Volunteer Programs: Building Human and Natural Resource Capital

ESPMP 4041W - Problem Solving for Environmental Change
Report #7/7

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This report was compiled by students and faculty at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in collaboration with the City of Oakdale.
Community-based volunteers have a high level of involvement in their community and commit their time to making positive improvements. Currently, Oakdale does not have a structured volunteer program. The city engaged Environmental Science, Policy and Management students from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities to evaluate the existing volunteer program and develop an infrastructure for their use in the future.

Information was collected from personal interviews, participant observations, and journal articles. This information dealt primarily with the recruitment, training and retention of volunteers, as well as details concerning volunteer coordinator positions. Our recommendations were shaped based upon our findings and the goals of the City of Oakdale. The suggested recommendations as follows:

1a. Update the City of Oakdale website to include information about how citizens can get involved.
1b. Adopt the Branch Out Oakdale (BOO) volunteer program in order to maximize community involvement and participation in its volunteer efforts.
2. Focus volunteer efforts on the location, marking, and treatment of introduced plants species within the Oakdale Nature Preserve
3. Create a structure for volunteers to serve Oakdale Discovery Center.
4. Adopt a competency-based training system for all volunteers.
5. Create a Volunteer Coordinator position for Branch Out Oakdale.
Introduction

Oakdale, Minnesota officially became a city in 1974 and is located just east of St. Paul in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The 2010 census estimated the city population to be around 27,378 people and the city limit holds 11.29 square miles, which consists mainly of residential, urban, and natural environments (City of Oakdale, 2010). Oakdale’s development has allowed for residential and urban growth while also preserving natural lands and waters, like the beautiful Oakdale Nature Preserve and Discovery Center.

The use of volunteer power is a cost-effective way to engage and empower citizens, as well as enhance a community's knowledge and ability to care for its natural environment. Programs that are most successful in achieving these objectives are those that are based on the planning and participation of the community. Community-based volunteer programs are those that occur within the limits of the area in which they operate and are run primarily by the volunteers themselves (Hibbert et al., 2001). Additionally, such volunteer organizations thrive when they operate based on a framework that provides a clear structure for training members and executing projects.

Studies have shown that participants who are highly involved in their community are significantly more satisfied with the state of their neighborhoods (Sommer et al., 1994). On top of that, volunteer projects can be just as productive as those carried out by professionals in the field (Tretheway et al., 1999). For these reasons, by taking advantage of its wealth of human capital, the city of Oakdale has great potential to increase its capacity to effectively, efficiently, and sustainably maintain its natural resources through the use of community-based volunteers.

Although Oakdale currently has a strong volunteer base, the tasks and projects undertaken have been isolated events that build somewhat-temporary community bonds. By organizing a community-based volunteer program with reliable and recurring volunteer involvement and participation, Oakdale can increase the capacity to engage volunteers and care for natural resources. A structured curriculum and framework will streamline communication between Oakdale city staff and volunteers, as well as provide the necessary training, tools, and assistance to accomplish program goals and objectives. Engaging the knowledge and skills of volunteers and ensuring satisfaction with their community are essential aspects of this system, as it is truly their participation that makes the program successful.

This report provides Oakdale with the structure and framework for a community-based volunteer program that will engage community members in order to maintain and sustain Oakdale’s natural resources.
Vision Statement

The official mission statement of The City of Oakdale is as follows:

“The City of Oakdale is committed to serve the continuing community-wide needs of our citizens by enhancing the vitality and quality of life for all” (City of Oakdale Executive Summary, 2010).

The City of Oakdale values community involvement. In their Comprehensive Plan, Oakdale has outlined a number of Community Goals including to, “continue to proactively plan and implement strategies to make Oakdale more sustainable and promote and encourage the health of its residents,” as well as to, “create and maintain strategies to welcome, integrate, and support all citizens into the Oakdale community” (City of Oakdale, 2010). These goals, along with the request from the city, have led the researchers to create an ongoing and sustainable volunteer program.
that prioritizes the involvement of Oakdale residents to build a greater sense of community while maintaining their environment.

The class vision for Environmental Science, Policy and Management 4041W course is as follows:

“We aim to create a cohesive, achievable set of recommendations in collaboration with the Oakdale community to enhance the vitality and quality of life, sustainability of the local land and waters, and foster greater community engagement now and into the future.”

The vision of the community-based volunteer program, Branch Out Oakdale (BOO), is as follows:

“Guided by Oakdale’s emphasis on community, this report recommends strategies that will help the city create a strong foundation for a volunteer program to help build and benefit the entire community for now and years to come.”

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this report is to support and expand the city’s current volunteer program by creating a framework that can be used to engage citizens in the development, care and use of Oakdale’s natural resources. To accomplish this, feasible management recommendations have been developed that have proven successful for other cities and organizations.

