81-1014784*