# Virginia Master Naturalist logo

# Proposal Form for Volunteer Activities

All VMN volunteer activities must be approved by the local chapter before volunteers begin participating. This form collects the information needed for chapter leaders to make a decision about the activity, to advertise it to volunteers, and to document it as a service opportunity in the VMN online volunteer management system.

## Contact Information

**Submitter:** Who is submitting this activity proposal? **Name:** Lisa Mease and Meagan Thomas **Email:** [Lisa.Mease@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:Lisa.Mease@dwr.virginia.gov)and [Meagan.Thomas@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:Meagan.Thomas@dwr.virginia.gov)

**Chapter Lead:** Who will be the point of contact for this activity within the VMN chapter?   
**Name:** **Email:**

**External Lead:** If this activity is led by another organization, who is the primary point of contact for this activity within that organization? If there are additional external contacts for the activity, please include them as well.

**Name(s):** Lisa Mease; Back-up contact: Meagan Thomas  
**Organization(s):** Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR)  
  
**Email(s):** [Lisa.Mease@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:Lisa.Mease@dwr.virginia.gov); Back-up POCs: [Meagan.Thomas@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:Meagan.Thomas@dwr.virginia.gov)

**Phone Number(s):** Lisa Mease: 804-476-0742; Meagan Thomas: 804-965-3013

## Activity Information

**Activity Name:** DWR Birdability Project

**Purpose:** How will this activity contribute to natural resource education or conservation?  
This project aims to increase accessibility to natural resources for disabled wildlife viewers. Volunteers will conduct accessibility surveys that will provide the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) with accurate accessibility information pertaining to Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail (VBWT) sites. This information will be added to the nationally recognized Birdability map and publicized in association with VBWT site pages on the DWR website. Likewise, the training and experiences provided by this project can empower VMNs to be advocates for trail improvements in their local regions and educate the public about inclusive wildlife viewing practices.

**Service Type:** Within which of the 4 VMN service types does this activity best fit? Some activities may cross over service types, but please choose the one best primary type.  
Citizen Science

**Description:** What will volunteers do as part of this activity?

Volunteers will be asked to complete a Birdability assessment **for designated sites on the Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail**. Volunteers will also be asked to report back to DWR with the link to the assessment as well as the status of the following amenities: accessible restrooms, bird blinds, parking spaces, kayak launches, and what the trail surface(s) is.

**Location:** Where will this activity take place?  
Throughout the Commonwealth at VBWT sites.

**Time Frame:** Is this project ongoing for the foreseeable future or does it have a planned completion date? When will this activity take place, and what is the time commitment for the volunteer?  
  
Completion date will be upon contingent on all VBWT sites being surveyed. Time commitment will vary depending on the size of the site and how many accessible trails are within it. Smaller sites with a single accessible trail could take an hour or two; larger sites, especially those with multiple accessible trails, may take longer.

**Safety Hazards and Protocols:** What hazards might the volunteers encounter and what safety protocols need to be followed?  
Dehydration: volunteers should bring plenty of water for the field.   
Uneven ground: wear close-toed shoes and watch for uneven ground to avoid slips, trips, or falls.   
Ticks, chiggers, and other biting insects: wear insect repellant in the field.  
Sun burn: ensure application of sunscreen prior to any fieldwork.

**Youth Supervision:** Will the VMN volunteers have sole supervision of youth, meaning that no parent, teacher, or other individual will be there to maintain responsibility for the youth? If so, the volunteers may need additional training and screening to stay in compliance with VCE volunteer policies.  
No

**Diversity and Inclusion:** If applicable, describe how this activity will engage underrepresented populations and be relevant to diversity and inclusion efforts.  
Oftentimes, lack of accessibility information is a major barrier for disabled wildlife viewers. This project will increase access to the outdoors by reducing such barriers. Also, by training VMN in the above, it is our hope that volunteers will become inspired to serve as advocates for trail improvements which increase the usability for all people. Birdability also lists potential safety issues and sources of noise to better include People of Color and Neurodiverse individuals.