To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set:

1. Review the current volunteer program and facilities of the City of Oakdale.
2. Assess existing city and organization volunteer programs to be used as case study examples.
3. Design a framework for an ongoing and sustainable community-based volunteer program for the city.
4. Compile project-specific training curriculums that will be used to orient and educate volunteers.
5. Research volunteer coordinator position descriptions and duties from other organizations.
6. Recommend this framework, curriculum, potential volunteers in addition to the creation of an internship or paid position that serves as a Volunteer Coordinator for the program.
Methods

Site Description

Located within the 220 acre Oakdale Nature Preserve is the Oakdale Discovery Center. The Discovery Center offers visitors the opportunity to learn about nature through art, books, and exploration of the Nature Preserve’s prairie, mature trees, 28-acre lake and abundant hiking and biking trails (City of Oakdale, 2010). There are numerous recreation programs, activities and community events held in the center on a regular basis, which are coordinated through the City of Oakdale’s Recreation Department. The Discovery Center is also rented and used for weddings, receptions, parties, business meetings and training sessions. Both preschool and school-age children visit the Nature Preserve and Discovery Center each year, with the majority arriving by bus. Three regular, full-time staff work from the Oakdale Discovery Center.

Demographic Information

The most represented age class in Oakdale for males and females is 45 to 49 years old (Census, 2010). Of Oakdale adults, 31% have a high school diploma, while 18% have a Bachelor’s Degree and 6% have some form of Graduate Degree (Census, 2010). The ethnic makeup of Oakdale consists predominantly of 79.1% caucasian ancestry, 8.1% Asian ancestry, and 5.8% black or African ancestry (Census 2010).

Research Techniques

For the scope of this project, Oakdale’s current volunteer program was assessed, as well as volunteer programs from other cities, organizations and agencies. In an effort to adequately assess these programs, a number of techniques were utilized. These techniques include informational interviews, participant observations, and secondary data sources. Findings from these techniques provide support that was used to make informed recommendations for an ongoing and sustainable volunteer program for the City of Oakdale.

Informational Interviews

The primary source of information for this report consisted of the interviews of representatives from local volunteer-based organizations, nonprofits, and environmental agencies. These interviews provided firsthand knowledge about volunteer organization structures, best practices, and other topics related to volunteerism and natural resource management (Appendix A for contact information and interview questions).

An email interview was conducted with the Oakdale Discovery Center’s Administrative Assistant, on September 23, 2013. For this interview, a set of five
questions was sent to inventory the current operations and staffing at the Oakdale Discovery Center.

A six question interview with the Senior Planner for the City of Maplewood was conducted on September 30, 2013, via email. Maplewood has been recognized in the past for its successful volunteer programs. Contact information was found at the City of Maplewood’s website. The intention of the interview was to learn more about successful volunteer programs in areas around Oakdale.

A half-hour long, in-person interview was conducted on October 2, 2013, with Director of Operations at Loaves and Fishes, a nonprofit that provides free meals to people living in Minneapolis and the surrounding community. The interview was conducted based on questions regarding volunteer program structure, community outreach, and retention. Contact information found through Loaves and Fishes website.

The Volunteer Coordinator for the St. Paul Eco Stewards was interviewed on October 8, 2013, in person. The interview lasted approximately one hour and was based on six questions, although most of the findings were gathered through dialogue. The St. Paul Eco Stewards are volunteers who preserve, protect, and restore St. Paul’s natural areas. Discovered through internet searches for “volunteer programs natural resources Minnesota” and selected because of the volunteer-based organizational structure. The interview was conducted in order to learn more about volunteer program structures and hierarchy of volunteer and employee command.

On October 9, 2013, an email interview was conducted with the Volunteer Resources Manager of the Three Rivers Park District. The interview consisted of 11 questions that focused on the current volunteer operations of the district, as well as their recruitment, training and recognition of volunteers. Three Rivers Park District was selected to interview because of their large and successful volunteer program, as well as their environmental focus and location in the Twin-Cities Metropolitan Area.

A list of five questions regarding existing volunteerism in Oakdale was emailed to the Environmental Services Superintendent for the City of Oakdale on October 9, 2013. These questions were designed to contact with city officials in Oakdale was establish prior to the beginning of this study, and the interviewee was one of the lead contacts for this report.

On October 22, 2013, a 20-minute long in-person interview was conducted with the University of Minnesota Urban and Community Forestry Volunteer and Program Coordinator. Four questions were asked, with most of the discussion being about training for alternative volunteer programs. More specifically, topics discussed were the number of training hours needed to perform tasks like tree pruning and planting and the structural framework of The Citizen Pruner and Master Gardener Programs.
Contact information through communication with a University of Minnesota professor.

A 20-minute long interview was conducted on November 21, 2013, with the Dendrology Instructor at the University of Minnesota. Interview conducted because of interviewee’s experience with natural resource marking tools and methods. Contact information found through extension directory and communication with a University of Minnesota Teaching Assistant.

