

MDC to Host Missouri Master Naturalist Training

The Loess Hills Chapter of Missouri Master Naturalists is taking applications for training classes and membership. Missouri Master Naturalists mix science with service by assisting with conservation and nature education programs. An orientation for new members or people interested in the program will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 17 at the Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) Northwest Regional Office in St. Joseph.

Training sessions will begin on Feb. 28. Sessions will include 40 hours of training, including classroom sessions from 6 to 9 p.m. on Tuesday evenings, and field trips on Saturdays. There is a \$100 fee for books and supplies that participants will keep. The Master Naturalist program is a partnership between the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), University of Missouri Extension and the volunteers who serve in the program.

Master Naturalists are given special training regarding nature in the region where chapters are based. Members help out at MDC public events, conduct education demonstrations, take field trips and hold social events tied to a shared love of nature. The Loess Hills chapter is currently working to plant or identify native trees and shrubs along the U.S. 36 highway right of way, said Mary Jo Ostenberg, chapter president. Many chapter members commute to activities from throughout northwest Missouri.

"We do a lot of work with schools, such as installing butterfly gardens," Ostenberg said. "We do nature interpretive hikes, volunteer at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, collect native plant seed at places like Dunn Ranch, birding surveys, and surveys for endangered species."

Participants for the training sessions must submit applications by Jan. 30. Applications are available at MDC's Northwest Regional Office, 701 James McCarthy Drive on the campus of Missouri Western State University. Many volunteer activities are suitable for those members with mobility challenges.

For more information, call 816-271-3100. Information about Missouri Master Naturalists programs is available at <http://extension.missouri.edu/masternaturalist/>.