

MDC plans Master Naturalist volunteer training

Protecting Missouri's natural resources is an ongoing and challenging task. The challenge is made easier when private citizen groups – as well as state agencies – can provide education, outreach information, and services. That's the idea behind Missouri's Master Naturalist volunteer program.

The Loess Hills Master Naturalist Chapter will hold a Master Naturalist volunteer training orientation 6-8 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 8, at the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) office in St. Joseph, 701 James McCarthy Drive on the Missouri Western State University campus.

This volunteer program mixes science with service in partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and University of Missouri Extension.

"The intent of the Master Naturalist program is to better connect people to the environment and to nature," said Syd Hime, MDC volunteer and interpretive coordinator. "There are a lot of people with an interest in nature who are looking for opportunities to develop their skills as a naturalist and use those skills in volunteer service. We provide that through a community-based natural resource volunteer and education program."

Master Naturalists are given training regarding nature in the region where chapters are based. Participants must complete an initial training course and eight hours of advanced training. They must also contribute 40 hours of natural resource-related volunteer service through a local chapter. Master Naturalists may go afield to work on natural habitat improvement projects or help educate the public at special events hosted by MDC and conservation partners.

Attendance at the Jan. 8 orientation event is required to take part in the upcoming Loess Hills Master Naturalist training. The training classes will be held 6 to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays from Feb. 26 to May 21 at the MDC office in St. Joseph. There are also five Saturday field sessions. Registration for the training closes Jan. 22. Class size is limited, so early registration is encouraged. The enrollment fee is \$100, which pays for books and education materials. Participants must be 18 years or older.

For more information about the Loess Hills chapter's training, contact TJ Peacher, MDC Outreach & Education Supervisor, at tj.peacher@mdc.mo.gov or 816-271-3111, ext. 1435.

Information about the Master Naturalist program is available at <http://extension.missouri.edu/masternaturalist/>. For information about all MDC volunteer opportunities, visit <http://mdc.mo.gov>.