Participant Observations and Site Visits
Two main sources of primary information were utilized. Both provided first hand experience with volunteer programs and familiarity with objective sites.

On October 2, 2013, researchers participated in a volunteer activity with Loaves and Fishes at St. Stephen’s Church in Minneapolis, MN. Between 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., prepared and served free meals to the public. During this time, questions were asked towards the directors, volunteers, and attendees to gain an insider’s opinion about the program. Questions were very informal and conversational, and mainly concerned with how the event’s participants had heard of Loaves and Fishes, why this project interested them, and how long they had been involved. Noted multiple barriers to effective volunteering, such as confusion about location or role, and unfamiliarity with program staff.

On October 15, 2013, researchers went to the Oakdale Nature Preserve in order to locate and mark introduced plant species. Observed the methodology of ESPM 4041 Group 2, of which the group members located introduced plant species using basic plant identification skills and noted their prevalence, maturity, and potential growth using a custom matrix. Information was gathered on several different locations that illustrates high-risk areas that may severely limit native plant growth.

Secondary Sources
Available literature about general and natural resource-based volunteerism was collected and reviewed via the Internet and hard-copy publications provided by Gary Johnson, Extension Professor with the Department of Forest Resources at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Information about existing volunteer programs, Nature Centers, and Friends groups from across the Twin Cities metro area was reviewed to gain a perspective about what is being utilized and has worked in other areas. Peer-reviewed articles on introduced species management practices were reviewed to gain a better understanding of current best management practices.
Assessment

The strategy for assessing interviews, participation, and literature review involved identifying common themes and ideas for best practices and synthesizing them into a cohesive set of recommendations. If several sources noted similar topics, then those particular items were given special attention. This report assumes that if a certain item or strategy is mentioned by more than one source, then that item is especially relevant for developing volunteer programs.

An assessment of Oakdale’s current volunteer program was conducted to find both its strengths and weaknesses. Shortcomings of the program were then identified and research was conducted to resolve what other cities, nature centers and organizations have done to operate their volunteer programs. Based upon this research, major findings and recommendations were formulated, which will be used to build and improve the volunteer program for the City of Oakdale.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1: The City of Oakdale lacks a core and recurring volunteer base

Oakdale currently holds a number of annual volunteer-centric events, including community tree-plantings, buckthorn pulls, and a cleanup event at Tanner’s Lake. Churches, schools, and businesses make up the majority of Oakdale’s current volunteer base. These groups are self-organized and self-managed, as the city of Oakdale has little to no direct control over what types of training the volunteers receive, what hours they work, or who leads them. Though helpful and productive, volunteer events put on by these groups tend to be one-time occurrences with variable attendance. The same groups may participate in multiple activities, although they are seldom comprised of the same people.

Recommendation 1a: Update the City of Oakdale website to include information about how citizens can get involved

Many organizations, including Loaves and Fishes, use online forms that prospective volunteers can use to indicate their interest in donating their time, knowledge, and skills. The internet is one of the most straightforward ways that an organization can reach out to the community, and so a successful volunteer program begins with an easy-to-use volunteer page. When a visitor enters the keyword “volunteer” into the search bar on the website, that person should be able to find a page about volunteer opportunities without too much extra digging. The website should clearly state current volunteer opportunities, as well as the responsibilities and expected time commitments of the position and steps necessary to get involved. The position should
be thoroughly described because the website will likely be one of the user’s first encounters with volunteerism in Oakdale. The instructions for filling out these forms should be clear and explicit—a confusing application process can discourage potential volunteers.

Recommendation 1b: Adopt the Branch Out Oakdale (BOO) volunteer program in order to maximize community involvement and participation

BOO provides the framework for a community-based volunteer program. It is designed to give citizens the opportunity to volunteer in a particular field of interest. It is recommended that the first two fields direct volunteer activity toward the eradication of introduced plant species in the Oakdale Nature Preserve and various fields of work at the Oakdale Nature Center (Figure 2).

It is recommended that the Nature Center acts as the capital center of Branch Out Oakdale, as it is a well-known site where volunteers can communicate with each other and the designated volunteer coordinator. Branch Out Oakdale outlines a plan and process of action that will ensure volunteer involvement, education, and leadership in an open-feedback loop (Figure 3). This methodology allows for volunteers to learn about a subject of interest and have the opportunity to take on a leadership role over time. The first round of applicants will have a primary opportunity to become leaders, and specific volunteers that possess leadership

Figure 2: Branch Out Oakdale visual concept.
Source: Original work, ESPM 4041 Group 7.
qualities may be asked to lead future training curriculums, oversee day-to-day operations, and develop new branches for other volunteer projects.

