

Education Volunteers: School Group Programs 2021 Report

Number of Volunteers: 12

Number of Hours: 188 teaching, 60 training

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TYPES OF SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- CHESPAX Programs - Representing the Chesapeake Bay and the Patuxent River, CHESPAX is the environmental education program for the Calvert County Public School System. It is a unique program in which the Board of Education staff works closely with local, state and regional partner agencies to provide hands-on environmental education curriculum for the students of Calvert County. Calvert County Natural Resources provides the field trip portion of the curriculum for every public school 1st grade class (Pollinator Pals, fall and spring), 3rd grade class (Terrapins, spring), and 5th grade class (Oyster Reefs, fall). These field trips follow a set and rehearsed program so that each class receives a similar enriching experience.
- Other in-county groups (non-CHESPAX)- May include day cares, home-school groups, private schools, middle or high school classes, or other public school grades who want some more time in the parks between CHESPAX visits. These programs are more specialized to the teacher or group's needs, though volunteers will typically lead standard activities like dip-netting in the pond/swamp, fossil searches, or swamp walks.
- Out of county groups - Many schools from surrounding counties come to us to allow their students time to connect with nature. These are typically larger groups and activities usually include dip-netting in the pond/swamp, seining in the bay, learning about the importance of wetlands, and searching for fossils on the beach.
- Homeschool Fridays - Homeschool Fridays is a series of environmental education programs developed for homeschoolers ages 4 to 12. There is a different theme each month. Each two-hour program consists of self-guided indoor and staff/volunteer-led outdoor hands-on learning. These groups require training beyond our general education volunteer training for a CHESPAX program. Programs are at Flag Ponds Nature Park.

SKILLS NEEDED

- Enjoy working with and teaching children. Field trips are typically elementary school groups, though we do occasionally have pre-K and high school groups.
- Be able to engage and lead groups of approximately 10-20 people.
- Must pass a background check (must be renewed annually).
- Be flexible to unexpected factors or changes to a program; be ready to fill-in or help out where needed.

Optional, but preferred, skills

- Have general knowledge and interest of the local natural world and ecosystems. Volunteers will be trained with program-specific information, but prior knowledge or initiative for extra research is always helpful.
- Be familiar with the park(s) where volunteering.
- Be able to answer questions about Calvert County plants, animals, and ecosystems.

VOLUNTEER DUTIES

- Independently lead groups of approximately 10-20 people (students and chaperons) for 20-30-minute intervals
 - Lead activities/stations: give clear, complete instructions; supervise the group and provide assistance where needed; guide students to record and interpret data
 - Take groups on short hikes over varying terrain and point out animals, plants, or habitats related to the curriculum
- Use various types of scientific equipment; understand their function and resulting data
- Assist naturalists with set up, clean up, and transport of equipment. May include sorting, re-stocking, cleaning, hosing off, lifting, and carrying various items and weights.

REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

- Come appropriately dressed and prepared for the weather. The beginning and ends of each season may bring high heat, wind, rain, or cold, accordingly. Volunteers may also be exposed to ticks, mosquitoes, poison ivy, and unexpected wildlife.
- Be excited about exploring and spending time in nature and be able to share this excitement with others.
- Spend long periods of time standing, walking, and moving over various terrains and inclines (may include dirt, gravel, grass, sand, boardwalks, and hills or steps).
- Be knowledgeable about the program and parks. Fully complete training before assuming a leadership role and take advantage of refresher trainings.
- Be on time and prepared for all programs. Volunteers are typically needed from 9:00am-2:00pm.
- Maintaining Qualifications: volunteers must volunteer with a homeschool Friday or CHESPAX group at least once in a 2-month time period. If it has been more than 2 months since you have volunteered, you will need to attend another observation day as a refresher.

TRAINING

- Initial orientation in-person with program leader.
- New volunteers must undergo a background check per the Parks & Recreation Background Check Policy
- New volunteers must complete at least two observation days for most field trips.
- Attend additional trainings and enrichment events as available.
- Volunteers are provided supervision by staff naturalists and experienced volunteers.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Most activities are for volunteers who have been trained and have earned their Qualifications approval.
- Once trained, volunteers will receive a certificate and can then respond to be a volunteer in different opportunities, particularly for nest box checks.

PROJECT DATES

- **Spring:** Teach CHESPAX 3rd grade Terrapins programs and other school group programs as needed
- **Fall:** Teach CHESPAX 5th grade Oysters programs and other school group programs as needed
- We ask that education volunteers commit in advance to dates or programs in order to ensure proper staffing and leadership for each field trip. Scheduling is done in advance at the beginning of each teaching season, though further scheduling may be done on a monthly or weekly basis.

Summary of 2021 Activities

Spring of 2021 – everything was virtual; no volunteers were needed.

Fall 2021 – CHESPAX started again with the Oysters and Pollinators programs. At least one, sometimes 2 volunteers came in each day to help with Oysters (no volunteers are needed for Pollinators).

We were able to coordinate with the Chesapeake Beach Oyster Cultivation Society (CBOCS) better than in the past and have several of their volunteers go through our education volunteer training and volunteer with us as well.

Future Plans

- Train volunteers to use Galaxy Digital to register for opportunities.
- Provide new volunteer orientations that include hands-on practice with Galaxy Digital.
- Offer additional trainings and informal get togethers as time and COVID allow.
- Spring 2022 kick-off meeting will be offered as a meet and greet with staff and volunteers as well as an opportunity to review the CHESPAX Terrapins program and go over the scheduling for the fall season.

Supporting Calvert County's nature parks and natural spaces



CALVERT STEWARDS

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

A partnership between Calvert Nature Society and Calvert County Natural Resources Division

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Volunteer Portal: <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>

Calvert Nature Society: www.calvertparks.org

Calvert County Natural Resources Division:
www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources

