

2018 Steward Survey Summary Report

Executive Summary

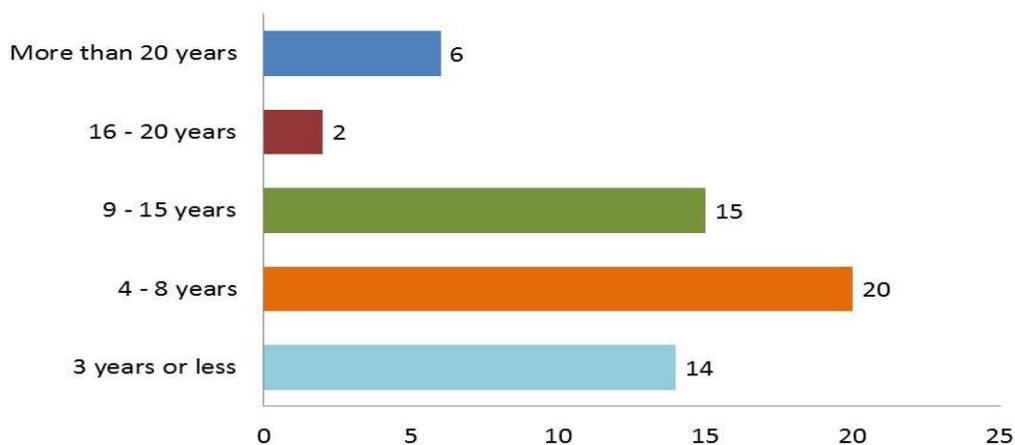
- Of the 54 stewards who took the survey, the largest cohort of stewards have volunteered for 4 to 8 years
- Stewards love being out in nature and the opportunities to learn about their sanctuary
- Stewards least like reporting and paperwork
- Stewards would like more communication from MNA and more information specific to their sanctuary
- Not every steward wants training, but of those that do, basic plant identification, controlling invasives, finding boundaries and orientation to MNA's steward program are of greatest interest
- Regional training or gatherings with other stewards is the preferred means to learn more
- Special steward hats or t-shirts are great but there are many ways MNA can recognize stewards

Background

Approximately 100 MNA stewards were asked to complete an online survey in December 2017 and January 2018 to help MNA gauge steps it might take to strengthen and improve this vital volunteer program. Couples who jointly steward the same sanctuary were asked to submit one response. We greatly appreciate all the stewards who took the time to take the survey.

In total, 54 responded and their answers are summarized by question below. Question 1 pertained to contact information and is not included here. It was an optional question to give stewards the chance to respond anonymously. There were seven anonymous responses in total.

Q2: About how long have you been an MNA Steward?



The largest cohort of stewards have volunteered for 4 to 8 years. (Three individuals gave two responses to this question, hence a total of 57.)

Q3: What do you believe is the essential role of MNA?

Almost all respondents mentioned protecting land or habitat. A few mentioned education as an important role for MNA. About half of the respondents (21) answered with a statement that noted MNA's emphasis on rare species or a variation using terms such as "critical plant and animal environments", "protecting and locally, rare and fragile habitats, "to secure, maintain and protect sensitive habitat". The remaining responses were more general, e.g. "protecting significant tracts of land from development", "protecting habitat", or "preserving land and water in a natural condition."

Q4: What do you believe is the essential role of an MNA Steward?

The vast majority of respondents (40) characterized their role as monitoring (including annual reporting), maintaining, stewarding, caretaking, protecting, or being the "eyes and ears" of the sanctuary to make certain it is being used appropriately, that it is free from dumping/invasive species, that it is not being destroyed, or other purposes. Other responses included:

