

Note that the goal of this internship program is to foster engaged/applied research and build bridges across campus and throughout Extension.

Extension Internship Proposal:

Developing a Volunteer Naturalist Program for Extension in Colorado

Faculty Mentor: Seth Davis, Warner College of Natural Resources and Natural Resources PRU co-leader

Extension Mentor: Kerri Rollins, Tim Aston, Lisa Mason and a Core Team that is working on this including leaders of the Natural Resources PRU

Region: Successful completion of this overall project will make this program available to Extension statewide, however two pilot counties (Adams and Arapahoe) have already been identified and are located in the Front Range Region of Extension. The majority of work on the project can take place remotely.

Internship scope, goals and objectives for 2021:

1. Research, evaluate and recommend existing Extension Naturalist Program curricula content and suitability for Colorado biomes and update or create additional content as needed using current, research-based information from the Warner College of Natural Resources
2. Develop citizen science and field activities that can be integrated into the curriculum for engaged learning
3. Design the curriculum so that it can be delivered online and/or in-person using resources from CSU Extended Campus if applicable

How was this applied research project identified? Colorado is a leader within the outdoor industry, boasting scenic beauty and abundant wildlife for visitors and residents alike to enjoy throughout the year. With the onset of COVID, it is well documented that people are turning more to the outdoor experience for physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, creating an increased need for educational opportunities in the outdoors.

CSU Extension has successfully offered volunteer engagement programs such as Master Gardener and Native Plant Master, leaving space for a Volunteer Naturalist program. These programs are known to engage community through volunteerism and programming for the general public, as well as generate funds that can supplement budgets. Additionally, many County Extension Offices are housed within their county's parks and open space departments. Many of these departments aspire to have an environmental education component, such as a Volunteer Naturalist Program, that can engage their communities through educational talks, hikes and trailhead tables. It makes sense that the counties see Extension being able to fill this role, and in fact there are 2 front Range counties ready to pilot this once curriculum and training is developed. This project would eventually seek to create online curriculum in partnership with CSU Online as well.

Stakeholder groups the intern would work with: Warner College of Natural Resources staff; Front Range Region of Extension, specifically staff from Adams and Arapahoe counties; Extension Natural Resources PRU leadership; a core team of interested parties from Extension from around the state who are excited about this opportunity and want to be involved.

Student learning outcomes and opportunities for professional development: The successful intern will learn how to develop a curriculum for Extension programs, as well as develop new relationships with Extension professionals. Professional development could include eExtension

webinars from other states about their Naturalist Programs, and technical resources from WCNR.

Specific mentor styles to share with interns? While the mentors will oversee the internship, there is a group of interested Extension professionals that will have been convening that will also provide insights about how best to integrate this program into Extension, as well as experience from the field.

Travel funds or opportunities to provide students with housing? This internship will not provide housing. Travel funds could be supplied if needed through the Front Range Region.