

# Wyoming Naturalist Program



## Volunteer Handbook & Policy Guidelines

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[www.WyomingNaturalists.org](http://www.WyomingNaturalists.org)

# Index

<a href="#">Index.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Introduction.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Mission.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Who We Are.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Program Policies.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Expectations of WNP Participants.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Who is a Wyoming Naturalist or Certified Wyoming Naturalist?.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">How may the WNP or Certified WNP Title be Used?.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Certification Requirements.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Annual Meeting.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Fees.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Applicant Information.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Qualifications.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Age Limits.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Selection &amp; Acceptance.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Initial Program Fee.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Refund Policy.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Background Checks.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Confidentiality.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Basic Education Training.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Attendance.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Course Assessment &amp; Survey.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Advanced Education Training.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Approved Advanced Training Opportunities.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Reporting Advanced Training Hours.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Volunteering as a Wyoming Naturalist.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Approved Volunteer Activities.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Standard Behavior for Volunteers.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Volunteer Training.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Travel Time.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Reporting Volunteer Activities.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Contributions.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Additional Requirements of Partner Organizations.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Wyoming Game &amp; Fish Department.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, &amp; Trails.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Dismissal from WNP.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Ground for Dismissal from WNP.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Procedure for Dismissal.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Additional Program Policies.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>

[Nondiscrimination & Equal Opportunity Statement.....](#) 16  
[Volunteers Working with Youth.....](#) 16  
[Appendix I.....](#) 18  
[WYOMING NATURALIST PROGRAM: RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND USE OF IMAGE.....](#) 18

# Introduction

The Wyoming Naturalist Program (WNP), established in 2020, provides education and training to participants in biodiversity, ecology, conservation, management, and interpretation, so that they can become leaders in the effort to protect our natural resources and the special places where we live. The organization's website can be found at <http://wyomingnaturalists.wyobiodiversity.org/>.

## Mission

The mission of the WNP is to cultivate an educated community of volunteers to deliver environmental education and active stewardship to protect the state's natural resources. We will achieve our mission by bringing together a partnership of organizations in Wyoming to

- Provide training for WNP participants;
- Provide volunteer opportunities above and beyond those already available to the public;
- Provide partner organizations with a trained and educated volunteer force to assist with natural resource projects and outreach.

## Who We Are

The Wyoming Naturalist Program is coordinated by a committee of state agencies and non-profits that includes [Audubon Rockies](#), [Wyoming Game and Fish Department](#), [Wyoming State Parks](#), the [University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute](#), and [University of Wyoming Extension](#).

The WNP partners with many more federal, state and local agencies and non-government organizations to enhance trainings and bring a diversity of service opportunities to our participants.

# Program Policies

## Expectations of WNP Participants

Participants in the Wyoming Naturalist Program are expected to attend all required basic education training courses and field sessions. After completion of the basic training program, participants are expected to contribute 40 hours of volunteer service in the fields of environmental and conservation education, outreach, and stewardship in the state of Wyoming. After their first year in the program, participants are expected to complete 8 hours of advanced training each year in addition to their 40 hours of volunteer service.

## Who is a Wyoming Naturalist or Certified Wyoming Naturalist?

The title Wyoming Naturalist is awarded to individuals who complete the basic education program and are actively working towards certification by providing volunteer service. The title Certified Wyoming Naturalist is awarded to an individual who has completed the certification requirements and/or the certification renewal requirements, as described on page 4. Use of these titles are a privilege, and should only be used by persons who have completed, or are actively working towards completing, the certification requirements of the program after completion of the basic education training. Persons who complete the basic education program but do not participate in the service component of the program do not receive, and shall not claim, a title.

## How may the WNP or Certified WNP Title be Used?

The titles of Wyoming Naturalist and Certified Wyoming Naturalist are official titles that shall only be used by individuals who have completed, or are actively working towards completing, the certification requirements of the program after completion of the basic education training.

The Wyoming Naturalist Program is a public service program operated to provide accurate, unbiased natural resources information and education and/or accurate data collection. The aforementioned titles **may not** be identified with any particular political viewpoint and **may not** be used by groups or individuals as they participate in political advocacy. The titles are to be used **only** when doing unpaid volunteer work associated with and approved by the program. Any implied commercial endorsement resulting from use of the titles are improper. Therefore, the titles may not be used for commercial publicity or private business. Participating in a commercial activity, association with commercial products, or giving implied WNP endorsements to any product or place of business is a violation of WNP policies. Wyoming Naturalists and Certified Wyoming Naturalists may only identify themselves as such while volunteering in conjunction with official/approved WNP programs or activities, NOT for business or personal gain.