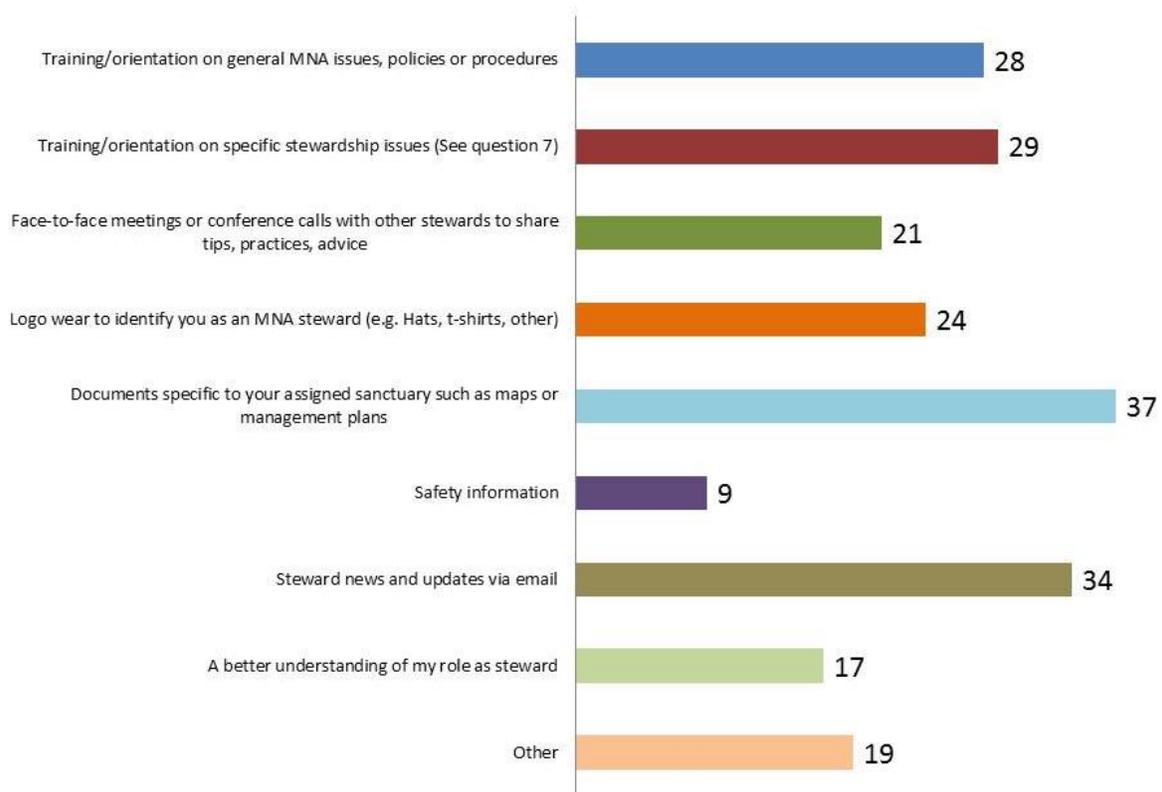
- Promoting care of sanctuaries; being an advocate for tasks necessary to sustain or move forward the sanctuary's conservation
- Facilitating the general public's ability to enjoy the preserves; getting people involved; education of the public to value natural areas and appreciate ecological systems
- Carrying out the goals or management plans of the sanctuary; assisting staff; participating in workdays or aid in planning of days
- Having input regarding management decisions
- Getting to know the land; educating ourselves on our sanctuaries and the plants, animals, ecosystems there.

Q5: What do you like best about being a steward? What do you like least?

Some of the many things respondents liked about being a steward are getting outside in nature, making a difference for an important cause, interacting with volunteers, teaching others, learning about nature and stewardship, supporting MNA's mission (beyond financial contributions), applying skills and experience, and feeling ownership of the sanctuary.

Not surprisingly, paperwork and reporting were the things stewards liked least. Other items listed included working outdoors in hot weather and biting insects, not being able to volunteer more given distance to sanctuary or lack of time, human impacts (garbage, destruction of similar habitat outside of the sanctuary), invasive species, differing views about restoration needs, lack of resources for some preserves, and lack of knowledge about identifying sanctuary boundaries or the plants/animals within.

Q6: Of the following, what might help you the most as an MNA volunteer steward?



