

## Program Introduction

The Oregon Naturalist program (formerly Oregon Master Naturalist) is an OSU Extension Forestry and Natural Resources program, launched in 2009. The program was established to increase science and environmental literacy of all Oregonians and increase and improve environmental stewardship in Oregon. Utilizing engaging online and field courses, and the scenic places in which the program takes place, the program strives to foster an emotional connection between participants and place. Through certified Oregon Naturalists, the program builds volunteer capacity in programs, organizations, and agencies throughout Oregon. Educated and trained volunteers have a lasting impact on the communities in which they serve. As of January 2024, nearly 92,000 hours of volunteer service have been reported, contributing to over 200 different programs and projects across the state.

## Program Vision

We envision a statewide community of knowledgeable, passionate, and engaged naturalists working to connect Oregonians to the natural world.

## Program Mission Statement

The mission of the Oregon Naturalist program is to increase knowledge, sense of place, and connection to the natural environment for all Oregonians. The program provides transformative, science-based, experiential learning in outdoor settings, and encourages service that protects and supports ecosystems and community wellbeing in Oregon.

## Values

- **Shared learning** - We strive to co-create transformational learning opportunities for participants that are experiential, participatory, and fun! We invite emerging naturalists and instructors to share their own unique perspectives and learn outside, in nature, and in community with one another.
- **Credibility** - We incorporate the most rigorous science and research-based content into our coursework. Participants enjoy award-winning curriculum taught by high quality instructors and experts in the field. We acknowledge that there are many ways of knowing, and strive to include the wisdom and perspectives of indigenous leaders and teachers.
- **Service** - Our certified Oregon Naturalists volunteer thousands of hours to environmental and educational agencies, nonprofits and programs each year - giving back, taking action, and making a meaningful difference in the communities and ecoregions where they live.
- **Belonging** - We acknowledge that our state's history and the treatment of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color has shaped our collective experiences, and our ability to access and feel safe in nature. We are building an inclusive community, one in which naturalists of all backgrounds experience a sense of belonging and connection through nature and service.
- **Interconnectedness** - As naturalists, we see interconnectedness in all living things and the landscapes surrounding them. We strengthen our own connections to the natural world and each other to preserve Oregon's unique ecosystems for future generations. We work in collaboration with our instructors, community partners, and program participants because greater impact comes through partnership.

## Program Training Structure

The Oregon Naturalist Program has a two-part training curriculum format.

**Online Course** - The online course covers a broad range of natural history and natural resources conservation topics. It covers basics on ecoregions, geology, watersheds, ecology and wildlife management, forests, rangelands and climate change. This 12-week course occurs twice per year, beginning in January and September. The material is delivered entirely online via an interactive website. This course serves as the statewide core curriculum and the foundation for the field-based Ecoregion Courses. It is delivered via the Oregon State University Professional and

Continuing Education unit (PACE). Go to <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/oregon-naturalist/online-course> for the course topic outline and registration details.

**Ecoregion Field Courses** - Oregon is divided into 9 different ecologically distinct regions, or Ecoregions. These ecoregions serve as the basis for the Oregon Naturalist field courses. Building upon what is covered in the Online Course, field courses focus on specific ecological and earth processes, and the conservation and management of natural plant and animal communities within an ecoregion. Field courses spend most of the time outdoors visiting natural areas that illustrate these concepts. See <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/oregon-naturalist/ecoregion-field-courses> for further details. These courses are usually offered during the spring and summer months and are typically 6-8 days in length.

Once coursework has been completed, participants must complete volunteer service to officially become an Oregon Naturalist. Maintaining that designation requires ongoing education and volunteerism. The next page describes the certification process in detail.

## Oregon State University Land Acknowledgement

Vast tracks of Oregon acquired as public domain by the federal government were home to many cultures prior to our country's exploration, expansion and settlement. Due to the federal policies set in place to accommodate settlement, indigenous peoples were forcibly removed from their homeland to make way for the "public domain". Oregon State University recognizes that, because of the [theft and sell-off of these federal lands](#) (Land Grant), our campus is located within the traditional homelands of the Mary's River or Ampinefu Band of Kalapuya. Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 (Kalapuya etc. Treaty), Kalapuya people were forcibly removed to what are now the Grand Ronde and Siletz reservations in Western Oregon. Today, living descendants of these people are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon (<https://www.grandronde.org>) and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (<https://ctsi.nsn.us>).

To learn more, visit the [Native Lands](#) mapping site to find out upon whose lands you live, and watch the Oregon Public Broadcasting *Oregon Experience* episode "[Broken Treaties, An Oregon Experience](#)".

## Oregon Naturalist Program Land Acknowledgement

The Oregon Naturalist Program studies the vast and diverse ecosystems of Oregon. These landscapes shape the way we see and experience Oregon as naturalists. *We acknowledge that the places we visit as learners are the ancestral homelands of more than 60 distinct Indigenous tribes and bands representing many cultures and languages. Indigenous peoples have called Oregon home for time immemorial, and the varied and diverse landscapes and natural resources shaped who these people are. When white settlers came to Oregon, the original inhabitants were forcibly and violently removed from their lands to make way for settlement of the state. We acknowledge that Indigenous people are still here and thriving on their ancestral lands and honor their traditional ecological knowledge and stewardship of the Earth.* There are nine federally recognized tribal communities in Oregon. These communities actively manage and care for lands, including, among other things, for fisheries, wildlife, timber, recreation, tourism and economic development. *The Oregon Naturalist program is committed to an ongoing partnership and engagement with indigenous communities to create authentic learning experiences and teaching of this knowledge through our courses.*

Learn more about Oregon's nine federally recognized tribal communities [HERE](#).