**Finding 2: The Oakdale Nature Preserve’s foremost issue is the prevalence non-native and opportunistic plant species**

The Nature Preserve offers an accessible way for citizens to be in a natural area with defined trails and paved paths. In the Oakdale Nature Preserve, 25 non-native and opportunistic plant species have been identified (ESPM 4041 Group 2). The most prevalent species are common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), and exotic honeysuckles (*Lonicera tartarica*). The prevalence of introduced species on the preserve is widespread, but most eradication treatments have been in high traffic areas near trails and pathways. A current location and GIS mapping of introduced species has been completed (ESPM 4041 Group 2). The map shows where specific species have been located and the severity of their introduction. Natural resource mapping can also be done electronically through the use of Android phones and tablets using Open Data Kit, a research platform and collection site that is used widely by universities and
environmental agencies. Successful marking strategies make information accessible to others using opendatakit.org (ODK). There are many forms of treatment methods for introduced plant species that have been practiced in North America. Mechanical control methods involves the uprooting or entire plants and do not use chemicals or herbicides, which can be detrimental to ecological processes (Zavaleta et al., 2001). Mechanical treatments should “usually be the first ones to look at when evaluating an invasive plant removal project. These procedures do not require special licensing or introduce chemicals into the environment. They do require permits in some situations, such as wetland zones. Mechanical removal is highly labor intensive and creates a significant amount of site disturbance, which can lead to rapid reinvasion if not handled properly” (Mattrick, 2012). Mechanical treatments tend to do more harm than good when procedure and protocols are not properly implemented.

**Recommendation 2: Focus volunteer efforts on the location, marking, and treatment of introduced plants species within the Oakdale Nature Preserve**

The prevalence of introduced plant species on the Oakdale Nature Preserve can be addressed through collective volunteer efforts. It is recommended that fifteen to twenty volunteers undergo extensive training (no less than 20 hours total) to develop skills in plant identification skills, marking strategies through Open Data Kit on Android Devices, and mechanical treatment processes. It is recommended that the GIS map created by ESPM 4041 Group 2 is used initially to locate where current high-risk areas are. It is recommended that the training is led by the Volunteer Coordinator qualified in environmental education. It is recommended that after training, volunteers are split into groups of four to five and assigned a designated area of the nature preserve as it relates to high-risk areas outlined by the initial GIS map (ESPM 4041 Group 2). Each group will be responsible for the location, marking, and mechanical treatment of introduced plants in their designated area. The Volunteer Coordinator will oversee operations and routinely evaluate treatment techniques. It is also recommended that peer-evaluations are utilized. This will consist of all volunteers evaluating the prevalence of introduced plant species in sections other than their own and evaluating using Open Data Kit. By providing volunteers with the necessary training and tools to work productively, a collective volunteer effort will allow for the reestablishment of native plant species within the Oakdale Nature Preserve.

**Finding 3: The Oakdale Discovery Center is a valuable resource for the community and can be improved to better serve its citizens**

The Oakdale Discovery Center is located in the heart of Oakdale and offers visitors a variety of indoor and outdoor services to suit their needs (City of Oakdale, 2010). However, through the help of volunteers, the operations at the Discovery Center can be enhanced, allowing both volunteers and city staff to better accommodate and serve the citizens of Oakdale.
Recommendation 3: Create a structure for volunteers to serve Oakdale Discovery Center

These volunteers will serve to support operations and enhance the abilities of the Center, allowing it to better serve the needs of the community. Additionally, having a recognizable “home” that volunteers can report to alleviates confusion, thus promoting member retention. Because the Discovery Center is an educational and recreational resource that serves the entire community, it is important to have several volunteer options that meet a variety of needs and interests. For these reasons, this report recommends the creation and implementation of the following three positions: Volunteer Administrators, Volunteer Naturalists, and Volunteer Outdoor Managers. For descriptions for the three Oakdale Discovery Center volunteer positions and an overview of their proposed responsibilities, see Appendix C. A sample training checklist for the volunteer positions at the Oakdale Discovery Center can be found in Appendix D.

Finding 4: Trained volunteers are integral parts of a community-based volunteer program

Trained volunteers are valuable as they have accomplished a training course where they have attained a higher level of knowledge in a given subject area. These volunteers often have high levels of interest and competency rates in their fields. This means that trained, senior-level volunteers have the ability to perform tasks efficiently at the individual and group level while also being able to disseminate knowledge and skills amongst lower-level volunteers. With enough training, upper-level volunteers are also able to assist in recruiting and selecting new volunteers, conducting training sessions, and other tasks (Bonn et al., 1993).

Recommendation 4: Adopt a competency-based training system for all volunteers

Basic training is necessary to establish a minimum level of competency among all volunteers, which allows them to have a consistent foundation of knowledge and skills in their work (Community Tool Box, 2013). This report recommends that basic training consist of an orientation that all volunteers will complete. In addition to the orientation, volunteers can choose from various additional areas from which to become certified.