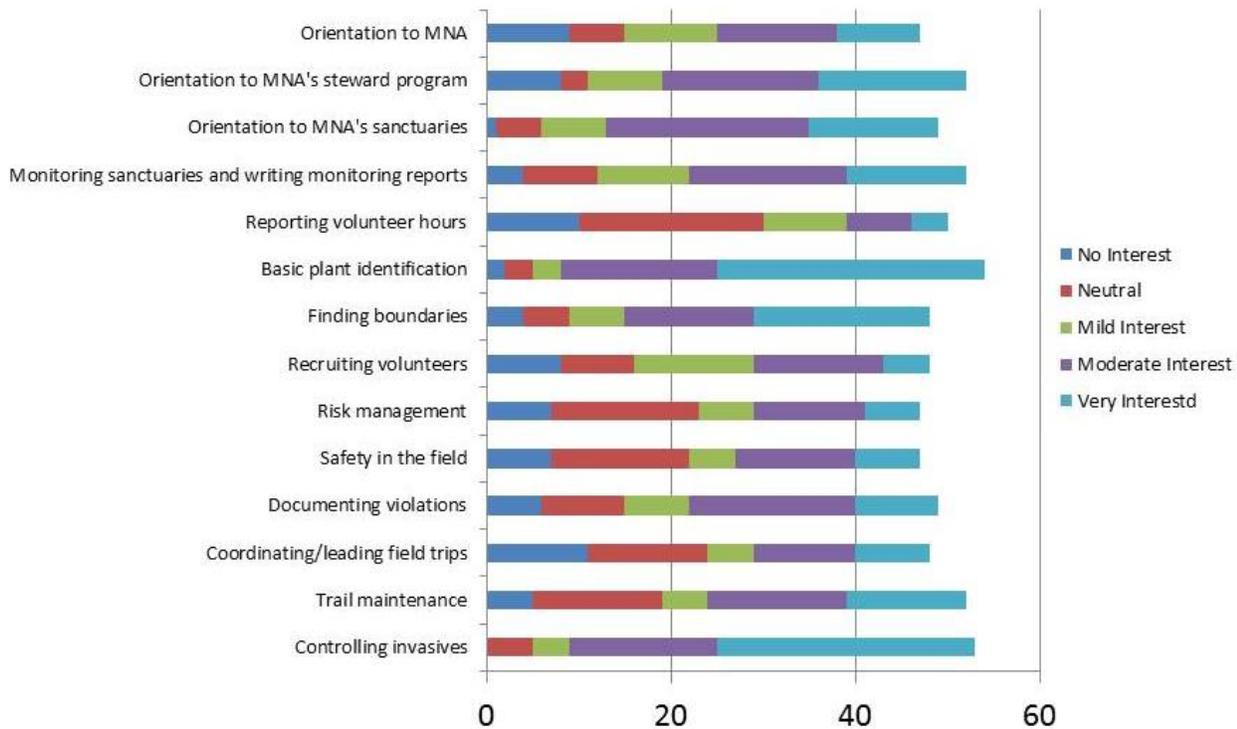
Respondents could select more than one response to Question 6. “Documents specific to your assigned sanctuary such as maps or management plans”, “Steward news and updates via email” and “Training/orientation on specific stewardship issues” were the top selections. Additional suggestions included:

Communications/Assistance Needs: Reminders of when to submit monitoring reports; help in requesting volunteer support; more workday volunteer help; awareness of other activities on the sanctuary; proper orientation/training of interns who may be put in charge of volunteers; steward news & updates with tips, practices, advice, etc. ; respect for my abilities and no micromanagement; happy with the way things are

Training/Information Needs: Plant identification; boundary marking; other stewardship issues such as identifying invasives; first-aid (for trip leaders); provide on-line only, no time for travel or class; restoration plans for sanctuaries; tour the sanctuary with someone knowledgeable

Identification/Other: Official-looking, laminated identification cards; temporary or removable armband identifying as MNA volunteer; option to camp in very remote preserves with demonstrated practice of no trace camping; obtain records of volunteer hours that can be used to leverage company donations;

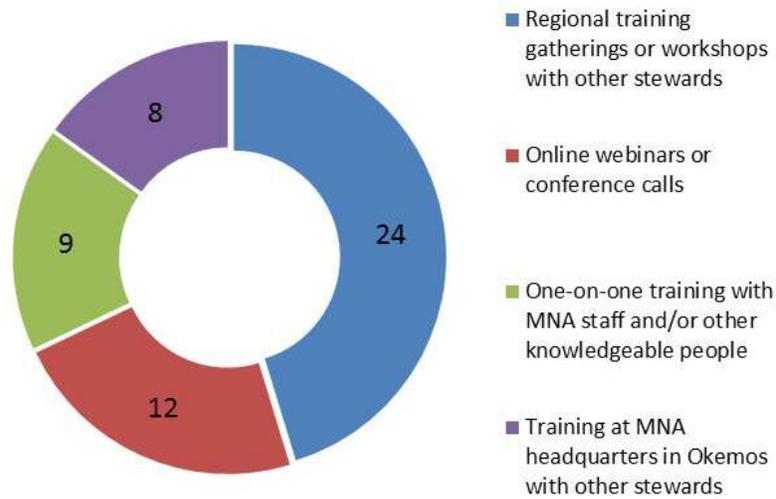
Q7 Are there any specific training/discussion topics that might be of interest to you? Please rank all the options on a scale from no interest to very interested.



