

Education – School Groups 2023

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Number of Volunteers: 10

Number of Hours: approximately 193.5

Includes:

- 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.

TRAININGS

- Initial orientation in-person with program leader.
- 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.

PROJECT DATES

- **Spring:** Teach CHESPAX 3rd grade Terrapins programs and other EE programs as needed
- **Fall:** Teach CHESPAX 5th grade Oysters programs and other EE programs as needed
- **Homeschool Fridays:** Offered September – December and January - June
- 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 2023 ACTIVITIES

With the re-worked 3rd grade Terps program, we now need one volunteer each day in the spring. We also need one volunteer each day in the fall to help run the Oysters programs. It has been a challenge to find volunteers in the spring; we had staff filling in for volunteers more days than not. The volunteers who we did have were not happy with the program as it stands. Their feedback centered mostly around the amount of exposure to the elements in the Terps programs as well as the pace/repetition of the program because of the station set up. Most expressed being physically exhausted at the end of each day they volunteered.

The fall Oysters program is further north in the county and closer to where most of our current teaching volunteers live. It is also an easier program, responsibility-wise, for the volunteers and that shows in terms of volunteer participation in Oysters vs. Terrapins. Our coverage for the fall was much better than spring with most days being filled.

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. In addition, at least one CBOCS volunteer assisted at each day we had Oysters in a support role.

Homeschool Fridays is back as an opportunity for a volunteers and our current Homeschool volunteer, Penny Moran has been a huge help. This is about all we need for this program – one volunteer. It will be a challenge to expand this to others as it only happens once a month. It would be tough for a new volunteer to get in, trained, and be able to roll with the unpredictability which is the nature of dealing with groups of homeschoolers.

Future Plans

- Continue to help volunteers to feel more comfortable using Galaxy Digital to register for opportunities.
- Find a better way to be sure folks record their hours. Looking back, many more hours were NOT recorded than were. We'll be looking for a better system in 2024.
- Provide new volunteer orientations that include hands-on practice with Galaxy Digital
- Offer additional trainings and informal get-togethers as time allows
- Offer appreciation – small gifts and awards
- A spring 2024 kick-off meeting will be offered as a meet and greet with staff and volunteers as well as an opportunity to go over the revised CHESPAX Terrapins program
- A similar fall season kick-off meeting will be held at the end of August for the fall season
- Spring and fall season equipment clean up days will be offered if time allows
- Work with the Volunteer and Grants Coordinator to recruit new teaching volunteers

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

2023 Annual Report

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CALVERT STEWARDS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
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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

