

# Forest Preserve District of Cook County

## Accreditation Program and Policy for Land Management Stewards

April 22, 2002

The Department of Resource Management (DRM), through its Volunteer Resources Section, administers the following accreditation program in response to an amendment to the 2002 Executive Budget Recommendation by the Board of Forest Preserve Commissioners “to establish an accreditation program and policy for the Land Management Stewards that will allow Accredited Site Stewards to supervise volunteer land management workdays at restoration sites”.

### GENERAL CONCEPTS

Land management as a policy and program of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County is implemented by the Department of Resource Management. Volunteers, working on ecosystem management sites under the direction of Volunteer Resources Section staff and within the Land Management Guidelines, provide valuable unpaid services that augment the work of paid District staff

As a means of furthering the District goals of ecosystem management, the Department of Resource Management undertakes the training and certification of qualified volunteer stewards to supervise Resource Management Volunteers. Appropriate instruction programs are offered by and/or through the District for this purpose. These volunteer stewards, once fully trained and determined competent in the required subjects, are accredited and called *Master Stewards* (MS).

Accredited Master Stewards participate in an extended learning process, the Stewards' Expertise Enrichment and Development Program (SEED), as part of the District's continuing education effort to advance knowledge regarding ecosystem management.

Master Stewards are authorized to oversee volunteer workdays at any ecosystem management site throughout the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Accreditation is renewable every three years. Accreditation renewal is be automatic if the MS has kept up all requirements of accreditation. However, the District may choose not to renew accreditation for cause.

District staff continues to monitor all ecosystem management site activities. Site Stewards, prior to workdays, confer with Resource Management staff as to intended workday objectives. Site Stewards and Master Stewards ensure that workday reports are submitted to the Volunteer Coordinator no later than three (3) days after each workday. At their discretion, Department of Resource Management staff site check work accomplished as indicated on the Workday Report. DRM staff participates in workdays whenever possible in order to maintain a close working relationship with volunteers.

## ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

A qualified volunteer must pass, demonstrate knowledge of, or participate in, the following in order to be successful as a Master Steward candidate.

1. Pass a written test demonstrating thorough knowledge and understanding of the Land Management Guidelines governing restoration activities and the District requirements regarding the burning of brush piles.
2. Demonstrate the ability to identify the target species of ecosystem management and be able to differentiate said species from similar non-target species to the Director, Department of Resource Management or his designate (*ie.* Resource Ecologists, Nature Center Directors, Assistant Directors, or other qualified Department of Resource Management staff).
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the proper use of herbicides within State of Illinois and District regulations to Department of Resource Management staff holding a valid State of Illinois Herbicide Applicator's License. Even if the volunteer holds a current State of Illinois Herbicide Applicator's License, he or she must demonstrate an understanding of District herbicide regulations.
4. Participate in the following District sponsored seminars dealing with:
  - safety and risk management;
  - being a good representative of the District;
  - correct handling and reporting of witnessed illegal activity; and
  - instruction on identifying the presence of Asian long-horned beetles and Gypsy moths.
5. A further requirement, after a Master Steward becomes accredited, is to participate in the SEED (Stewards' Expertise Enrichment and Development) Program seminars. Some of the SEED seminars will be mandatory during the Master Steward's initial three-year term; other SEED seminars will be elective.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES of the MASTER STEWARD**

The Master Steward will execute the following responsibilities during his or her tenure.

1. During volunteer workdays:
  - ensure that all volunteer activities on ecosystem management sites are performed in a safe and careful manner;
  - ensure that all activities carried out by volunteers are in accordance with the Land Management Guidelines;
  - ensure that all volunteer activities are approved and listed on the current Management Plan;
  - ensure that proper brush pile burning procedures are followed; and
  - ensure that herbicide is used only in accordance with all State and District regulations.
2. Ensure that the Site Steward completes and files the requisite workday paperwork in a timely fashion, no later than three (3) days after each workday.
3. Demonstrate the judgment and human relation skills required to be a good representative of the District to the public, to work well with District staff and to have a positive impact on volunteers.
4. Participate in the Stewards' Expertise Enrichment and Development (SEED) Program, the District's ongoing education plan for volunteer stewards. Certain training seminars are required during the Master Steward's initial three-year term; other seminars are elective.