Certification will signify that a volunteer has gained sufficient knowledge in a given subject area, such as introduced plant species treatment. Each additional certification will give the volunteer access to a broader set of tasks, responsibilities, and benefits. It also signifies that they are qualified to perform specific tasks at an individual or group level, such as the pulling of buckthorn. Finally, since being trained requires a considerable time commitment, receiving certification for various training sessions will encourage volunteers to remain with the program. It is recommended that the invasives training program consists of more than twenty hours of fairly rigorous training, test-based for invasives identification, and costing around $50 for textbook,
classroom, and teaching expenses. The Nature Center certification will be less rigorous, giving Oakdale citizens three options from which to choose from. Training and certification will differ depending on the position they choose to get involved in. All Nature Center volunteers will participate in a similar orientation session that will acquaint them with the facilities and resources available to them.

Finding 5: Volunteer coordinators are necessary resources for organizing and guiding volunteers

Volunteerism is critical for getting citizens involved in their community, but volunteers also need support and leadership in order to maximize their capacity. A lack of guidance and direction can discourage member retention and ultimately compromise the effectiveness of the volunteer program. In fact, a report by United Parcel Services indicated that the number one reason that individuals stopped giving time to an organization was poor management (1998). An effective way to avoid such conflicts is to create a position dedicated to managing volunteer hours and projects. This volunteer coordinator position will also be important for facilitating two-way communication between volunteers and staff members and foster a cooperative environment (Citizens Information Board, 2008). Additionally, the site visit with Loaves and Fishes at St. Stephens revealed that having go-to staff member who is responsible for assigning and clarifying tasks was extremely helpful for assuring that participants feel interested and useful to their projects.

Recommendation 5: Create a Volunteer Coordinator position for Branch Out Oakdale

Having a full-time Volunteer Coordinator (or a seasonal, full-time Volunteer Coordinator) who is responsible for recruiting, training, and managing volunteers would be a significant asset for the City of Oakdale. The most cost-effective way to fill this position is to hire a student intern from a local college or university preferably with prior leadership and natural resource experience. Said student should also be friendly, well-organized, and have good communication skills. It is recommended that the Volunteer Coordinator follows the plan of action outlined by the open feedback loop (Figure 3). Responsibilities will include recruiting, interviewing, and training new members, scheduling volunteer hours, and generally helping accommodate new volunteers into their positions. Volunteers for the Nature Preserve and Introduced Species Management will report to the volunteer coordinator, who will in turn report to the city's forester or environmental services superintendent. Appendix B for a sample description and overview of the Volunteer Coordinator position proposed by this report.
Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to take inventory of the existing volunteerism base in Oakdale, MN, and to make informed recommendations for creating an ongoing, community-based volunteer structure for the city. A federal assessment of community involvement values volunteer work in Minnesota at $21.62 per hour, indicating the immense potential value that citizens can provide for their communities (Volunteering in America, 2013). Having a constant source of volunteers can be an important way for a city to promote financial efficiency, preservation of natural lands and waters, and foster a strong, resilient community base. By providing a well-structured program that allows participants to achieve certification and recognizes their commitment, this volunteer program is designed to enhance the city’s capacity to manage their unique natural resources.

Our research revealed the importance of structured volunteerism and the positive impact it has on citizens and their surroundings. Based on these findings, the specific recommendations of this report are designed to accommodate a wide array of audiences, skills, abilities, and interests so as to appeal to all citizens of Oakdale. Our findings also indicated a need for a clear leadership position to address volunteer operations and concerns. This report outlines a plan for creating and organizing a self-sustaining volunteer program that meets these needs.

References


APPENDIX

APPENDIX A - Interview Contacts and Questions

A1. Questions for the Oakdale Discovery Center’s Administrative Assistant. Interview conducted on September 23, 2013

- Are there any existing volunteer programs or volunteers that work from the Discovery Center?
- Do area school groups come to the Discovery Center for field trips? If so, do they walk or arrive by bus?
- What programs are currently held at the Discovery Center? Who conducts these programs?
- Is there a space in the Discovery Center that could be used to house the volunteer program? For example, a space for volunteers to keep their belongings, have their breaks, get the latest information and updates, etc.
- What staff positions work from the Discovery Center?

A2. Questions for the Senior Planner for the City of Maplewood. Interview conducted on September 30, 2013

- How has Maplewood found success in getting constituents to become volunteers?
- How has Maplewood found success in maintaining long-term volunteer involvement?
- How has Maplewood found success in formulating a volunteer system?
- Are the Maplewood advisory committees filled with volunteers? If so how many?
- How does Maplewood seek volunteers for a specific commission?

A3. Questions for the Director of Operations at Loaves and Fishes. Interview conducted on October 2, 2013

- What are the responsibilities of your position?
- How do you relate to volunteers?
- How has Loaves and Fishes found success in getting volunteer and community involvement?
- How much responsibility is given to volunteers?
- Are there ways in which volunteers can perform a variety of roles?

