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## Third Update on COVID-19 for Chapter Boards

Hello VMN volunteer

*You are getting this message because you are a board member of a VMN chapter.*

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Dear VMN chapter board members,

A number of chapters have reached out to me to ask what the Governor's Executive Orders [55](#) and [53](#) mean for continuing VMN volunteer service. I hope that this message will help answer your questions. I am also going to send it to the VMS this afternoon, so every VMN volunteer should receive it.

In the orders, "engaging in outdoor activity" is a legitimate reason to leave home. We are all asked, however, to limit excursions from home as much as possible, no matter the reason for going out, so please keep that in mind as you are choosing what to do and where to go.

**We have the following general guidelines for VMN volunteer service:**

- Be sure that your site is open for outdoor activity. Many sites and trailheads are closed. If it is closed, you should not be going there.
- If your project is in partnership with another organization (e.g., State Parks, The Nature Conservancy, Soil and Water Conservation District, etc.), please double-check that they want you to be doing that project right now. Some organizations have suspended volunteer activities, even if they can be done individually. For example, the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club has suspended all trail maintenance for the trails they maintain and VCE has suspended all in-person 4-H programming.
- Adhere to distancing guidelines, meaning that you must not gather in groups of more than ten individuals, and you must stay at least 6 feet apart from other individuals who are not part of your household. Ideally, stick to activities that you can do on your own, so long as you are in a safe place for that.
- To reduce crowding at the trails and parks that are still open, try to visit at off-peak times. If the parking lot looks crowded, choose a different location. The better we can all adhere to this, the more likely it is that parks will be able to remain open. VMNs should be exemplary in this regard.
- Do not share equipment such as clipboards, writing utensils, binoculars, etc. with anyone outside of your household.
- Be understanding of fellow VMN volunteers who prefer to remain at home and do not want to go out for outdoor activities. Do not pressure anyone to participate, even if they had previously made a commitment to a project. Many people may have more critical things on their mind, and they may prefer to set their VMN service to the side for now.
- Avoid higher risk activities. We do not need to add to the EMS workload.

- If you are a new VMN trainee whose training course was cancelled, please be aware that we will be developing additional guidelines for you over the next couple of weeks. We are gathering information from our chapters that had spring trainings, and we will be using that information to come up with guidelines for the kinds of activities the partially-trained trainees are allowed to do between now and when their courses resume. For now, just assume that what we have written so far applies to you.

**Examples of VMN service projects that seem allowable *if done following the general guidelines above:***

- Monitoring bluebird boxes
- Making wildlife observations for various defined projects (e.g., Breeding Bird Atlas counts)
- Phenology monitoring for projects like Nature's Notebook
- Backyard citizen science projects, such as weather monitoring for CoCoRaHS.
- Computer projects, such as the Digitizing Virginia's Herbaria project
- At-home administrative projects, such as working on the chapter's VMS, writing chapter newsletters, and board and committee meetings via teleconference
- Continuing Education that you can do at home, such as [our CE webinars](#)

**We are working on compiling a list of possible at-home projects that I will post to the VMN website when ready. You can help by directing your chapter members to any projects that you already have approved that can be done from home.**

Thanks, everyone! Keep your spirits up, and stay well.  
Michelle



*Virginia Bluebells spotted at a State Park. I'm thankful that our State Parks are still open for day-use as of today...let's help keep them that way by not overcrowding them.*

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