Not all stewards are interested in training but of those who are, “Basic plant identification”, “Controlling invasives”, and “Finding boundaries” are of the greatest interest. Additional feedback included the following:

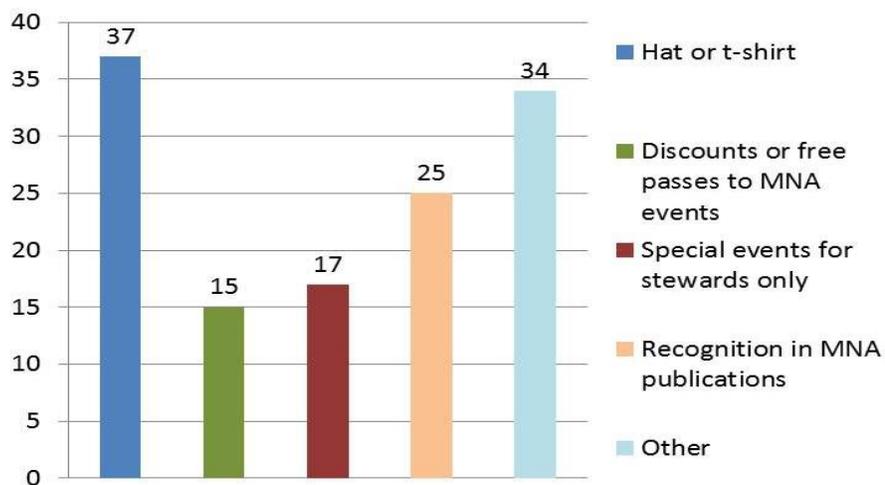
- Low or neutral interest may have been selected for a topic because that is an area of expertise
- Controlling invasives on neighboring properties
- Procedures for using sanctuary for research
- Restoration
- How to get repairs done and signage replaced as needed
- Assistance for leading special topic trips, such as mileage
- Info about philosophy and strategy behind land acquisition and partnerships

Q8 What is your preferred format to learn more?



“Regional training gatherings or workshops with other stewards” was the clear favorite but, according to comments on this question, that is not possible for everyone due to distance or other factors. Stewards enjoy meeting other staff and other stewards, but there is also interest in being able to learn on one’s own through online documents, videos, and electronic distribution of written materials.

Q9 Besides a complimentary membership, how can MNA best recognize you as a volunteer and your contributions as a steward?



“Hat or t-shirt” was the most popular response, followed by other ideas that included: identification badge or card, vehicle cling, small lapel pin reflecting hours of service, broad-brimmed hat. More than one person stated that being a steward is its own reward and no recognition is necessary. Another asked that MNA listen to steward ideas and allow for implementation as a means of recognizing contributions. Camping privileges following set guidelines and bringing back the magazine with a focus on sanctuaries were also mentioned. One steward summed it up this way:

I think all these ways are good to motivate stewards and volunteers. We need to become a unified group to save our environment. We need to let others know about us, and at times, to be invited to some of our activities.

Q10 What other suggestions or ideas do you have that would help you and MNA improve its steward program?

MNA Stewardship Structure and Support: Hire and keep more regional stewardship organizers to both develop relationships with stewards and to fulfill organizational goals; need regular communication, perhaps more contact via email or mailed newsletter; reminders of workdays and advance notice of other activities happening at the sanctuary; stronger sense of support for those stewards who are more isolated; concise package of specific sanctuary information; recognize and appreciate skills and experience

Steward Roles and Responsibilities: Better understanding of steward role and guidelines; a steward handbook or guidebook would be helpful, both print and on website; badge of honor or identifier such as a hat

Knowledge and Training: Need more specific information about the sanctuary; herbicide training; plant identification; communicate other opportunities to learn, volunteer, and workdays in specific areas; create an exchange program among stewards to do field work and learn from others; opportunities to discuss issues and learn from other stewards by reading their reports or hearing best practices; steward directory to facilitate exchange of tips and ideas or to reach out to other stewards to visit sanctuaries when I travel; determine stewards' skills/expertise and how best they can help

Monitoring/Reporting: Easier formats for reporting, including online forms

Education and Outreach: Showcase stewardship/sanctuaries in the magazine; offer a way to contribute colorful fact sheet for sanctuary; provide accurate location/directions online; encourage use of guides and citizen science apps such as eBird, NestWatch, Herp Atlas, MichiganFlora.net, etc.; suggest outreach opportunities (schools, clubs, municipal/governmental); solicit/commission artwork/photos for magazine/publications/website both from steward and outreach partners; offer statistical comparisons of rank between sanctuaries by size, species, habitat, etc.; post volunteer opportunities as we need more people to remove invasives