A4. Questions for the Volunteer Coordinator for the St. Paul Eco Stewards. Interview
conducted on October 8, 2013
● What are the responsibilities of your position?
● What natural resource projects are currently being undertaken in St. Paul?
● Do volunteers have a variety of options for what they’d like to do?
● Is there a framework for interacting with volunteers?
● How have you maintained volunteer and community involvement?

A5. Questions for the Three Rivers Park District Volunteer Coordinator. Interview conducted on October 9, 2013
● What is your position with the Three Rivers Park District? What is your day-to-day experience like?
● What types of volunteers do you see?
  ○ Demographics
  ○ What is their background knowledge? Expertise?
● What is the structure of the Three Rivers Park District volunteer program and who coordinates or is in charge?
● What type of training do volunteers get? Who trains them?
● Are there different levels of volunteers/certifications they can achieve?
● What are the major projects volunteers work on or are a part of?
● How do they learn about your program? What methods do you utilize to reach out to volunteers?
● Is there a recognizable volunteer “home base” or location they report to?
● How long are volunteer commitments? Do you have a lot of repeat volunteers?
● Are there volunteer leaders at each event or site? If so, how are they chosen?
● Are volunteers recognized for their work? If so, how?

A6. Questions for the Oakdale City Forester. Interview conducted on October 9, 2013
● What natural resource-based volunteer events does Oakdale regularly conduct? (You mentioned that there were tree-plantings and buckthorn pulls)
● How often do they occur?
● How many volunteers typically participate?
● How do you attract/notify volunteers?
● What businesses/schools/churches/etc are the most active volunteers?

A7. Questions for the University of Minnesota Urban and Community Forestry Volunteer and Program Coordinator. Interview conducted on October 22, 2013
● What are the responsibilities of your position?
● How have you found success in getting volunteer engagement and retention?
● What considerations did you make when developing training curriculums?
A8. Questions for the Wood Lake Nature Center Interpretive Naturalist. Interview conducted on October 31, 2013

- What is your position at Wood Lake Nature Center? What is your day-to-day experience like?
- What types of volunteers do you see?
  - Demographics
  - What is their background knowledge? Expertise?
- What is the structure of the Wood Lake Nature Center volunteer program and who coordinates or is in charge?
- What type of training do volunteers get? Who trains them?
- Are there different levels of volunteers/certifications they can achieve?
- What are the major projects volunteers work on or are a part of?
- How do they learn about your program? What methods do you utilize to reach out to volunteers?
- Is there a recognizable volunteer “home base” or location they report to?
- How long are volunteer commitments? Do you have a lot of repeat volunteers?
- Are there volunteer leaders at each event or site? If so, how are they chosen?
- Are volunteers recognized for their work? If so, how?

A9. Questions for the Dendrology Instructor at the University of Minnesota. Interview conducted on November 21, 2013

- What electronic programs or platforms have you utilized for the marking of natural resources?
APPENDIX B - Sample Volunteer Coordinator Position Description

Volunteer Coordinator

Job Description: The volunteer coordinator will provide direction, coordination and consultation for volunteers in the Branch Out Oakdale (BOO) program for the City of Oakdale.

Time Commitment: Estimated 20 hours/week, permanent position

Responsibilities:
- Assess volunteer program and job descriptions and adapt them to fit changing needs
- Maximize community outreach efforts by recruiting new volunteers to the Branch Out Oakdale program
- Interview, screen, and select volunteer applicants
- Conduct and/or arrange for volunteer orientation and training sessions
- Schedule and coordinate volunteer hours and shifts
- Evaluate volunteers and recognize their service and efforts
- Act as a liaison between city of Oakdale staff and volunteers to develop a two-way communication
  - Volunteer Coordinator reports to the City Forester/Environmental Services Superintendent

Necessary Qualifications:
- Ability to communicate with, supervise and empower volunteers to be effective in their roles - experience with volunteers is preferred
- Excellent communication and organizational skills to maintain accurate records and provide timely statistical and activity reports on volunteer participation
- Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite
- Prior leadership experience

Preferred Qualifications
- Knowledge and understanding of natural resource-related topics
- Previous experience working with or supervising volunteers
APPENDIX C - Sample Volunteer Position Descriptions

C.a) Nature Preserve Administrative Volunteer

Position Description: Administrative volunteers will assist with clerical tasks and contribute to the overall upkeep of the Nature Preserve. Applicants should be relatively comfortable using the internet, computers, and other office equipment. Will report to Volunteer Coordinator.

Time Commitment: Approximately 3-5 hours per week, but shifts are flexible. Preference given to volunteers who can commit for at least 6 months. On-the-job training provided.