WNP education and experience may be given as qualifications when seeking employment; however once employed, credentials may not be displayed by the employee or the employer.

***Violation of the policy concerning the use of the title of Wyoming Naturalist or Certified Wyoming Naturalist is grounds for removing the certification or membership of an offending member. Such violations will be reviewed by the steering committee, who will make a final determination of the disciplinary actions to be imposed.***

Administrators of the Wyoming Naturalist Program and other members of state sponsoring agencies who are in a direct supporting role, *but who have not certified*, may show or wear the Wyoming Naturalist text and logo in supporting, promoting and/or advertising the program. However, they may not promote themselves as a Wyoming Naturalist or Certified Wyoming Naturalist unless they have completed their education and all volunteer requirements.

## Certification Requirements

To become a Certified Wyoming Naturalist, a participant must complete and achieve a minimum of the following:

- Completion of the basic training course. This typically includes 40 hours of combined classroom and field instruction. “Completion” means that attendance and assignments fulfill the expectations of the Program.
- 40 hours of approved volunteer service.
- To maintain annual certification, participants must complete 8 hours of advanced training and continue to contribute 40 hours of approved volunteer service each year.

All naturalists have one calendar, beginning January 1<sup>st</sup> and ending December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, to complete their 40 hours of volunteer service and their required training hours (completion of the basic training course for first time participants; 8 hours of advanced training each year after) in order to achieve or maintain their certification.

Each naturalist must submit at least one service project (of 1 hour minimum) into the hour entry system each calendar year in order to remain a participant in the Wyoming Naturalist Program. Failure to submit a service hour entry by December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year will result in removal from the WNP. Participants may re-enroll in the WNP by applying to and retaking the basic training (exceptions may be granted by the steering committee on a case-by-case basis).

## Annual Meeting

The WNP Annual Meeting is held each year in Casper, WY. The Annual Meeting is always the 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend in September. All members of the WNP are encouraged to attend. The Annual Meeting provides opportunities for attendees to complete WNP-approved advanced

training hours and gain service hours, meet members of other cohorts, and to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of WNP participants. recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the WNP participants.

## Fees

The initial program fee is \$200 (more information on the initial fee can be found in the applicant information section). Fees are not required for continued participation in the WNP. However, some events or trainings may require a fee or donation to attend. Fees will vary depending on the duration and venue of each event.

# Applicant Information

## Qualifications

Anyone over the age of eighteen (see below for youths age 14-17), can become a Wyoming Naturalist. No previous education or experience is needed—only a willingness to learn and to actively steward Wyoming’s lands. Preference is given to full-time Wyoming residents. Successful participants must have an interest in expanding knowledge in natural history, possess a willingness to learn and share knowledge with peers, and must be able to pass a background check.

## Age Limits

The WNP is geared toward adult participants. However, there are likely to be some highly motivated youth and parent-child teams who would fit into this program perfectly. Youth who are 14-17 years old may participate, provided that they (1) apply and enroll in the program using the application and enrollment procedures established by the program, and (2) be accompanied at trainings, field trips, and volunteer service events by a parent or other adult who is a WNP participant and who is directly responsible for them.

## Selection & Acceptance

Applications for the WNP open annually in the fall. The application may be found at <http://wyomingnaturalists.wyobiodiversity.org/index.php/apply> and must be completed in its entirety. The application form is closed after 40 applications are received or at the discretion of the steering committee. In the event that more information is needed after reviewing an application, interviews with that applicant may be conducted by phone, video conference, or email. Applicants will be informed by email as to the decision of acceptance or nonacceptance.

Applicants who are accepted into the program must do the following before the deadline provided to them in their acceptance email:

- Pay the initial program fee.
- Complete and pass a background check.
- Review and sign a liability waiver/photo release for Wyoming Naturalist Program.

## Initial Program Fee

The initial program fee per person is \$200. Acceptable payment includes on-line credit card payment and checks written to the University of Wyoming Biodiversity Institute. All mailed payments should be addressed to Wyoming Naturalist Program, Biodiversity Institute, University



of Wyoming Dept. 4304, 1000 E. University Ave., Laramie, WY 82071. Program fees are subject to change. Financial assistance is available.