Mandatory (during the initial three-year term) SEED Program seminars include, but are not limited to:

- human resource management, with topics to include public outreach, the District's sexual harassment policy and conflict resolution; and
- the history of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.

Elective SEED Program seminars may include, but are not be limited to:

- advanced plant identification;
- bird identification;
- first aid and CPR;
- lake and pond ecosystems;
- wetlands; and
- erosion control.

The Environmental Education Workshops, field study classes offered to teachers at Camp Sagawau Environmental Education Center, is also available to interested Master Stewards as part of the SEED Program.

## PROCESS of ACCREDITATION

1. Volunteer writes letter of application to the Department of Resource Management Volunteer Coordinator (VC).
2. Applicant completes form detailing name, address, phone and email information; basic medical information; emergency contact information; and a basic resume. Such information will be kept confidential and secure.
3. VC directs applicant to the Director of the nearest Nature Center, or other appropriate DRM staff, who makes arrangements for applicant to complete Accreditation Requirements 1, 2 and 3.
4. Involved Nature Center Director, or other DRM staffer, informs VC of completion of first three requirements and turns over test materials and any comments or observations.
5. VC informs applicant of schedule of required seminars listed in Accreditation Requirement 4. If schedule permits, applicant may attend these seminars concurrently with completion process of first three requirements.
6. VC enters dates of completion on the Accreditation Requirement form next to each required item. Once form is complete, VC forwards it along with test materials, comments of Nature Center Director and his own comments to the Director of the Department of Resource Management.
7. Director of the Department of Resource Management reviews applicant's information and approves or disapproves the volunteer's application to become a Master Steward.
8. If approved, the Director of the Department of Resource Management signs a *Certificate of Accreditation* for the successful applicant.
9. The newly accredited steward receives the Certificate of Accreditation, signs an acknowledgement of risk statement and officially becomes a Master Steward.
10. Unsuccessful candidates are welcome to request a meeting with the VC, and/or Director of the Department of the Resource Management, to discuss outcomes.

## **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS in the MASTER STEWARD PROGRAM**

Master Stewards are a respected part of the Department of Resource Management team and are expected to communicate fully and honestly with District staff. Similarly, Master Stewards are to communicate accurate information in a positive manner to members of the public. Master Stewards are expected to faithfully execute all of the responsibilities outlined in the above section, *Responsibilities of the Master Steward*.

Failure to meet these requirements may be addressed by Land Management staff, with the approval of the Director of the Department of Resource Management, in the following ways:

- a verbal warning; or in the case of repeated incidents,
- a written warning and requisite re-training.

In the case of a pattern of incidents or any of the following violations:

- willful violation of the Land Management Guidelines;
- repeated violation of the Land Management Guidelines after the initial violations have been brought to the attention of the Master Steward;
- knowingly conducting brush pile burning in a manner unsafe to the public or in violation of the District's brush pile burn regulations;
- misuse of herbicide that threatens human or environmental safety;
- willfully or repeatedly conducting land management activities in a manner threatening to public safety;
- willful falsification of documents; and
- willful conduct of land management activities not contained in the Management Plans.

Corrective action may include the following:

- Suspension of duties of the subject Master Steward for a stated period of time followed by a possible probationary period upon reinstatement.
- Expulsion from the Master Stewards Program or refusal to re-accredit.
- Direct supervision of ecosystem management activities on subject site by District staff
- Suspension of volunteer activities at subject ecosystem management Site.

Such corrective actions will occur only as a result of a discussion among the subject Master Steward, Volunteer Coordinator, the Director and/or Assistant Director of DRM, other staff as necessary, and a representative Master Steward.

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County retains the authority to terminate its relationship with any volunteer at any time for cause.