Responsibilities:
- Filing, duplicating and distributing paperwork
- Organizing digital files, including photos, word processing documents, spreadsheet, etc.
- Conducting Internet research for Nature Preserve staff and volunteers
- Managing materials for other volunteer activities
- Maintaining a neat and orderly office environment

Desired Qualifications:
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office or equivalent
- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Good organizational skills
- Outgoing and pleasant attitude
- Reliable, “team player” mindset

C.b) Nature Preserve Education and Naturalism Volunteer

Position Description: Volunteer educators and naturalists are responsible for synthesizing information collected from outdoor management groups to create educational programs and materials for the Nature Preserve. This may include in-person talks or demonstrations, informational brochures, trail signs, online content, etc. Will report to Volunteer Coordinator.

Time Commitment: Approximately 5 hours per week, schedules are flexible. Preference given to volunteers who can commit for at least 6 months. On-the-job training provided.

Responsibilities:
- Gathering information gathered from outdoor management volunteers
- Using information gathered to develop educational materials for children and adults
- Adapting and changing materials based on seasons, needs, and interest of Nature Preserve visitors
- Curating and caring for live animals at the Nature Preserve
• Fostering an exciting and intellectually stimulating experience for visitors

Desired Qualifications:
• Comfortable speaking in front of groups of various sizes
• Good communication skills, including writing
• Strong knowledge of Oakdale community including its natural and social history.
• Prior experience in education or naturalism

C.c) Nature Reserve Outdoor Management Volunteer

Position Description: Outdoor management volunteers are responsible for hands-on management and maintenance of the Oakdale Nature Preserve. This position requires

Time Commitment: Approximately 3-5 hours per week, shifts are flexible. On-the-job training provided and orientation provided.

Responsibilities:
• Hiking and monitoring trails in the Nature Preserve
• Marking location of invasives and other points of interest using GPS technology
• Clearing obstructions to the trail
• Recording phenological phenomena including temperature, precipitation, cloud cover, presence of various plant and animal species, etc.
• Taking pictures of plants and wildlife for use in interpretive materials

Desired Qualifications:
• Educational and/or experiential background in environmental studies, botany, natural resources, or related field
• Strong organizational skills
• Ability to work independently or in teams

C.d) Introduced Plant Species Branch Volunteer

Position Description: A volunteer in the Introduced Plant Species Branch will act as a land steward at the Oakdale Nature Preserve. The foremost current issue at the preserve is the prevalence and spread of exotic and opportunistic plant species. Volunteers will locate, mark, and remove the most prevalent and advancing species that are found near walking trails or other at-risk areas.

Time Commitment: Approximately 5-10 hours per week, but shifts are flexible. Preference given to volunteers who can commit for at least 6 months. On-the-job training provided.
Responsibilities:
Each volunteer will be assigned a designated area within the nature preserve along with three to four other volunteers. Each group of volunteers is responsible for monitoring the overall health and preservation of their section with the first priority being the eradication of exotic and opportunistic plant species. Each individual and group will be responsible for...
  · Identification of exotic and opportunistic plant species
  · Location of specific plants using a Smartphone or tablet
  · Treatment of undesired plant species by uprooting the plant entirely

Desired Qualifications:
  · Basic tree and plant identification skills
  · Experience working in a natural area
  · Ability to work independently or in small groups
  · Basic knowledge with Android Platform

APPENDIX D - Volunteer Training Frameworks

D.a) Administrative Volunteer Training Checklist
  ● Approx 2-3 hours instruction, plus additional on-the-job practice
  ● First shift is direct, guided orientation and training
  ● Second and Thirds shifts are supervised by Volunteer Coordinator/Senior Volunteer to ensure proficiency in necessary areas and to clarify and answer questions.
    ○ Tour of Nature Center - approx 30 minutes
      ■ Includes getting familiar with maps of the Nature Preserve
      ■ Learning to open and close the Center at the beginning or end of the work day
    ○ Small icebreaker exercise with fellow staff - approx 30 minutes
      ■ Volunteer will get to know the other volunteers and staff members with whom they will work
    ○ Equipment Overview. - 20 minutes
      ■ Volunteer will learn to locate and operate the following office equipment
        • Supply closets, drawers
        • Frequently used forms and documents
        • Printer/scanner/FAX/etc
    ○ Handling Walk-ins - 20 minutes
      ■ Volunteer will learn to help create a welcoming environment for guests at the Nature Center
        • Checking guests/groups in for events or meetings
        • Directing guests to brochures, literature, activities
        • Signing guests up for volunteer programs
    ○ Phone Training - 20 minutes
      ■ Volunteer will learn to communicate information over the phone
APPENDIX E - Sample Naturalist Orientation and Training Framework

The following training framework creates a structure in which naturalist volunteers in the Discovery Center branch of Branch Out Oakdale can become trained in various areas. Volunteers are not obligated to complete all sessions, only those that interest them, but the orientation session must be completed first. Additional sessions can be completed in any order, depending on the interests and commitment of the volunteer. This framework is flexible and can be expanded to include more sessions or reduced to fit the needs of the Oakdale community. All training sessions can be scheduled in advance or on an as-needed basis when interested volunteers register.

