

West Virginia Master Naturalist State Advisory Committee

After several conference calls late last year and an abortive e-mail attempt to sample people's opinions as to how a Master Naturalist State Advisory Committee (SAC) ought to be configured, I agreed to contact all of the concerned parties individually and try to put together some sort of consensus report.

I have now talked individually with at least one coordinator from each active chapter as well as several other concerned parties, so here is a synopsis of folk's thinking on the subject of the SAC:

SAC Membership

Virtually everyone feels that active chapter coordinators ought to sit on the SAC. For chapters where leadership is shared, only one would sit on the Committee. At least one person thought that a Chapter Coordinator should be able to designate another person to represent the chapter on the SAC if he or she chooses. It was also universally agreed that one representative from each sponsoring entity should sit on the SAC. Right now, this would include WV DNR Wildlife Resources, Oglebay Park, Davis & Elkins College, and possibly the WVU Co-operative Extension Service.

Several people thought having two or three "at large" members on the SAC would also be desirable. These could possibly be persons elected at the annual meeting.

I asked my contact persons how long SAC members should hold office. Some suggested two years, some thought four. It then occurred to me that since most of the SAC members would likely be there by virtue of their being chapter coordinators or representatives of partner organizations, that their term of office would automatically be determined by how long they held the position that put them there. If "at large" members are added, they might hold office for some set period.

SAC Leadership

One possibility is that a SAC Chairperson would be elected by the SAC membership. Most respondents thought that a Chairperson should serve for at least two years. Several people saw wisdom in having the DNR representative chair the committee.

SAC Meetings

Everyone seems to agree that an annual meeting and quarterly phone conferences is a good model.

SAC Responsibilities

First and foremost, the Committee's responsibility would be to advise DNR Wildlife Resources on Master Naturalist matters. That would include of course anything upon which DNR might solicit the Committee's advice. But Master Naturalist folks also had ideas about areas in which they would like to offer advice. Some of these are:

- Maintenance or records
- Identifying and certifying instructors
- Facilitating start-up of new MN Chapters
- Chartering of Chapters
- Content of the Training Manual
- Enforcement of By-laws and Regulations
- Oversight of expenditures that affect WV MN as a whole

- Standardization of MN fees
- DNR's Master Naturalist website
- Setting standards for chapter websites and blogs
- Establishment and maintenance of a recertification process
- Periodic curriculum review and revision, if necessary

There seems to be a desire for a SAC that takes a more active role in at least some of these areas in addition to simply offering advice. There is recognition that despite the good intentions of DNR, it may not be able to commit sufficient resources to the Master Naturalist Program to insure that all of these concerns are addressed effectively and in a timely fashion. One possible solution might be that the SAC would form "working groups" of three or four individuals each that would help DNR accomplish the work that needs to be done. Examples might be working groups (or sub-committees) dealing with

- Annual meeting program planning
- The Training Manual
- Instructor recruitment
- Recertification
- Curriculum review

Other possible Issues

Do we need a Recording Secretary for the meetings? This is an odious job and it's always hard to find someone who will do it. We might set-up a "rotating secretary" system so that no one has to do it all the time.

Almost everyone I talked to felt that a formal (but not too formal) committee structure is necessary. Everyone is acutely aware that we all have limitations on the time we can give to the effort, and so the need is for a lean and streamlined committee that can accomplish what is necessary with a minimum of fuss and wasted effort.

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May 18, 2010