



Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist Program Policy Statement



The OCVN program is administered by Ohio State University Extension in cooperation with a state steering committee. The committee is made up of dedicated individuals from the following organizations:

- The Ohio State University Extension
- The Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- Ohio Sea Grant
- Five Rivers Metro Parks (Dayton)
- Ohio Master Gardeners
- Audubon Ohio
- Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative (OBCI)
- Hancock Parks District
- City of Dublin Parks

Program Mission

The mission of the OCVN program is to promote awareness and citizen stewardship of Ohio's natural resources through science-based education and community service.

What is an Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist?

An Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist is an individual with a passion for the natural world who wishes to attend training and use his or her knowledge by giving back to the community through volunteer service. The program has three components: training, volunteer service hours, and advanced education.

Purpose

The Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist (OCVN) program is a volunteer educational program designed to meet the natural resource education needs of the citizens of Ohio. Its purpose is to train volunteers and use their expertise to teach people more about Ohio's natural resources and their importance to our quality of life. Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists provide service to their local natural resource organizations so that their activities and programs can be more effectively and efficiently delivered to the general public.

Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist trainees receive formal training from their local partnership covering a wide range of pertinent natural resource topics. To become an OCVN, the trainee must be accepted into the program, complete the training component, pass the required exam, and volunteer for the specified number of hours.

The volunteer commitment may be fulfilled in a number of ways, depending on the needs determined by the local chapter. After the completion of the initial required volunteer time, volunteers are encouraged to continue to assist with natural resource program delivery as Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists.

The state OCVN steering committee develops policies and guidelines for the operation of the program. It also provides some training and recognition materials and other resources for chapters participating in the program. On the local level, the program is coordinated by an OCVN coordinator or committee.

Training

The formal training program is the responsibility of the OCVN coordinator or committee managing the program. Instructors are OSU faculty, ODNR professionals, Extension Specialists, Extension Associates, experienced Volunteer Naturalists, and other experts.

The training program is to provide a balanced, integrated practical course in natural resource science. The following are the core topics. Other topics based on local needs may also be part of the curriculum.

- The OCVN Program
- Ecological Concepts
- Effective Education Practices
- The Art of Nature Interpretation
- Exploring Ohio's Watersheds
- Aquatic Life
- Stewardship
- Geology
- Soils
- Plants
- Forests
- Insects and other macroinvertebrates
- Reptiles & Amphibians
- Birds
- Mammals

The principle resource for the training will be the OCVN Training Manual and other materials approved by the state steering committee that include the core topics appropriate to Ohio. Core training is held during a 2-3 month period, with continuing education or in-service training provided during the year in accordance with local needs and resources. Regional continuing education opportunities should be offered at least once every two years. A national conference is held annually to assist in fulfilling continuing education requirements.

Attendance

Each OCVN program trainee is expected to attend every class session. The trainee is responsible for initiating provisions to make up any missed sessions. A limit on the number of allowable absences may be specified by the local coordinator.

Examinations and Quizzes

All trainees must pass a final exam with a cumulative average of 70 percent or better. This exam will test the trainees' knowledge of broad natural resource principles. Local level coordinators may incorporate quizzes into the training program as they see fit.

Volunteer Commitment and Certification

The OCVN state steering committee has established the following minimum requirement for certification and recertification. However, the local chapters may opt to increase these minimum requirements.

Certification:

- 40 hours of combined classroom and field instruction.
- 40 hours of approved volunteer service projects.

Note: Local programs are organized by chapter. Local partners are responsible for providing leadership to chapters, including volunteer service projects.

Upon completing the training portion of the program, each trainee will receive an OCVN name badge and a "completion of training" certificate. Upon fulfillment of the 40 hours of volunteer service, the trainee will then receive an OCVN certificate and an OCVN logo pin.

Only unpaid public service in OCVN-sponsored activities will count toward the requirement. Other volunteer activities may be counted after receiving prior approval from the local coordinator. The required volunteer hours must be completed within one year (or another time period designated by the local coordinator) of completing the training course.

Volunteer Selection

Volunteer selection for the program is managed by a local coordinator or committee.

Each OCVN applicant must:

- Complete an application
- Review and sign the OCVN Policy Statement form
- Review and sign an OSU Extension Standards of Behavior form
- Attend a face-to-face interview
- Pass a fingerprint background check and have two references verified.
- Have a service record on file at the local office

Information in the service record file is treated confidentially. Volunteers' records are kept in separate files in a secured place and are accessible only by trained staff. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to make sure that the information on his or her application (e.g., address, contact information, etc.) and service record are kept current and accurate. This is necessary for liability reasons and for the protection of the volunteer as well as program clientele.

Use of the Title

The title "Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist" is to be used only and exclusively in conjunction with the OCVN program. Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists are expected to identify themselves as such only when doing unpaid public service work under the auspices of the OCVN program. Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists are advised not to advertise their place of business during program-sponsored activities and are not to be listed as OCVNs on the advertisements of businesses that they own or where they are employed. Because the OCVN program is a source of unbiased, research-based information, the following are considered inappropriate: appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or giving implied University endorsement of any product or place of business.

Recertification

Once an individual has completed the necessary requirements and is certified as an OCVN, he or she is not automatically an OCVN for life. Volunteer Naturalists must be recertified each year to remain on the "active" list and maintain the OCVN title. Volunteer Naturalist Recertification is achieved by fulfilling the following minimum requirements:

1. Donate a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service each year.
2. Complete a minimum of 8 hours of continuing education through any of the following options:
 - Participation in the Association for Natural Resource Outreach and Service (ANROSP) Conference.
 - Participation in an OCVN-sponsored continuing education session.
 - Participation in any other program approved by the local coordinator for recertification.

Each Certified Volunteer Naturalist chapter may set its own recertification standards above and beyond these minimum requirements.

Inactive Status

An inactive Certified Volunteer Naturalist is one who is unable to commit to the annual recertification requirements at present but would like the opportunity to remain in the program and recertify in the future. The following policies apply:

- 1) To request “inactive status,” the Certified Volunteer Naturalist must be in good standing and must have completed the original commitment of training, passed the exam, and completed the required hours of volunteer service.
- 2) The Certified Volunteer Naturalist must complete an Inactive Status Request Form.
- 3) The inactive Certified Volunteer Naturalist must attend 8 hours of acceptable continuing education for each year of inactive status (see item #2 in the Recertification section).
- 4) An inactive Certified Volunteer Naturalist may recertify within 3 years as long as the defined criteria are met. Individuals on inactive status for more than three years must also retake and pass the final exam or retake the course, in addition to meeting the defined requirements.

Out-of-State Transfers and Transfers from Similar In-State Programs

A Certified Volunteer Naturalist who was certified in another state may be admitted into the OCVN program by:

1. Showing that he or she is a Volunteer Naturalist in good standing in another state.
2. Completing the Volunteer Involvement packet for his or her file.
3. Attending a face-to-face interview and passing a fingerprint background check.
4. Acquiring a current OCVN program training manual.
5. Acquiring an OCVN program name badge.
6. Scoring a minimum of 70 percent on a final exam administered by the local coordinator
7. Meeting all of the recertification requirements listed herein.

In-State Transfers

Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalists transferring from one chapter to another also must be in good standing and have their file transferred to the new chapter.