## Refund Policy

A refund of the initial program fee will be granted until two weeks prior to the start of course. If the refund is requested after the initiation of the background check, applicants will be refunded the initial program fee minus the cost of the background check. Refunds requested less than two weeks before the start of the course may or may not be granted at the discretion of the steering committee. No refunds will be granted after the start of the course.

## Background Checks

Background checks will be required for all applicants accepted into the WNP. The background check fee is covered by the applicant's initial program fee. Certain volunteer agencies or organizations may require fingerprinting or an additional background check before a WNP participant can volunteer on their projects. Costs of additional background checks are the responsibility of the participants, unless covered by the agency or organization requiring them.

## Confidentiality

Your contact information, consisting of your email address and your town of residence, will be shared with other members of the WNP; this information will not be shared publicly. All other personal information received through the program's application and volunteer screening process are considered confidential information. The information provided will be kept confidential within the committee accepting and reviewing applications. Hard copies will be stored in a secured location.

It is the responsibility of the WNP participant to provide current contact information to be kept on file. To update your contact information, please contact a WNP steering committee member.

# Basic Education Training

## Attendance

Wyoming Naturalists must attend all classes. Absenteeism will be addressed in a case-to-case situation and will be reviewed by the WNP committee. Participants are responsible for informing the WNP committee in advance if classes will be missed, and for arranging for making up any missed classes. Attendance at the final session, held in person at Sinks Canyon in May, is required to complete the basic training. Inability to attend the in person final session must be communicated with the steering committee in advance. Failure to attend the in person final session or its makeup, the Wyoming BioBlitz, will result in removal from the program.

## Course Assessment & Survey

During the basic training courses, participants will be asked to complete assignments for each topic taught. These assignments may vary from making observations, writing a journal entry, presenting information in a later class, or doing some independent reading. This list is not exhaustive, and other assignment types may be used. Assignments are intended to expand and strengthen learning, and are an opportunity for the instructors to assess student learning and effort, and the efficacy of the program overall. Assignments are not graded or marked in the traditional sense. If an assignment cannot be completed as the guidelines for them are intended, please contact a WNP committee member and they will work with the participant to determine an appropriate alternative assignment.

WNP participants will be asked to complete a pre- and post-training survey provided by the program committee. Participants are not required to complete the survey; however, voluntary participation will be encouraged. The main purpose of the survey is to gather information that will be used to improve the program in the future. The surveys may be administered online or by paper. Additional surveys may be used throughout the year to collect information that will help improve and guide the program.

## Capstone Projects

Capstone projects are an optional undertaking during the basic training. Capstone projects serve as the crowning achievement or pinnacle of a learning experience; the capstone projects during the basic training are a way for naturalists-in-training to develop and utilize their naturalist skills to provide a service to other naturalists or their community.

Each year, naturalists-in-training will be presented with various capstone projects to choose from. Each project offers an opportunity to apply naturalist skills, with support from the committee throughout the process. Individual work is allowed, but group work is encouraged to build and strengthen the participant's naturalist network. Presentations of the capstone projects will take place during the in-person field experience in May, unless otherwise noted. The presentation is required in order to count the capstone project work

towards service hours. More information on service hours derived from capstone projects can be found in the Reporting Volunteer Activities section.

# Advanced Education Training

## Approved Advanced Training Opportunities

To maintain annual certification, WNP participants must complete eight hours of advanced training and 40 hours of volunteer service each year. WNP participants are encouraged to take advantage of trainings offered by programs other than the WNP. However, only 4 hours of non-WNP training may be applied towards the required eight hours of advanced training each year. Non-WNP advanced trainings must meet the requirements found under the [Resources folder](#) on the WNP website in order to qualify as advanced trainings. Trainings that are required for a volunteer service project count towards volunteer hours, not advanced training hours, in most cases.

## Reporting Advanced Training Hours

After the completion of an advanced training course, WNP participants must record their hours in Volgistics. The recording and tracking of advanced training hours is the responsibility of the participant.

# Volunteering as a Wyoming Naturalist

## Approved Volunteer Activities

Volunteer service must be unpaid, organized by an agency or non-profit NGO, and have a direct or indirect impact on Wyoming wildlife or wildlands. Service can be classified as stewardship, education and outreach, community science, or program support. See this [simple breakdown](#) of what qualifies for service hours.