E.a) New Volunteer Orientation Session

Goal: New volunteers will be familiar with a brief history of the Nature Center, some vital statistics, resources available to them and to the public, and how to use the volunteer binder to record their hours.

Time Commitment: Approximately 1 hour

Conducted by: Conducted by Volunteer Coordinator and/or Nature Preserve staff

Objectives:

- Overview of history and statistics of Nature Center
- Overview of the Naturalist volunteer position and additional certification sessions available to them
- Interests assessment
  - New volunteers will fill out an anonymous interests survey to gauge their interest and knowledge regarding various aspects of the environment, the community, the Nature Center, etc. prior to their volunteer experience. Another similar survey will be conducted 6 months later to assess how their responses changed.
- Tour of Discovery Center and overview of resources available
- Introduction to Volunteer Binder
  - Learn to record dates, times, hours, and projects completed at the end of each volunteer shift. (Refer to the sample Volunteer Binder in Appendix F for more information)

Recognition:
- Volunteers can check off “Orientation Session Completed” box on their page of the Volunteer Binder.
E.b) **Live Exhibits Training Sessions**

**Goal:** Volunteers will learn about the live plants and animals that are kept on display at the Discovery Center.

**Time Commitment:** Between 1-2 hours

**Conducted by:** Nature Preserve staff or senior naturalist volunteer

**Objectives:**
- Learn about the natural history of each species in the exhibit, why it is important to Minnesota/Oakdale ecology, and why it is on display at the Discovery Center.
- Learn where maintenance equipment is kept and how to use each piece of equipment.
- Learn how to care for each exhibit including how often it should be cleaning, watering, feeding, light needs, etc.

**Recognition:**
- Volunteers will be able to check off the “Live Exhibits Certified” box on their page of the Volunteer Binder to show that they have completed this session.
- Volunteers who dedicate 10+ hours to caring for live exhibits will receive a special pin to reflect their commitment to this area.

E.c) **Wildlife Recognition Training Sessions**

**Note that this session can be divided into many different sessions, depending on the level of expertise desired. For example, Wildlife Training can include a session dedicated solely to birds, insects, aquatic plants, etc.**

**Goal:** Volunteers will be able to recognize many of the plants, animals, and their habitats that live in the Nature Preserve, and will know how to record sightings in the appropriate location. Volunteers will also be familiar with some of the natural history of these species and why they are important to MN ecology. If the Wildlife Recognition session is divided into different sessions, it can be divided into.

**Time Commitment:** Approximately 2-3 hours of instruction from naturalists or volunteers, plus additional time for additional nature hikes/observations. Time commitment will vary depending on how knowledgeable volunteers wish to be.

**Conducted by:** Senior naturalist volunteer, naturalist

**Objectives:**
- Overview of a field guide of plants and animals.
- Learn how to identify plants/animals based on markings, calls, identifying features, etc.
  - 10 most common species in the area.
- Learn how to record plant/animal sightings in a volunteer naturalist journal.
- Schedule additional hikes for additional experience on volunteer’s own time.

**Recognition:**
- Volunteers will be able to check off “Wildlife Recognition” (or whatever subgroup) in the volunteer binder.
- Volunteers who dedicate 10+ to identifying and recording species in the Nature...
E.d.) Educational Materials Training Sessions

**Note that this session can be divided into many different sessions. For example, it can included a session dedicated to blogging/social media, photography, brochures, activity development, etc.**

**Goal:** Volunteers will be able to effectively develop and employ several types of educational materials for Nature Center visitors using outreach techniques including photography, blogging/social media, brochure-writing, etc.

**Time Commitment:** Approximately 2-3 hours of instruction, plus additional time for additional practice. Time commitment will vary depending on how knowledgeable volunteers wish to be.

**Conducted by:** Communications specialists or senior volunteers

**Objectives:**
- Overview of common types of audiences that visit the Nature Center frequently handles, as well as their various educational needs
  - How to speak to adults, students, children, clubs, church groups, etc.
- Overview of commonly used educational materials as well as how and when to use them.
  - Photography, blogging, brochure-writing and best practices for using them

**Recognition**
- Volunteers will be able to check off “Educational Materials” (or whatever subgroup) in the volunteer binder
- Volunteers who dedicate 10+ to developing and implementing educational materials and activities in the Nature Preserve will receive a special pin
APPENDIX F - Sample Log Sheet for Volunteer Binder

Name ________________________________ Phone: ________________________________

Email: ________________________________ Address: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Activity</th>
<th>Time In</th>
<th>Time Out</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
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Certifications

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<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Coordinator Signature</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Exhibits</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Recognition</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Materials</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Sample Log Sheet for Volunteer Binder
Source: Original work, ESPM 4041 Group 7