## A note about Land Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgements are becoming commonplace at institutions like Oregon State University, given during various events and gatherings. They are meant to recognize the real harms inflicted upon indigenous peoples and their cultures and honor the lands that were stolen from the peoples upon which such events occur. Oregon State University, its Extension Service, and the Oregon Naturalist program have all created land acknowledgements. However, there are [legitimate criticisms](#) of such land acknowledgements as merely moral exhibitionism to make those in attendance and the institutions feel better. These statements almost never pledge work to correct the injustices or promise to give back the land or proclaim tangible efforts to give more voice to indigenous peoples. Real change takes time and commitment, not just words. I have chosen to include print versions of a version of the OSU land acknowledgement and the Oregon Naturalist "work-in-progress" land acknowledgement. There is much hard and difficult work to do, and it will take time. To the extent that the Oregon Naturalist Program can affect real change, our land acknowledgement is just a start to both honor the people and their traditional ecological knowledge that shaped the landscapes we study in our program and state our commitment to give voice to indigenous peoples and their cultures by engaging them directly in Oregon Naturalist coursework.

## How to Become a Certified Oregon Naturalist

Participants who wish to become an Oregon Naturalist must complete the previously discussed coursework, volunteer their time to various natural resource-based programs, groups or agencies, and maintain a certification status through ongoing volunteerism and continuing education. Here are the specific requirements:

1. **Complete the Online Course** (12-week commitment)
2. **Complete one Ecoregion Field Course** (6-8 all-day field classes, usually over several weekends or several months)
3. **Complete at least 40 hours of volunteer service** (within 1 full calendar year of completing all coursework; may start reporting any time after enrolling in an Oregon Naturalist course)
4. **Maintain certification on an annual basis** (This requirement does not start until a full year after you complete your initial certification requirements – includes at least 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education - topics pertaining to natural history and/or natural resources management)

## Types & Examples of Volunteer Service

**Education & Outreach** – If you like to speak to people or are always explaining nature to your friends and family, this type of volunteering might be for you! Volunteer to give an educational or interpretive program at a city, county, state and/or federal park. Lead nature hikes or help develop a visitor guide for a natural area. Many of these places depend on volunteers during peak visitor seasons.

**Community Science** – Are you a scientist at heart? Volunteer to collect data for a local group or national database. Wildlife and plant surveys, water quality monitoring, phenology and precipitation are some examples. These surveys are critical for maintaining and managing for biological diversity and tracking the impacts of climate change.

**Land Stewardship** – Are you a hands-on person? Volunteer to maintain a natural area by removing invasive species or restoring native vegetation. Or, perhaps you'd like to assist in maintaining a trail or other public recreation area. If you like to get your hands dirty, this might be your way of volunteering.

**Program Support** – More of a behind-the-scenes person? Nature centers, state and federal park visitor centers, and various natural resources groups need volunteers to serve on boards and committees, work on newsletters and websites, and even meet and greet the public at information stations. This is a great way to give back if you have physical limitations, want to hone new skills, or just want to contribute in a way that is less physically taxing.

## Types & Examples of Continuing Education

- **Other OSU Extension classes** – OSU offers dozens of classes on various natural resources topics. Programs include: Tree School, Master Woodland Manager, Citizen Fire Academy, various local Extension forestry classes on forest management and forest health, Oregon Natural Resources Education Program (ONREP), Master Gardener, Oregon Bee Atlas and Master Melittologist, etc. Contact your local County Extension Service office for more details.
- **Other Oregon Naturalist Ecoregions** – Why stop with just one Oregon Naturalist Ecoregion? You're encouraged to participate in other Ecoregion field courses as time and space allow.

- **Lectures, Field Trips, & Trainings** – Dozens of groups offer these kinds of learning opportunities, including “science pubs”, wildflower and birding hikes, skills-based trainings, etc. The Oregon Naturalist Program has several newsletters (Willamette Valley – Portland, Mid-Willamette Valley, and Columbia Gorge) that share opportunities like this.

## Personnel

- **Jason O’Brien** – Oregon Naturalist Program Statewide Coordinator
- **Alice Phillips** – North Willamette Valley (Portland Metro area) Program Coordinator, Washington County Extension Service (1/2-time FTE\* for Oregon Naturalist Program)
- **Ann Harris** – Columbia Gorge field course lead – Hood River & Wasco County Extension Service, Open Campus Education Coordinator
- **Jamie Doyle** – Oregon Coast field course lead - Coos and Curry County, Sea Grant Extension, Marine Resources Educator
- **Rachel Werling** – Klamath-Siskiyou Mountains field course lead\*\* – Jackson County Extension Service, Land Steward Coordinator

## Staying In Touch

The program currently has three active newsletters that provide monthly updates about continuing education and volunteer service opportunities, as well as contributions from fellow Oregon Naturalists. These newsletters serve the Portland area, the Mid-Willamette Valley, and the Columbia Gorge chapters of the Oregon Naturalist Program. Go to <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/oregon-naturalist/oregon-naturalist-chapters> to learn more and to sign up for each of the chapter newsletters.

## Equal Opportunity and Accessibility

Oregon State University strives to ensure that all educational programs, services, activities and materials we offer to the public are identified, developed, delivered, and evaluated in an inclusive, equitable, and socially just manner. OSU Extension Service educational programs, services, activities, and materials are available to all people.

Oregon State University Extension Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs, services, activities, and materials on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, familial/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, genetic information, veteran’s status, reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

All members of the university community may raise concerns of discrimination, harassment, and bullying with OSU’s [Office of Equal Opportunity and Access](#).

### Requests for accommodations

If you are in need of specific accommodations to participate in our programming, please contact [oregonnaturalist@oregonstate.edu](mailto:oregonnaturalist@oregonstate.edu).