## Standard Behavior for Volunteers

Volunteers shall at all times:

- Uphold the commitment made to the program.
- Be considerate and respect others' points of view.
- Conduct themselves appropriately to context and setting at all times.
- Accept responsibility for actions taken.
- Abstain from alcohol and controlled substances while acting as a WNP volunteer or while representing the program.
- Not abuse the program's authority, certification, or membership.
- Keep accurate records of volunteer service, training, and report these to the appropriate authorities of the Wyoming Naturalist Program.
- Strictly follow all program rules, regulations, and policies.
- Attend all volunteer commitments. In the event that a volunteer is not able to attend their volunteer commitment, they must contact the volunteer supervisor in the organization they are volunteering with (this is separate from the WNP committee) in advance of their missed commitments.

## Volunteer Training

WNP volunteers are expected to attend all training sessions required by the agency sponsoring the service opportunity. In most cases, training may be included in volunteer hours. In some cases, training may be applied towards advanced training requirements. Volunteers are responsible for contacting WNP staff to determine which category is appropriate, and for recording hours correctly.

## Reporting Volunteer Activities

WNP volunteers must record all volunteer hours in Volgistics. The recording and tracking of the volunteer hours is the responsibility of the participant. Training and assistance on the use of this program will be provided. In order to remain an active participant in the WNP, individuals

must record at least 1 volunteer event per year. Individuals who do not meet this requirement may be removed from the WNP email list, and may no longer claim the title of Wyoming Naturalist.

### *Capstone Projects*

Participants in the basic training may choose to participate in a capstone project. Capstone project participants can report up to 10 hours of volunteer service for their work on the capstone project, if they present their capstone project and their work-to-date at the final class of the basic training (the May field weekend). If additional work after the May presentation is needed to finish and implement the capstone project, those hours may be recorded as service hours.

### *Wyoming BioBlitz*

On average, attendance at the Wyoming BioBlitz and all of its advanced trainings and surveys will provide a naturalist with 4 hours of advanced training and 8 hours of volunteer hours (for their participation in data collection during the BioBlitz surveys). Additional volunteer time may be counted if the naturalist leads workshops or assists with the registration table or cooking.

### *Travel Time*

For WNP volunteers whose participation in a service project requires travel outside of their town of residence, volunteers should record the actual travel time as part of their reported volunteer hours. Volunteers will also need to provide the total distance traveled when reporting their volunteer hours. If the service project requires camping due to a long hike to reach the project site, volunteers may also count 8 hours per night of camping towards their volunteer hours.

## Contributions

Wyoming Naturalists and Certified Wyoming Naturalists may not charge fees for talks, slide presentations, demonstrations, etc while serving volunteer hours. As a volunteer, they may only accept donations for these activities *on behalf of the program*. Naturalists who know ahead of time that a donation will be made should contact the Steering Committee. The donation can be made online at <https://www.givecampus.com/campaigns/50560/donations/new>. See Course Fees section above for the mailing address for all mailed donations. These gifts will be used to aid the program in the furtherance of the WNP mission.

If giving talks or classes while not volunteering for the WNP or using the title, the member may accept payment.

## Additional Requirements of Partner Organizations

### Wyoming Game & Fish Department

Wyoming Naturalists who choose to provide service to the Wyoming Game and Fish

Department (WGFD) are subject to all WGFD volunteer requirements, including an additional background check and completion of WGFD's Volunteer Service Agreement.

### **Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, & Trails**

Volunteers serving Wyoming State Parks (WSP) must complete the Park's Volunteer Agreement and keep a WSP timesheet (in addition to logging WNP volunteer hours) to be submitted to the Park supervisor, or as instructed by the Park supervisor.



# Dismissal from WNP

## Ground for Dismissal from WNP

Wyoming Naturalist and Certified Wyoming Naturalist volunteers can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the WNP committee, if actions taken by the participant are in conflict with the WNP's mission or objectives. Any WNP participant who does not complete the basic training or who does not fulfill the service hour requirements each calendar year will be removed from the WNP. Notice of dismissal will be added to the volunteer's confidential file. Violation of any of the compliance standards may be means for immediate dismissal.

## Procedure for Dismissal

The volunteer will be approached and given a warning that their actions are not in accordance with the WNP's mission or objectives. Depending on the circumstances, this step may be revoked.

The volunteer will be notified in writing of their dismissal by the program's committee. This form must be signed and approved by two active members of the committee.

## Additional Program Policies

All participants, instructors, or administrators of the Wyoming Naturalist Program shall abide by all University of Wyoming Regulations, Standard Administrative Policies and Procedures, found at <http://www.uwyo.edu/regs-policies/index.html>, and the University Policies as outlined in the University of Wyoming Employee Handbook, found at <https://www.uwyo.edu/hr/>, regardless of University employment status.