## Volunteer Information

**Training and Experience:** What prior experience, skills, or training must the volunteers have? If there is optional or mandatory training offered as part of this activity, please describe that here as well.   
  
Participating volunteers must watch the [mandatory training video](https://video.vt.edu/media/Birdability+Training+Video+for+VMN+project+with+DWR/1_iijyxgoi) on the [VMN website](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/virginia-bird-and-wildlife-trail.html) which describes the project summary, forms used, and data collection. Likewise, volunteers will be asked to review some materials on the Birdability website prior to conducting an assessment. DWR has also provided a written project guide which can be found on the VMN website in the event that volunteers would like the instructions in a print format.

Volunteers must have access to a smart phone, tablet, or computer for entering data into online forms, and the must have comfort with using a web browser and online forms.

Volunteers will also be asked to have access to a printer so that they can print data sheets for use in the field.

Prior experience with identifying birds and other wildlife is helpful, but not required.

**Resources:** What resources will the volunteers need to do the activity (for example, tools, supplies, access to software)? Which of these resources must the volunteers provide? Which will be provided to them? By whom?

Clinometer or cell phone with a clinometer app to estimate trail slope, a simple tape measure (volunteers must provide) for estimating trail width. Writing utensil and something to write on for data forms. A camera (cell phone camera is fine) to take representative photos of the site. Plenty of water and comfortable walking shoes. Optional: printed map of the site and binoculars to view wildlife.

**Benefits:** How will volunteers benefit from participation in this activity?  
Learning how to improve trails to increase access for all people. Exploring the Commonwealth through the VBWT and experiencing the excellent wildlife viewing opportunities within it.

## Documentation

This information will be used in the volunteer opportunity listing within the VMN volunteer management system (Better Impact). We recommend that chapters paste the Description, To Participate, and Additional Information text into the Pre-Signup Description field in Better Impact and add links there to any related files, including this completed activity form. The Post-Signup Description may be pasted into the Post-Signup Description field.

**Description:** Provide the basic description you wish all volunteers to be able to see for this activity within the VMN volunteer management system.  
This activity will engage volunteers in boots-on-the-ground surveying of Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail sites for accessibility. Volunteers will visit sites to assess accessibility features. Information collected from these surveys will be shown on a crowd-sourced map created by the non-profit Birdability and will be reported to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.

**To Participate in This Activity:** If volunteers wish to participate, what should they do?   
Watch the [DWR training webinar](https://video.vt.edu/media/Birdability+Training+Video+for+VMN+project+with+DWR/1_iijyxgoi) (required). Review the [Volunteer VBWT Site List](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bL7iGRMpnWDyWbI6RU84zhlQieb_rXdk0sVBtIpcNMA/edit?usp=drive_link) spreadsheet for available sites. Fill out the [Volunteer Site Selection Form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSerh8nUZubGJ3MFLDQy7xOMNP8uWRk9-FF19G4RXPHZVBOWJg/viewform?usp=sf_link) with your top three VBWT site choices. **Signing up for a site means the volunteer is agreeing to review all trails at that location**. The DWR project coordinator will reach out to confirm the site assignment.

**Additional Information:** List links to any websites or documents related to this activity. Attach files as needed.

All training and supplemental materials can be found under the ‘[Virginia Bird and Wildlife Trail](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/virginia-bird-and-wildlife-trail.html)’ section of volunteer opportunities on the [state VMN page](http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/). This includes a detailed project guide pdf, the mandatory training webinar to be reviewed by all participants, and more.

**Post-Signup Description:** Provide any additional information you wish volunteers to see after they sign up for this activity in the VMN volunteer management system.  
Thank you so much for signing up for this project! Your efforts are helping to make the outdoors accessible for everyone!

If for whatever reason you’re unable to complete the site within one year, please reach out to the project coordinator and the site will be made available to everyone.

## Internal Chapter Section

Chapter leaders may use this section to document approvals, record comments, indicate the Category and Activity to be used within Better Impact, etc.