## Nondiscrimination & Equal Opportunity Statement

The Wyoming Naturalist Program is conducted in a manner that assures equal opportunity for all, based solely on individual merit and fitness of applicants and employees, related to specific jobs and without regard to age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by the federal and/or state law.

WNP prohibits discrimination and promotes affirmative action for its participants and volunteers as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other applicable laws.

**The University is committed to equal opportunity for all persons in all facets of the University's operations and is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer. The University will provide all applicants for admissions, employment and all University employees with equal opportunity without regard to race, gender, religion, color, national origin, disability, age, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity, creed, ancestry, political belief, any other applicable protected category, or participation in any protected activity. The University ensures non-discriminatory practices in all matters relating to its education programs and activities and extends the same non-discriminatory practices to recruiting, hiring, training, compensation, benefits, promotions, demotions, transfers, and all other terms and conditions of employment.**

## Volunteers Working with Youth

In order to protect young students from those who would victimize them and protect volunteers from unwarranted allegations of abuse, all volunteers will adhere to the following policy:

**Suspected abuse** - If a volunteer suspects that any student has been subject to physical, mental or sexual abuse (regardless of where it may have occurred), they must report it immediately to their local law enforcement office.

**Two-deep supervision** - Two adults (volunteers and/or parents) must be present at all volunteer activities.

**No one-on-one contact** - One-on-one contact between a volunteer and a student is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, such as reviews and evaluations, the meeting is to be conducted in the full view of other people.

**Respect of Privacy** - Volunteers must respect the privacy of all participants in situations such as restroom breaks and may intrude only to the extent that health and safety requires. Volunteers need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

**Proper Preparation for Risk** – Activities with elements of risk should never be undertaken without proper preparation, equipment, clothing, supervision, and safety measures.

**Constructive Discipline** – Discipline used during an activity shall be constructive and reflect values of the program (i.e. respect, courtesy, etc.). Only in the case of self-defense or to prohibit the physical harm of others shall an instructor use physical force.

**Sexual Harassment and Bullying** – No sexual harassment or bullying, even between students, is to be tolerated. Volunteers who observe or are made aware of any inappropriate behavior involving other volunteers or students are to intervene and talk to the offending person. They are to report the incident to the volunteer coordinator and program director and/or committee member at the earliest time possible.

## WYOMING NATURALIST PROGRAM: RELEASE OF LIABILITY AND USE OF IMAGE

In consideration of my participation in the Wyoming Naturalist Program (“the Program”), I state and agree as follows:

I agree and understand that recordings, which may include my image, appearance, voice, name and/or biographical material (“My Likeness”) may be made and/or produced at the Program. I hereby give the Program, the University of Wyoming, and partner organizations permission to use, reproduce, duplicate, broadcast and distribute My Likeness, in any and all media, including but not limited to the Internet, whether now known or hereafter devised, in perpetuity. I agree that I have no claim for compensation, that My Likeness may be used in commercial or advertising materials, that My Likeness may be edited by the Program, the University of Wyoming and partner organization’s sole discretion, and that I waive any right to inspect or approve the finished version.

I understand that my participation in the Program may involve sustained strenuous physical activity. I will only choose to participate in such activities if I am in good health and am aware of no physical problem or condition that will limit or interfere with my ability to participate. I know that I can opt out of these strenuous activities.

I agree that I am participating in the Program at my own risk, and acknowledge that the Program has made no warranty or representation, expressed or implied, regarding the safety of conducting the Program.

**I expressly release and hold harmless the Wyoming Naturalist Program, and the University of Wyoming and its officers, directors, employees, agents, licensees, successors and assigns from and for any and all claims, demands, actions and causes of action whatsoever for (i) libel, defamation, invasion of privacy or right of publicity arising from the Program’s use or alteration of My Likeness (or any part thereof); or (ii) any loss, damage or injury to person or to property suffered or incurred by me in connection with the Program or any aspect of it, including, but not limited to, any transportation arranged by, paid for or provided by the Program.**

This release shall be binding upon me and my heirs, next of kin, executors, administrators, and assigns. By signing below, I acknowledge that I have thoroughly read and understand this form and that the statements I have made are all true.

### Participant Information:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Name (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Name (sign)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Emergency Contact Information:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Emergency Contact Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Emergency Contact Phone Number